Introduction

1. Background Information

Language is basically meant for communication. The process of liberalization, privatization and globalization depends mainly on communication for which language is essential. Knowledge acquisition, dissemination of information, technical advancement and scientific discoveries, etc., too are happening through language. Hence, language education is essential for the purpose of social development. It aims at encouraging independent thinking in order to bring out the innate ideas; also helps free and effective expression of opinions and logical interpretation of the present and the past events. Further, it motivates learners to nurture their natural creativity and imagination in their own way. One has to learn language to use it in speech and in writing for academic and other purposes. Also only through language, one can be inculcated with morality, spirituality, and ethics.

Thus, language and its study can play an important role in human life: it enables to overcome diversity, sustains environment, brings individual identity, enables globalization, provides equal opportunities, creates language awareness, build up intercultural competence, allows mobility, and encourages personal and social development of the individual (A.G.Brett, 2014). Due to these reasons teaching and learning of language finds a central place in the educational process.

In the policy of education, goals are listed in a generalized way e.g., teaching another language to know the culture of others (for unity), minimum level of learning (MLL), etc. But in practice, one finds it difficult to integrate the goals with actual requirements of the society because of its heterogeneous
nature. Also, they are not specified in practical terms. It may be seen that MLL remains only on paper.

On the one hand, we have statuses among languages such as official languages, classical languages, scheduled and non-scheduled languages, minor and minority languages, tribal and endangered languages, etc., and on the other, we have a system of teaching them according to their preferences such as first language (L₁), second language (L₂), and third language (L₃), etc. The difficulty often faced is to make and maintain a distinction while teaching a language according to their priorities and preferences. The other difficulty is to teach them as subject of study and also as a medium of instruction or a tool of communication. Besides, teaching of language is often misconceived as teaching of literature. As a result, learning of language gets often derailed. (Subbiah, Pon : NTS/NEO documents)

Acquisition of language is conceptually different from its learning. The former takes place in an uncontrolled situation as a natural process, while later is in a formal controlled situation. This fact cannot be ignored while deciding the quantum of language is actually learnt. Different school boards and the universities have different curricula. All these have resulted in the variations in achievement across the language courses. Hence, there is no comparability among them across universities, and also among the school boards (ibid, 2008/2009).

Such variations could be avoided if the essentials of language teaching are appropriately specified and the core areas adequately taken care of. But, there is no mechanism available as such either to outline these essentials or to accommodate them in the teaching learning process. This makes the language education a cumbersome process. It is further compounded due to
frequent movement of the people resulting in the emergence of language pluralism and multilingualism. All such complexities demand the creation of a system which could provide clarity about language education at the levels of both goals and achievements (ibid, 2008/2009).

In the light of the above, the teaching of Tamil in general, was reviewed by undertaking a brief analysis of the textbooks, syllabi, and curricula of school boards and the universities. In most cases, it reveals that only literature is taught in the name of language. This is happening because most of the language learners have the same language as their mother tongue and the essentials of that language have already been acquired by them in one way or the other during the day to day activities. May be, due to this, only the use and usages of language are taught and that turned out to be literature teaching. However, in certain institutions like Southern Regional Language Centre of the Central Institute of Indian Languages, Tamil language is taught as a subject of study in the L2 context under a common curriculum applicable to all the Indian languages (here, the language being taught is not the mother tongue of the learners). To a certain extent, similar teaching is also going on in Pondicherry Institute of Linguistics and Culture, and also in the International Institute of Tamil Studies, Chennai.

2. Issues and Scope of the Study

Teachers are expected not only to teach but also to assess the quantum of language learnt by the learners at various stages in the teaching programme and also at its final stage. Generally, it is found that the teachers of language and literature are not familiar with assessment mechanism as it involves the preparation of tools and techniques with appropriate rationale
behind them. Moreover, due to the issues explained above, there is no
unanimity among the teachers, learners, and evaluators in understanding the
goals of language education in the same way. As a result, evaluation, a partial
coverage of it is assessment, becomes irrelevant and meaningless because it
fails to fulfill the prerequisites of evaluation. It is a lengthy process which
requires the identification of constituent elements as well as the dimensions
associated with them for the purpose of quantification and measurement.
Accordingly, the process of language teaching and learning is to be shaped
up, by appropriately outlining the details in clear terms.

When society is dynamic, the language being used by them will also
become dynamic. Further, when it consists of people of different categories
and origins, their language needs, learning priorities, etc., will obviously have
multipronged ones. Hence, the process of teaching, learning, and evaluation
too is to be viewed in the above context.

In the area of education, language is used as a subject of study as well
as medium of instruction. The concern here is the subject of study. When
language is viewed as a subject of study, the emphasis is made more on the
structure and nature of language, along with their operating contexts. Thus it
refers to the understanding of language in all its dimensions and the details
need to be worked out in such a way that they will become teachable,
learnable, and quantifiable. When this is taken up at different levels of
language, especially at the syntactic level, there are many issues which
somehow, failed to draw the serious attention of the researchers of language
pedagogy. Thus, the need arose to resolve all such issues by undertaking a
research study on “Assessment in Language Learning with reference to
Syntactic Aspects (a Pragmatic Approach)”. 
3. Objectives of the study

This study makes an attempt to highlight the practical problems that are encountered by learners and also teachers of language in the $L_2$ context (while playing their respective roles), and to find out some workable solutions. Keeping in view the enormity of the work involved, the scope of which is limited to syntactic part of Tamil language so that all the details as mentioned above, could be worked out in the pedagogical point of view. The same is presented as the outcome of this study.

Thus, the focus of this study is to

1. define and demarcate the components that constitute the syntactic part of language
2. identify the types of problems that are encountered while learning / mastering the syntactic components of language
3. identify and define the dimensions of language and to propose a list of problem contributing factors that are associated with its syntactic part.
4. outline the details of assessment mechanism already available (including the formulation of a set of questionnaires – one each for collecting written and oral responses) for adopting them to the present context, and
5. suggest viable mechanism for quantifying the language being learnt with reference to syntactic aspects (at the $L_2$ context) thereby making the process of teaching, learning, and evaluation more meaningful.

This is the vital part of the objective of this study.
It requires the formulation of a list of learning points and to find out their viability and adoptability for the purposes of teaching, learning, and evaluation of the language as $L_2$. The process of finding out the viability and usability of the list proposed, in a way, is assumed to be a hypothesis for this study.

4. Limitations

Scope of this work is centered around the contents of the following materials produced by the Centre for Testing and Evaluation of Central Institute of Indian Languages viz., (1) Syntactic part of the General Frame of Reference for language, literature, & personality∗ (2) Syntactic part of assessing mastery of language. Besides, the relevant portion of the work on (3) Assessing personality through language, and (4) the details of Syntactic structures, their operating contexts, and the dimensional problems identified by various scholars (in the pedagogical context) were also taken into account. As regards the learning context, the 10 month training programme in Tamil being conducted at the Southern Regional Language Centre (SRLC) of the CIIL, through its basic, intermediate, and advanced levels (wherein the emphasis is more on using the dimensions of syntactic aspects) has been considered. This scope is limited only to syntactic aspects of language which play a vital role in operationalising a language and subsequently literature too. However, the learning of literature is not the focus here.

5. Consultative Sources

The libraries consisting of specialised materials on language studies especially those at NTS-India, SRLC, and CIIL Mysore were the main consultative sources for this study. In addition to the above, references were

∗ Contains all the terms or components of language that are hierarchically listed as major, minor, ans sub components in the broad headings of phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics along with Indian language parallels in Kannada, Malayalam, and Tamil.
also drawn from various theoretical works on linguistics, pedagogy, grammars, educational measurement, and evaluation from different sources. Subsequently, the resources available in the departments of linguistics in the University of Mysore, Madurai Kamaraj University, Tamil Univeristy, Dravidian University were also referred to and utilised to the extent possible.

6. Plan of this Dissertation

The outcome of this research is presented in the following 5 chapters apart from introduction and conclusion, in addition to ten appendices and bibliographical references.

Introductory part of this work provides background information, scope of this study, objectives, limitations, plan of the dissertation, etc.

Chapter-1 provides perspectives on syntactic aspects. An analysis of the syntactic components was undertaken in historical perspectives. In this, views of various scholars followed at this level of language, have been incorporated and for each of which the Researcher's inferences were provided. This paved a way to set the scope of coverage of this study.

This is followed by Chapter-2 on problems and methods. The problems being encountered by the learners of Tamil as L₂ especially at the SRLC have been collected in the actual class room, analysed and classified under certain specific categories. At every stage of the research study, specific methods (considered as effective for that part of the work) adopted, have been highlighted.

Chapter-3 deals with the dimensions of language with examples drawn from syntactic components. They were discussed in detail, identified and listed under 5 broad categories by considering the language in a wholistic way. The focus of this chapter was to formulate a list of problem contributing
factors (proposed for incorporating them in the L₂ syllabus as learning points) duly identified under each of the five dimensions.

In chapter-4, the concept of assessment has been discussed in the context of determining the quantum of language being learnt. This is devoted to the formulation of a detailed questionnaire – one each for getting written responses and the other for oral responses. They were used as a main tool for data collection.

Chapter 5 presents the details of analysis under different heading. The focus of the analysis is to determine the viability of the learning points proposed. For this purpose, a four point criteria viz., self introspection, quality of tools used, the impact duly caused on the learners (by these learning points), and the opinion of teachers / researchers on L₂.

The concluding part of this work provides the multifaceted outcome of this study under 9 headings.