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## THOUGHTS ON FIRST YEAR SYLLABUS OF COMPULSORY ENGLISH

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### Abstract:

The first year of college education is important in that it may give proper direction to students. In respect of language learning, two facts are to be noted. Marathi as L1 is learnt in informal situation. English as L2, on the contrary, is learnt in formal classroom situation. Therefore, we have to be very careful about devising the strategy of English teaching. While teaching English, the L1 acquisition process is to be taken into consideration. The skills of LSRW are to be taught in that sequence right from Class I. To do this, there should be an integrated course from Class I to PG.

However, if the school curriculum is not fulfilling its responsibility, a university BOS cannot undertake the entire responsibility. We cannot deprive students of literature or creativity only on the ground that they are poor in English. In spite of this, at the college level, we can start with phonetics and phonology along with literature teaching. This is conforming to the natural order of language learning. It is because it begins with the spoken aspect.

### KEYWORDS:

Education, Thoughts, English, Language.

### INTRODUCTION:

In case of evaluation, we should dismiss the semester system. On the contrary, we should also reject the Annual system. The golden mean of 80+20 pattern yields good results.

In the term end question paper, 36 marks may be allotted to anthology, and 24 to language. In the annual question paper, 32 marks may be allotted to the First Term syllabus, whereas the remaining 48 to the Second Term syllabus. Among 32 marks, 20 and 12 be allotted for anthology and language respectively. Among 48, 28 and 20 marks for literature and language respectively may be allotted.

### NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

This article aims at expressing the researcher's views on the first year's syllabus of Compulsory English of Arts Faculty. While doing so, the researcher has some facts in front of him. In the first place, English is a second language in India. It is learnt in formal classroom situation. Secondly, children are getting the formal exposure of English from Class I nowadays. Thirdly, there is the lack of informal exposure of English. Fourthly, because of the lack of informal exposure, students should know the basic grammar of English at some stage. It is true that subconscious language acquisition is better than conscious language learning. Yet, there is no harm in learning basic grammar in addition to subconscious language acquisition. Fifthly, we should not fully insist on basic grammar in colleges. It should be taught in secondary schools. Sixthly, excessive emphasis on structural and even communicative approach will curb students' creativity. Therefore, at the college stage, we should mainly insist on English through literature. Lastly, mass education is our policy. As a result, our classes are likely to be very big. We have to devise our strategy accordingly. In the light of these facts, the researcher would like to express his views.

### THE PLACE OF ENGLISH IN COLLEGE SYLLABUS

To know the place of English in college syllabus, we should know the place of English in India. English is a second language in India. Therefore, there is a difference between learning Marathi and learning English. Being a mother tongue, Marathi is learnt in informal situation. It is learnt subconsciously. English, by and large, is learnt in formal situation. It is learnt consciously. The earlier subconscious way of learning is called Acquisition; the latter conscious way is called Learning. In other words, Acquisition is subconscious; learning is conscious. Therefore, a child does begin acquiring language. Learning is somewhere at the intermediate stage.

Recently, the Govt. of Maharashtra has taken the decision to teach English from Class I.

The foundation of students' English should have been consolidated by the end of Class X, i.e. SSC. The question of developing communication skills, or linguistic competence need not occur in college education. In order to do this, there should be coordination between the ministry of school education and that of higher education. Education should be treated as an integrated process. Each stage should be related to its earlier and subsequent stage, if any. Then only there will be organic unity in our educational policy. In consideration of the language acquisition process, the researcher thinks the following steps to be followed:

1. Standard (i.e. Class or Grade) I to Standard IV (Lower Primary School)—Teaching communicative competence practically (i.e. speaking in front of them with proper accent, intonation, pause, rhythm, etc.)
2. Standard V to Standard VII (Higher Primary School)—Teaching communicative competence theoretically; also word power and remedial grammar (i.e. teaching them phonetic symbols, accent, rhythm, intonation, etc. Also word power and remedial grammar)
3. Standard VIII to Standard X (Secondary School)—Teaching basic grammar (e.g. a book like High School English Grammar and Composition may be prescribed.)

While doing this, the aspect of literature need not be forgotten. This suggestion is based on the sequence of child's first language acquisition. If we apply this acquisition process to L2 learning, students will be benefited.

This above discussion may sound a digression. But it is not so. The whole schedule presented above is to show that the students' communicative and linguistic foundation should be consolidated by the end of secondary education. College education need not be the stage where the problem of competence arises.

However, in reality, the condition is not as ideal as we think. Therefore, we feel the need of paying attention to students' language competence. In spite of this, there are some limitations to college syllabi. The college syllabuses cannot teach them basic grammar fully. Even the college syllabuses need not excessively insist on communicative competence at the cost of content stuff. The college syllabus of English should aim at providing intensive knowledge of literature and linguistics. In this article, thoughts on English include those on the syllabus, evaluation system in general and evaluation pattern of this course. Units in the syllabus should help them learn English. The question paper pattern need not break the syllabus into pieces. Another fact is that our evaluation system should not forget that we are imparting mass education.

### SELECTION OF SUBJECTS FOR FYBA

Following may be the pattern of the selection of subjects for FYBA:

a) Group A-Core Papers  
Marathi, English

b) Group B-Optional Papers—Languages (minimum one and maximum three languages to be selected)  
Marathi, Hindi, English, French, German, Spanish, etc.

a. Group C-Optional Papers—Social Sciences (minimum one and maximum three social sciences to be selected.) Economics, Political Science, History, Sociology, Education, Cooperation, Psychology, etc.  
(N.B. Total number of papers, including core subjects, should be six.)

### JUSTIFICATION OF THE SELECTION PATTERN

In the selection of subjects for the first year of Arts, three groups are suggested. The first is the core group of compulsory languages of Marathi and English. The second is the group of languages and the third is the group of social sciences. Among the remaining two groups, students may select four subjects. However, each group must have at least one subject.

Here the researcher intends to include Marathi and English as core subjects. It is because Marathi is the L1 and English the L2. By simultaneously learning both the languages, students will improve competence of their mother tongue too. Marathi is learnt in informal situation. In this situation, the learner becomes aware of the situations around him. Then he tries to codify the situation. In this process, its grammar plays a peripheral role. English is learnt in formal classroom situation. Here the learner becomes aware of the rules of grammar. Then he tries to thrust the situation only within the sphere of his knowledge of grammar. The first approach is contextual; the second approach is textual. It has been proved [2] that the grammar consciousness of L2 is conducive for the improvement of the linguistic competence of L1. U.R. Ananthamurthy [1], in his article, "Education: Problems and Solutions" says that one's mother tongue is a better medium for the acquisition of learning skills. Language skills are acquired through English. To quote him:

Nothing will improve the schools until we bring in the Common School legislation. If it is difficult to legislate for a common school, we can do two or three things. One, give common schools English from Standard I so that children, particularly in Kerala where they need a language skill because they cannot get jobs in their state, get access to the English language. However, we could teach all other subjects in Malayalam because the learning skills are quicker in one's own language. After a certain level, if children have to shift to English medium, they will shift easily, without any trauma.

(Manorama Yearbook 2007 597-98)  
Bilingualism is conducive to the learner.

Hindi is our national language. Still the researcher does not include Hindi in the core group, for practical considerations. First, students of Maharashtra are exposed to Hindi. Secondly, Hindi is not much different in vocabulary and sentence construction from Marathi. Thirdly, both Marathi and Hindi use the same script, i.e. Devnagari. Fourthly, excessive restrictions lead to dislike for teaching.

In Group B, the researcher would like to introduce other languages. Here students, who are most interested in languages, may choose three languages. Those who are interested in social sciences will choose one language. Regarding the situation in rural Maharashtra, students are most likely to select English or Marathi or both. Students in cities may select one or two foreign language (s).

Group C is the group of social sciences. Here students are free to choose both mental and moral sciences. It must be noted that the special subject they are going to choose in TYBA must be from those chosen from Group B or C in FYBA.

This article is meant for the syllabus of FYBA Compulsory English. Therefore, in this article the researcher intends to restrict his discussion to that paper only.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR SYLLABUS

Regarding the syllabus, the researcher would like to make certain suggestions.

The present textbook of Pune University's Compulsory English is inclusive of all topics. It is its strength. Students need not go for other books to study topics in their syllabus. This feature of the textbook is worth retaining. Our textbook should be inclusive of all. It is essential in a Compulsory English course. This course need not suggest any reference books. However, it should be explicitly divided into two sections—anthology and language. Both the sections may be included in one book. The book may be divided into two parts—first term and second term syllabus. If the book becomes too bulky, divide it into two volumes—one for one term.

We should bring about bifurcation between literature and language in a single course. If students are poor in English, give them an integrated course in language. This course can be given through three years of compulsory English course. Each year's course will give 40% weight on language and 60% on literature. In other words, the integrated course should be divided into three years. Its first part will be prescribed for FYBA.

Here the question is: Which aspect of language should be taught first? This question gains importance in respect of the first year's course. It is because the accuracy of the whole sequence depends on the first year's

choice. We, therefore, have to give a serious thought to this problem. We have to fall back on the child first language acquisition process. A child's stages of learning the first language are: listening sounds, words, sentences; speaking sounds, words, sentences. After acquiring these primary skills in informal environment, the child acquires reading and writing in formal classroom situation. Here the child learns grammar. A child develops Listening and Speaking respectively in the process of learning L1. Reading and writing are later stages. The stage of learning basic grammar is the last one. It is not mandatory in the language acquisition process. It is because language is speech first; writing is derivative. Writing is only a way of recording speech. Therefore, we have to insist on the phonic substance in the beginning. Practice in listening is done in literature classes. Here we have to present spoken language in theory. There are constraints in practicing speaking skills in big classes. However, phonetics is an humble but feasible attempt at making students aware of the sound system. This topic is very interesting. It will enable them to learn and practice sounds on their own. In other words, prescribing the syllabus of phonetics for 40% marks is feasible.

Next comes the question of the angle of looking at literature. Here we have to expose students to literary texts as they naturally occur, and as they are naturally absorbed. A common reader is mainly interested in what the text says. His curiosity need not be curbed under the guise of communicative approach. In this connection, a drastic change is required. If we expose students to descriptive approach, they will reap its benefits.

To do this, each unit may be followed by its glossary and discussion questions. However, there should be long answer questions at the end of the unit. We need not neglect the importance of students' creativity on the ground that students are poor in English. However, for global questions, the number of lessons should be increased. About 30 or more units may be included. The length of each unit may be more or less equal to those of Reflections I (existing textbook prescribed by Pune University for FYBA Compulsory English). They may be divided equally into the first and second terms.

#### SYLLABUS: THE ANTHOLOGY SECTION

The researcher would like to make certain suggestions. In respect of the choice of lessons, Reflections I of Pune University is on the proper track.

The syllabus for the year may be divided into two sections—literature and language. In anthology, as mentioned above, the Board of Studies may include around 15 lessons in the first term and 15 in the second term. That book, however, should have lessons appropriate for the students of FYBA.

Here the researcher does not suggest any fixed tenets to select lessons. The only important thing is that while including lessons, the BOS should remain undogmatic. It should fulfil two criteria: interest and difficulty level. In other words, it should be interesting; and secondly, it should consider the difficulty level of the students. Sometimes some whim occurs to suggest that lessons or poems should be related to 'Indian culture'. To materialize this desire, non-Indian authors are dismissed. There is a potential danger in it. It is that even mediocre or boring lessons of Indian authors may be included. The BOS need not undertake the responsibility of showing patriotism in this respect. Keats's sensual appeal is certainly more valuable than a so called Indian poet's, say, socialistic appeal. The aim of literature is delightful instruction. Students should learn something; but while doing so, they should not get bored. Students will certainly enjoy Wordsworth's 'The Solitary Reaper' much more than a boring Indian English poem. The BOS should be free from Indo-mania or any other kind of unacademic or anti-academic dogma. It is meaningless to add stuff less literature in the name of Indianism. At the same time, it is equally meaningless to drop British writers on the ground that our students are not familiar with the Western culture.

Equally important is the craze for decanonization. Some take pride in saying that we must get rid of the canons of western literature. To fulfil this thirst, they introduce authors of several other countries of non-native English speakers. It is nothing but tearing the syllabus into pieces. Such experimentation is not needed except in special papers at the TYBA level.

One more aspect is to be borne in mind. There are so many modern literary theories today—structuralism, post-structuralism, feminism, and so on. Motivated by such theories, several modern authors come and write literature. If their literature is prescribed, students will most likely fail to understand it at this level. There are two main reasons for it. First, the FYBA is not a very mature level of understanding subtleties of literature. Secondly, a Compulsory English class consists of students of diverse special subjects in future. Students other than those who want to select English in future need not take genuine interest in analyzing a work of art critically. It is for this reason that the BOS would stick to traditional writers at the FYBA Compulsory English level. Prose writers like Raja Rao, R.K.Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Oscar Wilde, Somerset Maugham, Mark Twain are examples of good prose. Similarly, poets like Rabindranath Tagore, Sarojini Naidu, John Keats, P.B.Shelley, Emile Dickinson may be introduced.

### SYLLABUS—LANGUAGE SECTION: PHONETICS AND PHONOLOGY

In case of language, it is suggested that students may be exposed to phonetics and phonology. The aspect of vocabulary and grammar may be suspended for subsequent years. The researcher would like to suggest the following syllabus for language:

#### Term I

1. Phoneme and allophone
2. Syllable
3. Vowels and consonants in British R.P. (Classification of vowels into pure vowels and diphthongal glides, three-term labels to consonants—position of vocal cords [voiceless-voiced], place of articulation [bilabial, velar, etc.], manner of articulation [plosive, nasal, etc.]
4. Word transcription
5. Differences between the following pairs of words: /i:/ - /I/ as in seat-sit, for example.
6. Word accent
7. Rules for accentual pattern

(Transcription of about 100 mono, di and polysyllabic words with proper accent on them to be practiced in class.)

#### Term II

1. Accent in sentences, stress shift, stress shift according to function, weak forms, tone groups and pause, nucleus, shifting the nucleus, intonation, uses of tones  
(Similarly about 75 sentences with appropriate pause, accent and intonation)

### JUSTIFICATION OF THE LANGUAGE SYLLABUS

In case of language, the researcher thinks of the sequence of the first language acquisition. The proper sequence of L1 acquisition is: phoneme, word, sentence, grammar. The last skill is not mandatory. These skills are acquired first through Listening, then through Speaking. It is suggested that they (i.e. the BOS) maintain the same sequence. The first year syllabus, therefore, should heavily insist on phonology. The language section of the syllabus should be carefully designed. It is because to expose students to language, proper sequence should be carefully maintained. In this respect, the first year language syllabus is very important. It is the beginning of language learning. It is the launching pad for three years' integrated language course. In consideration of this process, the researcher suggested the above syllabus.

### EVALUATION SYSTEM IN GENERAL

It is very important that we need not, in any case, introduce the semester system. This syllabus is meant for general universities imparting mass education. The semester system is useful only when the number of students does not exceed 20. Besides, the workload of the teacher should be taken into consideration. One more fact is to be thought about. The teacher in colleges is expected to do not only teaching but extra-curricular and co-curricular activities. Within these expectations, how much time can he spend on preparation and evaluation? A class of Compulsory English consists of more than 100 students. Are you sure that you will give proper justice to students by doubling the evaluation work of teachers?

On the contrary, sole reliance on Annual Examination is inappropriate too. In this process, both students and teachers are likely to be lethargic. The whole first term would be wasted without study. To prevent this situation, Continuous Internal Evaluation (CIE) system is suggested. In it, certain periodical tests are proposed for internal evaluation. Total marks scored in internal examination are added to the total marks obtained in annual examination. This system, however, is not much different from the semester system. Therefore, it should be dismissed on the same ground for which we rejected the semester system.

The golden mean of the two is the existing system of Pune University Arts and Commerce courses. They divided the total evaluation into two parts—internal evaluation and annual examination. The annual examination carries 80 marks. It is a written examination. The term end examination carries 60 marks. Marks scored in term end examination are reduced in proportion to the value of 20 marks. Thus the student is given marks out of 100. This system seems most beneficial in the existing situation. The reasons are obvious. In Term I, the student does not think of the second term syllabus. He fully concentrates on the first

term syllabus. He cannot afford to hold any casual attitude towards the first term syllabus if he intends to score. It is obviously because his internal evaluation solely depends on this syllabus. In Term II, he concentrates on the second term syllabus. However, while doing so, he cannot afford to forget the first term syllabus altogether. It is because the annual examination question paper lays 40% emphasis on the first term syllabus. In this way, the student remains alert and sincere throughout the year. Teachers can assess term end exam papers without much strain. In case of the work-load of teachers, it is seen that teachers can bear that much burden. Neither annual system nor CIE or semester system is as feasible and efficient or effective as this one.

In short, the 80+20 system has its benefits. Students can concentrate on a specific syllabus in the first term. Besides, they are bound to remember the syllabus of the first term. This system, therefore, is worth implementing.

**EVALUATION PATTERN SUGGESTED**

Lessons or poems need not be fragmented on structural basis. Therefore, questions on writing activity, vocabulary and grammar need not be on literary passages in the text. Such questions divert learner's attention from content to form. Instead, students should be habituated to looking at the anthology section purely from literary angle. It will help them to fully absorb and enjoy the theme. While making this argument, the researcher is quite aware that grammar should not be taught in isolation. However, integration of grammar with the text is distinct from fragmenting a text into pieces for its structural analysis. Structural analysis makes students not learners but mechanics of English. 'English through literature' is a kind of 'English through exposure' here. While listening to or reading a text, they will inadvertently acquire vocabulary and grammar. These skills enable students to learn English subconsciously. They should be made aware of thematic analysis of the text. Thematic analysis will be more useful than structural analysis in this case. Therefore, the proportion of emphasis should be changed. 60% weight should be given to literary topics, and 40% to language topics.

We need not neglect the importance of students' creativity on the ground that students are poor in English. In the existing pattern of Pune University syllabus, writing skill is tested only in question 3. 20% emphasis on testing writing skill is a meagre portion for students of higher education.

Taking all these aspects into consideration, the researcher suggests the following pattern of question paper:

TERM END EXAMINATION	
Question 1: Long answer questions (2 out of 3)	[20]
Question 2: Short notes (2 out of 3)	[16]
Question 3: Phonology	
a) Write short notes on any two (out of three) of the following:	[10]
b) Transcribe phonemically, any four (out of six) of the following words with proper accent: (Two monosyllabic, two disyllabic and two polysyllabic words may be given.)	[8]
c) Lay accent on any six (out of nine) of the following words:	[6]

(While providing words, it is suggested that 'Rules for Accentual Patterns' (11 rules) as given in Bansal and Harrison's *Spoken English* be referred to. As far as possible, one word may be related to one rule.)

These questions test the following testing items (competencies):

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**TERM END EXAMINATION**

Question No.	Testing Item (Competency)	% of Emphasis
1.	Understanding, analyzing and interpreting theme in different ways	33.33%
2.	focusing on constituents of theme	26.67%
3.		
a)	Theoretical knowledge of concepts	16.7%
b)	Transcription for pronunciation	13.3%
c)	Accent identification	10%
Total		100%

This pattern shows that emphasis on anthology (thematic understanding, analysis and interpretation) is 60%. The first question tests total theme, whereas the second question enables students to concentrate on its smaller details. The core skills of listening, reading and writing are given due justice in questions on literary topics. The speaking skill is introduced in the second section, i.e. phonology as Q.3 is on phonology. Phonology provides both theory and practice. Besides, teachers can promote spoken English in class, or if possible, outside class. Q.3 (a) lays more emphasis on theoretical knowledge of articulation. It carries 10 marks. Q. 3 (b) and (c) carry 8 and 6 marks respectively. In terms of percentage of emphasis, it is 16.7%, 13.3% and 10% for (a), (b) and (c) respectively. Q.3 (a) is a theory question, whereas (b) and (c) are practical questions. Theory question is given more emphasis than the other two questions. It is because we are introducing phonetics for the first time in college syllabus. However, the total emphasis of (b) and (c) is more than that of (a).

The pattern of Annual question paper may be as follows:

**ANNUAL EXAMINATION**

Question 1: Long answer question (Based on First Term Syllabus.) (1 out of 2)	[10]
Question 2: Short notes (Based on First Term Syllabus.) (2 out of 3)	[10]
Question 3: Phonology (Based on First Term Syllabus.)	
(a) Write short notes on any two (out of three) of the following:	[8]
(b) Identify the phonemic difference between any four (out of six) of the following pairs of words:	[4]
Question 4: Long answer questions (Based on Second Term Syllabus.) (2 out of 3)	[16]
Question 5: Short notes (Based on Second Term Syllabus.) (2 out of 3)	[12]
Question 6: Phonology (Based on Second Term Syllabus.)	
a) Write short notes on any two (out of three) of the following:	[8]
b) Divide any two (out of three) of the following sentences into tone groups and mark the tonic accent:	[6]
c) Identify the tone (the falling, the rising, etc.) in any two (out of three) of the following sentences:	[6]

These questions test the following testing items

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## ANNUAL EXAMINATION

Question No.	Testing Item (Competency)	% of Emphasis
1	understanding, analyzing and interpreting theme in different ways (in the form of revision)	12.5 %
2	focusing on constituents of theme (in the form of revision)	12.5%
3	(a) theoretical knowledge of concepts (in the form of revision) (b) identification of differences in phoneme (in the form of revision)	10% 5%
4	understanding, analyzing and interpreting theme in different ways	20%
5	focusing on constituents of theme	15%
6	(a) theoretical knowledge of concepts (b) identifying tone group and tonic accent © identifying the tone	10% 7.5% 7.5%
Total		100%

40% emphasis is laid on the revision of the First Term syllabus. The purpose is that students need not lose touch with the first term syllabus. Within 40%, 62.5% weight is given to literary topics, whereas 37.5% to phonetics and phonology. Regarding the emphasis on the second term syllabus, the proportion is 35% and 25% for literature and language respectively.

**CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following conclusions can be drawn from the discussion:

1. English is a second language in India. It is learnt in formal classroom situation.
2. The formal exposure of English is provided from Class I in Maharashtra.
3. Because of the lack of informal exposure, students should know the basic grammar of English.
4. Excessive emphasis on structural approach will curb students' creativity.
5. Mass education is our policy. As a result, our classes are likely to be very big. We have to devise our strategy accordingly.
6. Acquisition is subconscious; learning is conscious.
7. The problem of communication skill need not occur in college education.
8. The existing textbook of Pune University is inclusive of all topics.
9. Semester system is not wholesome where mass education exists. Similarly, sole reliance on annual examination brings lethargy among students.
10. Language acquisition should begin with listening and speaking. Listening skill is developed through teacher-talk. To promote speaking skill, introduce phonetics and phonology. Besides, teachers should use correct language with all the rules of articulation. They should promote speaking skill among students.

From these conclusions, the researcher makes following recommendations:

1. Teach basic grammar in secondary schools. For that, establish rapport between the ministries of school education and higher education.
2. At the phase of higher education, insist on English through literature.
3. While devising any strategy, do not forget that we are implementing the policy of mass education.
4. Keep mother tongue and English as core papers for FYBA.

#### THOUGHTS ON FIRST YEAR SYLLABUS OF COMPULSORY ENGLISH



5. Promote students' creativity and analytical power.
6. Introduce phonetics and phonology the first year. Let concerned teachers promote speaking skills scientifically.
7. As we are imparting mass education, do not implement the semester system, or annual examination system. However, the 80+20 system is very useful. Implement it.
8. Literary and language topics should be separated from each other.
9. At the stage of FYBA, 'English through literature' policy will be effective.

This article is based on theory as well as researcher's 27 years' teaching experience. At some places, theory is upheld; at some other instances, empirical evidence is given priority. The research hopes that it will be a guideline for devising the syllabus for the First Year Compulsory English course in general Indian universities.

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