WEAKENED LANGUAGES OF INDIA’S DIASPORA AND
A MODEL FOR LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION

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Abstract

This paper will describe languages that have been historically weakened under the influence of a variety of circumstances. I will suggest here a theoretical model that should help in upgrading the status of such languages in any speech community. We know of languages that have developed gradually from their colloquial status to literary status and have risen to meet the emerging linguistic needs of various professional domains. Such steps in language development are obviously in response to new professional, socio-cultural, and official needs of society. As the social life of people changes with time so does the social life of a language. We also see the reverse situation in the history of languages. We see many examples where languages have moved from their developed stage to linguistic degeneration. Such situations happen under the influence of a politically dominant and financially more rewarding language. The revival of such weakened languages becomes an arduous task with no guarantee of success.

Key words: language as social experience, heritage language loss, intergenerational transmission, heritage language as national resource, heritage vs. host language, taxonomy of speech communities, revitalization of languages, language use in U.S., accelerated language learning, sociolinguistic generalizations.

Résumé

Ce travail décrit les langues qui se sont historiquement affaiblies en raison de nombreuses circonstances. Je proposerai ici un modèle théorique qui pourrait contribuer à valoriser le statut de ces langues de toute communauté linguistique. Nous connaissons les langues qui se sont développées progressivement du statut de langue parlée au statut de langue littéraire et qui ont réussi à s’adapter aux besoins linguistiques de nombreux domaines professionnels. À l’évidence, de tels changements dans le développement de la langue viennent en réponse à de nouveau besoins professionnels, socio-culturels et officiels de la société. De même que la vie sociale des
populations se modifie avec le temps, la vie sociale d’une langue change également. Nous constatons aussi la situation inverse dans l’histoire des langues. Nous trouvons de nombreux exemples où les langues sont passées du stade développé à une dégénérescence linguistique. De telles situations émergent sous l’influence d’une langue politiquement dominante et financièrement plus valorisante. La renaissance de ces langues affaiblies devient alors une tâche ardue sans garantie de succès.

**Mots-clés:** langue comme expérience sociale, perte de langue du patrimoine, transmission intergénérationnelle, langue du patrimoine comme ressource nationale, langue patrimoniale vs. langue du pays d’accueil, taxonomie des communautés linguistiques, revitalisation des langues, utilisation de la langue aux USA, apprentissage accéléré des langues, généralisations sociolinguistiques.

1. **LANGUAGE AS SOCIAL EXPERIENCE**

Language is a marvel of human culture used to exchange subtle and creative ideas. Language is both a cultural product and a cultural practice. The quality of the social life of a language depends on various modes of communication for which it is used in that society. In other words, the social significance of a language becomes the determiner of its status in a particular society.

Contact with other cultures and their languages has been in existence for centuries. Wars, trade relations, relocation of communities have brought different speech communities together. As a consequence of the global movement of millions of people in today’s world, contact between languages from different regions of the world has grown considerably. In such a renewed state of contact, multilingualism has increased gradually. Multiple languages have coexisted and competed with each other. They also complement each other in carrying out the localized social functions. There are many situations in human history where politically or economically powerful languages have gradually usurped formal domains of language use and have pushed other languages to informal domains. Languages operating in formal domains become more significant for education and gain more prestige in that society.

In a diaspora, when we talk about language loss, language shift, language maintenance or language revival for a particular language, we are talking about that language at the community level. A community is rooted in its shared traditions, customs, and values that often endure over multiple generations. For instance, when we see the declining status of Bhojpuri and Hindi in Mauritius, we are talking about those languages at the community level. In other words, we are referring to a situation that is far beyond a few isolated individuals who may be still maintaining their proficiency in the language for one reason or the other.

Language is closely related to its culture from where it draws its contents and its lexical denotations. We often see that religion, which is a significant
component of culture, is strengthened in diasporas, and, as a result, many segments of the heritage language related to religion also survive. If other cultural components like festivals, food, music, sports, and language are weakened or obliterated altogether, then the language connected with those domains is also affected accordingly. Sociolinguistic studies of Indian and other diasporas have confirmed repeatedly that the heritage language is the weakest component to survive. In other words, heritage languages in the diasporic contexts are destined to disappear sooner or later. Also, in our study of the Guyanese Bhojpuri, it has emerged clearly that while heritage languages are forgotten, some linguistic elements of those languages survive generation after generation. Such linguistic segments find their referents in the corresponding segments of the culture, which also have survived. As languages do not function in a cultural vacuum, linguistic segments without their cultural referents around gradually recede to extinction. For example, while the Guyanese Bhojpuri/Hindi in Guyana vanished as a medium of communication around 1920, linguistic elements from domains of religion, food, and kinship terms have continued to be used to this day just as their referents have.

### Loss of Heritage Languages

Studies of all diaspora languages show that most of the heritage languages become weak in their new homelands. These languages are often relegated to a secondary position owing to their diminished use or non-use. For most of them, the attrition happens over two, three, or more generations. A few diaspora languages may survive longer. The heritage language Tamil disappeared in Guadeloupe and Reunion where French reigned supreme in all domains of language use and where the prestige of French had gripped the minds of the immigrants. Also, Indic languages Bhojpuri and Hindi did not survive at the community level in Mauritius under the important status of French and English. The fate of Indic languages in most other countries where Indian diaspora exists has been similar. There are a few exceptions to this generalization. Indic languages are continuing to some extent in Fiji and Suriname up to this day, and Tamil has survived in Sri Lanka after centuries. In Suriname and Fiji, however, there are social indicators that Indic languages are losing ground gradually. There is lesser use of the Indic languages among urbanites, educated people, and youngsters – which is a clear sign of the decline at the community level.

The weakening of languages is not limited to immigrant languages. Languages in their native environment also have also suffered under the domination of colonial languages like English, French, Spanish and Dutch. Hindi in India is one such case, which seems to be perennially stuck in a secondary position as English occupies almost all the prestigious domains of language.
use in India. The Irish in Ireland and Maori in New Zealand have also receded under the domination of English from their historically pristine positions.

Most heritage languages in diaspora communities disappear within a few generations. Heritage languages of most immigrants in Europe, the United States, and Canada have been evaporating in three generations after immigration. Gujarati and Panjabi, which had survived in East Africa for almost 100 years, started losing ground after their arrival in Western countries. Tamil emigration from countries like Sri Lanka, Malaysia, and Singapore to Western countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand show a similar story of language loss. The Tamil language that was preserved full-blown in the previous countries of residence mentioned above was considerably emaciated under the influence of Western culture.

The life span of heritage languages in some other countries has been longer than in countries of Western culture. In Guyana, the heritage language of the indentured laborers started losing ground around 1920, which was almost 80 years after their first immigration in 1838. This was around the 1920s when immigrants’ children started going to school for formal education. They learned English there and brought English back to their homes. The introduction of English in homes caused havoc on their heritage language Bhojpuri, which started receding from the scene in favor of English and the English-based creole (Gambhir, S. 1988). Trinidad & Tobago in the Caribbean Sea and Mauritius in the Indian Ocean have had a similar story of language shift. The language journey in Fiji and Suriname is slightly different. Although the historical factors involved in the immigration of indentured laborers to Guyana, Trinidad, Suriname, Fiji and Mauritius were very similar, heritage languages in Fiji and Suriname have survived as colloquial languages to this day.

To explain the variation in this phenomenon of language loss and language preservation in the above-mentioned communities of the diaspora, we need to delve deep into the socio-political circumstances of each community. Their unique circumstances that triggered these differences deserve further scrutiny. Possible reasons that caused different outcomes are size of the heritage community, recurrent replenishment with new speakers, geographical distance from the land of origin, perceived hierarchy between languages, relationship between the heritage and host communities (convivial or of conflict), public policy, and perceived economic importance of the heritage and host languages, etc.

For any diasporic community, learning the host language is a necessity but retaining the heritage language is an option. If the host language is socially and economically powerful, it grasps the minds of immigrants tightly from the very beginning, and the heritage language begins to appear redundant to
its speakers for most purposes. In domains outside the home, usefulness of the host language is significant in the workplace and marketplace. The use of one’s heritage language, however, becomes voluntary and contingent on individual choice. In homebound and heritage-related domains, the usefulness of one’s heritage language can be seen frequently amongst the first generation members. This may be out of habit, a conscious effort for retaining their cultural identity, desire to pass on their heritage language and culture to their children, or simply due to their limited proficiency in the host language. Their children, however, after they start going to school, are more influenced by their peers. Thus, the local language is planted in the youngsters’ minds in the school system. Such youngsters understand their heritage language in varying degrees but choose to respond in the host language (especially if the host language is English) if they knew that their parents would understand it.

Since the second generation members did not speak their heritage language with their parents, they did not develop much speaking proficiency in it. As a result, they do not use it with their children, who are thus not exposed to the heritage language in any significant measure. Thus, the heritage language is not transmitted to the third generation. This is a typical scenario of language loss in three generations. This scenario exhibits the fastest route to language disappearance in diasporic communities. The disruption of language transmission across generations is summed up as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intergenerational Language Transmission Scenario in Diaspora Communities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(plus sign indicates presence and minus sign indicates absence)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Generation</th>
<th>+ Speaking</th>
<th>+ Listening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Second Generation</td>
<td>– Speaking</td>
<td>+ Listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Generation</td>
<td>– Speaking</td>
<td>– Listening</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Heritage Languages Valued as National Resource**

Although heritage languages of almost all diasporas have demonstrated language loss, there is some fresh thinking on the study and promotion of heritage languages in the West. Language planners, administrators, and community organizers have felt the need to preserve heritage languages and also reverse language attrition to the extent possible. In the U.S., language planners and researchers are beginning to view immigrant languages as a national resource and are trying to include many of them in the foreign language curricula of schools and colleges. The President of the United States introduced on 5 January 2006, a new program named National Security Language Initiative, under which many additional language study programs have been introduced. The STARTALK summer program and NSLI-Youth language
immersion program deserve special mention. Under the STARTALK, “criti-
cal” languages Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Urdu, Persian, Swahili, Turkish, Dari,
Russian and Korean have been funded for holding summer programs ranging
from kindergarten to university level. The NSLI-Youth program is a study-
abroad language immersion program for high school students to experience
new cultures first hand and learn new languages. UNESCO has also been advo-
cating preservation of language diversity for a long time.

Host Language vs Heritage Language

If humans are neurologically equipped to be multi-lingual why people in
a diaspora need to give up their heritage language for making way for a host
language to come in? Why are they not able to keep the one they already have
and add another one to their repertoire? Bilingual and multilingual communi-
ties exist all over the world and hence being bilingual or multilingual should
not present a problem. Even in diaspora communities, there are a few instances
of such dual control of the heritage language and the host language. South
Asians settled in East African countries were able to preserve their Gujarati
or Panjabi throughout their stay in those countries. Similarly, Tamils, who
emigrated from India to Sri Lanka more than 2000 years ago, have continued
to speak their heritage language up to this day. Both the communities, of
course, had also learned the local languages, Swahili in Africa and Sinhalese
in Sri Lanka. The nomadic Gypsies have preserved the core of their Indic
language even after centuries of their separation from their homeland India.

It is true that people are indeed capable of becoming bilingual or mul-
tilingual by retaining their heritage language along with the language of
the new country in which they settle. But there is widespread evidence that
heritage languages of immigrant communities have not survived in the long
run. Diminished use of the language results directly from the diminished
need for its use in the new environment. As the host language becomes the
preferred language for climbing the economic and social ladder, the decline
of another language for which few domains are left to operate in, becomes
inevitable. In Western countries, the prestige of the Western lifestyle and the
Western languages pushes the heritage languages down. Such is immigrants’
own attitudes that relegate their heritage languages to a secondary position.
Such silent pressures are obviously from below, and not from above. Even
the awareness of advantages of knowing multiple languages are not able to
prevent the loss of heritage languages. Cognitive benefits of bilingualism, the
value of pluralistic polities for cognitive development, opportunities to study
and work abroad, and an upswing in the cultural exchange between diaspora
communities and their countries of origin have not made any significant
difference in the situation.
2. TAXONOMY OF SPEECH COMMUNITIES

Fishman’s scale GIDS (Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale), which has inspired much research in the area of language vitality, rests on the centrality of the conception of disruption of the intergenerational transmission. Later, two different metrics (UNESCO, Ethnologue) with different orientation were also developed and used in assessing vitality in different speech communities. A detailed discussion of the three scales is found in Lewis & Simon (2009).

My scale given below is a global scale that covers all languages from the strongest to the weakest. The scale covers languages in their native places as well as in their transplanted environment. This scale is not designed to assess language vitality of any speech community although it presents a comparative view of the status of any language on a scale of vitality. The following 8-point scale suggests a scale from strong language communities to weak language communities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>Languages which are full-blown, vigorous, vibrant and are used in most formal and informal domains of language use. Examples include English, French, German, Japanese, Chinese, Dutch, Arabic, Persian, Hebrew in their native environments.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Languages in their native environment, which are spoken and read extensively and have vast written literature, but are relegated to the secondary position in their communities. They are not used in most formal domains of language use due to the presence of another dominant language in the arena, although the intergenerational transmission is unabated. Examples include India’s languages (Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, etc.) under the domination of English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Languages which are predominantly colloquial, have limited written literature (mostly folk literature), and their intergenerational transmission is unabated. Examples include Bhojpuri, Awadhi in India.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Languages which are predominantly colloquial, are in the process of revival, and their intergenerational transmission is limited. Examples include Maori, Hawaiian, Irish, Sanskrit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Languages which are predominantly for reading comprehension with no native speakers. Examples: Sanskrit, Latin, Old Greek.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Languages which are not spoken, not read, no intergenerational transmission, have a few remaining linguistic elements, but still a part of the community’s socio-political identity. Examples include Guyanese Bhojpuri, Trinidad Bhojpuri, Mauritian Bhojpuri.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Languages which are almost extinct in a particular region but have an emerging sense of socio-political identity. Examples include Guadeloupe Tamil, Reunion Tamil.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Languages that were spoken in the past but are not spoken anymore, not read, and have no native speakers, but still a part of the socio-political identity of descendants to some extent. Examples: Andaman languages in India and many American Indian languages in America.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although languages in category one can be considered full-bodied, robust languages enjoying prestige in the eyes of its speakers and outsiders, these must have developed to their present status only gradually. No language begins with a full array of functions, and every language evolves as the speech community confronts new needs. In language types 2 to 7, more and more language elements did not develop either in the beginning stages or became dormant or dead in a multilingual situation at a later stage. While linguistic elements can be revived, but dormant or dead languages face a much larger and formidable challenge to revive.

Theoretically, any language can be upgraded on the scale suggested here. But, the fundamental pre-requisite in every case is the real-life need for the elevation. Once need is established in the minds of its users, proper nurturing of the language is likely to follow. Furthermore, to be on track for development, a language has to be actively in use so that needs are felt, appraised, determined, and then met in the right context. New words are coined or borrowed as necessary. On a different dimension of language development, speakers exercise their creativity to expand the language to new horizons. It is through extensive usage that efficient and crisp expressions develop over time. New collocations get standardized, and redundancy is removed. New figurative usages of simile or metaphor develop through the extension of literal meaning. Collective human creativity becomes instrumental in providing new shades of meaning. In developed languages, words attested to in the dictionary, list multiple meanings, which reflects a kind of enrichment that developed through written literature. English has gone through this process extensively and intensively. Some languages that continue to be confined to their colloquial roles do not blossom to the same extent. Classical languages are stuck in their traditional roles while their descendant vernaculars take over new roles in communication.

Language contact is another venue for language development. Different languages in contact borrow words and sounds from each other to meet new concepts to address new cultural situations. Dominated languages borrow more than dominating languages. Hindi borrowed hundreds of words from Perso-Arabic sources and English, and along with those words also came new sounds ख़, ग़, ज़, and फ़. The latter two sounds came into standard Hindi first through Perso-Arabic languages first and were later reinforced through borrowings from English, and both of these sounds are currently social markers in the Hindi speech community, and this is an example of semantic enrichment of the language. Borrowings from English have introduced many new concepts which are now an integral part of the culture.

In the final run, where a language would eventually measure up on the above scale depends on specific sociolinguistic factors in the history of that
language. Languages with greater economic rewards and languages with official patronage have received more acceptance in the society and have gradually ascended to a higher position on the scale. The aspiration to form a strong, unified nation led Hebrew to ascend on the scale to become the lingua franca and the national language of Israel, and this is a unique example in the history of mankind.

3. REVITALIZATION OF DEBILITATED LANGUAGES

I propose here a model of language revitalization with specific application to weakened languages in their native land as well as in transplanted communities abroad. We can apply this model of revitalization to Hindi in India, Irish in Ireland, and Maori in New Zealand. All the three languages are in their native environment. The model is also equally applicable to India’s diaspora communities in Western nations or the sugar plantation countries. Based on my research about Bhojpuri/Hindi in the Caribbean area and elsewhere, I propose here a five-pronged model of language development. The five constituents for the target language retention, recovery, or revitalization within this model are as follows:

1. Real life need of learning or retaining a language
2. Stimulus to learn and use the language
3. Opportunities for learning the language
4. Opportunities for using the language
5. Opportunities for proficiency development

This model is sequential in its operation. It starts with real life need and moves on to other stages. The model implies that getting to subsequent stages is based on an essential pre-requisite, which is real life Need for the language one wants to retain, recover, or revitalize. This need-based movement from the initial stage to the next becomes the trajectory for the language development.
The fifth component assumes systematic work to widen one’s vocabulary and general language proficiency through extensive reading and language use. These five elements work in a loop and allow endless repetitions depending on the targeted proficiency level. The revival of a heritage language or even the retention of a heritage language seems directly proportional to the presence of these five elements.

In the model proposed here, real life need for learning a language is at the root of this cycle of five elements. Need to learn a language triggers inducement to learn it. Once need, and the incentive to fulfill the need are planted in the head of an individual, then one would explore opportunities to learn the heritage language. Once the basic language is learned, the learner is ready to find domains where he or she can use the target language for practice and for developing proficiency.

The human sphere of needs goes beyond physiological and tangible needs. Human needs are along various dimensions – basic needs, emotional needs, and self-fulfilling needs. While achieving physiological needs are a greater attraction for most people, the achievement of abstract level needs, such as self-identity enhancement or deep understanding of cultural concepts of another society can become significant needs for some people. Needs, it seems, are mostly individual but can also emerge collectively at the community level. The common denominator in all the above-mentioned instances is the intense need that triggers an action for fulfilling it. If there is no need, an ensuing action to fulfill it is unlikely. There is a clear distinction between want and need. In the context of language learning, we can say that need to communicate with others, to read a foreign literature, to watch foreign language movies, or else to conduct fieldwork abroad for research can also be at the root of learning a new language.

This model builds on the COD framework developed in Grin (1990, 2003) and expanded in Lo Bianco, (2008a, 2008b) to examine language vitality within and across speech communities. It is based on three basic principles of Capacity Development, Opportunity Creation, and Desire (C.O.D.). The basic premise of the C.O.D. model was to assess the vitality of individual languages although the above-mentioned authors have also applied it to their revitalization studies of Irish, Welsh, and Basque in Europe and Maori in New Zealand. In the C.O.D. model, the three components are not sequential, and they interact with each other in any order. For assessing the vitality of a language, the components Capacity, Opportunity, and Desire can be looked at independently. However, for increasing the vitality of a language, boosting any one factor results in strengthening the others.

The C.O.D. model is somewhat different from the model proposed here. While the C.O.D. model seems primarily for weakened languages in their
native lands but the model proposed here aims at both revitalization of native languages as well as transplanted languages removed from their place of origin. It is my hope that the additional elements and their re-organization in the proposed model here will increase its applicability to a wider sphere.

It is a common sight that voluntary organizations engage in organizing weekend schools and summer programs to teach heritage languages without assessing real life need of their learners. They neither share any sources of incentive with them nor any possible venues for its use. As a result, the outcome regarding language proficiency is modest. A real life need for something automatically gives rise to a desire, which gets strengthened by a stimulus (mainly economic) to acquire it. In the context of language acquisition, once the need and stimulus are established, one explores opportunities for learning the language. In a foreign land, professional opportunities for language learning and venues for using the language are hard to find and form a formidable challenge for a needy person.

Once you have learned your target language, where would you use it? As we shall see below, there are not many opportunities for practicing the target language in real-life in foreign lands. Appropriate domains for language use are a precursor to cultivating proficiency in the target language. The following table presents an analysis of opportunities for the second generation for using Hindi as a foreign language in the United States.

### Degree of Hindi Use by the Second Generation in the United States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domains</th>
<th>Ample Use</th>
<th>Some Use</th>
<th>Very Little Use</th>
<th>Almost No Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Home</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents/grandparents</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L, S</td>
<td>L, S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindi movies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu music</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community Events</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian stores</td>
<td></td>
<td>L</td>
<td></td>
<td>L, S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian restaurants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>L, S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious &amp; cultural centers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S, L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>L, S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities in foreign language</td>
<td>L, S, R</td>
<td>W</td>
<td></td>
<td>S, L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>classrooms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research at the university level</td>
<td>L, S, R</td>
<td>W</td>
<td></td>
<td>S, L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work Place</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleagues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S, L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S, L</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(L=listening; S=speaking; R=reading; W=writing) (Based on Gambhir & Gambhir 2014: 170)

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As the above table presents, there are venues for developing listening comprehension, but there is very limited need for developing reading proficiency. Also, there are very few situations where one can practice speaking skills. The opportunities for speaking the target language in diasporic communities are not likely to be found outside the heritage community.

4. ACCELERATED LANGUAGE LEARNING

In the modern age of technology, no matter how far a diasporic community is relocated from its original homeland, it can stay connected with the current waves of its native culture. Access to the internet has made tons of authentic exposure to the heritage culture accessible to relocated communities. In communities where cultural exposure is extensive, heritage languages are not likely to become extinct entirely. The situation is comparable to a tree, which may look dead but whose seed is still alive. Similarly, a heritage language, though seemingly may be dead, can be revived with proper nurturing. Evidence for this hypothesis comes from American classrooms where a large number of language learners come to study their heritage languages. It is the experience of many instructors that the language learning by heritage learners is much faster than in non-heritage learners. The same is also true for associate heritage learners. The associate heritage learners are those who speak a different Indic language but share many facets of the culture related to the target language (V. Gambhir 2008). For example, in a Hindi classroom, students coming from Hindi speaking families are ancestral heritage speakers, but students coming from Tamil-speaking families would be associate heritage speakers. Here, two points merit consideration for any empirical research on this issue. Someone who hails from a Tamil-speaking family and comes to a Hindi class may be in a better position than someone who hails from a Hindi-speaking family and is learning Tamil. The reason is that Hindi is a language of wider communication in India as well as in diasporic communities as compared to Tamil, and in all probability, someone from a Tamil-speaking family is likely to have more exposure to Hindi than the other way round. A second point that merits consideration is the concept of linguistic distance between languages. For example, the linguistic distance between Hindi and Tamil is larger than the distance between Hindi and Gujarati. As a result, someone coming from a Gujarati-speaking family is likely to learn Hindi faster than someone coming from a Dravidian language background. The reason is simple. Hindi and Gujarati share many cognates, and the syntactic congruity between the two is enormous. Same way, the linguistic distance between Hindi and Tamil is expected to be shorter than between Hindi and a European language. Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages, though they belong to different genetic families, they have converged linguistically and
culturally during centuries of their co-existence and interaction. This has made multilingual India a “linguistic area” where languages from different genetic families have developed common structural and semantic characteristics (cf. Emeneau 1956).

Given the constraints on language learning and language use opportunities in distant lands, our best hope is that a heritage language will be taught and learned as a foreign language in academic institutions, and this is what is happening in the United States now. Languages of many immigrant groups (not all) are part of the foreign language curricula, and heritage students and others are learning them as foreign languages. In the acquisition process, heritage students have some advantage over non-heritage learners due to their familiarity with the culture. However, such familiarity diminishes with every successive generation. I have suggested a term fortage for such a language situation, which is a blend of two words – foreign and heritage. The language acquisition in the fortage method will be more like a foreign language but with characteristics of teaching and learning a heritage language. While foreign languages follow a bottom-up approach, heritage languages are best helped with a top-down approach. With a proper blend of the methodology, the language acquisition process is likely to be faster for heritage learners.

The internet technology for online courses is bringing hope and success within reach of communities. The technological devices like Skype and FaceTime and pairing with appropriate conversation partners abroad are beginning to work and making the learning process less formidable. Study abroad or traveling abroad and living in the community where the target language is spoken is a better alternative but it is demanding in terms of time and money and is beyond the reach of most learners.

5. INDIAN DIASPORA AND SOCIOLINGUISTIC GENERALIZATIONS
Based on our sociolinguistic studies of Indian diaspora countries, following generalizations in the context of language preservation and language shift seem to hold:

1. If the host language is prestigious and economically rewarding, the new immigrants have a high stimulus to adopt it enthusiastically, and their enthusiasm goes overboard to the extent that they let their heritage languages go. The best example to support such a situation is the disappearance of Indic languages of Indians from East Africa after they migrated to the United Kingdom and the United States in 1972. Although their languages had survived in East Africa throughout their long stay there, but they disappeared in three generations in the West.

2. Three social indicators synchronously point out to the gradual decline of a language. These three indicators are as follows: a. when urbanites
use a specific language lesser than their rural counterparts; b. when educated people use the language lesser than their uneducated counterparts; and, c. when the younger generation is using the same language lesser than their older kinfolks. In a composite picture, the three indicators constitute lesser visibility of the language in visual and aural forms. Similarly, the reverse direction of the three indicators would point out to the increased use of the language when the language would be going through a turnaround to show an upsurge.

3. When a language is used minimally in formal domains of language use, the language is weakened; and when it starts showing diminished use in informal domains, the language starts receding altogether from the community. In diaspora communities, such a process is extant and obvious and often completes in three generations.

4. All learning is need-based. We acquire a knowledge of something, or we acquire a skill to fulfill a specific need that would serve a practical purpose in our day-to-day life. Furthermore, we acquire any new knowledge or learn any new skill only to the extent we require to address our real life needs. We seldom go beyond that extent. Our development in those areas stops at a certain point of the development trail. In the case of most professionals, people are usually proficient in their professional registers, but outside their professional field, their proficiency is often not of the same level. Some individuals may want to achieve a higher level of proficiency in the area of their choice, but unless it becomes a real life need to be dictated by their profession or some other compelling role in the society, it is not likely to go forward. There is a difference between wants and needs. While wants are infinite, insatiable, ephemeral in nature and they come and go, but needs are finite, crucial for our perceived success level, and which eventually lead to the invention and intervention of strategies to achieve them.

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One author


Edited books


