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L1 AND L2 LEARNING

W.A.Bull in 'Language in Culture and Society' says that, "Getting educated is a personal matter, in contrast, providing education is a social enterprise." He suggests that society's interests in education cannot be ignored. Society has its own reason for providing for the education of its young and if it chooses to teach them foreign languages, it is because it feels that in some way society's needs require this.

The common element in those situations which are usually called 'second language' situations is that the language being learned (L2) is not the mother tongue (L1) of any group within the country, but that it does have some internal, social function. Almost by definitions the countries where the L2 will be a second language are multilingual states. It may be that there is no one local language that is sufficiently dominant to become immediately a national language. Even where there is a candidate for this role it may happen that there is political resistance to its general acceptance or that it has not yet evolved into an entirely satisfactory instrument for the expression of man's needs in the twentieth century. Until another language is ready to take over, some of the functions of a national language will be performed by a language which has historical connections with the country. In practice this means English and French and the situation arises mostly, though not exclusively, in multilingual states that were formerly colonies of Britain or France. The scale and variety of use of the second language differs enormously. It can encompass part or all of government administration, politics, law, medicine, industry, internal trade, newspapers, general publishing, and education. As a result, in education it may become the medium of instruction at any level from the primary school upwards.

It is because the L2 has these other, non-educational functions that it has a place in education at all. If the other activities could be carried out entirely in a local language, the arguments for using a second language as a medium of instruction would largely disappear. The greater the general use of the language in the country the earlier in the educational system it is likely to become the medium of instruction. In states where the L2 has a major function, those who have to develop an education policy are perpetually torn between the general desirability of educating children in their mother-tongue and the need to produce very high levels of proficiency in the second language so that learning at the higher stages is made more effective. In all such countries the second language will at the very least be taught as a subject in the primary school.

In countries where the social role of English or French has been reduced as local languages have taken over, they have come to play an increasingly smaller part in the educational system too. India is a country in transition. English is losing its status as a second language and in some states has already become a foreign language. It is now felt that the regional languages can cope with all aspects of education except technical and scientific subjects at the university level. Consequently there is a steady reduction in the use of English as a medium. Only in Southern India does English remain a L2, because it can serve as a more acceptable 'lingua franca' than Hindi. With the change in status comes an almost inevitable drop in the standard of English proficiency.

In Tanzania a slightly different situation has arisen, because the adoption of 'Swahili' as a national language has not given rise to any of the controversy that India has

seen. 'Swahili' cannot yet perform all the functions that English can, but one can anticipate that it will steadily replace English both socially and in the educational system until the only place for English will be in the teaching of scientific and technical subjects. At that point English would have acquired foreign language status.

Contrary to the second language (L2), the 'foreign language' learning situation is one in which the target language is not the mother-tongue of any group within the country where it is being learned and has no internal communication function either. In foreign language learning the material and method is designed to give a practical command of the language like second language learning. But whereas the second language learner needs the language for use within his own community, the foreign language learner needs it so that he can form contacts with a community other than his own.

Wherever the second language occupies a position of great importance in the daily life of the community, we are likely to find that it is introduced at the primary level of education. It is justified by the necessity for starting at an early age if the language is to become an efficient tool of learning at the higher levels. Almost all L2 courses assume a beginning in the primary school. Text-books are designed to appeal to the younger child. The language is graded much less steeply and the methodology must not be in conflict with the approach that is adopted to the teaching of the rest of the primary curriculum. Although in the first three to four years there may be considerable similarities with foreign language teaching, in its later stages the teaching of second languages comes progressively to resemble the teaching of the mother-tongue. The aim will be to expand the pupil's experience through language, developing his personality and his sensibilities. However, the aims, methods and materials of language teaching vary according to the socio-linguistic status of the target-language, which may be that of a second, foreign or alternate language.