

Listening to many voices: Social Justice Themes and Technology in Developing Hindi Listening Proficiency

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Abstract

This paper examines the use of authentic materials related to social justice topics through two technology platforms—VoiceThread and PlayPosit—in developing listening proficiency for Hindi in flipped/asynchronous and traditional classes. Examples of different types of activities and assessments will be demonstrated for each platform. These examples will be considered in light of current research in effective strategies for listening activities and assessment.

This paper will also consider how to select relevant content and tasks based on ILR/ACTFL proficiency-based standards. Suggestions and examples will be offered for various levels and their use in a standard university Hindi curriculum. These considerations will be drawn from the author's experience as a team member in a project to develop Hindi proficiency guidelines for a listening assessment tool that is being developed as a companion to the OPI assessment.

Keywords: Listening assessment; Technology; Hindi pedagogy; Flipped class; Online class; Remote learning; Asynchronous class; VoiceThread; PlayPosit; Social issues

1) Introduction

Listening is one of the most challenging skills to develop in a foreign language classroom, due to the natural latency of listening skills in the acquisition, as well as the difficulty of creating meaningful assessments to track progress for the benefit of both students and teachers. Technology now offers a wealth of content and software platforms for use in language classes, yet the potential of this technology in Hindi instruction remains largely untapped and untethered from research in the development of listening proficiency. Although technology-based listening activities can be used in traditional face-to-face instruction, the “flipped classroom” model is particularly well-suited to self-guided listening activities that provide immediate feedback to students. This is also relevant in the case of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, when most classes are online.

A key goal of listening tasks in the target language (L2) is to assist students in understanding the sound, tone, thought process, culture, and word choices that native speakers of the L2 make in their daily lives. Authentic materials are preferable for this goal because students are exposed to a variety of other features of the culture in the L2 while they accomplish the listening task objectives. Lessons based on social justice topics in Hindi listening can benefit students in understanding the language as well as social complexity. I will provide background for this approach, including (2.1) a discussion of

the challenges for using authentic listening materials for lower-level students, and (2.2) a guide for how to determine proficiency standards while creating such listening activities. In section (2.3), I will discuss how and why I use authentic social justice topics in listening materials and activities. Section 3 is dedicated to discussing technology solutions, and section 4 outlines three sample lesson plans with different types of activities and assessments that integrate top-down and bottom-up processing. In particular, I will explain how and why I use online tools such as VoiceThread and PlayPosit to create such listening activities and assessments.

2.1) Challenges for Teaching Listening

When we teach Hindi as a foreign language in a context where students have few opportunities to listen and speak the L2 outside of class, it is important to integrate listening activities in and outside the classroom as much as possible. For this reason, ACTFL recommends that learning takes place through the target language for 90% or more of classroom time, except in immersion program models where the target language should be used exclusively (ACTFL, 2021).

While this is a laudable target, there are several challenges in using authentic materials, especially with lower-level students. The natural speaking speed of native speakers often intimidates new L2 learners when they listen to an authentic listening passage for the first time. To increase

learners' comfort and familiarity, it is important for teachers to introduce authentic listening materials in a course as early as possible. Teacher-talk is not a substitute for authentic texts: while speaking in L2 classes, teachers are sympathetic; they slow down and repeat sentences in a way that does not happen in real life. On the contrary, according to Larry Vandergrift, "exposure to authentic-type texts and natural speech rate is preferred by L2 learners and can be beneficial for listening development" (Vandergrift, 2007, p. 200).

Other problems arise because authentic listening passages include language that is "more redundant, full of false starts, rephrasing, and elaborations. Incomplete sentences, pauses, and overlaps are common" (Nunan, 2003, p.24). Authentic materials have a range of vocabulary, phrases, and grammar that do not match with the students' L2 level of understanding because in actual conversation people do not restrict their grammar and vocabulary. For these reasons, some students may have anxiety about listening and complain that when they watch a video and listen at the same time, it takes them too long to comprehend.

Although most agree on the usefulness of authentic texts, it can be difficult to create meaningful, authentic tasks. In real life, we seldom perform activities similar to the fill-in-the-blank or multiple-choice tasks that are so common in language classes. Because listening is an interpretive skill,

listening tasks should be modeled on real-life situations and responses that target different strategies. Top-down and bottom-up processing are two strategies that learners use to approach listening passages. Both should be activated and integrated in activities whenever possible. Bottom-up processing involves attending to isolated pieces of language such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Top-down processing attends to the overall meaning and uses prior knowledge and experience to predict content. These strategies can be used in designing common types of tasks, including listening for specific information, listening for gist, and listening for inference.

2.2) Proficiency Standards in the Design of Listening Activities

I draw upon my training and experience as an ACTFL OPI and WPT tester and rater in order to determine proficiency benchmarks for my classes and design level-appropriate listening activities. According to ILR, the length, purpose, and language of a given passage must be factored in its overall rating. This is similar to the ACTFL OPI standard, where the proficiency level depends on four categories: functions, content, accuracy, and text type. There are four proficiency levels: Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, and Superior. Students in the novice level can produce words, phrases, and lists in the context of daily life, whereas intermediate level

students can produce strings of sentences, and ask and answer simple questions in the context of familiar topics. Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced have sublevels of low, mid, and high. A low sublevel can barely complete that level's task, while a mid can sustain that particular level's task. Sublevel high can complete all the tasks of the level plus some higher-level tasks.

2.3) Incorporating Social Justice Issues in Listening Activities

I often choose authentic listening materials related to social justice topics in India so that students can become more informed about Hindi speakers' history, culture, present experiences, and hopes. "Social justice is a philosophy, an approach, and actions that embody treating all people with fairness, respect, dignity, and generosity" (Nieto, 2010, p.46).

As a new teacher, I avoided using social justice issues because I was worried about how students would react to hardships and problems in India. I was afraid that students would lose interest in India if they learned about issues such as the water crisis, electricity scarcity, sexual harassment and rape, education system, health, and pollution. My inclination was to show students an ideal India like in Bollywood movies where people are singing, dancing, and celebrating life. However, I realized that this was misguided when a colleague of mine noted, "If we don't tell them the

truth, that doesn't mean it doesn't exist. How will they face reality?"

From that point on, I have incorporated materials to prepare classes according to world-readiness standards. After using these materials in class, I found that my students became more engaged in activities and discussions. For a number of years, I have organized my courses around weekly themes based on social justice issues and related authentic materials. Recently I co-authored a Hindi reader for beginning and intermediate learners using social justice topics published by Routledge (Knapczyk & Knapczyk, 2020).

3) VoiceThread and PlayPosit for Flipped Classroom Activities VoiceThread

I typically incorporate one listening activity every two weeks that involves both traditional and flipped classroom approaches. Most of my classes include a mix of heritage and non-heritage students, which makes it difficult to balance listening activities. I have found that non-heritage students can keep pace with heritage students in activities that focus on short advertisements or voicemails. But as I begin to incorporate longer videos, non-heritage students feel anxiety about in-class listening tasks. Moreover, as Erickson has suggested, "class time prevents . . . [the teacher] from playing a passage multiple time. VT enables students to experience the 'human element' of asynchronous interactions typically

missing in the text-based discussion” (Erickson, 2020, p.300). For these reasons, I prefer flipped classroom assignments where students can watch the video several times on their own and complete an activity to prepare for an in-class discussion.

I have found VoiceThread and PlayPosit to be the most effective platforms for creating such listening activities. VoiceThread (VT) allows the teacher to create a listening activity around a piece of content in which students must listen and respond in an appropriate manner. Activities can be expanded to include teacher-to-student and student-to-student interactions, as well as task-based progressions through a sequence of activities. VT lends itself to the flipped classroom model because tasks are completed by students asynchronously.

In VT, students can contribute by recording audio and video, either with their phones or by recording to VT directly. In VT each thread is separate, so students can listen to and respond to each other’s comments. I find VT an excellent platform for students to perform oral presentations and discussions with partners. I ask students to record oral presentations on VT which are based on the theme of the week. Before this assignment, students have read, written, listened, and spoken about the theme during in-class activities. The assignment in VT is time-bound, opening, and closing at

certain times. A rubric is attached to each assignment, so that students have clear instructions about how to fulfill the task.

According to one of my Hindi students, “VoiceThread is a good way to improve our speaking skills and having an example is helpful. I think VoiceThread has been helpful in teaching me how to read better, and it also helped me immensely with my pronunciation. It also allows time to speak and [the option to] cancel when I make mistakes. It lets me practice Hindi over and over for speaking and comprehension” (Knapczyk, 2016).

PlayPosit

PlayPosit (PP) allows teachers to meld listening content, tasks, and assessment. Its primary use is to insert comprehension tasks and questions into an audio or video clip. Tasks can be tailored for both guided and open-ended responses, from true-false questions to reflections on aspects of culture. “The educators can manage the learning process more effectively, assessing the students on their comprehension of the materials and, at the same time, providing them with constructive feedback. For instance, an educator can start a PlayPosit task with reflective pause interactivity to let the students set goals and understand what the purpose of the task is, and, on a broader sense, how it can connect to their lives” (Shahrokni, 2018, p.113).

For guided tasks, students receive immediate feedback on the accuracy of their comprehension, and the teacher can guide and control their progression through an activity based on this built-in formative assessment. Like VT, these functions are asynchronous, making it ideal for the flipped classroom.

PP lets a teacher create questions such as free response, multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, discussion forum, and polling survey. This is useful for helping students to learn expressions and phrases. The video pauses automatically to let students complete an exercise and it requires them to redo the exercise until they answer correctly. PP makes it easy to choose and edit a clip, and embed exercises within a video. Grading and feedback also occur automatically as students progress through the assignments.

4) Sample lesson plans

Below are outlines of three sample lesson plans for listening activities from my undergraduate elementary and intermediate classes.

Sample lesson plan #1: Novice-high to Intermediate-low

The first example is from an elementary first-semester course. This lesson is appropriate for first-semester students who have a Novice-high proficiency because the content is simple and somewhat predictable, with short sentences in the present tense.

This listening passage is based on a shopping theme. I selected a video advertisement in which a girl is in a market and asks the prices of a few souvenirs (CP Plus, 2015). In this clip, a boy comes to the shop and starts misbehaving with the girl by touching her inappropriately, though he pretends that this is unintentional. This makes the girl uncomfortable. The shopkeeper notices this and says, “This is being recorded by the surveillance camera.” This changes the boy’s tone, and he apologizes to the girl by saying, “Sorry sister.”

In this class, my focus is on shopping and an unexpected situation. For the pre-listening activity students discuss the following questions with a partner: How much do they spend each week on shopping? Where do they go shopping? What things do they want from the market? After this discussion, they brainstorm the phrases and keywords that they may use while shopping.

During the first phase of the listening activity, students watch the advertisement and circle the phrases and keywords from their lists that they hear in the video. Next, I have students complete an assignment based on this video using PlayPosit with their phone or laptop. Student responses are recorded in PlayPosit which helps make them accountable. Students work individually so that they can complete the questions at their own pace and not be tempted to skip questions or use English with a partner.

As students watch the video clip, they complete multiple-choice questions in PlayPosit such as: What kind of market is this? What is the phrase used by the girl to ask the prices? What are the phrases the boy used for asking to see items in the shop? Such guided questions test students' understanding of bottom-up elements of the passage. These questions are followed by free-response questions which elicit more top-down approaches and personal reactions to the overall meaning of the video. Students listen to my pre-recorded questions and record their responses on PlayPosit. Examples of questions include, what are the differences you see between markets in the US and in India? What would you do if you were the girl in this video?

These listening activities in PlayPosit are followed by a shopping role-play. This activity is useful after the listening activities because in the video clip students have seen how to ask for the prices and to see items. Through these activities, students practice responding to questions and requesting information using simple sentences and phrases in the context of immediate survival needs and personal information.

Sample Lesson Plan: First semester Elementary Hindi

Topic: Shopping

Duration: 40 minutes

Materials: Advertisement of CP PLUS surveillance camera, PlayPosit questionnaire, role-play materials: Indian currency, images of vegetables, groceries, and fruits

Goals: Students listen for how people ask for prices and request things they need and want in the market.

Students will be able to identify the difference between markets in the U.S and India.

Students will be able to recognize the problem of eve-teasing in the marketplace.

Students practice listening skills.

Students can express, ask about, and react to preferences, feelings, and opinions about shopping using simple sentences.

Activities

Pre-listening discussion:

How much do you spend each week on shopping?

Where do you go for shopping?

What things do you want from the market?

Brainstorm the phrases and keywords that may be useful while shopping.

Listening activity: While watching the video, circle the phrases and keywords from your list that you hear in the video.

Post-listening:

(1) Discuss in the class, teacher to students:

How do people ask prices in the video?

How do you like the boy?

Does eve-teasing happen in the U.S.?

Why do they have a surveillance camera in the market?

(2) PlayPosit activity

Guided multiple choice:

What kind of market is this?

What is the phrase used by the girl to ask the prices?

What are the phrases the boy used for asking to see items in the shop?

Free-response questions:

What are the differences you see between markets in the U.S and India?

What would you do if you were the girl in this video?

(3) Role-play

You are in India and trying to buy vegetables for making the dish ‘palak paneer’ along with a few fruits in order to throw a party. You go to the market where you see several vegetable-sellers. You

have only 100 rupees, but you must buy 5 things. Ask for the prices, bargain, and then calculate.

The person who buys 5 things for less than 100 rupees is the winner.

Example questions and phrases:

How much is spinach?

Do you have tomatoes?

Will you give me a discount?

Is it the correct price?

Why are mangoes so expensive? It is mango season.

Are these bananas good?

What is the total?

I am going to the other shops.

Sample lesson plan #2: Intermediate-low/mid

The second example is from a second-semester elementary class and is based on a clip from the TV show “Satyamev Jayate.” In this talk show, the host interacts with people from all walks of life and discusses topics that are sensitive and thought-provoking. In this video clip, the host takes opinions from male and female audience members about their definitions of “masculinity” (StarPlus, 2014). This debate is interesting for viewers because what is true for one gender is not for the other.

My goals for this lesson are to guide my students to think about the qualities that men think they should possess and compare this with the comments of women in the audience. From a language perspective, students learn many adjectives for describing the qualities of different people. They learn how to express their opinions and use humor. They hear several people’s speaking styles. In this video clip, they write on the board in Hindi about the qualities of an ideal man. Students find it very interesting and get engaged with the issue.

For many second semester students, this authentic material is difficult because people are speaking at their natural pace. This task is made easier by giving students bottom-up tasks where they focus on grammar and vocabulary. This video is used in a flipped classroom activity where students watch the video and complete the assignment at home. I give them only

a portion of the video for this assignment and save the rest for an in-class activity. Students fill in the blanks with the words and grammar that they hear in the video. I also give them a vocabulary list along with the video.

My classes include a mix of heritage and non-heritage learners and flipped classroom activities help to ensure each group of students is given adequate time to listen repeatedly. If I use this activity in class, some non-heritage students complain that it is too difficult. Meanwhile, heritage students jump in and give the answer after every pause. This leads non-heritage students to give up and look to the heritage students for the answers. The flipped classroom format avoids such problems in a mixed-level class.

The video clip for this activity is 5-6 minutes long. For the class activity, we approach this video from a more top-down perspective. I start the pre-listening activity by asking questions: What are the qualities of your best friend? What are the qualities that you see in the person sitting beside you in class? What are the traits you don't like about a person?

This is followed by an in-class listening activity using PlayPosit. Before class, I insert pauses in the video every few minutes along with questions to discuss. I show students the video in class and pause after the men in the audience finish talking. The students discuss these questions: What are the qualities that they think a male must have and why? What

percent of males in India do you think have these qualities? Whose opinion do you like the most and why? Next, I pause the video after the women in the video talk about the qualities of men. Then students discuss whose opinion they like the most and the least.

These listening activities are appropriate for students at the Intermediate low/mid-level of the ACTFL proficiency-based standards. These activities involve listening to formal and informal L2 discourse and giving preferences using a string of sentences. This video is appropriate for this level because at this point in the course students are familiar with most of the major time frames of the language and have practiced basic vocabulary.

Sample Lesson Plan: Second semester Elementary Hindi

Topic: Qualities and personalities of people

Duration: 30 minutes

Materials: Video from Satyamev Jayate (When Masculinity Harms Men), fill-in-the-blank handout and a glossary, PlayPosit

Goals:

Grammar: Students listen for pronouns and verb endings.

Students practice listening skills. They learn how to express their opinions and use humor.

Students learn many adjectives for describing the qualities of a person.

Students think critically about their beliefs about the ideal qualities that men and women should possess.

Students learn cultural expectations about these qualities in India.

Activities

1) Flipped classroom homework assignment: Only three-quarters of the video clip is used for this activity. Fill-in-the-blank activity with missing words and grammar.

Pre-listening: Study the glossary. Discussion questions:

What are the qualities of your best friend?

What are the qualities you see in the person next to you in the class?

What are the traits you dislike about this person?

2) Listening Activity: Guided activities on PlayPosit: Pause and interact

What are the qualities that you think a male should have and why?

Guess what percent of males in India have these qualities?

Whose opinion do you like the most and why? (first pause-male audience)

Whose opinion do you like the most and the least? (second pause-female audience)

Homework: Write an essay describing the qualities of people. Compare yourself with one of your friends.

Describe 5 qualities that you share and 5 that you do not.

Sample lesson plan #3: Intermediate-high/Advanced-low

The final listening example is from a second semester the intermediate class where I use another clip from the “Satyamev Jayate” talk show (Satyamev Jayate, 2016). The topic of this episode is domestic violence, and I use a clip where the host interviews people who abuse their spouses and asks the reasons for their behavior. This episode also includes NGO workers who explain why men feel so empowered that they dare to abuse their partners. When I show this video to my students, they ask me many questions about women’s education in India and other related topics.

To prepare for this listening activity, I use a range of materials to discuss this topic such as magazines, posters, and newspapers. Students read about this topic in Hindi magazines before this listening activity. Two students read one article, make a glossary, and write a summary that they share with the whole class. In class, we add a few stories about people who see domestic violence around them but fail to speak up because they have become accustomed to it in their lives. For example, I tell a story to my students about one of my friends who earned her doctorate in women studies from Delhi. Her husband was abusive and started hitting her from day one of their marriage, but she had hope that he would change one day.

One day she said to me, “We are women; we have to tolerate this.” I said, “But you are well educated.” Then she asked, “Didn’t your father ever hit your mother?” I said, “No, never.” I use this story as an example to show that domestic violence starts from childhood: when kids see that their fathers hit their mothers and no one does anything about it, they come to think that this is normal behavior.

I also use an authentic poster in which a husband is beating his wife and two men see this and talk about it. One man says that this happens in every household. The other responds that even if it happens in every household, it doesn’t mean it is okay. Through these magazine articles, posters, and anecdotes, I encourage my students to think critically, recognize the issues, and be able to take action when needed.

For the listening activity based on the video clip, I use VoiceThread and a hybrid class style in which students work at home. First, they watch the video and complete a fill-in-the-blank exercise where I ask them to listen to the verb endings and change them to past tense. After this activity, they write a couple of questions that come to their mind while watching the video. Next, each student meets with their partner and asks the questions that they have written while recording their interview on VoiceThread. They must use words that they hear in the video clip. I do not give them guided questions for this activity because I want them to think creatively.

The activities for this lesson are appropriate for the advanced-low of the ACTFL proficiency-based standards. “They can narrate and describe all major time frames using connected discourse of paragraph length and talk about a variety of topics, including work and current events that are relevant to them and the society they live in” (Elvira, 2012, p.42). In these activities, students listen to formal and informal L2 discourse and give their preferences using short, connected paragraphs. Students must use new high register vocabulary from the listening passage in these activities.

Sample Lesson Plan: Third semester Intermediate Hindi

Topic: Domestic violence

Duration: 30 minutes

Materials: Video clip from Satyamev Jayate (Domestic violence), fill-in-the-blank handout and a glossary, VoiceThread

Goals:

Grammar: Students listen for all time frames.

Students practice listening skills.

Students think critically and pose questions after watching the videos.

Students use formal language, imitating speakers in the videos.

Pre-listening: Read one magazine article about domestic violence and the #MeToo movement in India. Share in class what you learned in the article. How are these issues different in America?

The instructor provides an anecdote.

Teacher-student discussion about a poster.

Students watch the video at home and complete a fill-in-the-blank activity.

VoiceThread: Students meet with a partner and ask questions that they created for their partner and video record their interview on VT. They must use the words that they have heard in the video.

Student feedback for Lesson Plan #3

It took 60 minutes/45 minutes to finish the assignment.

To watch the video and answer questions, about 30 minutes. To make a video on VoiceThread answering questions, about 10 minutes.

Difficulty was medium/somewhat difficult.

I learned a great deal. I learned a lot because I had to do some research beforehand. I learned a lot from this activity because it is very practical and applicable content.

I learned some from this activity, practicing speaking without having time to think is where most of the important practice was for me.

It forced me to speak.

The activity was somewhat easy for answering the video questions, and somewhat difficult for the speaking part.

The activity was fun, the topics were interesting because it applies to the real world and the topic is hand on current issues. It also helped me learn different tenses and grammar structures.

I like the Satyamev Jayate videos.

5) Conclusion

Most language teachers agree that listening is an important skill in teaching a foreign language. It is important to use authentic materials for listening activities to provide students with real-life experience. Using VoiceThread and PlayPosit for listening activities saves class time because these tools can be used in a flipped classroom style where students listen to passages and complete assignments at home. These tools are useful for a class of mixed heritage and non-heritage because both groups have time to comprehend the content. I have given several examples of how bottom-up activities—in which students focus on listening to details such as words, phrases, and grammar—can be integrated with top-down activities where students can see the big picture and give open-ended responses to listening passages.

No doubt, the real challenge is to find social justice listening material that is age-appropriate and has a clear and concise message. Rather than trying to locate such material in one sitting, I suggest that teachers should keep these topics in mind as they watch videos for their own entertainment and make a collection of those suitable for teaching.

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