

# TEACHING HINDI AS A COMMUNICATION LANGUAGE: PERSPECTIVES AND INNOVATIONS AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Sanskrit has been the chief source language of Indian culture from ancient times. Pali had been popular in many parts of Asia from Buddhist times as the language of intellectual, scientific and religious discourses. Tamil is an important source language for understanding the synthesis of Aryan and Dravidian elements in Indian culture. From the medieval period, Hindi has been emerging as a vehicle of culture and a language for contact with people. In contemporary India, Hindi is a link language for the 22 or more major regional languages. As a vehicle of culture, it represents the dynamism of vibrant Indian culture. During the great socio-cultural movements like the Bhakti movement and the freedom movement, Hindi has been a vehicle of communication for the millions. Because of the perception of Hindi as a communication language of the masses, by Gandhi, Dr. Ambedkar and other leaders, it was accepted in the Indian Constitution as the official language of the Indian Union. The Indian bureaucracy is still under the dominance of English, although it is only the co-official language. As far as the people are concerned, Hindi is a “great communication language”. By analysing the trends of teaching Hindi globally, we can observe that strategies are being evolved to teach Hindi as a communication language.

## 2. HINDI: A CONTACT LANGUAGE FOR ASIA

Hindi is a contact language for South and South-East Asians, especially in the ports, bazaars, tourist spots and pilgrimage centres. Hindustani, or the spoken form of Hindi and Urdu, is a common heritage of the people of India and Pakistan. Linguistically, it is an advantage for better communication between people in India and Pakistan. As a result of the long historical and geographical ties, this common spoken Hindi is very well used in Bangladesh, Burma, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore. In the north-eastern regions of India and in Tibet, Nepal and the border areas of India and China, pilgrims, traveling traders, Buddhist monks and religious missionaries have always used Hindi as a contact language.

Due to the socio-cultural and historical circumstances, the spoken form of Hindi, especially Dakshini Hindi became popular in South India. In the modern period, as an after effect of the Hindi Prachar movement launched by Gandhiji, Hindi became a second language in the whole of South India. Through trade, tourism and Buddhist travel, Hindi reached Sri Lanka and Maldives. Since the Sinhalese and Divehi languages have developed from Pali, they have wonderful affinity with Hindi. Similarly, Nepali and Hindi have developed from the same linguistic stock even though Nepali has been influenced by the Tibeto-Burman. The people of the Tarai region of Nepal speak Maithili which is an important dialect of eastern Hindi. Hindi is a common communication language for Indians and Nepalis for their socio-cultural, literary and commercial contacts. In Afghanistan, many people are familiar with the spoken form of Hindi. Hindi is also spoken in the Gulf region and along with Arabic, and is playing the role of a link language for Arabic-speaking people and Indians speaking various regional (Indian) languages. In most of the South East Asian countries, spoken Hindi is used in the ports and business and tourist centres like Hong Kong.

### 3. HINDI AND MASS MEDIA

In the field of mass communication, Hindi is a popular language in the electronic media, especially all TV channels. In Mumbai, the hub of Indian film industry, also known as “Bollywood”, people speaking the different languages of South Asia work together to create feature films in Hindi, which have been very popular world over. Television programmes and serials in Hindi are popular in the whole of Asia and beyond. Hindustani music and Hindi film songs are very much loved globally, especially in Asian countries such as Uzbekistan and other parts of the former Soviet Union. India and Pakistan have always experienced their unity through film music, Hindi films, Ghazals and Sufi music. The communicative value of Hindi language is also evident in the print media, since the largest number of newspapers is published in Hindi. In the changing socio-political scenario, Hindi can play an important role in the fields of tourism, business, mass communication and literary contact. Since the audio-visual media places importance on the spoken word, the spoken form of Hindi will become more popular and acceptable in many parts of Asia. (Gopinathan 2008: 23).

### 4. HINDI AND THE INDIAN DIASPORA

Hindi has become a prominent international language because of the Indian Diaspora for whom it is a symbol of their cultural identity. Linguistically, the Indian Diaspora has proved to be a replica of Indian society. The people of different states in India use Hindi along with English for mutual contact.

Likewise, the Diaspora also uses Hindi as a link language and this process is gaining momentum. In fact, the Diaspora carried this linguistic consciousness of a Pan-Indian Hindi language in their collective mind (Gambhir 2007: 5). The Indian people who left India took their languages along with the other symbols of their culture. The Ramayana of Tulsidas has helped the existence of Hindi language as a cultural symbol among the Indian Diaspora of countries like Mauritius, Fiji, Surinam, Trinidad, Guyana, etc. As a result of Indians living alongside other linguistic groups of the world for a long time, the contact between Hindi and the world languages has also intensified. Typical examples of the effect of this contact can be found in the Dutch influence on the Surnamese Hindi of Surinam and Holland, the Kaibiti influence on Fijian Hindi and the influence of French Creole on Mauritian Hindi. Thus, the spoken forms of Hindi have acquired many linguistic diversities, worldwide. As a result of the propagation of Hindi by cultural organisations of the Indian Diaspora, such as Arya Samaj, Sanatan Dharma Sabha, Hindi Pracharini Sabhas, etc., not only the people of Indian origin, but also other foreigners who came into contact with them, have been learning Hindi because of their interest in the cultural programmes and Hindi cinema. This has resulted in increasing interest in Hindi in many countries like England, France, Holland, Belgium, Germany, Australia, New Zealand and others. During colonial times, the speakers of colonial languages tried to suppress the Hindi language in different parts of the world where there was a strong presence of Indian Diaspora. However, because of the perseverance of the people, Hindi could survive in these countries.

In countries like Trinidad, Hindi has survived only in the spoken form, i.e. as a communication language in the broken form because of the domination of English and Creole. It is a fact that most of the people of Indian origin in Trinidad have no knowledge of the written form of Hindi.... The world Hindi Conferences have created an awareness of Hindi among the people of Indian origin and the Indian immigrants. This has stimulated the teaching and learning of Hindi among the Diaspora. People are also starting to understand the need for teaching Hindi, especially communicative Hindi, to the younger generation of the Indian Diaspora for whom language can be a bridge to the forgotten culture of their ancestors. The growing interest in the society and culture of India is another reason for learning Hindi worldwide.

## **5. TEACHING HINDI AS COMMUNICATION LANGUAGE**

Teaching Hindi as communication language is not only linked with the spoken aspect of the language, it is an attempt to find out the linkage between language and its use in the socio-cultural contexts. Many of the European and American scholars like McGregor (1970), Gumperz (1967) and Pořizka (1972) have identified

the importance of teaching the spoken form of Hindi and they prepared such teaching materials. These were certainly different from the grammatical theory-oriented materials on Hindi published by earlier scholars. Even theoretical grammatical works like *Hindīn kielioppi* ('Hindi Grammar') by Bertil Tikkanen (1991) and *Vyavahārik Hindī Vyākaraṇ* by Zalman Dymshits (1985) focus more on the communicative aspects of Hindi grammar. Present-day scholars are trying to link the learning of Hindi with popular cultural forms like Hindi film songs, Hindi television serials, newspapers and other culturally important activities such as the presentation of drama, presentation of Bhajan singing and the traditional type of recital of Ramayana and other poetry forms, short story reading, etc. Tomio Mizokami of Japan had even formed a troupe of his students who presented Hindi dramas around the world. In a Warsaw Hindi Workshop, the present author also experimented with dramatisation with bilingual adaptation as an effective way of teaching communicative Hindi. Tomio Mizokami has brought out a collection of 301 popular Hindi film songs with Japanese translations (Mizokami 2006). In the introduction to this book, Mizokami states that taking this book to the audio-visual laboratory of the Osaka Foreign University, the student will be able to hear any song of his or her choice. In this way, the student becomes familiar not only with the linguistic aspects of Hindi like words, idioms, sayings, etc., but with the Indian attitude, mental make-up and social behaviour. By singing and playing the Hindi film songs, the students will immerse themselves in the joys of Indian life and Indian ethos. Anjana Sandhir of the USA has also brought out such a volume entitled *Learn Hindi and Hindi film songs* (Sandhir 2004). Sushama Bedi in her article on the teaching of Hindi in America has mentioned that the audio-visual programmes plus grammar-translation methods of learning Hindi are more effective (Bedi 2007: 12). Adopting the methods followed by the American Defense Language Institute, oral proficiency is given prime importance. The aim of such learning can be developing the ability of the student for social interaction through conversation in Hindi either with their grandparents in India or following the dialogues in any social context. Her teaching through selections from television films and improvisation, video recordings and computer work can equip the student with the use of the communication language. For this purpose, the American institutes are making lab work an inevitable part of such learning. Programmes for cyber learning of Hindi is organised in many countries such as Australia and the USA. The experiments of Dr. Richard Barz of the Australian National University and the experiments of Afroz Taj through his cyber programme "A door to Hindi", funded by the United States Department of Education deserve special mention. Intensive workshops on communication skills in Hindi have proved to be most effective. The experiments in Warsaw and Leipzig have shown that the workshops comprising native-speakers, local

teachers and students with involvement in multiphased cultural activities in the workshop can be most effective for teaching Hindi as a communication language. In countries like Mauritius, a remarkable thing with the MGM Institute is the creative writing programme as well as the translation programmes with Hindi-French courses. In fact, translation is the best means of cultural communication. Hindi being a link language and a vehicle of link literature, any programme for teaching Hindi as a communication language should promote the teaching of translation from the local language to Hindi as well as from Hindi to the local language. This will certainly help to have a comparative approach in studying Hindi literature. Creative approaches can help to communicate the world culture and world literature through Hindi. Translation from Hindi into foreign languages can help the higher learning process. A typical example is the translation of Premchand's stories and the novel *Godān* into world languages. Reading the Finnish translation of Premchand's *Godān*, *Pyhä Lehmä* (Tikkanen & Karttunen 1989) with my students of Hindi at the University of Helsinki, I have found that reading and comparing such translations with the originals is a way of finding the unity and diversity of world languages and world culture (Gopinathan 1999: 267–70). The recently held workshop at Budapest on Teaching Hindi in Central and Eastern Europe has also recommended the use of language technology and multimedia in teaching Hindi language and literature (Gopinathan 2008: 87–92).

## 6. CONCLUSION

Hindi is emerging as a communication language on both the national and international level. The teaching of Hindi as a communication language needs new strategies. The spoken form of Hindi and the linkage of language and culture should be the focal points in any such teaching programme. Many experiments with the help of mass media, have been done in this field by scholars at world universities and institutions where Hindi is being taught. The Diaspora is also evolving strategies to make Hindi popular among the younger generation. Gaining experience from international experiments and the ideas that emerged in the workshop at Budapest and the world Hindi Conferences, effective programmes may be organised for teaching Hindi as a communication language on a global level. International co-operation is needed for designing multimedia teaching materials with the application of language technology.

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