



# Teaching Hindi and Urdu as Hindi-Urdu

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## Abstract

Since the rise of India as an economic powerhouse in the world scene, more and more North American universities have started taking an interest in South Asia. In the catalogue of courses offered on South Asia, Hindi-Urdu as a foreign language is a prominent one. Are Hindi and Urdu two languages? Or one? If two, what are the grounds to offer them as one course? And if one, why do many universities teach them as separate languages or teach only one of them? Without going into the details of the socio-political aspect of the Hindi-Urdu controversy, in this paper, I will only deal with the rationale behind bringing Hindi and Urdu into one course offering, and the pros and cons of such an academic approach and its justifications. I will also discuss some of the challenges faced by Hindi-Urdu teachers: lack of textbooks, Hindi (Devanagari) first/Urdu (Nastaliq) first approach, assessment, and so forth.

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## 1 Introduction

The presence of South Asia in academia is not a novelty. European and American Universities have been engaged in the study of classical India of antique times for centuries. Under the banner of “Indology” (Academic Studies of India) or “Indian Studies”, some western universities have been academically investigating classical languages such as Sanskrit, its literature – both fictional and liturgical. In modern times, American universities have adopted a geographically neutral term “South Asian Studies”.

With the rise of globalisation in the early nineties of the last century, India emerged as an economic powerhouse in an increasingly globalised world. The significance of India in the world economy began to be reflected in the world of academia too. Along with the classical India, the present day Indian (South Asian) society also started becoming a point of interest in academic circles. The shift in academic interest towards modern India resulted in universities offering courses related to present day South Asian society. Modern languages are usually the first to enter the catalogue of any area studies program. In the case of South Asia, Hindi, being the largest language, is more or less always the first modern language to be offered in South Asian Studies programmes. The rise of the popularity of Hindi in North American universities has been discussed in a detailed account by Bhatt (2012).

Hindi has a sister language, Urdu, which is perceived to be mainly spoken by Muslims of urban North India and, later after the partition of India in 1947, by a substantial part of the population in Pakistan. Urdu has been installed as the national language of Pakistan, although it was not indigenous anywhere in the geographical territory of present-day Pakistan. The mutual intelligibility of Urdu with the native languages of Pakistan varies to various degrees depending on the language.

However, due to its status as national language, the comprehension level and the spoken competence are very high among the different linguistic populations of Pakistan. The statuses of Hindi and Urdu have raised polemics in almost all fields of human interaction in the society – mundane, academic, political, linguistic, and so forth. Different sides have taken different positions on Hindi and Urdu – as one language or as two different languages or one language with two different varieties or two languages with a lot of commonalities. There has been an abundance of literature written on, against and for all sides of the argument (Bhatia, 1987; Brass, 2005; Khan, 2006; King, 2001; Lelyveld, 1993; Rai, 1984, 2005; Rahman, 1996 and many more). The scope of this paper is not the Hindu-Urdu controversy, rather the rationale behind teaching Hindi-Urdu as one (foreign) language in western universities. For that reason, I will not go deeper into the controversy, its complexities and ramifications, and will rather show differences and commonalities and, on the basis of them, I would analyse the justification of teaching Hindi and Urdu as Hindi-Urdu. I will also discuss the challenges of teaching Hindi-Urdu together.

## 2 Hindi and Urdu

Hindi and Urdu are both languages that belong to the Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European family of languages. Hindi is usually associated with the Hindu population of North India and Urdu with the Muslims. In post-partitioned India, Hindi has become associated with India and Urdu with Pakistan<sup>1</sup>. In this section, I will mention common linguistic features of Hindi and Urdu, and also discuss the features that make them different from each other.

### 2.1 *Hindi and Urdu: Differences*

#### 2.1.1 *Scripts*

The most evident distinction between Hindi and Urdu is the script. Hindi is written in Devanagari and Urdu in Perso-Arabic script<sup>2</sup>. Devanagari is an indigenous script in South Asia, and Perso-Arabic script was established in India by the Muslim rule. As it happened with the Islamic conquest in other parts of the world, a new writing system, or script, is introduced to the local languages. Many indigenous South Asian languages such as Kashmiri, Sindhi, Punjabi, and so forth, also had experienced a similar evolution. With the introduction of a new script to the already existing language, some orthographical compromises needed to be reached and the invention of new graphemes was also needed to represent phonemes present in the indigenous languages, but were not reflected in the introduced script. The new script had to adjust to the sound system and orthographical peculiarities of the spoken language. Although the language spoken was not yet called Hindi or Urdu, rather Hindavi, Hindui, Dehlavi, Gujri, Dakani, Rekhtah, and so forth, for convenience sake, we will call the indigenous language “Khariboli”. Khariboli is a term given to a specific variety of the language spoken in the present-day “Hindi Belt”<sup>3</sup>, from which standard Hindi and Urdu have evolved. Here are a few examples of adjustments the Perso-Arabic script had to make to properly denote the full range of phonetic representations of Khariboli sounds which Devanagari, the Hindi script, already had.

##### 2.1.1.1 *Wide range of vowels*

The indigenous languages in South Asia, including Hindi, have a wide range of vowels and diphthongs, the phonetic counterparts of which do not exist in Perso-Arabic script. The Perso-Arabic script has three short vowels: zabar (a), zer (i), pesh (u), and a few semi vowels such as the short and long ye (y sound) and the vao (v sound) that can function as vowels to represent the vowel sounds of South Asian languages. All the vowel sounds of the Khariboli are represented with the combination of short vowels and the semi-vowels. Although it is possible to precisely represent all the vowels, in practice, a grapheme can represent different sounds depending on the context. This

happens because short vowels in Urdu, as in many languages that use Perso-Arabic script, are rarely written.

This unique feature of Perso-Arabic script, hence Urdu, makes indigenous words not represented precisely in written form, but people who know the language do not pronounce them incorrectly.

The words *is*/इस/ *اس* (this) and *us*/उस/ *أُس* (that) can be written in Urdu corresponding to the precise pronunciation, but since short vowels *zer* and *pesh* are more frequently not written, the orthographic representation of both words tends become identical in that case, that is, *اس* .

The words *or*/ओर/ *اور* (towards) and *aur*/और/ *اور* (and), just like the example above, can be precisely written in Urdu, but the short vowel *zabar* is rarely written. In this case too, both words are written in exactly the same way, that is, *اور* .

### 2.1.1.2 Retroflexion

Hindi has 7 retroflex sounds, *ṭa*, *ṭha*, *ḍa*, *ḍha*, *ṇa*, *ṇa*, *ṛa*, *ṛha*, for which the Perso-Arabic script did not have corresponding sounds and the letters to represent them. Urdu had to add a diacritic, which is called “*choti toy*” to the closest sounds *ta*, *tha*, *da*, *dha*, *ra* and *rha* to represent retroflex sounds. The retroflex nasal *ṇa* is the only indigenous sound that is not represented in Perso-Arabic script in any way. It is always replaced by a dental *na*<sup>4</sup>. This way, all indigenous sounds are represented and no compromise or contextual references were needed as in the case of 2.1.1.1.

### 2.1.1.3 Aspiration

Every plosive consonant in Hindi has its aspirated counterpart, namely, *ka* and *kha*, *ta* and *tha*, *pa* and *pha*, and so forth. The Perso-Arabic script does not have individual graphemes to represent these sounds, but just like Roman transliteration, the Perso-Arabic script combines two letters to aspirate the plosive sounds. As the Roman transliteration uses “*h*”, the Perso-Arabic script uses “*do chashmi he* (هـ)” to represent aspirated consonants. Here too all the indigenous sounds get representations and no compromise or contextual references were needed as in case of 2.1.1.1. Do different scripts make a language two languages? In the linguistic diversity of the world and history of languages, often a language is written in more than one script. Merely different scripts are not enough to consider a language as different languages. For instance, the Serbian language has been written historically in both Cyrillic and Latin scripts, and the tradition of using two scripts still continues. Many Indian languages have been simultaneously written in different scripts; Punjabi is written in Gurmukhi and Shahmukhi, and also sometimes in Devanagari. Konkani was written in more than three scripts for a long time until it was standardised in Devanagari. There have been instances in history where one same language is written in different scripts. Different scripts do not provide a sufficiently strong basis to classify a language as different languages.

### 2.1.2 Pluralisation

Both Hindi and Urdu have standard forms of plural derived by the same rules for Hindi and Urdu. Such pluralisation according to the rules comprises the majority of cases in Urdu. However, in the high register of the language, Urdu often uses Persian and Arabic words and pluralization that is not recognisable in Hindi. For instance, the word “*natījā* (نتیجہ)” (result) has its plural from “*natīje* (نتیجے)” which is derived through the common rules of plural formation in Hindi and Urdu. In the majority of cases, “*natīje*” would be used. However, it is not uncommon to hear *natāej* (نتائج), especially in a political or philosophical discourse. Some other rules of Perso-Arabised plurals (such as *savāl* (سوال) – *savālāt* (سوالات)) is not uncommon in Urdu, but rather unusual, if not entirely alien to Hindi.

Some Perso-Arabised plurals are commonly used in Hindi with a semantic shift. The word *kāgaz* (कागज़) (commonly used for “paper”, but can also mean a document) has a plural form (*kāgāz*)

ūthat is derived according to the norms of Hindi. However, the Perso-Arabised plural kāgūzāt (काग़ज़ात کاغذات) has a semantic shift and is not used for “papers”. Rather, it is exclusively used to mean “documents”. On some rare occasions, some Perso-Arabised plurals are fairly common in Hindi: hāl (हाल حال) (condition) – hālāt (हालात حالات), jangal (जंगल جنگل) (forest) – jangalāt (जंगलात جنگلات).

The legal vocabulary in Hindi is mostly drawn from Urdu. The legacy of the colonial judicial system, that solely used Urdu to conduct its business during colonial times, still remains in place. It is not uncommon to see court papers in Hindi loaded with many Urdu terms. One can see the depiction of court scenes in the popular culture of Bollywood and television that truly represents the linguistic features of legal Hindi.

### 2.1.3 Some spelling conventions

Although the corresponding spellings of both Hindi and Urdu are more or less the same all the time, in many words the last long “ā” of Hindi is written with “h” sound in Urdu, that is, **ज़्यादा** (zyādā) vs. **زیادہ** (zyādah). This specific spelling rule applies mainly to non-indigenous South Asian words, but the scope of this spelling convention now includes indigenous words too. For instance, **पूजा** (pūjā) is often written **پوجہ** (pūjah). Interestingly when such spelling needs to be declined into the oblique case, in Hindi, it almost always follow the Hindi/Urdu grammar conventions, but in the case of Urdu, in the written form, one can find both the declined and non-declined form. On the other hand, in oral Hindi and Urdu, such declensions are always uttered without failure.

Here I take a common word, mazā (fun/happiness), and use it in oblique case too (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Spelling convention – mazā**

मज़ा	mazā	مزہ	mazah
मज़े में	maze mē	مزے میں / مزہ میں	mazah mē / maze mē

I would like to remind the reader that the pronunciation of **مزہ میں** (mazah mē) will always be **مزے میں** (maze mē).

### 2.1.4 Izafat

The genitive case construction for possession in Hindi and in Urdu is enabled by the postpositions kā, kī and ke. The overwhelming majority of possession in Urdu is expressed by these postpositions, which are part of the common grammatical rules of Hindi and Urdu. However, there are constructions called Izafat, which also express possession, that is typical of Urdu and very rarely used in Hindi. For instance, Sher-e-Punjab (Lion of Punjab) or Hukumat-e-Pakistan (Government of Pakistan). In the case of ordinary constructions, according to the Hindi-Urdu grammar rules, these constructions would reverse the order of nouns, that is, “Punjab ka Sher” and “Pakistan ki Hukumat”. The Izafat construction in Urdu comes from Persian-Arabic traditions and follows Persian-Arabic grammar rules. In Urdu, they are more or less used as phrases. The presence of Izafat is very common in the high register of Urdu and can be often heard in political and religious discourses in television, radio and newspapers. The Izafat in Hindi is rather rare and used only in phrases. Some occasional use of Izafat in Bollywood film titles, songs and dialogues can also be seen in Hindi.

### 2.1.5 Vocabulary

Another evident distinction between Hindi and Urdu is vocabulary of high register. Although the common day-to-day language is very similar in Hindi and Urdu – in fact, it is not possible to

separate them at that level – but when it comes to the high register of political, philosophical, religious discourses, the vocabularies diverge significantly. Hindi draws its high register vocabulary from Sanskrit and Urdu from Persian and Arabic. A common example of use of such high register vocabulary would be the political discourses on televisions in India and Pakistan or newspapers in Hindi and Urdu. A substantial part of the Sanskritised Hindi would be as incomprehensible to a native Urdu speaker as Persianised and Arabised Urdu to a speaker of Hindi who has had education and training in Hindi. Below are the two examples, one each from Hindi and Urdu.

Urdu: An opening statement by a new talk show host.

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ۔ اِسْلَامِ عَلَیْکُمْ۔ کھیٹل ٹاک میں خوش آمدید۔ سابقہ وزیر اعظم نواز شریف صاحب کی تقریروں کا ایک جملہ ابھی تک زیر بحث ہے۔

Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim, Asalaam valaikum. Capital Talk men khushamdid. Sabiqah vazir-e-azam Nawaz Sharif sahib ki taqirron ka ek jumla abhi tak zer-e-bahas hai<sup>5</sup>. [Geo TV, Capital Talk, 10th October 2017]

In the name of God, most Gracious, most Compassionate, greetings. Welcome to “Capital Talk”. A statement in Ex- Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif’s speeches is still a hot topic of discussion.

Hindi: News headlines of the Day.

जम्मू कश्मीर में सुरक्षा बलों को बड़ी कामयाबी। दो मुठभेड़ में चार आतंकी डेर। मारे जाने वालों में जैश का कुख्यात आतंकी खालिद भी शामिल। गुजरात में लिया चुनाव आयोग ने तैयारियों का जायजा। सभी दलों के प्रतिनिधियों से मुलाकात।

Jammu Kashmir men suraksha balon ko bari kamyabi. Do muthbher men char atanki dher. Mare ja-nevalon men jaish ka kukhyat atanki Khalid bhi shamil. Gujarat me liya chunav ayog ne taiyarion ka jayaza. Sabhi dalon ke pratinidhiyon se mulaqat<sup>6</sup>.

[RStv, Hindi News Bulletin, Oct. 10, 2007]

A big success to security forces in Jammu Kashmir. In two encounters four terrorists killed. Among dead terrorists is the infamous Khalid. The Election Commission oversees the preparation of elections meets with the representatives of all the parties.

The bolded words in the sentences belong to the high register of Urdu and Hindi respectively that are used in political discourses and are not easily intelligible to a common speaker of the other language. In the Urdu sentence, along with the Perso-Arabised vocabulary, there are two Izafat constructions too; vazir-e-azam (Prime Minister) and zer-e-bahas (under furious discussion).

To conclude the section on differences between Hindi and Urdu, one can say without any hesitation that the differences between modern Hindi and Urdu arise only when the non-indigenous (non-South Asian) component influenced by the Islamic legacy of India is added to the contemporarily existing native language, whatever it may be – script, grammatical components (pluralisation or genitive constructions) or simply vocabulary. On the other hand, the Sanskritised vocabulary is also similarly alien to a native Urdu speaker.

## 2.2 Hindi and Urdu: Commonalities

### 2.2.1 Grammar

Modern Hindi and modern Urdu, both developed from the same idiom which was earlier called, as mentioned above, Hindavi, Hindui, Dehlavi, Gujri, Dakani, Rekhtah, and so forth. In fact, according to Faruqi (2003), the old names of Urdu are Hindvi, Hindi, Dihlavi, Gujri, Dakani and Rekhtah. While discussing the evolution of Urdu, Rehman (2011) also states that the language was also known as Hindavi and Dehalvi. The common ancestral variety of both Hindi and Urdu is also known to linguists as Khariboli. The further development of the language into Hindi and Urdu is the product of late 19<sup>th</sup> century politics. Although the Perso-Arabic script was introduced to an indigenous language which already had a script, it did not deal with the structural grammar or make any changes to it. The Perso-Arabic script needed to adjust to the sound system of the language, but it did not attempt to completely redefine the grammar, although some Perso-Arabic grammatical elements managed to get into the grammar of the language.

Apart from the few elements that are described above in 2.1.2–2.1.4, Hindi and Urdu have exactly the same grammar patterns – morphological and syntactical, in inflexion, conjugation, declension, and so forth. The distinctions that are mentioned above are rare and mainly used in the high register of both languages. For instance, pluralisation, as mentioned in 2.1.2, has its indigenous pattern too and that indigenous pattern is more commonly used than the one mentioned in 2.1.2. The spelling convention that are mentioned in 2.1.3 is restricted in Urdu to the orthographical level only. The oral representation of the language neutralises this distinction and declines the nouns as they would have been written in Hindi with proper declension. In fact, in the majority of cases, even in Urdu and even in the written form, this type of declension follows the indigenous pattern. And *Izafat* (2.1.4) is only used as phrasal construction. Here too the indigenous pattern overwhelmingly dominates in usage, both orally and in the written form.

### **2.2.2 Colloquial language**

The colloquial Hindi and Urdu languages do not differ a lot. A native speaker of Hindi and a native speaker of Urdu would not need a third language to hold a conversation on any mundane topic. The vocabulary related to everyday life is similar to a very high extent and the grammar, as we explained in 2.2.1, is exactly the same unless the language, Urdu in particular, uses a higher register and non-indigenous plural, or uses *Izafat* for phrases. The biggest part of the differentiating vocabulary in Hindi and Urdu is represented in nouns and adjectives. The other types of words such as pronouns, postpositions, numbers, verbs, and so forth, are highly similar. It is no surprise that the higher registers of Hindi and Urdu mainly comprise the differentiating nouns and adjectives, whereas the rest of the words in the sentences remain the same.

I conducted a small-scale experiment with my students from a course “Language, Religion and Identity in South Asia”. This course discusses various language conflicts and issues from South Asia. The major body of the students in the course are from India and Pakistan, who know Hindi and Urdu as mother tongues. There are two non-South Asian students in the course as well, a Canadian of European descent and an Arab Canadian. While tackling the topic of “Hindi-Urdu controversy”, I asked these two non-South Asian students to write down any three sentences in English. I did not restrict them to any topic, and they could choose any sentences they wanted. As expected, they chose very common sentences from everyday life. Then, I asked the students who knew Hindi to translate these 6 sentences into Hindi, and I asked the same of the Urdu speaking students. As I expected, the translation to both Hindi and Urdu were exactly the same. Although this was not a scientific experiment, it is representative of the common perception of extreme closeness of the two languages.

### **2.2.3 Culture**

Although Urdu is associated with Muslims and Hindi with Hindus of South Asia in the contemporary linguistic scene, there are many cultural elements that are common to both Hindi and Urdu speakers. These cultural elements are independent of any religious affiliations, for example, folk songs and dances, folktales, some wedding rituals, some common attire, some festivals such as the kite flying festival of *Basant Panchami*. The modern pop culture is in fact outright independent of any religious affiliation as so forth any Hindi or Urdu affiliation. The popular culture of Bollywood is equally claimed by both Hindi and Urdu speakers, and is used in Hindi-Urdu as a foreign language classrooms.

As there has been a lot of research on incorporating cultural elements in foreign language classes, Hindi and Urdu both can, to a great extent, utilise the same material for teaching the cultural component of Hindi-Urdu.

The cultural component of honorifics that are represented in pronouns in Hindi-Urdu are precisely the same in both languages. They are used similarly in when people are speaking Hindi and Urdu.

### 3 Hindi and Urdu vs. Hindi-Urdu

The rise in interest in South Asian studies in academia in western universities corresponds to the rise in the number of South Asian language courses. As Hindi is the most widely spoken South Asian language, it is natural for universities to start offering Hindi as a first “foreign/second” language in the catalogue of South Asian languages. Most of the universities started teaching Hindi as the first modern South Asian language. Even if the language taught was Hindi, most of the programs in North American universities were called “Hindi-Urdu” language program and when Urdu was taught, the program would be called Urdu language program. In a nutshell, “Hindi-Urdu” meant Hindi in general.

In the last decade, the “Hindi-Urdu” program, which previously meant Hindi only, started to become real Hindi-Urdu. More and more universities in fact started teaching Hindi and Urdu both as one foreign language of Hindi-Urdu. A variety of reasons (social, political, academic, emotional, financial etc.) were offered to explain the rationale behind merging Hindi and Urdu to Hindi-Urdu.

One of the main reasons the South Asian academic world likes to cite for offering Hindi-Urdu as one foreign language is the idea that Hindi and Urdu are not two different languages, but just one single language with two different varieties. The wider context behind such a statement consists in the common ties between Hindus and Muslims – mainly cultural, but also historical. This ideological stance in academia is mainly driven more by the sense of a culturally common South Asian community, in contrast to Hindu and Muslim communities, back home in India and Pakistan, as well as in diaspora. There are also very strong linguistic grounds to back their statement of Hindi and Urdu being one single language with two different varieties.

Apart from the ideological grounds for merging Hindi and Urdu into one foreign/second language, there is an academic position too. For the study of modern (North) South Asia, both Hindi and Urdu are equally important. Until the partition of India and a few decades later, Hindi and Urdu literatures were not clearly distinguished from one another. Many writers were claimed by both languages and their respective language speakers. Their writings were published in both Devanagari and Nastaliq, with a little bit of editing to make them comprehensible for the respective readers. In fact, most native readers would not know if a particular author was a Hindi or Urdu one. Premchand, Manto, Krishan Chandar, Ismat Chugatai are vastly read in both languages.

Scholars who study other aspects of South Asia would certainly find knowledge of both languages handy for their field work. For example, most of the texts of the religious Bhakti movements can be found in Devanagari script. At the same time, most of the archived documents are in Urdu because of the fact that the lower level bureaucracy of Colonial India was conducted in Urdu. For anyone to study modern South Asia, especially the colonial times, the knowledge of both Hindi and Urdu is indispensable.

There are other practical reasons for this merger. As it happens, while discussing the demographic make-up of the language, Hindi and Urdu are lumped together into “Hindustani” to make one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. Since the term “Hindustani” does not exist officially, Hindi-Urdu is the closest to the linguistic reality of Hindi and Urdu as one language. And it can be used to make a sales pitch to a bigger clientele. The merger can make students interested in both Hindi and Urdu together.

On the other side of the merger, one cannot be careful enough not to alienate potential students who are interested in only one of the two languages. A big part of the student body who come to learn Hindi or Urdu or Hindi-Urdu in the North American Universities are so-called “heritage students”, second or third generation children of South Asian immigrants. It is not inconceivable that a student may have a personal or familial inclination toward a particular language, Hindi or Urdu, and may reject the other.

So far, in my personal experience of teaching Hindi-Urdu in the University of Toronto Mississauga, I have found that students are more attracted, than reluctant, to take the course.

There has not been much research done specifically on the patterns of enrollment in Hindi, Urdu or Hindi-Urdu. The only data available on Hindi, Urdu and Hindi-Urdu come from a report

(Furman, Goldberg, & Lusin, 2010,) on the enrollments in languages other than English in institutions of higher education in the United States of America. The data from the two years covered in the survey (2006 and 2009) give an interesting picture of the choices students made in taking one of the three options: Hindi, Urdu and Hindi-Urdu (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Hindi, Urdu and Hindi-Urdu enrollments in higher education in the USA**

	2006	2009
Hindi	1,946	2,207
Hindi-Urdu	393	639
Urdu	344	335

Hindi, as expected, draws more students than Hindi-Urdu or Urdu. Even Hindi-Urdu seems to be more attractive to students than Urdu alone.

From the limited data, one can conclude that the merger of Hindi and Urdu to Hindi-Urdu is mainly based on ideological grounds, as it is clearly seen that the merger does not bring increased enrollments; rather, the enrollment is substantially less in Hindi-Urdu. The merger is also done with the aim of equipping future scholars with maximum linguistic skills to work on medieval and pre-independence India. Although the merger does numerically expand the size of the body of native speakers, it is not reflected in the classes of Hindi-Urdu as a foreign language.

#### **4 Approaches to teach Hindi-Urdu**

Since the idea of teaching Hindi-Urdu is relatively new, different universities use different approaches to deal with two different scripts. There has not been a standard approach in this regard. As many top universities teach Hindi-Urdu in a single course, here I will survey their teaching approaches. Since there has not been any research done on teaching approaches used by various universities, I base the following part of the article on my personal communications with the professors of some North American Universities where Hindi-Urdu is taught.

##### **4.1 Devanagari first approach**

An overwhelming majority of the universities offering Hindi-Urdu apply this approach. The students are taught Devanagari (Hindi) script first and later, once they are fairly comfortable with Devanagari, Nastaliq (Urdu) script is gradually introduced. The time of introduction of Nastaliq also varies in universities. The most common approach is to introduce Nastaliq in the middle of the first semester, which is usually the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> week. Some universities start Urdu in the second semester. In some universities, Urdu is introduced as a small component of the course and is not given equal amount of time and grade points.

The rationale behind this approach lies in the level of difficulty of the scripts. Devanagari is a comparatively easier script and more precise for the language (Hindi-Urdu). It also is more intuitive (R. Delacy, personal email communication, July 30, 2014) compared with the Urdu script. The language and its sound system, that is, the wide range of vowel and consonantal sounds, can be more precisely represented in Devanagari script. As we have seen in 2.1.1.3, in Urdu, the short vowels of the language are usually not written, and other vowels are made in combination with the short vowels. A word written in Urdu without short vowels can be uttered in two, or sometimes three or four, ways. Some letters behave like both consonants and vowels depending on the context. Only the context allows a reader to know exactly what that word is.

With these complexities of the Nastaliq script, when a foreign language learner comes across a new word, he will not know its exact pronunciation. On the other hand, with Devanagari the pronunciation is more or less the same as how the word is written in accordance with the pronunciation rules. Since Hindi and Urdu at the basic (foreign language) level do not differ much from each other and share a very high percentage of common vocabulary, it is helpful for the student to learn

the basic vocabulary with Devanagari. Later, when Nastaliq is introduced, the student already knows the word and this helps him to correctly pronounce the word. In other words, for learning Urdu as a foreign language, a small corpus of basic words already known to the student can be helpful and increase the pace of learning.

#### **4.2 *Nastaliq first approach***

The Nastaliq first approach is rare, but some schools, such as Harvard University (R. Delacy, personal email communication, July 30, 2014) rely on this. In Harvard University, the course starts with the introduction of Nastaliq for the first three weeks and at the beginning of the second semester, Devanagari is introduced.

Introducing Nastaliq first has some psychological advantage. Learning the so-called tougher script gives students a better grounding in it, and later, when Devanagari, the so-called easier script, is introduced, the students would have already achieved a big milestone. When Devanagari is introduced first, some kind of reluctance is often observed among the students in learning Nastaliq.

The choice of one script or another to start with also depends on the training of the instructor. If the instructor is a native speaker, he/she must have learnt the other script only as an adult and he will feel more comfortable teaching the script that was his first script. There are very rare native speakers-teachers of Hindi-Urdu who have learnt both scripts from the beginning. The non-native speakers-teachers also bring their training to the classroom. If they were trained to teach one script or another first, they would prefer to teach the same way.

In higher level classes, Hindi and Urdu are usually separated or, if they are taken together, the students are given the choice to focus on only one script. In the University of Toronto Mississauga, Hindi-Urdu was taught both at the introductory and intermediate levels and they had planned to teach both languages at the advanced level in two separate courses. In Princeton University, after the introductory course of Hindi-Urdu, where both languages are taught, the languages are separated at the intermediate level. Since there are very few students at advanced levels, the languages are again brought together in one classroom, but the students are given the choice to choose one script or the other. If a student chooses to use both scripts, they are welcome to do so. The material is presented in both scripts (Fauzia Farooqi, personal email communication, August 22, 2014).

#### **4.3 *Either Devanagari (Hindi) or Nastaliq (Urdu)***

This approach is extremely rare. To my knowledge, there is only one university in North America that uses this approach. McGill University in Montreal subscribes to teaching either Nastaliq (Urdu) or Devanagari (Hindi) to the students (Pasha M. Khan, personal email communication, November 13, 2016). The students are given the opportunity to study either Hindi script and vocabulary, or Urdu script and vocabulary. Both scripts are taught simultaneously in the same class. All the material, homework, quizzes, PowerPoint slides, and so forth, are provided in both scripts/languages. The instructor uses both registers to teach the respective languages and tries to use common "Hindustani" vocabulary whenever possible.

This approach, though manageable, requires a heap of extra work from the instructor. Most of the time, students choose one script/language or the other, but on rare occasions, some enthusiastic students might want to learn both.

### **5 Challenges in teaching Hindi-Urdu**

Although historically, culturally, and also based on the linguistic proximity between the two languages, it makes sense to teach them both as one course. However, there are some serious challenges in combining Hindi and Urdu into one language and organising them in one classroom.

### 5.1 *Lack of textbooks*

There are a fair number of books to learn and teach Hindi and a comparatively lower number for teaching and learning Urdu, but there is not a single book to teach Hindi-Urdu. The closest to having a book to teach both Hindi and Urdu are the twin books of “Beginning Hindi” (2015) and “Beginning Urdu” (2011), both of which were written by Pien Joshua and Faruqi Fauzia. Both books follow the same organization in terms of the number of units, lessons, and exercises, except in the sound and script section. This set of books is used in McGill University which subscribes to the third approach of ‘Either Devanagari (Hindi) or Nastaliq (Urdu)’ mentioned in 4.3.

In a similar fashion, Tej Bhatia published two separate books for learning Hindi and Urdu: “Colloquial Hindi: The complete course for beginners” (Bhatia, 2002) and “Colloquial Urdu: The complete course for beginners” (Bhatia & Koul, 2005). Both books follow exactly the same pedagogical tools and same patterns of contents using the respective languages and scripts. For instance, the first three lessons in both books are as follows; “Greetings and social etiquettes”, “Where are you from?”, “What would you like?”. Bhatia (2019, forthcoming) is also planning to publish a common grammar book for Hindi and Urdu under the title “Hindi-Urdu: A Comprehensive Grammar”.

The idea to meet the needs of the clientele of both Hindi and Urdu as a foreign language through one set of pedagogical tools is not new. Already in 1989, BBC had published “Hindi Urdu Bol Chaal” (Bhardwaj & Wells) attempting to teach both Hindi and Urdu to the learners. The main idea of the book that comes with audio-lingual tools is to teach a spoken version of Hindi and Urdu, a point of convergence where the distinction is superficial.

For higher level Hindi-Urdu, a reader, “Hindi and Urdu since 1800: A Common Reader”, was developed by Schakle and Snell (1990). In line with the discussion on historical, political and linguistic dimensions of the Hindi-Urdu controversy, the book has authentic texts written in Hindi and Urdu by various authors suitable only for superior or distinguished proficiency levels.

McGregor (1992) has also created a separate Urdu study material, which complements his Hindi grammar manual “Outline of Hindi Grammar: With exercises” (McGregor, 1972). The combination of these two books is used in Harvard University to teach the combined course of Hindi-Urdu (R. Delacy, personal communication, July 30, 2014).

Another scenario of convergence is sometimes seen in Hindi as a foreign language books, which towards the end also introduce Nastaliq script briefly and superficially. In “Hindi language course” (Pořizka, 1972), a brief introduction of Perso-Arabic script with some examples is given. Such books usually give some examples, but rarely go beyond that. The idea of briefly introducing Nastaliq is to give learners the information that the language is also widely written in Perso-Arabic script.

There are also some online resources that tackle Hindi and Urdu as a foreign language either together or using the same or similar material. Although online material created by Afroz Taj from the University of North Carolina separate Hindi (“A door into Hindi”; <https://taj.oasis.unc.edu/>) and Urdu (“Darwazah”; <https://taj.oasis.unc.edu/urdu/>), but materials such as texts, audio, video, exercises are more or less similar, simply presented in the respective scripts. Unfortunately, both websites remain incomplete and they have many broken links. The complete and fully functional websites would have been great resources to learn Hindi and Urdu separately. They would have also helped those who would want to learn Hindi-Urdu together.

Another extremely helpful online resource for advanced and distinguished proficiency level learners is “Rekhta” (<https://www.rekhta.org/>). Although the aim of the website is to introduce Urdu literature comprehensively, it makes the literature accessible even to those who do not know the Perso-Arabic script. The website is equally useful for those who want to learn Hindi through Urdu or Urdu through Hindi, or who have learnt Hindi and Urdu as a foreign language and have acquired advanced proficiency and want to expand their knowledge base. Every page of the website can be transliterated into Hindi (Devanagari), Urdu (Nastaliq) or Roman script just by a mere click. This enormously useful website is equipped with an online dictionary, an alphabetised Hindi-Urdu writers’ list, links to audio-visual inputs and many similar other tools.

All the teachers of Hindi-Urdu have to rely mainly on the material developed personally by them. In fact, the teachers usually use a book for teaching Hindi (Devanagari) or Urdu (Nastaliq) first and then, after introducing the second script in due time, start converting and adjusting the book and material into the second script.

Since Hindi and Urdu individually are not very popular foreign languages beyond academia, teaching/learning material for both languages is scarce. In a market-driven economy, the publication of HFL or UFL books is not lucrative business. Combining Hindi and Urdu further shrinks the market. It will be very hard to expect a publisher to take an interest in publishing Hindi-Urdu textbooks. Unless some university decides to publish a combined Hindi-Urdu textbook, the teachers will have to rely on their own materials or combine different materials to teach Hindi-Urdu.

## **5.2 *Pace of learning***

Studying Hindi-Urdu together means literarily learning two vastly diverse scripts. A substantial part of time in and beyond the classroom is required to master two very uncommon scripts. This hinders the pace of learning the foreign language. It significantly slows down the coverage of material and, with it, the acquisition of an overall knowledge base in the language.

Depending on the aim of the university, the combining of Hindi-Urdu can be seen both positively or negatively. If the Hindi-Urdu language program plans to create future scholars on modern South Asia, the combining of Hindi-Urdu is indispensable. On the other hand, if the university subscribes to the communicative language teaching approach, where the students are more interested in learning the language for communicative purposes so that they can travel in India and Pakistan, interact with local people, or watch Bollywood films, the combining of the two languages would not be a very good idea. The learning of two scripts will require time that could have been used to learn spoken/communicative language.

## **5.3 *Reluctance to learn two scripts***

This is a further expansion to 4.2 from the perspective of Hindi. The popularity of Hindi in the academic world – among other reasons – is also due to the economic rise of India with globalisation. The expansion of academic interest on South Asia from classical to modern India is also the product of India's new position on the world stage. The interest in modern Indian languages, mainly Hindi, lies in the idea of a modern vibrant India that could be penetrated through the main Indian language, Hindi.

Unlike in Europe, language courses in North American universities are not restricted to students of the respective area studies. One does not have to be a student of South Asian studies to take Hindi. In fact, the majority of Hindi students have majors and minors other than South Asian studies. Their fascination lies more in the language aspect of the course rather than a strong academic interest in India. They would generally want to learn the language to travel and have first-hand experience of living India, and they would want to delve deeper into the society and culture. The reluctance to learn a second script can be anticipated. The main aim of these students is to acquire communicative skills which they can use in the country. For them, adding another script does not correspond to their main goal for learning Hindi; they would invest time and resources to further expand their (communicative) language skills.

## **5.4 *Heritage learners***

Apart from globalisation and India's strong position in the globalised world, another factor that made Hindi-Urdu popular in North American academia is the South Asian diaspora. A big part of the student body that comes to learn Hindi-Urdu consists of second or third generation children of South Asian immigrants. Their aim in learning Hindi-Urdu is make and maintain their cultural ties with their ancestral land, communicate with the grandparents and relatives from India and Pakistan, enjoy Bollywood films without subtitles, and know the meanings of Bollywood songs

that they have already memorised, but do not understand fully. Just like the group above, they are also reluctant to learn another script. Acquiring knowledge of another script is a hindrance and delaying factor in achieving their aim of learning communicative Hindi or Urdu. The motivation to learn Hindi-Urdu is in fact similar to that of non-heritage learners.

The ethno-religious divide sometimes also plays an important factor to choose Hindi or Urdu or Hindi-Urdu. Since Hindi is associated with Hindus and Urdu with Muslims, and further with India and Pakistan, the choice of the language to learn in university can be influenced by this factor. And reluctance can be anticipated among both communities in learning the other language or even a combined version.

## 6 Conclusion

The rationale behind combining Hindi and Urdu into Hindi-Urdu or keeping them apart depends on the aim that the university wants to achieve or the ideology it subscribes to. If the decision to combine them into one is ideologically driven and based on the belief that the people of South Asia (especially of North India), apart from being followers of different religions, namely, Hinduism and Islam, do not have any other difference and that they are culturally and linguistically the same people, university authorities (that is, academics and administrators of South Asian studies departments) will prefer the combined course of Hindi-Urdu. This stance indirectly also expresses the approach these department have towards its future plan. Combining Hindi and Urdu into one language has some significant scholarly advantages. A future scholar on Modern North India will miss a lot if they are equipped with only one language. The manuscripts of many important documents are often found only in one script which could be important for the research scholar, but he would not be versed in it. The use of a particular script was not very strictly associated with this or that religion. There is a heap of Bhakti literature (A Hindi religious movement) found in Perso-Arabic (Nastaliq) script. Similarly, Sufi literature which is associated with Islam can be found in Devanagari script too. If the South Asian Studies department of a university aims to equip their students for future research on India (South Asia), a combined Hindi-Urdu course can be considered a logical step.

Since the popularity of India-related courses is on the rise because of India's new position in the global world, the universities want to capitalize on language courses. In such situations, the aim of the university is to get high enrollments rather than teaching Hindi or Urdu as a subject that will lead to some scholarly achievements. In such a scenario, the university would prefer to offer Hindi and, in some rare occasions, Urdu separately and independently of each other.

The student's perspective is also quite similar. If the student has a scholarly interest in South Asia, one can see the enthusiasm to learn Hindi-Urdu, because it can cover India and Pakistan, and Hindu and Muslim heritage of India. If the aim is only to learn a language to communicate with the people, any of the languages is sufficient and, in fact, learning an additional script is a hindrance to acquiring the language fast. In the case of heritage students, they overwhelmingly prefer only one language – their own so that they can make connections with the ancestral land and communicate with the relatives. They find learning another script an additional burden, which does not have any use in their lives.

Regardless of their associations with different religious communities in South Asia, Hindi and Urdu are very similar languages and it makes perfect sense to teach/learn them together. At the same time, the university must also be very clear about its position with regard to the language (Hindi-Urdu in particular here) teaching. Hindi-Urdu will attract a lower number of students, but they would be very enthusiastic, especially for doing research. On the other hand, Hindi alone, and to a certain extent Urdu alone, will attract a larger number of students, but their interest will not go very far beyond the language.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Nothing can be further from the truth. In fact, Urdu was a language of North Indian urban areas such as Delhi, Lakhnow, and Agra, that were the hub of Muslim aristocracy prior to and during colonial times.

<sup>2</sup> There are two types of Perso-Arabic Scripts – Naskh and Nastaliq. Although Urdu can be found written in both, the overwhelming majority of Urdu texts are published in Nastaliq. Naskh is more often used to write Arabic language. The Unicode standard for Urdu uses Naskh but can easily be assigned to Nastaliq if proper fonts are available.

<sup>3</sup> Hindi Belt is a term used for the Indian states of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh where the majority population is Hindi speaking

<sup>4</sup> In fact, in Perso-Arabic script, except ma, all different types of nasal sounds, that is, velar, palatal, nasalisation of vowels, are replaced by simple a n sound represented by the letter “Nun”. At the end of a word, the nasalisation of a vowel is usually replaced by “Nun Ghunna”.

<sup>5</sup> Hunterian transliteration

<sup>6</sup> Hunterian transliteration

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