INTRODUCTION

Overview

The English language has an equivocal status in India today. Though a foreign language it plays the role of a second language in many spheres of social, educational, commercial, official and political activities. Despite the political propaganda against it, English still occupies an important place in our national context. English is the key to the storehouse of knowledge. This knowledge is not yet available in Indian languages. It is in this context that the role of English as a library language becomes important. Even though some universities have switched over to regional languages as media of instruction in humanities at the pre-university (PU) and undergraduate levels, it will take some time to extend this to courses in science, law, medicine, engineering and agriculture.

The importance of English being universally acknowledged, university authorities and educationists deemed it fit to make English a compulsory subject at the pre-university stage and in the first two years at the undergraduate level. The focus has now changed from literary language to language of comprehension - a functional or working knowledge of English to comprehend books written in the language. The aim of the teacher should be to develop in the student the ability to comprehend writings in English and the skill to express
himself/herself in clear, simple language which is grammatically correct and contextually appropriate.

The plus two stage is a crucial one in the student's educational career. It is the taking off point for many academic and professional undergraduate courses where instruction is mainly in English and where English as a subject of study may or may not from part of the syllabus. It is imperative to give students a firm footing in the language at this juncture. The student should be able to relate the language taught in the classroom to his needs outside the class- to his other subjects, to the world in which he interacts, to the profession he is likely to take up in the near future.

The Textbooks:

The old pre-university course (PUC) textbooks which were in use in the state of Karnataka from 1981 to 1986 were thought to be unsuitable for achieving the objectives of English language teaching at the plus two stage. In April 1986 new English textbooks were introduced for the pre-university classes. The objectives of the textbook writers were to make "the learning and teaching of English more effective, enjoyable and purposeful" (I year PUC Detailed English Text, 1986: vi). The aim was to develop in the student the ability to read at a reasonable speed, to comprehend talks, lectures, etc., to write grammatically correct sentences and to speak with fluency, making himself understood. The textbook also contains guidelines on how to use the book.
The new textbooks were expected to overcome the drawbacks of the earlier textbooks. But examination results told a different story. Not only was there no dramatic improvement in performance, but on the contrary deteriorating standards culminated in a general hue and cry from the teaching community against both the new textbooks as well as the changed pattern of evaluation.

The new textbooks called for a different method of teaching from the one's adopted by teachers when dealing with earlier texts. Though it is not very clear exactly what methodology is being advocated by the textbook writers, they did expect a changed attitude from the teaching community towards the new texts. But teachers stuck to old methods of teaching— the Lecture Method—explaining the contents in detail. The new texts and new pattern of evaluation did not result in any significant improvement in students' comprehension or written expression.

The textbook writers' assumptions regarding the teacher and the taught may have contributed to some extent to the non-realisation of the stipulated objectives. It was presumed that the pre-university student at the entry level has learnt the basics of English as far as vocabulary and grammar are concerned. "A textbook of this level has to start with the assumption that the necessary components of English Grammar have already been taught to the students before they enter the Pre-University Course" (Ibid:xi). The second assumption was
that the teacher is going to cover all the lessons in the textbook. Thirdly, the contents will be taught by contextual incorporation of grammar where the focus will be on language within and outside the classroom. But reality presents a different picture. In the first year of the pre-university course some lessons are deleted in order to limit the portions and enable students to pass. Grammar is not taught contextually. The teacher concentrates on the contents of the text and grammar is taught independent of the text.

Other Factors:

A plethora of other factors have been contributive in preventing effective language learning. The average Indian teacher of English has little understanding of the aims and objectives of teaching. His/her aim, in so far as he/she does have one, is to make sure students get through the examinations. So he/she dictates answers to important questions. English is not taught as a skill subject as it ought to be but as a knowledge subject. In the absence of regular and compulsory re-orientation programmes teachers do not get an opportunity to update themselves with the latest developments that are taking place in the field of language teaching. The teacher also has certain fallacious assumptions regarding the students' previous knowledge of English. He does not bother to teach basic structural patterns and items presuming they are known to the students. This creates a void
in the students' language learning process. There is no positive and active participation of the learner in classroom procedures. Home assignments are rarely given to reinforce classroom teaching, or if given rarely done by students.

At the pre-university level we have the particularly problematic type of student—the 'faux debutant' or false beginner. He has learnt certain forms of the English language, but not having mastered enough grammar is unable to construct coherent sentences and paragraphs. The student is not motivated to learn English, first because marks scored in it do not carry weightage and secondly because he does not foresee any future usefulness of the language either in relation to social contexts or the job he is likely to take up in future. Most students attend English classes without the prescribed textbooks.

Large classes with more than a hundred students have become the order of the day in urban and semi-urban colleges. Heterogeneity is another common classroom phenomena wherein one finds a small percentage of English medium students and a large proportion of Kannada medium students. This also comes in the way of effectual language teaching. Inadequate infrastructural facilities is another hurdle faced by the English teacher. Above all, exposure to English is limited to only four hours per week.

Lack of a clear-cut government and education policy on the status and role of English in the present day socio-political Indian scenario has added to deteriorating standards of English. Though a compulsory subject, marks
scored in it are not taken into account during admission to various undergraduate professional and academic courses. Syllabus designers, curriculum framers and textbook writers have primarily urban backgrounds and are unfamiliar with the problems and language needs of rural students who form more than 85% of the student population. We have an urban elite setting down educational conditions for the rural student. The examinations have been reduced to a farce especially in remote, rural colleges where answers, particularly to the grammar questions, are either dictated by some obliging teacher or copied.

We are confronted with a dismal picture of language teaching conditions at the plus two stage. Wherein lies the fault—with syllabus framers, textbook writers, teachers or students? Perhaps fingers could be pointed in many directions. But there is no denying the fact that the teacher could play a pivotal role in remedying this situation, if not fully at least to a certain extent. A teaching methodology and suitable teaching/learning materials which adapts itself to prevailing circumstances may pave the way for meaningful teaching and learning of English.

**Methods—Old and New**

The teaching method widely prevalent at present is the Lecture Method. Here the teacher gives a detailed verbal explanation of the contents of the textbook either in English or in the mother tongue or by attempting a judicious mixture of English and the mother tongue. Grammar is taught via the
Structural-Situational Approach. Constraints of time and large classes deter the teacher from giving any kind of individual attention to students. At the end of the two year pre-university course students' acquisition of English is far short of the mark. They continue to make the same mistake that they made at the commencement of the course. One very concrete observation may be made—the Lecture Method has never been and will never be conducive to the effective teaching of English at the pre-university level. But if we are going to rule out the Lecture Method we have to think of an alternative, feasible method which will work satisfactorily within the purview of the innumerable adverse factors present at this stage.

The last two decades have seen a phenomenal growth of new procedures and innovative techniques which has revolutionized traditional thinking on classroom activities. The Communicative Approach is the latest 'fad' in the language teaching profession. But many practicing teachers have voiced disappointment over the fact that the theoretical postulations and procedures propounded by communicative language teaching do not stand the acid test of real classroom teaching, particularly if the strength is large and the teaching conditions far from favourable. Inability to implement the communicative approach successfully should not lead to its abandonment in favour of older, traditional and obsolete but easier methods of teaching. An eclectic approach would be more suitable for overcrowded, heterogeneous, underequipped
classes. This research programme attempted to focus on a realistic approach to Communicative language teaching apropos to large classes of intermediate students or 'false beginners' who are not highly motivated to learn the target language. An experimental teaching project was undertaken to gauge the efficaciousness and outcome of synthesising the structural and communicative approaches to language teaching. Observations were recorded and conclusions drawn.

The Aims of the Present Study

1. To appraise Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) critically in terms of actual classroom practice.

2. To analyse the English Language Teaching (ELT) situation at the pre-university level in the state of Karnataka and examine in depth the inherent problems particularly with regard to teaching materials and methods.

3. To gauge the compatibility of CLT with the ELT situation at the pre-university level in Karnataka.

4. To work out an appropriate language teaching methodology which takes cognizance of the negative factors prevailing at the pre-university level, with special focus on improving reading comprehension and written expression.

5. To design suitable instructional materials apropos to methodology.

6. To test the feasibility and efficacy of both methodology and teaching/learning materials under realistic classroom conditions.
Constraints of the Present Study:

The present research has been confined to the pre-university level. It was not possible to monitor the development of language skills over an extended period on account of constraints of time. The existing first year PUC English syllabus and detailed textbook was used as a broad framework for the researcher to work on in the design of methodology and materials. It was presumed that a methodology that is feasible in the first year of the pre-university course could be extended to the second year also.

Design:

This thesis comprise ix chapters. Chapters one to four deal with a detailed overview of the origins of CLT, its theoretical basis, the objectives and characteristic features of the approach, the communicative syllabus, curriculum and methodology, the teacher's and learners' role and communicative language testing.

It chapter four the merits and drawbacks of CLT have been enumerated. Here an attempt has been made to assess CLT critically in relation to existing classroom circumstances. Chapter five is devoted to an analysis of the language teaching situation at the pre university level in the state of Karnataka and ascertaining the compatibility of CLT with the same. In the sixth and final chapter the results of an experimental teaching project have been discussed and evaluated.
It is hoped that this research study will be of help to textbook writers in designing suitable teaching/learning materials; to pre-university teachers in enabling them to teach English meaningfully and effectively under realistic and adverse educational conditions within the confines of a regular college/institutional curriculum.