

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Realizing the importance of English, it has been taught in the schools and the colleges as second language or third language compulsorily in India in general and in Assam in particular. English has been included as one of the subjects in school and college curriculum and also occupies as a medium of instruction in certain schools. Hence, it is the predominant tool of instruction in higher studies. This study presents an insight into the practice of English language learning as a second language and various kinds of difficulties faced by the 12<sup>th</sup> standard Assamese medium students of Barpeta District of Assam in learning the four skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing, as most of the Assamese medium students are found remarkably poor in English even after completing their higher secondary course. Whatever English they know in the name of English, is not at all useful in their practical life. So, this study aims to find out the root of the problem of the Assamese medium students in learning English as second language.

#### **1.1. Background of the Study**

Background of the study includes language as a whole, first language and second language, foreign language and second language, acquisition and learning of language, English as an international language, and English language in the North-East India.

##### **1.1.1. Language**

Language enables people to express their feelings, ideas and wishes and so on. It is a tool through which the worldly knowledge is acquired and preserved, and language is one of the indicators of cultural identity of a linguistic community as well as individual personality. Each language contains its own people's culture and customs. The degree of cultural similarities varies from language to language. Thus, the cultural gap may not be much wider between the languages of a family, but may

be much wider between the languages of different families. There exists not only the cultural gap but also variation of linguistic system. Therefore, the process of acquiring\ learning a language belonging to another linguistic family includes internalization of culture in addition to the linguistic features of that language.

‘Language is the medium through which the child acquires the cultural, moral, religious and other values of society’ (Klein.1986:6). Moreover, every language plays a crucial role in maintaining social relationship between and among the people of the same linguistic community and of the various cultures, customs and beliefs.

### **1.1.2. First Language and Second Language**

A language is ‘first’ and so is its acquisition if no other language was acquired before; otherwise it is second (Klein, 1986). Thus, the mother tongue which is acquired primarily by a child when its language cells are empty is first language (L1), and the language which is acquired/learnt in addition to the L1 is second language (L2). In this context, the term ‘second’ can refer to any language that is learnt subsequent to the mother tongue. Thus, it can even refer to the learning of third (L3) or fourth language (L4).

Moreover, pedagogically or from the point of view of language policy of India, the term ‘first language’ and ‘second language’ are defined as: The first language, broadly is the language introduced in the school as a subject from first standard to tenth standard, and is commonly used as a medium of instruction at the school level and as a medium of expression by learner in his social communication. It is usually the mother tongue or regional language of the child. The second language is the language which is introduced compulsorily either at the end of primary stage or in the beginning of the lower secondary stage after the attainment of sufficient proficiency in the first language by the learner.

The main objective of the second language is to enable the speaker for wider participation in the society and the nation leading to secondary socialization. Hence, the second language is usually the official language of a state or national language.

### **1.1.3. Foreign Language and Second Language**

The term ‘foreign language’ refers to that language for the use of which there is no immediate reinforcement outside the classroom. For example, if English is learned

by a Japanese student from Japan in the United States, the status of such learning is treated as second language learning, because he has abundant opportunities to use that language outside his classroom. On the other hand, if the same student learns English in his country, he may not have equally abundant opportunity to use English outside his classroom. Under this condition, the student is deemed to be learning English as a foreign language. It is important that we keep this distinction in mind when we teach English to speakers of other languages, because each teaching/learning situation will require different materials, strategies, and goals.

#### **1.1.4. Acquisition and Learning of Language**

There are different opinions about the acquisition of language and learning of language. Krashen's (1981) opinion is mention worthy here. He distinguishes between 'acquisition' and 'learning'. Acquisition refers to the subconscious process of picking up a language through exposure and Learning refers to the conscious process of studying it. According to this view, if a language is internalized subconsciously through exposure in a natural environment the process becomes acquisition. In contrast, if a language is internalized consciously through instruction in classroom settings, the process becomes learning. When a language is internalized subconsciously by a learner, he may not have grammatical competence, but he may have communicative competence in a particular context. When a language is internalized consciously by a learner, he may have grammatical competence, but may not have communicative competence.

#### **1.1.5. English Language and its Brief History**

The history of English may be divided into three periods: Old English from about 700 to 1100 AD; Middle English from 1100 to 1500 AD, and Modern English from 1500 to the present.

Old English showed considerable differentiation from the other languages of Europe. Old English was clearly Germanic, but it had borrowed many words already from Latin. Along with the words borrowed from Latin, Old English continued to coin its own words and thus remained vibrant in its usage.

From the 9th Century, West Saxon became the dominant dialect. Norse speakers acquired English at this time. They brought Norse words into their English. In addition, the English native words were also adjusted in their pronunciation by the Norse speakers. At this time, the Normans were the dominant class and so French words were accepted in the domains of administration, law, and church. Words such as felony, angel, and duke came into English. One-fifth of words used in arts and science in English came from French.

London became the capital of England in early 11th Century, and its dialect, which was close to the dialect of Essex, became prestigious. Slowly, London English gave up its local peculiarities and assumed the role of a universally accepted dialect with prestige. In the Fourteenth Century, English became the medium of instruction in schools, as the language of the courts of law and the opening of Parliament. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* was written in this period, utilizing a variety of London English.

In the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, many familiar 14<sup>th</sup> Century words were replaced by many words which were borrowed from French and Latin. Words such as consecrate, firmament, grace, pollute, and sanctity came into English in this process.

Modern English presents a peculiar picture. It has retained the old spelling, even as it developed new pronunciation – modern pronunciation with medieval spelling. Many Latin words were borrowed into English through French. This period also saw development of regularity in vocabulary, in form and usage, grammatical forms, and in syntax.

English language developed a tendency and respect for correctness in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. “Accessions to the vocabulary in the 17th Century show the influence of French and Italian, particularly in matters of fashion and the fine arts. The 18th Century showed the influence of more distant countries such as India, and the 19th Century continued that tendency. However, scientific terms are the outstanding contribution of the 19th Century, and this has remained true in the 20th” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*).

#### **1.1.6. English as an International Language**

English is an international language, spoken in many countries both as a native and as a second or foreign language. It is taught in the schools in almost every country on this earth. It is a living and vibrant language spoken by over 300 million people as their native language. Millions more speak it as an additional language.

English is spoken habitually in the United States, the British Isles, Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Republic of South Africa, Liberia, and many territories under the United Kingdom and the United States of America. It is estimated that 300 million people speak English as a second language, and an additional 100 million people use it fluently as a foreign language. As a rough estimate, 1000 million or one billion people around the world have some knowledge of English, either as a native language, as a second language, or as a foreign language.

English is the associate official language of India which has over 1000 million (over billion) people. Pakistan, Bangladesh, and many other nations which were ruled by Britain continue to use English both as an optional medium of instruction in their schools and as one of their official languages. The islands of the Philippines continue to use English as an important tool for education, administration, and for mass media purposes. English is the chief foreign language taught in the schools of Europe, South America, Asia and Africa.

Even though some nations which were ruled by the French continue to teach French as their most preferred second language, English is gaining ground even in these countries. In the former Soviet Union, Russian was the dominant language. Since the break of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian Republics have been rapidly introducing English in their school system as a second or foreign language. In Russia itself, English is gaining ground as the most popular second language. In Japan too, English is the most favored second or foreign language.

Outside Europe, English is the predominant language of international commerce. Although the United Nations and its various agencies have more than one language for transaction, more often than not, English comes to be chosen as the preferred language of communication between the participating member-nations.

All this has happened within the last one hundred years. The ascendancy of English as the most preferred language began two hundred years ago with the colonization of North America, Asia, and Africa by Britain. The Industrial Revolution in Britain, its ever-expanding maritime power, development of material wealth, progress in scientific research and consequent power, all helped the spread of English, even as Britain marched as a great empire. In the Sixteenth Century, English was spoken mostly in England, southern Scotland, and small areas of Wales and Ireland. There were only about two to three million people speaking it as their native language. At present one in seven in this world speaks English either as a native language or as a second language. English was well established as the dominant language in North America in the 17th Century. But its rapid growth was in the 19th Century.

Latin was the main medium of education in Western Europe throughout the middle ages. French was the language of diplomacy for four centuries, from the 17th to 20th. And yet, at present there is not a single language which can be compared to the position occupied by English as the international language. This is so, even though more people in the world speak Chinese than English as their native language. Spanish may claim a large number of native speakers, but neither Spanish, nor French, nor Russian, nor Chinese can even come close to the level and variety of uses to which English is put in the world.

English is learned everywhere because people have found out that knowledge of English is a passport for better career, better pay, advanced knowledge, and for communication with the entire world. English is also learned for the literature it possesses, and for the variety and rich experience it provides. English has replaced French as the language of diplomacy. In this computer age, English is bound to expand its domains of use everywhere. Everyone wants to appropriate English as their own.

#### **1.1.7. English Language in the North-East India**

There are eight states in the North-East India namely, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. English language in the North-Eastern states of India plays a role of link language among the

educated people of North-East India. English is the medium of instruction at the post graduate level in all these states. However, in under graduate level both English and Assamese are the media of instruction in Assam. In Arunachal Pradesh, English is the only medium of instruction from primary level to post graduate level and it is the first language taught from the primary level onwards. English is the state language of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Sikkim. Assam is geographically divided into two valleys namely, Brahmaputra Valley and Barak Valley. While the official language of Brahmaputra Valley (Upper and Lower Assam) is Assamese, the official language of Barak Valley (Southern Assam) is Bengali. Besides Assamese and Bengali, the two major languages of Assam, other languages like Bodo, Mishing, Karbi, Bhojpuri, Hindi etc. are also spoken here. However, in the tribal states like Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya, majority of the people embraced Christianity. These missionaries set up schools and colleges where English is the only medium of instruction. Certainly, in Assam and other north eastern states, the Christian missionaries also set up English medium schools which are playing a major role in the field of education.

## **1.2. Scope of the Present Study**

The present study tries to identify the areas of problems in the process of learning the four language skills of English language by the 12<sup>th</sup> standard Assamese medium students of Barpeta District and to suggest certain remedial measures to overcome the problems encountered by them.

The researcher has chosen the Assamese medium students of 12<sup>th</sup> standard only for the present study. There is a genuine reason behind it. The students compulsorily have to learn English as one of the core subjects from the very beginning of their school life up to 12<sup>th</sup> standard. So, obviously the students are directly involved in learning English for about 12 years. After learning English for 12<sup>th</sup> year, the students should be equipped with a fair degree of English proficiency to cope up with an English environment. But it has been observed that their English proficiency is not up to the mark, rather poor. Most of the students cannot acquire English proficiency according to the aims and objectives of the 12<sup>th</sup> Standard English syllabus. The gap between the aims and objectives of the English syllabus and the students' performance explicitly indicates that there is something behind the teaching-learning of English.

### **1.3. Delimitation of the study**

The present study has the following delimitation:

1. The study is confined only to Barpeta district of Assam.
2. Only Assamese medium higher secondary schools/ junior colleges are considered for the purpose of the study.
3. Only the 12<sup>th</sup> standard of the higher secondary level is considered for the study.

### **1.4. Objectives of the Research Study**

1. The main objective of the study is to analyze the problems of learning English language by the 12<sup>th</sup> standard students of Barpeta district, Assam.
2. To study the present status of English language learning in the Assamese medium H. S. Schools of Barpeta district.
3. To identify the difficulties and errors faced by the students in all level of linguistic analysis, viz. phonology, morphology and syntax.
4. To study how far the English syllabus designed by AHSEC for 12<sup>th</sup> standard students is suitable in developing their language skills.
5. To examine the different methods, materials, teaching techniques used in the classroom and their effectiveness in the teaching learning process.
6. To study the socio-economic background of the teachers in general and of the students in particular.

At the end of the study, on the basis of findings the researcher will try to suggest some remedial measure which may enrich the teaching-learning process of English in the higher secondary schools of Barpeta district in particular and in Assam in general.

### **1.5. Hypothesis**

The study is based on following hypothesis:

1. The method and materials used for teaching English at Higher Secondary level do not help the students to develop all the language skills equally of the students.



2. The syllabus prepared by the Assam Higher Secondary Education Council for 12<sup>th</sup> standard students is not designed to develop the four skills viz. Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking skill of the students.
3. The teachers' efficiency and exposure to English is poor. So, there may be a direct influence on mother tongue in case of pronunciation and English speaking.
4. The evaluation system used at Higher Secondary level cannot measure the communicative competence of the learners.

### **1.6. Statement of the Problem**

This study is an attempt to trace the problems faced by both the teachers and the students in the English teaching and learning process in Assamese medium Higher Secondary Schools of Assam with special reference to Barpeta district. It aims at presenting the contemporary situations in Assam with regard to English teaching and learning and suggesting effective methods of teaching English to those students whose background and exposure to English is very limited in the classroom as well as in the school campus.

English is treated as a world language because of its wide exposure in all fields all over the world. Regarding as a common language for wider communication and the language of science and technology, modernity and development, English has been given a social status symbol. Most of the parents prefer their children to be educated in the English medium school for a secured future. Generally the people who have good command in English are esteemed high in the society in spite of all these positive aspects, the performance of English in the educational institution is remarkably poor. It has been observed that even most of the students of English medium schools fumble in the name of English speaking. Their English competency is not up to the mark. The case of Assamese medium students is still worse, because they are less oriented to listening and speaking skill in the English classroom. Their chief emphasis is on reading and writing as they have to pass in the examination only by writing question's answer. It is seen that most of the Assamese medium students can neither write nor speak correct English even after their graduation. They are not intimately introduced with the four skills of English language, viz. Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. All these indicate that there must be some problems in between the teaching- learning

process of English in the Assamese medium educational institution of Assam. In order to achieve the desired goal of teaching and learning English at Higher Secondary level, it is very essential to observe and find out the root of the problems, so that required measure can be adopted to make the teaching-learning process more fruitful and effective.

### 1.7. Selection of the Sample for the Study

For the present study, 200 (two hundred) students, both boys and girls of 12<sup>th</sup> standard have been selected from total twenty Higher Secondary schools and Junior colleges located at different areas of Barpeta district. Considering the variables of the present study, 10 students (five boys and five girls) and one teacher from each institution have been selected randomly. The list of the institutions is mentioned below-

**Table: 1.1. List of sample Higher Secondary Schools/ Junior colleges**

Sl. No.	Name of the institutions	No. of teacher	No. of students	
			boys	girls
1	Barpeta Vidyapith HS School	1	5	5
2	Bhella Higher Secondary School	1	5	5
3	Bhawanipur Higher Secondary School	1	5	5
4	Baghmara Higher Secondary School	1	5	5
5	Barbala Higher Secondary School	1	5	5
6	Chenga Higher Secondary School	1	5	5
7	Datirbari Karagari Higher Secondary School	1	5	5
8	Gunialguri Higher Secondary School	1	5	5
9	Kayakuchi Higher Secondary School	1	5	5
10	Langla Higher Secondary School	1	5	5
11	Mandia Higher Secondary School	1	5	5
12	Navamilan Higher Secondary School	1	5	5
13	Palhazi Higher Secondary School	1	5	5
14	Paschim Moinbari Higher Secondary School	1	5	5
15	Pallarpar Madrassa Higher Secondary School	1	5	5
16	Rehabari Higher Secondary School	1	5	5
17	Sarthebari Higher Secondary School	1	5	5
18	Tarabari Higher Secondary School	1	5	5
19	Howly Junior College	1	5	5
20	Milanjyoti Junior College	1	5	5
	Total	20	100	100

### **1.8. Methodology of the Study**

The research methodology gives a detail account of the research design including population of the study, definition of the sample, and administration of the questionnaire and data analysis process. The researcher decided to collect required data from total 20 institutions of Barpeta district offering Higher Secondary course. The data were collected from total 20 teacher respondents consisting of one English teacher from each institution and two hundred (200) student respondents consisting of ten (10) students from each institution. In case of teacher respondents, representations were made from both genders i.e. male and female, different age group and different teaching experiences. In case of student respondents both boys and girls were taken into consideration.

The data were collected on personal observation, discussion, and through recording and questionnaires. Total six sets of questionnaires were prepared for the collection of data. One set was for teacher and the remaining five sets were for the students. Amongst the five sets of the students' questionnaires, one set was prepared for the students' over all information and the remaining four sets of the students questionnaires were prepared skill wise, one questionnaire for each skill (i.e. Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) for diagnostic test to find out their difficult areas of language learning.

For the present task, skill wise four questionnaires (each one for each skill) were prepared and the students were tried out in the field through pilot study and based on the results drawn through the pilot study, the questionnaires were modified and finalized. The finalized questionnaires were used for data collection. In order to elicit data through discussion or interview with the students, a structured questionnaire was prepared and used; and the responses of the students were recorded using the tape recorder.

### **1.9. Data Elicitation (Administration of the Questionnaires)**

The finalized questionnaires were administered with the informants and the testing procedures were carried out in three phases. In the first phase, speaking and writing tests were conducted. The questions which were constructed in the interview schedule were asked and then the students were instructed to speak on any one of the given topics or of their own interest. The responses of the students were also recorded using a tape recorder. For this speaking test 50 (fifty) minutes were allotted (five minutes for each student). After 20 minutes gap, the questionnaires of writing test were given and for that 40 minutes were allotted.

After two days gap, in the second phase, the reading and the writing comprehension tests were carried out. To test the reading comprehension, the questionnaire of reading comprehension was given to the informants. For this test 40 minutes were allotted. After the completion of reading test, the listening comprehension questionnaire was given. To test the listening comprehension of the students, the answer sheets were given separately to the informants and then the listening questions were posed to the students using tape recorder and in certain circumstances questions were read out by the researcher.

Again after two days gap in the third phase, the questionnaire for overall information of the students as well as the teachers were carried out (two set of separate questionnaires; one set is for students and another set is for teacher). And for this 40 minutes were allotted. Moreover, instruction about each questionnaire was given to the students to avoid unwanted misinterpretation. In this way, the data collection was carried out in all the schools under study. In addition to this, the students-teachers classroom interaction, were observed and their class test papers were examined. Moreover, data have also been updated then and there in order to fill up the gap found in the corpus and to verify the authenticity of the data.

### **1.10. Analysis of Data**

The data collected for each skill viz. speaking, writing, reading and listening and the data of overall information of the students and the teachers were processed and analyzed separately. The speaking performance of the students recorded during the field works were transcribed and then the transcribed items were analyzed keeping in view with the finding of communication strategies followed by the students while they encountered linguistic gap and the strategies were classified. The data of the

writing skill were systematically analyzed and errors were identified and classified in all the linguistic aspects of second language. The data of reading comprehension and of listening comprehension were analyzed and classified as comprehensible and non-comprehensible items. Eventually, the remedies were given for all the problems encountered by the students in the process of learning English. The detailed analysis of the data, discussion, findings and remedies are presented in the subsequent chapters.

### **1.11. Organization of the Thesis**

The present study entitled “**A Study on Learning English By the 12<sup>th</sup> Standard Assamese Medium Students of Barpeta District, Assam**” contains six independent chapters.

The first chapter of this study is “**Introduction**” which presents a general insight of language, first and second language, foreign language and second language, historical background and importance of English language, scope and limitation of the study, objective of the study, statement of the problem, adopted methodology, organization of the thesis etc.

The second chapter of the research study is on “**Review of Literature**” where the researcher has highlighted various works available which are relevant to the present field of study. The reviews are further sub-headed as ‘Education and Training’, ‘Classroom Teaching of English as Second Language’, ‘Language Proficiency, Teacher and Learner’ and ‘Review of Studies on English Language Teaching’

The third chapter of the research report is “**English Language Teaching: A Brief Profile**” where the researcher attempts to give a brief historical overview of the practice of English language Teaching, Rise and Spread of English in India, English language teaching situation in Assam as well as in India, present Education system of Assam, the place of English in the school curriculum and the problem of teaching English in Assam.

The fourth chapter of this study is “**Methods, Materials and Techniques of Teaching English as Second Language**”. In this chapter the researcher discusses some popular methods of second language teaching such as Grammar Translation

Method, the Direct Method, The Audio Lingual Method, the Bilingual Method, Situational Language Teaching, Communicative Language Teaching Method, the Natural Approach, the Co-operative Language Teaching Method, the Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT), Total Physical Response, the Immersion Programme, etc. Besides these popularly adopted methods, the researcher has also tried to explore some new methods of language teaching propounded by applied linguists in recent time.

The fifth chapter of the study is “**The Difficult Areas of Learning English by the 12<sup>th</sup> Standard Assamese Medium Students of Barpeta District, Assam.**” In this chapter, the researcher tries to find out the difficulty areas of learning English by the 12<sup>th</sup> standard Assamese medium students in acquiring the four skills, viz, listening, speaking, reading and writing. Moreover, some other problems related to the teachers and the students are also discuss and analysis

The sixth chapter is “**Findings and Suggestions**” where the researcher presents the overall summery of all the findings in brief and advocates some remedies for those problems and discusses the areas to be explored in future in this field.

The final chapter is followed by Bibliography and appendices.