

Can Speech and Translation be Part of Academic Writing?

Umesh Patra

The paper is premised on the assumption that writing is privileged over speech in the pedagogy of undergraduate (UG), postgraduate (PG) and research programmes offered by English departments in three select central universities in India – Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi (BHU); The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad (EFLU); and Mahatma Gandhi Central University, Motihari (MGCU)– where the author has been engaged with as a student or teacher. Besides these university curricula, shortlisting criteria for entry-level jobs for teachers at Indian Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) also lay stress on candidates’ writing skills. But training in academic writing can move beyond credit-based written assignments. The author suggests an emphasis on speech and encourages a ‘heteroglossic’ approach to students’ involvement in speech exercises within the classroom. For this purpose, unorthodox heuristic tools such as karaoke, video lectures, stand-up comedy may be used in both the English classrooms as well as the prospective academic writing courses. As writing centres use verbal dialogues between tutors and students as primary mode of consultation, academic writing courses should pay adequate attention to the augmenting and testing of students’ speaking skills which, as the paper will show, may lead to better academic output.

Secondly, the paper suggests that academic writing courses in India could include ‘translation’ as a necessary component in the curriculum. Given the multilingual nature of Indian classrooms, students’ knowledge of languages other than English can be utilised for translation projects to and from their native languages. Currently, the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in English already offer courses on Indian literatures, but only those available in

English. Translation projects in academic writing courses will encourage the students' acquaintance with texts in the languages of their original composition and will also contribute to the corpus of Indian literatures available in English. A mechanism can be established through which students can identify relevant texts of their interest, translate and finally publish their translated works within the course duration. The knowledge of the publication process and a hands-on training in translation will be immensely helpful for students. It has the potential of providing the prospective authors with novel themes of contemporary relevance rooted in the socio-cultural milieu of India in the field of literary studies.

Locating the Problem

A study of the existing pattern of instruction in the undergraduate, postgraduate and research programmes offered by departments of English in above mentioned central universities in India show a perceivable emphasis on writing. Those who wish to pursue a teaching career in HEIs in India are also evaluated on their writing accomplishments. However, despite such emphasis on writing, the recent UGC letters (discussed in the next section), especially in the last two years, concerning academic writing in India show signs of worry. In this section, the author explores why an already writing-based curriculum is still found wanting of further training in the mechanics of writing.

The examination related ordinances of the three central universities picked as samples – BHU, EFLU and MGCU – show the break-up of marks assigned to the different modes of evaluation. BHU and MGCU have allotted 70% and 80% marks respectively to end-term or/and mid-term examinations in UG and PG programmes in English while 30% and 20% marks are allotted to internal assessments (Ordinances Related to Examinations 1; Ordinance No 20.

Medium of Instruction, Examinations, Evaluation and Grading System for Programme(s) of Study Other than the Research Degree Programme(s) 5). At EFLU, 60% marks are allotted to end-term and 40% to internal assessments (Ordinances Governing Academic and Administrative Matters 24). EFLU follows a ‘cafeteria model’ of credit distribution which allows students the freedom to pick and choose from a basket of courses offered by various teaching departments of the university. It provides more scope for innovative examinations like open-book tests and project reports. On the other hand, the evaluation pattern at BHU and MGCU provides a modest scope (about 30% through internal assessment) for testing one’s linguistic ability through quizzes, and discussions. That modest scope may still get further diminished if the teacher decides to take written assignments for internal assessments as well. In such scenarios, there remains absolutely no platform for the students to harness their linguistic and critical abilities in methods other than writing. The examination ordinances in all these universities are framed by the higher statutory bodies of the university and are monitored by the Controller of Examinations (CoE).^[1] This centralised pattern does not distinguish the specific requirements of the English departments. Hence, a singular focus on writing overshadows the harnessing of speaking skills of the students.

Besides writing, a student of English also requires practice in conversation. For most students, especially those who received schooling in vernacular medium, the classroom might be the only platform for an active engagement in English. However, the classroom discussion operates in a register that suits prescribed texts. The act of writing, contextual to the Anglophone texts, is detached from everyday use of English. At best, such practices produce erudite academicians well-versed in western literary jargon, but often, less than confident in common

parlance. As a result, students' vocabulary in English usually consists of words and phrases specific to their curricular texts. Their linguistic competence is often confined to a formal register that receives less nourishment from the active use of language in the spoken form. In short, there is a discernible lack of integration between the English they use for academic reading and writing, and the English they speak in public.

The shortlisting criteria for Assistant Professorships in English in higher education also ignore the candidate's speaking skills. Eligibility is based on a PhD degree or/and National Eligibility Test (NET) certificate (Draft UGC Regulations 5-6). For a PhD degree, one is required to defend the thesis in an oral viva conducted much after the submission of the written dissertation. In many instances, the PhD viva becomes more of a congratulatory ceremony than an evaluative one.^[2] For qualifying the NET, through a cyber-test, one is not even required to demonstrate one's writing skills^[3]. A student, without any demonstration of speaking and writing skills, may be eligible to teach English by qualifying the NET. Participation in seminars, debates, or theatre that can expose a student to public speaking are not considered as part of evaluation. Furthermore, 'Table 3A,' which sets the shortlisting criteria for an Assistant Professor job, does not allot marks for seminar presentations, though 10 marks (out of 100) are allotted for publications in peer reviewed journals (Draft UGC Regulations 77-78). Thus, it can be said with some degree of certainty that English education in India at the university level is dominated by writing. In light of this, two questions arise: Is there a need for a course on academic writing in India when the existing curriculum already privileges writing? Second, if at all such a course comes into being, how will it set itself apart from the existing UG, PG and research programmes offered by English departments in terms of methodology?

The Prospect of a Writing Centre/ Course on Academic Writing in India

A cursory reading of letters issued by the UGC reveals why a writing-based curriculum still needs further writing courses. On 14th June 2019, UGC set up the Consortium for Academic and Research Ethics (CARE) in order to “identify, continuously monitor and maintain” a reference list of quality journals (Public Notice on Academic Integrity 1). The letter states,

It has been reported that in India the percentage of research articles published in predatory journals is high. Unethical practices leading to ‘pay and publish trash’ culture needs to be thwarted immediately ... Indian academic community is informed that: 1. They must avoid publication in predatory/dubious journals or participation in predatory conferences. It is further advised that they must not get associated (as Editors/Advisors or in any other capacity) with journals/ publishers/ conferences involved in fraudulent/dubious/ deceptive practices (Public Notice on Academic Integrity 1).

Along with its attempts to curb the menace of predatory journals, UGC invited proposals to conduct a study on the “Quality of PhD Thesis in Indian Universities” in the last ten years through its letter dated 21 May 2019 (Quality of PhD 1).^[4] It also mandated a two-credit course titled “Research and Publication Ethics (RPE)” for all MPhil and PhD programmes as a precautionary measure (Research and Publication Ethics 1). Such strong-worded letters testify that a course on academic writing is the need of the hour. This section further discusses the prevalent publication practices in Indian academia that fail to produce competent writers despite proliferation of academic outputs, and then the peculiar challenges a writing centre in India – modelled on the writing centres of the U.S. – might face while operating in a multilingual classroom.

English departments in India are no exception to the lack of academic integrity outlined

so far. In an article titled “On English from India: Prepositions to Post-positions,” K. Narayan Chandran, Professor of English at University of Hyderabad, laments the “very poor writing produced by our budding researchers” which “merits urgent attention by experts who recommend advances in the English curriculum” (Chandran 158). One reason for this paradoxical situation, in which a writing-based system is chastised for not producing good writing, is simply the lack of adequate training in the technical aspects of writing. The compulsion attached to publications for career advancement is certainly a major cause. The sense of compulsion – to publish – is counter-productive. Due to the absence of a robust mechanism by which teachers could be assessed on their teaching ability, publication becomes a yardstick of academic accomplishments. The existing shortlisting criteria as well as Career Advancement Scheme (CAS) propel academicians, otherwise unwilling, to secure just the number of required publications for selection or promotion. Often, such forced publications comprise the pool of articles in the predatory journals. Those, more evolved in ethics, take recourse to the underbelly of academic black market, the ghost writers that are on an alarming rise in India.^[5]

But, what about those aspiring to be good writers? Reputed Indian journals, while promoting quality research, often reject submissions that may be currently inarticulate but have the potential for publication through curated suggestions. In light of such editorial policies, a journal becomes a mere platform that collates well-written articles.^[6] Such a platform promotes good writing without aiding their composition. An astute academician would get published in such journals, but not without risking the opportunity of further improvement. Such journals replicate an evaluation-centric education system that conducts stringent examinations with least attention to training. Such a practice does not aim at producing better authors, even from the pool

of 'rejected' submissions.

In this scenario, the prospect of a writing centre that could provide personalised consultation, or a semester or yearlong course on academic writing can be a panacea for many. In the West, specifically in North America, many writing centres fill in this gap through drop-in facilities, one-to-one appointments with experts, and non-evaluative guidance helping prospective authors in various stages of writing. They help in various stages of the writing process which begins before the act of writing itself. Michael, a writing coach at The Writing Center at University of North Carolina says in his video "What Happens in a UNC Writing Center Coaching Session?", "You don't need to have started a paper, you can use your session to brainstorm". From the very gestation of an idea to its possible fruition, either in form of a research paper or a poem, a consultant provides a sympathetic and understanding ear. Apart from individual consultations, many writing centres organise group events. The Viadrina Writing Centre, Germany organises 'short-term workshops' (Lunchtime Lessons), writing events like the 'Writing Marathon' or 'Long Night Against Procrastination', and in class workshops or team-teaching" (Farrell, O'Sullivan and Mooney 16).

In India, writing centres have unique challenges where academic writing is produced in languages other than English. For example, reputed research journals such as *Himanjali* and *Vichar Vaibhav* published by Indian Institute of Advanced Studies and Indian Council of Social Sciences Research respectively invite articles exclusively in Hindi. MGCU has provisions for PhD and MPhil dissertations to be written in Hindi (Ordinance No 35: Admission, Medium of Instructions, Examination, Evaluation, Grading System and Other Provisions for the Award of Master of Philosophy (MPhil.)/ Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) Degree 9). BHU also allows

submission of “thesis in Hindi or English or any other language approved by the concerned DRC/ SRC/ CRC”^[7] (Amended Ordinance Governing the Award of The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy/ Vidyāvāridhi (2016) 23). Thus, there is a provision for dissertations on Pali literature to be submitted in English at BHU. Which language should the consultation take place in a situation when the language of the academic writing is different from that of the texts studied? Let’s consider these hypothetical situations:

An Odia author consults an Odia writing coach regarding a research paper on the Odia folk theatre called *Pala* to be published in an Odia journal. The consultation could be useful. Now a Patna-based English researcher from Odisha consults a Delhi-based English writing coach from Telangana regarding a paper on Mahasweta Devi’s Bengali short-story ‘Draupadi’, which the researcher read in English translation by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Spivak 381-402). The situation will be much more complicated.^[8] A monolingual dialogue (in English) between the researcher and writing coach regarding the English rendering of a celebrated Bengali text will lead to many elements being further lost in translation. Thus, even consultation must take recourse to translanguaging in the Indian context, at least in the field of humanities.

The consultation part of the writing centre, which is regarded as a ‘core activity,’ takes place through spoken communication. As mentioned earlier, writing centres acknowledge that the process of writing begins even before the first word is written. It begins with the gestation of an idea which finds its first articulation in the form of a chaotic jumble of words, gestures, and silences through a spoken form of consultation. If a ‘Course on Academic Writing’ is to be set up expanding this core aspect of writing centres, it needs to incorporate the spoken elements. In a monolingual setting, the language in which the idea is conceived, spoken, and written is one. But

in a multilingual setting like India, the act of speech is inalienably tied to the act of translation. To borrow from Raja Rao, “One has to convey in a language that is not one’s own; the spirit that is one’s own” (Rao vii). An Indian speaks by frequent code-switching and code-mixing. If she chooses to speak in one language, she must be translating a good deal of her ‘spirit.’ According to Rao, if an Indian chose to write in English, she cannot write like the British nor only as an Indian. The current higher education system in India provides little scope for spoken communication, which is bound to be either multi-lingual or translated. But it plunges students straight to the act of writing that takes after monolingual models.

Incorporation of Speech and Translation in a Course on Academic Writing

In this section, the author will discuss the need to create a ‘heteroglossic’ classroom in both English departments as well as the writing centres offering academic writing courses in India. As speech is central to the act of consultation in writing centres, students must be encouraged to speak before writing. In order to facilitate their active engagement with language both at a social and a personal level, the author will suggest certain heuristic tools that could be used in academic writing courses.

K. Narayan Chandran (1996) urges Indian English teachers to be ‘conscious’ of the hegemony of English, and categorically states, “It is only fair that those who profess English in India acknowledge this right away and train their students in *the language* first—and not merely in the ‘skills’—before they encourage them to embark on theoretically ambitious journeys” (Chandran 157-158). Chandran speaks specifically about the metropolitan centres of higher education. While the author agrees with Chandran’s insistence on training in language, the question remains whether the teachers can train students in language at the tertiary level.

First, it must be mentioned that the English departments in India are not necessarily composed of students who study literature entirely by interest or choice. The author here speaks through the subjective experience of his engagement with English departments at higher educational institutions in Rourkela, Varanasi, Hyderabad and Motihari. The current hierarchy in higher education, driven by market forces and job opportunities, posits English education in a unique position. Those who receive English medium education in private schools or in Kendriya Vidyalayas are persuaded to pursue professional courses like engineering, medicine, law or management. Those who do not enrol in such courses, either for failing the entrance examinations or for economic reasons, seek admission in a general stream in science or commerce. Others choose English as the next best option in humanities. Students from less privileged sections who had studied in government or municipality schools, taught in vernacular medium up to their intermediate, and learning English through grammar-translation method may prefer English as a prestigious course. Some of these students seek coveted jobs in Indian Administrative Services (IAS) after their undergraduate studies. But there are also students who come to English classrooms by choice.

An English classroom is thus a heterogeneous space not only because of a mix of interests of the students towards studying the subject (and the language), but also because it may consist of aspiring vernacular medium students (not habituated to be taught in English) and English medium students who recently joined the humanities. This is especially true for suburban or rural colleges. So, the question is how to justify teaching Shakespeare in archaic English when this learning in the subject is not integrated with the two-credit 'Compulsory English' course that still follows hackneyed examples of grammatical rules (such as, "The train had left the station

before the patient arrived.”). The English teacher then fulfils her duty like the mythical Sisyphus. In order to allow the students to pass the examination, the teacher is often bound to give stale questions and assignments such as the ‘plot’ or ‘character sketch’ of *Hamlet* which they could answer using readily available notes on the internet. So, can a ‘course on academic writing’ adequately address this problem?

The author here suggests Mikhail Bakhtin’s idea of ‘heteroglossia’ as a useful pedagogical tool. In his book *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin views human society characterised by ‘heteroglossia’ – simultaneous existence of multiple worldviews by different individuals (Bakhtin). Through dialogues, individuals can shed their fixed positions and begin to understand as well as form part of other’s discourses. Dialogues have the capacity of changing people’s opinions, affecting their worldviews, and moulding their ever-changing personas that resist finalisation. Speaking in the context of the novel, Bakhtin finds originality not in linguistic creativity of the author, but in the collating of diverse, yet already existing, worldviews in one artistic form. He defines a novel as “a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organised” (Bakhtin 262). Any work of art that pays more attention to the authorial point of view and operates in a unitary language becomes ‘monoglossic’ in the Bakhtinian sense. It negates, silences and suppresses the other discourses. Similarly, a classroom that follows the unidirectional lecture-model also risks being ‘monoglossic’. On the other hand, a ‘heteroglossic’ classroom can include utterances, viewpoints, speech-acts by students and be used as resources to address some of the problems outlined before.

Umesh Kumar, an English teacher at BHU, suggests that the “English only” policy in

higher education silences a significant number of students in the classroom. He saw “a group of students extremely vocal in the class” while the other group “involved those who display themselves as the most attentive listeners to the first group as well to the teacher” (Kumar 45). Upon his questioning their silence, Kumar found that “not knowing English that well is the reason for their silence in the class” (Kumar 45). To avoid such ‘monoglossic’ classrooms, ‘heteroglossia’ can be introduced by what Ofelia García calls ‘translanguaging’ that views language “as a unitary meaning making system of the speaker” which marks a departure from the structuralist view of language as a closed system of codes such as English, Odia, Bengali etc. (García). According to this view, a bilingual speaker experiences simultaneous existence of two languages. It stresses the speaker’s act of engaging in the meaning making process by using the linguistic apparatuses they possess. Their use of codes from multiple languages would not be regarded as code-switching, but as the expression of a blended existence. The dialect of each individual consisting of words, phrases, mannerisms peculiar to the speaker (also called idiolect) can become part of the classroom discourse only if they are allowed to be presented in whichever form they could. In other words, students can be allowed to speak in any language they could express themselves for a meaningful dialogue.

This participation can be ascertained often through means beyond traditional teaching methods, both in English and academic writing classes. For example, ‘Project Bolo’, an initiative by The Humsafar Trust, presents interviews of LGBTQ personalities in India through its YouTube channel. The questions are framed both in English and regional Indian languages, and the interviewees speak in the language of their choice about their lives, the hardships they faced, and their views on sexuality. In the digital age, one must acknowledge the immense possibility of

a moving picture to paint a million words. Instead of isolated meditations, writing can use videos as a complement. Students could be taught how to conduct structured and unstructured interviews and be assigned the task of interviewing famous personalities in their vicinity. This assignment could take the form of a specific project. It would harness their skills of note-taking, conducting structured or unstructured interviews, and documentation.

The author used Karaoke^[9] in his ‘Compulsory English’ courses. For students, uninitiated to English songs, this method could be used in three steps. First, a video song could be played in front of the entire class which they would be asked simply to enjoy. Once they listen to the song for two/three times, they could be asked to write down the lyrics as much as they surmised. Second, the lyrics version of the song could be played, and the students can be asked to tally how much of their words were similar to the actual lyrics. The song could be played again for them to write down the actual lyrics. Third, the karaoke version of the song could be played in which the students would be asked to sing together or individually, referring to the lyrics they jotted down. Preferences should be paid to those songs that are suited to the Indian students. This exercise is meant for the students to be comfortable with speaking English, not necessarily to improve their pronunciation or vocabulary. A good example of how students can think of videos as creative complements to traditional writing genres, like dissertations, is Shaktipada Kumar’s PhD from EFLU in which he studied Chou dance of West Bengal. Writing about the history, origin, mythology of any cultural artefact is possible, but describing in words what is performed through the body can be a challenge. He created a documentary on Chou as a complement to his written dissertation. Advanced students in a course on academic writing can take cue from such creative transformations of written texts and attempt to create simple documentaries on specific cultural

forms of their regions that would require a spoken narration of the items discussed.

Stand-up comedy is another creative activity a writing course may explore. Though, as a profession, it is limited to the urban pockets of the country, with the English-speaking urban and semi-urban youth as the target audience, many comics use a bi-lingual or English script. Even though it's not a platform that all could excel in, the idea of stand-up sessions can rid vernacular medium students of their inhibitions, exposing their own 'affected' ways of using language, and making them speak for the first time the English they know with candour.

The above are some of the many ways in which speech could be incorporated in a curriculum that is meant to bring flair in writing. The writing-based assignments usually given to students in UG and PG programmes in English in the abovementioned universities often require the students to walk the trodden path. Due to the availability of guidebooks on literary texts in print and web sources, students have the option of either paraphrasing or simply copying such content for their assignments. Such kinds of writing will not show traces of the writer as much as speech exercises can. Any of the above tools will require an active and original use of language by the speaker.

At this point, returning to the idea of translation the section began with, it should be reiterated that an academic writing course in India does have one implicit opportunity, often ignored in even English departments. The ability of competent use of Indian languages besides English needs to be duly acknowledged and appreciated. This emphasis on translation is expressed by Ganesh Devy who, in his book *After Annesia*, sheds light on the amnesiac Indian scholar, searching for literary aesthetics either in the West—distant in space, or in Sanskrit—distant in time while ignoring the literature in the here and now. According to Devy,

the amnesia set in during the colonial period continues thereafter. He writes:

Trapped between an indiscriminating revival of the past and an uncritical rejection of it, between Sanskrit poetics and Western critical theory, bhasha criticism today has ceased to be an intellectual 'discourse'. And as a combined result of amnesia and disorientation, bhasha literatures, with literary histories ranging from five to ten centuries, seem to suffer damage from what is obviously an acute crisis in Indian literary criticism. (Devy 10)

With this realisation, Devy left his teaching job in the Department of English at Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda in 1996, and established People's Linguistic Survey of India. He devoted his life to the monumental task of drafting literary historiographies of Indian languages, published in 90 volumes in various Indian languages including English. Apart from Sahitya Akademi, no other institution or individual has made such a contribution to Indian literary criticism. Devy emphasises the need for translation of literary texts among Indian languages as well as their translation to English. Only through exhaustive translation of texts produced in the recent past and in contemporary times, the amnesia of the Indian scholars can be cured.

Aijaz Ahmad shares this view on translation as well. English departments across the country have the capacity, like no other institution or organisation, to engage in authentic research in Indian literature. Writing in the early 1990s, Ahmad saw the increasing professionalism and dependence on Anglo-American models hindering this engagement. He wrote, "Today, if he were to teach English and write, let us say, only in Hindi or Telegu, the bureaucrats of English might well pronounce him unfit to teach at the university" (Ahmad 280). The Indian academicians, according to Ahmad, are ashamed to do genuine research and writing in their languages as well in the field of translation because of professional pressures. "The directions of research and writing for the best and the brightest, the most ambitious, are thus increasingly controlled by the local academic bureaucracy and the foreign publishing industry;

an active kind of bilinguality is by and large suppressed, and ‘Indian’ literature remains at best a side issue because India is not his ‘field’” (Ahmad 280-281). However, it is a fact that much has changed in the Indian English departments since the 1990s. At present, both UG and PG programmes in English include courses on Indian literatures. For example, the model syllabus for BA (Hons.) English programme by UGC includes a) Indian Classical Literature, b) Indian Writing in English, c) Modern Indian Writing in English Translation and d) Literature of the Indian Diaspora (Structure of B.A. Honours English under CBCS 1). Such courses feature only those texts that are available in English translations in order to create a uniform list of texts that can be studied by all the students in a multilingual classroom. But a writing course has more scope to make choice-based course-contents catering to the individual students registered for a course. It could ensure the engagement of students in actual tasks of translation.

The act of translation of contemporary texts has many theoretical concerns, the author will deal specifically with the practical aspects here. The translator must receive prior consent of the original author so that she does not involuntarily violate any intellectual property rights or end up doing a translation of an already translated text. Having obtained the consent, the translator may require intermittent correspondence with the original author in order to understand the culture-specific meaning of certain words or phrases in the source text. Depending on the nature and length of the text, the extent of the correspondence may vary. After translating the work, the translator must show, and explicate the translated work to the author, who may or may not be proficient in the target language. The translator would seek the verbal or written approval for publication after the author is convinced that the text is faithful to the original. Only after this process is complete can a translator seek publication opportunities for the translated text. An

individual would require a mechanism which facilitates this process as well as ensures publication. It is the very mechanism which can be set up by a course on academic writing. Such projects have been undertaken by individuals and groups, often hailing from the marginalised sections of society. Below are two examples.

The book *Same Sex Love in India: A Literary History* is an English anthology of stories, poems, essays and genre-defying compositions edited and mostly translated by Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai. It “traces the history of ideas in Indian written traditions about love between women and love between men who are not biologically related” (Vanita xxiii). Bringing into one volume the texts composed in various languages (Urdu, Marathi, Bengali, Malayalam and others) from ancient to modern times, this book was a product of “five years of intense joint labour and nearly two decades of individual work” by its editors in collaboration with poets, critics, and scholars who helped them translate (Vanita xvii). This project, funded partly by the University of Montana, required a lot more than writing on a word processor. It involved locating texts, authors, and translators of various languages and procuring their copyrights.

Gogu Shyamala’s acclaimed book *Father May be an Elephant and Mother only a Small Basket, But* provides another model that can be used for translation projects. It is an English translation of twelve Telegu short stories by Shyamala. Unlike the previous book that collates translation of texts composed in various Indian languages, this one collates stories of only one author written in one language which are translated by nine different translators comprising teachers, researchers, and independent scholars. Even though translated by different authors, this book retains an organic unity in which the stories are arranged as snippets in the lives of the Madiga community. The syllabus of a course on academic writing can include the publication

process of these books (among many) as case studies for prospective translators and editors. These studies could create a stage for an action research into translation, that could result in publication of literary works translated by the students enrolled.

Conclusion

To recapitulate the points of the above discussion, the quality of academic output in India does show some signs for introspection. The lack of adequate training in the art of writing can be one of the reasons for the rise of substandard articles in predatory journals. Various initiatives taken by UGC such as the mandating of a course on research and publication ethics and setting up the CARE list of journals are institutionalised steps to ensure better quality. As far as the departments of English in Indian central universities are concerned, there exists an emphasis on writing in the evaluation mechanism which is counterproductive at times. Even the shortlisting criteria for teaching jobs in English does pay more attention to the writing skills of candidates. The efforts to make students efficient in speaking skills will have a positive impact on their academic output as well. A writing centre can address these concerns by providing both one-to-one counselling as well as a full-fledged course that deals with various aspects of writing for academic purposes. Such a course can use various tools such as video interviews, karaoke, documentaries as individual assignments which will foster the art of speech. At the same time, such courses can have translation of contemporary Indian literary texts as a necessary component within the course curriculum. Through various translation projects, such courses can provide a hands-on training in translation as well as publication avenues to authors. Over a period of time, these courses can also serve as models whose best practices can be adopted in teaching strategies in higher education.

Notes

^[1] For most universities, “Board of Studies” regulates the syllabus and evaluation scheme of courses offered by one department/centre. “School Board” is a higher body that ratifies the curriculum of all the departments in a school/faculty. “Academic Council” is the highest academic body that regulates the curriculum and examination system of a university/institute. Matters related to examination are handled by the Controller of Examinations.

^[2] I am not arguing that oral viva is not evaluated at all, but trying to show that the speech component is overshadowed by an over emphasis on writing up to the PhD programme which is viewed as a qualifying criterion for teaching jobs.

^[3] National Eligibility Test (NET) is conducted twice a year to determine eligibility for the job of Assistant Professor. Till 2012, it had descriptive questions in one component. Since 2012, all questions are objective in nature. Since 2018, the NET is conducted online. While such measures were taken to ensure transparency and expedite publication of results, the examinees were pushed further and further away from using their language skills through writing.

^[4] The report of the proposed committee on the quality of PhD thesis has not been public yet.

^[5] Any serious discussion on the loss of academic integrity in India must acknowledge the presence of ghost-writers that are flourishing in cities like Delhi and Hyderabad which are famous for their academic institutions. A report in *The Economic Times* shows how umpteen number of freelancers and companies such as ‘Dissertation Deal’ churn out dissertations, MBA assignments and academic papers for clients for an agreed upon remuneration (Kurup and John). A simple Google-search provides the list of various websites which are in the business of providing academic papers in no time.

^[6] What’s often ignored in the case of publication of a journal is the amount of legwork the editorial board has to invest in the process. It requires constant communication with peer-reviewers, amiable correspondence with authors, ensuring that the feedback was acted upon, convincing established/known authors to edit their submissions (despite blind peer review) while trying to meet the deadline without compromising the policy and quality of the journal. Many Indian journals have resorted to a three-step formula of a) plagiarism check, b) proofreading, and c) publication. Even though the end-product may be good, it does not help in improving the writing quality, perhaps because it is not regarded as a goal.

^[7] BHU defines DRC, SRC, CRC as Departmental Research Committee, School Research Committee, and Centre Research Committee (Amended Ordinance Governing the Award of The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy/Vidyāvāridhi (2016) 9)

^[8] I am not saying that such communication is doomed to fail. Even a non-verbal communication could be immensely beneficial if the two parties agree to communicate. History has given us countless examples of patois, pidgins, and creoles that came into being through successful attempts of conversations between mostly illiterate masses transported against their will to

distant lands.

^[9] Karaoke is a form of entertainment in which the tune of a popular song is played through an audio device without its lyrics. Amateurs singers sing the lyrics themselves in accompaniment to the tune. Often found in bars and pubs, Karaoke also forms part of social gatherings. Originating from Japan, Karaoke literally means an empty orchestra.

Works Cited

- Ahmad, Aijaz. *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. New York: Verso, 1992. Print.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. New Delhi: Pinnacle Learning, 2014. Print.
- Banaras Hindu University. *Amended Ordinance Governing the Award of The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy/ Vidyāvāridhi (2016)*. Varanasi. 1-67. Web. 4 Oct. 2020.
- Banaras Hindu University. *Ordinances Related to Examinations*. Varanasi. n. pag. Web. 1 May 2020.
- Chandran, K. Narayan. "On English From India: Prepositions to Post-positions." *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 35.2 (1996): 151-168. Web. 1 May 2020.
- Devy, Ganesh N. *After Amnesia: Tradition and Change in Indian Literary Criticism*. Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1995.
- English & Foreign Languages University. *Ordinances Governing Academic and Administrative Matters*. Hyderabad. n. pag. Web. 1 May 2020.
- Farrell, Alison, Íde O'Sullivan and Sharon Tighe-Mooney. *An Introduction to Higher Education Writing Centres*. E-book, All Ireland Society for Higher Education, 2015. Web. 1 May 2020.
- García, Ofelia. "Ofelia García – Translanguaging." *YouTube*, uploaded by MuDiLe 2017, 11 October 2017. Web. 1 Aug. 2020.

Jain, Rajnish. "Quality of PhD Thesis in Indian Universities." *UGC*. 21 May 2019. Web. 1 May 2020.

Jain, Rajnish. "Public Notice on Academic Integrity." *UGC*. 14 June 2019. Web. 1 May 2020.

Jain, Rajnish. "Research and Publication Ethics." *UGC*. December 2019. Web. 01 May 2020.

Kumar, Shaktipada. *Reconfiguring Performative Traditions: A Mnemocultural Inquiry into the Chhou Dance of Purulia*. 2018. The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. PhD dissertation. Print.

Kumar, Umesh. "The Question of Regional Indian Languages in the English Classroom: Towards a Heterographic Pedagogy of Translation." *Translation, Nation and Knowledge Society*, Special issue of *Translation Today* (2020): 43-55. Print.

Kurup, Saira, and Shobha John. "PhD Thesis, MBA Assignment - Ghostwriters to the Rescue." *The Economic Times*, 17 June 2012. n. pag. Web. 1 Jul. 2020.

Mahatma Gandhi Central University. *Ordinance No 20. Medium of Instruction, Examinations, Evaluation and Grading System for Programme(s) of Study Other than the Research Degree Programme(s)*. Motihari. n. pag. Web. 1 May 2020.

Mahatma Gandhi Central University. *Ordinance No 35: Admission, Medium of Instructions, Examination, Evaluation, Grading System and Other Provisions for the Award of Master of Philosophy (M.Phil.)/ Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) Degree*. Motihari. 1-10. Web. 04 Oct. 2020.

Michael, "What Happens in a UNC Writing Center Coaching Session?" *YouTube*,

uploaded by UNC Writing Center, 21 July 2016. Web. 1 July 2020.

Rao, Raja. "Foreword." *Kanthapura*. Bombay: New Directions. 1967, vii. Print.

Shyamala, Gogu. *Father May Be an Elephant and Mother Only a Small Basket But*. New Delhi: Navayana, 2012. Print.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "'Draupadi' by Mahasveta Devi." *Critical Inquiry* 8.2 (1981): 381-402. Print.

The Humsafar Trust. *Project Bolo: Indian LGBT Oral History Project*. YouTube. 20 Sep. 2011. Web. 1 May 2020.

University Grants Commission. *Draft UGC Regulations on Minimum Qualifications for Appointment of Teachers and Other Academic Staff in Universities and Colleges and Measures for the Maintenance of Standards in Higher Education 2018*. New Delhi. 2018. Web. 1 May 2020.

University Grants Commission. *Structure of B. A. Honours English under CBCS*. New Delhi. n.d. Web. 1 May 2020.

Vanita, Ruth, and Saleem Kidwai, eds. *Same-Sex Love in India: A Literary History*. Haryana: Penguin, 2008. Print.

Umesh Patra
Assistant Professor, Department of English
Mahatma Gandhi Central University, Motihari
umeshpatra@mgcub.ac.in
© Umesh Patra