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## The Teaching of Linguistics in India - An Evaluation of the Course Content of Papers in Seven Indian Universities

**Ravindra B. Tasildar, M.A.**

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### Introduction

An elective course offered only to the students of B.A. in Indian universities is variously called - *English (Honours)*, *English (Major)*, *Principal English*, *English (Optional)*, *English (Special)* and *Special English*. The term *Special English* has been preferred in this paper as used by the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) for English (1989). The papers offered in the B.A. (Special English) course can be broadly classified into two categories - papers related to literary studies and papers on the study of English language. Linguistics is the main component of papers on the study of English language. Almost all the universities in India offer core papers on the study of English language in the B.A. (Special English) course with exceptions like Universities in Madhya Pradesh, Goa University and Jamia Millia Islamia.

This globalized era offers many new avenues to the students of B.A. (Special English). This paper is an attempt to evaluate the teaching of linguistics in Indian universities *vis-à-vis* the current needs of the students.

### Inclusion of linguistics

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The discipline of English Studies in India is now more than two hundred year old. The teaching of English in colonial India was dominated by literary texts. The study groups and committees appointed to review English studies in India have persistently recommended the incorporation of linguistics in the B.A. (Special English) course for over fifty years. The following table summarizes the recommendations of the study groups and committees.

**Table A. Recommendations of the study groups and committees**

Name of the Committee	Year	Recommendations
The Kunzru Committee	1957	Recommended to teach linguistics at the university level
The Study Group	1967	Emphasized the inclusion of a paper 'Linguistic description of English (including phonetics, stylistics)' among the three optional papers suggested for subsidiary English courses
The Study Group	1971	Suggested a paper 'Linguistics and Phonetics with special reference to English and methods of second language teaching'
The UGC National Workshop on Syllabus Reform in English	1977	Recommended a core paper on 'The Use of English', despite the deliberations on the inclusion of 'linguistics' in the zonal workshops
The Curriculum Development Centre for English	1989	Suggested a vocational course in 'Linguistics and Language Teaching'
The Curriculum Development Committee for English (CDC)	2001	Minimized the emphasis on language, recommended 60% credit to the units on 'History of the English language, and the History of Old and Middle English literature' and 'Elements of Linguistics and the Structure of Modern English' in a paper comprising the study of language and literary criticism

In addition to these committees and study groups, some subject experts also stressed the need to incorporate linguistics in the B.A. (Special English) course. Gokak (1964-65:124) noted "We know that our graduates are not able to write even a few sentences correctly in English. This is unfortunately true even of many students who have taken up the Special English Course for study". Hence, he insisted on introducing a course unit in 'Modern English Usage' in the B.A. (Special English) Course. Since majority of students of English in India join teaching profession, Lott (1964-65)

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suggested a compulsory paper on ‘English Linguistic Studies’ while Nadkarni (1964-65) insisted on including half a course unit in the phonetics of English.

### **The Need to Review Teaching Linguistics in English Classes**

There are mainly two reasons for the inclusion of linguistics in the B.A. (Special English) course - first, the failure of literary studies to develop linguistic competence of the students and second, the inclination of majority of the students of B.A. (Special English) towards teaching profession. Thus, the purpose of introducing linguistics at the undergraduate (UG) level in Indian universities is mainly to develop linguistic competence of the prospective teachers of English.

However, in the present era of globalization, in addition to a career in teaching, the students of B.A. (Special English) can get jobs at call centres, shopping malls, hotels, tourism industry, in print and visual media, etc. Therefore, it has become imperative to review the teaching of linguistics in Indian universities *vis-à-vis* the current needs of Indian students.

### **Papers on the Study of English Language**

According to Mohan and Banerji (2003) the syllabus is perhaps the most important referential document of a course. Based on the syllabi documents, this paper is a modest attempt to evaluate the course content of papers on the study of English language offered in the B.A. (Special English) course in seven universities in Maharashtra, viz., University of Mumbai (UoM), University of Pune (UoP), Shivaji University, Kolhapur (SUK), North Maharashtra University (NMU), Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University (BAMU), Swami Ramanand Teerth Marathwada University (SRTMU) and Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University (SNDTWU). Hereafter these universities are referred to with their abbreviated forms.

**Table B. Nomenclature of papers on the study of English language**

University	Paper No.	Title of the Paper	Class	Implementation
BAMU	P- I	Introduction to Language	FYBA	w.e.f. 2009-10
SRTMU	P- I	Modern English Structure	FYBA	w.e.f. 2009-10
SNDTWU	D.C. II	Phonetics, Grammar and Communication	FYBA	during 2010-11
UoM	P- V	English Language and Literary Criticism	TYBA	w.e.f. 2008-09
UoP	Special P- III	Introduction to the Study of English Language	TYBA	w.e.f. 2010-11
SUK	P- VIII	The Structure and Function of Modern English	TYBA	w.e.f. 2009-10
NMU	General	The Study of English	TYBA	w.e.f. 2009-10

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	P-III	Language		
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BAMU, SRTMU and SNDTWU have introduced papers on the study of English language to students of first year (FY) BA Optional English while the UoM, UoP, SUK and NMU offer these papers in the final (third) year (TY) BA.

### Components of Papers on the Study of English Language

Since linguistics forms a core component in papers on the study of English language, it would be worth knowing the proportion of language components in FYBA Optional English in BAMU, SRTMU and SNDTWU.

**Table C. Papers on the study of English Language offered in FYBA Optional English in BAMU, SRTMU and SNDTWU**

Aspects of language study	BAMU	SRTMU	SNDTWU
	P- I: Introduction to Language	P-I: Modern English Structure	D.C. II: Phonetics, Grammar and Communication
Phonetics	50 %	50 %	31%
Grammar	50 %	50 %	38 %
Communication Skills	--	--	31%
Total	100 % (100 marks)	100 % (100 marks)	100 % (100 marks)

‘Phonetics’ and ‘Grammar’ are the common components in papers on the study of English language offered by BAMU, SRTMU, and SNDTWU in FYBA Optional English. BAMU and SRTMU give 50% weightage each to ‘Phonetics’ and ‘Grammar’ whereas SNDTWU gives 31% weightage each to ‘Phonetics’ and ‘Communication Skills’ and 38% to ‘Grammar’. These universities have restricted themselves to the introduction of phonetics and grammar.

The UoM, SUK, NMU and UoP have also included other aspects of language in TYBA. The proportion of language components in papers on the study of English language offered in the third year of BA (Special English) has been considered here.

**Table D. Components in papers on the study of English Language**

Aspects of language study	UoM	SUK	NMU	UoP
	P- V English Language and Literary	P-VIII The Structure and Function of Modern	G-III The Study of English Language	S – III Introduction to the Study of English

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	Criticism	English		Language
Language Orientation	--	10 %	25 %	--
History of English Lang.	50 %	--	--	--
Phonology	12.5 %	10 %	18.75 %	18 %
Morphology	12.5 %	10 %	12.50 %	10 %
Syntax	--	60 %	18.75 %	18 %
Semantics	--	10 %	--	--
Sociolinguistics	25 %	--	12.50 %	54%
Conversational English	--	--	12.50 %	--
Total	100 % (40 marks)	100 % (100 marks)	100 % (80 marks)	100 % (100 marks)

## Discussion

### *Entry level competence of the students*

Though entry-level competence of students is more or less the same in all the regions of Maharashtra, the universities in the state have introduced papers on the study of English language at different stages in the B.A. (Special English) course. BAMU, SRTMU and SNTWU have introduced papers in FYBA while the UoM, UoP, SUK and NMU in TYBA.

### *Apparent mismatch*

There is an apparent mismatch between the time required to teach the units on 'phonology' and the weightage given to 'phonology' in papers on the study of English language. The weightage given to 'phonology' does not justify its significance in the study of English language. For instance, in the UoM there are only seven marks for phonetic transcription and stress and intonation.

### *Priorities of universities and needs of students*

In accordance with the recommendation of the CDC (2001), the UoM has reduced weightage of language component from 60% to 40%. The UoM gives 50% weightage to the history of English language, SUK gives 60% weightage to syntax, the UoP gives 54% weightage to sociolinguistics (including pragmatics) and NMU gives 25% weightage to language orientation. The UoP and SUK are among very few Indian universities to include separate units on 'pragmatics' and 'semantics' at the UG level. However, no university has introduced 'stylistics' as recommended by the Study Group (1967). Perhaps, time is not yet ripe for it.

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Apart from a career in teaching, this globalized era offers many new avenues to students of B.A. (Special English). Therefore, it is essential to acquaint UG students to the major national varieties of English – British, American and Indian. In units on sociolinguistics, the UoP focuses on these major varieties whereas the UoM, SUK and NMU give negligible weightage to these national varieties. SNTDWU and NMU have included Communication Skills (FYBA) and Conversational English (TYBA) respectively to cater to the needs of students.

The priorities of these universities vary widely. It is rather difficult to relate variation in the weightage given to different aspects of language with the global (global + local) needs of Indian students. The teaching of linguistics in the B.A. (Special English) course in many Indian universities is just more of the same.

### **Status Quo**

The prime objective of teaching linguistics in Indian universities is ‘to acquaint’ students with basic concepts of linguistics. According to Shinde (2009:5), for more than sixty years after Independence, English language studies have been purely academic. Knowledge about language rather than skill mastery has been dominant. As a result, the linguistic competence of students of B.A. (Special English) in Indian universities today is not very different from what Gokak (1964-65) had noted four decades ago.

In the syllabus document of MA English Part II (w.e.f. 2004-05) in the section on ‘Teaching Methodology’ the UoP mentions, “Though a minimum linguistic ability is a prerequisite for doing any course at the PG level, it would be unrealistic to teach with the ideal students in mind. The fact remains that we have to teach students who are far away from the expected level of linguistic attainment”.

### **To sum up**

The reports of the study groups and committees simply include titles of papers and no study group or committee has provided a sample syllabus for papers on the study of English language (in contrast, sample syllabi have been provided for the papers related to literary studies). Even when, the report of the UGC National Workshop on Syllabus Reform in English (1977) mentions that details of the paper on ‘The Use of English’, will follow, (vide appendix) (UGC, 1977:155), the details have not been included in the appendix. This has probably resulted in disparity in the weightage of different aspects of language in Indian universities as seen in papers on the study of English language offered in the final year of the B.A. (Special English) course in four universities of Maharashtra, viz., the UoM, SUK, NMU and UoP. Taking into account competence of students, it is imperative to design a need-based sample syllabus for papers on the study of English language in Indian universities.

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