Teaching-Learning Statement

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1 Teaching-Learning Philosophy

My teaching philosophy is best understood as the role that members of many species — humans are a glaring exception to this — play in the development of their offspring. They provide the newborn with the minimum that is necessary for its survival, allow it to practice survival under a very brief tutelage, and then trust it to manage entirely on its own. My general approach to teaching anything is to get students interested in it and to equip them with the necessary technical know-how, if any, required for independent exploration. This minimalist or "bare-minimum" approach to teaching helps students blossom into critical thinkers who understand that all knowledge must lead to new questions, and that inspiration to learn stems from "I don't know"s[1].

When teaching linguistics, I thus pursue two goals that I believe ensure students have a foundation strong enough to encounter "I don't know"s and to pursue them: (1) Expose students, right from the start, the scientific method of studying language, and (2) provide them with the tools to pursue this questioning in and outside academia (in industry or community work). I am thus particular about teaching students traditional (questionnaire-based) and non-traditional (experiment-based) language data collection techniques to ensure that students engage critically with linguistic and interdisciplinary theory, while also learning skills crucial for non-academic jobs. Linguistics is highly interdisciplinary and I ensure that my teaching reflects this so that a student interested and skilled in one or more disciplines that linguistics intersects with — psychology, neurology, computer science, literature, sociology, politics, anthropology, genetics and education — sees the breadth and reach of studying language.

I believe that classrooms must include rather than exclude. I therefore try to keep my teaching style and material accessible and lucid, and my evaluation methods dynamic. I ensure that I am approachable and available to discuss students' questions, assigned readings and other readings. This ensures that I do not need to compromise on the natural level of a course. I also ensure that I design my courses to cater to the needs and goals of a particular classroom. For instance, an *Introduction to Linguistics* course I would design for students of BA Linguistics would be different from one I would design for students pursuing BA English. For the former, I would teach the core areas of linguistics using cross-linguistic data, with the applied areas I discuss including language acquisition, the human brain and language, and language endangerment, among others. In the latter, I would teach students about contemporary English grammar, including that of the various varieties of English (Indian, African-American, Irish, Singaporean, and Australian), many of which have a significant presence in English literature. As an introduction to the applied areas of linguistics, I would teach them English lexicology and lexicography, the history of the English language, English language variation and change, and language policy and planning, since all of these impacts the literature produced across the world.

The paradox of teaching linguistics is that while the discipline concerns itself with an endowment available to every human, language and meta-language used to teach it can often be exclusionary. In countries like India, where classrooms are linguistically diverse, the discipline, especially formal linguistics, is often alienating for new students. They struggle to understand textbook language data illustrations. These are usually from languages that have been extensively researched, — languages such as English, French and German, to name a few — which they have no grammaticality judgments on. Being trained in linguistics in the multilingual South Asian academic space, it is natural for me to teach using language data from the languages spoken by my diverse classroom. For instance, when I teach the concept of "free word order" in an Indian classroom, the language data I use to illustrate the phenomenon is not from German, Japanese, or Turkish, but from the South Asian languages. Students who speak these or related languages then enrich the discussion of the topic.

2 Teaching experience and methods

I have taught both introductory as well as intermediate-level linguistics courses. In introductory courses in linguistics, I introduce students to the fundamentals, to establish a solid foundation and improve their confidence. For instance, in the undergraduate course *Introduction to Linguistics* for foreign language students at Jawaharlal Nehru University, I co-designed the course to first have students see how language is special

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[1] Szymborska, W. (1996). *The poet and the world*. [In-person lecture]. https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1996/szymborska/lecture/.
Text found after reading Szymborska quoted on Ayesha Kidwai's personal website.

to humans and familiarise them with the defining features of human language, and to get a glimpse of how human language is structured — phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics — also the sub-areas of core linguistics. The first module *Language the most human thing about us* was thus to get students interested in the study of language. Students were then introduced to the sub-areas of linguistics via short modules on them. This exploration was done via ample illustrations from natural languages. Students were encouraged to think about the sounds, words, and the sentence structures of their native languages and the foreign languages they were studying. They were then taught modules on a few applied areas of linguistics to introduce the empirical side of the discipline.

In intermediate courses, I teach the concepts and methods necessary to start a specialisation area. We analyse linguistic data and and read relevant literature. I engage students with seminal texts and (critically) test these theories in empirical waters. I did this in the master's level course *Phonology* taught at The Deccan College Post-Graduate & Research Institute. For example, in the *Generative phonology* module of the course, I first explained what generative phonology is, including how it is part of generative approaches to grammar and what its goals are. I thereafter taught students the prerequisites of the generative phonology machinery. I then taught them the ins and outs of the phonological rule formalism using cross-linguistic data. We practised rule-writing for cross-linguistic data sets in the classroom after which students were assigned practice problem sets as homework. Many problem sets were from the languages of India that they were familiar with. For every module, I provided students with a list of seminal works, textbooks, and resources from which certain pages were assigned as obligatory readings.

Although I have not taught Advanced-level linguistics courses yet, I would like to reserve these for critically reading and for discussing seminal and advanced-level literature, for writing article and book reviews, for conducting novel empirical research and writing it up as an academic paper or dissertation. The aim here would be to teach students fine scientific argumentation by studying a specific linguistic phenomenon and to connect the specific to the general, i.e., to the big-picture questions in linguistics and allied disciplines.

I have also taught English as a second language to undergraduate students at the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi. Here, I applied my knowledge and expertise in linguistics to build my teaching material and to inform my methods to teach a second language to a multilingual group. Using data from languages spoken by my students, I aimed to make them aware of our implicit linguistic knowledge, showing them ways to tap this to learn English.

Teaching-learning cannot be restricted to classrooms, and one of my favorite ways of teaching is through advising. I encourage students to discuss their work in progress, and we try to solve problems that do not necessarily have simple answers.

I believe that evaluation must aim to test students' level of understanding of a topic, and their ability to engage critically with it and to think of its empirical coverage. Aiming to test for textbook definitions of terminology, paradoxically, undermines the "bare minimum approach" to teaching-learning. For instance, if I wanted to test the vocabulary of students of English as a second language, I would test their knowledge of vocabulary building strategies. I would ask them to pick five words they consider complex in a given text and decipher the meaning from the context. Now, given a word, they must generate new words by adding word-parts (inflectional and derivational morphology), by thinking of or looking up synonyms and antonyms (meaning or semantics) and by thinking of homophonous or rhyming words (sound or phonology). They then choose any 3 words generated by distinct strategies to create two novel sentences. I would not ask, for instance, "What is a noun? List some nouns and create sentences using them".

Every learner has their strengths and weaknesses. Some can design and execute experiments well, while some are good at data analysis and statistics. Others' strengths lie in arguing succinctly in words. I, therefore, encourage evaluation methods such as group designing and execution of fieldwork questionnaires or a language experiment, group term papers, and presentations, where the strength of each learner is harnessed to complete sub-tasks of a large collective task. Researching in groups initiates students into the world of collaborative problem solving, the bedrock of all work environments —academia, industry and community. My individual-based evaluation methods include sit-down closed-book exams, sit-down open-book exams, 24-hour take-home exams, and writing term papers, article reviews, and book reviews. Like in my classroom teaching, I use cross-linguistic data sets in my evaluation, asking students to reflect on their own language(s).

All testing and quizzing should mirror to the student (a) what they know relative to what they knew before, (b) and what more they can know. This means that my evaluation methods must serve the student in their self-learning journeys driven by "I don't know"s, as much as they serve institutional evaluation criteria.