

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

With a land area of 676,577 sq.km., Myanmar is the largest country in the Southeast Asia region, bounded by mountain complex in the north, east and west, and enclosed by the Andaman sea and the Bay of Bengal in the South, Southwest, and the west. Myanmar shares borders with Bangladesh, India, China, Laos and Thailand. Myanmar or the Union of Myanmar is made up of 135 national races, of which the main national races are Kachin, Kayah, Kayin (Karen), Chin, Mon, Bamar (Myanmar), Rakhine, and Shan. Population of the country is estimated at 52.4 million (July, 2003) according to the Foreign Ministry of Myanmar. The main religions of the country are Buddhism (89.2%), Christianity ( 5.0%), Islam (3.8%), Hinduism (0.5%), Spiritualism , better known as Animism (1.2%) and others (0.2%). Regarding Christianity, under the Myanmar Baptist Convention, there are 16 regional conventions and Karen Baptist Convention is one of them. Karen Baptist Theological Seminary is under the Karen Baptist Convention.

#### **1.1 Background of Karen Baptist Theological Seminary**

Karen Baptist Theological Seminary (KBTS) is situated in Insein, one of the townships of Yangon, the former capital of Myanmar, Southeast Asia. It is also accredited by the ATESEA (Association for Theological Education in South East

Asia). At present, this seminary offers several Theological study programmes: Licentiate in Theology (L.Th.); Bachelor of Theological Studies (B.T.S.); Bachelor of Theology (B.Th.); Master of Arts in Religion (M.A.R.); Master of Divinity (M.Div.); and Certificate of Church Music (C.C.M.). It also offers Liberal Arts Programmes, such as Communicative English, Computer Science, Business and Administration, and Karen Major, as evening classes.

### **Aims and Objectives of this Seminary**

1. To train Karen students and indigenous peoples for Christian ministry and service.
2. To impart sound knowledge in Scriptures and faith, and higher theological education for their ministry and service.
3. To cultivate evangelistic zeal and stimulate the students to active sharing of the Good News in their ministry and service.

It is according to the aim No.2 that these students are to learn Biblical Studies (Old Testament, New Testament), theologies (Pastoral, Contemporary, Systematic, Feminist, Asian, etc.), Historical Studies (Church History), World Religions, Religious Education, and also Language Studies. All these original texts are in English. Out of the six theological study programmes, texts are translated into Karen for L.Th. classes only because they are the students of which the admission requirement is to have passed the ninth standard. For them, both the medium of teaching and texts are in Karen. However, for the other programmes such as Bachelor's and Master's programmes, the medium is to be in English and the texts are in English. The academic admission standard for the B.Th programme is that they

must pass the 10<sup>th</sup> standard (grade). Graduates from the L.Th. and B.T.S. programmes with at least one year service in Christian ministry may also join the B.Th. programme if they pass the entrance examination. Similarly, the B.Th. students are also able to join the Master's programme after graduation, if the required score is met. Therefore, texts and medium are to be in English. Among those who finish their master's degree, some can even go abroad or stay locally for further higher education during their ministerial life.

Therefore, the students are primarily to be trained to read and write in English. As theological students they are assigned to do book reports, presentations, term papers, translations, discussions, and research. In class, though the medium is English for theological subjects, they are often allowed to discuss and orally present in Karen, but the writing tasks are in English.

In Myanmar, English is taught as a second language. For all colleges and universities, the texts of all subjects, except Myanmar as subject (Myanmar Language/ Literature), are in English. Therefore, English is taught to equip these students with necessary language skills in order to read and write in English as required by the course. The emphasis is on reading and writing, and their basic language need is to be able to cope with the various texts they are to encounter. There are some learners who enjoy learning English, an international language, as a teaching and learning medium. However, while some are from big cities, many are from small districts and villages, so their foundation of English and their motivation are not the same. To the students from the districts and small villages, the exposure of English they receive is less compared to those in big cities. In B.Th. first year class, there may be two kinds of students, those who are allowed to join it directly, and

those who have taken a special English class for one year, as they had previously failed to obtain required pass marks in the entrance exam.

The Seminary has a Library where there are mostly theological and spiritual books but there are also some English books, for example, graded readers and fiction. It also has an audio visual room, especially for the evening English communicative classes. The classes for B.Th programme usually host 30-40 students.

## **1.2 Rationale and Significance of the Study**

The B.Th programme was offered in 1996. Since then, a series of English text books (for four-different years) was produced by an external expert at the request of the Seminary, and it was then designed as a trial edition. This text book was taught to the students for many years. However, English teachers of these classes can add or adapt the materials or make use of other coursebooks. In 2003, it was decided by the Faculty of English that these texts would better be used for the L.Th classes. It is because the reading comprehension passages are rather short and therefore seem less challenging compared to the text books they have to study for other theological, biblical and historical studies. Therefore, the respective class teachers are responsible for choosing the teaching materials and the coursebooks.

English teaching staff usually hold a Bachelor's degree in English, but not with a proper training for teaching. Teachers usually follow a text book prescribed by the Institute or make use of some coursebooks that would be best for the needs of the students. The coursebook serves as a syllabus, with the belief that these coursebooks are carefully researched and designed for the use of general language teaching contexts, especially with the communicative goals, but regarding some language input, more materials and exercises are added, or adapted if necessary. Therefore,

designing or revising a syllabus is not familiar with many teachers, except those who are B. Ed degree holders, or those who graduate from Teachers' training colleges.

Designing a syllabus also has another ground. As KBTS is one of the two leading Karen Baptist theological seminaries in Myanmar, occasionally there have been requests to share texts and prescribed books, and syllabus with other smaller seminaries. Therefore, a model syllabus is needed as well.

Usually in the previous years English was taught four hours a week to all B.Th classes, from the first year to the fourth year. However, from the last two years, as it was needed to add more hours to other studies, English was taught three hours a week. In one academic year there are 38 weeks, and if taking into account private study and exam weeks, and holidays, there may be about thirty teaching weeks.

English is taught to help them know, develop and make use of the medium language and to improve their reading and writing skills, and thus facilitate them with their major studies. After the B.Th. programme, some of these students have opportunities to pursue a Master's degree programme, and also Doctor of ministry programme both locally and abroad which means that they also need this language after school as well. Therefore, educational English or academic English will be appropriate for them, as they may need to achieve knowledge and critical thinking ability for themselves through English. Some students will later impart the knowledge and skills they receive to others again, although most of the students are to work back in the local churches where Karen is their mother tongue.

Given the above situation, an integrated syllabus could be appropriate, and through reading passages on various topics as topical input, it is hoped to provide students with the language input (grammar and vocabulary) and also with reading and writing skills. General English is a stepping stone to further specific disciplines.

This research will be an attempt to design a syllabus for the first year students in a four-year degree programme. It may also serve as a guide for teachers who have followed textbooks or coursebooks as the main teaching materials and enable them to design a specific syllabus. From this step, the whole course for the four years can be designed through working together with the other English teachers at the seminary. It may also yield a sample syllabus for the other seminaries in Myanmar.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the most needed English language skills required by first year theological students
2. To identify the linguistic and non-linguistic content appropriate for the first year theological students
3. To identify the teaching methodologies and learning activities appropriate for the first year theological students
4. To design a syllabus for the first year bachelor of theological students in Myanmar.

### **1.4 Scope of the Study**

The focus of this study is to develop a first-year English syllabus which will best facilitate the B.Th. students in their studies. The primary institutional context is KBTS, although the syllabus may be available to other theological seminaries in Myanmar with the same study programmes.

## 1.5 Definitions of Terms

Syllabus: "Syllabus design concerns the selection of items to be learnt and the grading of those items into an appropriate sequence." (Harmer, 2002)

Integrated syllabus: "a syllabus that is based upon a close relationship between different units of language ( e.g. grammar, functions, skills) and which seeks to provide for mutual reinforcement between the different components of the syllabus." (Richards and Schmidt, 1985)

Topical or content-based syllabus: "one that is organized around themes, topics, or other units of content." (Richards, 2001)

English for General Academic Purposes: "the teaching of the skills and language that are common to all disciplines." (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998)

B.Th: Bachelor of Theology

Linguistic content: structures and vocabulary of a language, i.e. grammar and vocabulary

Non linguistic content: topics, text types, skills, strategies, tasks and activities, apart from grammar and vocabulary