

To
The Chairperson
The Centre for Linguistics
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi – 110067

22nd January 2018

Subject: GBM of Centre for Linguistics Resolves to Boycott Implementation of Compulsory Attendance in Toto.

Sir

This is in reference to circular No. IV/Eval II/28/AS/2018 dated 10.01.2018 and No. IV/Eval II/28/AS/2018 dated 18.01.2018 requiring students to mark their attendance in classes (for course work students) and at the centre office (for non-coursework research scholars). The General Body Meeting of the students of the Centre for Linguistics, held on 19th January 2018 has unanimously resolved to reject these circulars and boycott the implementation of the attendance system in toto.

We would like to attest that we are a centre that has never suffered from massive absenteeism. In fact, often our MA class strength exceeds the space in our classrooms. We attend classes with the sincere belief that we will learn something new each day and will thus enrich our inventory of knowledge about our discipline in particular and academics in general. The argument that compulsory attendance improves quality of learning and research is totally baseless and infantilizes students and scholars who are adults and who participate in higher learning voluntarily. Imposing attendance will help no learner in attaining knowledge and rather may in many occasions, as listed below, prove to be highly detrimental in the quest for knowledge.

The Centre for Linguistics already has a rigorous and regular assessment system in place in the form of class participation, assignments, group works, exams, term papers and presentations for its MA, MPhil and PhD students. Therefore, we do not see the merit in introducing attendance as a yardstick to measure our academic excellence. In fact, the centre for linguistics has produced some of the best linguists in the country and has maintained a high quality of research without ever resorting to adopting such a measure. Further, the decision to bar students from taking end-semester exams for lack of minimum attendance is against the basic premise of teaching and learning practices. By doing so this circular is merely rewarding non-academic achievements and is discouraging freedom in pursuit of knowledge. Therefore,

we see no merit in encouraging the attendance system, which hinders freedom in our academic pursuits and goes against the ethos of learning and research that is unique to JNU. In fact, we believe that the attendance system will adversely affect the quality of our learning rather than better it. Moreover we are also convinced that the attendance system is antithetical to the kind of research that the discipline of linguistics demands of us.

The Centre for Linguistics at JNU has close associations with other linguistics departments across the city. Students often attend talks, lecture series, seminars and conferences at these departments. The intimation for such events often arrive at the eleventh hour. Further, as you know, linguistics is a highly interdisciplinary field, which also requires us to be at academic events at other departments and research centres across Delhi. In this context, compulsory daily attendance is a serious hindrance to our academic pursuits and restricts our participation in such valuable events.

It must be noted that empirical studies that the students of the centre conduct are not based in JNU. Many of us conduct extensive field work in remote locations across the country. Sometimes even MA students visit such fields multiple times to collect data. Data collection is seasonal and dependent on the convenience of our informants/participants. The circular dated 10.01.2018 states that with the implementation of the attendance systems, students will be required to procure prior permission of “ the competent authority”, apart from their supervisor/centre chairperson, in order to proceed to their field. We are unable to understand who exactly this “competent authority” is, that decides the time and period of our fieldwork. Currently, we follow an ethical principle in this regard; indigenous and tribal communities, minor language speakers, speech and hearing impaired participants and children with whom we often work are our only competent authorities who have the power to define our fieldwork period. Therefore, enforcing the administrative barrier of compulsory daily attendance will not just hamper quality of the empirical research, but also demand that we go against the ethics of empirical research. Moreover, our centre lacks the infrastructure and research tools required to engage our diverse participants at the university. Additionally, non-NET scholarship holders have no financial support from the university that would allow them to pay for the travel expenses of these participants.

As is well attested, JNU has a massive infrastructural crisis. Outstation students do not get residence for months on end after admission and are forced to stay outside campus. Scholars from every part of NCR are considered day scholars and are ineligible for hostel residence. Some of our research scholars live as far as a four hour commute away and to expect them to come to the university everyday and mark their attendance is absurd. It is disrespectful of their time, which would otherwise be used to do good research. Moreover, neither the central library, nor the school library have seating space adequate enough to accomodate all the

research scholars of the university. Our centre too does not have sufficient infrastructure to accommodate us at the centre. It is highly insensitive to expect students to spend their time and money to come to the centre to merely sign and then just leave. If the whole point of the exercise of marking attendance is to foster world class research and foment an academic community we fail to understand how we are to achieve this when we will be forced to travel to and from the university for the better part of the day and yet not even have a place to sit except for lobby floors and steps of staircases.

With a steadfast allegiance to continued healthy learning and research in our university and our commitment towards world-class linguistics we strongly condemn any attempts to impose a system of compulsory attendance on us and hereby resolve to refuse to sign on any attendance sheets.

Thanking you

With Regards

MA, MPhil and PhD Students of the Centre for Linguistics