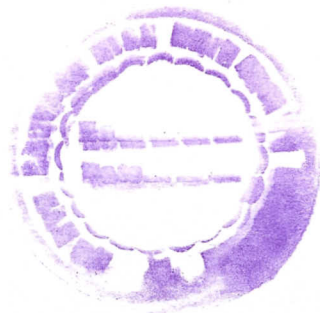


**ATTITUDES OF THE SECONDARY KHASI
STUDENTS TOWARDS ENGLISH LANGUAGE
LEARNING : *A Linguistic Perspective***

ABSTRACT



by

Mrs. ANTOINETTE KHARMALKI

**DEPARTMENT OF KHASI
NORTH – EASTERN HILL UNIVERSITY
SHILLONG - 793 022, INDIA**

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ATTITUDES OF THE SECONDARY KHASI STUDENTS TOWARDS ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: A Linguistic Perspective

History indicates that learning English has always been considered important since it was first taught to the Khasis. According to E. Weston Dkhar, English Language learning in Khasi and Jaintia Hills was first started in 1832 in the Shella Primary School where it was offered as one of the languages to be learnt, the others being Sanskrit and Bengali.¹ When Thomas Jones started his school in 1842 at Mawmluh, it was reported that the Khasis were very keen to learn English as they understood the benefit of learning that language.² As time passes, English language gains more status and prestige especially in later years where it is found to be the second language of the educated section of the community. English, though not the mother-tongue of most people in Shillong at present often functions as the sole or major language of law, government, education, business and media. This is so because it has become a second language of the Khasis as well as an official language of the administration. It is felt important therefore, to investigate the attitudes of the Khasis towards learning English. This study is specifically aimed at gauging the attitudes from a linguistic point of view. By this it is meant that the attitude scale will include learning the components of morphology,

¹ Dkhar, E. Weston, *Primary Education in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills*, p. 41.

² Ropmay, D., *Ka Centenary History ka Balang Presbyterian*, pp. 4-7.

syntax, phonology and the statements covering the general attitudes of learning English.

In order to be able to present my work in a systematic manner, I have divided my work into five chapters.

The first chapter entitled *Theoretical Background of the Study* consists of a discussion on the theoretical background of language learning, language acquisition and language teaching. In this chapter there is also a general discussion on what is meant by *attitude*. In order to investigate students' thought and feeling towards learning English, it is necessary to find out their expressed attitudes towards learning English. Attitudes play an important role in shaping the learning behaviour which is a part of the study of social psychology. Attitude is very beneficial since its significance lies in the fact that it helps in the understanding of interpersonal and inter-group relationships. Attitude is a response to an object or situation, be it positive or negative. It is a preparation for some action. It is a functional state of readiness to act or to give response to the relevant objects. Thus, if a person gives response to an object it means that he has developed an attitude towards that object and it should be noted that his response is based on past experiences.

This chapter further lists the various methods for measuring attitudes, namely, the Thurstone method, Likert method and Guttman's technique and a brief discussion on language attitudes.

The second chapter entitled *Review of Related Literature and Objectives of the Present Study* reviews all available related literature on studies pertaining to attitudes towards learning English conducted abroad and in India. The chapter also highlights the objectives of the present study which are as follows –

1. To find out the attitudes of the secondary Khasi students towards English Language Learning (ELL).
2. To construct and administer English Language Learning Attitude Scale (ELLAS).
3. To construct and administer the English Language Proficiency Test (ELPT) and then to find out their performance in the ELPT.
4. To measure the attitudes of the students according to the social variables of medium of instruction at their primary school level, local background, sex, age and parents' level of education.
5. To compare the response of the students in the ELLAS and their performance in the ELPT.
6. To analyse the data statistically.

7. To find out the methods of teaching of English in the secondary schools of Shillong by holding discussions with the students.
8. To offer some suggestions for future research.

Chapter three entitled *Methodology* deals with the methodology followed in the present research. In this chapter, the problem was stated, the sample of the study was mentioned, the tools used were explained. The steps for construction of the tools were also discussed. The chapter further discusses the procedure of data collection, the statistical techniques used as well as the scope and the delimitations of this study.

The problem of the study was stated clearly in the topic chosen namely, **Attitudes of the Secondary Khasi Students Towards English Language Learning: A Linguistic Perspective**. What this problem entails are the following –

1. What are the current attitudes of the secondary Khasi students towards ELL?
2. Do they have positive attitudes towards learning English as reflected in the components identified by the researcher, namely, morphology, syntax, phonology as well as the general statements on English Language Learning?

3. How are the social variables like local background, medium of instruction (at the primary school level), sex, age, and parental education responsible for the formation of attitudes towards ELL?

Sample of the Study

The sample for the Try-Out stage of the ELLAS and the ELPT consists of 50 students (30 females and 20 males) from class IX of the Malki Presbyterian School, Shillong and the sample for the final stage consists of students belonging to 15 schools of Shillong which totals 1000 students (500 males and 500 females).

Tools Used

The tools used for the present study are –

- a) English Language Learning Attitude Scale (ELLAS) constructed by the researcher herself.
- b) Personal Information Blank
- c) English Language Proficiency Test (ELPT) constructed by the researcher herself.

Steps Taken for Construction of ELLAS

In the present research work, the researcher has adopted the Likert-type method which is also known as the method of Summated Ratings. The statements are

selected by the researcher who uses her own judgements regarding the appropriateness of the statements that students have to respond on a five point scale: *Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree* and *Strongly Disagree*. The scales are assigned 4, 3, 2, 1 and 0, for favourable statements and for the unfavourable statements items are scored 0, 1, 2, 3, and 4. In both the favourable and unfavourable statements 2 is the neutral point. The total score of an individual is obtained by summing his/her scores for all the items. The items not correlated with the total scores on the scale are left out. For this the highest 27 percent of the scores and the lowest 27 percent of the scores are taken and the mean scores of the items are calculated to find out the 't' value. The difference in the mean is the discriminating power or internal inconsistency of the statement, i.e., the top 27th percent whose range was 112-143 and the bottom 27th percent whose range was 46-109 was found out. Then the critical ratios was determined. Only the statements with higher discriminating power were chosen for the final stage. There were 40 statements (both favourable and unfavourable): 10 statements pertain to morphology, 12 pertain to syntax, 12 to phonology and 6 to general attitudes.

Steps Taken for Construction of the ELPT

The identified components of the ELPT were morphology, syntax, composition and phonology. Marks distributed for the ELPT are: 29 for morphology, 28 for syntax, 6 for composition and 62 for phonology. Those items whose range was 40-60 percent were retained on the ground that they were neither too easy nor too difficult. This is the level of standardising the ELPT.

Before administering the ELLAS and the ELPT for the final stage, there was a Try-out stage. The purpose of the Try-out stage was to –

- a) identify items which are to be administered for the final stage,
- b) to reject irrelevant items,
- c) to estimate the discriminating power,
- d) to determine the critical ratio,
- e) to find out whether the students understood the questions of the test.

Try-Out Stage

The ELLAS and the ELPT were administered in a natural setting of the classroom. After creating proper rapport with the students the researcher requested the students to read the instructions carefully and necessary direction were given to them orally. They were then requested to give their response in the ELLAS after performing the ELPT. The average time taken was 2 hours. The response sheet were then collected after the students had finished their response and the pronunciation test was then conducted.

When the responses are scored they are done with the purpose of eliminating and modifying the statements which are not suitable on the basis of 'item analysis' (for the ELLAS) and on the basis of 40-60 percent (for the ELPT).

After scoring, the items selected from the ELLAS were 22 and from the ELPT 28 items were rejected. Then the ELLAS and the ELPT are considered ready for final administration.

Statistical Techniques Used

The statistical techniques used for the analysis of the data are the following –

1. Item Discriminating Power.
2. Critical Ratio.
3. Mean.
4. Standard Deviation.
5. Coefficient of Contingency.
6. Z-Test.
7. χ^2 - Test.

Delimitations

The study was delimited to the following points –

1. The main thrust of the study was on the attitudes of the secondary Khasi students towards ELL in the schools of Shillong, which was delimited to class IX students of the selected secondary schools of Shillong.
2. The questions covering ELPT also was delimited to irregular verbs of English, degree of adjectives, number, affixation, interrogation, tense, negation, voice and letter writing. For phonology, the study was delimited to segmental phonology only, which covers pronunciation of words covering consonants, vowels, diphthongs and triphthongs.

Chapter four deals with the *Presentation and Analysis of the Data*. The large data that has been collected through the administration of the tools was subjected to analysis and interpretation. So the present chapter is devoted to the appropriate tables relating to the attitudes of the secondary Khasi students towards ELL. There are two tables of analysis for each social variables, one which presents the analysis of the ELLAS-based data and the other of the ELPT-based data. The data was further analysed with the selected social variables. After the presentation and analysis of data comes the interpretation of results. The chapter then proceeds to examine the attitudes of the students in relation to the following social variables.

1. The analysis of the social variable of the medium of instruction at the primary school level reveals that the variable plays an important role in developing students' attitudes towards ELL. Firstly, the data shows that students having either Khasi or English medium of instruction have positive attitudes towards ELL.

However, the result of the ELLAS-based data clearly indicates that there is a significant difference between the attitude of the Khasi medium and English medium students towards ELL where the English medium students have scored higher. The difference is significant at 0.05 level. The ELPT-based data, on the other hand shows no significant difference between the attitudes of students coming from either Khasi or English medium background. Nevertheless, it may be interpreted here that students with an English medium background at the primary school level have a higher positive attitude towards ELL (ELLAS-based data).

2. Regarding the social variable of local background, the analysis shows that it also plays an important role in shaping the attitudes of the Khasi students towards ELL. The data shows that students from both urban and rural background have positive attitudes towards ELL. The ELLAS-based data shows that there is no significant difference between the attitudes of the students towards ELL based on local background. However, the ELPT-based data shows that urban background students have done slightly better in the ELPT which is significant at 0.01 level. It may be interpreted from this that students from an urban background have a slightly more positive attitude towards ELL.
3. The social variable of sex is also examined and the analysis of the data shows that female students have a more positive attitudes towards ELL as indicated by the ELLAS-based data which is found to be significant at 0.01 level. But the ELPT

based data shows that male students have done better than female students which also reflects their positive attitudes towards ELL.

4. The data on the social variable of parental education needs special clarification because the researcher has divided the parents' level of education of the students into four groups, viz., Group I which is a group of Illiterate parents, Group II of Under-Matric parents, Group III of Matriculate parents and Group IV of parents who are Graduates and above. Furthermore, mothers' level of education and fathers' level of education are analysed separately. χ^2 test was, therefore, used to analyse the components of the attitude scale separately as are the components of the ELPT analysed separately.

The analysis shows that fathers' level of education of the students has not affected the attitudes of the students towards ELL except in the students' attitudes towards learning morphology. Mothers' level of education, on the other hand, is seen to have influenced the attitudes of the students towards learning syntax and phonology. On the whole it is found that students whose fathers' level of education are Graduates and above, i.e., Group IV have scored the highest positive attitudes towards ELL followed by Group II then followed by Group III and lastly by Group I. Where the mothers' level of education of the students is concerned, it is found that Group IV also have scored highest positive attitude, followed by Group III, then followed by Group I and lastly by Group II.

Furthermore, when the performance of the students in ELPT is analysed, it is found that fathers' level of education of the students influenced the performance of the students in morphology and composition whereas the mothers' level of education has an influence on the students' performance in morphology and syntax. On the whole it is found that those students whose fathers belong to the highest level of education, i.e., Group IV have done better in the ELPT, followed by Group III, then by Group I and lastly by Group II. In the same manner, where mothers' level of education is concerned, it is found that students whose mothers have the highest level of education, i.e., Group IV have done better in the ELPT followed by Group III, then by Group II and then by Group I.

On the whole, it may be seen that there is an association between the students' attitudes towards ELL in morphology only, when based on fathers' level of education. Whereas the mothers' level of education of the students have influenced their attitudes towards learning syntax and phonology. Hence it may be concluded that the mothers' level of education of the students have influenced more in their attitudes towards ELL. On the other hand from the ELPT based data both the mothers' and the fathers' level of education have equally influenced the performance of the students in the ELPT where the fathers' level of education of the students is statistically significant in morphology and composition whereas the mothers' level of education of the students is statistically significant in the component of morphology and syntax.

5. The data which is then analysed, is on the social variable of age. It is found that there are four age groups among the sample of class IX students in this study. Group I are students whose age is 14 years, Group II 15 years, Group III 16 years and Group IV are 17 years old students. It is found that the age of the students has influenced the attitudes of the

students towards learning morphology, syntax, phonology and the general attitudes. On the whole it is found that students belong to Group II, i.e., 15 years of age have the highest positive attitudes towards ELL followed by Group I students then followed by Group III and then followed by Group IV.

Regarding the performance of the students in the ELPT, it is also found that the age of the students has influenced the students' performance in morphology, composition and phonology, on the whole it is found that students belong to Group I (i.e., age 14) have done better followed by Group II which is then followed by Group III and then by Group IV.

The results clearly show that younger students namely, the 14/15 years old groups have a much higher positive attitudes towards ELL whereas students on the age groups of 16/17 years old have a less positive attitudes towards ELL.

Finally, regarding the methods of teaching of English in the schools of Shillong, a discussion was held with the respondents of the study and from the discussion held, the researcher found that the method of teaching of English to these students is not the Grammar Translation Method.

Chapter V entitled *Summary of Chapters and Suggestions for Future Research* comprises the summary of the major findings of the study. It also highlights the feasibility of further research work related to this research.

