Chapter 5
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Three Year Degree Course (Arts)
Textbooks in General English

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Chapter 5

Three Year Degree Course (Arts)

Textbooks in General English

We will analyse and evaluate in this chapter the syllabuses, the textbooks and allied teaching materials in General English prescribed for the present Three Year Degree Courses in arts under both Gauhati and Dibrugarh Universities. In our proposed task we have to keep in mind the needs and the ability of students already discussed in Chapter 3. Suggestions of the students for the improvement of the present courses in general and the textbooks in particular are taken into consideration too. When evaluating the textbooks the following five aspects are mainly analysed: vocabulary, grammar, thought content, cultural points and interest value. Some other aspects like the syllabus design, the teaching objectives, editing and printing errors, and the motivation of students are also analysed. As far as the difficulty level of the textbooks is concerned we will try to find whether they are written or chosen taking the actual entry behaviour of the target learners into account.
5.1 The syllabuses

As discussed in the preceding chapter a good syllabus should clearly mention these four aspects — content, specification, justification and attainability. The content of the syllabus of Gauhati University is reproduced in Appendix 3(B) and that of Dibrugarh University in Appendix 3(C). We find that the former syllabus does not specify the objectives of the course. There are no details of the teaching points to be covered. The prescribed topics are not arranged in an ascending order of difficulty. There is also no mention of a teacher's handbook or reference books. But the latter syllabus states the objectives of teaching English clearly. It contains a detailed list of topics, teaching points, prose pieces, poems and the textbooks. A Teachers' Manual which has been prepared by the university gives guidance on how to teach Paper I of the course on remedial grammar and composition. Unlike the Gauhati University syllabus the syllabus of Dibrugarh University spells out clearly the scheme of examination with a division of marks allotted to different topics and to different types of questions. In the Gauhati syllabus the arrangement of poems and drama in the first year, and prose, rapid reader, grammar, usage and
composition in the second does not seem to be based on sound principles. But the allotment of subjects—remedial grammar and composition in the first year's course, composition and appreciation of prose in the second year's and poetry and drama in the third year's—in the Dibrugarh University syllabus is arguably appropriate.

However, both these syllabuses have a number of shortcomings in common which are similar to those we have pointed out in the higher secondary syllabus. In addition to them the following three deficiencies are worth mentioning. No testing methods and instructions on evaluation are recommended for the classroom teacher, the question paper-setter or the answer script evaluator. The syllabuses do not include any teaching item on writing skills like note-taking, and note-making which are essential for students to prepare for the examinations. No mention is made to teach speaking skills through students' participation in seminars, group discussions, debates, mock parliament and dramatics. Moreover, as there is no specification of the teaching objectives in the Gauhati syllabus the justification of what has been included in the course cannot be found out. For the same reason it also cannot be
affirmed that the intended objectives are attained by the students with the use of the textbooks prescribed for them.

As an inference from our discussions in Chapter 3 it can be said that what is taught is no indication of what is learnt (Mackey 327). So the texts should not be too difficult if the actual entry behaviour of students falls far below the expected level. To meet the stated objectives in the Dibrugarh syllabus the prescribed textbooks are justified to some extent. The objectives are attainable if other factors like teaching methods and classroom situation are improved. However, a detailed analysis of the textbooks is necessary and it will be made later in the chapter.

5.2 The textbooks on prose

There are two prescribed textbooks on prose for the detailed study — one in each of the universities of Gauhati and Dibrugarh. The title of the book has not been mentioned in the printed syllabus of Gauhati University. However, it is found that the anthology is English Prose and Poetry Section for Degree Course prepared by the Publication Department of Gauhati
University. The book for the students in Dibrugarh is *On the Threshold* edited by D.K. Barua.

As discussed earlier the Gauhati University syllabus does not mention clearly the aims and objectives of the course. However, in the Foreword to the anthology they have been described in most general terms as the following: "the selected (prose) pieces will introduce our students to a variety of ideas, viewpoints and individual styles"; they "should instil awareness of both expressive resources and functional efficiency of the language"; and "the best service English can render us is to strengthen and enrich our own cultural tools". In the Preface to *On the Threshold* the editor has set two objectives in selecting the passages: "to give the students access to a wide variety of good standard English" and "to place before them a selection of essays, sketches and stories which will be both informative and thought-provoking." He has admitted that "in colleges, serious interest in the subject is being replaced by emphasis on functional English." But he avows a different outlook. Quoting the following words from the Kothari Commission Report 'The main purpose of the first degree should be to bring students to the frontier of knowledge and to the threshold of the world of research,' he says, "It is at
this stage of growth that the mind is most ready to consider new ideas, to entertain controversial ones, and our choice of the essays, on the whole, has been governed by this consideration."

But in both the anthologies the editors have not mentioned anything about the actual entry behaviour of the college entrants (Forrester 4-5). Neither have they kept in view their real needs for English. In our analysis we will try to find whether the difficulty level of the prose pieces included in the textbooks is reasonably controlled to suit the needs of the students.

We find that the Gauhati University anthology contains fourteen prose pieces and that of Dibrugarh twenty-two. Although all the passages are not prescribed for the present courses we are taking all of them for analysis and evaluation because there is every possibility that some prose pieces may be replaced with others in the coming academic years. We will conduct our discussion under the following headings: (1) Vocabulary, (2) Grammatical structures, (3) Thought content, (4) Cultural points, (5) Interest value, (6) Notes and glossary, (7) Exercises, (8) Mistakes in the textbooks and (9) Printing and get-up.
5.2.1 Vocabulary

When the students enter the degree classes after eight years of learning English they are generally expected to be able to read and understand original writings of English authors with no artificial control over vocabulary and grammatical structures. But owing to several factors the college entrants do not come with the knowledge of the vocabulary and grammatical structures which they are supposed to have mastered by the end of the +2 stage. So, if textbooks in General English for Three Year Degree Courses are designed without taking the actual entry behaviour of students into consideration they will be too difficult for them. From our experience in the classroom and by going through the answer scripts of examinees at the higher secondary final examination and from our investigation into the needs and ability of undergraduate students in Chapter 3 we have found that the knowledge of English of college entrants falls far below the expected level. Keeping in view the actual standard of students of the Three Year Degree Courses we shall take the Nagpur vocabulary list of 3300 words, including supplementary two cycles, for active use (2700 words of this list were meant for active use by secondary school students and
the rest 600 for passive use by those who would go to colleges) (Nagpur Report 65-66) as suitable for the T.D.C. students and shall refer to it in our analysis of the textbook. However, we shall not be rigid in dismissing a lesson as unsuitable if a few words fall beyond the above range of vocabulary.

Difficult words in different passages which fall outside the vocabulary recommended above are identified followed by our discussion on them with regard to their frequency, range, coverage, usefulness, difficulty and overall value. There are a large number of difficult words in one passage in the Gauhati University anthology and in a number of passages in On the Threshold. We have identified 32 difficult words in "Walking Tours", 28 in "Indian Philosophy", 46 in "The Happiness Principle", 29 in "The Road to Happiness", 78 in "Shakespeare in Today's England" (including Latin words), 45 in "The Making of the Bomb" and 67 in "Sir Agravaine". The following are only a few examples from them:

troubadour, bivouacs, grog, egregious, emancipation, caveat, anthropomorphism, emanation, whipster, indubitable, preternatural, gormandizing, objurgatively,
withal, valetudinarian, regimen, intractable, exultation, polemicists, extraction, sloop, trimethylene, neutrons, uranium, nuclei, cadmium, fissionable, isotopes, protons, centrifuge, neptunium, plutonium, malapert, inexplicable, raveneth, debilitated, disgorge, brigand, unicorn, thingummybob.

The frequency of the words like the above ones is very limited. Their range and covering capacity are less too. The words like troubadour, bivouacs, anthropomorphism, valetudinarian and debilitated are very difficult for the students. As far as their needs are concerned such words are not useful. As the seven passages discussed above contain a large number of such words we consider them unsuitable for the students.

The other thirteen prose passages in the textbook for Gauhati and sixteen in that for Dibrugarh also contain several difficult words. The suitability of these passages will improve if the words like the following are edited and replaced with simpler and useful words:

palaeolithic, neolithic, trajectories, paterfamilias, solecism, guillotined, opiate, derangement, aquiesce,
astigmatism, antediluvian, astrakhan, crepuscule, batrachian, beguilements, slumberous, excrescence, ubiquitous, circumlocution, rearguard, phlegmatic, staccato, legato, systole, untramelled, contemned, countenance, debaucherries, drudgeries, crinolines, abominable, declension, fidgety, cognoscenti, autochthonous, progenitor, counterpane, trotting, lariats, smouldered.

5.2.2 Grammatical structures

It has been recommended in the Study Group Report [The Study of English in India, 1967, Appendix Three (A)] that a total of 376 grammatical structures should be covered in a higher level course in General English meant for the students of Classes XI and XII. (This number of structures includes the structures taught in earlier classes.) But taking into consideration the actual entry behaviour of the T.D.C. students and their needs and ability we accept the limit of the above number of grammatical structures to be suitable for writing or selecting texts for them. We are going to analyse the prose passages in the two textbooks to find whether they contain long and involved sentences which render them unsuitable for the students. However, the
degree students should also be able to read original
texts by English authors. Nonetheless, the prescribed
texts should not contain many lengthy and more than four
clause sentences. We will conduct our discussion
mainly touching the following points: (1) sentences
with more than four clauses and complicated in thought,
(2) sentences with difficult patterns or forms, and (3)
usefulness of such sentences in communicative functions
and day-to-day life situations.

There are a number of very lengthy and involved
sentences in the following seven passages out of which
we give only a few examples quoting them in full. Owing
to space constraints, we only indicate a few other
sentences which are long, involved and inappropriate
from the pedagogical point of view.

"Walking Tours" by R.L. Stevenson

1 I know a village where there are hardly any clocks,
where no one knows more of the days of the week
than by a sort of instinct for the fete on Sundays,
and where only one person can tell you the day of
the month, and she is generally wrong; and if
people were aware how slow Time journeyed in that
village, and what armfuls of spare hours he gives,
over and above the bargain, to its wise inhabitants, I believe there would be a stampede out of London, Liverpool, Paris, and a variety of large towns, where clocks lose their heads, and shake the hours out each one faster than the other, as though they were all in a wager. (6-7)

2 And well for ... alarm of your clown. (4)
3 We can think ... own private thought! (5)
4 If you ask yourself ... a fiddle-stick's end. (10)
5 You learn from ... egregious of donkeys? (10)

"The Frogs" by Philip Robinson

6 By a miracle and a very long jump he escapes; but his jump has landed him in the lively rivulet which is now swirling down the middle of the road, and so, before he can draw his legs up, or collect his thoughts, he is rolled along with sticks and gravel into a ditch, sucked into a water-pine, squirted out at the other end, received by a rushing drain, and, ere he can extricate himself, is being whirled along towards the river, where live the barbarous paddy-bird and the ruthless adjutant-crane. (14)

7 The swallow came ... peoples the crepuscule. (11)
"Twelve Million Black Voices" by Richard Wright

10 The word 'Negro', the term by which, orally or in print, we black folk in the United States are usually designated, is not really a name at all nor a description, but a psychological island whose objective form is the most unanimous fiat in all American history; a fiat buttressed by popular and national tradition, and written down in many state and city statutes; a fiat which artificially and arbitrarily defines, regulates, and limits in scope of meaning the vital contours of our lives, and the lives of our children and our children's children. (15)

11 This island, within ... dash against it. (15)
12 The steep cliffs ... warrants instant reprisal. (15)
13 Three hundred years ... we shall inherit. (15-16)
14 In the main ... us do it?' (17-18)
15 In 1890 many ... lack of labour. (19)
16 Kings are dictatorial ... her fleecy children! (21)
"Walt Whitman" by Edward Carpenter

17 In this face you discern command, control, gentleness, and the most absolute inward unity, serenity, and peace; no wandering emotions or passions flit across the crystal mirror of the soul; selfhood in any but the highest sense has vanished — the self has, as it were, returned to its birthplace — leaving behind the most childlike, single-hearted, uncensorious, fearless character imaginable. (32)

18 Both are faces ... the highest domain. (31-32)

19 Whitman's immense ... a real portrait. (32-33)

20 Not only is ... field of literature. (33)

"Indian Philosophy" by C.E.M. Joad

21 While insisting, that is to say, that the end of life is spiritual fulfilment, it indicates the road which must be followed, if the end is to be achieved; and, since it is only to the man who lives rightly that truth is revealed, the apprehension of the truth which is sought by philosophy no less than the realization of the end
which is enjoined by religion depends primarily upon conduct. (41)

22 Perhaps the most ... India frequently indistinguishable. (34)

23 Hence, there must ... same musical idea. (35)

24 If man's real ... is an aspect. (38)

"Tragedy : An Introduction" by G.Lowes Dickinson

25 The men whose deeds and passions he narrated were the patterns and examples on the one hand, on the other the warnings of his race, the gods who determined the fortunes they sang, were working still among men; the moral laws that ruled the past ruled the present too and the history of the Hellenic race moved, under a visible providence, from its divine origin onward to an end that would be prosperous or the reverse according as later generations should continue to observe the worship and traditions of their fathers descended from heroes and gods. (62-63)

26 The subject of ... worship as divine. (61-62)
"Useful Work versus Useless Toil" by William Morris

27 And, yet, we must say in the teeth of the hypocritical praise of all labour, whatsoever it may be, of which I have made mention, that there is some labour which is so far from being a blessing that it is a curse; that it would be better for the community and for the worker if the latter were to fold his hands and refuse to work and either die or let us pack him off to the work house or prison — which you will. (74)

28 It is threefold ... he fidgets with. (75)

As we can see there are a number of lengthy sentences in the above seven prose passages with many embeddings in them which are complicated in thought. For example, the sentences 1, 6, 10, 17, 21, 25 and 27 contain 13, 11, 8, 5, 11, 11 and 12 clauses respectively. The grammatical structure or pattern of all the sentences listed here is difficult for the students. Moreover, such lengthy sentences are rarely used in present day writings and in real life situations. So the students will not have any use of such sentence patterns either for reading or for writing purposes. Keeping in mind students' needs for English
and their ability, to use Ramesh Mohan's words, "those stylistic (functional) varieties of the language" should have been chosen "which they (students) will have occasion later to use or understand" (CIEFL Language Through Literature 2 v). Therefore, we find these seven passages unsuitable for the students at this stage. There are some sentences comprising four or more clauses in the rest of the prose passages in the two anthologies but we do not think these sentences make them unsuitable for the students. However, other aspects like thought content, cultural points and interest value of these prose passages need to be analysed before arriving at a final evaluation. These aspects will be analysed in the subsequent subsections.

5.2.3 Thought content

Besides vocabulary and grammatical structures the other important factor which may render a particular piece of prose difficult for the students is thought content and the style of presentation of thoughts. So in order to find the suitability of the prose passages we will analyse here the thought content of all of them in both the anthologies.
"Walking Tours" is a thought provoking essay on the joy of travelling on foot. "On Archaeology" reflects the author's views on the study of ancient relics. "Simon's Father" is a short story depicting the plight of an illegitimate child who, at last, finds a father for himself and a husband for his mother. "The Prevention of Literature" is on the freedom of the press. "Ramanujan" and "Homage to Gandhi" are two biographical sketches of two great Indians. "What I Require from Life" is Haldane's own expectations from life. In "Science and War" Russell describes the role of science in developing war weapons and shows how war should be banished if humanity is to survive. In "Spoon Feeding" the author speaks of dangers of depending too much on simplified things and the help of machines. "Two Dragons in the Road" is a commentary on the harmfulness of the present examination system which is relevant to the Indian context too. "On Being Polite" is an essay on social manners. "The Rhino of Kaziranga" is a descriptive essay on the Kaziranga sanctuary in Assam where one-horned rhinoceroses are found. The essay describes Kaziranga from a tourist's point of view. "The Frogs" is a comic essay which is meant more to give pleasure than to instruct. The essay describes frogs in India during the rains. "Twelve Million Black
Voices" describes the condition of Negroes in the United States of America with historical perspective. In "The Study of English Style" its author touches upon some important points regarding style and grammar. "The Style of the English Bible" is a critical analysis of the English translations of the original Bible written in Hebrew. "Reflections on Gandhi" is a critical appraisal of the life of Mahatma Gandhi. In "Give Her a Pattern" Lawrence gives his views on what should be the status of woman in the society. In "Shakespeare in Today's England" Mirad C. Chaudhuri describes his experience at Shakespeare's birthplace regarding how his plays are received there today. In "Mass Culture" its author shows us the dangers of popular culture. "Significance of the Russian Revolution" shows the effects of the Russian Revolution on the poor and the downtrodden. "Life of Ma Parker" is a short story which centres round the death of the little grandchild of the protagonist of the story. "Sir Agravaine" is an enjoyable short story which narrates a seemingly uncanny atmosphere but results in a middle class marriage. The above twenty-three prose pieces will not pose much difficulty to the students of the T.D.C. stage. So from the teaching point of view the thought content of these lessons are not unsuitable to be included in the course.
In determining the conceptual difficulty of a prose passage we have used our subjective insight "since no validated difficulty schedule exists, relevant to the Indian context", to borrow Ramesh Mohan's words (CIEFL Language Through Literature vi). However, we have kept in view the Assamese students' needs and ability. Accordingly, we consider the following three passages difficult for the T.D.C. students more owing to their style of writing or presentation of thoughts than the thoughts themselves: "Wordsworth in the Tropics" which is a thought-provoking essay on the many-sided face of Nature; "Nottingham and the Mining Country" which describes the dark side of the mechanical civilization; and Chekhov's "In Exile" which is a short story showing deep psychological penetration into human life. All these three lessons will pose difficulties for the students. So they should be replaced with some other pieces of prose with simpler style of presentation of thoughts.

We also consider ten prose pieces from the Dibrugarh University textbook difficult for the students. "Walt Whitman", "Indian Philosophy", "The Happiness Principle" and "The Road to Happiness" are philosophical essays which go beyond the students'
ability to comprehend. "The Western Intellectual Tradition", "Tragedy: An Introduction" and "Robert Owen and Owenism" may be suitable for serious students of English literature but are not suitable for the average students. A course in general English aims at giving communicative competence to students, not train them in literary appreciation. The fact that the above three essays are serious literary writings is even evident from the titles themselves. So they will be very difficult for the general course students and hence unsuitable for them. Although "Useful Work versus Useless Toil" is on a general topic the style of presentation of thoughts does not make it very easy for the students to grasp the meaning. "The Making of the Bomb" is on a scientific topic. Although the language is simple the essay contains some references to atomic reactions with which the Assamese students are not acquainted. So it will be very difficult for them. Lastly, the short story "A Visit to Grandpa's" by Dylan Thomas uses language in a highly personal style with subtle psychological symbols. So it is very likely to be difficult for students. As discussed above these ten prose passages are difficult and hence unsuitable to be included in the general English course. Therefore, they should be replaced with some other pieces of prose
written with simpler subject matter and in simpler style of presentation of thoughts.

5.2.4 Cultural points

A prose passage may be difficult for the students if it is about some topic involving the culture of the English people which is quite different from the Assamese culture. But there is no such prose piece in the two textbooks. So from the point of view of cultural difference no passage is difficult for the students.

5.2.5 Interest value

The anthologists seem to have been guided by the thought of selecting the passages known for their literary merit without taking into account the suitability of their difficulty level or their interest value for the students. We have already discussed the difficulty level of the prose pieces from the point of view of vocabulary, grammatical structures, thought content and cultural points. From our investigation into the Assamese students' needs, ability and interests done in Chapter 3, it is clear that the students are interested in topics on wit and humour, adventure, sports, current
affairs, entertainment programmes like movie and music, and the life and society in the State. Except the passages like "Simon's Father", "Ramanujan", "Homage to Gandhi", "Science and War", "Spoon Feeding", "Two Dragons in the Road", "On Being Polite", "The Rhino of Kaziranga", "Reflections on Gandhi", "Give Her a Pattern", "Mass Culture", "Significance of the Russian Revolution", "Life of Ma Parker" and "Sir Agravaine" others are not sufficiently interesting to the students. Some prose pieces on wit and humour, adventure, sports, current affairs, entertainment programmes like movie and music, and the life and society in the State of Assam should be included in the textbooks which are likely to be more interesting to the students.

5.2.6 Notes and glossary

Notes and glossary are a necessary part of a textbook in a Second Language course. They are as much helpful to the student as to the teacher. Further, the notes and glossary should be sufficient to cover all the difficult words, idioms, unfamiliar points, references and allusions of any type. If the explanations given in the notes and glossary of the textbook are sufficiently elaborate the student will not be tempted to use cheap
bazar notes. In the type of classroom situation prevailing in Assam where there are generally more than one hundred fifty students in a class, the teacher cannot give personal attention to each and every student. So the notes and glossary may come to the help of the student if he faces any difficulty regarding a point or an allusion in the text.

In the two textbooks under our evaluation there are Notes on each prose passage. First there is a brief introduction to the author and his works followed by a brief note on the theme of the passage. Then the explanation of different references, allusions and difficult words is given. But all the words falling outside the 2700 active vocabulary have not been explained which should have been done. Guidance on their pronunciation should have been given too because students should know how to pronounce the words they learn. If the pronunciation is given in the Notes the students can practise them at home without depending solely on the teacher's pronunciation. In the textbooks there is no guidance on the pronunciation of words. It should be included in the notes and glossary.
5.2.7 Exercises

In a textbook of prose like *On the Threshold* where the teaching objective is 'simple appreciation of English prose' (as stated in the syllabus), the testing exercises on comprehension and composition are more necessary than the practice exercises on grammatical forms. Heaton spells out the relationship between testing and teaching in the following words:

Both testing and teaching are so closely interrelated that it is virtually impossible to work in either field without being constantly concerned with the other. Tests may be constructed primarily as devices to reinforce learning and to motivate the student or primarily as a means of assessing the student's performance in the language. In the former case, the test is geared to the teaching that has taken place, whereas in the latter case the teaching is often geared largely to the test. Standardised tests and public examinations, in fact, may exert such a considerable influence on the average teacher that they are often instrumental in
determining the kind of teaching that takes place before the test. (5)

The testing exercises can be a valuable teaching device and an instrument to motivate students. To quote Heaton again:

A test which sets out to measure students' performances as fairly as possible without in any way setting traps for them can be effectively used to motivate them. A well-constructed classroom test will provide the students with an opportunity to show their ability to perform certain tasks in the language. Provided that details of their performance are given as soon as possible after the test, the students should be able to learn from their weaknesses. In this way a good test can be used as a valuable teaching device. (7)

But there are no exercises given in the textbook, On the Threshold. So usefulness of exercises is lacking in this book.
It is necessary that the textbooks on prose should contain sufficient exercises on correct sentence patterns, grammar and usage for consolidation of previous knowledge and for removing students' errors. Valid and reliable exercises discussed in the previous chapter may be designed and included in the textbooks for the T.D.C. students. Although it takes more time to design multiple-choice type of items, we think this type to be most suitable for the remedial work. Remedial exercises on the use of tenses, subject-verb agreement, use of prepositions and relative pronouns, and even on spelling of words should be designed with multiple-choice type of items and included in the T.D.C. textbooks.

However, in the Gauhati University textbook there are composition exercises on the subject matter of the passages. Let us analyse those exercises. We consider that the views of Harris (59) regarding the objectives of comprehension and composition exercises discussed in the previous chapter hold good for undergraduate students too.

The following are some of the composition exercises given in the textbook:
1. What are Haldane's ideals of private and public life? What are his reasons for choosing socialism?

2. What are the four "general human needs" that Haldane mentions?

3. What are Haldane's notions of freedom and equality? How are these to be realised in the world? (149)

And

1) Give a historical account of the connection of science with warfare.

2) What are the effects of developments in science on war?

3) How does modern warfare differ from wars of ancient times?

4) Why are human beings prone to war? How can the course of war be eliminated? (152)

We find that most of the questions in these exercises seek to test the students' knowledge and information of the subject matter of the prose passages included in the textbook. But English as a language is largely a matter of skills. Therefore, the views of Harris (59) already referred to should have been taken into account when
designing the exercises. Students should be asked questions which would aim at identifying the central idea of the passage and how the arguments are built up through illustration and reason. Students should also be asked questions to identify the author's purpose in writing the passage and his attitude towards the subject and the reader. Some questions should be asked on the tone of the passage, and the devices and methods used to bring about the effect.

5.2.8 Mistakes in the textbooks

The learner is apt to accept whatever is printed in the textbook as correct. An average teacher may also hesitate to make the necessary corrections. We have found the following editorial and printing mistakes in the anthology prescribed for the students of Gauhati University. The mistakes along with their possible correct forms are given below:

Prose section

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<td>Sir R. Livingstone</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>'... I sing or oy'</td>
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There are a large number of mistakes like the above ones in the textbook. We have identified, at least, thirty. Most of them are printing errors. They relate to wrong punctuation marks, omission of punctuation marks, spelling mistakes, etc. Our discussion on the mistakes in an English textbook done in the previous chapter is relevant here too. So we do not feel the need to repeat the discussion on the harmfulness of mistakes to the learning environment and the learner. Therefore all these mistakes should be corrected to make the textbook mistake-free and suitable as a teaching tool. On the contrary, we have not found any editorial or printing errors in *On the Threshold* except one or two very minor
printing errors. So we may say that this textbook is nearly error-free.

The printing and get-up of both the textbooks are suitable for the students of the T.D.C. stage.

5.2.9 Overall evaluation and suggestions for improvement

Although some prose pieces in both the anthologies are suitable for the undergraduate students there should have been some passages on sports, wit and humour, current affairs, adventure, stories of bravery and topics relevant to the life and society in Assam because our investigation reveals that students take keen interest in these topics. The passages found unsuitable owing to one reason or the other should be replaced with some other interesting and simpler pieces of prose.

Notes and glossary, and exercises on practice and testing given in both the textbooks are quite inadequate. There should be profuse explanations of difficult words, phrases, idioms and other references so that the students will not be lured to use cheap bazar notes. Guidance on the pronunciation of new and difficult words should be given in the books too.
Exercises on practice and testing should be so designed as to increase the communicative competence of the students and make them use English in real life situations. Sufficient exercises on comprehension, composition and appreciation should be incorporated into the Dibrugarh University textbook to make it suitable for the students.

Classroom activities should be suggested for the teacher in both the books to handle the passages and the exercises effectively in large classes.

5.3 The textbooks on poetry

Whereas in Gauhati University the same book contains both prose and poetry, in Dibrugarh a separate book entitled *Whispering Reeds: An Anthology of English Poetry* edited by D.K. Barua is prescribed for the students. No explicit objective is stated in the Gauhati University syllabus for including poetry in the course but the Dibrugarh University syllabus states that the objective is to teach the degree students skills of appreciation of poetry. However, in the Foreword to the former anthology the editor has said that "the poems the students will encounter here will not only satisfy a
taste for music and vivid imagery but acquaint them with a wide range of valuable emotional experiences". As mentioned in the Preface the editor of the latter anthology wants "to provide B.A. Pass and Honours students with a selection of annotated poems which will give them a fair idea of the growth of poetry in England from the time of the rise of the lyric in the sixteenth century to our own time." When analysing and evaluating the poems we intend to connect these objectives with the objective(s) stated in the syllabuses and find whether they are in communion with the needs and ability of the students.

The poetry selection in the Gauhati University anthology contains twenty-two pieces but in the Dibrugarh anthology seventy-six. Although all the pieces are not included in the present courses we will take all of them for analysis and evaluation because, we think, some may be replaced with others in coming academic years. We will conduct our discussion touching the following aspects: vocabulary, thought content, cultural points, interest value, notes and glossary, exercises, mistakes in the textbooks and printing and get-up.
Most of the poems in both the textbooks which were written before the twentieth century contain archaic words like thou, thee, spake, drest, reposeth, quoth, art (meaning, are ), wert, etc. besides shortened forms like 'Tis, don't, conn'd, etc. However, except "Lycidas" and "Gerontion" no other poem contains a large number of difficult words rendering it incomprehensible to the students. Notwithstanding, we have identified several difficult words in the poems like the following:

usurious, uxorious, connubial, umbrage, auburn, hymeneal, languor, eglantine, replenished, choristers, aureole, citherns, geraniums, slough, coeternal, effluence, ethereal, suffusion, vernal, guerdon, perfidious, devour, vanquished, seraphic, thegither, anither, abstruse, palfrey, misletoe, embowered, causeys, estaminet, merds, juvescence, concitation.

It is our view that poems do not become unsuitable merely because of some difficult words. Other aspects need to be analysed too. We will analyse the poems not from the point of view of their literary merit but their suitability for the students learning English as a Second Language at the degree stage.
Our findings clearly show that the Assamese students do not study English merely for enjoying English literature. They study English to meet some social requirements. But the studying of a language is incomplete if poetry is excluded from the course. Poetry shows a different use of the language from that in prose. Moreover, a simple experience or an emotional feeling can be expressed in a beautiful manner in poetry. But the same cannot be done in the language of prose. The T.D.C. (arts) students need to study only the general aspects of poetry like sound, rhythm and word-picture, not the technical or critical aspects which are required for the serious students of English literature.

Keeping in mind the above discussion we find most of the poems in both the anthologies not unsuitable for the students. However, we find that "The Pirate Father's Return" by Lord Byron and "The Toilet" by Alexander Pope, which are taken from long poems each, and "Still Falls the Rain" contain several allusions, therefore, difficult. As Ramesh Mohan says, the poems in a General English course should be on such themes which are "simple, straightforward and universal in
appeal" (CIEFL, Anthology of English Verse vii) and self-contained too without any allusions. So the above three poems should be excluded from the courses.

"To be of any value, poetry must mean something to the reader in terms of his experience and imaginative understanding of life", says Barua in the Preface to Whispering Reeds. But the Assamese students may find it difficult to realize this in English poetry because of the difference in background. However, the cultural difficulty is kept at the minimum and there are, to quote the editor's words again from the Preface, "enough human points of contact, both of imagination and social history" which make the poems included in the two anthologies interesting to the students.

Notes and glossary are a necessary part of a textbook in English. It is more so in a poetry textbook. In the two anthologies there are notes, and explanation of difficult words and allusions on each poem. But they are not sufficient for the students. All the difficult words falling outside the first 2700 words from the Nagpur Vocabulary List should have been explained in the notes. Guidance on pronunciation should have been included too. If these things were done the students could study the poems in detail at
home without the guidance of the teacher because, it is true, he (the teacher) cannot give sufficient attention to individual students in large classes.

In a general English course the undergraduate students are required to study some general aspects of poems like sound, rhythm, imagery, metaphor, symbol, tone and theme, not the critical and technical aspects which serious students of English literature need to study. Poetry should, actually, be read and studied more for enjoyment than for knowledge and information. Therefore, exercises on poems should be so designed as to elicit responses from students regarding how far they have enjoyed them. Questions should also be designed on the student's perception of how the poet has used devices like simile, metaphor and symbol to bring about the poetic effect and to weave a world of magic with words. Some of the exercises given in the Gauhati University anthology do help in the learning process. However, more questions should be designed in such a way that they will make the student read the poems again and again, and note down poetic devices and linguistic deviations which bring about the poetic effect. We find that there are no exercises in the anthology prescribed for the students of Dibrugarh University. Suitable
exercises on comprehension, composition and appreciation should be incorporated into this book.

However, one positive aspect of the book *Whispering Reeds* is that it is free from editorial or printing errors. On the contrary, the poetry section of the Gauhati University anthology on prose and poetry contains several of them. The typography of the two textbooks is found to be sufficiently attractive and clear.

5.4 The textbooks on drama

There are four textbooks on drama in the two universities. In Gauhati a Shakespearean play *Julius Caesar* is prescribed along with an abridged version of *An Inspector Calls* by J.B. Priestley. In Dibrugarh, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Modern One-Act Plays* edited by V.A. Shahane and M.Manuel are included in the course.

The T.D.C. (arts) students in Assam do not need to study an original Shakespearean play for the sake of studying English literature. A course in general English is meant for giving students a general
proficiency in English and developing their communicative competence in the language. The inclusion of a play in the course should contribute towards this end through teaching comprehension and simple appreciation of the general aspects of the play. But the original texts of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and *The Merchant of Venice* are very difficult for the students owing to the following reasons: The plays are written in verse. A large number of words used by Shakespeare are no longer used in the same sense. Of course, in the prescribed New Swan Shakespeare edition of both the books there are sufficient notes and explanations on difficult words given "within the range of a specially chosen list of 3,000 most commonly used English root-words" (Introduction to *Julius Caesar* v).

There is also a section which gives hints to examination candidates on how to answer questions. The students like to have a Shakespearean play in the course because the story appeals to them and they take the help of bazar notes on the play. From our experience we know that very few students read the original text of the play and enjoy the poetry and different aspects of it.

So we think that instead of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and *The Merchant of Venice* some other modern
plays will be more suitable for the students of the general English course. A simplified and adapted version of these plays written in current English may be suitable too. However, if an original play of Shakespeare is prescribed it should not be made compulsory. A play written in current English should be prescribed as an alternative so that only the students who are interested in Shakespeare's drama may study it. Others may opt for the alternative one. Whether it is a Shakespearean drama or a modern one, it should contain enough exercises on comprehension and discussion which will make the students use language skills rather than their ability to appreciate literature.

The prescribed edition of An Inspector Calls is an abridged version of the original one of the same title. The editor has written an introduction to the play and added Glossary and Notes to it. The explanations of the difficult words in the text are helpful to the students. The Introduction is also helpful to have a general idea of the play. J.B. Priestley, the playwright, describes "the relationship of one human being to another and the responsibility of the individual to his fellow man" (Introduction to the textbook v). Five characters in the play who are in one way or other the cause of
driving a girl to commit suicide try to avoid their responsibility but under pressure they become aware of it. Again, when the pressure is removed, they fall back into their old ways.

The play is not unsuitable for its inclusion in the degree course as far as the difficulty level and subject matter are concerned. The play is interesting too. Unlike Shakespeare, Priestley is a twentieth century playwright and uses current English in his play. Further the play has been abridged and difficulties for the students removed. So it is suitable for teaching conversational English and appreciation of drama.

But there are no exercises appended to this textbook. Exercises on comprehension are necessary for students. The teacher also needs the comprehension exercises to discuss the subject matter of the play in both general and tutorial classes effectively. Exercises on discussion, composition, and appreciation are useful to students and helpful to the teacher. So exercises on these aspects of the play should be included in the textbook. A note to the teacher should be given in the textbook as to how he can conduct classroom activities suitable for teaching a play. The
relevance of the language of drama to practical life should be pointed out too so that the students will develop real interest in the study of the play.

There are five one-act plays in the collection, *Modern One-Act Plays*. They are listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Titles</th>
<th>Authors</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Under Fire</td>
<td>Laurence Housman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Karl-Ludwig's Window</td>
<td>&quot;Saki&quot; (H.H.Munro)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 The Dear Departed</td>
<td>Stanley Houghton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Hewers of Coal</td>
<td>Joe Corrie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 The Monkey's Paw</td>
<td>W.W. Jacobs</td>
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Shahane and Manuel give the following comments on the theme of the first one-act play in the anthology:

"Under Fire" has for its subject matter one of the three attempts made on the life of Queen Victoria. ... The Queen remained dignified and self-possessed and showed no sign of panic at all. She exhibited quiet courage in that moment of crisis. She also took merciful view of the offenders. Laurence Housman skillfully
brings out these qualities of the Queen in the play. (133)

Saki's "Karl-Ludwig's Window" contains wit and elements of fantasy and has a tragic climax. "The Dear Departed" shows the pitfalls of human greed and hypocrisy. The playwright here exposes the hypocrisy associated with the event of death. "Hewers of Coal" presents the noble and the ignoble in human nature by taking only five coal mine workers as the characters. "The Monkey's Paw" is a play of atmosphere as well as of character. The climax of it is touching and tragic.

All these short plays are interesting. Each of them is also followed by an introduction, a brief remark on the theme, notes and glossary, and exercises on appreciation, comprehension, composition and language work. In the beginning of the book there is an introduction to the general aspects of the one-act play as a literary form.

After considering all aspects of the textbook we find it quite suitable for the students of the degree course.
5.5 The rapid readers

There are three rapid readers prescribed for the Gauhati University students and two for the Dibrugarh. Thomas Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Mulk Raj Anand's *Apology for Heroism* the abridged version of Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*, Jim Corbett's *My India* and James Hilton's *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* are the five textbooks. The themes of these books are very likely to be interesting to the students with the language within their comprehension. The most enjoyable of all Hardy's novels, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, centres round the life of Bathsheba Everdene, the heroine, who is a beautiful but whimsical woman. Three suitors, each entirely different from the other, are attracted to her. The story is set in the farming world of Wessex. *Apology for Heroism* is "a statement of belief" of the writer himself. It is a piece of confessional essay in which the writer has asserted his belief in humanism, a kind of "worship of humanity" (27).

*Kim* "displays an all-embracing understanding of numerous races and a tolerance for opposing creeds written without rancour or bitterness, but with love and good will" (Introduction v). The story narrates
the travels of Kim, the hero, in different places, in mountains and plains of India with a Tibetan lama. The description of Indian landscapes, her people of different religions and creeds come alive in the novel. The present abridged edition of the novel is a suitable rapid reader. The textbook contains an introduction to Rudyard Kipling's life and works with a brief summary of the story, a note on the novelist's style and a short appreciation of the principal characters. There are explanations of difficult words and other allusions given at the end of the text. Exercises on language works and comprehension are given too. The introduction, notes and exercises are very useful to the students as well as the teacher. My India presents India through Corbett's eyes. Narrated in a simple, lucid, direct and lively style it contains several interesting sketches of the people of the country. The book is quite suitable as a rapid reader. Goodbye, Mr. Chips, a short novel, is meant to be used for teaching the students the skills of simple appreciation of English fictional prose. It tells the life story of a school teacher who is endowed with simplicity, friendliness, a sense of humour and genuine humaneness. Although the book contains a number of difficult words
which fall outside the first 2700 words from the Nagpur Vocabulary List, and a number of more than three clause sentences, it is not likely to be difficult for the T.D.C. students. The story is also interesting to them. A few points in the story which touch the English life and are different from those in the Assamese society may pose a minor difficulty to the students. But they do not hinder their understanding and enjoyment of the story. So this textbook is quite suitable for the purpose of which it has been prescribed.

The prescribed Macmillan Student edition of Far from the Madding Crowd and the University of London edition of Goodbye, Mr. Chips are not available in the market. The students and the teachers use other editions of the books which are readily available. But we are of the view that the editions which are not available in the market should not have been prescribed for the students. Moreover, there are no notes, glossary and exercises in Apology for Heroism and My India. So they should be incorporated into them for the benefit of the students.
5.6 Grammar, composition and allied materials

There are five books on grammar and composition prescribed or recommended for the students of both the universities. They are: *A Remedial English Grammar for Foreign Students* by F.T. Wood, *Modern English* by N. Krishnaswamy, *Reading for Meaning* by M.L. Tickoo and Paul Gunashekar, *An Intermediate English Practice Book* by S. Pit Corder, and *Grammar and Composition: A Senior Course* by C.A. Sheppard and David Reid Thomas. The first book is common in both with the next two included in the Gauhati University course and the last two in that of Dibrugarh.

F.T. Wood's book is satisfactorily designed to teach English grammar for remedial purposes. The teaching items like 'tenses', 'preposition' and 'common errors' included in the syllabus can be taught to the T.D.C. students effectively with the use of this book. However, if the exercises had been designed using local names and places it would have been more interesting to the students in Assam. So supplementary exercises on the above grammatical items should be prepared relating them to day-to-day life situations and be given to the students for practice. *Modern English* is complementary...
to the other textbook. 'Idioms', 'comprehension' and 'substance writing' along with other teaching items on grammar and usage can be taught with the help of this textbook. There are some practice exercises on comprehension, substance writing and other grammatical items which are helpful to students. But there should have been more such exercises to provide more practice for students. The teacher should prepare supplementary practice exercises and distribute them to students in the form of handouts. Reading for Meaning is prescribed for teaching substance writing and comprehension. The book contains twelve lessons. Each lesson is followed by a glossary; exercises on comprehension, vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation and composition; and a section on the use of the dictionary. Words outside the General Service List are glossed. The exercises on comprehension contain five types of questions — global comprehension, local comprehension, factual comprehension, inferential comprehension, and critical and evaluative comprehension. The twelve prose passages are drawn from a wide range of prose forms: fiction, popular science, biography, autobiography, travelogue, humour, etc. So they cater to the variety of interests. The book is a suitable textbook for teaching what it is prescribed for.
One of the objectives of the course covered under Paper I of Dibrugarh University is stated in the syllabus as "correcting, through practice, grammatical mistakes common in the written work of the students." An Intermediate English Practice Book provides 288 exercises on vocabulary and grammatical items. The students are expected to repeat the exercises again and again in order to "have a mastery of the construction, vocabulary or point of grammar" (Foreword to the Student in the Practice Book ix) that they are practising. The Practice Book also contains some exercises on dictation, precis and comprehension. Key to the 288 exercises is given at the end of the book. "The essential thing about teaching grammar is not the explanation of the rule but the practice of the correct form" (Forrester 63). Considering from this point of view the Practice Book is very useful to students. The exercises in the book can help the students to learn the grammatical items through practice. The key to the exercises given in the book can help the students in their study without the help of the teacher. But this textbook, written by an English author, needs to be supplemented by exercises written with local colour (names of places, persons and activities related to Assam) so that they will be more interesting to the
Besides dealing with grammatical items like noun, verb, article, pronoun and voice, *Grammar and Composition: A Senior Course* contains composition items like precis writing, letter writing, essay writing, etc. There are brief explanations of grammatical concepts followed by suitable examples and exercises. Teaching items like letter and application writing and writing paragraphs on a given topic included in the syllabus can be taught effectively with the help of this book. However, this book does not contain teaching items like direct and reported speech, translation and comprehension. Direct and reported speech is covered in *A Remedial Grammar for Foreign Students*. Comprehension is to be taught with the help of the prescribed rapid reader, *My India*. In the *Teachers' Manual* some instructions are given to teachers as to how they may teach Translation in the class.

In the Dibrugarh University syllabus there is a list of basic reference books and a handbook recommended for the use of teachers, particularly, in teaching Paper I of the course. The reference books are very useful to
teachers in broadening their knowledge and conducting teaching activities in the classroom. The handbook offers detailed guidance to teachers on different teaching items. So the handbook is quite useful to the teachers of English. However, no guidance is given on how to teach the textbooks included in Paper II and Paper III. So if the present handbook prepared by the Board of Studies in English is enlarged and guidelines on how to teach prose, poetry, novel and drama are included in the book it will be more helpful to the teachers of English. On the contrary, the Gauhati University syllabus does not mention a handbook for teachers or even an ELT dictionary for the students. They should be recommended for teachers and students respectively.

5.7 Testing and examination

Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens say, "For if, as we have suggested, teaching programmes are to a considerable extent controlled by textbooks, it is true to say that they are in another way controlled by such examinations as they are designed to lead towards" (xiii). Therefore, the final examination question papers have an important role to play in the process of
learning English. They should be treated as teaching devices and designed accordingly. The questions like the following are not very specific:

Explain the significance of the title of Blake's "Holy Thursday". What light does the poem throw on social condition of Blake's times?

Or

Give, after C.P. Snow, a pen-portrait of Ramanujan.

Or

Comment on the title of Mulk Raj Anand's book *Apology for Heroism*.

Or

Write a note on Kipling's handling of the character of Kim.

As we find, the above type of questions set in the final examinations of Gauhati University on poetry, drama, prose and rapid reader are mostly literature-oriented.
It appears that mainly the skills of literary appreciation and global comprehension are meant to be tested by the questions. The questions can be better designed if the expectation of the scope and length of the answers is made specific. Moreover, some questions should be designed relating the theme of the prescribed passages with real life situations, if possible. Thus students will find a scope to establish the relevance of the passages they study to the life and society beyond the classroom and the examinations.

5.8 Comparison of the Courses in Gauhati and Dibrugarh Universities

Here we make a very brief comparison of the courses in General English for the T.D.C. students of both the universities. The written syllabus of Dibrugarh University is better designed than that of Gauhati University. But the prescribed anthology of prose and poetry of Gauhati University contains prose pieces and poems which are more suitable for the degree students than those prescribed for the students of Dibrugarh University. There are a number of editorial or printing errors in the prose and poetry anthology of Gauhati University but there are almost no such errors in the textbooks of
Dibrugarh University. The Gauhati University course is of 200 marks but that of Dibrugarh University is of 300 marks. Whereas the former is literature-oriented, the latter is language-oriented. In any case, both the courses and the textbooks for them have several shortcomings which should be remedied in order to make them effective for teaching and learning of English.

Conclusion

From the discussions made in this chapter we conclude that the written syllabuses in both the Universities have several defects. A number of prose passages and poems are unsuitable for the students owing to one reason or the other. The two original Shakespearean plays are likely to be difficult too. So they should be replaced with some other twentieth century plays. The printing errors in the Gauhati University prose and poetry anthology should be corrected. A teacher's handbook should be prepared and provided for the use of teachers in which suggestions must be given for teaching prose, poetry, drama, remedial grammar and composition effectively. The final examination questions should be very specific with regard to the scope and length of the answers sought.
Particulars of the copies of the textbooks taken for evaluation

T.D.C. (arts), Gauhati University


T.D.C. (arts), Dibrugarh University