2. AIMS AND OBJECTS

2.1 Need

As discussed in chapter one, English (both in written and spoken forms) has come to stay as an important language in India. Panjab is one of the progressive states in the country. The number of school-going children in the state is increasing at a tremendous rate. Also, more and more men and women from Panjab are competing for All India jobs and Central Services and are going abroad for higher education, for employment, and on cultural exchange missions. A spirit of adventure being a part of their character, they are often moving out to different states within the country in search of better jobs or better business. All this makes it incumbent upon them to have a reasonably fair proficiency in English so that they can converse with people of other states and countries with ease and fluency.

These are, of course, some of the situations in which any person might be called upon to use a language other than his own. But, with Panjabis, the use of English is not restricted merely to need. Educated Panjabis can be seen conversing in English even among themselves perhaps more often than happens in other parts of North India. This is so because Panjabis take a certain amount of pride
in using English — in speaking and writing to their Panjabi friends in English. Indeed, the ability to speak English carries, among them, a certain status symbol — a sure sign of one's being 'educated', and even belonging to a higher class (there being no such thing as 'uneducated English' among Panjabi speakers). Nothing else might better explain the 'demand' in the matrimonial columns for 'convent educated' girls.

The sense of pride in the use of English is such that even those who use Panjabi in their informal daily conversation are found to use a very large number of English words along with Panjabi. Besides, whenever there is a formal gathering of educated people (e.g. in educational conferences, college and school functions, convocations and Prize-Distribution functions, welcome or farewell functions, meetings of the elite clubs like the Jaycees, Lions, etc., extension lectures by experts, Principal's address to the students, etc.), English is often the only choice as a medium of communication. When such occasions call for the use of spoken English, there inevitably arises a demand that some reasonably good standards of pronunciation be adhered to.

It is in this context that the present project has been undertaken to make a thorough, broad-based study of the pronunciation of relatively common English words as
said by teachers of English in the rural areas of Panjab.

There has been no previous study on the subject of Panjabi speakers' pronunciation of English, except one by Sethi (1976). (Also see Sethi, 1978, 1979, 1980a, 1980b, 1981, 1982). For his study, Sethi took 20 educated Panjabi speakers (mostly in the age group of 35-45), including teachers, doctors, lawyers, engineers, lecturers, businessmen and housewives, a number of whom had had an active contact with city life for several years. He studied both segmental and suprasegmental features of the phonology of these speakers' English - their vowel system, consonant system, consonant clusters, word accent, sentence stress and rhythm, and intonation. Thus, it is a comprehensive study of all major areas of phonology of this non-native accent of English, which he calls 'Panjabi English'.

Sethi's was the first ever work of its kind and it succeeded in showing the direction and pointing out the fields where further research could be carried out. However, being a study of the spoken English of educated Panjabi speakers in general, it has not paid any special attention to the specific problems of the teachers of English in the rural areas of Panjab. The present project aims precisely at doing this.

2.2 Why rural teachers only

There are a good many reasons why the project focuses its attention on the rural teachers only. First, a very
big segment of India's population lives in rural areas only. This big segment, therefore, deserves greater attention in a democratic country like ours. Second, the rural population has so far been a comparatively neglected lot in the matter of sophisticated education. This discrimination is not in consonance with the declared national objectives. If anything, the rural population needs greater attention because, while city-dwellers may have an occasional access to good English, the rural people do not have even occasional contacts with even a near-native accent. Now, although radio and television have reached a large chunk of our rural population, such population still remains far behind the urban population in the matter of contact with spoken English in any standard form. Whenever the rural listeners switch on a radio or a television, they do so with the sole purpose of listening to the programmes in the local languages or the national language. The percentage of educated people in rural areas is so small that no family likes to listen to the programmes or news in English. Thus the rural population continues to be almost cut off from any standard spoken English. Third, as Panjab is admittedly a progressive state, there is hardly any family in the state which does not have some of its relatives settled abroad in some English speaking countries like the U.K., the U.S.A., Canada, Australia etc. As has already been stated, when these relatives meet, our young boys and girls living in
the rural areas of the state suffer from a sort of inferiority when they are not able to speak English with their cousins with a standard accent and intonation.

It is for these reasons that this project in spoken English has been confined only to the rural population of Panjab.

2.3 Delimitation of the project

The present project is limited in several directions. On the geographical dimension, it is restricted to villages in Panjab, and on the social dimension, to the teachers of English only. From amongst the teachers of English again, it is limited to trained graduate teachers who are (or have been) teaching English to high or higher secondary classes only.

There is a further delimitation of our project. While the previous study (mentioned above) covered all areas of English phonology (viz. vowel, consonants, consonant clusters, word-accent, sentence stress and rhythm, and intonation), the present project is restricted to the study of individual sounds and their distribution, consonant clusters and word accent. This restriction has been imposed in order to achieve a greater depth in our investigation. Following this restriction, the unit chosen for the study is the word, and not any longer sequence.

In one sense, however, the present project is an ambitious one. It aims at studying the spoken English of
teachers teaching English in rural schools of Panjab. An attempt has been made in it to spot out various pronunciation problems and to trace their origin by studying the English of three different generations of teachers over the past sixty years or so. The study of divergencies from RP in the spoken English of such teachers can go a long way in giving a proper direction to the entire programme of teaching English in the state.

2.4 Why teacher-taught sets

While selecting one set of three teachers of English from one particular district of the state, we have purposely selected teacher-taught sets. A teacher-taught set consists of three rural teachers, say A, B and C, taken from the same district, of whom A should have taught English to B at the latter's school stage and B should have taught it to C at C's school stage. A, B and C thus constitute a teacher-taught set of three teachers who belong to three different generations.

The rationale behind the selection of such sets is to try to find out, if possible, as to when and where the divergencies in pronunciation (RP as the model) sneaked in. How far has a good teacher been successful in guiding the pattern of behaviour in respect of the spoken English of his pupils? How far has the general deterioration in the standard of English in the country been able to undo
the impact of a good teacher? Does the spoken language pattern of a teacher pass on to his students? If so, to what extent? What is roughly the amount of damage a bad teacher can cause? How far is it true that some of the divergencies in pronunciation as noticed today have been there through generations, and what could be the possible reasons? These are some of the questions sought to be answered by the selection of teacher-taught sets for the present study.

2.5 Aims

As is clear from the discussion in 2.1 above, English has come to stay as an important language in Panjab. It is, therefore, essential that our young students should be able to communicate their ideas, and converse, in English in such a way that they can understand others and are understood by others. They must be intelligible not only within their own state or within their own country, but also in all countries wherever English is used.

With such international intelligibility as our aim, some standard pronunciation and accent will have to be evolved for speakers of English in Panjab. The present project has selected RP as a model (reasons given in chapter one) for measuring various divergencies, so that any future study on the subject can make these observations its starting point while evolving some 'standard' variety
of English. The present project, however, aims at presenting things as they are, without suggesting a prescriptive model.

Some text-book writers or teachers of English, it is expected, might come out with remedial materials which might lead to a tangible improvement in the standard of spoken English in this part of the country. It is also expected that text-book writers who write for students of English at the school stage might re-orient their books in the light of the present studies. Even in the matter of teacher-training, colleges of education in the state, or teacher-trainers in these colleges, might come out with new techniques or new syllabi so that prospective teachers of English are better equipped in the field of spoken English and are in a position to deliver the goods in a more effective manner. We can foresee, therefore, a change in the entire English teaching programme in the state and a complete re-orientation in matters like text-books, teacher-training and teaching-techniques, once the real position is placed before the concerned people in a graphic and lucid manner. The present project is a very humble attempt to shake up the teachers of English into a new thinking, to make them see for themselves the glaring disparities in our professed aims and actual practices, and to enable them to rise to the occasion to do their bit in
setting their house in order so that the young students of this progressive state do not lag behind in this competitive world of today.