

# **CHAPTER - I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

## CHAPTER I

### I N T R O D U C T I O N

After the independence, Universalisation of Elementary education (hereafter UEE) has been an utmost important goal of our education. This goal has not yet been achieved. UEE includes universal enrollment, universal retention and universal achievement. Although there has been significant improvement in enrollment and retention at primary level, achievement level of children is still unsatisfactory.

The National Policy on Education, 1986 (hereafter, NPE-86) has emphasised much on the improvement of achievement level. NPE -86 called for paying attention to laying down minimum levels of learning that all children completing different stages of education should achieve. On the recommendations of NPE, 1986 a committee was set up by the Ministry of Human Resources Development in 1991 which submitted its report entitled Minimum Levels of learning (hereafter MLL) at Primary stage. The main objective of this committee was, clearing up MLL for primary classes and recommending procedure for comprehensive learner evaluation and assessment. MLL was confined to the curricular areas of Language, Mathematics and

Environmental studies in Cognitive and Non Cognitive areas of learning.

At the primary level, language occupies a pivotal place in the curriculum. The basic skills acquired through language learning facilitate learning of concept in other areas. In the shaping of the personality of the child and in all his / her effective transactions in day to day life situations, the nine basic skills namely listening, speaking reading, writing, comprehension of ideas. (through listening and reading, functional grammar, self learning, language use and vocabulary control play significant roles. The pupil's performance in language generally concerns all the four major elements of language i.e. speech, listening, reading and writing (Pumfrey, 1991). Reading is one of the four component but as far as achievement level is concerned it is considered to be a crucially important component of Hindi Language. Pumfrey (1990) acknowledges reading as one of the amplifiers of human capabilities. In addition he states the importance of reading as follows

"In most societies, not to be able to read is to be impoverished because of the effects both on career opportunities and on access to much of a country's cultural heritage." (Pumfrey,1990)

Chall et. al.(1990) recognize its importance of reading

by saying,

"Reading was a particular concern because of the considerable evidence that it was highly related to most other kinds of academic learning and therefore could be used as an index of general academic achievement."

Reading is a cognitive process of the interpretations of signs perceived through the sense organs (Betts, 1966). Strang (1967) says, "Reading proficiency is the royal road to knowledge; it is essential to the success in all academic subjects. In modern life, learning depends largely upon one's ability to interpret the printed page accurately and fully." Reading clarifies, formulates and hence help to express ideas born of the reader's common experience. It is one of the channel among many through which the environment affects the individual. The process of reading involves a hierarchy of skills ranging from auditory and visual discrimination to such higher order mental activities as organizing ideas, making generalizations and drawing inferences (Deboer and Dallman, 1964).

Generally, pupils enter first grade with varying degree of reading skills; might be due to rich exposure of Hindi in home and their interplay with a pupil's natural abilities and age differences. The poor reading achievement of pupils is attributed to the

dialect interference usage and second language differences (Juel et. al., 1986)

Dialect interference has been defined as,

... the tendency of individuals learning a new dialect to impose the sounds and structures of their native tongue on the unfamiliar sounds and structures they are trying to master (Johnson. 1969).

—Dialect interference has been conceived as the effects of the sound syntax and semantics of one linguistic code on the acquisition of competence in a different linguistic code (Reed and Pumfrey, 1992). In terms of their syntactic, semantic and phonological features non standard dialects of a tribal language are different from standard dialect. This difference may adversely affect the academic attainment, in general, and reading in particular, if not taken into consideration during the teaching assessment process in schools (Reed and Pumfrey, 1992).

Gough and Juel (1991) have viewed reading as consisting of two things. One is word recognition; the other, comprehension. Both things are essential for reading. To the beginner, reading is taught through either 'phonics' or 'sight vocabulary' approach (Modiano, (1973). The former requires the pupil to associate sounds with particular letters, where as the latter requires him/her to recognise word configuration

and to attach the appropriate meaning to them. In both the approaches, a second language learner may face difficulties. A study (Hoover and Gough, 1990) of bilingual pupils, who were in the first grade in Texas, found that products of the pupil's decoding skill and their listening skill were correlated (.84) with reading achievement confusion which is the result of an inability to discriminate the phones of another dialect. A pupil who is from a different culture may have difficulties in perceiving the different shapes of letter symbols and in matching unfamiliar sounds to different shapes during reading. The reason for her difficulty may be that these are meaningless to her. In such a situation, she is forced to learn phonics by rote. The pupils have problems in remembering meaningless material (Bruner 1962; Piaget, 1969). Interestingly when rhyme, rhyme and repetition, and fun occur pupils can and do retain nonsense material, such as occur in some nursery rhymes and names of film character and dialogues.

The sight vocabulary approach could also be difficult for such a pupil. He may not read properly until he acquires enough of the second language. The child may only be benefited if the sound symbols of the second language matches those of the pupil's mother tongue (Modiano 1968). 'Look and say' as a method of teaching reading can degenerate into 'Glimpse and guess'



(but not read).

The comprehension ability of the pupil is influenced by several factors. It is pointed out that slow acquisition of an academic vocabulary, recognising less familiar words, and lack of fluency would affect the comprehension ability of the pupil (Chall et. al. 1990). If this is not the case, the child is able to read with comprehension. Stanovich (1982), Chall (1988) Laberge and Samuels (1985) and Perfetti (1985) have also mentioned importance of fluency for comprehension of the text. Vocabulary knowledge is both a contributor to and a detriment of, progress in learning to read and is essential for reading comprehension (Pumfrey, 1991). A pupil for whom Hindi is a second language may have poor vocabulary knowledge and grammatical cues in relation to other pupils for whom Hindi is not the second language. If all the subskills involved in reading are required to cope with the reading process itself, then the amount of attention available would be inadequate (Laberge and Samuel, 1985). To overcome this difficulty automaticity in word recognition is essential in order to free the reader's attention from the task of decoding text and allowing it to be directed towards the comprehension of the text (ibid.) Generally, the comprehension of beginners or slow readers is restricted by unautomated lower level skills (decoding) (Norman and Bobrow, 1975). The ability to recognise words differentiates the

skilled from the less skilled early reader (Ehri and Wilce, 1983).

The main focus of this study is to investigate the effect of dialect interference on various aspects (accuracy and comprehension of reading. Reading attainments are considered to be one of the most important determinants of academic achievement in schools, whatever the culture, sex or social class of the pupil. A pupil who has not mastered the basics of reading in Hindi, will not be able to progress to the more complicated parts of the curriculum. If the pupil falls behind at the age of seven and nothing is done to help him he may remain behind for the rest of his life (ibid.).

A positive correlation has been established between dialect interference and low reading attainment (Edward, 1983). The lower reading achievement in standard Hindi of the pupils who are used to speaking different dialects is attributed to effect of dialect difference. The reading problems of dialect speaking pupils are the result of linguistic interference (Labov, 1972). Those who speak different dialect may omit certain forms of standard Hindi owing to dialect interference during the early stages of reading development (Baratz 1968). This may also affect their fluency and comprehension in reading. Dialect speakers



reconstruct words in sentences. they hear to make them consistent with their own dialect expectations (Goodman, 1969). Such a reconstruction sometimes leads into omission of certain words. This should not be considered the results of low cognitive functioning but, rather that of an active thinking process.

If we have to meet the linguistic needs and interests of bilingual children for the effective implementation of the Curriculum, then it is necessary, for these needs and interests to be identified, documented and more widely disseminated to organise and develop appropriate strategies for the maximum development of pupil's educational potential. One central purpose is to optimise those attainments on which opportunities in this country largely depend.

To this end, Pumfrey (1988) and Reed and Pumfrey (1992) have recommended that there should be more studies in the field of dialect interference' in relation to reading attainment. These studies are needed for two reasons : firstly, to ascertain whether DI affects the reading attainments in standard Hindi by bilingual pupils, and secondly, if DI does exists, to identify such effects in relation to pupils' reading as a first stage in developing educational strategies to alleviate any adverse effects of DI.

Seeing the importance and urgency of such

issues, researchers are very much concerned with investigating and establishing the relationship between dialect difference which is the result of growing up in a different culture and language environment and reading attainment in standard Hindi. In theory, DI is likely to affect all aspects of languages -receptive (reading and listening) and expressive (writing and speaking ). This study concentrates on pupil's reading attainments. Some studies have shown a positive correlation between dialect usage and low reading achievement (Edwards 1983: Pumfrey, 1988).

The main aim of the present study is to explore one small aspect of this field, thereby enhancing an understanding of the relationships, theoretical and empirical, between reading accuracy and comprehension of Hindi text by tribal children compared with that of nontribal children. Reading attainment is the focus because the degree of proficiency attained in reading is the most important factor in determining general educational performance (Mabey, 1986, Pumfrey, 1988, 1990 and Chall et. al. 1990).

It is assumed by the investigator that lower reading attainment of tribal children in relation to non tribal children in Hindi language is owing to dialect interference. The effects of dialect interference on reading attainment are not open to

direct inspection. It is necessary to examine how the tribal child performs, mainly in reading. There are three aspects of language proficiency. The first is conceptual in nature and can never be measured. The second language proficiency manifest in every day life, and the third is language proficiency sampled by using a test. This study is on the third aspect of language proficiency. The utterances that the child produces in response to the text (accuracy and comprehension) are treated a windows through which the internalised rule system can be viewed in theory, DI can be detected by comparing the relative performance of tribal and non tribal 7-8 year old pupils. Therefore, the investigator has formulated a study to compare :

- the accuracy scores, and
- the comprehension scores.

Significant differences that can be attributed to the effects of DI will be explored. Factors other than cultural groups and sex, which may influence various aspects of reading i.e. socio economic status, grade and age of the subjects will be controlled.

Whatever findings emerge from this study may help those who are concerned and interested in developing appropriate strategies for meeting educational needs of tribal children and in achieving UEE.