

# On the Teaching of Indian Languages and Literatures Abroad

**Omkar N. Koul**

Indian Institute of Language Studies, India  
[onkoul@gmail.com](mailto:onkoul@gmail.com)

**Abstract.** Indian languages and/or literatures are taught in various universities/institutions in different countries all over the world since long period of time. These languages are taught in different linguistic situations and with different objectives. They are not merely taught as foreign languages to non-native learners, but they are also taught as heritage languages to the Indian immigrant children who may have very little exposure to these languages at home in an alien environment. The teaching of Indian languages abroad needs to be reviewed from the point of view of the objectives of language teaching, use and preparation of instructional materials, importance of teachers training, language teaching methodology, role of literature in language teaching, importance of translations from Indian languages into foreign languages and institutional support in India and abroad. Here an attempt will be made to point out certain issues and problems related to the tasks involved in the teaching of Indian languages and literatures and suggest remedies with special reference to Hindi and Urdu languages which have largest number of students.

## 1. Language Teaching

### 1.1. Instructional Materials

Instructional materials are of two types: texts and supplementary materials. The texts are usually selected by the instructors of their choice or sometimes devised by them keeping in view the objectives, needs and level of the learners. There has to be wide range of available text materials the instructors can choose from. It is imperative to have the texts available in the local medium of instruction, i.e., English, French, German, Russian etc. The usual structure of the text material comprising different lessons follows a general format of text, vocabulary, grammatical and cultural notes.

The text materials are an integral part of any language teaching and learning situation. There is a long tradition of the writing of the language teaching/learning courses using different formats from structural to situational materials. Different types of instructional text materials are currently being used. The materials include certain standard manuals and the text materials prepared by the concerned teachers at different levels. As far as Hindi and Urdu languages are concerned most of the materials are available in the English medium. There are limited materials available in the medium of other major foreign languages such as French, Russian, German, etc. The traditional text materials are available in the format of narrative passages, selections from literature, conversations followed by grammatical notes, vocabulary etc. No adequate efforts have been made to select text materials from the current use of language used in the print and electronic medium.

Presently, the language samples vary a lot in content, style and variety of speech. Now there is a preference to select text from standard spoken variety used in electronic and print media. The newspapers present the current use of language in writing and are considered ideal for the text. Not many texts are available for teaching Hindi and Urdu languages.

The principles of gradation of materials are not adhered to. The principles of simple to complex structures are adhered to. In the selections from newspapers, it is possible to grade the materials on the principles of simple news items to special reports or columns and editorials; short to long conversations, narratives or reports.

There are no standard tests. It is necessary to develop standard tests to test the development of language skills among the learners at different levels from the minimum to maximum levels of achievements using a standard five point scale.

## 1.2. Supplementary materials

Supplementary materials may include cultural readers, pedagogical grammars, learners' dictionaries, online courses etc. Whereas in the design of the text materials the choice is made by the concerned teachers in the design or the selection of a standard language teaching/learning course, but in the supplementary materials the teachers rely on and recommend other support materials. It is the area language experts, linguists and lexicographers of the concerned languages and institutions working for the development of the languages have a prominent role.

1. Cultural readers are handbooks useful for explaining different cultural bound lexical terms, expressions, customs, festivals and other socio-cultural patterns of the people who speak the concerned language natively. No cultural readers are available in Hindi and Urdu for the use of language learners in these two languages. The language learners have to refer to different sources and rely mostly by the explanations provided by the teachers in class.
2. Pedagogical grammars provide grammatical descriptions of the target languages from pedagogical point of view. They are to be distinguished from linguistic grammars and must include descriptions from pedagogical point of view and exercises too. No adequate attention has been provided to this area in Hindi and Urdu. Most of the grammars written in these languages are by foreigners or non-native speakers of these languages. Though useful, they do not meet the requirements of language learners. Pedagogical grammars must base their descriptions on the selected text and supplementary materials including the current use of spoken and written materials used in print as well as electronic media.
3. Audio-visual materials are of different types: (i) the recordings of the texts and also some supplementary materials in the pronunciation of the native speakers; (ii) free conversations related to the use of the target language in different social domains of household, market place or offices etc.; and (iii) interactive audio materials to build conversations.
4. Preparation of online language courses in target languages which would be composite courses introducing pronunciation of speech sounds, script, vocabulary, structures, grammatical and cultural notes, drills and exercises in interactive format. They can form the self-learning language learning packages. Though online courses have been prepared in some selected Indian languages like Tamil, Kannada, Bangla, the serious work is yet to begin as far as Hindi and Urdu are concerned. Materials currently being used for Hindi and Urdu are excerpts from some TVserials, stage dramas or films with no explanations. Their use in public domain is an infringement of copyright violations.
5. Websites of the target language resources are required for referring to the language resources. The materials should provide linguistic, sociolinguistic and cultural profile related to the target languages. These websites should provide

- (i) different kinds of text materials,
- (ii) supplementary materials such as conversations and narrations in socio-cultural context, excerpts from plays, TV serials with explanations and
- (iii) learners' dictionaries in the target languages.

No serious work has been done in this area as far as Hindi and Urdu languages are concerned.

6. Learners' dictionaries form an important part of supplementary teaching/learning materials in a second/ foreign language teaching situation. Though a large number of bilingual dictionaries of different sizes are available in Hindi and Urdu languages, no useful learners' dictionaries have been prepared for the needs of second/foreign language learners in these languages. A learner's dictionary must ideally provide examples of the use of lexical items from the texts.

## **2. Teaching of Literatures**

There is an interest in teaching the courses on Indian literature and or the literature of a specific language in foreign universities. The universities which offer courses in Indian literature subscribe to an idea that Indian literature is one written in many languages. The course contents usually revolve certain literary trends in selected languages like Sanskrit, Bangla, Hindi, Urdu, Tamil etc. The selection of texts is made from the available translations. For offering courses on Indian literature or literature of a specific language, there is a need to have the basic material as follows:

1. Critical histories of literature in English and other prominent foreign languages like French, German, Russian, Spanish, Italian etc. The histories have to be as objective as possible so that the students are able to comprehend the literary trends and interpret them in their own way. These histories have to be pedagogically oriented.
2. Comparative literatures in Indian languages as well as selected foreign languages.
3. Authentic translation of prominent literary works from Indian languages into English and major foreign languages.
4. Publication of literary journals related to contemporary Indian languages.
5. Websites in all Indian languages providing up to date information on the concerned languages and literatures. The websites may provide the texts in translation with different interpretation.
6. Teaching of courses in literatures may not be an end in itself. Appropriate materials are to be developed for teaching Indian languages through literature.

There are no adequate materials as listed above for teaching of Indian literatures particularly Hindi and Urdu languages. Currently the selections of texts are made at random depending on the availability of literary texts in translation or interpreted in the language of medium of instruction.

### **2.1. Integrated courses on Languages and Literature**

Assigning a definite role to literature would depend upon the objectives, levels and situations of language teaching. It is important to address the issue of selections of sample or representative literature, and also to identify the objectives of the teaching of literature. The main objectives of second or foreign language teaching are to develop linguistic, socio-

linguistic, communicative, discursual, strategic competence of the learner at different levels. It is possible to make use of appropriate selections of literature as instructional materials in fulfilling these objectives.

The role of literature can be broadly categorized at two levels: Introductory, and Advanced. At the Introductory level, selections of the literary texts can be used for imparting instructions in four basic skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. For example, Literary text including prose and poetry can be used in developing listening comprehension. The oral narration of pieces of prose, recitation of poems, discussions of literary topics, literary dialogues and narratives can be used in developing speaking skills. Literary texts can be used for reading comprehension too. Imitating different types of literary styles for creative writing exercise, writing of guided compositions, paraphrasing of literary texts, and preparation of summaries etc. can be used for developing writing skills.

For teaching literature at the Advance level of a language course would require the identification of clear-cut objectives. The objectives may be as follows:

1. to appreciate the literature at the target language;
2. to understand the socio-cultural patterns of people who speak the language natively;
3. to understand the literary tradition in the target language;
4. to undertake comparative and contransive studies of the literature of the target language with that of the learner s mother tongue. etc.

In my opinion, the most difficult part of the curriculum planner and a teacher is to make selection of sample or representative literature. The process of selection involves the (a) gradation of literary texts; (b) choice of literary genres, (choice of literary styles and (d) choice of standard vs. non-standard varieties.

As far as the gradation of literary texts is concerned, it is suggested to employ the principles of simple to complex or known to unknown . It would mean to start with the selections from contemporary or modern literature and move to medieval and ancient texts. The simple reason being that the language used in contemporary literature is a form of living language the learner can easily encounter in the natural language environment. The transition from modern to ancient would be more smooth than from the old to modern. Similarly, it is suggested that selection of literary texts should be primarily made in the standard variety and the non standard varieties can be introduced at the advanced or higher levels.

It is possible to integrate the language and literature courses keeping in view the objectives of language teaching and learners interest. Conscious attempts need to be made to bring the two closer.

### **3. Translation**

Translation is becoming an important tool to enhance understanding between cultures. The source and target cultures are so different that translators face a challenge in enabling readers to understand the source culture. There is a need to present the cultural terms in a manner which represents the source culture most appropriately. A translator has three options: (a). adopting the source-language terms without any explanation, (b). adopting the source-language terms with extensive explanations, and (c). rewriting the text for the target-language audience. The first choice is preferable for several reasons: (i) the text reads more fluently; (ii) the translator is closer to the source culture; and (iii) the reader of the target texts gets a more genuine image of the source culture. Globalization has made this option possible and more acceptable. Translators are facing with new challenges. In the cross-cultural translation process, de-coding, re-coding and en-coding has to focus on cultural transposition. A translator has to be both bilingual and bicultural. Referring to the globalization in its

expanded meaning, I will make some remarks on translation and culture, problems of translation and the development of appropriate translation tools and methodology.

Translation involves the transposition of thoughts expressed in one language by one social group into the appropriate expression of another group. It entails a process of cultural decoding, re-coding and en-coding. Cultures are increasingly brought into greater contact with one another. Multiculturalism, which is a present-day phenomenon, has an impact on almost all peoples worldwide. Moreover, as technology is developing at a hectic pace, nations and their cultures have come very close to each other. We are at the threshold of a new international paradigm. Boundaries are disappearing and distinctions are being lost.

### 3.1. Translation and Culture

There are three major types of translations: (i) business and social studies, (ii) science and technology and (iii) literary. As far as the translations in the areas of business, social sciences, science and technology are concerned, English has more or less emerged as a *lingua franca*. Globalization is changing the face of business, and bringing many challenges. One of the biggest challenges is how to remove the language barriers that divide people and cultures around the world. No one language will ever be universally accepted as the sole vehicle of international communication. Translation will continue to be an important tool available for obtaining information and content in different languages for multinational customers, work forces, business partners and researchers. The success of technical communication in a national and/or international context depends primarily on translation. Increasing communication between different states or regions at the national level or at the international level brings the question of the status of the transfer of meaning and the act of translation in focus with a new urgency.

In the globalized world, besides modern sciences and technologies, literatures of other cultures and languages have found a wider audience. There is so much more for translators and writers and readers to explore and share. The transfer of the culture-bound terms from the source language into the target language is more acceptable in the translation of literary texts. Translators have more access to online information, such as dictionaries of lesser-known languages. The Internet too helps the reader to understand foreign elements in the text.

### 3.2. Problems in Translation

There are practical problems of translating the terminology in different subject areas. Mostly, the misunderstandings are due to the translation or interpretation of terms. There is an urgent need for the development and standardization of the multilingual terminology.

A good source-target language dictionary is in no way sufficient in technical translation. Equivalence plays a central role in translation. It expresses the correspondence of pairs of terms from the source and target language as far as their contents are concerned. There is a focus on functional equivalence of terms. An act of translation doesn't mean carrying out a word-for-word translation of terms from the source language into the target language. The contents of the terms must be transferred. There are various degrees of equivalence:

1. Complete conceptual equivalence
2. Partial equivalence or overlapping
3. Inclusion; a term merges into another
4. No conceptual equivalence

It is difficult to achieve typical equivalence or one-to-one correspondence in practice. It is not always possible to get unambiguous definitions. Meaning of a term can only be worked out completely from the context. It is a case of interpretative translation, based on interpretations. There is a danger of "interference" from one concept into another.

The problem of translation is a dual one because it concerns two different systems of languages and concepts respectively. There is a problem is the lack of conceptual clarity.

### 3.3. Translation Tools

The translation tools fall into different categories: bilingual terminologies and dictionaries, encyclopedic dictionaries, cultural readers, database, linguistic corpora etc. The existing bilingual and multilingual terminologies are often incomplete and do not keep pace with the general expansion and the shift in the meaning of terms in different disciplines.

There is a need to develop a multilingual terminological database for Indian languages like Eurodicautom of the European Commission's Translation Service. Available at [www.echo.lu/edic](http://www.echo.lu/edic), it contains more than 5 million entries - technical terms, abbreviations, acronyms and phraseology - in twelve languages.

### 3.4. Methodology

Three types of methodologies are adopted: presenting meanings in context, emphasizing the difference, and transfer method with special explanations. The meanings of terms become clear when the terms are considered in context. The knowledge of the context is supplied by amplifications in the text in footnotes or in appendices. In order to make the meanings clear differences in the source and target language concepts terms can be explained. In the "transfer method", further translation step is undertaken regarding the contents.

## 4. Agencies

Various agencies in India should have a prominent role in facilitating the teaching and learning of Indian language and literatures to non-native speakers of these languages in India and abroad. A few suggestions are made as follows:

1. The national language institutions and central universities like Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), Central Institute of Hindi (CIH), Central Hindi Directorate (CHD), National Council for the Promotion of Urdu Language (NCPUL), Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL), National Council for the Promotion of Sindhi Language (NCPSL), Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan (RSS), Mahatma Gandhi International Hindi Vishvavidhyalaya (MGIHV), Maulana Azad Urdu University (MANU) etc.;
2. State Academies, Textbook Boards, Language Departments and Translation Bureaus;
3. Central and State universities;
4. Reputed publishing houses committed for the development of Indian languages and literatures;
5. Inter-governmental agencies for the development of languages, literatures and cultures in collaboration;
6. The ICCR may support the international collaborative activities in the preparation of the need based language learning materials in Indian languages;

7. The Indian Embassies and High Commissions abroad may assist the programmes related to conducting of short-term workshops, seminars, teachers training in Indian languages and literatures;
8. The language teaching programmes run by Indian Embassies and Cultural Centres may supplement the programmes conducted by the universities and other institutions abroad. Well-trained faculty has to be provided in these Centres, who can collaborate with the local scholars in running the programmes successfully.

## 5. Conclusion

Foreign language teaching has undergone tremendous changes lately all over the world. It is no more a routine academic job. A lot of attention is paid in framing clear-cut objectives, devising of learner-centered need-based courses, preparation and selection of instructional materials including print and audio-visual materials, developing of online courses, use of different suitable language teaching methods, administering of language tests in measuring the achievement levels. As far as the teaching of Indian languages as foreign languages abroad, especially Hindi and Urdu, we have to go a long way.

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