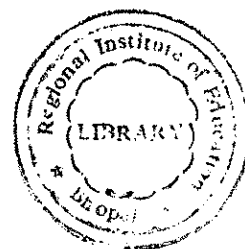


CHAPTER - I



CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

'It is language, more obviously than anything else that distinguishes man from the rest of the animal world. At one time, it was common to define man as a thinking animal, but we can hardly imagine thought without words. More recently, man has often been described as a tool-making animal; but language itself is the most remarkable tool that man has invented and it is the one, that makes all others possible.'(Charles Barber, 1965)

1.1 CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF LANGUAGE

According to Edward Sapir (1970), 'language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols.'

In the 1964 edition of Encyclopedia Britannica, language has been defined as 'an arbitrary system of vocal symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in a culture, interact and communicate.' (Max Black, 1968)

Bloomfield (1980) says that ' the totality of the utterances that can be made in a speech community is the language of that speech community.'

In Aristotle's view, language or speech is actually the representation of the experience of the mind.

Further, Carlos Fuentes (1988) has said that 'language is a shared and sharing part of culture that cares little about formal classifications and much about vitality and connection, for culture itself perishes in purity or isolation.

On analysing many different definitions or attempts to define language, as an answer to the question 'what language is ?' we can give lot many interpretations about language, like language is a means of communication and self-expression. It is arbitrary, non-instinctive and conventional. It is a symbol system and is structurally complex. Also it is open-ended, extendable and modifiable as it is a form of human social behaviour.

FUNCTIONS OF LANGUAGE

Language performs a number of functions based on the purpose of its use. Language with a functional purpose is illustrated by Michael Halliday (1964) as follows :

Instrumental: It performs an instrumental function the way an individual satisfies the need by asking for something (May I drink some water ?)

Regulatory: It performs a regulatory function controlling another's behaviour (eg. Teacher asks the student, "Stay quiet, please.")

Interactional: It performs an interactional function used for maintaining interpersonal relations (eg. wishing a friend a happy birthday).

Personal: Language performs a personal function where one talks about oneself (eg. I am feeling very elated today).

Heuristic: It performs a heuristic function to find out about the world in general (eg. Is there a drug to cure AIDS ?).

Imaginative: It performs an imaginative function where one talks about one's imagination (eg. write an essay on the topic "you are on the clouds").

Informational: It also performs an informational function- to seek and give varied types of information (eg. What is the current rate of population growth in our country ?)

COMPONENTS OF LANGUAGE

Laura E. Berk (1999) has explained about the components of language. She says, 'language consists of four sub-systems-phonology, semantics, grammar, and pragmatics. Knowing language entails mastering each of these aspects and combining them into a flexible communicative system.

The first component, **phonology** is concerned with understanding and producing speech sounds.

Semantics, the second component is concerned with understanding the meaning of words and word combinations.

The third component, **grammar** consists of two main parts: syntax, the rules by which words are arranged into sentences and morphology, the use of grammatical markers that indicate number, tense, case, person, gender, active or passive voice and other meanings.

Finally, **pragmatics** refers to communicative side of language. This component of language is concerned with how to engage in effective and appropriate communication with others.'

THEORIES OF LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Language - the most awesome of universal human achievements - develop with extra ordinary speed over the early childhood years. Three theories provide different accounts of language development. According to the behaviorist perspective, language like other behaviors, is learned through conditioning and imitation. Behaviorism has difficulty accounting for the speed of language progress and for children's novel, rule based utterances. However, it has had a lasting impact on efforts to help children with serious language delays and disabilities.

Chomsky's nativist perspective proposes that humans are born with a language acquisition device (LAD) that permits children, as soon as they have

acquired sufficient vocabulary, to speak in a grammatically consistent fashion and understand the language they hear. Evidence indicating that a complex language system is unique to humans, that language functions are housed in specific regions of the brain, and that a sensitive period for language development exists is consistent with nativist theory. However, vast diversity, among the world languages and children's gradual acquisition of many constructions has raised questions about Chomsky's assumption of a universal grammar within the LAD ensuring built - in- knowledge of grammatical rules.

In recent years, interactionist theories have arisen, stressing that innate abilities and social contexts combine to promote language development. Today, there is increasing acknowledgement that biology, cognition, and social experience may operate in different balances with respect to each component of language. Grammar may be more innately determined than other aspects of linguistic skill. (Laura E. Berk, 1999)

1.2 LANGUAGE AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

There is an important relationship between language proficiency and academic performance or achievement, perhaps because the way we impart knowledge in school is largely through language and the way we measure academic achievement is language - based - predominantly through written tests. Loban (1963) found that students who write well were also above average in speaking and reading.

The ability to use language to help solve problems, conceptualize the principles and concepts and comprehend phenomenon is a tool to academic performance.

Vygotsky "viewed intelligence as the capacity to benefit from instruction, with language having a powerful developmental role" (Spencer, 1988, p. 170). In this sense, language is a tool for learning and an aid to understanding. According to Vygotsky (1978), "human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them." Hence, language acts as a vehicle for educational development and is important for the apprehension and acquisition of knowledge.

In the educational context, language is important for comprehension and making use of knowledge. Shale (1988) describes the role of the teacher in the "ideal educational process" in four parts : First, the teacher and the student determine and validate what the student knows. Second, on the basis of what is determined, the teacher may provide additional declarative knowledge. Third, the teacher and the student negotiate the meaning of what is taught. The assumption is that the teacher will clarify points for the student, but in the best exchanges the teacher also gains understanding (Shale & Garrison, 1990). Fourth, through repetitions of steps two and three, both the teacher and the student's advance in their knowledge, and the students knowledge is validated by the teacher.

The zone of proximal development is observed during this third step of the schooling process, in which teachers help "others to gain consciousness and reach higher ground intellectually, transforming the meaning of the lower order concepts" (Spencer, 1988, p. 176), also (Schaffer, 1996; Vygotsky, 1962). In this step there is "room for the negotiation of meaning and the prospect of mutual learning through dialogue and discussion" (Rowntree, 1975, p. 284). In an ideal form of education, the teacher and student engage in what King and Browhell (1966) refer to as "The Great Conversation."

Unfortunately, a great deal of actual schooling time is spent conveying information, rather than ensuring comprehension. This often precludes

the formation of an interactive learning environment in which learning is an ongoing process shared between the teacher and students.

In the classroom (or school), development of speech or language for communication between teachers and students should be encourage. Teachers need to encourage talk, which can be exploratory, tentative, used for thinking through problems, for discussing assigned tasks and for clarifying thought: talk is not merely social and communicative; it is also a tool for learning.

Despite these concerns, however, the nature of teacher - student language in the classroom has remained largely the same (Dillon, 1985; 1994; Hodge, 1993; Jones, 1988).

1.3 THE MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION IN SCHOOLS

The language in which formal learning is conducted is usually called the medium of instruction. In a multilingual society, such as India, the rapid spread of literacy among the masses can only take place through all the local vernacular languages. The promotion of new technologies and of a national culture, on the other hand, would seem to require the use of a single common language. This is the dilemma of the medium of instruction.

THE THREE LANGUAGE POLICY

With the exception of a couple of states, India has a language policy which provides for three languages to be learnt in school. Under this policy students are required to learn the federal language, Hindi, the language of their own state, and English or any other European language. And in Hindi - speaking states they have to learn another Indian language, so that the burden remains the same. Officially, the medium of instruction in schools is the regional language. But

in India, perhaps more than in many other countries, there is a wide difference between what the law says or what the government says and what actually happens in practice. And, of course, all the linguistic laws and educational laws are bypassed by the ever - expanding English - medium private sector.

1.4 LANGUAGE SCENE IN INDIA : A PROFILE

The picture in India is a very complex one as it is a multilingual, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious country. The linguists all over the world look upon India as linguistic area because of the myriad of languages it has. There are 1652 mother tongues according to the 1961 Census of India, out of which more than 400 are tribal languages. The Eight Schedule of the Constitution of India has recognized 18 languages. There are four major languages families, namely Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, and Tibeto-Burman, and Austro-Asiatic. In addition, there are a few other families that have their own inherent characteristics. The Tibeto-Burman languages of the North-east are distinctly different from the Indo - Aryan languages, and so are the Dravidian languages. Languages belonging to the same language families have also developed their own distinctive characteristics due to various socio-cultural and geographical reasons.

ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Terming English as a Second Language or as a Foreign Language seems to be a verbal quibble. Earlier the two terms were often used interchangeably or almost so. The English on the other hand, make a very careful distinction between the two. By English as a Foreign Language they mean English taught as a school subject, or on adult level solely for the purpose of giving the student a foreign - language competence which he may use in one of several

ways - to read literature, to read technical works, to listen to the radio, to understand dialogue in the movies, to use the language for communication possibly with transient English or Americans.

When the term English as a Second Language is used, the reference is usually to a situation where English becomes a language of instruction in the schools, and a lingua franca between speakers of widely diverse languages, as in India.

Assigning English the status of a second language is often more fundamental to the life and functioning of the country than when it has foreign - language status. (Albert H. Marckwardt, 1965)

BILINGUALISM

Students in India studying in English - medium schools experience biligualism i.e, mother tongue and medium of instruction which is English. However, the term bilingualism has not been used in a consistent way among researchers and theoreticians. Definitions vary considerably. Macnamara (1967), for example, defines bilinguals as those who possess atleast one of the language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) even to a minimal degree in their second language. At the other end of the scale, bilinguals have been defined as those who demonstrate complete mastery of two different languages without interference between the two linguistic processes (Oestreicher, 1974) or more languages (Bloomfield, 1933).

Alison J. Elliot (1994), have talked about many different kinds of bilingualism, and only some of the most important for child language study are outlined here. Some children learn both languages in the home (**simultaneous bilingualism**) and others learn a second language only when they go to school (**successive bilingualism**) some simultaneous bilinguals hear only one language from each person around them, while others are surrounded by people who

frequently switch languages. Some successive bilinguals learn a second language without their first language losing its importance for them (**additive bilingualism**), while others have no choice but to learn the second language since that is the dominant language in the community (**Subtractive bilingualism**).

1.5 FIRST AND SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Learning a language is an instinctual and developmental process that involves predictable stages. We acquire our first language as children, in the context of natural, interesting and meaningful interactions within our social and physical environment. In such an environment, children are exposed on a daily basis to peer and adult language models in a context that gives meaning to language. Because of this strongly contextualized environment, speakers tend to learn communication shortcuts such as incomplete responses and many non-verbal cues. Cummins (1980) initially referred to this type of language as **basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS)**. Usually it takes about two years for students from different linguistic backgrounds to comprehend context - embedded social language readily.

Cognitively demanding tasks of the curriculum require a second developmental level, beyond conversational language, that consists of the language used in school and in many facets of adult life. Here, the context is less clear. This level of communication depends on a speaker's (or writer's) ability to manipulate the vocabulary and syntax and discourse style with precision (Ovando, 1983). Cummins (1980) has referred to this type of language competence as **cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP)**. It takes five to seven years for English language learners to attain this level.

Further, Cummins (1984) have talked about **common underlying proficiency (CUP)**. It refers to the transfer of prior acquired knowledge and skills

in the home language to the new language. Regardless of the language in which a person is operating, the thoughts that accompany talking, reading, writing and listening come from the central engine, when a person owns two or more languages, there is one integrated source of thought.

Bilingualism and multilingualism are possible because people have the capacity to store two or more languages. People can function in two or more languages with relative ease. Information processing skills and educational attainment may be developed through two languages as well as through one language. Cognitive functioning and school achievement may be fed through one monolingual channel or equally successfully through two well developed language channels. Both channels feed the same central processor.

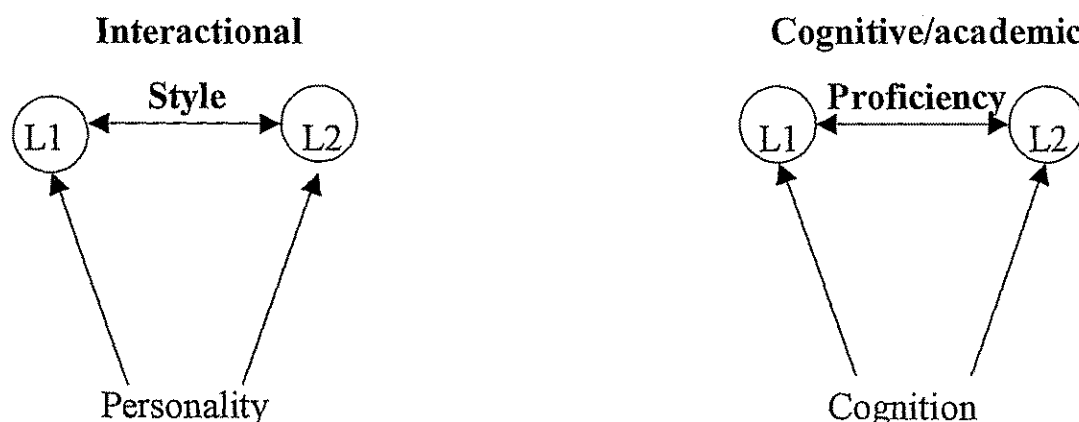


Fig.1 Model of attribute - based interdependent language proficiency.

1.6 LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

English is used as the medium of instruction in English-medium schools. As discussed earlier also, English is the second language in India. Therefore, one of the objectives of this research study is to examine the effects of English language proficiency on the academic achievement of students of class V. The theoretical foundation to investigate this factor is Cummins (1981, 1986,

1991) work on cognitive academic language proficiency, which relates both cognitive and linguistic processes to the academic success of students, more specifically non-native English language learners. English language proficiency is presumed to be one important contributor to the unexplained variance of the differences in academic achievement of students (Canale, 1981; Cummins, 1981, 1991).

Cummins (1982), Chamot and O'Malley (1986) and Shuy (1978, 1981), have conceptualized the relationship of language proficiency and academic achievement by using an iceberg representation (see Figure 2 below). In this representation, basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS), or skills, which depend on the surface features of language and lower levels of cognitive processes, are represented above the waterline while the cognitive - academic language proficiency (CALP) or skills related to the meaning of language and higher level of cognitive processes are represented below the waterline.

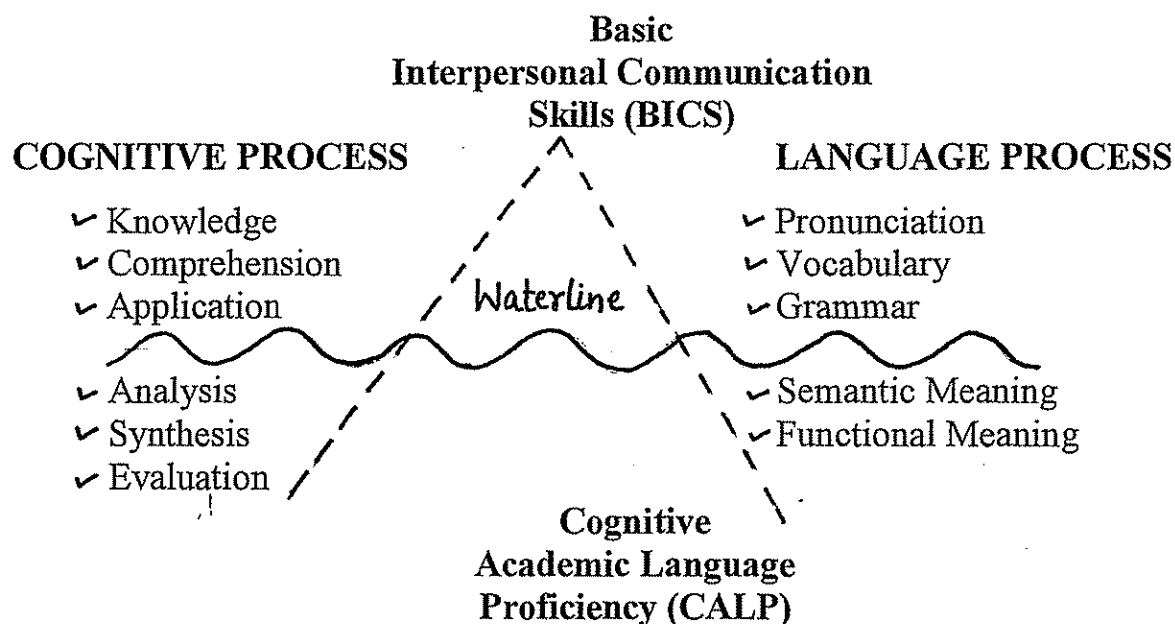


Figure 2. Surface & Deeper levels of language proficiency

Adapted from : Rosenthal, J.W. (1996). Teaching science to Language Minority Students, p. 48. Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Cummins (1981) contends that all children develop basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and learn to communicate in their native or first language and that cognitive - academic language proficiency (CALP) reflects a combination of language proficiency and cognitive processes that determine a student's success in school.

According to Cummins (1980, 1981), Krashen and Biber (1987), Rosenthal (1996), and Spurlin (1995), CALP is the type of language proficiency needed to read textbooks, to participate in dialogue and debate and to respond to in writing tests, CALP enables the student to learn in a context, which relies heavily on oral explanation of abstract or decontextualized ideas.

According to Chamot and O'Malley (1986), Cummins (1982) and Rosenthal (1996), students who have not yet developed their cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) will be at a disadvantage in such settings.

1.7 NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In a multilingual society like India, those students whose medium of instruction is English are learning and experiencing knowledge in a language, which is not their mother tongue. These students will have to listen to instructions in the classroom, read textbooks, interact with teachers in subject discourse and write exams in English. Other factors being constant, the proficiency that students develop in English language may considerably influence the overall academic achievement of students. Hence, this study is pertinent in a situation where parents are being enthusiastic to send their children to English - medium schools, which in turn is leading to mushrooming of schools whose medium of instruction is English. The results of the study may be useful in evolving or formulating the policies in the schools to strengthen the English language proficiency of students, so as to enhance their academic achievement.

1.8 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

English Language Proficiency and Academic Achievement : A Study
on Class V students

1.9 VARIABLES OF THE STUDY

Independent Variable

English Language Proficiency

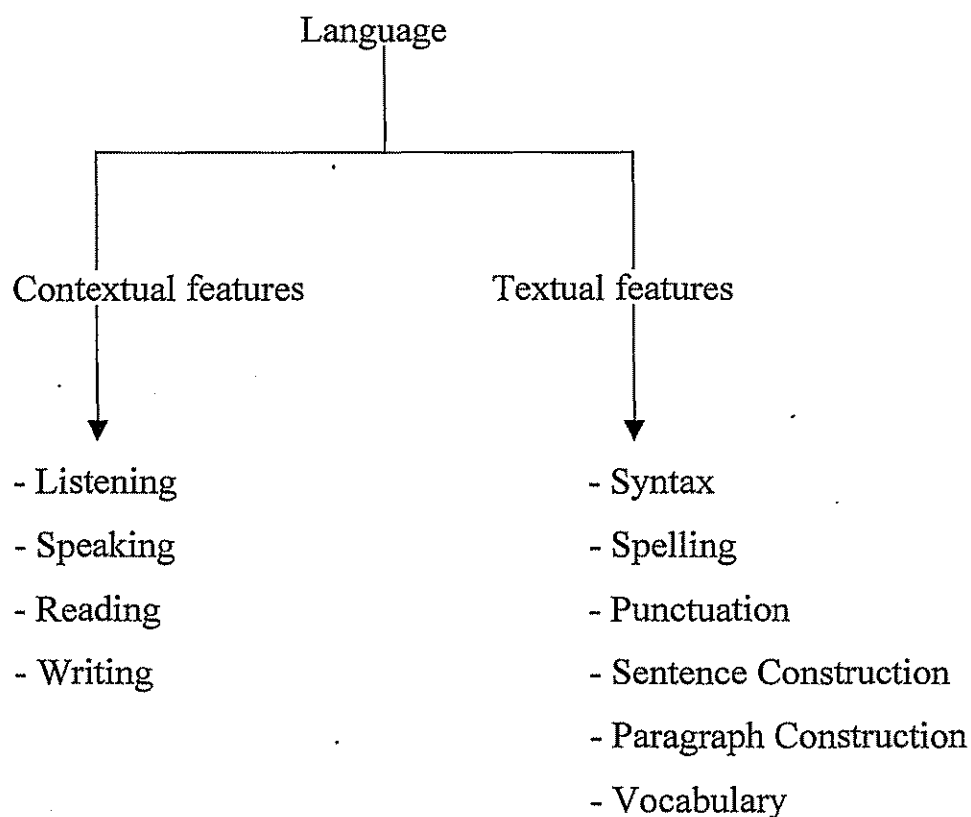
Dependent Variable

Academic Achievement

1.10 OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF THE VARIABLES UNDER STUDY

For the purpose of the present study the independent variable and the dependent variable has been defined as :

1.10.1 Language Proficiency :



Language proficiency is a dynamic relationship between contextual and textual features of language.

1.10.2 Academic Achievement

Academic achievement refers to the acquired potentials (knowledge and capabilities) in a subject or subjects.

1.11 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- (i) To study the proficiency of students (of class V) in English language.
- (ii) To study the academic achievement of students of class V.

- (iii) To examine the relationship between proficiency in English language and achievement in different subjects of class V.
- (iv) To study the effect English language proficiency on academic achievement.

1.12 HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

There would be a significant effect of English language proficiency on academic achievement of students.

1.13 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- (i) The study was confined to students of Anand Vihar School, Bhopal.
- (ii) The study was conducted only on class V students.
- (iii) The study was conducted only on 110 students.

1.14 SUMMARY

In this chapter, the investigator has discussed about the problem, its theoretical background, the need of the study and also the operational definitions of the terms.

The objectives and hypothesis of the study have been formulated and presented. The delimitations of the study have also been mentioned.