

## About Rahul

Jayaseelan

1. Please allow us to do some reminiscing. Rahul first came to us as an ‘interesting’ student whom Gautam Sengupta had directed to us: he had – Gautam told us – done medicine (like himself), had completed his MBBS course, but now wanted to do Linguistics. We were intrigued. Hyderabad University wouldn’t give him admission to M.A. because he didn’t have a B.A. We in CIEFL had just started our M.A. program, a very different and open concept of an M.A. program, in which anybody could take a course even as a casual student and be given credits; and if the person eventually obtained the regular admission to the M.A. program, the credits would count. And this is precisely what Rahul did. He first joined as a casual student and then got admission. But it soon became clear that he was immeasurably superior to the other students.

2. Looking back, we now understand why he made the switch from medicine: Rahul’s bent of mind was ‘philosophical’ (a word we use for want of a better word); he wanted to understand the world in a deep way. He was attracted to Chomskyan linguistics because of its mentalist claims. (He once told us that his earliest introduction to Linguistics was through Steven Pinker’s book “The Language Instinct.”) Even in Linguistics, he gravitated towards deeper and deeper parts of the discipline, doing much of his work unraveling the intricacies of quantifiers.

3. I have a joint paper with Rahul, in a volume titled *Strategies of Quantification* (Gil et al., eds., Oxford, 2013); it is on the semantics of distributive quantification by reduplication in Dravidian. This paper is actually four-fifths Rahul Balusu, and one-fifth Jayaseelan – so much so that I jokingly asked him (while we were writing the paper): Why don’t you just thank me in a footnote instead of making me a joint author? Anyway, this paper has a background and a history. In a sense, this paper is *the Ph.D. thesis that Rahul didn’t write at NYU*. He was deep into this topic, under the supervision of Anna Szabolcsi, when simultaneously something was happening on the personal front; and he found the semantics thesis too stressful. He wrote a thesis in computational phonology of Telugu. But all the thinking and writing on the semantics topic was lying unused; so when I needed a paper to fill a gap in the aforementioned volume – I

owed the volume a paper, but my paper was already committed to a journal – I persuaded Rahul to write up his unused stuff as a paper. (And I had to be a joint author because of the obligation to the volume I just mentioned.) Rahul’s part of the paper is a superb example of clarity and depth, of the obsessive pursuit of a question until all its ramifications are worked out.

**4.** Rahul became very close to us. He was close as a student, and even more so after he became a colleague. He was always at our place, and a sure and expected guest at every family celebration or festival. After his death, Amrit said to somebody (or wrote in an e-mail to somebody): It was as if we had someone else’s child in our keeping.

**5.** There was so much of expectation riding on him. We expected him to shoulder the burden of carrying forward Indian linguistics when we older people retire. He was our big hope. But Rahul has opted out of Linguistics; he did this by opting out of Life.