

# The Popular Culture of Bollywood in Teaching Hindi as a Foreign Language: Facilitator or Debilitator?

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## Abstract

In American and other western universities, a considerable part of student body of Hindi as a foreign language (HFL) courses comprises second and third generations of Indian diaspora “Heritage Learner” students. Living in a community, cultural ties are maintained with the help of some pan-Indian elements such as Indian festivals and the popular culture of Bollywood. Bollywood and Bollywood type soap operas have become a driving force in raising the interest and motivation of not only diasporic students, but also often ethnically non-Indian students too. Including Bollywood elements in HFL classes through songs, video clips of popular dialogue sequences, and posters of Hindi films keeps the students’ interest level very high. Often Bollywood type sequences can be used in a role play, script (for a film scene) writing activities or other communicative tools. There is also a downside to Bollywood in HFL teaching. As the stories of Bollywood movies are often unrealistic, so is the language used in them. There is excessive code switching between Hindi and English, and sometimes different dialects or even other cognate languages such as Punjabi, Marathi or Gujarati which can be potentially confusing and misleading for students. However, the incorporation of carefully selected Bollywood elements can enhance the students’ learning experience.

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## 1 Introduction

The importance of the role of teaching culture in a foreign language class has been discussed, debated and researched extensively (Bragaw, 1991; Byram 1989; Ellis, 1987; Morain, 1986; Valdes, 1986). The indispensability of the incorporation of culture and elements of culture has always been emphasised and even institutionalised by educational systems in Europe and America. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL, 2008) includes culture as one of the five C’s in the National Standards in Foreign language Education. The Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2001) for languages also highlights the role of culture in foreign language education through examples. The teaching of culture in the classroom is not simply related to information or behavioral knowledge about a certain language community, but can take a more active role in the teaching of the language itself. Most of the research on culture learning is in fact a discussion on how to incorporate culture into different settings in language learning through curricular materials and instructional methods, through field trips to communities and immersion programs etc. Furthermore, a significant part of that research also deals with the use of culture, mainly contemporary pop culture, as a tool to teach a language. In this scenario the culture is not simply a cultural element which is included in the language class to acquaint the

learner with the culture of the target language, but this cultural element also informs the design the teaching of grammar, vocabulary and sentence patterns i.e. the language itself.

The modern popular culture of a language community plays a significant role as a motivational factor in making the language popular among foreign language learners. The use of pop culture to motivate and to teach the communicative language has been practiced in teaching other foreign languages too. Japanese anime and manga as motivational as well as teaching tools for Japanese as a foreign language have been investigated by Fukunaga (2006), Armour and Iida (2014), and many others. The role played by the Korean TV dramas and K-pop in motivating students to join Korean language classes at the National University of Singapore has also been discussed by Chan and Chi (2010, 2011). The popularity of Spanish telenovelas has also drawn students to Spanish as a foreign language classes and those who watch them tend to show more confidence and do better in the classrooms (Muchnik, 2010; Weyers, 1999). Cheung (2001), Domoney and Harris (1993), Duff (2001), and many more have dealt with the use of popular, mainly American, but also wider culture of Anglophone countries, in teaching of English as a foreign language.

The Hindi language is in a unique position to exploit the immense popularity of the pop culture of Bollywood to define its teaching by way of including Bollywood scenarios. Bollywood – the Mumbai-based Hindi film industry – has offered a main source of entertainment for the Indian masses since its very beginnings. Although the feature films are made in the main language of North India – Hindi-Urdu, very often called Hindustani – it has its admirers all over South Asia and even beyond, although the film lovers often speak other languages at home.

In American and other western universities, a large proportion of the student body of Hindi as a foreign language (HFL) courses comprises second and third generation of Indian diaspora, ‘heritage learners.’ Hindi teachers in western universities, keeping in mind the unique demography, predominantly heritage learners, of Hindi language classes, incorporate elements of Bollywood to keep the students’ level of interest high. Bollywood elements such as songs, video clips of popular dialogue sequences, posters and trailers of Hindi films are commonly used in HFL classes to inductively teach certain grammatical patterns. Often, Bollywood type sequences can be used in a role play, script writing activities (for a film scene) or other communicative tasks.

This paper discusses the issue of using Bollywood derived material in teaching Hindi as a foreign/second language and what are the problems it raises? The papers attempts to presents a balanced account of the advantages and disadvantages of Bollywood pertaining to the status of Hindi itself and its use in teaching methodology.

## **2 Bollywood and its relevance to Hindi teaching**

The loose definition of Bollywood is the Mumbai-based Indian film industry that makes feature films in Hindi. Because of a very different appeal from classical Hollywood, Bollywood films have a huge following in the whole of South Asian subcontinent and diasporic South Asian community. Especially for the South Asian diaspora all over the world, Bollywood is a major source of entertainment.

In this paper, I use the term Bollywood in a broder sense because of its relation to Hindi language and even more to teaching HFL. The idea of Bollywood goes beyond the borders of films produced in Mumbai. With Bollywood I not only mean the films, but also include popular TV shows such as soap operas, sitcoms, serials, stand-up comedy, talk shows, game shows, reality TV, Music TV (B4U, Zee Music, Music Plus, MTV India), and so forth, and even the commercials. As a whole in this paper, I use the term Bollywood to relate to both the movie-based entertainment industry whose products are in Hindi and also related broadcast and print Hindi media.

HFL as a university course has a relatively long tradition in the universities of Europe and America, but it was limited to only few universities. In the mid-nineties of the last century, India had opened its market to the global world, and in a very short period, India with a rapidly growing economy became major player in the global economy. Academia also noted India’s importance as

an academic discipline, and more and more courses on India or South Asia were, and are, being offered by universities all over the world. Hindi being the biggest language in South Asia is one of the first courses offered on South Asia in some universities.

A large proportion of Hindi students in western universities are described in the USA as heritage learners, second or third generation of Indian immigrants. In most of the cases these learners are not exactly 'heritage learners' in very strict terms, as they often do not speak or hear Hindi in their households. They come from different language communities, such as Gujarati, Punjabi, and so forth, or sometimes from the communities of less cognate languages such as Bengali and Oriya, or even very different language communities, such as Tamil, Telugu, and so forth. Rakesh Ranjan (2008), in categorising the heritage learners in American universities, explained that despite their different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the majority of undergraduates of South Asian/Indian origin wanted to learn Hindi to explore their cultural roots. Indian, rather South Asian communities in a broader sense, share some common cultural elements, such as Indian festivals, Indian food, and often even religious cultural heritages. Among other factors, Bollywood also plays a big role in creating a Pan-Indian identity. Bollywood constitutes part of the main entertainment for all South Asians throughout the world. And through Bollywood, Hindi language becomes an integral part of Pan-Indian identity, even for Indians whose languages do not have common ancestry with Hindi, such as Dravidian languages.

The choice of students' second/foreign language greatly depends on motivational factors. Motivation, as classified by Deci and Ryan (1985) in their *self determination theory*, can be intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is linked to enjoyment and satisfaction, and extrinsic motivation to outside factors such as rewards, incentives or fear of punishment. Bollywood provides an intrinsic motivation to the students to learn Hindi. The Bollywood buffs may not speak or fully understand the language, but it does not diminish their fascination with the colourful world of Bollywood. The intrinsic motivation, which is ignited by the charm of the colourful world of Bollywood, its melodious and highly popular Hindi songs and melodramatic stories with a happy ending, drives the students to take Hindi so that they can enjoy the films in the original without reading subtitles and enjoy the meaning of the songs they had already learned by heart because of their media's popularity.

One of the ways to raise and keep the motivation high, as suggested by Dörnyei (1994), is to "include a sociocultural component in the L2 syllabus" (p. 281). He further suggests bringing films, TV recordings, music, and so forth, into the classroom. Bollywood serves precisely this purpose; it makes the lesson more learner centered. Bollywood, which is already a part of their lives, if used in the classroom, gives relevance to their everyday lives. As mentioned in the case of Mexican students learning English, "... pop music is their most frequent and meaningful exposure to English outside their three hours a week of classes" (Domoney & Harris, 1993, p. 235). One can safely say that the situation is the same with Hindi. Bollywood is the learners' most frequent and meaningful exposure to Hindi outside their classes. As Cheung (2001) puts it: "Unless they can see direct personal benefits and life relevancy in what they are taught in the school, students have no clear goal to aim for." (p. 57)

The appeal of Bollywood is in fact not restricted to the South Asian community, Bollywood and especially its songs, are very popular in Africa, Middle-East, Central Asia, Southeast Asia and, to certain extent, Eastern Europe as well. Many studies have been conducted on the global popularity of Bollywood, and lots of academic publications on global Bollywood have appeared in the discipline of Film Studies. Not infrequently, students not of South Asian origin sign up for Hindi classes with the same motive as their colleagues of South Asian origin. They are equally interested in Bollywood and they also come with some prior knowledge of Hindi acquired through film titles, songs or even dialogue sequences. The popular video website "YouTube" hosts a series of Bollywood songs sung by Europeans, Africans, and other Asians nationalities.

The popularity of Hindi courses in the universities has risen steeply in last two decades. More and more universities have started offering Indian language courses and Hindi, being the biggest

language in South Asia, becomes the first entry in the catalogue of modern South Asian languages. In this scenario, Bollywood has played a very significant role. It is becoming a driving force in motivating students to sign up for Hindi classes in academic institutions. And now it is important for teachers to maintain the high level of interest in Hindi, and Bollywood can also play an important role in achieving this. Language teachers in many universities have been using Bollywood as an effective pedagogical tool to teach Hindi/Urdu as a second language to both heritage and non-heritage learners.

### 3 Bollywood: The advantages

Bollywood has done a great deal of work in promoting Hindi. Although never with this particular intention in mind, Bollywood has propagated a standard form of Hindi to great masses of people in India and abroad. With the television revolution of mid-nineties, through Bollywood, standard Hindi has penetrated deeper into the masses in more remote parts of the South Asia. In this way, Bollywood has played an instrumental role in making Hindi the most representative language of India for foreigners. The popularity of Hindi makes it the first modern Indian language offered in academic institutions all over the world.

Heritage learners and other students who also are interested in Bollywood and the world of Bollywood sign up for Hindi in Western Universities. They often come to Hindi classes with various levels of prior knowledge in Hindi, gained to some degree through familiarity with Bollywood songs, dialogue sequences or simply film titles. As Domoney and Harris (1993) say about the motivation of Mexican students learning English thorough pop music: “As more time and attention to pop music in an English curriculum would increase student motivation because classroom activities would use *their* knowledge, *their* music, and *their* language.” (p. 235) In a very similar manner, HFL students will also be more motivated, if they can relate the knowledge acquired in the classroom with their knowledge, their music and their language which has been part of the their lives even before the coming to the class.

This paper not only deals with idea of using pop culture in second/foreign language teaching in a theoretical framework, but it also tries to show how it can be carried out in practice. In the next section, I describe some Bollywood tools that can be used in HFL classes.

#### 3.1 Film titles through posters

To teach students grammar patterns or rules, film titles can be a very effective tool. Often, the students already know the titles and know roughly their meanings. What they do not know is the grammar behind it. While teaching grammar inductively through different communicative methods, Bollywood posters can also be used as another communicative tool to internalise structural patterns in the cognition of the student.

In Hindi classes, for instance, Hindi film posters can be used to teach grammar patterns that express the present imperfective tense. The present imperfective tense in Hindi is analytical and is derived by combining the imperfective participle of a verb and the auxiliary *honā* (to be). Grammatical gender and number sensitivity is articulated in the imperfective participle. A PowerPoint slide with several Bollywood film posters that have present imperfective tense with different verbs and other elements such as nouns can serve as a brain exercise. After seeing the words in a context, students inductively start understanding the grammar rules.



Fig. 1. Present imperfective tense in Hindi film titles

The Bollywood titles in the posters read:

- 1) जिस देश में गंगा बहती है। [jis deś mẽ gangā bahtī hai] <sup>1</sup> (1960) – the country where the Ganges flows
- 2) हम तुम पे मरते हैं। [Hum tum pe marte hain] (1999) – I have a crush on you.
- 3) दिल चाहता है। [Dil chahta hai] (2001) – The heart desires.
- 4) हम आपके दिल में रहते हैं। [Hum apke dil mein rehte hain] (1999) – I live in your heart.
- 5) जीते हैं शान से। [Jeete hain shaan se] (1987) – We live with style.
- 6) जिस देश में गंगा रहता है। [Jis desh mein Ganga rehta hai] (2000) – The country where Ganga lives.

In Figure 1, one can see that all the titles are in present imperfective tense with different subjects (singular, plural, masculine, feminine), and to extract the grammar rule becomes easy, since the students already know the sentences. And with the deconstruction of the Bollywood titles into the grammatical units, the students establish the grammar patterns in their brains.

Another example I can give is the “Permissive” construction. The permissive is a modal verb construction that expresses a permission given by the subject to someone to do something, the English translation of this construction would be “to let someone do something.” In a Hindi sentence construction, the verb देना [denā] (give) is used and the other verb takes the oblique form of the verbal noun, that is, “to let eat” or “खाने देना [khāne denā].”

बॉलीवुड से ...

चलो, पोस्टर पढ़ते हैं!

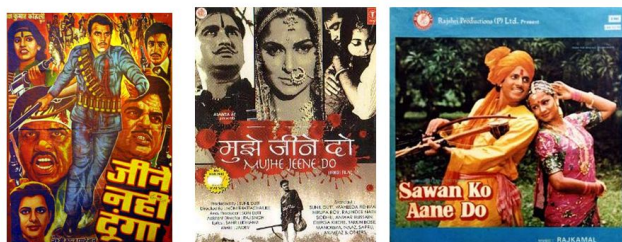


Fig. 2. Permissive construction in Hindi film titles.

The Bollywood titles in the posters read:

- 1) जीने नहीं दूंगा [jīne nahī dūgā] (1984) – I won't let you live.
- 2) मुझे जीने दो [mujhe jīne do] (1963) – Let me live.
- 3) सावन को आने दो [Sawan ko aane do]. (1979) – Let the rains come.

All three posters in Figure 2 have different subjects and have some differences in tenses and moods. The students are more motivated to perceive and analyse the grammar information given in this way rather than simply giving them the sentences. They express enthusiasm in their efforts to analyze how the rules function in the film titles. In this way, grammar rules can be effectively taught using the posters.

Examples of any grammar rule can in fact be found in Bollywood posters. Using Bollywood posters to illustrate grammar structures raises student interest. If they already know the names of the films, then they usually know the meaning as well. When such a poster is used for the learning of any one particular grammar structure, that structure becomes very clear to them and they easily learn to use the structure to construct other sentences.

### 3.2 *Film songs*

Songs accompanied by dances and other expressions of emotions are typical features of Bollywood movies. The popularity of the songs is also a key factor in making or breaking a film at the box office. In fact, in India and also in rest of South Asia, the major part of the popular music industry comprises movie songs, while other types of popular music has a only minute share in the music industry. The music of Bollywood travels even beyond South Asian societies and enjoys immense popularity in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Central Asia and even Eastern Europe. Some interesting studies have been made and published in Indonesia, Egypt and Israel (Gopal & Moorti, 2008). In the long run, films usually get erased from the memories of the spectators, but the songs and the melodies stay alive for generations. Collections of songs from Bollywood films are also produced as albums in the market, unlike in western markets, where music groups or singers make their albums. Movie songs are the only songs that are heard in buses, markets, cafes, and even in private parties. The music programs in radio and television are also playing overwhelmingly films songs. In fact, all music TV channels (such as B4U, Zee Music, Music Plus, MTV India etc.) show mainly programs that are based on songs from Bollywood movies.

In view of the popularity of the songs, they are the first elements of a film to penetrate the diasporic community as a reflection of the popularity of the film. Most of the time, students signing up for Hindi classes are well aware of the new songs of the latest films. Frequently, they even know the songs by heart and roughly know the meaning as well. To motivate students to learn Hindi through Hindi film songs is not a novelty. Anjana Sandhir (2004) has published a book on learning Hindi through Hindi film songs. The songs are very often familiar to ethnically non-South Asian students too, who have been inspired by the popularity of Bollywood films to join Hindi classes. This pre-knowledge of the songs can be cleverly utilised by the Hindi teacher to teach grammar structure patterns along with new vocabulary and to make learners aware of the grammar behind it.

Even old Hindi film songs can also be used to teach certain grammar points. The students may not be familiar with these songs, but the melodies and the rhymes help them to remember the sentences and, through them, the grammar patterns, and of course new vocabulary.

For example, there is an old film song that can be effectively used to teach the conditional mood to the students, “कायदा कायदा ... [kāyḍā kāyḍā ...]” in the film खूबसूरत [khūbsūrāt] (1980). The whole song is in the conditional mood, as the children in the song are imagining how the world would be interesting, if it had some unusual things such as flying fish, a blue sun, and so forth. Here is a chorus from the song:

- |  |                             |
|--|-----------------------------|
| 1) सूरज का रंग नीला होता [sūraṅ kā raṅg nīlā hotā] | if the sun were blue        |
| 2) पेड़ों का रंग लाल [peṛō kā raṅg lāl]            | and trees red               |
| 3) पंछी रहते पानी में [pāchī rahte pānī mẽ]        | if birds had lived in water |
| 4) और मछली गगन विशाल [aur machlī gagan viśāl]      | and fishes in the big sky.  |

After studying this song, students can be asked to imagine more unusual things – things they would like to see in the world. The song has already given them the structure of the conditional and continuing using imaginative lyrics enforces the grammar.

Songs can also be used to teach numbers, “एक दो तीन चार ... [ek do tīn cār ...]” (तेज़ाब [tezāb], 1988) or days of the week, “सोमवार को हम मिले ... [somvār ko ham mile ...]” (अपनापन [apnāpan], 1977), subjunctive, “बार बार हो ... [bār bār ho ...]” (लगान [lagān], 2001).

Bollywood songs have much potential to be used in the HFL classroom to teach and practice targeted grammar patterns. This unorthodox teaching tool penetrates the psyche of the learners and makes the classroom atmosphere more relaxed. The melodies, rhythms, rhymes and the visual inputs allow for the inductive introduction of grammar and new vocabulary. The students’ response to such a teaching tool is usually very positive.

### 3.3 *Dialogue sequence/movie clips*

As with the songs, dialogue sequences from popular Bollywood movies can also be taken to create active participation in the HFL classrooms, especially for the higher level Hindi classes. While watching carefully selected 1-2 minute scenes, the students get information not only through the words they listen to, but the visual input also plays a vital role in understanding the context. The simple idea of watching a movie clip from a Hindi film in a classroom can bring down the anxiety level and improve the classroom atmosphere.

If the teacher carefully selects a popular film from among the latest, there is a high probability that a relatively good number of the students might have already watched the film and would be familiar with the broader context. There could be many language exercises that can be prepared, keeping in mind students’ prior knowledge of the film content. The students can simply describe the events that led to the conflict shown in the clip or what will happen after the event from the clip. There might also be a fair number of students who have not seen the film. There can also be many similar exercises for them as well; predicting future events after the event in the clip or deducing the past events that led to the conflict/issue shown in the clip. There is another possibility of engaging both groups of students in one activity where one group predicts or presumes and the other corrects.

With the movie clip, there are some other kinds of exercises which can increase students’ active participation. They can simply be asked to reproduce a similar role play activity based on the script or they can be asked to make an oral presentation on the movie clip they just saw. They can also be asked to rewrite and improve the script or to write a script on a similar scenario.

Although it is little hard to use Bollywood movie clips to teach the language in the elementary level, but it can be a very effective, engaging and motivating tool that can create a relaxed atmosphere of enjoyment in the classroom and, at the same time, enhance the learning experience with the sights and sounds of their favourite “Bollywood” entertainment.

In some non-western or even western universities, the pool of HFL students consists only of non-heritage students who are either unaware of or are not interested in Bollywood films. Can Bollywood-based material be used for HFL teaching in such a situation? The simple and straightforward answer is “yes.” However, the function of such material will be somewhat different in such a scenario. The film posters can be used as authentic text, which is one of the core elements of communicative language teaching. The songs can make the classes very interesting, their melodies and rhymes can help student to learn sentences patterns and, through the sentence patterns, the grammar. The songs can also help the students retain easily the vocabulary taught through the

songs. The use of videos in foreign language classrooms is a very common practice. The dialogue sequences or movie clips can be used in various ways to practice the language. The video clips can also be shown to teach target culture practices such as the celebration of *Holi* or *Deepavali*, and Hindu festivals, marriage ceremonies or some other religious sacrament.

#### 4 Bollywood: The debilitating factors

Credit must be given to Bollywood for increasing the popularity of Hindi in non-Hindi speaking areas. Hindi-Urdu or Hindustani itself is the biggest language in the Indian subcontinent. With the popularity of Bollywood, the number of speakers of Hindi increased over time. Second language speakers of Hindi can be very fluent in the language and their understanding of the language goes beyond simply the capacity to speak it.

In the Indian school system, Hindi is the most popular third language taken by students and offered by schools. The constitutionally backed third language formula is mandatory in schools in India. Five years of third language is mandatory during the 12 years of schooling, and Hindi is the most widely offered third language in the non Hindi speaking areas. This constitutional language policy also brought Hindi to rest of non-Hindi speaking India.

Although the fact remains that Bollywood has made Hindi popular, at the same time, a point has to be made that Bollywood has made 'bad' Hindi popular. An adulterated contaminated version of the language became popular in India. This has not always been the case; only in last few decades has the language of Bollywood been anglicized and much unnecessary code switching has become the norm in the movies. In the early history of Bollywood, the films followed the language of the masses, and now Bollywood makes the trend and the masses follow it. The trend-making character of Bollywood is now penetrating into the linguistic make up of the films, changing the language of the common man.

##### 4.1 *Devanāgarī: The first victim*

*Devanāgarī* is the script in which Hindi is written. It is an old Brahmi<sup>2</sup>-based syllabic script which precisely represents the sounds used in modern Hindi. On the other hand, the romanised version, which is often seen in Bollywood, does not correctly represent all the consonantal and vowel sounds of the language.

In a Bollywood Hindi movie, romanised Hindi is used for the casting, posters and all propaganda material. Figure 1 shows a clear picture of the current language situation in Bollywood. Out of five posters presented there, only one is in *Devanāgarī*. Despite the fact that I try very hard to find Hindi film posters in *Devnāgarī* to use for my Hindi classes, they are just not available, at least not on the Internet. It is only rarely that one can find a poster in *Devanāgarī*, and that would usually be for an old movie.

There is no standard form of romanisation for Bollywood uses. The phonetic transcription of Hindi words into Bollywood romanisations lacks a proper representation of all the sounds Hindi has. The three basic vowels in Hindi have a short and a long pronunciation, *a* vs. *ā*, *i* vs. *ī* and *u* vs. *ū*, which is represented in *Devanāgarī* graphemes, that is, Hindi orthography. This issue is sometimes resolved using English orthography, for instance, "ee" is used to represent *ī* or "oo" for *ū*, for example, "*jeene nahi doonga*" to say *jīne nahī dūṅgā*. Such representations are also very inconsistently applied. There are other similar cases such as: nasal sounds which are often dropped; the difference between the dental and the retroflex consonants is never represented; and diphthongs are also often misrepresented. One must point out that such (mis)representations do not create any confusion to the moviegoers. Usually they already know the words, and such misrepresentations would not cause them to mispronounce or misunderstand the word.

Here, one can easily argue the reason of such penetration of romanisation in Bollywood because of the post-colonial dominance of English over Indian languages. There is more to the rea-



soning behind this than simply the post-colonial dominance of English on Indian languages. In most of the non-Hindi speaking areas of South Asia, the clientele of Hindi films understand Hindi well enough such that they do not need translation of any kind in form of dubbing or subtitling in their respective languages. However, they do not know how to read and write Devanāgarī very well, though they are all very familiar with the Roman/Latin script of the English version. The advertisement and the promotional material goes much further and reaches to much a wider audience, if it is made in romanised Hindi.

Romanised Hindi should not discourage the teachers of HFL from using film posters for teaching Hindi. In fact, as these posters are authentic texts, they should be highly recommended in a communicative language teaching approach. These posters should definitely not be used during the teaching of Devanāgarī script. In university level HFL teaching, IAST is used to teach Devanāgarī. IAST has exact representations for all the sounds of Hindi. Using film posters during the learning of Devanāgarī will confuse them and hinder the learning process. Even if the posters are used later, when the students have already learnt the script, the teacher should make sure that the students write the film names in Devanāgarī too, so that along with the Bollywood romanisation, the students will know the exact spelling in Hindi.

The global popularity of Bollywood has become a double-edged sword for Devanāgarī. On the one hand, it promotes Hindi; on the other, it has to make compromises in the script to reach a wider audience.

#### 4.2 *(Mis)representation of the culture and real life*

Bollywood can be effectively used to teach Hindi as a foreign/second language because of its popularity among ethnic South Asians, as well as, to a lesser extent, among the non-South Asian masses. The popularity of the Hindi films plays an instrumental role in motivating students to sign up for Hindi classes and the same motivation keeps them going, if elements of Bollywood are used in teaching methodology and curriculum. However, the idea of teaching culture through Bollywood films is of very limited scope. The culture represented by the Bollywood films cannot qualify as a true reflection of Indian society or Indian culture.

Bollywood represents a media form with the aim of entertaining the masses and making money through the entertainment. It does not play the role of a mirror to society. A viewer of a film would not also expect to see the hardships of real life, where he lives every day of his life and endures the hardships on his own skin. He comes for entertainment and wants to travel into a land of fantasy. His main idea of coming to a cinema theater is “paisā vasūl [पैसा वसूल], usually written “paisa vasool” in romanised Hindi, a typical term in Bollywood jargon meaning “money’s worth.” As the popular commentator on Mumbai lifestyle, Shobhaa Dé (2008) puts it, “The only philosophy that rules here, is ‘Paisa vasool.’ Value for money. Are you getting the biggest bang for your buck?” (p. 191). The money spent by the moviegoer has to give good amount of entertainment so that the money spent will be worth spending. A typical phrase after coming out of a cinema theater “पैसा वसूल हो गया। [paisā vasūl ho gayā]” means that the movie was worth spending the money. With this approach towards film making, films would hardly give a true picture of reality.

The approach of “paisā vasūl [पैसा वसूल]” means that the culture, traditions, and social norms shown in the Bollywood films assume the form of a hotchpotch of subcultures. For instance, a marriage ceremony in a Bollywood film would be given a very glamorous touch with songs and choreographed dances that usually do not happen in a real wedding. Real religious or traditional elements of a wedding are rarely or only superficially shown in films. Similarly, celebrations of religious festivals shown in the films are also far from the traditional ways of marking such occasions.

Although a heritage learner of Hindi would have an idea of Indian society and could filter and process the information they get from Bollywood films, for the non-heritage students from non-South Asian societies, there would be a need to explain the differences between the Bollywood

depictions of cultural elements and the reality of actual social and culture contexts. The authenticity of Bollywood depicting the Indian society and culture, and the lifestyle depicted in them in particular is extremely debatable, since Bollywood is simply an entertainment industry, which is far removed from the real life in Indian society. Hirji (2010), while talking about the cultural identity of Canadian South Asian youths, credits Bollywood with helping these youths learn Hindi and some aspects of Hindu culture, but at the same time, he acknowledges the confusion that appears in the unrealistic portrayals of modern Indian life.

However, with the use of selected pieces from Bollywood and detailed explanations about them, foreign language learners of Hindi can be given some glimpses of customs and traditions of the Indian society. For instance, a depiction of a marriage ceremony in a film, if it has a “saat phere”<sup>3</sup> or “shoe stealing custom”<sup>4</sup>, can be used to explain these rituals and customs to foreign language students. At the same time, the students should also be told that such choreographed dances are not part of marriage ceremonies. In this way, the role of Bollywood as a carrier of Indian culture can be justified.

#### 4.3 *Excessive code switching between Hindi and English*

The dominance of English through the romanisation of film titles, as shown in Section 4.1, is a reflection of the much bigger picture of the overuse of English in Hindi films. The whole casting at the beginning of Hindi films is always in English. There has always been a tendency to use English titles for Hindi films, but lately, this tendency has become a mainstream trend and these words are not from the vocabulary of the common man’s language. For example, “The legend of Bhagat Singh” (2002), “Mangal Panday: The rising” (2005), “Three idiots” (2009), “No One Killed Jessica” (2011), and so forth. A prominent newspaper, “The Times of India,” has published an article on this very trend, “Bollywood films fancy for English titles” (Jain, 2010).

The imagination of Bollywood is not limited to just to the titles of Hindi films in English; it goes even beyond that by giving the films titles in Hinglish – a construct named and created in Hindi speaking big cities, and well accepted and expanded by Bollywood. It is a socio-linguistic phenomenon that also fascinates linguists, who they call it code-switching and code-mixing (Kachru, 2006; Kothari & Snell, 2012; Thakur, Dutta, & Thakur 2007). Sometimes, the Hinglish titles go beyond the simple replacement of Hindi words with English, it even penetrates the deep syntax of Hindi, for example, “jab **we met**” [when we met] (2007), “kuch **luv** jaisa” [something like love] (2011), “**luv ka the end**” [the end of love] (2001), “**always** kabhi kabhi” [always sometimes] (2011)<sup>5</sup>. This so called “cool funky” Bollywood-type language has also been picked by multinational companies to promote their products. Here are few slogans used by them: “yeh dil mange **more**” [the heart wants more] (Pepsi India), “**think** milke **think** hatke” [think together think different] (Virgin Mobile).

Such extreme Hinglish phrases are used in film titles or advertisement slogans to serve as catch phrases to attract more customers, and they do manage to catch the attention, but such extreme code-mixing is not a usual phenomenon. In dialogue sequences and conversations in the films and the advertisements, the code-switching is limited to nouns, adjectives or full sentences, but rarely extending to the deeper syntax of the language.

In dialogue sequences in Bollywood movies, especially when the lifestyle of young people from cities and towns or college life is depicted, excessive code mixing has become the norm. The percentage of English code can be as high as 50%, or even more so, when depicting high class society. In reality, in code-mixing in the language of youths, even from metropolises, is heavily dominated by Hindi. The English code is used mainly to express modern terms, or sometimes the use of set phrases are also common, but they are over-presented in the speech of youths, as usually shown in the Bollywood films. Only in the entertainment media, films, interviews, reality TV, or other entertainment programs does the language of masses get contaminated with excessive use

of English. As the stories, stunts, and life situations in the Bollywood films are far from reality, so is the language used to depict them.

Bollywood buffs do not mind such language. In fact, they like it a lot, but even so such video clips are not very useful for providing cultural notes on Indian lifestyles to HFL students. It is also not very helpful to teach the language itself with such video clips, as it could give the wrong idea to the students that such language is very common in India. On the flip side, the popularity of Bollywood films is so enormous that the students motivated by Bollywood would not mind learning it this way too. As one of my students, Jacintha Lima, puts it:

If in a Bollywood movie a sentence in Hindi has 3 Hindi words and 3 English words, it makes it easy for us to guess and understand the meaning of the whole sentence, that way we have more chances of retaining in our memory the three Hindi words spoken in the sentence. If, for example, a sentence has all 6 words in Hindi, we might not understand anything at all or a very little and would hardly retain any word (personal communication, 2012).

So even the contaminated version of Hindi is helping them to learn the language. This is certainly a valid point, as a Bollywood motivated HFL learner is not concerned about the purity of language; they just want to learn the language so that they can watch and enjoy Bollywood in the original language. When and if they go to India, they want to be able to communicate with people, and indeed they can, even if they use Bollywood Hindi.

## 5 Conclusion

In last few decades, with the drastic changes in the idea of language teaching and how to realise it, the communicative approach has come to the forefront of language pedagogy. Teachers of Hindi as a foreign or second language have an extra tool at their disposal: Bollywood. It has been effectively used by language instructors to motivate heritage as well as non-heritage learners to acquire language skills. In a modern smart classroom, where the required information and sources are just a click away, it would be a waste not to include this unorthodox, but very effective language teaching tool. Songs, titles and video clips with dialogue sequences can all facilitate an interesting HFL classroom where grammar, new vocabulary and other elements of language learning can be learned through multimedia tools and this keeps the students' interest high. On the other hand, Bollywood is a double-edged sword for language teaching, as it completely ignores the fact that Hindi has a script, Devanāgarī. All the posters are in Anglicized Roman script, and sometimes the names of films and songs are in English. Bollywood films also do not show the reality of Indian society; they show a fantasy world rather than the real one. Due to this, the teaching of Indian culture through Bollywood can be regarded as contentious in some respect, although some elements of the culture can be explained to the students through Bollywood films. In the same way as the stories and lifestyle depicted in Bollywood movies is unreal, so is its language unreal. Excessive code-switching and code-mixing gives learners the wrong notion of how Hindi speakers communicate. It may also demotivate students from putting extra effort into learning Hindi, if they think they can get by easily without using good Hindi.

Bollywood can be a facilitator, and it is because of Bollywood that a large number of students are flocking to Hindi classes. To keep the motivation of these students high, elements of Bollywood should definitely be included in the classroom, but it should be done in a very selective manner. Items from Bollywood should be carefully selected, the use of these items should be selective, and students should be constantly reminded that they also need to be selective in perceiving any element of Bollywood as a reflection of real India.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I am using two parallel types of transliteration of Devanāgarī into Roman letters. For names of the films, the Bollywood type of romanisation is used. As in most of the cases, the posters of the films are in

this type of transliteration. The filmography is also transliterated in this form. For references to the songs, dialogue sequences and other words written in Hindi in the original document, I am using proper International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (IAST) system (without inherent “a”) in square brackets along with the original “Devanāgarī” version, because they are not often seen in romanised form and refer to grammar and grammatical correctness here.

<sup>2</sup> A name given to a group of ancient scripts from which modern Indian Indo-European scripts are developed.

<sup>3</sup> A ritual of seven circles made around a holy fire to make Agni (the God of fire) a witness of the holy matrimony.

<sup>4</sup> A popular custom of stealing the groom’s shoes by the bride’s sisters or mates. The shoes are returned only when the financial demands of the stealers are met.

<sup>5</sup> In boldface are the English words and the translation into full English is given in the square brackets and “love” is also spelled in a unique ‘cool’ manner as “luv.”

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