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## Deferred Reading(s): A Critical Discourse Analysis of English Language Textbooks (2011-2025)

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**Abstract:** During the initial years of the inception of the largest university of the state, Calicut University did not distinguish between language and literature. However, by the 1990s, language and literature were taught as separate subjects. And over the years, the modus operandi of the English language, a mandated course offered to students, has changed in a myriad of ways be it in terms of the textbook or other resources.

In the context of the NEP being implemented in the state, this paper examines how the University's English Language Textbooks have contributed to deferring understanding of “language” and “communication” over the years. The paper studies EL textbooks offered as a part of the common course since the introduction of the Choice Based Credit Semester System (CBCSS) in 2009, to the National Education Policy (NEP) in 2020, have defined communicative language courses in Kerala. The paper employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyse how undergraduate English Language (EL) textbooks offered to students have contributed to deferred understandings of communicative language as reflected in the common courses of largest state university.

**Keywords:** *English Language Education, Language Textbooks, Critical Discourse Analysis*

## Introduction

The origin of English language education in an institutional set-up within the higher education sector in Kerala can be traced back to the establishment of CMS College, the oldest college not merely in Kerala but in India as well. The college was established in 1817, years before the establishment of the earliest universities in India. The curriculum adopted by the college was one architected by Benjamin Bailey, the founder of Malayalam printing and book publishing. The curriculum primarily aimed at cultivating a cadre of educators and labourers to meet the administrative needs of the Travancore government, with translation serving as the principal method of instruction. However, a more systematic approach to English language education, encompassing structured syllabi and textbooks, was adopted much later after the establishment of the first universities in Madras, Calcutta, and Bombay in 1857. Calicut University was established years later, in 1968, and since then structured syllabi, including English language textbooks, were offered as part of the pre-degree and degree courses offered by Calicut University.

As it is, the status of research on English language education in the Indian context is close to stagnation. As Amol Padwad notes in his work *Research on English Language Education in Indian Universities: A Directory*, this is so because the departments of English in India follow curricula that are predominantly literature-oriented, and hence the faculties that teach are also literature specialists. This lack of significant research on ELE in India is reflected in the Kerala context as well. However, there has been significant research on English studies in Indian universities, and some of these have undertaken cursory studies on English language education in India. Works such as Susie Tharu's *Subject to Change* (1998), "Dissimilar Twins: Language and Literature" by Rukmini Bhaya Nair in *The Lie of the Land: English Literary Studies in India* (1992), and "United by a 'Foreign' Language: The Evolution of English in Multilingual India" by Partha Sarathi Nandi in *English Studies in India: Contemporary and Evolving Paradigms* (2012) are some examples in this regard. In the Kerala context, apart from studies on English language teaching and cursory studies on English language education in schools, there has hardly been any significant research examining the status of English language education in the university context in Kerala. This paper addresses this gap by studying the English language textbooks that impart English language education in the context of Calicut University.

The paper will study how the English language courses offered by Calicut University have presented differing understandings of "language" and "communication" over the years through English language textbooks, the key pedagogical tool of English language education, since the introduction of the Choice Based Credit and Semester System (CBCSS) in 2009 to the National Education Policy (NEP) in 2020.

## Literature Review

As Suman Gupta rightly points out in *Reconsidering English Studies in Indian Higher Education* (2015), it was with the beginning of the crisis debates that there emerged a sense of urgency to historicize English studies in India. However, he remarks that “in the field of English linguistics outside the specific concern of language teaching (a part of applied linguistics) [it] didn’t figure significantly in the crisis debates.” In fact, Gupta in his conclusion reminds readers of the scope for further research on the “philological rationale that underpins the ‘new’ Orientalism in ES... In a different direction, given the ongoing turn towards emphasizing language literacy over literary study for ES in Indian HE—somewhat different histories of ES with less investment in the literary could be anticipated.” This paper attempts to explore that scope for further research.

## Methods

The paper adopts Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the textual discourse in EL textbooks as both the theory and the method. Apart from this, the paper also employs comparative discourse analysis in an attempt to understand how the understanding of keywords such as “language” and “communication” has changed within the textual discourse of EL textbooks from 2009 to 2022. However, when adopting CDA as a methodology and theory, it is essential that I explain what the three terms of CDA mean to me in the context of this paper. As Rebecca Rogers rightly points out in the introduction to *Critical Discourse Analysis in Education*, “The intentions of the analyst always guide the theory and method of CDA.” Hence, though CDA may vary at the “critical,” “discourse,” and “analysis” junctures, it must include all three to be considered CDA.

In the context of this paper, “critical” is an attempt to decipher the relationship between form (semantics and syntax) and function (textual discourse) of language. In other words, it refers to how people (authors and editors of EL textbooks) use language (form) in order to achieve the desired outcome (function). Such an approach will invariably be rooted in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), one which starts at the social context (textbook) and looks at how language acts on and is constructed by the social context (higher education context of Calicut University). One of the premises of SFL is that the text under study must be a whole text, and not a single utterance or sentence; thus EL textbooks as a whole are subject to scrutiny.

“Discourse” (textual discourse) in this paper refers to a “systematically organized set of statements which gives expression to the meanings and values of an institution.” Thus, the textual discourse is read as constructing and being constructed by the context in which ELE is imparted to undergraduate students of Calicut University. For “analysis,” the paper adopts Fairclough’s (1992, 1995) analytic procedure, which includes a three-tiered model consisting of description, interpretation, and explanation of discursive relations at the local, institutional, and societal domains of analysis. The local

domain is the EL textbook, the institutional domain is the preface of the EL textbook, and the societal domain is the history of EL textbooks, which serves as the metanarratives of the time that shape and are shaped by the institutional and local domains. Thus, the analysis will continuously and consciously move between micro- and macro-level analyses of the texts.

## Findings and Discussion

### Titles of the Textbooks

The English language (EL) textbook (A01 course textbook) of 2012 is titled *Communication Skills in English: Listening and Speaking* (CSE) by the authors and editors. The title of the textbook (form) performs the “function” of limiting the focus of the EL textbook to two aspects, “listening” and “speaking.” The EL textbook of 2014, titled *The Four Skills of Communication: English Language Course* (FSC), performs the “function” of explicitly stating and focusing on the four essential skills of communication. In 2017, the word communication (form) is removed from the EL textbook title altogether and is replaced by another title, *Transactions: Essential English Language Skills*. There is subtle difference even in the subtitling of the EL textbook, from an “English language course” to one that inculcates the “essential English language skills.” In 2019, the textbook is titled *Functional Grammar and Communication in English* (FGC), and hence it performs the “function” of envisaging the course as one with the focus on communication, rather than an all-encompassing English language course.

### Prefacing the Prefaces

The authors and editors of EL textbooks CSE (2012) and FSC (2014) explicitly state that there is to be development of communication skills in English (form). However, the textbook CSE performs the “function” of offering a course in communication, with the understanding that better communication skills in English will “enhance students’ employability” (Introduction), and maintains the view that there is an “increasing importance of English for career purposes” (Introduction). On the other hand, the textbook FSC performs the function of offering a course in English language, as there is a “need to learn English to be a part of the global community” (Preface).

On the periphery, it might appear that the understanding of the words “communication” and “language” has remained constant across the EL textbooks over the years or, in terms of SFL, that changing forms have performed the same function. Hence, aspects such as “listening,” “speaking,” and “pronunciation” have remained relevant across the textbooks, as is evident from the contents pages of both the textbooks. However, there are certain other aspects which have been removed and certain others which have been added, as is evident from the content pages of the EL textbooks FSC and CSE. In CSE, grammar is an indispensable part of communication and, as is evident, there is an undue

emphasis on the listening and speaking skills in the form of multiple modules (such as Part II: Pronunciation and Accent, Part III: Speaking Skills of the textbook, and Part V: Telephonic Skills). However, the modules on “telephone skills” and “neutralization of accent” in CSE are removed, and modules on “reading,” “writing,” and “grammar” are incorporated in FSC. Thus, in the EL textbooks the varying forms are performing the function of shaping the EL textbook in such a manner that it encourages the students to gain expertise in all forms of “communication,” both oral and written, and also provide an all-encompassing understanding of “language.” Arguably, this could be a reflection of the premises with which both the textbooks were devised; while CSE was devised to cater to employment needs (Preface), FSC was devised to cater to the demands of globalization (Preface).

The central premise with which both the authors and editors of the EL textbooks FSC (2017) and *Transactions* (2019) set out to teach the students English “language” and “communication” is the same, but the contexts in which they are situated are different. Hence, despite being in the same form of EL textbooks (A01 course textbooks), they perform different functions. FSC situates globalization as the contributing factor to the changing roles of English in public and private spheres and hence places the “need to learn English to be a part of the global community” (Preface). On the other hand, *Transactions* urges one to learn English as it enables one to communicate across borders—social, cultural, geographic, linguistic, vernacular, or caste-based. Thus, FSC performs the function of placing the need to learn English in connection to a larger global phenomenon, whereas *Transactions* performs the function of placing the need to learn English as a practical necessity in the context of English emerging as a lingua franca (Preface). The variation in the functions performed by the two EL textbooks becomes furthermore evident in the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the contents of the textbooks wherein FSC adopts a rather generic approach which might be applicable to any and every learner of ESL/EFL. In fact, the Preface defines the textbook as one primarily made to meet the needs of undergraduate students of Indian universities. On the other hand, the Preface of *Transactions* specifically claims to be tailor-made to the needs of Kerala English Language Learners (KELL). *Transactions* is more concerned with how the textbook can meet the needs of ESL/EFL learners of Kerala at the tertiary level. However, both the textbooks are also similar in how they claim to be task-oriented (FSC) or adopt a task-based approach (*Transactions*).

*Functional Grammar and Communication* (FGC) is “aimed at preparing students at the functional level” (Preface). Thus, unlike all the previous EL textbooks, here the focus is on how grammar serves the purpose of communication. Such a change reflects how EL is beginning to be viewed solely as a communication aid.

### Modulations in the Modules

Considering how the module on listening (form) performs different functions in different EL textbooks CSE and FSC: in CSE, the modules on listening detail the approaches to be adopted while listening to talks, descriptions, announcements, radio, TV, and casual conversations. On the other hand, the authors and editors of FSC limit the modules on listening to approaches adopted while listening to lectures, conversations, and speeches. As is evident, in CSE the module on listening performs the function of considering different career options one might be involved in as a graduate in English and attempts to train the student in many of these. On the other hand, the textual discourse in FSC limits its function to the possibility of listening to pieces that one might encounter most frequently as a student. Again, the modules could be reflecting the premises with which they were designed and formulated; while CSE was formulated to meet the need of “English for career purposes,” FSC was formulated to meet the needs of globalization.

As for how the module on “speaking” (form) performs different functions across the two textbooks: the authors and editors of CSE attempt to train the students on different aspects and elements of phonetics and linguistics. Thus, word stress and rhythm (pp. 85), falling and rising tones (pp. 108), and fluency and pace of delivery (pp. 108) become individual chapters of the textbook. The authors and editors of FSC, on the other hand, focus on the different purposes that communication serves and hence greeting, enquiring, and reporting become individual chapters. Thus, as is evident, the module on speaking (form) in the two EL textbooks differs in the function it performs—from being understood as a medium in which the phonetics and linguistics of spoken language reign supreme to one which is evaluated on the basis of whether it fulfills the purpose of communication or not.

Notable among the differences is how, in CSE, the modules titled “Pronunciation and Neutralization of Accent” and “Speaking” are devoted to aspects of linguistics and phonetics, whereas in FSC, apart from the single sub-module devoted to pronunciation, no other section of the textbook discusses phonetics or linguistics. The quantity of the audio the students are exposed to in these modules is also incomparable to that of CSE. In fact, FSC states the reason for this change in the Preface of the textbook as follows: “English language studies have started prioritizing the communicative aspects of English over the traditional linguistics and literary aspects.” Also, in CSE there are repeated mentions of the effects of the Indian accent on spoken language in the chapters “Problems in Pronunciation” (pp. 28–30) and “Influence of the Mother Tongue” (pp. 126–131); in FSC there is no attempt to avert such an influence at all. Thus, in both EL textbooks the functions performed by the forms of “speaking” have changed significantly. In CSE pronunciation and accent are significant aspects of mastering speaking, but in FSC these no longer remain significant.

In CSE the module on communication skills (form) begins by suggesting the different forms of communication around us and instructing the ways in which communication can be made effective. The rest of the module is devoted to different ways of oral communication (Preface) in which we communicate, and thus the chapters are as follows: greeting, making requests, group discussions, and so on. On the other hand, in FSC the first chapter is similar in function to that of CSE. However, the rest of the module connects the role of English in communication through the lens of linguistics (“Braj Kachru Circle,” p. 9) and globalization (“Global English,” p. 12). Thus, while CSE attempts to perform the function of acquainting the students with ways in which English can be of use to them, FSC attempts to perform the function of inculcating in them a wider or rather “global” understanding of the origin of the language and its (omni)science in the world today.

The module on pronunciation (form) in both FSC and *Transactions* more or less introduces the students to similar concepts—vowels, consonants, and word stress. However, the difference in function of the module on pronunciation (form) in *Transactions* lies in the fact that it has a module solely devoted to L1 interference, and this module specifically addresses the mistakes Malayalis make while using English.

The module on grammar (form) in FSC and *Transactions* differs significantly in the functions they perform even in content composition. In FSC, tenses is only one of the chapters among many in the module on grammar. In FSC, as is the practice of the textbook, each chapter in the module on grammar begins with a theoretical introduction—be it the chapter on word-class, subject–verb agreement, tenses, articles, phrases, clauses and sentences, voices, or idioms—and is then followed by activities or tasks. Hence there is an attempt to first acquaint the students with what the different aspects of grammar mean and then proceed to make them practice each. Whereas in *Transactions*, tenses occupy the bulk of the content of the module on grammar and there is only one chapter in the module devoted to anything else: modals. Thus the grammar module in *Transactions* performs the function of conveying the understanding that tense usage is a major problem that the student population of Kerala is struggling with. Hence, the undue importance given to tense in the module on grammar in an EL textbook designed exclusively for the students of Calicut University. In fact, the stated learning objectives of the module read as follows: “To develop a good grasp of the common grammatical errors of Malayali speakers of English.” Also, in all the chapters the theoretical explanations are kept to a minimum; rather, emphasis is given to the activities. Again, the textbook performs the function of delivering the understanding that practice precedes theory in grammar.

Significant functional differences are also observed in the performance of the module on reading. In the module on reading in FSC, the authors give due importance to reading different kinds of texts in different contexts—reports, charts, ads, and so on (pp. 52–75). *Transactions* performs the function of training students to read and does not give much relevance to what text is being read; thus the texts

offered as a part of the reading exercise are all of the same genre. Hence, the tasks that follow are named as follows: “finding facts,” “vocabulary,” and “finding main idea” (pp. 129–148).

In the module on speaking (form), the function in terms of content composition remains more or less the same. However, the difference in function is performed through the difference of approach. FSC again is theory-intensive, and tasks always follow the theoretical explanations, whereas in *Transactions* the theory is also clarified through tasks. Thus, the effort is to encourage students to do.

### **Transactions and FGC**

FGC includes an entire module devoted to the “Basic Concepts of Syntax.” The module covers all aspects in terms of the form and structure of the sentence, and throughout the module the focus is on ways to train students in “writing skills” and “spoken skills” in order to enable them to express themselves correctly and appropriately, with a basic overview of the “key areas of English grammar” (Preface).

In the module on grammar, unlike *Transactions*, which focuses on the study of tenses in EL, FGC focuses on the use of the different functional elements in a sentence. In the unit on tenses, the focus is on the tense forms used in everyday transactions.

The bulk of the EL textbook is devoted to the module on “skills for communication.” The module includes aspects of oral as well as written communication. Thus, the module does not merely include units on CVs and letters, but also on presentation skills and group discussion. However, unlike *Transactions*, the EL textbook does not attempt to aid students in improving their “vocabulary,” “reading skills,” or “phonetics.” Thus, from the EL textbook *Transactions* to the EL textbook FGC, the function performed by EL textbooks shifts from one which trains students in vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, speaking, and reading to one wherein the EL textbook envisages EL as a tool for oral and written communication.

### **Conclusion**

The paper thus elucidates how, over the years, the EL textbooks have offered differing understandings of what constitutes “language” and “communication” or, in terms of SFL, how the EL textbooks as a form have performed different functions in contributing to the understanding of “communication” and “language” over the years.

The paper achieved this objective through the CDA of the EL textbook titles, the prefaces which place the EL textbooks in the context of the UG students of Calicut University (local domain), the study of the modules (form–function relationships), and the history of ELE through EL textbooks (societal domain).

The findings of this study strengthen the idea that EL textbooks also play a significant role in shaping the understanding of the words “language” and “communication,” and that EL textbooks are ideologically laden in the ideas they perpetuate and propagate within academia.

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