

“Heritage” learners of Hindi as a Foreign/Second Language: Motivation, Culture and Identity

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Abstract

The surge of Heritage learners in Hindi as a foreign/second language classes in North American universities is the result of combination of several factors. A large-scale migration from South Asian Countries to North America has played a key role in raising the profile of South Asian related courses in universities across North America. The next generation of diasporic South Asians who come to universities for higher education try to negotiate their identity in the western world through culture and language. The unique flexible education system in American universities also allows the students to chose courses from a wide range of subjects in the Humanities. The students regardless of their selected major or minor have to fulfill requirements for taking course from Humanities and Social Sciences. Many Universities even have language requirements too. This unique feature of the education system gives the diaspora students an opportunity to venture into their heritage past and motivates them to take Hindi to fulfill the language requirement and also to make connection with their ancestral past through language. In this paper I will try to examine Hindi second language courses through their ethnic make-up i.e. Heritage and non-Heritage learners, and student motivations for learning Hindi. .

1 Introduction

Since the early 1990s second language teaching of Hindi has been gradually growing in the North American universities. The surge in Hindi as a foreign/second language can be attributed to several factors. India as an economic and political power in the globalised world started taking the centre stage as a significant player since it opened its market for the rest of the world in 1990s. This led to academia being forced to take the discipline of Indian/South Asian Studies more seriously and broaden the scope of the discipline beyond its former focus on research on classical India. Studies of modern South Asia became a vibrant field of study along with the teaching of modern Indian languages. Hindi, being the most widely spoken and understood language in South Asia, is almost always the first entry in the catalogue of modern South Asian languages.

Another factor that played a very important role in popularising Hindi as a university course is the strong South Asian diaspora community. There is a significant number of students from ethnic South Asian backgrounds in universities in North America who are interested in learning Hindi for various reasons such as heritage language, popular culture or language requirements etc. Such students are usually labelled as “Heritage students”. Justified or otherwise, this label is used as a blanket term for all ethnic South Asian students who come to learn Hindi. The term “heritage students” in case of South Asia, however, erases the differences and neutralises the linguistic and ethnic diversity of different South Asian communities.

The term “Heritage language” without detailed elaboration in the context of South Asian diaspora sometimes fails to reflect nuances and differences. The paper will deal with the idea of Heritage language learning of Hindi by considering the demographical make-up of the learners’ body, identity issues and the motivations of the learners.

2 Heritage language and Heritage language learner

A “Heritage language” in the context of foreign/second language learning is a language spoken by a group or a community that is not a dominant in an area. It is a minority language that is usually spoken at homes and in communities, but not used in the wider society. Various terms have been used by different authors defining heritage language in different settings; ethnic, ancestral, native, primary language. Many scholars have used more precise terms that describe the reality of the heritage language; allochthonous language, home language, immigrant language, community language, language of origin etc. In a definition for the term “heritage language” Valdés (2005) has used the terms “nonsocietal” and “nonmajority” languages. Such languages according to him are either indigenous languages, i.e. native American languages in the USA, or the languages of immigrant population. Fishman (2001) added another category “colonial language” into the wider definition of what constitutes a heritage language. By colonial heritage language Fishman meant the language of early settlers in North America which were transmitted through generations in various forms, for instance, Dutch, German, French etc.

Hindi as a foreign/second language belongs to the group of the languages of the immigrant population and for this paper I will focus on this type of heritage language. Fishman (1999) had given a very wide definition to the idea of heritage language in an anglophone society; “language of personal relevance other than English” (cited in Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003, p. 216). Following the similar logic, Cummins (1991) had used “language other than English and French” in Canadian context. While trying to describe the complexity of the term and various levels of use of the language, Cho, Cho, and Tse (1997) defined a heritage language as “the language associated with one’s cultural background and it may or may not be spoken in the home” (p. 106)

What happens when a heritage language is brought into educational settings¹ i.e. to be taught as a second/foreign language, and how the idea of a “heritage” learner is defined needs to be examined and the relationship between the terms “heritage language” and “heritage language learner” explored. Just as in the case of “heritage language”, scholars have used many terms to describe heritage language learners; home background speakers, quasi native speakers, bilingual students etc. There are multiple factors one needs to consider while defining who is a “heritage” language learner. Wang and Garcia (2002) correctly express the complex semantics of the term, “There is no one profile of heritage language students, as they cover a heterogeneous population” (p. 2).

Vlades (2001) defines a heritage language student as one who “is raised in homes where a non-English language is spoken, speaks or merely understands the heritage language, and who is to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language. (p. 38)” This definition presumes that the home language of the student is different than English, which is not always the case. Often, the home language is either English or a mix of English and the native language of the parents.

Van Deusen-Scholl (2003) appropriately notices that ethnic heritage is the basic element in defining a heritage student. All scholars of the field agree with the idea of ethnic heritage, but they are not able to give a uniform answer to the question of the the relationship between this and levels of fluency and proficiency in a language. According to Wang and Garcia (2002) “Most of them within our school system probably fall somewhere along the continuum of language abilities” (p. 3). In an attempt to make the distinction between heritage connection and language proficiency level Van Deusen-Scholl (1998) uses two terms “heritage learner” and “learner with heritage motivation”. The former has some exposure to the language and the latter feels a cultural connection to the language but hardly possess any significant knowledge of the language.

The ethnic background of the student is normally regarded as what leads to students being labelled as heritage learners, and proficiency in the language is more or less irrelevant to the use of

this term. On the other hand, one needs to be aware of the fact that even if the student has absolutely no knowledge of the language, s/he is still aware of cultural elements and practices associated with the language and thus vocabulary associated with the culture.

The term “heritage student” was adopted in Standards for Foreign Language Learning (ACTFL, 1996). Since then the term has become standard to refer to the students that have an ethnic background specific to the language they come to learn.

3 Hindi as a heritage language

Apart from the usual complexity of defining a heritage language and its learners as heritage students, Hindi or Hindi-Urdu² as a heritage language has an additional dimension of wide-spread bi/multilingualism with Hindi in the ancestral lands of the heritage language learners. According to Ethnologue 22³, out of more than 600 million speakers of Hindi, more than 250 million speak Hindi as a second language. These second language speakers of Hindi in the diaspora do not use Hindi as a home language. Is Hindi their heritage language? If a student of Hindi has another South Asian language as his home language, should s/he be considered a heritage language learner?

The debate around these questions has been discussed in academic publications. To answer these questions appropriately, a multiple-factor analysis of individual cases should be carried out. The broad brush of the term South Asian ancestry gives only an indistinct picture of heritage language in relation to the heritage student and it is not wise to simply put all South Asian ethnic students on the same plain as heritage language learners.

Scholars, while discussing various issues concerning heritage learners of Hindi, do take notice of the linguistic complexity of South Asian heritage and make a point in their papers to acknowledge the specificity of Hindi “heritage learners” having complex linguistic background. However, the question of their identity as heritage student is rarely raised. Nijhawan (2011, 2017) also expresses some discomfort in using the blanket term of heritage learner for all the students of Hindi from ethnic South Asian background but carries on with the convention of calling them heritage learner. Ilieva (2007) classifies “heritage students” into 4 groups; a) heritage students whose family speaks Hindi, b) heritage students whose family speaks another Indo-Aryan, i.e. cognate language such as Gujarati, Bengali, Punjabi, Marathi, etc. c) heritage students from a Dravidian language speaking family, and d) heritage students whose parents are from the South Asian diaspora. Later in 2012, Ilieva labeled the four categories respectively as a) ancestral, b) associate cognate, c) associate non-cognate and d) culture associated. However, the term “Hindi heritage student” is not challenged and used to refer to all the students from ethnic South Asian background.

“In the present study, I will refer to a Hindi heritage language learner (HLL) as someone who has an emotional attachment to Hindi and/or another South Asian language through family practices and who has some proficiency in the Hindi language” (Ilieva, 2012, p. 18).

A similar approach is taken by Gambhir (2008) in dealing with this complex issue. The author here also acknowledges the diversity of Hindi “heritage learners” but does not question the validity of the term “heritage student” in case of non-Hindi heritage language. In fact, the title of the paper itself is “The rich tapestry of heritage learners of Hindi”. If the blanket term of “heritage learner” of Hindi is to be accepted for all the students from ethnic South Asian background, the definition below covers all the elements.

“A heritage learner of Hindi is a student whose family may speak Hindi or another Indian language at home. The student may or not be able to speak or understand Hindi but is familiar with Hindi language and its culture through his or her connection with the heritage land.” (Gambhir, 2008, p. 2).

Another layer of complexity is added to the issue when students of Urdu speaking Indian and Pakistani ancestry are also considered. Whether Hindi and Urdu are two distinct languages, or two varieties of the same language is more a political than a linguistic question. More or less all

scholarship on this issue agrees that both languages in their low registers are practically identical. Apart from different scripts; Devanagari for Hindi and Nastaliq for Urdu, the differences appear only when Perso-Arabic and Sanskritic vocabulary is applied in Urdu and Hindi respectively in the high register of literary, philosophical, religious, political etc. discourses. Due to the nature of elementary and intermediate foreign/second language courses, the low register is the focus of the course content. The familiarity of heritage learners with language in the low register would put students with from Urdu speaking families, or with Urdu speaking ancestry, into the category of heritage language learner.

As I mentioned above that scholars do recognise the complexity of defining the heritage student of Hindi as a second language. Due to lack of precise terminology for such cases they generally use the term “heritage student” for conveniences sake.

4 Ethnic South Asian students as heritage language learners of Hindi

In this part I want to address the following question “In Hindi as a foreign/second language classroom, is Hindi a heritage language for a student from a non-Hindi speaking South Asian background?” The b), c) and d), categories as defined by Ilieva (2008 and 2012) are covered in this analysis. I would put forward arguments in favour of both negative and affirmative answer to the question.

First, I would start with a negative answer to the question due to the following factors.

The simple fact that the home, or ancestral, language of these students is not Hindi makes a foundation for not considering them as heritage language learners. The linguistic proximity of languages of South Asia to Hindi varies from very close to very far and in certain cases to completely different language families. Ilieva’s (2012) b) and c) groups are formed on the basis of genetic classification of Indian languages. Furthermore, within the b) group of associate cognate languages – other Indo-Aryan languages, the proximity to Hindi i.e. the level of cognateness with Hindi also varies. For instance, Punjabi and Gujarati have higher degree of mutual intelligibility with Hindi than Bengali and Assamese.

Regardless of the different level of cognateness, the mere fact that the languages are different from Hindi makes a strong argument in favour calling them non-heritage language. A similar parallel can be made in the case of other language families such as Slavic, Romance, Germanic languages. Nowhere in the literature of Russian as a heritage language, is there a mention of other Slavic languages or in the literature of Spanish as a heritage language, are other Romance languages are mentioned.⁴ The linguistic proximity of Russian to other Slavic languages or of Spanish to other Romance languages is similar to Hindi with other Indo-Aryan languages. The argument made here is based purely on linguistics, the socio-linguistic dynamics in the South Asian society is not taken into consideration, this will be dealt later in the paper.

The c) group of Ilieva (2012) - associate non-cognate languages; Dravidian or other home language complicates the equation even further. Linguistically, there is even less reason, or in fact, there is absolutely no reason to call the students heritage language learners whose home or ancestral language is one of the Dravidian languages. In societies like Singapore and Malaysia where Tamil language speakers comprise the majority of Indian diaspora, calling Hindi the heritage language of the HFL students is rather illogical. This rationale should also be equally applicable to the Dravidian language speaking diaspora in North America. While defining the blanket term of “heritage student” for the students of the Dravidian ancestry, Gambhir (2007) establishes a connection between Hindi and their home languages through structures, sound, vocabulary and discourse features. According to her, heritage students (including Dravidian) have an additional edge over a traditional foreign language learner of Hindi “because of their knowledge about Indian thought pattern, culture, areal linguistic features (e.g., word-order, dative subjects, retroflex sounds) and shared vocabularies borrowed from Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic and English” (p. 2). Although the features referred here do make a case of calling the languages proximate to Hindi, it is still far-fetched to call the ethnic Dravidian students heritage learner of Hindi.

I do recognise that the students belonging to the non-Hindi speaking South Asian diaspora communities (both Indo-Aryan and Dravidian) comes to the classroom with some prior cultural and linguistic knowledge but calling Hindi their heritage language is somewhat debatable. Their exposure to Hindi is limited only to film and other silver-screen entertainment and that too with English subtitles.

To answer the question affirmatively, there are equally strong and, in some cases even stronger arguments to call certain students heritage learner of Hindi.

The Indian constitution along with Hindi recognises 21 languages, and on the continuum of proximity to Hindi, the languages fall in different places; from very close to very far. However, Hindi has achieved the unofficial pan-Indian status in North India and to certain extent, even in South India. It is the most widely spoken language in South Asia. The language policies of the education system in India mainly offer Hindi as a second or third language in non-Hindi speaking areas.⁵ The Hindi film Industry “Bollywood” has also played a crucial role in making Hindi popular among the masses. Hindi has also become an integral part of the Indian identity that’s why, the analogy of Russian versus other Slavic languages or Spanish versus other Romance languages is not applicable in this situation, although the linguistic parallels are quite apt.

The common linguistic roots, or cognateness, with the Indo-Aryan languages can serve as an argument to call Hindi as a heritage language to the students that fall under b) group (Ilieva 2007, 2012). However, one should keep in mind that “common linguistic roots or cognateness” by itself does not constitute a strong argument. This linguistic factor alone is common in many situations⁶ where a student with a heritage language that shares common ancestry, rather cognateness with the language is being taught. In many such cases the taught language is not considered a heritage language. The “common linguistic roots” argument is valid only when it is combined with the massive popularity of Hindi among linguistically varied South Asian populations, that makes Hindi a significant part of their identity. It is only after considering this fact that one can make a strong case for calling Hindi a heritage language of students with Indo-Aryan languages as their home languages.

The “common linguist root” argument cannot be easily extended to students belonging to the c) group of Ilieva (2012), whose home language is one of the Dravidian languages or some other non Indo-Aryan language. Even if, as Gambhir (2007) argues, this gives a linguistic rationale i.e. “Indian thought patterns, areal linguistic features” etc. in favour of calling them heritage students. The term “heritage student” could be extended to the students belonging to c) group not so much through the means of linguistic features, but the popularity of Hindi in South India.⁷ The limited popularity that might exist in India is hardly transferable to the diaspora population of South Indian language speakers, and even less to the 2nd generation that usually is part of the clientele of the Hindi as a second language courses in universities.

The perception of Hindi as *lingua franca* of India⁸ also contributes to this debate. The multilingual nature of India is often presented as a country that has Hindi as its main language. Hindi is almost always the first language that appears in the catalogue of foreign/second languages from South Asia. Students with Indian ancestry, regardless of their different home languages, do not hesitate to identify themselves as somehow related to Hindi. This relatedness can vary depending on the home language of the student and sometimes it just depends on their personal view or opinion on such language issues. This personal and collective relatedness to Hindi can determine the status of heritage language for Hindi in the minds of learners, teachers and scholars.

Another element that can support the argument that all students with South Asian ancestry, regardless of their home language are heritage students of Hindi is the popular Hindi film industry; Bollywood. Bollywood is one of the main sources of entertainment for South Asian diaspora communities. Although the films in other South Asian languages are also made in significant numbers, a significant number of South Asians prefers Hindi films over their home language films.⁹ Growing up in the diaspora, the overwhelming majority of students are familiar with newest Hindi films, the latest news from the silver screen, the lifestyle of the big stars, and gossip around their lives etc. This is their live connection with the ancestral land. Although the films are usually watched

with subtitles, but the constant listening to Hindi makes it relatively accessible and intelligible in their lives beyond Bollywood. When these students come to learn Hindi in universities, they already have some prior knowledge acquired through watching films. Bollywood in fact is often a driving force behind their choice of taking Hindi as a university course.

“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.” (Kumar Bhatt, 2013, p. 323)

This live connection to the language in the diaspora communities has been the topic of enquiry in many academic publications (Gambhir, 2007; Ilieva, 2012; Kumar Bhatt, 2012, 2013, 2018; Nijhawan, 2011, 2017)

The arguments presented above in favour of the term “heritage students” so far are mainly linguistic. Beyond the diverse linguistic scenarios, there is an element of pan-Indian culture which is familiar to the students with ancestry from all the parts of not only India, but South Asia in a broader sense. The cultural elements such as Indian festivals and rituals related to these festivals, Indian food, clothing, music, are to a large extent common to most of the students from Indian ancestry. The heritage cultural experience through these elements is largely translatable to the language learning experience. For instance, the vocabulary related to Indian food such as spices and dishes, term for typical Indian pots and pans etc. is not alien to them. Although the diaspora community has accepted the western style clothing in their day-to-day life, however during festivals and other celebrations Indian attire is gladly displayed. The words “sari, kurta-pajama, dupatta/chunni etc. do not need to be especially taught in the classroom. Bollywood has also played a significant role in keeping the cultural connection intact with the diaspora.

The question raised in the beginning of the section is a complex one. A simple affirmative or negative answer to the question is not able to reflect the complex reality of the linguistically and culturally intertwined diaspora societies.

5 Motivation

The motivational factors that lead the choice to take Hindi as second language among the students of South Asian ancestry can be classified into intrinsic and extrinsic as defined in *self-determination theory* (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Intrinsic motivation is caused by enjoyment and satisfaction and extrinsic is the result of incentives, expectation of reward and/or fear of punishment.

One of the intrinsic motivational factors is the common Indian heritage. Heritage students have close familial ties in India. Usually a significant part of their family, especially their grandparents still live in India. As mentioned earlier even though the home language of not all students is Hindi, the family back home often has a decent knowledge of Hindi, especially in case of Indo-Aryan speakers. The knowledge of Hindi, on one hand, can bring warmth and closeness in the family through the language, on the other hand it opens many opportunity to travel in India and employ newly acquired language skills and use them to explore India deeply, where an ordinary tourist scratches only the surface. Through language they can connect with the land, people and culture of their ancestors.

A small number of heritage students also have interest in carrying out studies and research on South Asia. A good knowledge of the local language is indispensable for investigation into any area of scholarship in humanities and social sciences. Scholars of area studies are aware of the fact that without the knowledge of the language, the credibility of the scholarship would be questioned.

Another motivational factor for the heritage students, that is peculiar to South Asia, is Bollywood. The popular culture of Bollywood is probably the biggest intrinsic motivational factor

driving students to the Hindi as a second language classes. The phenomenon of the popular culture motivating students to take foreign language is not unique to Hindi only. Japanese anime and manga, Korean dramas and K-pop, Spanish telenovelas etc. have created similar interest among university students to take up the challenge of learning their respective languages. The popularity of Bollywood in South Asian diaspora communities is described in detail above in the section 4. Bollywood as a motivational factor for students to take Hindi as a second language has been directly or indirectly a subject of research. Many publications mention the use of Bollywood as a teaching tool and learning tool. Almost no publication that talks mainly about heritage students of Hindi as a second language fails to mention the role Bollywood or Hindi films. (Gambhir, 2007; Gambhir, 2011; Hong, 2008; Ilieva, 2012; Kulkarni, 2013; Kumar Bhatt, 2012, 2013, 2018; Nijhawan, 2011, 2017; Parnami, 2018).

“...the role of Bollywood as a motivating factor for the students to take up and learn Hindi seriously is evident, with some of the Bollywood buffs (S3, S24, S36) expressing their satisfaction in terms of their growing ability to understand Hindi movies and songs.” (Kumar Bhatt, 2012, p. 358)

Below are some direct quotes (from different studies) from the Hindi language students about Bollywood as their motivation expressed in different publications

“I’m learning Hindi because I want to understand Bollywood films. I think learning Hindi is important because it’s important in my culture — Justin (quote translated from Hindi)” (Parnami, 2018, p.78).

“With regard to my personal interest, I am pretty satisfied that I am now able to understand the gist of any Bollywood film without the help of English subtitles – S36” (Kumar Bhatt, 2012, p. 358).

“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 – Jacintha Lima” (Kumar Bhatt, 2013, p. 331).

“... I love watching Indian movies, and I sing songs by Janoon ... – a student” (Warsi, 2003, p. 137).

The intrinsic motivation for heritage learners that includes familial ties, travel to ancestral lands, familiarity with the culture and enjoyment of Bollywood popular culture, that drives many of them to take Hindi is nicely summed up by Kulkarni (2013).

“However, second-generation youth and young adults often feel a need to learn Hindi or Urdu—to travel to India or Pakistan without their parents, to understand and develop their ethnic cultural identity, or simply to better understand the Bollywood films and Indo-Pakistani pop music that they have access to in the United States”. (p.3)

The extrinsic motivation that leads the heritage students to take Hindi is linked to the university system. Unlike the European higher education system, the North American system is very flexible. In fact, the system encourages and even forces the undergraduate students to take courses from different streams. The students are required to take a certain number of Humanities/Arts credits to complete their graduation regardless of their major. A significant number of Hindi students have as their major something other than South Asian studies, such as Psychology, Commerce, Engineering etc. When the system requires the students to take Humanities/Arts courses, students with South Asian ancestry look for the courses that are either familiar to them or help them to connect to their roots. Thus, they often take courses on South Asian history, religion, philosophy, languages etc. The

thematic familiarity of the courses is a reason for their choice, at the same time, the idea of learning more about their ancestral lands and connecting with their cultures in a meaningful way makes the courses attractive to them.

Many universities also have a language requirement. In such universities the students, mainly studying humanities and social sciences, are required to take one or two years of the second language as their undergraduate requirement. The language requirement being one of the reasons to take Hindi is noticed by several scholars (Gambhir, 2008; Nijhawan, 2017). Some students grew up regularly hearing Hindi, or a cognate language, and also passively learning it through Bollywood, the decision to take it as a university course seems quite obvious. They expect that the course would sharpen their speaking skills, remove any hesitation that they have because of lack of confidence, and will make them ready to travel in South Asia and use the language skills they have acquired during their studies.

6 Issues with heritage students

A lot of research has been done on the profile of heritage students and the issues teachers face in teaching heritage students and strategies for handling such issues. In this section, I will briefly touch upon some of the issues teachers of second languages face with respect to heritage language and heritage students. The common issue that is mentioned and discussed by many scholars (Gatti & O'Neill, 2017; Montrul, 2010; Valdés, 2005, 2014; Wang & Garcia, 2002 and many other) is different levels of prior knowledge of the heritage language who come to learn a second language. The situation is no different for Hindi as mentioned in many works (Gambhir, 2011; Hong, 2008; Ilieva, 2007; Nijhawan, 2017) on Hindi language teaching in North American Universities. A detailed classification of Hindi heritage students is proposed by Gambhir (2008); Zero-Beginners (ZB), Advanced-Beginners (AB), Near Natives (NN) to Natives¹⁰ (N) that come to take entry-level Hindi course. The non-heritage students are considered ZB. The rationale and reasons behind having such a wide range of proficiency levels in one class is a practical one. In most of the universities, the enrolment in Hindi classes is small, it is impractical to have different groups for the students depending on their proficiency level. The universities lack resources to hire faculties to teach small courses on a regular basis. The question, "whether there should be separate tracks for the students of different proficiency levels" has mixed responses from the teachers in the interviews done by Gambhir (2008), one strongly advocating separate tracks and the other find separating the students unnecessary.

In order to deal with the issue of high proficient students in the entry level classes, some universities¹¹ offer a fast-track/accelerated Hindi classes for AB, NN and N. In accelerated Hindi classes two years of coursework is completed in one year and if the students want to continue after completion of the accelerated Hindi course, they can directly join Advanced Hindi.

In universities where accelerated Hindi courses are not offered and all students with different proficiency levels are put together in one class, it becomes a big challenge for the teacher to meet the needs of all the different types of students. AB, NN and N need more reading/writing practice as their speaking/listening skills are already developed. The ZB need both writing/reading and speaking/listening skills. A set of strategies is offered by Gambhir (2008) to deal with the variety of proficiency levels in the classroom; such as open-ended tasks in which the student, depending on the proficiency level, will be able to do the task accordingly and will also be graded according to the progress made. Individualised assignments accessible to their proficiency level can also be given to the students. Activities between different proficiency levels can be used to promote peer learning.

7 Conclusion

Heritage language teaching is a unique and complex phenomenon and the complexity becomes even bigger when Hindi is defined through the notion of heritage language in diaspora South Asian communities. As in language acquisition literature, multilingualism is often explained through the

notions of first, second, third etc. languages, Hindi as a heritage language can also be defined as first, second or third heritage language. With Hindi, the students do not always have a direct heritage language connection, but rather a “heritage-land” connection, a term used by Gambhir (2008). To call the students from South Asian ancestry in a second language class heritage students is technically correct, but one should keep in mind that the term “heritage” is not an indicator of only a linguistic heritage, but rather broader cultural heritage, to which Hindi language is a mere component. Regardless of the ancestral languages of the students; and whether it is a Hindi, cognate or non-cognate, in modern times Hindi has become an integral part of their Pan-Indian identity. Many factors have contributed to make Hindi a component of Pan-Indian identity; that there are more speakers of Hindi than any other language in India, that it is the most learnt second or third language in the Indian school system and in Bollywood. For the diaspora community and more specifically for the heritage students, the world of Hindi cinema, Bollywood is the strongest “heritage” connection to Hindi. Along with Bollywood, familial ties play very important roles in their choice to take Hindi. The students usually have grandparents, uncles and cousins who are in India. Even if the family back home might have some other language, with their newly acquired knowledge of Hindi, they feel that have established an extra connection with them. Their wish to travel in India independently, make direct connection with the culture and people through language is also a big part of their dream when they take Hindi.

In addition, mandatory Arts credits, regardless of their disciplinary field, in North American Universities serves as extrinsic motivational factor for students to take Hindi or any other course related to South Asia. Many universities also have one or two years of language requirements for their Arts students. There is also a tendency for students to take a language that has a meaningful connection to their communities. The intrinsic and the extrinsic motivational factors are complementary to each other.

The students’ identity as a person of Indian ancestry naturally creates motivation to learn more about their ancestral culture and make connection with it. Hindi, the language with the biggest reach in India, provides a reliable tool to fulfil their wish to understand what is at the same time somewhat familiar and also somehow something exotic .

Notes

1. In some cases, when a heritage language has been introduced into educational institutions is has been because of a significant diaspora community and in other cases it also existed as a foreign language in institutions even before the significant interest generated by the growth in immigrant communities.
2. North American universities often define their program as Hindi-Urdu. Under the banner of Hindi-Urdu, sometimes only Hindi is taught or sometimes both Hindi and Urdu. While discussing the pedagogical issues, scholars usually use the term “Hindi-Urdu” to analyze language courses in North-American universities without getting into an analysis of language politics in relation to the terms Hindi and Urdu. In this paper, I also do not deal with the language politics and only deal with Hindi in this discussion on heritage language and heritage language learners. For detailed discussion on the linguistic complexity of the Hindi, Urdu and Hindi-Urdu see Kumar Bhatt (2018) .
3. See <https://www.ethnologue.com/>
4. I am aware of the fact that the relation between Hindi and other Indian languages is different from the one between Russian and other Slavic language or Spanish and other Romance languages. I will deal with it later when I will answer to the question in an affirmative manner. Right now, I am making only a linguistic argument.
5. The state of Tamil Nadu does not follow the three-language formula.
6. The Russian and Spanish examples are mentioned above. Within South Asian context, if a Punjabi heritage learner comes to learn Gujarati, he would not be considered a heritage student.
7. The level of popularity of Hindi in South India is rather limited and it also depends on various factors. Hindi is comparatively more popular in some state than other. The rural areas are less familiar with Hindi than urban centres. Bollywood that makes Hindi popular in North India has limited presence in South India.
8. This is certainly the case for North India and to certain extent for South India as well.
9. This is especially true for the speaker of Indo-Aryan languages. The reach of Bollywood is a bit limited in South India where their local film industries are dominant.
10. These students are native only in conversational Hindi, they are not able to read and write Devanagari.

11. University of Virginia, University of Pennsylvania, Yale University, University of Minnesota, Columbia University, University of Texas at Austin, etc.

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