

CHAPTER I

The Rationale of the Problem

1.1 Introduction

Language is a crucial criterion with reference to which man can be distinguished from animals. A living language is more than a system of signs. It has to perform various functions mainly as a form of interaction, as a means of expression of thought and emotions and as a source of aesthetic gratification. It reflects the culture of the people and it is the means by which members of the society communicate and thus bring about social cohesion. Language thus is the main component of culture and acts as a means to express other components. Intellectual development of homosapiens which is an important step in the process of biological evolution is closely associated with linguistic development. Language is described as "the instrument of all our distinctively human development, of everything in which we go beyond animals" (Richards, 1965). It is the chief vehicle in all spheres of life to express and transmit ideas and it also helps to store knowledge through generations. In short, language is a dynamic entity in which biological, psychological and sociological determinaters are conveyed.

As a child grows, he acquires language through experiences from the ever widening situations around him. By five he would be almost completely familiar with the complex grammatical systems of the language he speaks. This is a natural process. Unfolding of language takes place between the ages of two and seven. (Montessori 1965). This is, therefore, a very critical period. At this stage the language integrates totally with the individual's behaviour so that he can take care of any kind of situation dealing with practical problems of real life and the abstract types of concepts can be represented and attacked in verbal terms. Thus the child starts using the language he speaks in broad areas like daily routine life, social and cultural aspects of life and formal education.

1.2 Implications for Teaching

Implications of language in education are tremendous. Language instruction is a basic requirement for all types and levels of education. Education of a child begins through language and continues through language. To make learning effortless and natural, the child should be taught through the language he is familiar with, in the language through which he forms concepts, through which he can think creatively, and which helps him in socialization. Instruction in mother tongue helps in his search for self-affirmation, establishes group identity, meets the natural urge for cultural rootedness and helps to avoid

fanaticism. It brings the child into harmonious relationships with his environment and maximizes the opportunities offered by the early learning experiences (Pattanayak, 1981). Hence it can be said that, unlike all other subjects taught in schools which are concerned with that aspect only, mother tongue is concerned with almost every aspect and need of human life.

Language of school differs substantially from that of School (Wells, 1984). When a child starts going to school the natural acquisition of language is hindered to some extent. This is mainly due to the fact that in the school formal training is provided to the children to use language in new contexts which informal and routine use of language has not fulfilled. It is an important fact that the purposes of teaching mother tongue is not merely to impart knowledge but also to develop skills like listening and reading comprehension as well as oral and written expression which are the basic requirements for all types of education.

Knowledge of language in general and an understanding about it has always been fundamental to teaching. Considerable developments in the linguistic researches provide means to do language teaching better. Linguistics is now developing techniques to provide a scheme of description which goes beneath the surface form of language and enables us to gain an insight into what a person must know in order to speak a language and to

teach it. This aspect is very relevant with regard to teaching because "Schooling is a major break in the natural acquisition of language where ignorant pedants teach the non-existent logic, identify varieties as incorrect, create a low self-image by branding the home language as non-standard and try to establish their right to teach the correct and standard. It creates the first emotional disturbance, the first alienation from reality and sows the first seeds of social discrimination, violation and repression" (Pattanayak, 1981). This should not happen. Learning of a standard language should not take the person away from reality. It should be made as natural as possible. This can be possible only by understanding different varieties of that standard form and interpreting these varieties. It should never be a prescriptive process where a standard form is induced making learning difficult and artificial.

Carroll (1961) feels that a child should know the language patterns (new words constructions, etc.) in the spoken language before they are introduced in the printed form. This is because language is primarily a speech. A child by the time he starts schooling must have mastered the basic sound system and grammatical structure of the language he speaks. So in the formal school system, there is a functional difference between the role of mother tongue teacher and other tongue teachers. Another tongue teacher should help the child in learning to use the language creatively in a widely diverse services of contexts

and not in merely manipulating the increasing complex structures of the language. Language learning is essentially a habit forming process and the important stage in the habit forming process is elementary stage. "If we do not secure the habits of accurate observation, protection and imitation during the first stage, it is also doubtful whether we shall ever secure them subsequently" (Palmer, 1969). A child should be introduced to the standard forms of the language as naturally as possible. The emotional identity with the language spoken by him at home and around should not be off all of a sudden.

1.3 Language Development and Cognitive Development

Children start schooling at the age of five assuming that language considered essential for learning purposes is acquired by that age. According to Ervin - Tripp (1970) children by that age will have learned the semantic and syntactic structures of language and also to use ellipses or abbreviated answers to respond. But studies have come out with the finding that certain aspects of the language are not acquired by five year olds and many interacting linguistic and cognitive problems are involved at this stage (Arnette-Karmuloff Smith, 1979). From Humbolt to Sapir many psycholinguists have upheld the proposition that language determines thought. Based on Whorf's hypothesis, Brown and Cassirer also have explained language as a "lure to

cognition". But Cromer Vygotsky and Piaget have demonstrated that intelligent and cognitive operations are expressed in non verbal behaviour also. Cromer (1974) argues that human beings "are able to understand and productively use particular linguistic structures only when (their) cognitive abilities enable (them) to do so".

1.4 Language Development and Social Perspectives

Language is necessarily a social phenomenon. But it also differs from individual to individual. Even among the people who speak the same language there will be variations. There are identifiable differences between people of the same age in aspects of language such as vocabulary, certain areas of syntax, skill at using speech for certain tasks and the art of reading and writing which can only be described as examples of inequality between the individuals concerned and these are precisely the areas of language taught in school (Hudson, 1983). People coming from different environments will have different concepts about the language in use and this necessitates the need to teach mother-tongue at schools. Many children coming to school will have communicative difficulties, the kind of knowledge or skill that is rendered when using speech to interact with other children. This communication inequality naturally relates to equality of opportunity and educational policy. Research has shown positive co-relation between higher social strata and

shown positive co-relation between higher social strata and pursuit of higher education. Since lower status groups tend to get admission to an inferior stream of education and since superposed language do not only accelerate the existing inequalities, but also introduce inequalities where none existed before. The understanding of the socioeconomic process would not be complete without an understanding of the dialectical relationship between language and society (Pattanayak 1981).

Thus it can be concluded that language education, especially mothertongue education should not be taken for granted. Materials should be prepared carefully and systematically so that mothertongue teaching is made more efficient and interesting. Since children may expect newness in learning, preparation of such materials should not be undertaken without the proper awareness of what the children already have acquired. (Lazarus 1981). A text book, undoubtedly serves for majority of teachers as syllabus for language teaching. Some of the considerations for preparing text books have to do with sociology and psychology of language. But apart from these, linguistic aspects, which are also important, should be taken into account. It has to be clearly specified what vocabulary does the text book contain and what grammatical features the language comprises. These language behaviour should be described precisely in linguistic terms rather than vague and broad terms such as ability to read and converse freely with native people etc.

Despite the unique role, language education is very much neglected in India. "The educationists, who control and operate the educational system, generally being non-linguists have not been able to perceive objectively the dominant role of language in any formal educational system as more a linguistic interaction between the teacher and the taught than anything else" (Chaturvedi and Mohale, 1976). Language, in India, is never considered as a foundation for total curriculum. Languages taught as subjects and languages used as media of instruction cannot be equated with one or other. Generally the first language to be taught in school is mother-tongue which should also be the medium of instruction at least in the elementary stage. But what happens always is though mothertongue is introduced in the elementary stage, mother-tongue instruction is always taken for granted. A perusal of studies conducted shows that research in this area is limited only to achievement tests. Only one study has been reported on language development (Chattopadhyaya 1971).

Pattanayak (1981) has discussed about the faulty primary education in India. He has cited examples of his experiences in Jenukuruba area of Karnataka State where language education in primary classes is mere memorizing of the text book. So in a country where teaching is equated with memorization, emphasis should be given for improving teaching and developing

communication abilities. While preparing the text book, one should also visualize the hetero-genity of the class-room and the capacity of the children to articulate and assimilate the language being taught. This can be achieved through a scientific study of the language that the child knows and by understanding various factors that affect language development.

In the Indian context, text book is the main source for knowledge dissemination. So while preparing the text book, above mentioned crucial factors have to be taken into considerations. Knowledge that the text book reveals should be related to child's living experiences. It should not be a practising medium for elements already learnt. Then only the child will show enthusiasm in learning mother tongue and get pleasure out of it.

In the light of above discussions, it was found worthwhile to assess the language status of the children who enter the elementary stage and also to study a few significant psychological and sociological factors that influence language development. Actually, the title of the present study is, "A study of the language status of primary school entrants with regard to their mother-tongue".

1.5 Dimensions of the Problem

Every activity of life is conducted through language. Language is the centre of child's experiences. They perceive and remember experiences in the development and exchange of meaning through language. It is through language that child forms relationships with adults and peers" Toward the end of second year of life the normal child starts an intense use of language to explore his relations with people and things. He learns to ask questions and to seek help from other children or adults in learning the names of things, learning the categories in which his language orders the world and learning freedom and sanctions of his relations with others (Caroll 1961).

Gradual development of language knowledge from phonology to morphology to syntax and to discourse paralleled by gradual development from form to function places language in a very significant role with regard to education (Study, 1984). Success in learning is linked to language proficiency to a great extent. Once the child enters the school, language is the medium for exchanging ideas and developing skills. It is through language teaching learning takes place. Again it is through language that concepts are developed, meanings are clarified, ideas are shared and skills are acquired (Clerrick and Jacobo 1987).

There will be differences in the child's awareness of language and expectations about language in the school. Teachers understanding of language learning also will be different. It is usually at school that children's language development takes place at technical level. The disparity in the child's competence of language and teachers performance in the class room may bring about confusions in teaching learning situations.

Teaching learning can be effective only if the teacher is aware of the cognitive and linguistic factors that the child has acquired at each stage of development. At primary stage the teacher should be aware of the kind of syntactic forms the children are able to utter. The teacher should also be aware of the receptive abilities of the children, in other words while talking how much the children can comprehend and how much they can produce. While planning the language programme one should start from what the children know. Only by knowing what the child knows one can organize what should be taught to the child. But often mothertongue teaching has been regarded as natural learning situation in the sense that strategies are not determined by the learner but imposed by the teacher (Ingram 1975).

In a brief course of three or four years, during which the early levels of cognitive abilities are acquired the child succeeds in mastering the exceedingly complex structures of his

native language. By the end of the pre school period the normal child is at least on grammatical level - all most a full fledged member of his language community (Slobin, 1971). When the children reach school age, they must have started producing quite a variety of language skills. They must be producing complex and compound sentences and must be proficient in making certain social distinctions in this language behaviour. It is also contended that the children by the age of six or so have mastered basic syntax and morphology and phonology of the language they speak, whatever basic is (Stéfano, 1978) .. Researches have shown that a large number of syntax is known to the four year old (Berko, 1958, Slobin 1960). Linguistic advancement continues after the age of four, but these late developments involve such matters as style (Labour, 1964) and possibly semantics but apparently not syntax. A child's understanding of his language extends a beyond the sum total of sentences he utters. Children are able to understand and construct sentences they have never heard but which are well formed in terms of general rules that are implicit in the sentences they have heard. Discovery of this knowledge is of great importance as far as mother-tongue teaching is concerned.

The complexity of the structures a child utters determines his knowledge about the forms of language he speaks. But there are other aspects to be considered to determine the emerging communicative competence since there is also a social component

involved in the language acquired by the child. The complexity of the structures a child uses to a great extent depends on what cognitive and social meaning a child is trying to express. Studies have indicated that these socio psychological factors deal more with the language use and content than the forms. All these three factors together determine the communicative competence of the child. The communicative competence may vary within the same age group due to various psychological and sociological factors (Mccarthy, 1954, Jemplin, 1957, and Luria and Yudovich, 1959). Thus the communication competence which includes a set of competence - social, cognitive and emotional - develop as the individual integrates thoughts in a social setting in order to make meaning from experiences. According to Hymes (1972) communicative competence is language use or the language abilities of learner and speaker. Thus it should be emphasized that the aim of mother-tongue teaching is not in manipulating the increasing complex structures of the language taught but in developing the proficiency of the child in using the language creatively in a widely diverse series of contexts.

The divergence in the communicative competence may affect learning to a great extent. The communicative inequality in language is very much related to culture and thought (Hudson 1983). The mother tongue instruction should take care of the communicative inequality prevailing among the children admitted to a particular grade.

A perusal of the problems relating to mother ^{tongue} education discussed in the earlier paragraphs stresses the need of scientific study of the mother tongue education in Indian contexts and on that basis the present study is visualized. It will be worthwhile to study the language status of the school children and various factors affecting language development. Such a study can make the mother tongue instruction more effective thereby improving the whole instruction of other subjects since mother tongue is the medium through which the child gets formal education. Language is mainly a habit forming process and if it is not achieved at primary stage it is doubtful whether it will ever be achieved. Hence it was thought appropriate to conduct the study when the children start formal learning. The language status of the primary entrants and the factors affecting it will reveal how mother-tongue education has to be organised in a formal system. Study is designed to cover not only the forms but also the content and use of language which along with social and psychological factors will reveal the communicative competence of the child. The study was confined to children with Malayalam as mother tongue.

The Objectives of the Study are:

1. to assess the language status of the primary entrants
2. to study the relationship between language status and logical reasoning ability
3. to study the effect of some socio-cultural factors on language development

1.6 Description of Terms

Language status means the acquisition of lexical, morphological and syntactical categories by the child. Study of the acquisition of sound forms (phonology) is not included in the study since by the age of five child must have acquired all sound forms. Semantics is not included separately. But study of syntax and semantics separately is not an appropriate approach and in the present study, assessment of syntactical features take care of relevant semantic aspects also.

Logical reasoning constitutes child's ability to put objects into classes and to understand the relation between various groups of objects. This will be achieved through administering piagetian tasks for primary classes.

The effect of socio cultural factors on language development will be seen by collecting personal information of the children and relating it with their language development.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

Present study comes under developmental psycholinguistics. In the Indian context although some aspects of language learning have been studied, the studies have not adopted the methods and principles of modern linguistics. Linguistics has been called the study of what a native speaker knows about his language in order to speak it. It is more or less explicit externalization of the internalized rule he used to speak and understand his own language (S.Pit Order, 1984). Modern Linguistics developed techniques to offer comprehensive precise and systematic account of the formal aspects of language.

In Indian contexts, the spoken language is always considered inferior. Written language is supposed as spoken language in writing and considered superior. Naturally spoken language and communication competence of children are never studied which is very important in curriculum development. Hence emphasis should be given to improve the communicative competence of the children. This can be done only by deciding what the children already know. Present study attempts to study the language competence of the first standard entrants according to the norms and rules of approaches laid by psycholinguistic theories.

Any natural language is beyond the limits of classification and categorization. The fundamental aspect of a natural language is its creativity. A person can produce infinite number of sentences which he has never heard. Children's speech is particularly spontaneous and it is difficult to assess all aspects. But every speaker of a language must have mastered and internalized a grammar that expresses his knowledge. So a study which regarding his language should see the basic regularities of his language behaviour.

Regularities can be seen only through repeated observations. Although present study attempts observations in various setting, it was not able to provide quantifiable accounts. Study does not provide enough obligatory contexts to quantify the categories. Time limit is a factor that accounts for the same. If it were only categories, investigator can provide enough obligatory contexts to ascertain the acquisition. The investigator has made all attempts to tap children's knowledge of their language.