



Using Self-Study Materials for Classroom Teaching

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Abstract

In the last decade, a substantial number of Hindi textbooks for non-Hindi speakers have been published. They all are more or less self study materials. There are a very few, if any, teaching specific textbooks for the Hindi language. Hindi language teachers all over the world have to rely on self-study materials, and mold and modify them for classroom teaching purposes. The study investigates the possibilities for the use of self-study materials for classroom teaching. The study also surveyed student opinions regarding the use of a particular textbook and the supplemental material used along with this book.

1 Introduction

Until the beginning of the phenomenon of *Globalisation*, the Hindi language had been offered as a university course in very few academic institutions in the US and relatively more in European universities. As a reflection of such an academic stance towards the language, only a handful of textbooks for learning Hindi as a foreign language had been published. With the rise of India as an economic powerhouse in the globalising world, academia has started taking an interest in India and its biggest language, Hindi. As a result of the change in the last decade, a substantial number of new Hindi textbooks for non-Hindi speakers have been published. The field of Hindi as a foreign language is still comparatively small and unexplored in comparison to well established European languages, German, French, Russian etc., and most published textbooks for learning Hindi are self-study materials. There are very few teaching specific textbooks for the Hindi language. Hindi language teachers all over the world have to rely on self-study materials, and mold and modify them for classroom teaching purposes.

In this study, I plan to investigate the possibilities for the use of self-study materials for classroom teaching. For the Hindi classes (LAH 1201, LAH 2201 & LAH 3201) at the Centre for Language Studies (CLS), National University of Singapore, I use the book “Hindi: A Complete Course for Beginners” (Kumar Bhatt, 2007). The book is one in a series of self-study materials. I supplement the book with various kinds of exercises, activities, games and other tools used in the communicative approach to language teaching.

The study also includes a survey of different students’ opinions regarding the use of the book and supplemental materials: how complementary are the book and the supplemental materials to each other, what kind of additional materials will be more suitable to the students’ needs, and how the book can be used differently to enhance their Hindi learning experience.

The article is divided into three major parts. In the first part, I will deal with the history of Hindi as a foreign language. I will focus on the motivation and scope of learning Hindi in the past with respect to the materials developed at that time, and, with the changed economic map of the world

in the present, how the motivation and scope have also changed, and how this has influenced the teaching materials. The second part will deal with the Hindi Language Programme (HLP) at CLS, the presentation and analysis of the teaching materials, including the self-study book and supplemental materials used at the CLS. Finally, the third part is about students' perceptions of the teaching materials. I conducted a survey using a questionnaire to collect qualitative data on the teaching materials that we use in the HLP.

2 History of Hindi as a foreign language

Europe, specifically the United Kingdom, has a long tradition of teaching/learning Hindi as a foreign language. Early enthusiasts were some British officers from early colonial times in the late 18th century, who wanted to learn the language of the men under their command. Later, the teaching/learning of Hindi (Hindustani) was formalized, and already in the early 19th century, Hindi was formally taught in various institutions in India and Britain (Friedlander, 2006). America has a somewhat shorter tradition of teaching/learning Hindi, though some American universities have also been teaching Hindi for more than 50 years. While this is a relatively long period, Hindi teaching was limited to a small number of institutions. The study of the Orient was popular among anthropologists, ethnologists and researchers of other cultural dimensions, but the study of the linguistic heritage of India and the Indian subcontinent was restricted to the study of Sanskrit and other classical languages. The linguistic map of the modern India was not a subject of great interest and was not offered in many universities as courses.

With the rise of Chomskyan ideas of linguistic universals and his linguistic theory of *Transformational Generative Grammar*, the exotic languages were studied to find and confirm the 'universals,' to put the theories to test in the framework of unexplored languages, to confirm or negate, and to prove or disprove different elements of the theory. The main aim in learning a foreign language is to understand its structure, how far or closely the structural elements of the language are related to the Chomskyan ideas. Another reason to study Hindi in western universities was to learn how to translate literary works from Hindi to western languages to make oriental literature accessible to large numbers of readers in the West. Such was the fate of Hindi in western academic circles.

In university courses, the objective was to teach grammar through the structure of the language, and students were taught to become linguists, philologists and translators. Communicative competence always took a back seat. The materials developed at those times were mainly grammar books with, sometimes, drills and exercises (Fairbanks & Misra, 1966; Hook, 1979; McGregor, 1972). All such books were published by academic institutions. In some instances, the practicality of Hindi was ignored to such an extent that learning Devanāgarī script was treated as a waste of time. Ernest Bender's "Hindi Grammar and Reader" (1967) did not have Devanāgarī script and the book taught the whole grammar through transliteration. Such books are unimaginable in the contemporary context; the Hindi language and Devanāgarī script are inseparable for teaching purposes. As a result of such an approach, the institutes produced academics that had a very good knowledge of Hindi grammar, its structure in minute details, and all the nuts and bolts of structural patterns, but their communicative competence was not up to the mark. Their theoretical knowledge of detailed grammar did not correspond to the communicative skills needed to interact with native speakers of Hindi.

Eastern Europe has a somewhat different approach. Though more practical than their western counterparts, the materials developed in Eastern Europe also used the deductive approach, but the status of Hindi as a living language was not entirely ignored. The books published (Дымшиц [Dimshits], 1986; Дымшиц, Ульциферов, & Горюнов [Dimshits, Ultsiferov & Goryunov], 1980; Pořízka, 1963) in Eastern Europe had more practical texts and exercises, but they also heavily emphasised grammatical correctness and its precise explanations. Many universities in Eastern Europe used self made material, usually unpublished, but the approach remained similar.

With the start of nineties, India opened its markets to the global world, and started taking an active part in the global economy. In a short period of time, from being a participant, India's role

gradually transformed into that of a leading nation in the global economy. India began to emerge as a potential economic power in the increasingly globalised world. This new position of India could not be ignored by academia, which had to take note of India's potential as an academic discipline, which goes far beyond classical India of antique times. A strong Indian diaspora also played an instrumental role in making modern India visible in academia. In this changing scenario, more and more academic institutions started offering courses on India or South Asia in a wider and politically more correct sense. Language courses are amongst the first to be offered and Hindi, being the largest South Asian language, becomes the first entry in the catalogue of modern South Asian languages. In universities in the United States, Hindi language is often offered as a part of the Hindi-Urdu language programme.

Since then, more and more universities in the US have opened Hindi language courses and there has been a rapid rise in the number of students taking Hindi. Now, students taking Hindi are not interested in grammar, linguistic theories or in learning how to translate; they want to learn Hindi for practical purposes, that is, to communicate in Hindi, read and write in Hindi, watch Hindi TV programs and Hindi movies. A big part of the Hindi language learner body, particularly in American universities, comprises university students from the Indian diasporic community, that is, heritage learners, namely, second or third generation Indian immigrants. It is worth noticing here that the Indian immigrant community in America and Western Europe is in fact from non-Hindi speaking areas of India. They are mainly from Gujarat and Punjab and are hence Gujarati and Punjabi speaking, respectively. In the Singaporean context, the major diasporic community consists of Tamil language speakers. Tamil, in comparison to Gujarati and Punjabi, is far less cognate to Hindi. In fact, Tamil is a Dravidian language, which does not share common linguistic ancestry with Hindi, unlike Punjabi and Gujarati, which are Indo-Aryan languages like Hindi.

Common linguistic ancestry or not, Hindi is an integral part of the Pan-Indian identity. In the diaspora, all language communities from India, even from the broader area of South Asia, share some common cultural elements. Among other things, Bollywood, the Hindi film industry based in Mumbai, constitutes the main entertainment for all South Asians anywhere in the world. This language connection goes beyond the genetic classification of languages of South Asia. Bollywood makes Hindi an integral part of the non-Hindi speaking communities of the South Asian diaspora.

Driven by the colourful world of Bollywood, melodramatic stories of Hindi films, and melodious and highly popular Hindi film songs, the diasporic students are inclined to take Hindi so that they can enjoy the films in the original without having to read the subtitles and for understanding the songs that they already know by heart because of their popularity. These students of Hindi are different from those of the earlier times. They are not interested in the structure of the language and linguistics does not fascinate them. They simply want to learn the language to enjoy Bollywood films and TV programmes that are part of the Bollywood way of entertainment.

Even the non-heritage students also do not differ in terms of motivation for learning Hindi, if not Bollywood, they are also interested in communicative Hindi. They want to travel to India and get, through Hindi, firsthand experience of India. While a common tourist simply scratches the surface, they want to penetrate deeper into the Indian society.

With the change in the student body, the old approach of teaching Hindi through grammar and structures became obsolete; the previous generation of textbooks became outdated. From the beginning of the 1990s, a new generation of textbooks started appearing on the scene. Drastically different in nature from the previous grammar based books, this new generation of textbooks had a very practical Hindi teaching approach with dialogues and prose texts from everyday life.

In 1992, "Hindi" (Snell & Weightman) was published as a volume in the "Teach Yourself" series. This was based on the approaches to teaching Hindi adopted at SOAS (London University) in the 1980s, which were the current approaches to teaching Hindi as a university subject in the UK. The popularity of the book increased to such an extent that most western Universities teaching Hindi at that time started using this book. Since then, these books have been reprinted tens of times and two substantially different editions have been published. A slightly different version of

the book under the name “Get Started in Hindi: A Teach Yourself Guide” (Snell, 2010) was published in 2010.

The immense popularity of “Teach Yourself Hindi” has attracted other publishers to jump into the market. In the span of 20 years, the market has seen the publication of a rising number of similar books every year. “Elementary Hindi” (Delacy & Joshi, 2009), which is based on the approach to teaching Hindi at La Trobe University in the 1990s, “Colloquial Hindi” (Bhatia, 1996), and “Hindi: A Complete Course for Beginners” (Kumar Bhatt, 2007) are just a few in the long line of books published in the last decade. At the same time, grammar oriented books kept appearing on the scene of Hindi textbooks, such as “A Primer of Modern Standard Hindi” (Shapiro, 2000). Unlike the books from the previous generation, most of these books are not published by universities or other academic institutions, but by independent publishers instead. This is an indication that the publication of Hindi language learning books can be a lucrative affair. For a language like Hindi, which was offered as an exotic tongue in few universities just a few decades ago, even a single new publication in a year is a reflection of the popularity of the language in academic institutions. Or it may simply be learned by enthusiastic learners driven by their own conviction.

One of the common elements in all the books of the new generation is the fact that almost all of them are self study materials. The increasing interest in Hindi, which corresponds to the growth in the number of learners, leads to more publications in the field. The growth until now is still in a stage where the publishers do not feel comfortable in experimenting with the varieties of books that would introduce different methodologies of teaching Hindi, other than self-study techniques. There have been very few books published specifically for teachers. The “Gahan Hindi Shikshan” series (Varma & Jangannathan, 1973) claims to be made for teachers as well, and in their introduction, the books give advice to teachers, but the structure adopted by all the books in the series are more or less conformant with traditional teaching with dialogues, prose texts, and a variety of written exercises. There has been an initial effort to make a teacher oriented book, “Hindi Activity Workbook” (Verma & Verma, 2008), but the book is mostly made for young children and does not go beyond a few weeks of teaching Hindi as a foreign language to adults. Other books in this series by the same authors and publisher, “Learn Hindi Alphabets Activity Workbook,” “Learn Hindi Vocabulary Activity Workbook,” and “Learn Hindi Grammar Activity Workbook” have also become available in the market, but they all remain unusable in a HFL classroom. Some other teaching materials such as flash cards have also been published recently: “Hindi in a Flash” (Delacy, 2009), “Hindi Flash Cards: Script and Pronunciation” (Jain, 2010), but such materials are very few in number. Unlike the other very well-established foreign language teaching/learning traditions for French, German, Russian and, of course, English, Hindi as a foreign language is still in its infant stage. The amazing diversity that can be seen in the types of books being published to learn/teach well-established European languages is only a dream for Hindi teachers. In the current situation, Hindi teachers have to rely on self-study materials. They have to improvise, mold and modify the self-study materials for classroom teaching purposes and meet the needs of the communicative approach to teaching Hindi.

3 Hindi at the Centre for Language Studies

Hindi is a new addition to the spectrum of languages taught at the CLS. As mentioned before, because of the lack of Hindi teaching materials which adopt the communicative language teaching approach, Hindi language programmes all over the world have to make compromises in choosing textbooks for classroom teaching. The market either offers the classical type of grammar books or newly published self study materials, but has nothing specific for classroom teaching. Now, it is up to the teacher to use the best possible methodology using the limited published materials, and also to design additional materials. With regard to methodology, the teacher always should keep in mind the following statement by Richards (1985):

The domain of methodology in language teaching is concerned with developing and validating exercises and teaching activities by assessing the effect they have on the development of specific linguistic skills and abilities. (p. 10)

In the absence of classroom teaching materials, self study materials are the second best option for conducting a communicative classroom. “Hindi: A Complete Course for Beginners” (Kumar Bhatt, 2007) is used for first the three levels (semesters) of Hindi classes at the CLS. Along with the textbook, a PowerPoint presentation is also developed and used with each lesson in the book to include communicative tools and to overcome the deficiency of the book for classroom instruction. The PowerPoint presentation introduces the grammar and the themes of the target lesson using communicative methodology, including activities, tasks, games, role plays and other communicative tools. With the combination of the textbook and PowerPoint presentations, the use of the textbook does not exceed 40 percent of the teaching time.

The materials used at the CLS Hindi language programme include all three kinds of materials classified and labelled by Richards and Rodgers (1986) as text-based, task-based and realia. The book offers mainly the text-based materials, while task-based teaching and the use of realia are indispensable part of the PowerPoint presentations.

In the next two subsections, I will introduce the textbook and the PowerPoint presentation in detail.

3.1 The textbook

The text book “Hindi: A Complete Course for Beginners” (Kumar Bhatt, 2007) is a 15 lesson self study course, which gradually introduces everyday communicative Hindi and the grammar behind it. The themes in the book are quite standard for a self study book such as “meetings and greeting,” “family,” “daily routine,” “a telephone conversation,” and so forth. In the 15 lessons of the course, the complete basic grammar of the language is taught through standard rubrics in each section. These rubrics consist of vocabulary warm up, dialogue, key phrases, grammar points, culture notes, exercises, and so forth. After teaching the Devanāgarī script as part of the introduction, the book proceeds with simple sentences with very basic grammar. At the end of the book, there is a two way dictionary – Hindi to English and vice versa. The whole course pack also has 6 audio CDs with more than 100 audio tracks of 2–5 minutes each. As in any self-study instructional materials, while some elements of communicative language teaching already exist, it is up to the teacher to exploit these elements and implement the principles of the communicative approach.

To give a deeper look inside, I will be taking as an example a randomly chosen lesson, Lesson Four of the book, and give a fairly detailed account of its contents. Lesson 4, “Ramesh’s Day,” deals with the theme of “daily routine” and the main grammar point is present imperfective tense, which is roughly equivalent to present indefinite in English. There are also some other secondary grammar points such as negation, numbers and conjunct verbs. After making an initial introduction about the thematic and grammatical contents of the lesson in 50–70 words, the lesson starts with its standard rubrics.

3.1.1 Vocabulary warm-up (4A)¹

This section has 10–15 words or phrases that will be introduced in the lesson and represent the main vocabulary, upon which the theme would be built. Since the lesson is about the daily routine of a boy, time references such as morning, early morning, afternoon, and so on, are part of this section. There would also be mention of age, and so age related words are also included.

3.1.2 *Dialogue (4B)*

This dialogue section covers the conversational topic. The aunt Maya and Ramesh are talking about Ramesh's day. Hindi is a gender sensitive language. The gender is reflected in present imperfective tense, and the dialogue has a male and female character². The initial lessons of the book, along with the Devanāgarī script, also have ISO transliterations into Roman script. The book gradually drops the transliterations, and from Lesson 6 onwards, the lessons are only in Devanāgarī. Lesson 4 still has transliterations for the majority of Hindi sentences. Like in other self-study books, the whole dialogue section is translated into English as well. The dialogue section has three audio tracks, the first is like a normal conversation for listening practice and the second has pauses for repetitions for oral practice. The third track is called "conversation practice," as it is not directly related to the dialogue, but on the basis of dialogue, a conversation is simulated, or sometimes question are asked on the basis of the dialogue.

3.1.3 *Vocabulary (4C)*

All the new words introduced in the lesson are given here with translations. They are given here in their dictionary forms and not as they appear in the book. For instance, the verbs are in the infinitive and adjectives are in the masculine form. The vocabulary section is also in oral format in the audio track.

3.1.4 *Key phrases (4D)*

In this section, all the key phrases are used in the lesson are compiled, but it goes beyond the lesson vocabulary. All key phrases that might be needed for such conversations but are not part of the lesson, are also included in the list. For example, in the lesson with a conversation between a doctor and a patient, the key phrases go beyond those in the conversation and include those with other common diseases and constructions related such diseases. There is also an audio track for the section.

3.1.5 *Culture note 1 (4E)*

All the lessons have two culture notes. The first is more about language specificities and the second is about the theme of the lesson. In Lesson 4, culture note 1 is about the complex number system Hindi has.

3.1.6 *Grammar (4F)*

The grammar section has four to six grammar points explained in each lesson. There is usually one main grammar point, while the rest is secondary. In Lesson 4, the grammar points are: Present imperfective tense, conjunct verbs, negation, compound postpositions with pronouns and numbers 11–30. The grammar rules are explained in simple language, and in the case of any uncommon grammar term, the term is first explained and later the grammar. The explanation is followed by many examples using all possibilities of different genders and numbers. There are some audio exercises to every grammar point that are not present in a written form in the textbook. The grammar section has two audio tracks for practice. The first track reads out all the words and sentences written in this section and second contains grammar practice with some exercises for each grammar point. The second track is not presented in written form in the book.

3.1.7 *Reading (4G)*

The reading text is one of two texts in each lesson. The first is a dialogue (see 2.1.2. Dialogue (4B)), while the second (Reading) is a prose text. The structures in the reading text are also within

the limits of the grammar learned in the lesson. This is purely for reading purposes, which is why it is not presented in audio form.

3.1.8 *Culture note 2 (4H)*

The second culture note is about the theme of the lesson. In the case of Lesson 4, there is a dialogue about schools and the schooling system. Thus, the second culture note deals with the traditional education system of India, the *Guru Shishya Parampara* (teacher-disciple tradition) in a *Ashram* (a place of learning where the Guru lives with his family) environment.

3.1.9 *Exercises and answer key*

At the end of each lesson, there are some written exercises on the grammar learned in the lesson. The section can have a variety of different exercises such as translation, gap-fill, sentence transformation, matching exercises, word replacement, and so forth. The answer key is also provided at the end of the lesson for self checking, which is a typical feature of self study materials.

3.1.10 *Independent challenge*

The lesson ends with the ‘independent challenge.’ The book encourages students to keep a journal and the independent challenge refers to the journal. The fourth lesson asks learners to write in the journal about their routine and to refer to a dictionary for new verbs.

3.2 *PowerPoint presentations*

As mentioned in Section 1, the profile of the new Hindi language learner is such that they are not concerned with structures and forms, and linguistics does not fascinate them. Their only interest is to learn to communicate in the language and to acquire communicative competence. This leads to a challenge for the teacher to implicitly make the structure of the language penetrate into the cognitive system of the student, thus developing his communicative ability in the language. The answer can be found in the communicative approach, as Littlewood (1981) puts it:

One of the most characteristic features of communicative language teaching is that it pays systematic attention to the functional as well as structural aspect of language, combining these into a more fully communicative view. (p. 1)

An overwhelming number of language educators and researchers of modern times have shown the great advantages of communicative language teaching in comparison to other approaches. The use of PowerPoint presentations serves the purpose of complementing the book with such an communicative approach that includes various types of communicative activities, keeping in mind grammar to be used in such activities. These activities, as Littlewood (1981) further says, serve the purpose of providing “whole task practice,” improve motivation, allow natural learning and create contexts which support learning.

On the other hand, sometimes, some elements of traditional teaching of forms are also used in the PowerPoint presentations. Here, I would like to argue that some degree of grammar based teaching becomes essential when teaching a highly inflected Asian language such as Hindi. Also, in general, for the teaching of other languages, a combined approach of traditional teaching (i.e. form-focused/accuracy-based) and communicative teaching (i.e. meaning focused/fluity-based) has been advocated by many researchers. Lightbown and Spada (1999), having analysed more than 25 case studies of different methodologies of second language learning in the classroom, summarize and conclude that the best practice is the combination of the two approaches:

Many teachers still work in environment where there is an emphasis on accuracy which virtually excludes spontaneous language use in the classroom. At the same time, the introduction of communicative language teaching methods has sometimes resulted in a complete rejection of attention to form and error correction in second language teaching. But it is not necessary to choose between form-based and meaning-based instruction. Rather, the challenge is to find the best balance of these two orientations. (p. 153)

Larsen-Freeman (2000), after analysing almost all the methods of foreign language teaching in modern times, concludes that there are many factors that play an important role in the choice of teaching methodology, and no one approach is the best for all the instances:

Before being persuaded that one method is absolutely best, however, we should remember methods themselves are decontextualized. They describe a certain ideal, based on certain belief. They deal with what, how, and why. They say little of nothing about who/whom, when, and where. Each method put into practice will be shaped at least by the teacher, the students, the conditions of instruction, and the broader socio-cultural context. A particular method cannot, therefore, be a prescription for success for everyone. (pp. 181–182).

Brown (1987), focusing on the individual characteristics of learners, also calls for a combination of various approaches:

Tremendous variation among learners is recognized; human beings do not behave, each one, like the others, consistently and uniformly. Therefore, no single method suffices to answer all needs of all learners at all times. (p. 246)

Another interesting view on the combination of form-focused and meaning-focused instruction is offered by Birget Harley (1993). She proposes to identify the features that should be taught through form-focused instruction as well as those not through form-focused instruction.

As mentioned before, the book is only used for up to 40 percent of the classroom teaching time, and the rest of the teaching is conducted using PowerPoint presentations. The book, as we have seen, was designed for self study and thus lacks the elements of classroom teaching, especially the vast variety of communicative learning tools. To compensate for this disadvantage, the teaching is complemented through the PowerPoint presentations. In the PowerPoint presentation files, the usual communicative tools like activities, tasks, presentations, pair work, group tasks, role plays, and so forth, are regularly used to teach the grammar points introduced in a particular lesson. The PowerPoint presentations are a combination of the traditional teaching and communicative approaches.

I will give a few examples of the slides from Lesson 4 as screenshots. The main grammar structure introduced in that lesson is the present imperfective tense. The grammatical gender and number sensitivity is articulated in the present imperfective tense. In the examples, the agreement of the number and gender with the verb forms are represented by different font colours (Fig. 1). Pictures and corresponding sentences in the present imperfective tense are also presented to express the grammar rule and, with it, gender and number sensitivity.

मैं सिंगापुर में रहता हूँ

- संध्या – मैं हिन्दी बोलती हूँ।
- पीटर - मैं अँग्रेज़ी बोलता हूँ।
- क्या तुम फ़्रांसीसी बोलते हो?
- लड़कियाँ तमिल बोलती हैं।

• verb stem + ता/ते/ती + हूँ/है/हो/हैं
= 'Present Imperfective' actions done as habits or states

Fig. 1. Slide 1

The first slide is, in fact, based on the traditional teaching approach by giving the grammar rules (i.e. forms) through examples. Similarly, since the book is not read in detail in the classroom (i.e. the example sentences in the book are not read while going through the book), these sentences are given in the PowerPoint presentation before the students study the book. Although the grammar rules are not given explicitly in a form of table defining concordance, a footnote defining a basic rule for the formation of the present imperfective tense is given later. The concordance in this defining slide is emphasised through different font colours. The teaching of grammar in this particular case is not conducted entirely in an inductive manner, but at the same time it does not fully follow the principles of deductive teaching. In subsequent slides, more examples of present imperfective tense are given in random sentences as well as in chunks of connected writing without any explanation of further grammar rules.

Highly inflected Asian languages such as Hindi sometimes demands that the form-focused instruction should not be entirely rejected. Some complex forms are easily learned by the students when they are given explicitly along with meaning-focused exercises through activities and other communicative tools. In this particular instance of the teaching of the present imperfective tense, the tense form here is analytic, with the combination of imperfective participle and auxiliary verb *honā* "to be." The participle is number and gender sensitive and the form of the auxiliary verb is number and person sensitive. In comparison to English, in which the equivalent of the Hindi present imperfective tense is the present indefinite, the English present indefinite tense is more or less the dictionary form, except the third person singular. In Hindi, the whole tense form changes according to the grammatical person, number and gender. To add to the complexity of this compound tense form, only a part of it is number and gender sensitive (the participle) and the other part is number and person sensitive, but gender insensitive. When so many components of grammar are actively involved in the formation of such a basic tense form, some degree of traditional deductive teaching is necessary to give students a clearer idea of the construction. This could be treated as a feature that needs to be taught by form-focused instruction, as suggested by Harley (1993).

Here, I would also like to add that traditional grammar based teaching is not conducted throughout the course. Depending on the situation, that is, the complexity of the form, the teaching method also changes. For instance, the teaching of the past imperfective tense does not involve grammar based teaching, because the past imperfective tense is formed in a similar fashion as the

present imperfective tense, using imperfective participle and auxiliary in past tense. The auxiliary form in past imperfective tense is gender and number sensitive as the participle itself. The relatively simpler grammar forms give the teacher enough room not to teach grammar explicitly.

In the later slides of the PowerPoint presentation (not given here), the communicative tools are used to make students apply the grammar they have learned. Communicative activities such as role plays, interviews, pair work, group tasks and games are used to make students use the present imperfective tense. For example, in a role play scenario, an interview with a certain celebrity is conducted or a group interview is conducted, in which the participants are interviewed about the hobbies they have, the TV programmes they watch, the songs they listen to, and so forth. The classical exercise of relating the daily routine of an imaginary character with the help of pictures is also used and later the students' own routines are also discussed.

Task-based language teaching is an integrated part of the teaching approach. Rod Ellis (2004), one of the foremost proponents of task-based teaching, calls it as a strong version of communicative language teaching, particularly in contexts where the learners do not have much opportunity to get authentic communicative experiences. Here, I would like to show a slide with a communicative activity from Lesson 4, which is a typical example of a task based learning activity. In Lesson 4, there is a section about "asking and telling age." After giving a few examples in different genders and numbers, the class is divided into a few groups and group tasks are carried out. The task is to find out who the youngest and the oldest in the group is. The students ask each other for their age, determine the youngest and the oldest in the group, and one of them tells the whole class the results of the task. The main features of a task – authenticity, language skill, cognitive process and outcome – are included in this particular instance. This is not very difficult and is a task suitable for beginners' level Hindi (see Fig. 2 with Slide 2 for this group task).

तुम्हारी उम्र क्या है?

• Asking and telling age :

| | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| आपकी उम्र क्या है? | मेरी उम्र बीस साल है। |
| आप कितने साल के/की हैं? | मैं बीस साल का हूँ। |
| | राधा बीस साल की है। |

Group task - Let's find out:

सबसे बड़ा कौन है?

सबसे छोटा कौन है?

Fig. 2. Slide 1

The incorporation of authentic texts is also part of the teaching curriculum, although the entire teaching from the very beginning is not based only on authentic texts. As defined by Nunan (1999), "Authentic texts are those that have been produced in the course of genuine communication, not specially written for purposes of language teaching" (p. 79). Authentic texts, called "realia" by Richards and Rodgers (1986, p. 80), are provided in the form of Bollywood posters and songs, restaurant menus, advertisements, travel brochures, different types of forms, recipes, user manuals, newspaper items, and so forth. The complexity of the text and the grammar used in it define their use at different levels of Hindi courses. For example, the Bollywood posters are included from the

very beginning, even at the elementary level, but news items do not come until the intermediate to advanced levels.

In the third slide included here (Fig. 3), some Bollywood titles with the present imperfective tense are shown with the posters of the films. As mentioned before, Bollywood remains one of the main motives for the students to take Hindi, and heritage students often know the names of the films and some songs. They usually also know to some extent the meaning of the words they have learned from Bollywood titles and songs. After seeing the words in context, they start to understand the grammar rules. In this way, students are given opportunities to generalise the grammar rules through elements of popular culture, which they often already know. Brown (1987) describes the importance of generalising in the language learning process, which could lead to the formation of structure even without the knowledge of the learner:

Generalization is a crucially important and pervading strategy in human learning. To generalize means to infer or derive a law, rule, or conclusion, usually from the observation of particular instances. (p. 82)

Here I would like to give some examples:

दिल चाहता है। – The heart wants.

हम आपके दिल में रहते हैं। – I live in your heart.

जीते हैं शान से। – We live with style.



Fig. 3. Slide 3

Here, one can see that all the titles are in present imperfective tense with different subjects. To extract the grammar rule becomes easy, since they already know the sentences. The Bollywood songs are also used to teach the grammar content in a similar way.

The grammar part of the book is not used at all in the classroom, because the teaching approach which incorporates the PowerPoint presentations uses a combination of inductive and deductive methods and tries to inject the grammar into the cognitive mechanism of the students' brain. Later, when the texts from the book are read, the students find themselves in a familiar territory, where

the sentences with the new grammar already make some sense. In that way, the complementary nature of the book and the PowerPoint slides is successfully utilised and idea of complementing the book with extra materials is implemented in the classroom.

4 Students' perceptions of the teaching materials

In this third section of the article, I analyse the teaching materials (i.e. the textbook and the supplemental PowerPoint presentation materials) from the perspective of the students. I surveyed the students' opinion about the teaching methodology and collected qualitative data through a questionnaire. Overall, 42 students from the LAH1201 (38) and LAH2201 (4) modules (Hindi 1 and 2 respectively) voluntarily took part in the anonymous survey. The data were collected at the end of the first semester of the academic year 2011–12. Most of the students had already finished at least first five units of the book and the corresponding PowerPoint presentation materials for those units, and have a very clear idea of the pattern of the book, the supplemental materials and the teaching methodology.

The questionnaire tool was used to collect the students' opinions of the topics of the lessons, exercises, key phrases and vocabulary coverage, culture information, audio materials, the self-study aspect of the book, audio home assignments, and the complementary nature of the supplemental materials.

4.1 Question 1

What do you think about the topics of the lessons in terms of practicality, their usefulness, your personal interest etc.?

With regard to the choice of topics in the book, all 42 students found the topics relevant to learning a new foreign language. The frequent use of the terms, "daily or everyday life," "day to day activities," "basic communication and conversation," in their responses is a reflection of their satisfaction with the range of the topics taken in the book.

The topics covered are related to the basic skill required for learning and relate to day today activities. So they are quite useful in starting conversations as a beginner. (S29)

Some of the participants (S4, S8, S28, S30, S42) suggested some topics and asked for the topics to be more related to travelling in India. A student (S42) also suggested some historical and cultural topics. Some of the suggested topics are already in the book, though they appear only in the latter part of the book not studied yet by the students.

The gradual rise in the level of difficulty has also been noticed by the participants. One such statement was:

I like the way the book started off with the simple stuff and slowly progressed to the slightly difficult topics. (S11)

As mentioned earlier, the role of Bollywood as a motivating factor for the students to take up and learn Hindi seriously is evident, with some of the Bollywood buffs (S3, S24, S36) expressing their satisfaction in terms of their growing ability to understand Hindi movies and songs.

With regard to my personal interest, I am pretty satisfied that I am now able to understand the gist of any Bollywood film without the help of English subtitles. (S36).

4.2 Question 2

What do you think about the usefulness of the exercises in terms of variety, relevance to the contents, and level of difficulty?

In the classroom, different types of communicative exercises are given, and for the homework, the written exercises from the book and the audio tracks are used. All the participants found the written exercises from the book easy or moderately difficult, and some of them (S16, S20, S26, S32, S35) complained that the answer key at the end of the lesson was unnecessary or that this rather defeats the purpose of having an exercise. Written exercises with an answer key is a typical feature of any self-study book, as the answer key serves as a means for students to check their own progress. Students are encouraged not to consult the answer key while writing the homework. Along with the grammar practice, the aim of the written exercise is also to provide writing practice. Since Hindi is written in Devanāgarī script, regular writing practice is needed to make progress in the language.

A vast majority of participants (37 out of 42) gave positive comments on the usefulness of the exercises. Here are some of the comments:

It reinforces our concepts. (S2)

Good for revision. (S3)

It gave us practice in terms of writing. (S7)

It helps me (to) revise what was conducted during the lesson. (S11)

The exercises help to clear the doubts we have in the concepts and grammar. (S19)

The exercises reinforce what we've learned in the class. (S36)

S6 also mentions Bollywood in reply to this question as a suggestion to use songs for the exercises.

4.3 Question 3

How do you find the coverage of the vocabulary and key phrases?

With regard to the coverage of the vocabulary and key phrases, most of the participants (34 out of 42) found them useful, practical and context relevant:

The coverage of vocabulary and key phrases is very useful as it helps us understand the conversation in the book better. (S11)

Very useful for use in real life. (S1)

I think most of the basic vocabulary and key phrases have been extremely important for me to know how to ask basic questions. (S29)

Good coverage of essential vocabulary & key phrases for survival if stranded in India. (S30)

The coverage of vocabulary is pretty sufficient. Just enough to have a decent conversation in Hindi. (S36)

A fair number of them (S4, S9, S13, S17, S27, S32, S37, S38, S42) believed that the vocabulary section could be even more comprehensive.

More vocab & key phrases can be given. (S4)

I think it's great, and I think more can be added. (S9)

More key words and key phrases should be taught. (S37)

Although not asked directly in the question, it emerged that the two way glossary at the end of the book was also appreciated by some students (S17, S22, S26, S30).

Good. Useful phrases, esp. the dictionary like thing at the back of the book is very useful. (S26)

Glossary is really helpful. (S30)

A peculiar comment on the key phrases by a student (S35) is also worth mentioning, since s/he preferred to have grammatical explanations for the key phrases.

For the key phrases, since grammar comes quite late, we are forced to remember them by heart, once grammar is done, it is definitely easier to remember them. (S35)

It is part of the communicative way of teaching that the most commonly used phrases are taught without their grammatical explanations inductively or deductively – for example, the phrase “see you again” in Hindi is *phir milēge*, which means literally “we will meet each other again.” The students are not told that the verb is “meet,” not “see” and that the form is the future tense. The phrase is just learned by heart in the first few classes, but the future tense comes at a later stage of learning.

4.4 Question 4

How do you find the culture information explained in the book?

The student body in the HLP is demographically unique. More than 75% of the students are of ethnic Indian origin (mainly Tamil, but others too). The rest of them are a mix of Singapore’s other ethnicities and there are also some exchange students of both Indian and non-Indian ethnic background. Out of the 75% of ethnic Indian background, more than 50% come from Hindu families. The culture information described in the book is therefore already familiar to the some of the students.

As mentioned in the introduction to the book, there are two culture notes in each lesson, one language related and the other theme related. The linguistic culture note is a novelty to all the students, but the thematic culture note often presents familiar concepts to a fair number of the students. Although this is not strictly so, the Hindi language is frequently associated with Hindu population of Northern India. The religion related culture notes in the book do not cover other religious groups. Such culture notes are equally interesting to the non Hindu students as to ethnically non Indian students. Some of the culture notes are of a pan-Indian nature and go beyond the borders of ethnicity, religion and language, generating interest in all the students regardless of their familial background.

The demographic uniqueness of the Hindi classes in the CLS is evident in the comments given by the participants. The interest shown by non-Indians and non-Hindus in the culture information is articulated in the comments of S6, S9, S17, S24 and S28. On the other hand, the indifference shown by students of ethnic Indian background is also expressed by S35 and S36.

The most common adjective used by the participants in describing the culture notes are “interesting” (S3, S5, S10, S11, S13, S14, S15, S16, S17, S25, S26, S27, S28, S34, S38, S39, S41) and “informative” (S7, S10, S12, S13, S24, S40), while phrases like “fun fact” (S11), “riveting” (S8), “entertaining” (S15), “insight (into the culture)” (S29, S30, S32), and so forth, were also used as an indication of the participants’ interest in the culture notes. Two of the participants (S21, S32) even called the culture notes their favourite parts of the module. A few of them (S14, S23, S23, S27, S37) were so pleased with the information that they wanted more and more elaborate information on culture. Two of the participants (S37, S42) wanted the culture notes to be complemented by pictures and videos.

Here are two comments from the participants, expressing their pleasure in learning about Indian culture:

The culture information provides additional insight about the culture in India & the tradition, this adds value to the content.. (S29)

Very interesting and endearing to learn about other cultures. My favourite part of the module. (S21)

4.5 Question 5

What do you think about the audio materials in terms of their usefulness for listening comprehension, pronunciation improvement, vocabulary building and grammar structures?

As mentioned, the book is accompanied by 7 audio tracks for each lesson. The tracks contain listening comprehension, repetition drills, and oral exercises. Some of the tracks are used in the classroom, while others are for self-study or for homework.

The overall response to the audio materials was very positive, as the participants consider the audio materials to very useful and helpful for them to learn the correct pronunciation, to comprehend the text and to expand their vocabulary.

Some of the students (S17, S24, S28, S29, S32) complained that the tracks are fast, although the pace of the tracks is a little slower than in natural conversation. In the initial stage of foreign language learning, any pace which is close natural conversation would seem too fast to the students.

Two of the participants (S13, S14) suggested that the answers should be given separately for the oral exercises, and not right away after a short pause.

Some of the participants (S20, S22, S30, S31, S32) found the flow of the sentences unnatural too.

Content is useful. Accent is weird though – robotic. (S20)

The persons speaking in the audio tracks don't sound authentic (accent and pronunciation-wise). (S31)

Indeed, the tracks have some unnaturalness in them. They are a little slower than the natural conversational pace and the female voice sounds a little mechanical. Nevertheless, they do help the students in building vocabulary and learning grammar, or simply in practicing the language by repeating.

4.6 Question 6

How does the book help you to study on your own? Do you think the use of the book in the class is appropriate? Why and why not?

The self study aspect of the book was praised by the great majority of the participants.

It (book) is very clear even if I have to study on my own. (S7)

The book gives you a user guide to study on your own. (S21)

The book helps with vocabulary and grammar even when you study at home. (S39)

As the PowerPoint presentations presents grammar inductively, the deductively designed grammar explanations in the book act as a reference for the grammar learned through the PowerPoint presentations. This is a feature that was very much appreciated by the students, although the book was not used in class to explain grammar:

It is very useful. Well detailed explanations + awesome structure makes it easy to find relevant information. (S13)

The book serves as a useful reference to the notes (PPT files). (S25)

It helps to understand the topic. Better than to just use the lecture notes (PPT files) as explanation is more detailed in the book. (S28)

The book is complementary since everything is in powerpoint or written in the notes. However, (the) book allows us to understand/clarify confusing points. (S35)

On the appropriateness of the book for classroom teaching, the overwhelming majority of the participants (all except S8, S30) also gave very positive comments, although the positive nature of the comments is often related to the self-study aspect of the book.

It (the book) is very clear if I were to study on my own. (S7)

The book helps me in my self-study as it is very comprehensive. (S10)

The book gives you a user guide to study on your own. (S21)

The usefulness of the book for classroom use is also stated by the students.

It is good to use a book in class because it is always good to have a reference book. (S19)

The book serves as a useful reference to supplement notes. (S25)

It helps to understand the topic better rather than to just use the lecture notes as explanation is more detail(ed) in the book. (S28)

The book is complementary since everything is in the power point or written in the notes. However (the) book allows us to understand /clarify a confusing point. (S35)

It enhances our learning of the language especially through the dialogues. (S37)

4.7 Question 7

What do you think about the audio tracks that are given for the home assignments?

The course package also has an audio track with oral exercises in each lesson. The answers follow the drill questions after a short pause. The book does not contain the written script of the track. The students thus have to write the exercise down in their notebooks as a written assignment, which helps them in their listening comprehension as well as in writing practice.

The students had mixed comments on the difficulty of the exercise and their interest in doing the home assignment. All but a few (S2, S5, S8, S10, S20, S35) recognised the effectiveness of the exercise.

Quite difficult, for later exercises, but very good. (S4)

Too time consuming, but useful ... (S22)

Audio tracks given for home assignments are fast paced. There is a necessity to pause & comprehend before moving ahead, but the content is very relevant to the course. (S29)

It actually takes a very long time to go through every track and helped me have better spellings. (S42)

Often they related the exercise to the regular dictations they get, which form part of their assessment.

I frankly hate having to listen to it for assignments and having to write it down, but I do recognize its relevance for dictation purpose. (S32)

The suggestion to separate the exercises from the solutions was also made by some participants (S13, S17, S33, S35), but generally the home assignment is perceived positively.

It is very helpful and clears some doubts in the grammar and it is a good writing practice. (S19)

The audio tracks give you a good understanding of how Hindi should be spoken. (S21)

The audio tracks were perhaps the most helpful part of the homework. (S25)

The audio track is helpful in learning the language and helps the listener to observe the correct way of pronouncing. (S28)

4.8 Question 8

How does the supplemental material (.ppt files) complement the book?

The mutual complementary nature of the book and the PowerPoint presentation files was recognised by all but a few participants (S4, S8, S11, S17):

The powerpoints are a good summary of the lessons. (S20)

There is additional stuff on the ppt, which helps me to understand the book better. (S23)

The ppt files give a gist of the chapter & help in getting a quicker understanding of the lesson. (S29)

Since it is used in class, this is my main source of learning, if I doubt on one point, I can easily find the answer in the book. (S35)

It (.ppt) emphasises and builds up on the key ideas brought up by the book. (S37)

However, with regard to their preference for one or the other, the students varied in their comments:

As lecture note, it (.ppt) is alright; however, the book covers more and easier to understand. (S14)

They (.ppt files) are very helpful and straight forward but the bulk of my vocabulary and expressions come from the book. (S42)

The lecture notes (ppt) is useful that it provides more examples to enhance understanding of the topic (in the book). (S 28)

I like that the ppt goes beyond the book and teaches more. (S32)

5 Conclusion

Languages with relatively short traditions of being taught as a foreign language at the university level often lack good quality teaching materials. The discipline of foreign language education has also not been active and engaging enough with regard to these languages to stimulate the need for the creation of materials intended specifically for classroom teaching. Hindi as a foreign language is a typical representative of *less commonly taught languages* that need high quality teaching materials for classroom purposes. The best possible teaching materials a Hindi language teacher can find are self-study materials. Even if the approach of the self study materials is communicative, the use of self study materials in a classroom in accordance to the communicative approach requires modifications and additions to the materials. Communicative learning tools, such as activities, tasks, role plays, presentations, and so forth, if used along with self-study materials, can bring excellent results. The good use of limited resources can compensate for the unavailability of

good teaching materials, which is with a common problem for less commonly taught languages with a short history in foreign language education at the university level. The survey of student opinions about the Hindi language courses at the CLS has shown overwhelming acceptance of and support for a teaching methodology that includes a self-study book and communicative learning tools communicated through PowerPoint presentation files.

Notes

¹ All the rubrics are identified by a number followed by an alphabet. For example, 4A is Section A (vocabulary warm-up) in Lesson 4, while 4B Section B (dialogue section) in the same lesson. This pattern follows throughout the book.

² This feature – having a male and a female character – is applied throughout the book in the dialogue section.

³ Although in this article the book is first introduced and PowerPoint presentations later to explain the teaching methodology in a clearer way, in the class room the PowerPoint presentation is shown first and the book used later. The grammar points from the lesson are taught inductively through the communicative tools presented through the PowerPoint files.

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