CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview of the Study

This study seeks to characterize and compare the differences in the language learning conditions which arise as a result of differences in the nature of the classroom interaction in different classes in which English is either taught as a subject of study or used as a medium of instruction.

It is now widely believed that second languages are best learnt when learners are given opportunities to hear and use the target language as in natural communication situations (for example, Stern, 1978:176-179; Brumfit, 1985:153). It is also claimed that when a second language is used as a medium of instruction for a school subject, a more natural language learning environment becomes available and this leads to significant gains in language learning (Ellis, 1980:31; Swain, 1982:82; Stern, 1981:138-139).

However, the chief contention of this study is that all classes in which English is used as a medium of instruction, do not provide equal opportunities or equally conducive conditions for language learning. Rather, the availability of the language learning conditions in each subject class depends to a great extent on variables such as the nature of
the subject being taught through the second language, teachers' and pupils' attitudes to the subject in question, and above all, on the way the subject is typically taught, and the patterns of interaction that thus tend to be generated. These in turn differ, it is further contended, from the interaction that emerges in typical English (as a subject) classes.

Implicit in this argument is the assumption that different modes of teaching result in different interactional patterns and that these interactional patterns make available different kinds of language learning conditions and thus provide differential language learning opportunities.

Therefore, an attempt has also been made in this study to describe our current state of knowledge regarding the necessary and sufficient conditions for language learning, and to understand those features of the verbal interaction between learners and teachers which best bring about language learning. This description of the language learning conditions has then been used to develop a system for the analysis of classroom data that could capture the nature of the interaction in each type of class. This system has enabled us to ascertain the extent to which the conditions considered conducive to language learning are present in different classroom settings.

1.1 Background of the Study

This study had its beginnings in the attempt to understand how Bilingual Education i.e., the use of two or more
languages as media of instruction for part or whole of the school curriculum (Cohen, 1975:18; Stern, 1972:1), could contribute to the teaching/learning of English in Indian schools.

In India, one finds that pupils in English-medium or bilingual medium schools tend to acquire English more successfully than pupils in schools where English is taught as a subject. The fairly high rate of success in the language learning outcome of programmes in which a second language is used as a medium of instruction for part or all of the school curriculum, has also been well-documented by researchers in several parts of the world (e.g., Price, 1968; Lambert and Tucker, 1972; Swain and Lapkin, 1982; Genessee, 1983; Scott et al., 1974; Malherbe, 1946:64). It is argued that the success of the Bilingual Education approach lies in the fact that it provides the conditions considered necessary for language learning to take place (Tucker and d'Anglejan, 1975:67). There are in fact, relatively consistent research findings that such programmes create the same kind of conditions that characterize first language acquisition (Swain, 1982:82; Genessee, 1983:7) and provide a "naturalistic setting for second language acquisition" (Swain and Lapkin, 1982:5). Thus what becomes available is a rich language input which is not linguistically ordered but is organised around content and communication. The emphasis is on creating a desire on the part of the learners to learn the language in order to engage in meaningful and authentic communication in a situation in which the task
of language learning is incidental to the task of communicating with someone about a wide variety of topics which are inherently interesting to the learners (Swain, 1982:82; Tucker and d'Anglejan, 1975:67; Price, 1968:19-24; Swain and Lapkin, 1982:5-6; Genessee, 1983:7; Stevens, 1983:260; Stern, 1967:35).

Keeping in view the high success rate of most Bilingual Education programmes, this researcher began initially to attempt to examine various models of Bilingual Education in terms of their usefulness for language learning/teaching in the Indian context.

However, research on Bilingual Education in India seemed not to have moved in this direction at all. Whatever studies there were in this area appeared to concentrate on assessing through experimental designs, whether or not the use of English as a medium of instruction for another subject of study leads to any gain in language learning or not (e.g., David, 1978; Sharma, 1983). Other literature on Bilingual Education in India argued for the usefulness of such an approach in India (Nadkarni, 1978, 1979; Ghosh, 1980; Khubchandani, 1978, 1981), but there seems to have been no systematic investigation regarding the suitability of one type of programme over another.

On the other hand, a great deal of research on Bilingual Education has been carried out in various parts of the world, particularly in Canada and the U.S.A. However, till recently,
the focus of inquiry in this research has been on the linguistic and academic outcomes of Bilingual Education, on the relative success achieved in different situations through the employment of the target language medium at different levels (e.g., Late Immersion, Early Immersion), with differing patterns of use (e.g., Morning-Afternoon, Alternate Day, Simultaneous Translation etc., as defined in Cohen, 1975:18-19), as well as on the effects of Bilingual Education programmes on attitudes, on intellectual and emotional growth, and on the linguistic, social, cultural and political implications of such programmes (Stern, 1972:5-6; Cohen, 1975:23; Swain, 1982:92; Lambert and Tucker, 1972; Tucker and d'Anglejan, 1975:67). The suitability of a programme type seems to be decided upon on the basis of the prevailing socio-economic, linguistic and political context (e.g., Mackey, 1972:86). Even the available typologies of Bilingual Education (for example, Mackey, 1971; Fishman and Lovas, 1972) appear to be based on such issues as the nature of bilingualism aimed at in each programme and the modes of language interaction available in the home, school, regional area and nation. Consequently, any variations in the second language achievement level of the different Bilingual Education programmes have been accounted for by citing such socio-psycho factors as the status of the mother tongue and the target language in the environment, the attitudes of learners, teachers and parents to the target language and so on (see for example, Cohen and Laosa, 1979).
However, in the context of the current research emphasis in second language acquisition literature on optimal learning environments, it was felt that there was a strong possibility that the degree of success achieved by different Bilingual Education programmes could also be influenced by the differences in the language learning opportunities made available by different types of programmes. Recent writings in the Canadian context also seem to indicate that the nature of the educational treatment may be responsible for the reported differences among programmes (Genessee, 1983:18; Swain and Lapkin, 1982:8; Stevens, 1983:261). These writings seem to suggest that in approaches in which the target language is used as a medium of instruction, different (superior) results may be achieved depending on the nature of the classroom organization (Fillmore, 1982:285); the kind of teaching approach or teaching style adopted i.e., activity-centred, learner-centred, discovery-oriented rather than teacher-centred, content-focused, conventional (Stevens, 1983:261; Rodriguez, 1981 cited by Chamot, 1983:469; Genessee, 1983:18; Price, 1968:19; Swain and Lapkin, 1982:8, 69; Swain, 1982:94); the nature of the subject which is taught through the medium of the target language, i.e., subjects which are activity-centred, less displaced in time and space, requiring use of concrete referents, linguistically less demanding - for example, art and craft, physical education, cooking etc., vs. information
subjects such as history and geography (Krashen, 1981:44; Chamot, 1983:466; Stevens, 1983:265; Fillmore, 1982:284; Mohan, 1979:175).

However, what still seems to be lacking is research which can provide insights into what actually happens in the different type of classes and the extent to which the classroom interaction generated by different types of classroom organization, different teaching approaches and/or differences in subject matter content provides a natural environment for language learning. As Ellis (1984a:10) points out, "the nature of research methods employed in the various studies of bilingual education has precluded any investigation of the classroom interactions" occurring in different programmes.

It was therefore felt that there is a definite need to explore the nature of the interaction in different types of classes in which English is used as a medium of instruction, in order to ascertain the extent to which the nature of the subject itself and the way it is typically taught makes available a suitable context for language learning, and to examine the extent to which the language learning conditions thus created, differ from the language learning conditions that seem to be present in typical English classes.

1.2 Rationale for the Study

As pointed out in the previous section, the available reports of investigations carried out in the field of Bilingual
Education indicate that the research method generally employed precludes any investigation of classroom interaction and studies in this area seem to be directed either towards comparing, through experimental designs, the language learning outcome of programmes in which English is used as a medium of instruction and programmes in which English is taught as a subject, comparing the gains in language learning among different types of Bilingual Education programmes or towards ascertaining through correlational studies, the effects of Bilingual Education programmes on attitudes, on intellectual and emotional growth, on subject learning etc.

Such "product-oriented" studies, i.e., studies in which the focus is on "what the programme produces, chiefly in terms of student learning, but sometimes also in terms of changes that the programme brings about in teachers' and students' attitudes, students' self-concepts, related intellectual skills and the like" (Long, 1984:409), fail to tell us precisely what elements in any particular programme enable language learning to take place (see Long, 1984:411-414, for a detailed description of flaws inherent in such research designs). It is by now well-accepted that what we need is to be able to look inside the "black box" of the classroom (Long, 1983a) and to see what actually goes on there in order to arrive at any real insights into how classroom interaction provides a
setting for language acquisition to take place by making available certain opportunities for language learning (Ellis, 1984a:14, 156, 184; Allwright, 1983:196-197). If, as current literature suggests, interaction is crucial to language learning (Ellis, 1984a:14; Allwright, 1984a:7; Long, 1981:275), and the environment or the context in which a second language is learnt is potentially more important than the approach adopted (Burt and Dulay, 1981:177; Savignon, 1983:vi), it becomes necessary to understand the nature of the classroom interaction and the learning environment provided by any particular approach or programme before a beginning can be made in assessing the success of the programme. As Newmark points out,

We can ... gain considerable insight by examining in clear individual cases the particulars of the conditions under which language learning does take place in contrast with conditions under which it does not. Such insight can then be used to revise our own approach to language teaching and to assess in a principled way the claims of adherents of various pedagogical approaches. Instead of waiting for direct experimental evidence of the superiority of one approach over another, we can put ourselves in a position in which we can judge on theoretical grounds what elements of a pedagogical approach might account for its reported success and what elements in the implementation of that approach could account for its unreported cases of failure.

(Newmark, 1981:35)
Therefore, in this study, an attempt has been made to describe the nature of the conditions which assist second language learning and the nature of classroom interaction which makes available these conditions. It is hoped that such a study will have implications for Bilingual Education programmes and course design in ELT in India and that, an understanding of the nature of the interaction generated by the type of tasks occurring in each subject class may lead to an understanding of the kind of tasks which tend to generate interaction conducive to language learning, and thus enable us to judge which elements of an approach could possibly lead to its success or failure.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The central concern of this study is to find out to what extent and in what ways the nature of the classroom interaction differs in the regular English classes, the Content subject classes and the Activity classes, and the extent and the nature of the differences in the conditions for language learning that become available as a result of these differences in the nature of the interaction in each of these classes.

Therefore, the central questions which this study addresses itself to are:
(i) Does a more suitable context for language learning become available when English is used as a medium of instruction rather than when English is taught as a subject?

(ii) Which type of subject class in which English is used as a medium of instruction provides the most suitable conditions for language learning?

These initial questions are reformulated as hypotheses following a description of the language learning conditions and a preliminary investigation of different types of classes. These hypotheses are presented in Chapter III.

1.4 Method of Investigation

In order to deal with the central questions raised in this study, a description of the language learning conditions was needed as a basis for comparing the different classes. This description of the language learning conditions was arrived at through an extensive review of the available literature on second language learning theory, research and teaching practices. Another requirement was a system of analysis which could be used to analyze the classroom interaction data to be obtained from the different types of classes. To develop such a system of analysis, available schemes for observation/analysis of classroom interaction were examined and modifications on Fanselow's system of analysis 'FOCUS' (1977) made in the light of the framework evolved for the comparison of the
classes. The procedure for the collection of data was decided upon on the basis of preliminary observations of different types of subject/English classes in four schools. Following this preliminary investigation, it was also decided to confine this study to one school setting at the middle school level (Classes VI-IX). Seven classes constituted the sample for the main study. Classroom interaction data for these classes was collected using an audio-tape supplemented by field notes recorded by two observers. The conclusions of the study were arrived at on the basis of the numerical information obtained from the coded classroom data as well as a qualitative analysis of the classroom interaction in each of the classes in the sample.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study is restricted to a setting in which English is the medium of instruction for all subjects at all levels. The study is confined to English-medium schools because the nature of this investigation required analysis of different kinds of subject classes in which English is used as a medium of instruction. For, although there are bilingual schools in India where both English and the mother-tongue/regional language are used as media of instruction for different subjects (e.g., the Central Schools in which English is the medium of instruction for Science and Maths, and Hindi is the
medium of instruction for Social Studies), only in the English-medium situation is English used as a medium of instruction for all the different types of classes required for this study.

The classes in our sample are compared using a system of analysis based on the description of the language learning conditions. While this description of the language learning conditions is arrived at through an extensive review of the available literature on second language learning theory, research and teaching practices, no attempt is made to validate these conditions empirically. In fact, it is important to emphasize that the intention in this study is not to evaluate the effects on the learning outcomes of instructional programmes where English is used either as a medium of instruction or taught as a subject of study. Instead, the investigation is confined to analyzing classroom interaction in terms of the opportunities it makes available for language learning. However, the level of analysis that has been undertaken in this study, remains restricted in that no attempt is made to capture the entire complexity of interaction in the classroom.

1.6 Organization of the Study

In this chapter, an attempt was made to introduce the study, state the central problem, outline the method of investigation and define its scope. In Chapter II, the theoretical and research literature on first and second
language acquisition is reviewed in order to arrive at a description of the conditions necessary for language learning to take place. In Chapter III, this description is used to develop a system for the analysis of classroom data for the main study. The main findings of the study are then presented in Chapter IV while the conclusions and implications of the study are stated in Chapter V.

...