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**Critical Sociocultural Perspectives on an Asynchronous Online  
Intercultural Exchange between Hindi and English Language Learners**

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**Critical Sociocultural Perspectives on an Asynchronous Online  
Intercultural Exchange between Hindi and English Language Learners**

**by**

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## **Dedication**

*This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Sh. Surendra Nath Parnami.  
The memories of your love, kindness, and laughter continue to nurture me.*

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# **Critical Sociocultural Perspectives on an Asynchronous Online Intercultural Exchange between Hindi and English Language Learners**

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This study examines an asynchronous online intercultural exchange between seventeen Hindi language learners (HLLs) in the United States and eleven English language learners (ELLs) in India. Drawing on Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), the study conceptualizes this online exchange as a dynamic system and adopts a critical sociocultural approach to understand what constitutes the system and how it operates. The study also examines the different contradictions and outcomes that emerge within the system. Finally, the study looks closely at three HLLs' experiences to understand how their discursive cultural identities shape their online interactions with the ELLs and their overall engagement with the discussion project.

The study involved six weeks of online discussions between students from an intermediate-level Hindi language class at a large American university and a group of students learning English at a national university in India. The bilingual discussion forums were structured around thematic analysis of a mainstream Hindi (Bollywood) film called *English-Vinglish*, where participants discussed issues related to film studies,

gender-roles, and language ideology. Sources of data included the HLLs' languacultural autobiographies, post-collaboration reflections, interviews, transcripts from the online discussions, researcher's reflective journal, and transcripts from online and telephone communication with the ELLs and the teacher-collaborator in India. Qualitative analytical approaches like constant-comparison and triangulation inform the process of data analysis. In addition, theories and tools from Interactional Sociolinguistics (IS) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provide an overarching critical lens to understand the complexities of the different processes and interactions operating within the system under study.

Findings highlight the deeply contextual and layered nature of the online activity system, where each component of the system—subject, mediational tools, rules, community, division of labor, and object—plays an important role in how language, culture, and identity are perceived and constructed by the participants. Furthermore, analysis shows that technological, affective, and academic contradictions alter the dynamics of the system and limit participants' opportunities for learning. Finally, case study analysis of the three HLLs reveal that their cultural identities are situated in diverse historical, political, and socioeconomic experiences, which allow them to negotiate interpersonal understanding with their interlocutors and make meaning of the text under discussion.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Cultural learning has been identified as an important goal of foreign language learning by professional organizations that guide pedagogical thinking around language education in the United States and Europe. In the US, the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning Preparing for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (ACTFL 2006), also known as the National Standards, identify understanding *Cultures* as one of the five objectives for foreign language learning, and state that learners cannot truly master a foreign language “until they have also mastered the cultural contexts in which the languages occur” (p. 3, ACTFL 1996). Building on the ACTFL guidelines, the MLA report (2007) proposes *transcultural competence* as the critical goal for foreign language learning. Transcultural competence entails the ability to reflect on the world and oneself through “the lens of another language and culture” and “to comprehend speakers of the target language as members of foreign societies” (p. 4). A similar emphasis on decentering one’s perspective comes from the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (CEFR) that proposes guidelines for developing language learners’ intercultural communicative competence (ICC) (Byram 1989; 1997).

Despite a widespread consensus on the importance of studying culture in foreign language education (FLE), the field is divided on how it defines and teaches culture. Over the years, scholars have drawn from different disciplines including anthropology, sociology, linguistics, and communication studies in their attempts to conceptualize

culture, explain its interconnections with language, and propose approaches to teaching culture. These varying approaches have been predominantly identified along two schools of thought: modernist and postmodernist (Kramersch 2013) or what Holliday (2009) calls the old way of thinking and the new way of thinking about culture.

Within the modernist perspective, culture is conceptualized as the patterns of behaviors, set of practices and beliefs, and repertoires of artistic, historical, and socio-political traditions and institutions shared by the members of the given national community (e.g. ACTFL 2006). Empirical research on teaching of culture in FLE has been predominantly informed by the modernist perspectives. Over the years, different studies have researched how language learners acquire socio-historical facts about the given national community; how they develop and demonstrate attitudes of curiosity and openness and learn to interact with native speakers from the given target culture (e.g. Barnes-Karol and Broner 2010; Bueno 2009; Herron, Cole, Corrie, and Dubriel, 1999; 2000; 2002; Jourdain's 1998).

Scholars working within the postmodernist and postcolonial traditions (e.g. Atkinson 1998, Holliday, 2009; Kramersch 1993, 1998, 2011; Kubota 1999; Risager 2006, 2007) have critiqued the concept of culture being tied to national boundaries. They argue that identifying culture along nation states limits the definition of culture and confines it to a monolithic, static, and homogenous entity. It also propagates deterministic views about given national communities. The postmodernists offer alternate ways of looking at

culture as transnational, dynamic, and socially constructed spaces that allow for the construction of diverse cultural identities and positionalities.

Introducing a transnational paradigm in language education, Risager (2006) argues that both language and culture spread or flow across national structures and communities in the world. She borrows the anthropological construct of *languaculture* (Agar 1996) or *linguaculture* to explain the fluid connections between language and culture arguing that they are both ‘inseparable and separable at one and the same time’ (p. 196). She argues that globalization and large-scale migrations in the twenty-first century have allowed languages to move across different geographical locations, which results in the formation of new links between language and culture where language takes on new cultural meanings.

Kramsch (2013) echoes similar views and argues that cultural realities are getting deterritorialized in the fast changing globalized world. According to Kramsch, within the postmodernist perspective “culture has become a discourse, that is, a social semiotic construction...which is constructed and reconstructed in various ways by individuals engaged in struggles for symbolic meaning and for the control of subjectivities and interpretations of history” (p. 68).

Although the postmodernist approaches have provided helpful perspectives on conceptualizing culture and understanding its complex relationship with language, their application in pedagogy and research remains underexplored. Offering a potential reason

for the paucity of research using postmodernist methods of inquiry, Kramsch and Uryu (2012) argue that, 'young researchers are under pressure to produce research that conforms to the criteria of reliability and validity of the hard sciences and hence are discouraged from adopting truly poststructuralist methods of inquiry to study intercultural contact' (p. 222). They argue that the postmodernist perspectives offer dynamic research designs that have the potential to reveal deeper complexities of the phenomena under study.

In recent years, Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) technologies have emerged as helpful pedagogical tools for promoting cultural understanding in a number of foreign language teaching contexts (e.g. Furstenberg et al. 2001; Hertel 2003; Itakura 2004; Jauregi and Bañados 2008; Müller-Hartmann 2000; O'Dowd 2003, 2007). Some scholars argue that the development of CMC has contributed to bringing about an 'intercultural turn' in foreign language education (Thorne, 2010) as it has afforded opportunities for learners from different cultures to interact with each other through transnational telecollaborative projects, especially in contexts where study abroad is not viable.

A wide range of synchronous (e.g. videoconferencing and chatting) and asynchronous (e.g. email exchange and discussion forums) forms of technologies have been used to operationalize these intercultural partnerships (see Furstenberg et al. 2001; Hertel 2003; Itakura 2004; Jauregi and Bañados 2008; Müller-Hartmann 2000; O'Dowd

2003, 2007; Sardegna and Molle 2010). Both forms of technologies offer certain affordances. Synchronous forms of technologies have the advantage of providing learners with a virtual sense of face-to-face communication. They provide opportunities for immediate feedback and negotiations of meanings. On the other hand, asynchronous forms of technologies have been valued for providing sufficient time for learners to reflect on their utterances and present well-composed responses. While there are advantages and disadvantages of using both forms, other practical and institutional considerations need to be made for choosing the most relevant technological tool for setting up international telecollaborations. For instance, the use of synchronous forms of technology may not be a viable option in contexts where there is huge time difference between the two partnering geographical locations (e.g. Asia-North America). Some other factors that limit the choices of technological tools relate to overall accessibility and participants' history of use or 'cultures of use' (Thorne 2003).

Previous studies have examined various dimensions of online intercultural exchange: the efficacy of CMC as a tool for cultural learning; cross-cultural and pragmatic variations in interactional norms; the role of collaborative tasks and classroom instruction; outcomes of cultural learning; and other procedural challenges in setting up a transnational telecollaboration (Belz 2003; O'Dowd 2003, 2007; Ware and Kramsch 2005). It is important to note that most of these studies have researched intercultural exchanges between learners of Western European languages. In comparison, there is less

research on cultural exchanges situated within Asian language learning contexts (e.g. Bower and Kawaguchi 2011; Chung et. al 2005). South-Asian language learning contexts in particular remain under researched thus far.

These gaps in research deserve attention for various reasons. First, an intercultural exchange between L1 speakers of Asian languages like Chinese and Japanese and American-English could present unique challenges with respect to participants' varying language proficiency levels. In a recently published volume focused on intercultural exchanges in Asian and Pacific language contexts, Chun (2014) reports findings that suggest that college-level Chinese and Japanese EFL learners tend to have higher proficiency in English as compared to their American counterparts learning Chinese and Japanese as a foreign language. This is understandable since English language education is relatively widespread in Asian countries. Furthermore, the author suggests, American learners require more time to acquire higher proficiency in languages like Chinese and Japanese since these languages are considered more 'difficult' to learn when compared to Western European languages. This disparity in language proficiency levels puts the American learners at a disadvantage since they are unable to express and comprehend complex cultural ideas during online discussions (e.g. Liaw and English 2014 and Jiang, Wang & Tschudi 2014). These findings raise important questions on whether online cultural exchanges provide similar affordances for all language learning contexts.

Another argument in favor of addressing aforementioned research gaps relates to how culture has been traditionally conceptualized in European-language based online intercultural exchanges. One could argue that most of these studies are framed in a way that assumes narrow definitions of culture and ‘native-speakers’. For instance, in the last twenty years since its inception, the *Cultura* project (Furstenberg et al. 2001) has successfully facilitated online cultural interactions between college-level students in America and France. However, it has been argued that by situating French predominantly within France, *Cultura* has potentially reinforced the modernist bias of culture being tied to a monolingual nation state. Similar arguments can be made for how English-speaking culture has been mainly connected to America or England in online collaborations thus far, thereby ignoring a huge majority of ‘native’ English speakers in countries like India.

The project-design adopted by most online intercultural collaborations (e.g. *Cultura* and other *Cultura*-inspired projects) has also been critiqued for perpetuating deterministic perspectives on culture (Blyth 2015). Most of these projects include tasks that elicit explicit comparisons of participants’ native or first culture (C1) and the target culture (C2). It has been argued that such comparative tasks are based on the presupposition that there are well-defined, culture-specific ways for people to talk, behave, and think. Additionally, participants in these projects are assigned static identities and are expected to respond to given tasks as spokespersons of given national communities (‘French’, ‘American’ etc.). For instance, in the O’Dowd (2003) study

involving an email-exchange between students in Spain and England, one of the tasks required participants to describe what they think their email-partners would find strange or different about their country. While such discussion prompts could open pathways for interesting conversations, they compel participants to think along limited cultural realities.

The current study aims to address critical research gaps in the field by examining an online collaboration between Hindi language learners in the United States and English language learners in India. Unlike previous online intercultural exchanges, this project did not include tasks that explicitly require participants to provide cultural information and compare beliefs, practices, and linguistic patterns along nationalist cultural lines. Instead, my goal in this project was to create an online community where participants came together as international audience and reviewers of a single cultural artifact: a mainstream Hindi language feature (Bollywood) film made by an Indian director and shot both in India and United States.

Increasing globalization and Web 2.0 technologies have allowed people from around the world to connect as consumers of the same multimedia and popular culture artifacts. It is not difficult to find online public forums and chat rooms where people across national territories get together to discuss, analyze, and critique works of art. Inspired by this phenomenon, my goal in this study was to create a similar online learning space where the two participating groups are united in their efforts to understand and

analyze a single feature film. My rationale was that this co-constructed discourse analytical task would entail negotiation of languacultural issues between participants without explicitly requiring them to do so and without confining them within nationalist identities.

The complex political, cultural, and linguistic discourses surrounding this online intercultural exchange demanded research attention, since it had the potential to reveal aspects of languacultural learning that had remained under-explored thus far. To begin with, the cultural context that surrounds Hindi is not easy to define. The traditional conception of culture as a set of behaviors and beliefs shared by people inhabiting a shared geographical location provides a limited view of the Hindi-speaking culture since the Hindi-speaking region in India is characterized by immense linguistic and ethnic diversity. The study of culture in Hindi language teaching hence required a framework that goes beyond a monolingual and homogenous conceptualization of culture.

A monolingual and national framework of culture also raises critical questions with respect to culture pedagogy in English language teaching in India. English occupies a unique and complicated, if not problematic, status in India. Once associated with the colonial powers, English has now become the second official language in India. Although India has potentially the third largest English speaking community outside the US and UK, only about 4% of the total population (about 35 million) actually speaks the language (source [British Library](#)). Given the complexities and contradictions that

surround the English language in India, it is worth examining how culture is defined and taught in this language-learning context.

Finally, the proposed online exchange is marked by a very multilingual and multicultural context. Most potential participants from India speak more than two languages with English being either their second or third language. Additionally, the Hindi language learners in the US classroom are a mix of heritage and non-heritage students. However, some of the heritage students do not come from a Hindi-speaking family. This diverse linguistic and cultural setting results in unique interactions between the participants that offer new insights on how languacultural learning is negotiated in an online exchange. I draw on the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and discourse analytical methods to conceptualize the current online exchange as a dynamic system and study the various processes and experiences involved in it.

In the following chapters, I first review prior literature in the field to highlight the theoretical and analytical frameworks that inform this study (chapter 2). Chapter 3 outlines the research method, including the research design, process of data collection, and the procedure for data analysis. In chapter 4, I discuss the first set of findings that reveal how the online exchange functioned as an activity system. Chapter 5 focuses on three participants' discursive identities and experiences within the online system. Finally, in chapter 6 I discuss theoretical interpretations of my findings, offer pedagogical implications, and identify future areas of research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

In this chapter, I discuss key theoretical and analytical frameworks that have shaped this study. The first two sections outline prior scholarship and research on modernist and postmodernist perspectives on culture present in the field of foreign language education. The third section draws on postcolonial studies to understand the complex position of English in India, an issue that is central to the narrative that participants analyze in this study. The fourth section highlights important findings and arguments presented in support of using online intercultural exchanges for cultural learning in FLE. Finally, the last two sections in this chapter describe two analytical frameworks that I draw on to make meaning of the data from this study: Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

#### **Culture in FLE: Modernist Perspectives**

The study of culture has long been emphasized in foreign language education. Over the years, scholars in the field have proposed different goals and approaches to teaching culture. In the following sections, I review some of the key approaches based on the different goals proposed, ranging from the study of culture being approached as the study of civilizations, culture-bound communicative practices of a community, to developing an ability to function beyond and across well-defined linguistic and cultural communities.

The earliest approach to studying culture in the language classroom was structured around developing language learner's ability to study the arts and civilization of the target language community. This approach was referred to as the study of 'Big C' culture, which included all tangible aspects of a culture like its art, paintings, literary texts, etc. The approach was thus to study a nation's repertoire of historical and aesthetic traditions. As a linguistic anthropologist, Brooks (1968) critiqued this approach to culture calling it an elitist pursuit and insisted that the study of culture in the language classroom should move to the domain of everyday life. He proposed familiarizing learners with the target language community's patterns of communication and behaviors. He argued that everyday interactions in a given target language community were governed by culture and were thus worth pursuing in the language classroom. The study of this form of culture was referred to as the 'little c' culture. In his articles, he identifies a detailed list of everyday practices that could potentially be addressed in the language classroom. These included cultural activities like festivals, greetings, cleanliness rules , and so forth.

These ideas around the study of culture have been linked to the growth of the theory of communicative language learning in SLA (Byrd et al. 2011; Kramsch 1993; Byram and Feng 2004). Based on these ideas, many language educators in the 1970s-80s proposed a range of activities and approaches that centered on making language learners aware of patterns of behaviors in the target community and giving them scenarios where cultural misunderstandings could emerge due to cultural-specific patterns of

communications, beliefs, and practices. Morain (1984) lists some of these activities which include: cultural capsules; cultural assimilators, mini-role plays, short presentation, etc. The unifying factor in all these activities was to present the learner with a given scenario and teach them how to react to it based on how the native speakers in the target community would react to it. These approaches were thus based on the model of cultural assimilation (Omaggio-Hadley 2001).

Another important contribution to the field of cultural teaching in FLE comes from the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning Preparing for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (ACTFL 2006), also known as the National Standards, that highlight intrinsic links between language and culture, and argued that a learner cannot truly master a foreign language unless they understand the cultural context that surrounds language. The National Standards developed the idea of ‘Big C’ and ‘little c’ further and identified another important component, that of cultural perspectives. Perspectives were defined as the underlying beliefs and values that govern a given community’s practices and artifacts. In this sense, cultural perspectives were related to cultural products (Big C) and practices (little c). The goals proposed by the National Standards ushered in the idea of developing ‘cultural competence’ along with linguistic competence in the language classroom. Over the years, the National Standards have come to define the predominant approaches to culture teaching in FLE. Researchers and language practitioners alike have drawn

extensively on the idea of developing learners' cultural competence through the teaching of cultural products and practices, and reflections on cultural perspectives.

One of the key approaches within this model has translated into the use of authentic materials in the language classroom. Authentic materials like videos, films, literatures, images, etc. have been extensively used to teach culture across different proficiency levels. Herron and colleagues (1992, 1995, 1998, 2002) have conducting a range of studies that use a multimedia program called *French in Action* to show that learners' knowledge of the target culture can be enhanced through the use of videos. Similarly, Barnes-Karol and Broner (2010) present a detailed approach on how the use of images can enhance learners' understanding of cultural perspectives. They developed lessons using a pictorial resource called (*Hungry Planet: What the world eats?*) to help their Spanish-speaking learners understand the range of food practices adopted by Spanish speaking countries around the world.

Another approach to teaching culture has focused on helping learners change their attitudes towards the target community and become more open to cultural diversity. Robinson-Stuart and Nocon (1996) adopted this approach and trained their language learners in ethnographic research techniques. The purpose was to help learners reach out to the members of the target Spanish-speaking community and interview them and thereby develop more positive attitudes towards the target community. The possibility of changing stereotypes about the target community was also present in the ethnographic

method of interviewing. The researchers reported that the approach helped learners develop better attitudes and become more open about studying Spanish. Bateman (2002) repeated the same approach with her learners in a different region of the United States (Minnesota) and found similar promising results. The participants in both studies reported that interacting personally with the native speakers had helped them understand their perspectives better. However, in both studies Spanish speakers from different countries were grouped together as the ‘target culture’ and ‘target native speakers’, which raises concerns on the nature of cultural learning the students acquired.

Another approach to cultural learning in FLE draws from the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (CEFR) that highlighted the importance of developing intercultural competence as a goal for people from different nationalities and ethnic backgrounds in Europe to coexist harmoniously. Byram (1998) is credited for developing a well-defined model for developing learners’ Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). According to this model, developing learners’ ICC entails helping learners acquire necessary skills, attitudes, and knowledge base to help them decenter one’s perspective and interact with other cultures. In the United States, Byram’s work has predominantly informed approaches that use Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) technologies for developing learners’ cultural competence. Different studies have been conducted to show that using CMC as a way of bringing learners across different cultures and nations can contribute to their development

of ICC (e.g. O'Dowd 2003, 2007; Hertel 2004; Schlinker 2012). I discuss some of these studies in detail in a later section in this chapter.

The latest goals for cultural learning in FLE come from the MLA report presented in 2007. The report is credited for redefining the concept of cultural learning as not just tied to specific nation states, but to developing 'transcultural' and 'translingual' competence. According to Kramsch (2012, 2014), the conceptualization of transcultural competence emerged out of Pratt's (1991) work on 'contact zones' where cultures do not meet as equals but are contested and created. Hence, the goal of transcultural competence includes developing the critical skills to question the unequal relations of power in the given cultural context, both within the learners' own and outside context. The MLA goals also charge instructors with helping learners develop 'alternate world views' and to question the very nature of reality that they take for granted. Although the goals proposed by MLA are critical and much needed to enhance the changing definitions of cultures in the global hybrid world, they have proved challenging in terms of their implementation in the language classroom. The field is yet to present a comprehensive practical approach on how these ambitious goals can be achieved. These goals specifically come in direct conflict with the proficiency oriented goals being advocated for in the general domain of the FLE in the globalized world (Kramch 2014).

## **Culture in FLE: Postmodernist Perspectives**

The modernist perspectives on culture have been critiqued for encouraging cultural determinism (Atkinson 1999; Holliday 2009, 2011; Kramsch 1993, 1995, 2001; 2013; Kubota 1999; Kumaravadivelu 2008; Risager 2006, 2007). Scholars working within the postmodernist tradition have argued that by dividing target language communities along homogenous nation states, the field runs the risk of stating that there are deterministic ways for people to behave. This contributes to the development and reinforcement of stereotypes.

In a compelling argument, Kubota (1999) points out that Japanese culture in ESL/EFL has been constructed by discourses that are reminiscent of colonialism. She argues that Japanese learners in ESL settings are often viewed as lacking critical-thinking skills and being more group-oriented. Similarly, Holliday (2009) critiques the modernist perspectives on culture and argues that even when the modernist approach highlights the diversities within a given culture, these diversities are still imbued in a discourse that sees any variations in the target culture as an exception to the norm or a deficit to the mainstream perspective.

The postmodernist way of thinking of culture, on the other hand, acknowledges that culture is dynamic, transnational, and never ideologically neutral. Kramsch (1993) proposes looking at culture as a discourse, where “culture is created and enacted through dialogue” and “through this dialogue, participants not only replicate a given context of

culture” but also potentially shape a new culture (p. 47). Drawing on Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism, Kramersch (1993, 2013) argues that language learning is a dialogic process and that part of learning someone else’s language and culture involves perceiving the world through their metaphors, idioms, and grammatical patterns that filter one’s own subjectivity and historicity. She argues that “cultural and personal identity do not precede the encounter with a foreign Other, but rather identities get constructed through the obligation to respond to that Other, through dialogue” (p. 62). She proposed the construct of a “third place,” a place that lies at the intersection of the self and the Other, and where learners see themselves from both the inside and outside.

The postmodernist view on culture recognizes that the world is not divided into neat national boundaries and that these boundaries are easily blurred and negotiated. Postmodern scholars argue that contemporary multilingual and multimodal creations problematize the ‘one culture equals one language’ formula and foster hybridity. Economic globalization, large-scale migrations, and electronic modes of communication have made the traditional dualities of us vs them more complex (Kramersch and Uryu 2012). As Kramersch (2013) points out:

In a postmodernist perspective, culture has become a discourse, that is, a social semiotic construction. Native and non-native speakers are likely to see their cultural horizons change and displaced in the process of trying to understand others...A postmodernist definition of culture attempts to account for these new realities. If culture is no longer bound to the territory of a nation-state and its history, then we have to see it as a dynamic process, constructed and reconstructed in various ways by individuals engaged in struggles for symbolic

meaning and for the control of subjectivities and interpretations of history (Kramersch and Uryu 2012 p. 68)

Risager (2006) similarly argues that due to high-scale transnational migrations across the globe, no country in the twenty-first century is truly monolingual. She captures the dynamic quality of language and culture through the notion of “flows”. She argues that linguistic and cultural flows “are embodied in people moving, and when people move or migrate, they carry their personal languacultures with them to new places” (p. 196).

Highlighting the ideological nature of culture, Kubota (1999) argues “what is defined as culture or what constitutes culture is closely related to the question of who defines it and what kind of power relations exist between those who define it and those who are defined by it” (p. 17). She critiques the ‘taken-for-granted’ cultural labels that are used in applied linguistics and ELT research to depict a dichotomy between the East and the West. Using Japanese culture as an example, she argues that Asian cultures in the ESL classroom are often constructed within fixed and essentialized categories. Asian culture, she argues, is constructed as valuing collectivism and discouraging individual self-expression and creativity, whereas the Western cultures display the opposite characteristics. She argues these representations resemble how the Other was constructed within colonial discourses. She presents research findings on educational practices in Japanese schools to counter the stereotype and argue that misrepresentation of Japanese

culture in EFL literature is based on Orientalist discourses, rather than on evidence from research.

A critical orientation towards culture is central to the postmodernist agenda, according to which people on the margins have the agency and power to define and claim the world on their own terms. Holliday (2009) calls this the “bottom up process of defining culture” (p. 147), which challenges the old ‘top down’ approach prevalent in defining the nature of culture in language education. Similarly, Kubota (1999) suggests that cultural differences exist in various aspects of human experiences, but defining these cultural differences involves critical issues that require critical enquiry. She acknowledges that there is diversity within a culture with respect to race, ethnicity, language, class, age, gender, and geographical locations, and that these diversities and similarities are worth studying. However, it is also important to critically “understand cultural representations as particular truth or knowledge constructed by discourse” (p. 15). In other words, how culture is represented is a matter of knowledge constructed by discourse rather a given, objective truth.

Although there is a growing interest in poststructuralist perspectives on culture in language education, they are underutilized in research studies. Kramsch and Uryu (2012) argue this is because young researchers are under pressure to produce research that conforms to the criteria of reliability and validity of the hard sciences, and hence are discouraged from adopting truly poststructuralist methods of inquiry to study intercultural

contact. They argue that these perspectives offer dynamic research designs that have the potential to reveal the deep complexities of the phenomena under study. As they point out, “although appreciating the legacies of earlier studies, the study of intercultural communication needs to search for an alternative approach that goes beyond the constraint of traditional views of nation, culture, language, and identities in contemporary contact zones” (p. 218).

### **English in India: Postcolonial Perspectives**

A theoretical discussion around English in India is important for this study for two reasons. First, it helps contextualize my reasons for choosing the cultural text (a Hindi feature film titled *English-Vinglish*) that was analyzed as part of this online intercultural exchange. And second, the historical introduction and contemporary reach of English in India has important implications for Hindi, and particularly for Hindi language education outside of India. These implications become more evident in the later sections of this dissertation. In this section, I focus on understanding the different critical approaches to studying the presence of English in India.

I draw on critical perspectives in TESOL (Pennycook 1999; 2004) to examine the different socio-political discourses that surround the study of English Education in India. Historically, the inception and growth of English language education in India is intrinsically linked to the history of British colonialism. English education was introduced to enhance the functional abilities of the British government in a country that

was divided along more than 100 written and oral linguistic traditions. Similarly, the study of English (British) literature was introduced to fulfill the missionary goal of uplifting the moral values of the natives (Vishwanathan 1989). In an often cited colonial document epitomizing the Anglicized discourse, *Macaulay's Minutes*, Thomas Macaulay (1835), a British administrator in India, proposed that the British should invest in English education in India so that the administration (also referred to as the British *Raj/rule* in Indian history) could produce people “who were Indian in blood and color, but British in their thinking and belief”. Such systematic educational dominance has been referred to as ‘linguistic imperialism’ (Phillipson 2009) in postcolonial studies. It is argued that the story of colonization was not just about gaining monetary and materialistic control and profits, rather it was a systematic socio-cultural process of domination that entailed imposing Western epistemic beliefs and practices at the cost of rejecting the local and indigenous knowledge base and linguistic practices. Australian postcolonial scholar, Smith (1999) making similar parallels with British colonialism in Australia calls it the ‘colonization of the mind’ that involved rejecting the indigenous ways of life and people. Spivak (1988) calls it ‘epistemic violence’ where the history, culture, beliefs and practices of the indigenous population was completely diminished and re-written by the colonizers.

Since India’s independence in 1947, the status of English in India has changed. It has ceased to be a ‘foreign’ language explicitly connected with the colonizers and has become the second official language of India at the federal as well as at the state level,

except for one state where it is the first language. It can be argued that English has evolved as the lingua franca that connects (at least the educated middle-class) population across different linguistic regions. Some argue that acceptance of English as the second official language, and now the lingua franca, is based on the fact that it does not provide any ethnicity-based advantage to anyone in India, it is in some ways a borrowed language for everyone as it never originated in India (Annamalai 2004). However, the choice and acceptance of English as the second official language in a country that is linguistically so diverse cannot be seen as completely free from ideological perspectives.

Some scholars connect the acceptance of English in the post-independence era to the Western-based sensibilities of the Indian leaders who came to power after independence. The political discourse that ensued was that English education is crucial if the nation needs to succeed, since world's scientific knowledge was encoded in English. Pennycook (1994) compares this to the complex and intricate roots and infiltration of the discourse of colonialism. In a way it was the continuation of the colonial discourse where all progressive and modern knowledge was tied to 'English' and the vernacular was relegated to the position of holding traditional knowledge. This resulted in a vernacular-English divide in India that continues today (Annamalai 2004). This discourse of modern knowledge only being accessible through the language of the colonizer i.e. those who have power, is reminiscent of Foucault's (1984) theory on how knowledge is intimately tied to power.

Two important schools of scholarships have informed the study of English in India, since its establishment as an official language in post independent India: sociolinguistic research on World Englishes and postcolonial studies in literature and cultural studies (Kachru 1992; Bhabha 1984). Scholars working within these traditions argue that English has been ‘democratized’ in erstwhile colonies. English has emerged as the weapon (Caliban’s weapon, as Kachru says, drawing on the postcolonial reading of Shakespeare’s play, *The Tempest*) with which the Englishes in the ‘outer circle’ (i.e. the colonized) have resisted the hegemony of the English of ‘inner circle’ (i.e. the colonizers). The growth of literary writing in colonized countries has famously been referred to as the phenomenon of ‘the empire writing back with a vengeance’ by Rushdie (1982).

However, Spivak (1984) and other postcolonial scholars rightfully point out that these apparent democratizations of English in India are still a matter of elitist pursuit. Most of these scholars claiming to resist the hegemonies of colonizer’s English are Western-educated. The ‘empowering’ agency that English offers as way of improving one’s academic pursuit and improving means of livelihood is yet to reach those who are situated within the margins of the ‘inner circle’. Manu Joshep (2012) rightfully points out that the story of English in India is at once the story of modernism vs. tradition, rich vs. the poor, city vs. village, and the high caste vs. the low caste.

Ramanthan (1999) attempts to demonstrate this division in an ethnographic study of a group of students who belonged to lower castes (officially and unfortunately called the OBC, Other Backward Castes) who were educated in the vernacular-medium until high school and then joined a degree program in a Jesuits college in a city in Western India (Ahmedabad, Gujarat). The college had affirmative policies in place that allowed students to enroll in this college for higher education. The college also seemed committed to providing extra assistance to help these students develop their English language skills so that they could improve both their language and overall academic skills. However, the researcher found that pedagogical practices were not aligning with the institutional aims. Teachers were not qualified to teach English language skills as they preferred to teach the literature classes. Although the researcher did not adopt this framework for her study, this study appeared to me a practical illustration of Bourdieu's ideas on cultural capital and symbolic violence.

In outlining important ideas in critical perspectives in TESOL, Pennycook (1994) points out that only highlighting the power differential and social equalities is not sufficient. TESOL practitioners and researchers should not restrict their work to simply connecting the micro interactions in the classrooms to the macro level socio-political issues. Proposing ways and approaches on how the hegemonic power equations can be transformed or challenged is crucial to the project of adopting critical pedagogy in TESOL. Lin (1996) offers a glimpse of this in her study where she points out that through

their use of creative discursive practices, English language teachers in the lower socioeconomic schools in Hong Kong were able to negotiate the power that surrounds English. These discursive practices included using the learners' L1 more and even relying on grammar-translations to connect with the learners and keep them motivated to study English. In one of her other studies, Ramanathan (2005) found similar L1-oriented or vernacular-medium pedagogical practices being adopted as a way of resisting the dominance of English and at the same time coming to terms with the permanent presence of English in a vernacular-medium college in Gujarat.

### **Online Intercultural Exchanges**

The growth of internet-mediated communication technologies (IMCT or CMC) over the last few decades has revolutionized the study of foreign language education in many parts of the world, especially in Europe and United States. As a pedagogical tool, CMC is valued for intercultural learning as it offers critical affordances that allow learners to interact with people from different cultures within the confines of their language classrooms. These technologies are particularly helpful in providing cost-effective opportunities for prolonged cultural interaction where study-abroad is not viable (Belz 2007). A review of literature in the field indicates that different trends, outcomes and dimensions of online intercultural interactions have been examined. However, the field of online culture learning has predominantly focused on European language learning contexts. More research needs to be done to understand and examine what potential

affordances CMC can offer for learners of non-European languages, especially South Asian languages.

Different terms have been adopted to refer to transnational collaborations between language learners including ‘telecollaboration’ (Ware 2005; Belz 2003), ‘e-tandem’ (O’Rourke 2007), ‘intercultural foreign language education’ (Kramsch and Thorne 2002) and ‘online intercultural exchange’ (O’Dowd 2003). Each of these projects differs in their format and task designs. However, they share the similarity of being educational endeavors that are aimed at enhancing language learners’ cultural awareness, knowledge and understanding through semi-authentic communications with members of the target language community (O’Dowd 2012). Most of these projects have been part of language instructional curriculum where instructors have played an important role in structuring and guiding the intercultural interactions.

To date, research on the use of CMC for cultural learning has presented mixed results. One of the earliest and perhaps the most successful example of a telecollaboration exchange is Furstenberg et al.’s (2001) the *Cultura* project, which features online forum discussions between learners of French in America and English language learners in France. The project uses different communicative activities that allow participants to have an open dialogue regarding different aspects of their respective cultures. This project has provided impetus to many other studies in the field that have utilized similar

communicative activities with learners from different language learning contexts (e.g. Spanish, German, Italian).

Based on his analysis of multiple email transcripts between learners in England and Spain, O'Dowd (2003) found that participants were able to (a) provide basic information as well as personal opinions and analysis on the given cultural topic; (b) ask meaningful questions that encouraged feedback and reflection from their partner; (c) answer their partners' questions and encourage them to write more about the topic; and (d) offer a personal and critical perspective into the target culture. He argued that these critical elements of email exchange enabled learners to develop intercultural communicative competence (ICC) as defined by Byram (1997).

In another study, Itakura (2004) found that interacting with native speakers in a collaborative email project between Hong Kong learners of Japanese and native Japanese speakers allowed participants to modify the stereotypes that they had developed due to extensive exposure to media. Similarly, Hertel (2003) concluded that the email messages exchanged between American university students and students in Mexico had a positive effect on the American university students' attitudes and beliefs about the Mexican culture. O'Dowd (2007) also reported findings from different qualitative studies that demonstrated that engaging in meaningful dialogues with online partners can enhance learners' ICC. In a more recent study, Schenker (2012) reported findings from email-exchange between second semester students of German at a US university and high

school students studying advanced-level English in Germany to show that objectives of ICC could be achieved through telecollaboration.

Despite the many success stories, studies on online intercultural collaborations have also reported unexpected problems and challenges, such as misunderstandings and communication breakdowns resulting from lack of relationship building (Fischer 1998), lack of receptive audience leading to low motivation and frustration (Ware and Kramsch 2005), and miscommunication due to differences in online interaction patterns between participants (Peng, Lu and Wang 2009). Both O'Dowd (2003) and Itakura (2004) also identified cases of failed communication and instances where stereotypes were unintentionally reinforced.

Drawing on appraisal theory and Byram's ICC model, Belz (2003) adopts a linguistically grounded approach to show how participants in a German-American email exchange differed in their expression of affect, judgment, and appreciation. The participants were unable to develop attitudes of "openness and curiosity" because of their inability to understand their partners' culture-specific patterns of discourse. For instance, the German participants' direct and unmitigated performance of critique was interpreted as rude by the American participant.

Following Belz's (2003) linguistically grounded approach, Ware (2005) studied the online telecollaborative exchanges between English learners in Germany and students

of German in America. Upon examining the two groups' discursive choices in online communication, Ware found 'striking imbalance' (70) in how participants used personal pronoun deixis and questions to establish alignment and interpersonal interest respectively. Students in Germany used both these linguistic devices more frequently than their counterparts in America. According to Ware, this lack of communicative convergence indicated dissimilar levels of involvement with the project and resulted in 'missed' chances of communication, where participants were unable to engage in meaningful intercultural learning. She also reported findings from student interviews and questionnaires to demonstrate how participants' different use of linguistic conventions, socio-cultural expectations, goals, and positions within broader institutional factors influenced their participation and engagement with online discussions.

Despite the unfavorable outcomes, the exchange is useful as it creates opportunities for learning. As Ware and Kramersch (2005) suggest, instances of "missed" or "failed" communications can also provide learning opportunities for both language instructors and learners because these "unsuccessful" cases can help them become aware of the hidden aspects of online cross-cultural communications. The researchers argue that when participants in an online exchange cannot see each other, they are compelled to reflect on the different discursive functions and the various pragmatic and sociolinguistic features of the language in order to interpret the words on screen. This reflection leads to the development of what the researchers call an intercultural stance, where learners are

better able to understand “their own reasoning as the cultural context from which it comes, as well as the viewpoints of others” (Ware and Kramsch 2005: 203).

Overall, one could argue that a telecollaboration is a complex system where multiple factors interact to determine possible outcomes for cultural learning. There are both advantages and disadvantages to using telecollaborations for cultural learning. As a way of conceptualizing both the problems and perils of using the internet for foreign language education, Kern (2014) offers the metaphor of ‘pharmakon’ (p. 341), which refers to both a poison and a remedy. The author suggests although technology can provide contact with people around the world, ‘it does nothing to ensure successful communication with them, and some of its particular mediational qualities may in fact work against intercultural understanding’ (p. 354). The author argues that ‘instead of thinking of computer mediation either as simply a way of providing our students with more language practice, or as a virtual portal through which to explore the foreign cultural milieu that exists beyond the computer interface, we need to think of computer-mediated exchanges as what Pratt (1991) calls *contact zones*: “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (as quoted in Kern on p. 351).

Building on Kern’s argument, I argue that the field of CMC and cultural learning needs to examine erstwhile ignored contact zones where participants explicitly and visibly not just come with different ‘cultures of use’ (Thorne 2003), but are also

positioned along differing socio-political discourses like that of ‘Third World’ and ‘Arab-Muslim World’ (e.g. Helm, Guth and Farrah 2012).

### **Analytical Framework: Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)**

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), also referred to as activity theory, informs my analytical approach in this study. The historical origins of the theory can be traced back to the works of Russian marxist scholars like Vygotsky and Leontiev, who focused on studying human activity within its socio-cultural context (Yamagata-Lynch 2010). As a psychologist interested in the study of human cognition, Vygotsky proposed what is commonly known as the socio-cultural or socio-constructivist approach to learning, where all learning is always understood to be embedded in a social and cultural context. Unlike the cognitivists or the constructivists, the socio-constructivist approach does not view learning as a function of an individual mind interacting in isolation with its surroundings. Instead, the individual learner or a group of learners are perceived as being rooted in broader social institutional and cultural settings, who influence and are influenced by the socio-cultural environment they inhabit.

In his seminal work on the sociocultural approach to socially shared cognition, Wertsch(1991) argues that cognition and other forms of human mental functioning are ‘inherently situated in social interactional, cultural, institutional, and historical context’ (p. 86). He expounds on Vygotsky’s views on learning to illuminate the ideas

behind the sociocultural situatedness of the human mind. According to Wertsch, Vygotsky's 'general genetic law of cultural development' (p. 89) claims that mental processes within an individual (intrapsychological) originate in the individual's social interactions with other people and other forms of social interactions within people (interpsychological). In other words, social relations and interactions underlie human mind's growth and development.

Within the larger theoretical framework of socio-cultural theory, CHAT or activity theory is positioned as a research model or approach that allows for a close study of different interconnections between a given activity and its environment (Roth and Lee 2007; van Lier 2004). van Lier (2004) argues that an activity theory research model represents "an interconnected system of physical and symbolic aspects of the environment within which the activity occurs." (p. 210) Similarly, Lantolf and Genung (2002) refer to it as a unified theory of individual and societal behavior. A holistic study of human activity is thus integral to this theory.

Highlighting the significance of activity theory for educational research, Roth and Lee (2007) state that activity theory "has much potential for educators, because it is thoroughly about development and learning, encompassing the system as a whole and various subjects and communities that constitute" (p. 204). They refer to the philosophical theory of 'dialectics', where things are defined in terms of their contradictions. This is different from 'dualism', where things are defined in terms of their

opposites. In a dialectical approach, as the writers point out, “opposites are categorized as the non-identical expressions of the same category, which thereby comes to embody an inner contradiction” p. 195. This dialectical approach within activity theory can help reconcile and address many dualisms, such as subject versus object, individual versus collective, theory vs. praxis, etc., that pose challenges in the field of educational and learning research. According to the authors, activity theory moves away from these dualisms as it recognizes that these duals are part of the same entity, and that one cannot be studied without the other. For example, as the authors point out, “a researcher using CHAT therefore does not separate the poverty or culture of urban students' home lives from conditions of schooling, consideration of the curriculum, problems of learning, or learning to teach under difficult.”

The concept of ‘tool’ is also central to sociocultural theory. Sociocultural theorists argue that all human activity is mediated through cultural tools or artifacts, which can be technical, symbolic, and psychological in nature. Human agents act on the tools available in their environment and modify them to fulfill their communicative and psychological needs, hence there is a historicity to cultural tools. Language is recognized as an important mediating tool in sociocultural theory. According to Roth and Lee (2007), language serves as three functions of analysis in CHAT. The first function of analysis looks at language as the primary artifact, where language is used for action or fulfill communicative tasks. The second function of analysis focuses on language as secondary

artifact, where language is being used about an action. Finally, language as a tertiary artifact focuses on language being used to create theories of practice. Highlighting the shifting nature of language in the activity system, the authors point out:

Taken together, these three functions of language mirror the levels of analysis in CHAT. At the level of operation, language (choice of words, grammar) is unconscious. When language is viewed as action, it becomes an explicit tool (e.g., reflecting on action, representing situations), sign, or object. Finally, at the level of activity-theorizing teaching-it also may function as tool, sign, or object. Because in use, language can function as tool, sign, and object-being in each case materially embodied-it can switch its position in the activity system with ease. (Roth and Lee 2007, p. 208)

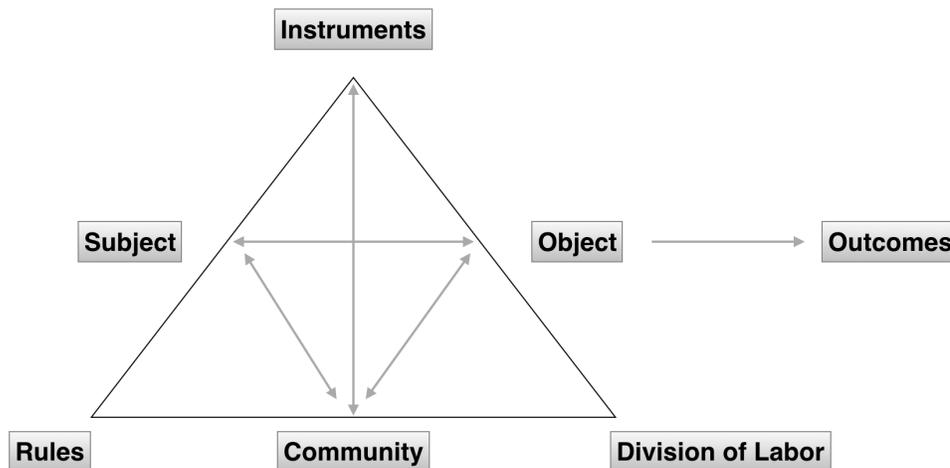
Another critical component of sociocultural theory is 'object'. Expanding on Vygostky's work, Russian scholar Leontiev argued that human activity is driven by individual or collective goals and motives (Yamagata-Lynch 2010). In a CHAT-based analysis, a systemic approach is adopted to understand how different goal-directed actions or behaviors combine to form a larger activity. The analytical approach is cyclic in that individual components or actions make meaning in the context of larger activity system, while the meaning of the activity as a whole depends on the sum of its parts i.e. each goal-directed action. Thus there is a constant dialogue between the micro component and the macro context in a CHAT-based analysis.

### **Activity Systems Analysis Model by Engeström**

Yrjö Engeström's activity systems analysis model (1987, 1999) is one method within CHAT that is widely used adopted by educational researchers. As a research

model, it depicts a concrete realization of an activity system that helps reveal material and social resources that are salient in the activity (Roth and Lee 2007). The triangle-shaped model is fundamentally an extension of Vygosty's triad, which represents an individual subject engaging in a goal-directed activity using a mediating tool. As the following digram shows, Engeström expanded the triangle to include three new components, including rules, community, and division of labor, to emphasize the complexity and interconnectivity of the sociocultural context in which human activity unfolds. Overall, the model provides a helpful way to conceptualize the dialogical way in which individuals or a group of individuals and their environment interact with and shape each other. Furthermore, in this model of analysis, human activity itself becomes the unit of analysis (Yamagata-Lynch 2010). The six components of this model can be explained as follows:

Figure 1: Engeström's Activity Systems Analysis Model



**Subject:** The subject is the ‘who’ of the activity system; an individual or a group whose actions, motives, utterances, and point of view is central to understanding the system.

**Mediating tools:** The mediating tools refer to the ‘how’ in the activity system. These are socially constructed physical and symbolic means that allow subjects to attain the desired outcomes.

**Rules:** Rules are implicit and explicit norms and conventions that govern interactions in an activity system.

**Community:** Community in an activity system refers to a group of multiple individuals who share the same goals and who construct themselves differently as compared to other groups in the system.

**Division of labor:** Division of labor explains how tasks are divided horizontally and how power is divided vertically among members of an activity system.

**Object:** Objects define the why in the system. They refer to the goals that drive actions in the activity system.

### **CHAT and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

Activity theory is sometimes criticized for limiting its focus on micro-level interactions (vanLier 2004) and adopting a structural approach to the larger macro-level context (Moje and Leiwis 2007). However, some research studies in the past, such as the study of a computer-mediated online intercultural exchange (Thorne 2000), research

studies on literacy development (Moje and Lewis 2007) and learner agency (Lantolf and Genung 2002) in a classroom, have shown that the activity theory can be combined with other analytical methods like critical discourse analysis to overcome this limitation.

In his seminal work on the artifacts and cultures-of-use in online intercultural communication between undergraduate students in France and America, Thorne (2003) uses Engeström's activity system model to illustrate the dynamics that link the micro online interactional activity with the macro sociocultural structures. He combines a genotype analysis that focuses on linguistic and paralinguistic characteristic and structures of online communication such as turn-taking, speech coherence, etc. with a phenotype analysis that highlights the larger context of participants' prior and everyday experiences with technological tools. In his study, he expands on Engeström's division of labor to focus on the division of symbolic labor, which, he argues, within the context of online communication "includes the social roles and identities implicitly and explicitly indexed and created through discourse (e.g. the institutional roles of student and instructor, as well as those of expert, cultural insider, enthusiast, biological male or female, etc.)" p.3. In his study, Thorne argues that the activity system of the online exchange is embedded in the larger systems of participants' academic life and technological experiences, which shapes how they perceive the possibilities, limitations, and communicative norms afforded by the online system.

Similarly, in their compelling study on literacy development, Moje and Lewis (2007) reframe usual activity theory-based analytical questions and adopt a critical sociocultural analysis approach to examine a classroom interaction in an eighth grade English classroom in a predominantly Latino school. The researchers present an in-depth analysis of a small data set to show how critical opportunities for enhancing sophisticated literacy skills were lost because both the students and the instructors were constrained by conventional cultural discourses. The class revolved around developing a topic statement for an essay based on the study of a novel *The Outsiders*, which revolves around the themes of how social gangs function. The researchers argue that from an activity theory perspective the students did learn to develop topic statements and were successfully able to relate their personal experiences to the novel when writing their final essays. However, crucial opportunities for literacy development were not realized, since during the class discussion students' utterances were constrained by cultural ideas typically associated with gangs. The discussion revolved around discussing the differences between 'good' gangs vs. 'bad' gangs with one student trying to defend the operations of some good gangs by saying that not all gangs are bad. However, the researchers rightfully point out the students were never encouraged to explore critical questions pertaining to gangs, like why are some social groups are culturally accepted and conceptualized as 'frats', 'clubs,' etc. but others are farmed as 'gangs'. The study overall highlights the necessity of

incorporating critical perspectives to find socially relevant meanings in everyday classroom learning activities.

In keeping with the above mentioned literature, I draw on activity theory and adopt a critical orientation to conceptualize and analyze the current online intercultural exchange as an activity system. I discuss my analysis approach in detail in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 3: Method**

This chapter outlines the research design, methods of data collection, and the procedure of data analysis adopted in this study.

### **Research Questions**

The specific research questions that guide this study are as follows:

1. How did an asynchronous online exchange between Hindi language learners in America and English language learners in India function as an activity system? What contradictions and outcomes emerged in this system?
2. What discursive identities emerged for Hindi language learners and how did it shape their engagement with the online exchange?

### **Research Design**

#### **Institutional Context**

This online exchange involved two educational institutes: a large state funded university in southwest America and a government-funded institute in central India. The American university is highly ranked at the national level and is well equipped with technological and modern educational resources. It also has a large liberal arts program and offers instruction in more than thirty foreign languages, including Hindi and Urdu.

The student-participants from the American university were enrolled in an intermediate-level Hindi language class. The class met during ninety minutes on Mondays and

Wednesdays every week and followed a largely communicative approach to language learning. The class curriculum was structured around different topics such as health, economy, environment, etc. There was no prescribed textbook for the class and instructional materials were distributed electronically via the university's learning management system (LMS)—Canvas. Instructional materials included a range of authentic printed and multimedia texts (e.g., newspaper articles, online videos, PowerPoints, etc.) in Hindi. Learners' performance in the class was assessed through a range of assignments including audio journals, vocabulary quizzes, in class-exams, homework, and final multimedia presentation. The online intercultural discussions required for this exchange were included as completion assignments in the syllabus and accounted for 20% of the final grade.

The Indian university that participated in this study can be described as a non-mainstream arts and social sciences institute, since it only offered specialized degrees in Sanskrit studies. The university offers BA, MA, and PhD degrees in Sanskrit linguistics, literature, and religious studies, as well as a bachelors and doctorate degree in Sanskrit language education (B.Ed., PhD in education). As part of the coursework for these degree programs, students at this university also took courses in modern subjects, like English, Hindi, Political Science, Computer Sciences, etc. While the university is well funded and has a robust infrastructure, it is not as well equipped technologically as the American university that participated in this study. For instance, it had multiple computer labs, but

did not have a fully functioning Wi-Fi connection at the time of this study. Another point of difference between the two universities was that the American university followed a semester-based academic calendar, whereas the Indian institute followed an annual-examination system.

About half of the student-participants from India was enrolled in the B.Ed. degree program and the remaining half was doing doctoral research in Sanskrit education and other areas. The B.Ed. students were taking a course in English language education and the class met for a period of forty minutes five times a week. The curriculum for this course was determined by a centralized governing body. The syllabus included a list of topics that needed to be covered during the given academic year. The online discussions required for this intercultural exchange could not be included as a graded assignment in the curriculum, and therefore students' participation in this study was voluntary, as it was for the PhD students. This online exchange was perceived as an opportunity for both PhD and B.Ed. students to practice their English language and computer literacy skills.

## **Participants**

### **Group 1: Hindi Language Learners (HLLs)**

The first group of participants included seventeen learners of Hindi in the United States (11 females and 6 males). I refer to these participants as the HLLs in this study. All participants in this group were in the age range of 19-22 years and were pursuing different fields of study. They all had access to personal computers, smart phones, and

appeared well acquainted with Internet-mediated technologies. They had been using Canvas for their Hindi class for one semester at the time of this study and had also learned to type in Hindi in the previous semester.

This group of participants was academically, culturally, and linguistically very diverse. The following table summarizes this information, as reported by the participants. The ‘languages’ column here represents the languages that the participants listed under the linguistic experience of their pre-collaboration journal. These languages included the languages that they knew, the languages that they were learning, and the languages that were spoken in their family. The next column in the table lists the terms participants used to describe their cultural heritage and identity. All names listed here are pseudonyms, most of which were chosen by the participants themselves. The names with an asterisk next to them were assigned by me.

Table 1: Participant Information (Group 1)

No.	Participant	Languages	Cultural Identity	Field of Study
1	Stacey	Romanian, English, Spanish, Hindi, and Urdu	Romanian, American	International Relations, Spanish, Hindi-Urdu
2	Riya*	English and Hindi	Indian-American	
3	Amanda	English, Spanish, Hindi, and Urdu	American	Linguistics, Hindi-Urdu
4	Bob	English and Gujarati	Indian-American	Economics

Table 1, cont.

No.	Participant	Languages	Cultural Identity	Field of Study
5	Tara	Nepali, Newari, English, Hindi, and Urdu	Nepali, Newari, American	International Relations and Global Studies
6	Colleen*	English, Spanish, Italian, and Hindi	American, Texan	International Relations
7	Shweta*	Gujarati, English, and Hindi	Indian, American	Accounts and Statistics
8	Simi	English, Tamil, and Hindi	Indian and American	Hindi, American Studies
9	Andy	Hindi, Spanish, Oriya, and English	Indian-American	Biology
10	Justin	English, Hindi	American (His parents are from Guyana )	Nursing
11	Roshini	English, Chinese, Korean, and Hindi	Asian-American	Biology
12	Maya	Bengali, Hindi, and English	Bihari-Bengali (She is officially not an American citizen, but has lived here for most of her life)	Political Science
13	John	English, Hindi	American	Political Science
14	Elizabeth	English, Turkish, Hindi, and Urdu	American	Math
15	Arjun*	English, Gujarati, and Hindi	Indian heritage	Economics

Table 1, cont.

No.	Participant	Languages	Cultural Identity	Field of Study
16	Vijay	Punjabi, English, Hindi, and Urdu	Punjabi, Sikh, American, and Indian	Business
17	Kyle	Gujarati, English, and Hindi	Indian heritage	Statistics and Accounting

### **Group 2: English Language Learners (the ELLs)**

Eighteen students from India were recruited to participate in this study (10 females and 8 males). Three of these participants were added to the discussion board in the second week of the collaboration. Eleven of these eighteen participants posted at least one comment during the online exchange; their pseudonyms and field of study are listed in the table below. Unfortunately, details regarding their language and cultural backgrounds are not available. I do know, however, that all of them had native-like proficiency in Hindi. Of the eleven participants identified below, three B.Ed. and one BA student were taking a formal course in English. The remaining PhD students had taken English language courses in their undergraduate and master's degree programs and were now informally learning English.

In terms of technology, only a few of them had personal computers, whereas all of them had smart phones at the time of this study. They had limited training in Hindi typing, and mostly relied on Google Transliteration Tools to type in Hindi.

Table 2: Participant Information (Group 2)

No.	Participant	Degree program	Had a personal computer	Had a smart phone
1	Mahesh	PhD	Yes	Yes
2	Kavita	PhD	Yes	Yes
3	Bharati	PhD		Yes
4	Pooja	B.Ed.	Yes	Yes
5	Abhijeet	B.Ed.		Yes
6	Kalindi	B.A.	Yes	Yes
7	Tarun	PhD	Yes	Yes
8	Kishore	PhD	Yes	Yes
9	Rajeev	PhD		Yes
10	Deepak	B.Ed.		Yes
11	Sukanya	PhD		Yes

### Teacher-Collaborators

My teacher collaborator from India, Maneesh (pseudonym), worked as an adjunct faculty member in the department of education at the Sanskrit institute. At the time of this study, he taught courses in English and Sanskrit language education and supervised doctoral research work in the field. Maneesh is a native Hindi speaker and has lived in

central India for most of his life. In addition to Hindi, he is proficient in Sanskrit, English, and a local dialect of Hindi (Malvi). Maneesh and I have known each other since the time I worked at the institute as an English lecturer (2009-2010). We have continued to remain good friends since 2010, when I moved to the United States for graduate studies.

At the time of this study, I was working as a teaching assistant (TA) for the Hindi class, while also pursuing my doctoral degree in foreign language education. My main duty as a TA was to manage Canvas (post assignments, make course-related announcements, etc.), grade assignments, and work with students in one-on-one feedback sessions during and outside of my office hours. I was also present in classes every week and offered in-class assistance to the primary instructor if and when needed.

### **Statement of Positionality**

My own languacultural identity is shaped by multiple languages and cultures that I have experienced at different stages of life. I grew up in Bhopal, a city in central India where the predominant language spoken was Hindi. Hindi was my primary language of communication at home and outside. Although linguistically I identify Hindi as my first language, Punjabi (a language spoken in the state of Punjab in India and Pakistan) constitutes the primary culture of my languacultural identity, since that is the language that grandparents and parents spoke at home. Like many of the participants in this study, I did not learn to speak my heritage language well, since my parents did not speak to me in Punjabi.

I started learning English in elementary school. My parents strongly supported English education and decided to send me to a convent school (not a boarding school) in Bhopal. At that time in India, convent schools were perceived to impart excellent level of English-medium education, since convent schools were run by foreign missionaries. After fourteen years of studying at a convent school, I successfully acquired advanced level proficiency in English, especially in written English.

I moved to the United States for graduate school seven years ago. The experience of living in the US has further enhanced my English language skills, and the rigorous academic training in graduate school in particular has developed my academic writing skills in English. Graduate school has also offered me invaluable opportunities to meet new people from varied cultural backgrounds. The peer group interactions in different classes have helped me understand and appreciate diverse worldviews. While I still feel like an outsider within the mainstream American culture, I feel well integrated into the micro-culture of graduate school and the university-level academic culture at large.

### **Project Description**

#### **Text: English-Vinglish**

Inspired by previous research in the field of intercultural telecollaborations (like the Cultura project), I chose a full-length Hindi feature film as a common text for discussion for this project. The film, called [\*English Vinglish\*](#), depicts the story of a middle-aged, upper middle class Indian woman, Shashi, who lives with her family in a

relatively big city in southwestern India. She runs a successful small-scale business selling homemade sweets. However, her family slights her for not being proficient in English. Shashi then travels to the United States to attend her niece's wedding. During her one-month stay in New York City, she enrolls for an English-language course and eventually becomes proficient in the language much to her family's great surprise. The rationale for choosing this film was that it offers a narrative that is both universal and particular. The story of learning to live and speak in a new world, and finding oneself in a new language has universal appeal, especially for language learners. Being set in India and the United States made the settings relevant for both participating groups. Linguistically, the film was not far beyond learners' proficiency levels since it utilizes colloquial Hindi with some dialogues being in Indian and American English. In general, the film met different criteria that make audio-visual resources comprehensible to the language learner. For instance, the film does not include long monologues, and for most scenes there is a correlation between the dialogues and video footage (Garza 1991). Finally, the film offered rich subtexts and themes required for generating meaningful intercultural discussions, for instance, the relationship between language and power.

The film was not part of the regular curriculum for either of the participating groups, and they were expected to watch the film on their own outside of class time. I had purchased a few copies of the film's DVD (with English subtitles feature included), which I offered to lend the HLLs before the online discussions began. I had also left two

copies of the DVD with Maneesh for the ELLs to have access to the film, although most of them had already seen it since the film had been released in India in 2012.

### **Weekly Discussions**

This six-week long project required learners to participate in asynchronous online discussions every week. These weekly discussion forums were hosted on a course website that I had created on Canvas, the LMS used by the American university participating in this study. This course was titled 'Online Exchange,' and it was separate from the main course website used for the Hindi class. I chose Canvas as the tool for facilitating this exchange, since one participant group was relatively more familiar with it. In addition, I had easy access to a dedicated Canvas-support team that provided free consultation and help in organizing my participant groups and adding the ELLs to the exchange.

In the following sections, I briefly summarize the week-by-week discussion topics and prompts; detailed versions of these are included in the appendix C.

#### ***Week 1: Getting to know each other***

In this introductory week, participants exchanged some basic information and shared their likes and dislikes with their group. The second part of the discussion prompt also asked them to share a picture that best offered a glimpse of their world. I hoped that this activity would help break the ice between the participants.

#### ***Week 2: Let's talk about films***

In the second week, participants were invited to share their general opinions about why people watch films and if films had the power to impact social behavior. They were also asked to talk about a particular film that had influenced them deeply. The discussion questions for this week were meant to serve as a previewing activity and to prime participants for an analytical approach towards cultural texts.

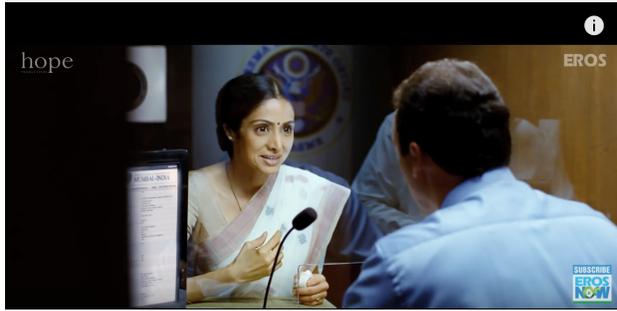
***Week 3: Your response to English-Vinglish***

The third week's discussion questions invited learners to share their response to the film and provide reasons why they liked or disliked the story and the characters in the film. One of the discussion questions also asked them to think about what the movie was about.

***Week 4: Thought-provoking scenes and issues 1***

Discussion questions in week 4 revolved around analyzing two critical issues raised in the film: language and power; and being a cultural outsider. The first topic encouraged participants to reflect on why certain languages were privileged over the other, while the second asked them if they had ever experienced feeling like an outsider in a given situation. Participants had the option to respond to one of these topics. To scaffold these discussions, I included clips from the following two scenes in the discussion prompt:

### Scene 1: My English Weak



In this scene, the film’s protagonist, Shashi, tells the visa officer at the US embassy in India that her English is weak. The visa officer responds by asking her how she will manage in his country without knowing English. Upon hearing this, an Indian official standing nearby, cheekily comments, “just like you are managing in our country without knowing Hindi”.

### Scene 2: Shashi places her million-dollar order



This scene depicts Shashi trying to order a cup of coffee at a busy coffee shop in New York City. She is limited by her English and is unable to understand the barista’s questions. She ends up running out of the coffee shop in tears.

### ***Week 5: Thought-provoking scenes and issues 2***

Similar to week 4, discussion questions in week 5 revolved around analyzing two other critical issues raised in the film: parent-child relationships; and gender roles in marriage. The first topic encouraged participants to reflect on what makes someone a good parent, while the second topic asked them to share their views on Shashi's relationship with her husband, Satish. Participants had the option to respond to one of these topics. This week also included clips from two scenes in the discussion prompts:

#### Scene 1: Shashi's visit to Sapna's school



In this scene Shashi attends a PTA meeting at her daughter's, Sapna's, school for the first time. Sapna is shown to study at a convent school, where everyone, including other parents and teachers, speaks in English. Sapna feels embarrassed and frustrated at Shashi's inability to speak in English. In the end, she chides Shashi for forcing one of her teachers to speak to Shashi in Hindi.

## Scene 2: Final speech



In this final scene of the film, Shashi delivers a speech in English at her niece's wedding. In her speech she tells the newly-wed couple that marriage is a special friendship between two people who are equal and that "family is the only place where you get love and respect".

### ***Week 6: Closing week***

In the final week, participants were asked to review their discussions from the previous weeks and invited to share any similarities and/or differences in opinions that they may have encountered.

### **Rules and Requirements**

The course website where the discussion forums were hosted included a module outlining the rules of the project in detail. The section titled 'What am I expected to do?' (see appendix A) informed the participants that they had to post at least twice in the discussion thread every week. The first post or the original post was expected to be in the participants' L2, whereas in their second post they had to respond to their peers in their

L1. In other words, the first discussion post by the HLLs was to be in Hindi and that by the ELLs was expected to be in English. Both languages were chosen as the medium of discussion with the aim of facilitating language exchange and also allowing participants to express themselves in the language in which they felt more proficient. The minimum word limit for the original post was 150 words and that for the response was 200 words. The deadlines for the HLLs to post their original comments and response were Tuesday and Thursday midnight respectively. Similarly, the ELLs were expected to post their original comments by Monday and their responses by Wednesday evening.

### **Project Implementation**

The project was implemented in multiple stages. The first step involved applying for an Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval at the university where I study. Once my research proposal was approved, I wrote to the Principal at the Indian university to seek his permission to recruit participants from his institute for this study. Meanwhile, I had already started discussing the project with Maneesh and had also pitched the idea to the primary instructor for the Hindi class at the American university. I was able to successfully persuade the instructor to include this online exchange in the syllabus, since some of the regular topics that he usually covered in class (like marriage and Hinglish) strongly aligned with the discussion themes that I was proposing in this project.

Once both Maneesh and the Hindi instructor were on board, I traveled to India to meet with my potential participants. I had about a three-hour long meeting with them, where I

introduced the project and walked them through the course website on Canvas. This meeting took place a month before the collaboration began. I continued to follow-up with Maneesh after I returned to the United States. Maneesh helped me arrange a conference call with the participants about two weeks before the project began, which gave me further opportunities to discuss the project with them and address their questions. I introduced the project to participants in America in class around the same time.

During this time, I had divided the participant pool into 8 sub-groups with 3-4 members each. Each sub-group had 2 participants from the Hindi class, and 1 B.Ed. student and 1 PhD student from India. Maneesh had suggested pairing B.Ed. and PhD students in each group to ensure that the pair always had access to a computer, since most PhD students participating in this study had a personal computer. I did not have very strict criteria for dividing the HLLs across the eight sub-groups, except to pair people with different genders and what I perceived to be their different cultural heritages.

Once the collaboration started, I was responsible for publishing the weekly discussion questions on the course website and also evaluating the HLLs' comments for a completion grade. I also tried to maintain communication with participants from India and with Maneesh through mobile-based chats, emails, and phone. Finally, at the end of the semester, I obtained consent from the HLLs to use their discussion posts and other related assignments as data for this study and requested time and permission to interview

them. I was able to obtain consent from the ELLs only two months after the collaboration had ended.

## **Research Method**

### **Data Collection**

I collected the following data sets from December 2014 through June 2015 for this study.

#### **Linguacultural Autobiographies**

During the week leading up to the collaboration the HLLs submitted a linguacultural autobiography, which I also refer to as a pre-collaboration journal in this study. The journal included a series of questions related to participants' general academic and personal background; their previous linguistic experiences; and their cultural heritage (see appendix B). The questions were asked both in Hindi and English. There was no upper word limit for this assignment, however, the HLLs had to write a minimum of 150 words in Hindi. They were encouraged to elaborate on their answers in English, if needed. I was unable to collect this data from the ELLs due to logistical issues, which I discuss in my findings chapter.

#### **Online Discussion Posts**

The weekly discussion posts from both groups was an important point of data in this study. The discussion forums were hosted on a course website that I had designed as an instructor, hence I continued to have access to all discussion threads even after the collaboration was over.

### **Post-Collaboration Reflections**

A week after the collaboration, the HLLs submitted their perceptions and reflections on the project. The scaffolding questions encouraged them to share what they liked or did not like about the collaboration, and if they had any problems understanding their peers' comments. I also asked them to offer suggestions on how this collaboration could be improved in the future. Like the languacultural autobiographies, this assignment had a minimum word limit of 150 words in Hindi. There is no data on the ELLs' perceptions about the project.

### **Researcher's Journal**

Throughout the duration of the study, I maintained a reflective journal, where I took detailed notes on different aspects of the project. I recorded factual details related to the implementation and execution of the project; summarized my telephone communications with Maneesh, and my informal interactions with the student-participants; and noted my in-class observations. The journal also became an important place for me to document my affective responses to different developments in the study.

### **Interviews**

I adopted a semi-structured approach to interviewing the HLLs about their languacultural backgrounds and their experiences in this exchange. Eleven out of the

seventeen HLLs agreed to be interviewed for this study. In total, I collected over 500 minutes of student-interviews. I also conducted a thirty minute long phone interview with Maneesh a couple of months after the collaboration.

### **Online Chats and Emails**

Although not part of the original research design, my mobile-based chats and emails with the ELLs and Maneesh also emerged as an important source of data in this study.

### **Data Analysis**

#### **Qualitative Approach**

The purpose of qualitative research is to present rich, holistic, detailed, and meaningful descriptions of the phenomenon under study. I adopted a qualitative approach to data analysis in this study, since it aligned with my research goal of understanding process and experiences. An important aspect of qualitative research is that it allows for a cyclic relationship between theory and research. Research questions evolve from data and shape one's understanding of theory. This approach allowed me to start my inquiry with a broad, open-ended research question, which I was able to refine based on new theoretical frameworks that I discovered along the process of data analysis.

#### **Discourse Analytical Method**

I draw on two approaches to discourse analysis (DA) to make meaning of the data in this study—interactional sociolinguistics (IS); and critical discourse analysis (CDA).

As a multidisciplinary and integrated approach to discourse analysis, IS allows for the study of language in interaction. It explains how language, context, and the interaction between the self and other are interrelated. This approach views discourse as occurring in social interaction where language use facilitates construction and negotiation of meaning. The main premise of this approach is that language structure, form, and use are socially and culturally constructed. Guided by this central idea, I relied on multiple IS analytical tools like face, frame, footing (Gumperz), stance (Herring), etc. to code and analyze my data.

CDA is a trans-disciplinary approach that combines linguistic and social theory in textual analysis to highlight the hidden issues of power differences, hegemonies, and social inequalities. The aim of CDA is explicitly political. Johnstone (2008) argues that the main impetus for CDA comes from Marxist studies that focus on highlighting the ideological practices that have come to be accepted as status quo. It is argued that language can be a powerful medium to influence people's thoughts and views and these influences are almost always politically motivated. CDA in essence aims to highlight the political and ideological underpinnings of language use. Texts in CDA are believed to be situated in discursive practices, which themselves are situated in social practices. The purpose of CDA is not only to highlight power equations inherent in the text, but to also suggest transformative practices. CDA thus aims to suggest ways of bringing about social change. Fairclough and Gee have adopted and expanded the understanding of CDA in the

field of education. They have brought the social theories of Bourdieu, Foucault, and Habermas on power, knowledge, hegemony, and capital into a dialogue with textual analysis. Both these scholars have offered manual references on how linguistic features of the text can be analyzed and related to social theories. While Gee focuses on micro-level analysis first (discourse) and then connects it with the macro-level contextual issues (Discourse), Fairclough's approach begins with identifying a social problem and then relating to linguistic features in the given text. Overall, both scholars highlight the importance of constant shifting between language and context in analysis.

### **Process of Data Analysis**

Data analysis was carried out in the following stages:

#### **Chronological Reconstruction**

I started the process of data analysis concerned that the online participation from the learners in India had been less than expected and that there had been a communication breakdown between Maneesh, the teacher collaborator from India, and me. To quantify this belief and to get an overview of the online interactions, I started my analysis with a chronological reconstruction of the entire project. I used data from the researcher's reflective journal, online discussion transcripts, and my chat-based communications with Maneesh and other participants to trace a day-to-day level of interaction between all participants in the study. This step revealed varying degrees of interactions within and across the eight sub-groups during the six weeks of collaboration

(see table below), and helped identify three sub-groups with relatively higher participation from learners from India: group 3, group 4, and group 5. This stage of analysis also revealed that Maneesh and I had been exchanging online messages or talking on the phone almost every day until the end of Week 3, when all our communication stopped.

Table 3: Number of Online Posts

Week	Group	No. of posts by the HLLs	No. of posts by the ELLs	Total posts
One	1	Riya = 3 Stacey = 3	Mahesh = 2	8
	2	Amanda = 3 Bob = 3	Kavita = 7	13
	3	Colleen = 3 Tara = 3	Bharati = 1 Pooja = 2	9
	4	Andy = 3 Shweta = 3 Simi = 3	Abhijeet = 2	11
	5	Justin = 4 Roshini = 4	Kalindi = 4 Tarun = 1	13
	6	Maya = 5 John = 3	Kishore = 6	14

Table 3, cont.

Week	Group	No. of posts by the HLLs	No. of posts by the ELLs	Total posts
	7	Elizabeth = 5 Arjun = 2	Rajeev = 1 Deepak = 1	9
	8	Kyle = 3 Vijay = 2	Sukanya = 5	10
Two	1	Riya = 2 Stacey = 2	Mahesh = 2	6
	2	Amanda = 2 Bob = 2	Kavita = 3	7
	3	Colleen = 2 Tara = 2	Pooja = 4	8
	4	Andy = 2 Shweta = 2 Simi = 2	Abhijeet = 2	8
	5	Justin = 2 Roshini = 3	Kalindi = 4	9
	6	Maya = 3 John = 2		5
	7	Elizabeth = 3 Arjun = 2	Rajeev = 1 Deepak = 3	9

Table 3, cont.

Week	Group	No. of posts by the HLLs	No. of posts by the ELLs	Total posts
	8	Kyle = 2 Vijay = 2	Sukanya = 3	7
Three	1	Riya = 2 Stacey = 2		4
	2	Amanda = 2 Bob = 2	Kavita = 1 (late)	5
	3	Colleen = 2 Tara = 2	Pooja = 3	7
	4	Andy = 2 Shweta = 3 Simi = 2	Abhijeet = 2	9
	5	Justin = 2 Roshini = 2	Kalindi = 1	5
	6	Maya = 2 John = 2		4
	7	Elizabeth = 2 Arjun = 2		4
	8	Kyle = 2 Vijay = 2		4

Table 3, cont.

Week	Group	No. of posts by the HLLs	No. of posts by the ELLs	Total posts
Four	1	Riya = 2 Stacey = 2	Mahesh = 1 (late)	5
	2	Amanda = 2 Bob = 4		6
	3	Colleen = 2 Tara = 2	Pooja = 3	7
	4	Andy = 2 Shweta = 2 Simi = 3	Abhijeet = 1	8
	5	Justin = 2 Roshini = 2	Kalindi = 2	6
	6	Maya = 2 John = 2		4
	7	Elizabeth = 2 Arjun = 1		3
	8	Kyle = 2 Vijay = 2		4
	1	Riya = 2 Stacey = 2		4

Table 3, cont.

Week	Group	No. of posts by the HLLs	No. of posts by the ELLs	Total posts
	2	Amanda = 2 Bob = 3		5
	3	Colleen = 2 Tara = 2	Pooja = 2	6
Five	4	Andy = 2 Shweta = 2 Simi = 2		6
	5	Justin = 2 Roshini = 2		4
	6	Maya = 2 John = 2		4
	7	Elizabeth = 2 Arjun = 2		4
	8	Kyle = 3 Vijay = 2		5
	1	Riya = 2 Stacey = 2		4
	2	Amanda = 2 Bob = 3		5

Table 3, cont.

Week	Group	No. of posts by the HLLs	No. of posts by the ELLs	Total posts
Six	3	Colleen = 1 Tara = 2	Pooja = 1	4
	4	Andy = 2 Shweta = 2 Simi = 2		6
	5	Justin = 2 Roshini = 2		4
	6	Maya = 2 John = 2		4
	7	Elizabeth = 2 Arjun = 2		4
	8	Kyle = 2 Vijay = 2		4

### Textual Analysis of Online Discourse

I closely read the online transcripts from each group and focused my textual analysis on how participants used language to achieve different discursive functions. Specifically, I studied linguistic and paralinguistic features of participants' posts to understand what they were 'doing with the language' in context. While I did not follow a predefined coding scheme, my identification and categorization of participants' language

functions was firmly situated in my background knowledge of analytical tools used in interactional sociolinguistics, such as stance-taking, face, frame, etc. For example, I categorized this interaction between Roshini and Kalindi (HLL and ELL from Group 5) — “It's so cool how we've basically seen the same Bollywood and American movies, even though you're in India and I'm in America. :)”—as a discursive move to establish alignment with the interlocutor.

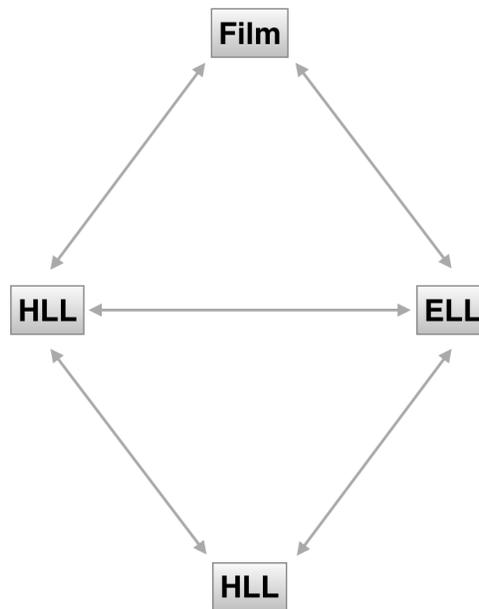
By focusing on discursive function rather than pure syntax, I was able to analyze Hindi data without always translating it into English. For example, I interpreted this comment from Pooja, an ELL from Group 3 —आप के विचारों को पढ कर लगता है कि हमारे निवास स्थान में, संस्कृति में भले ही विविधताएँ हों परन्तु विचारों में समानता है (After reading your opinions it feels like even though we live in different places and our cultures are different, our opinions are similar)—also as an interpersonal alignment-making move.

### **Initial Patterns of Interactions**

After coding the online transcripts, I moved on to analyzing participants' languacultural autobiographies (pre-collaboration journals) and their reflective journals submitted after the collaboration. This step in data analysis allowed me to cross-check my interpretations of participants' online discourse to their own perceptions around their participation in the discussions. I conducted this cross-sectional comparisons multiple times, refining and redefining my initial categories in the process. Based on this process, I was able to identify three patterns of interactions across the data points. These patterns

related to: how the HLLs presented themselves in the project; how the HLLs talked to other the HLLs and the ELLs in the group; and finally, how the HLLs and some ELLs responded to the film. I represented this pattern of interaction in a triangle-shaped diagram in my notes. (see Figure 2)

Figure 2: Initial Patterns of Interaction



### Analyzing Researcher's Discourse

At this stage in the process, I went back to my researcher's journal to understand why there had been fewer than expected discussion posts from participants in India.

Continuing with the process of chronological reconstruction, I traced my communications (online chats, emails, notes from phone calls, and a phone interview) with Maneesh along three stages: a. pre-collaboration interactions, when I first approached him with the idea; b. interactions during the collaboration, when he expressed inability to work more on the project due to other professional and personal commitments; and c. our communication two months after the collaboration, when he expressed appreciation for the project, and suggested potential ways of improving the collaboration in the future.

I tried to adopt an honest, critical, and introspective approach while reading these data points. My familiarity with and appreciation for scholarship in critical discourse analysis guided my analysis of my own discourse. In particular, I focused on how Maneesh and I were implicated in different situations of power and how these power relations were negotiated through talk.

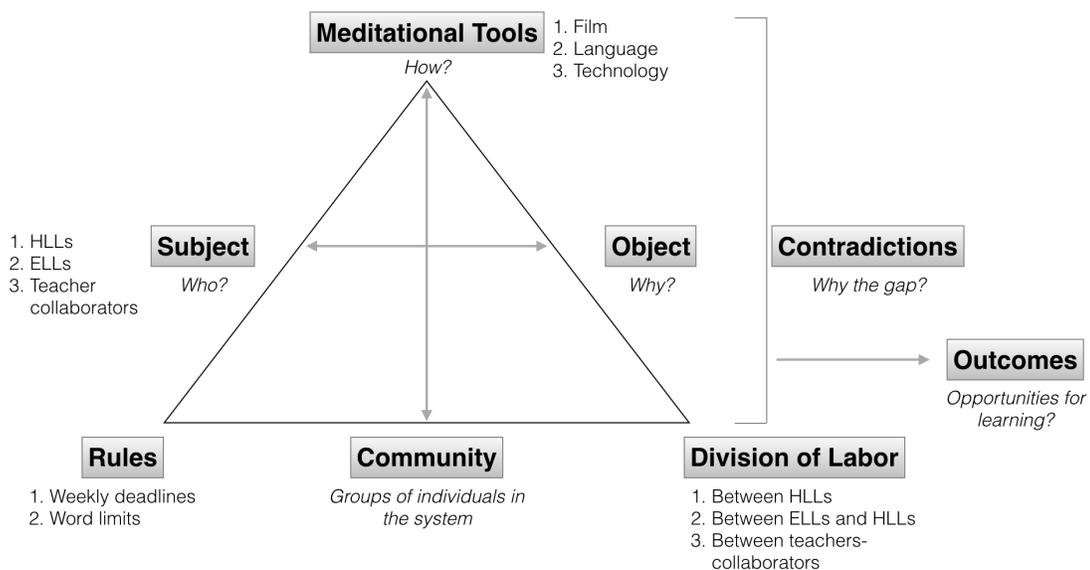
### **Refining Analysis through Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)**

By now in the data analysis process, I had discovered different pieces that explained how some seemingly disconnected aspects of this pedagogical experiment had unfolded: different patterns of interactions among participants and moments of tensions between the collaborators. At this stage, I decided to reengage with the larger theoretical framework for this study: ecological system theory. The inherent cyclic nature of qualitative research allowed me to revisit theory to understand how my different research findings so far could be structured into a cohesive narrative. As an ecological model of

research and inquiry, the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) offered helpful insight into how different dimensions of this experiment could be conceptualized as components within a single, dynamic system.

Working with CHAT as an analytical lens, I was compelled to look at other components in the experiment that had not directly emerged in my findings so far. For instance, how were participants using language as a mediational tool to construct their own community vs. the ‘other’ community? I proceeded to use the CHAT model to re-conceptualize my experiment as a system and map out its different components (see Figure 3). Overall, this model strongly aligned with my research goal of painting a comprehensive picture of the context, processes, and experiences within this intercultural online exchange.

Figure 3: Activity Theory Model for the Current Study



## **Analyzing Interviews**

The final stage of data analysis involved transcribing and thematically analyzing nine (out of eleven) interviews from the HLLs. This analysis served two purposes. First, it provided further opportunities to compare and cross check my interpretations of participants' online discourse and experiences. Second, the interview data in itself became an important site of inquiry in that it revealed participants' deep engagement with questions of identity and culture. Participants were much more detailed and open about talking about their languacultural experiences than they had been in their journals and online discussions. Noticing this trend, I decided to include the second research question in this study, and adopted discourse analytic strategies to understand how participants' language use indexed their identity construction.

This stage of analysis also helped me select three case studies for this research. I decided to focus on three HLLs from three groups that had seen higher participation from the ELLs: Justin from group 5; Tara from group 3; and Andy from group 4. The overall richness of multiple data points from these three participants guided my decision. The intercultural interactions in these three groups also allowed me to connect the question related to identity back to the engagement with the online exchange.

## **Trustworthiness**

There is no denying that qualitative research is inherently subjective. The goal in qualitative research is not to pursue an objective reality that exists outside of the research process; rather the goal is to allow a version of truth to emerge out of the process. Guided by this principle, I have tried to maintain rigor and trustworthiness in my research by deeply engaging with my data over a long span of time and letting it lead me to new and sometimes familiar interpretations. I have also adopted a data triangulation (Davis 1995; Lincoln and Guba 1985; Maxwell 1992) approach, by collecting multiple sources of data and pursuing similar questions across different data sets (journals, discussion posts, and interviews).

I have been inspired by more post-modern and progressive approaches to qualitative research, where scholars (Holliday 2005; Norton and Toohy 2011) propose deliberately asking provocative and biased questions to compel one's research participants to think. This approach, as they argue, allows for a more 'de-centered' methodology, where the research subjects, who are normally delegated to the margins, are given more agency to articulate their experiences. Maintaining ethics in this approach requires an honest, nonjudgmental, critical, and self-introspective stance, all of which I have tried my best to retain in my methods of data collection and analysis.

## **Chapter 4: Findings I**

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I draw on the activity theory framework to provide a holistic image of what the online exchange looked like and how it progressed. The second section examines the moments of tension or contradictions in the activity system that contributed to a communication breakdown between the instructor-collaborators and impacted students' participation in the exchange. The third section presents the outcomes that resulted from the interactions and contradictions within the activity system.

### **Online Exchange as an Activity System**

In this section, I aim to provide a thick description of the online intercultural exchange as an activity system and the patterns that emerged within the six components of the system: subject; mediating tools; rule; community; division of labor; and object.

#### **Subject**

Subject is the 'who' of the activity system; an individual or a group whose actions, motives, utterances, and point of view is central to understanding the system. There were three main subject-groups, whose perspectives were critical in understanding this online exchange: a. students in America, who I refer to as the Hindi Language Learners (HLLs) in this study; b. students in India, who I refer to as the English

Language Learners (ELLs); and c. the instructor-collaborators on both sides, i.e. Maneesh and me.

The following description of the activity system mainly focuses on the HLLs' subject position in the system. I have also drawn on data from the ELLs in this section to mainly contextualize and interpret the HLLs' utterances. The reason for the ELLs' missing perspectives relates to the methodological design and actual progression of the online exchange, which allowed for more data to be collected from the HLLs versus the ELLs. In addition, my access to the ELLs' perspectives was tied to my communication with Maneesh, which posed some challenges during the exchange. I discuss these problems and other tensions that emerged as a result of our conflicting subject positions in the system in the second section of this chapter.

### **Language, culture, and identity**

The pre-collaboration journal required the HLLs to answer questions related to their previous linguistic experiences and cultural identity (see appendix A). Combining this data, along with the HLLs' responses in the online discussion and their interviews, allowed me to understand how they perceived culture, language, and identity and how these three constructs were linked in their discourse.

There were certain similarities among participants in how they chose to define culture in their journals. Riya, Simi, and Amanda defined culture in terms of behavioral practices and products of a group of people. Many others described culture in more

intimate terms, equating it with family, values, and traditions (often religious) that they have grown up with (Bob, Maya, Kyle, Justin, Andy, Elizabeth, and Arjun). Colleen, Shweta, and Roshini defined culture as something that imparts people with a sense of identity and community belongingness. Similarly, Tara defined culture as something “very personal” that transcends nationality.

### **Language as a way to connect to culture**

Language emerged as an important component in how subjects approached the question of cultural identity. The links between language, culture, and identity were most apparent in the HLLs’ responses to the question on why they were learning Hindi. For some of the HLLs who identified their cultural heritage in India, Hindi was seen as a way of connecting with family and their cultural roots. In some other cases, Hindi was also perceived as important for attaining professional goals, along with reconnecting with cultural heritage:

I’m learning Hindi because I’m from India and one day I want to work with the people of India — **Simi** (quote translated from Hindi)

I’m learning Hindi because this is India’s global language and I want to learn the books that my Grandfather wrote in Hindi— **Shweta**

Hindi is the language of my country, what other reason do I need? — **Maya** ( quote translated from Hindi)

I chose Hindi as my foreign language because I didn't want to lose that connection with my roots and my heritage. I understood Hindi fairly well before starting, but mostly conversational Hindi. I wanted to build my vocabulary and be able to read and write in Hindi too. I think it is an important language to learn for me personally because of my cultural heritage. However, considering India’s population, I believe it’s an important language without that context as well. — **Riya**

I’m learning Hindi because this is the fourth most common language — **Kyle** (quote translated from Hindi)

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)

Justin went on to explain in his interview that language was the only thing he was missing from the culture (see Chapter 5). Language hence allowed these subjects to 'complete' and preserve a part of their cultural identity.

### **Language loss and cultural loss**

The seemingly direct link between Hindi and Indian cultural identity was problematized in some of the HLLs' responses elsewhere, where they identified other Indian languages as their heritage language and described their experiences of not being able to speak these languages or speak them well. A sense of identity loss that is connected to the loss of heritage language comes across in these narratives. For instance, Andy identified Oriya as one of his heritage languages. In his interview and discussion post in week 4, he talked about how his parents deliberately didn't teach him Oriya, so that he would learn only English and assimilate better at school in the United States. He said this loss of language made him feel like an outsider every time he visited India to see his family. (I describe his experiences in detail in chapter 5). Similarly, Simi described her experience with Tamil as follows:

Hi Abhijeet! Just like you and Andy, I definitely understand that feeling as well. When people learn that I'm from Tamil Nadu, they immediately begin talking to me in Tamil, like I should know it. I understand everything they say but unfortunately, speaking back to them in Tamil is a challenge for me. It's funny because my first language was Tamil but my parents forced me to learn English at a very young age before I started school here in the US so then I completely forgot it. I think it's important to know English, just because of how integrated it is in every society across the globe, but knowing your mother tongue

is also incredibly important because it reflect your knowledge and understanding of your culture and heritage. I wish I could speak Tamil just as fluently, or even better, than I can speak English.

### **Language and new (heritage) cultural identity**

While the loss of language appeared to create a sense of cultural loss for some, others perceived language learning as a way of constructing a new, or a more layered cultural identity. Interestingly, for two Indian-heritage learners of Hindi, this process of creating a new identity was situated in their experience of learning English as a young immigrant in the United States. These narratives emerged in Week 4 when Riya and Vijay separately mentioned that they could relate to the struggles faced by Shashi, the film's protagonist, in trying to communicate in a foreign land and her experiences of being a cultural outsider:

I can relate to Shashi to an extent in this scene. As an immigrant, when I was a young girl and first moved to America, I often felt like an outsider. I pronounced certain words differently than many of my peers and was not accustomed to American schooling. So I often got made fun of. However, since I moved from India to America and America to India almost every year when I was young, I began to take on a little bit of a southern accent from living in Texas. As a result I felt like an outsider in India too, which I still considered my home. It was really frustrating for me as a child, but I learned to grow a thick skin. I knew that instead of getting angry or sad, it was more productive to educate those around me about my experiences and learn to assimilate into my surroundings. I learned that this did not have to mean that I lost my cultural identity. Instead, I just gained a new cultural identity that incorporated my time in India and America. — **Riya**

Unlike Riya, Vijay did not directly mention identity in his post from Week 4. In his post, he described how his experience of moving to America mirrored that of Shashi's since he could not speak English either, and only spoke Hindi and Punjabi. His

performance in school suffered as a result, and he was worried that he would never be able to learn English. However, he said, he stopped watching Hindi and Punjabi films and only watched programs in English. After a long time, he continued, he finally succeeded in learning English. This personal narrative can be further contextualized with how Vijay answered questions around culture and cultural identity:

For me the meaning of “culture” cannot be completed without “language”  
I am a Punjabi, Sikh, American, and Indian

These data points together seem to indicate that for Vijay, learning a new language, English, was integral to forming an American identity.

### **Language and layered multicultural selves**

The interconnectedness between language learning and identity construction also emerged in the other HLLs with non-Indian cultural heritage. Stacey, who had moved to the United States from Romania at the age of six, mentioned in her interview that she always spoke to her parents in Romanian and found it “awkward” to speak to them in English. She stated that growing up in a bilingual household has made it easier for her to learn other languages. She was learning Spanish, Hindi, and Urdu at the time as this study and was planning to pursue Portuguese the following semester. She chose to study Hindi and Urdu because she “really really” wanted to challenge herself by learning languages that were completely different from the Romance languages that she was more familiar with. When asked to define her cultural identity, she commented that it was “a really tough question”. She explained that learning Spanish has resulted in her experiencing

“cultural crisis all the time” since she now strongly identified with Spanish culture because it is “closer to Romanian culture”.

Roshini, who had moved to American from China at the age of four, referenced a similar idea in her interview. She mentioned that growing up she had struggled to reconcile her ‘Chinese’ and ‘American’ selves. She preferred to keep her Chinese culture “at home” and brought out her “American side” when she was out in the world. She said that now she embraced her ‘Asian-American’ identity, and that in fact the combination of those worlds in her has allowed her to be more open to other cultures and languages, especially Hindi:

I read a few blog posts about it like how people are trying to reconcile their one culture with another. Umm...but I think if anything...being part of two cultures definitely gives you...you are very open-minded to learning new things. That’s why like...partially where my love of exploring...that’s really why I was like so open to learning Hindi and learning about Indian culture because I was already part of two cultures and I could already...I don’t know it feels like I am becoming even more diverse like other people would think like oh like why would you wanna do that like why would you wanna like go into something like something completely unknown and scary..umm..I guess for people who are exposed to both cultures is kinda like oh like you are just adding more...

While for Stacey and Roshini, learning a new language added another layer to their previous multicultural selves, for Coleen, another HLL in the study, foreign language learning allowed her to create a new “cosmopolitan” sense of self that transcended her regional and national identity and her monolingual-English speaking background. In her journal, Coleen stated that, “culture is very embedded into language

and vice-versa” and that she was learning Hindi because she was very interested in Indian culture. She described her cultural identity as follows:

I identify myself as an American and a Texan, leaning towards cosmopolitan in that I think a large part of my identity is my desire to learn about and experience other cultures.

Her desire to learn new languages and explore other cultures was further evident in the fact that she had already learned Spanish and Italian before she started learning Hindi.

### **Cultural identity outside of language**

For one HLL in the study, however, defining cultural identity did not directly relate to language. Amanda, who described herself as an American, had lived in Rhode Island before she moved to Texas at the age of twelve. She described this experience as being extremely challenging for her because Texas and New England were culturally very different. In her discussion post, she compared her situation to that of Shashi’s and said that she would be worried and scared because everything in Texas felt very strange. She elaborated on this response in her interview and explained that the two regions were very different in terms of behavioral practices and expectations related to dressing-up; communicating in public; expressing respect and politeness; being friendly, etc.:

Just like social expectations...again like in Texas it is very much expected to be friendly in public, and I didn’t feel comfortable with that for a long time because in Rhode Island, it’s much more stay to yourself and kind of like more closed off to people you don’t know...umm...and then you know, just the speech, the accents are different and all sorts of things like that...so yeah, I mean for a while, when I wasn’t comfortable with those things yet, I definitely felt like I was kind of on the outside looking in

She added that there was very little “racial and cultural diversity” where she grew up, since “everybody there is almost all Catholic, with mostly Irish and Italian heritage”, so becoming comfortable with cultural diversity in Texas was a big adjustment for her.

She mentioned that she knew almost nothing about India and Hindi before joining the Hindi class, and that the decision to learn Hindi (and Urdu) had happened on “a whim” after she had received a postcard from the department advertising their Hindi-Urdu program.

### **Mediating Tools**

Mediating tools refer to the ‘how’ in the activity system. These are socially constructed physical and symbolic means that allow subjects to attain the desired outcomes. Three mediating tools can be identified in this activity system. Firstly, the intercultural discussions were directed towards analyzing the film, hence the film is an important mediating tool in the system. Language (Hindi and English) was another tool in the system, since it shaped and communicated subjects’ discussions. Finally, technology is the medium that brought the subjects in contact, hence technology is the third mediating tool in this activity system. The following sections describe the patterns that emerged in how subjects interacted with the above-mentioned mediating tools.

### **Film as a cultural tool**

The subjects’ engagement with the film was guided by the weekly discussion prompts. Their responses to discussion questions from Week 2 revealed their general

perceptions about films as socio-cultural products, while their discussions in Week 3 showed how they responded to the specific narrative of *English-Vinglish*.

### **More than entertainment**

In response to the topic of why we watch films, participants collectively recognized that films are not only meant for entertainment, and that they serve other important social functions. Stacey, an HLL from Group 1, for instance, highlighted the informative purpose of films in terms of introducing the audience to a new culture:

I agree with what you say, that films should be entertaining but that with this movie one is also exposed to a new society. I think that holds true for both an Indian or Pakistani viewer as it does for someone living in the United States. As an American viewer, one is exposed not only to Indian society, particularly the way knowledge of English is seen as a sign of education or good status, but also a non-English speaker's frustration in both India and United States.

Roshini from Group 5 similarly argued that films can educate their audience, although she attributed this educational function to specific genres of films, like documentaries:

मुझे लगता है कि फ़िल्में सिर्फ मनोरंजन के लिए नहीं होती हैं। मनोरंजन के लिए कुछ फ़िल्में का इस्तेमाल किया जाता है, लेकिन सामाजिक-commentary और शैक्षिक-purposes (जैसा कि - वृत्तचित्रयें) भी के लिये कुछ फ़िल्में का इस्तेमाल किया जाता है।

I think that films are not only for entertainment. Some films are used for entertainment, but some films are also used for social-commentary and educational-purposes (for instance— documentaries).

Other participants did not distinguish between genres when highlighting the social functions of films. They argued that even when films are seemingly made for

entertainment, they offer commentary on social practices. In her post in Hindi, Elizabeth, from Group 7, referenced a popular mainstream Bollywood film, My Name is Khan, to support this claim. The film narrates the story of a Muslim Indian man living in the United States, who suffers great personal loss and discrimination due to communal and racial tensions post 9/11 terror attacks.

Tara and Colleen from Group 3 similarly pointed out that films, like any other art form, have multiple layers of meaning, which become evident based on the audiences' readiness and ability to engage with the film beyond the surface level of entertainment:

नहीं, फ़िल्में सिर्फ मनोरंजन के लिए नहीं होती हैं। हालांकि कुछ फ़िल्में कुछ लोगों के लिए सिर्फ मनोरंजन के लिए होती हैं, मुझे लगता है कि सारे लोग फ़िल्में अपने तरीके (way) में देखते और समझते हैं। फ़िल्में लोगों की सोच प्रभावित कर सकते हैं क्योंकि वे लोगों को नई अनुभव दिखाते हैं। या कभी कभी फ़िल्में लोगों को खुशी दे सकते हैं क्योंकि वे लोगों के लिए relatable या familiar हैं। कुछ लोगों के लिए, फ़िल्में पढ़ाने सकते हैं या लोगों को नई विचार देखा सकते हैं। फ़िल्में लोगों को नई संस्कृति दिखाते हैं।

No, films are not only for entertainment. Although some films are only for entertainment for some people, I think everyone watches and understands films in their own way. Films can influence people's thinking because they show people many experiences. Or sometime films can give happiness to people because they are relatable or familiar for people. For some people, films can teach or make them see new ideas. Films show people new culture. — **Colleen**

मुझे लगता है की फ़िल्में सिर्फ मनोरंजन के लिए नहीं होती। फ़िल्में चलने के लिए मनोरंजन चाहिए लेकिन अगर लोगों कुछ धौर से देखें तो, मनोरंजन के इलावा कुछ गहरे बात भी मिलेंगे। फ़िल्में भी एक किस्मकी कला है। कला अपने तरीके का यथार्थ दिखती है - लेकिन तब भी यथार्थ ही होती है।

I think that films are not only for entertainment. Entertainment is needed to make the film work but if people look carefully then, you will find deeper thing other than entertainment. Films are also a kind of art. Art shows its own kind of reality—but then also it is reality. — **Tara**

Maya and Andy highlighted other critical functions of films, like exposing and addressing social problems and propagating political ideologies:

नहीं, मुझे लगता है कि फ़िल्म बहुत प्रयोजन है। पिछले रविवार को, अमरिका का फ़िल्म फ़ैर (वे कहते “अस्कर्स”)

था। अस्कर्स में, बहुत आक्टर ने संस्कृति के समस्याओं के बारे में बहाताया और बहुत फ़िल्में इन समस्याओं के सामना करते।— **Andy**

No, I think films have many functions. Last Sunday was America’s Filmfare (they call it the ‘Oscars’ here). During Oscars, many actors talked about cultural problems and many films challenge these problems.

I wholeheartedly agree with you, John. Movies, whether we like it or not, has always been and always will be a reflection of our society and a representation of our thoughts (political, social, and/or religious). During the Holocaust, there were these plays and movies put up by Nazi Germany that characterized Jews as caricatures, as lesser, as sub-human. Were these movies not out to disseminate propaganda? — **Maya**

### **Films and reality**

The question on whether films depict reality generated less straightforward responses. The complexity of the question was explicitly called out by Colleen in her post, where she argued that people and the world are difficult to depict:

यह सवाल बहुत मुश्किल है! बिल्कुल, कुछ फ़िल्में यथार्थ दर्शाने कि कोशिश करते हैं। लेकिन, मुझे लगता है कि कुछ यथार्थ नहीं दर्शा सकते हैं। लोग और दुनिया बहुत मुश्किल दर्शाने हैं।

This question is very difficult! Absolutely, some films try to depict reality. But, I think that some realities can’t be shown. People and world is very difficult to depict.

When upholding the representational value of films, some participants were careful to point out that the reality that gets reflected in films is idealized, selective, and exaggerated:

मेरे ख़्याल में सिर्फ़ सब फ़िल्में द्वारा नए यथार्थ का निर्माण होता है क्योंकि भाल ही फिल्म दूनया में ज़िंदगी के बारे में, फिल्म डाइरेक्टर चुनते हैं यथार्थ में जैसा तरीका उनको पसंद है। इसीलिए कुछ फिल्म यथार्थ दर्शाती हैं लेकिन सब यथार्थ नहीं दर्शाती हैं

In my opinion every film creates a new reality because even film is about the life in the world, film directors chose the ways in realities that they like. Therefore some films represent reality but not all films. — **Stacey**

मेरे ख्याल में, फिल्मों द्वारा नए यथार्थ का निर्माण होता है। हाँ, कुछ फिल्में एक व्यक्ति का सामान्य, रोज़ ज़िन्दगी दर्शाने की कोशिश करती हैं, लेकिन उन फिल्मों भी के लिये, इस सामान्य ज़िन्दगी का चित्रण बार-बार तोड़ा-मरोड़ा और आर्दश प्रतिनिधित्व है। (मैंने कहना चाहा कि: “but even for these films, this depiction of normal life is oftentimes a distorted and idealized representation”...) —

**Roshini**

I do think that films are often based on reality, but maybe that is a cultural. I have not seen very many Bollywood films since I was a young girl. But in Hollywood films, reality is shown most of the time, though it is sometimes exaggerated. Do you think Bollywood films do this too? —**Riya**

Riya’s comment indicates that she perceives a cultural difference in how films, as culture-specific products, address the issue of representing reality. It would have been interesting to see this conversation move forward and understand if Riya’s perceptions about Hollywood and Bollywood were related to the kind of cultural beliefs audiences have about the representational value of films; in other words, are films in a given culture even expected to represent reality? Unfortunately, Riya did not receive a response to this post, nor did she agree to be interviewed for this study.

An ELL from a different group, Abhijeet, however, in his discussion post argued that in his society films created reality and had the power to influence social behavior:

जरूरी नहीं की फिल्म यथार्थ दिखाए मैं मानता हूँ कि समाज को देखकर फिल्म का निर्माण बहुत कम होता है किन्तु फिल्म को देखकर समाज जरूर बनता हैहमारे यहाँ तो हीरो रोल मॉडल होता है जो कि जैसा करेगा वैसे ही युवा वर्ग आचरण करेगा। इसीलिए फिल्म ही समाज को बनाती हैं। फिल्मों के माध्यम से लोगों का आचरण वेशभूषा सब कुछ परिवर्तित होता है

It’s not important films depict reality. I believe that films are rarely made to reflect social reality however society is definitely created on the basis of films. Around here hero (referring to film actors) is the role model. The youth will follow whatever he does. Therefore it’s films that make society. People’s behaviors and dressing habits everything changes through the medium of films.

Along similar lines, another ELL from Group 3, Pooja, in her post from Week 3 argued that the ending of *English-Vinglish* (where Shashi surprises her family with her fluent speech in English at the wedding) perhaps did not reflect real life, but it did reflect a desire for social change.

### **Response to English-Vinglish**

Overall, participants responded favorably to the story of *English-Vinglish*. Colleen's following quote from Week 3 captures participants' level of involvement while watching the film:

We watched the movie in a group and we were all yelling at the daughter the entire time. I can't imagine being that mean to my own mom!

This was the first time Amanda and John had ever watched a Bollywood film, which they both enjoyed. Bob, Amanda's group partner from the Hindi class, told Amanda that this was a good first Hindi film to watch since it was so easy to comprehend, given its mixed use of Hindi and English and its American setting. Amanda agreed with Bob and expressed surprise at this film not being as musical as she had expected a typical Bollywood film to be. She also appreciated the film for providing varied perspectives on Indian culture:

I agree that English Vinglish was a good first film. It wasn't exactly what I expected a Bollywood film to be like. I must admit that I expected dancing, but I guess that's not true of all Bollywood films! I liked that it showed many aspects of Indian culture: Indians in India, Indian emigrants in America, and even in the case of Shaashi's nieces the perspective of second generation Indian Americans. — **Amanda**

The film also allowed Amanda to project her own experiences into the story and imagine a future-self in India that would be comparable to Shashi's experience in America:

आनेवाली गर्मियों की छुट्टियों के लिए मैं जयपुर जाऊँगी। जयपुर में मैं हिन्दी पढ़ूँगी और हिन्दुस्तानी संस्कृति के बारे में सीखूँगी। मुझे लगता है कि जयपुर में मैं शाशि के जैसा लगूँगी। न्यू यॉर्क में शाशि अँग्रेजी नहीं बोल सकती थी और अकेली थी। जयपुर में मैं मेरे दोस्त बिना रहूँगा। मेरी हिन्दी भी बहुत अच्छी नहीं है। मैं हिन्दुस्तानी परिवार के साथ रहूँगी और स्कूल जाऊँगी। “English Vinglish” में शाशि अपने अमरीकी रिश्तेदारों के साथ रहती थी और अँग्रेजी का क्लास जाती थी। बहुत समान बात है। मुझे आशा है कि जयपुर में मैं विश्वास के साथ कॉफी खरीद पाऊँगी।

In the coming summer vacation I will go to Jaipur. I will study Hindi and learn about Indian culture in Jaipur. I think that I will feel like Shashi in Jaipur. Shashi can't speak English in New York and was alone. I will live without my friends in Jaipur. My Hindi is also not very good. I will live with an Indian family and will go to school. In “English-Vinglish” Shashi lived with her relatives in America and used to go to English class. It's very similar. I hope that I will be able to confidently buy coffee in Jaipur.

Similarly, Justin, Kyle, and Vijay also expressed surprise at this film, which they perceived as an atypical Bollywood film. As someone who had lived in India in his early years, Vijay seemed more familiar with Bollywood films and was critical of them for typically being unrealistic and predictable. He felt *English-Vinglish* broke those conventions:

I agree with your post Kyle, this turned out to be a much better movie that I had expected it to be. I was expecting a typical, boring, and very predictable Bollywood love story that we're all tired of watching. This movie had a good message for the audience and I enjoyed watching the meaningful story. I think it is important that we get family oriented mainstream movies every once in a while. Bollywood especially likes to dish out completely unrealistic love stories that no one can relate to or learn anything from so this was a good change.

Interestingly, an ELL from Group 5 (Justin's group), Kalindi, echoed very similar opinions on the film arguing that this film was unique in choosing a new and socially relevant subject:

मुझे ये फिल्म पसंद है क्युकी हम भारत में इस तरह के विषय को दिखाते ही नहीं . ये फिल्म इस तरह के सिनेमा को प्रोत्साहित करती है. इसे इस खूबसूरती से बनाया है की हम ये सोच सकते हैं की अच्छी फिल्मे सिर्फ अच्छे गानों , बड़े एक्टर एक्ट्रेस, रोमांस या एक्शन से ही नहीं बल्कि ऐसे सामान्य से विषय पर भी बन सकती है . और इसे देख के हम रिलेट भी कर सकते हैं क्युकी शशि जो सिचुएशन का सामना करती है वो भारत की हर दूसरी महिला करती है .

I liked this film because in India we hardly ever show such subjects. This film promotes this kind of cinema. This film has been made so beautifully that we can think that good songs, famous actors and actresses, romance, and action alone don't make good films, but that good films can also be made on such ordinary topics. And we can also relate with this film because every other Indian woman faces the situation that Shashi faces in this film.

However, there was one participant in the study who did not like the movie. Elizabeth, an HLL from Group 7, argued that the film conveys the wrong message in how it undermines Shashi's passion as an entrepreneur (she is shown to run her own small scale sweet making business in the film), since her social value and acceptability is only enhanced once she is able to impress her family by learning English:

मुझको फ़िल्म अच्छी नहीं लगी। मुझको फिल्म नपसंद आने के क्या कारण हैं कि मेरे ख्याल में कहानी या फ़िल्म का मतलब ख़राब हैं। शाशी एक परंपरागत महिला है, और परंपरा में कुछ ख़राबी नहीं है। शशी लड्डू बनाने का शौक है - उसका एक ही जुनून है - लेकिन फ़िल्म में शासी को हतोत्साह करते हैं। मुझे लगता है English Vinglish कहते है कि लोगो को जुनून नहीं पीछा करना चाहिये। शाशी अंग्रेज़ी सिखना का शौक थी, लेकिन सीर्फ़ उसका परिवार और उसका पति उसको मज़ाक उड़ाने के बाद। पहले यह अंग्रेज़ी नहीं सिखना चाहती थी। शयाद अंग्रेज़ी सिखना उसकी जुनून हो बनीं, लेकिन क्या कारण के लिये था? उसका परिवार और पति को खुश आने का था? शयद भविष्य में शाशी नये समस्याओं से मिलूंगी, फिर क्या हो जाएगा? शाशी को फिर से बदल हो जाना पड़ेगा।

I didn't like the film. The reason I didn't like the film is because I'm my opinion the film's message is bad. Shashi is traditional woman and there is nothing wrong in this

tradition. Shashi likes to make *ladoos*—she only has one passion—but the film discourages her. I think English-Vinglish says that people should not follow their passion. Shashi was fond of learning English, but only after her family and her husband started making fun of her. She didn't want to learn English before. Perhaps learning English became her passion, but for what reason? To make her family and her husband happy? Perhaps Shashi will encounter new problems in the future, and then what will happen? Shashi will have to change again.

Elizabeth continued to maintain her critical stance throughout the discussion. She was specifically critical of how the film tackled the relationship between Shashi and her husband, Satish. I will discuss this in detail in a later section in this chapter.

### **Language as a semiotic tool**

Language emerged as a critical tool in the system in how the HLLs constructed their opinions and made meaning of their interlocutors' comments. Both Hindi and English were used in the study. The rationale for including both languages was to create opportunities for participants to deeply engage with the discussion issues and feel constrained by their language skills. In the online discussions, participants were expected to post their first comment in their L2 and their responses in L1. For the pre- and post-collaboration journals, the HLLs were required to write a minimum of 150 words in Hindi and were encouraged to expand on their Hindi responses in English after that, if needed.

More than fifty percent of the HLLs switched to English while writing their pre-collaboration journal. Some of them (Bob, Roshini, Colleen) explained their Hindi responses in different sections by adding English sentences in parentheses, while others

chose to answer the later sections of the journal (questions on linguistic experiences and cultural identity) in English. The participants who chose to write both in Hindi and English had longer answers than the ones who only wrote in Hindi. In the Hindi-only journals, most prompts were answered in single sentences.

During one of the brief in-class discussion regarding the project, I asked participants why more of them had not used English in their journals. Riya explained that by the time she got to the last few questions, they were difficult to answer in Hindi, so she answered them in English. This reason aligned with my assumption behind designing the bilingual prompts and also with my interpretation of the other HLLs' patterns of code-switching in their journals. Interestingly, during this discussion, Andy, whose journals included mostly single-sentence answers, mentioned that he did not write in English because he "preferred to write more in Hindi and get feedback on that rather than write more in English".

In the discussion forums, the HLLs closely followed the instructions and wrote their first post in Hindi and the second in English. There was little evidence of code-switching within a single post. Some participants used English almost as a 'self-glossing' tool in their Hindi posts, where they explained the meaning of the Hindi word in parentheses in English. Here's an example from Justin's post from Week 4:

उसको अंग्रेज़ी आये यह इतना महत्वपूर्ण क्योंकि अंग्रेज़ी रोजमर्रा की चीज़ों (everyday things) के लिये इस्तेमाल किया जाता है। और अगर किसी को इन चीज़ों के लिये का अंग्रेज़ी का इस्तेमाल नहीं सकते है, तो यह बहुत असामान्य (uncommon) और शर्मनाक (embarrassing) है। मुझे पूरी तरह से लगता है

कि विश्व में कुछ भाषाओं का प्रभुत्व दूसरी भाषाओं से ज़्यादा होता है। शायद एक कारण इसके लिये है कि अमेरिका और ग्रेट ब्रिटेन दुनिया में बहुत प्रभावशाली (influential) देश हैं। अमेरिका और ग्रेट ब्रिटेन की संस्कृति दुनिया भर में फैल (to spread) गया है।

Language appeared to pose fewer challenges for the HLLs as far as comprehending their partners' posts was concerned. The weekly discussion tasks did not require participants to exchange linguistic feedback or comment on each other's language use. However, there were two instances where the HLLs asked for direct language clarification from the ELLs in their groups. In the second week, both Stacey and Riya, two HLLs from group 1, asked their partner in India, Mahesh, to clarify what he written in Hindi:

Hi Mahesh, good to hear from you! I am not sure if I understand everything you have said so be sure to correct me if I misunderstood. —Stacey, W 2

I'm not entirely sure what you meant by your last sentence - I understood it to mean that films can impact people's thinking in a positive and negative way, and that it depends on the situation. I agree with this....What do you think? Did I understand your sentence correctly? —**Riya**

Mahesh's use of very high-register Hindi words (e.g., सकारात्मक पक्ष की प्रबलता ~ the dominance of affirmative aspects; नकारात्मक पक्ष ~ negatory aspects ) could have potentially contributed to Stacey and Riya's problems in comprehending his comments. Mahesh did not respond to their questions, nor did he post a comment in English that week. Interestingly, Riya attributed the comprehension problem to Mahesh's use of a colloquial rather than a formal register in writing. In her post-collaboration journal, she wrote:

मुझे मेरा साथियों के पोस्ट कभी - कभी नहीं समझ आये क्योंकि उन्होंने सिर्फ हिन्दी में लिखा aur शायद aur colloquially लिखा ।

I did not understand my partners' posts sometimes because he only wrote in Hindi and perhaps wrote more colloquially.

Similarly, Roshini in her first week's post also asked for clarification from the ELL in her group, Tarun. She asked the following question but did not receive a response: "What does "सङ्गीत" and "एवं सामाजिककार्यो " mean?". Here the word सङ्गीत has a Sanskritized spelling, which could have contributed to the comprehension problem for Roshini.

In their post-collaboration journals, most of the HLLs reported that they were mostly able to understand their partners' comments. Colleen said,

कभी-कभी मेरे साथियों के पूरा पोस्ट नहीं समझना सकती थी, लेकिन आमतौर पर मैं ठीक थी।  
Sometimes I was unable to understand my partners' complete post, but usually I was fine.

Similarly, Amanda wrote:

आम तौर पर हमारी हिन्दी बहुत साफ थी इसलिए मैं ने सब बातें समझी । हालाँकि हमारी अँग्रेज़ी भी बहुत साफ थी क्योंकि कविता की अँग्रेज़ी बहुत अच्छी नहीं थी । शायद इसलिए कविता ने आसान हिन्दी में लिखा क्योंकि मेरी aur बॉब की हिन्दी बहुत अच्छी नहीं है ।

Usually our Hindi was quite clear so I understood everything. Although our English was also very simple because Kavita's English wasn't very good. Perhaps Kavita wrote in simple Hindi because mine and Bob's Hindi is also not very good. (translated from Hindi)

On the other hand, some of the HLLs said they encountered some problems in understanding others' comments. One HLL from group 6, John, said he found it difficult to understand his group-mate's comments. The ELL in this group hardly participated.

However, the other HLL in this group, Maya, was more proficient in Hindi than him. This posed a challenge for John and he said it would take him a long time to understand Maya's comments:

मैं ने कभी - कभी साथियों के पोस्ट समझने में कोई परेशानी है क्योंकि माया की हिन्दी बहुत अच्छा है। कुछ समय के बाद मैं समझ आता, लेकिन वह बहुत मुशकिल है।

I sometimes had trouble understanding Maya's posts because her Hindi is very good. After some time I was (able to) understand, but it was very difficult.

Maya in her journal mentioned that she mostly understood what was being said, but sometimes the words were not being used correctly. It was not clear if she was referring to the ELL's or John's post.

Some of the HLLs also reported using different strategies to make meaning of their interlocutors' comments. Both Arjun and Justin reported using online dictionaries to look for word meanings. Similarly, Shweta from group 4 mentioned that it was their fellow HLLs' posts that sometimes helped clarify what the ELL in her group was saying:

कभी कभी मुझे अपने साथियों के पोस्ट समझने में परेशानी हुई। जब यह हुआ, तब मैं बाकी पोस्ट को पढ़ती थी और मुझे लगभग सब कुछ समझ आ जाता था।

Sometimes I had problem understanding my partners' post. When this happened, then I would read the remaining posts and I would understand almost everything.

### **Technology as the mediating tool**

Data indicates that the HLLs were successfully able to use technology as the mediating tool to participate in this dialogue. As I mentioned before, the online discussions were hosted on Canvas, the learning management system that was being used

by the university in America. Given my affiliation with the university, I was able to create a separate course website for the online exchange on Canvas, which the HLLs were easily able to access. They did not report any problems in posting their comments through the six weeks of the project. The ELLs, on the other hand, had a different experience with technology. I discuss this in more detail in the contradictions section of this chapter.

In terms of the HLLs' interaction with the course website, two interesting patterns are worth mentioning. The first relates to one of the introductory activities from week 1, where participants were required to upload an image that best offered a glimpse of their world. I had intended for this image-exchange to work as an ice-breaker between the two participating groups. In six out of the eight groups, the ELLs and the HLLs were able to exchange images, and in group 1, 2, 4, 7, and 8 participants also commented on each other's images. In group 5 the exchange also elicited brief conversations around Origami and classical Indian dance between Justin, Roshini, and Kalindi. One HLL, Bob, mentioned the activity in his post-collaboration journal saying that he liked the activity and recommended including more of such activities in the project.

While designing the discussion modules, I had included links to readings in Hindi and English on the topic being discussed with the goal of providing additional pedagogical support to the participants. Interview data revealed that the HLLs either did not access those links at all or spent very little time on them during the course of the

discussions due to various reasons. Elizabeth, for instance, stated that she never felt the need to read anything extra before answering the discussion prompts. Shweta, on the other hand, said that she tried to read a couple of articles but found them too long and difficult. Andy pointed out that the links were not explicitly called out and hence they escaped his notice.

## **Rules**

Rules are implicit and explicit norms and conventions that govern interactions in an activity system. Since this activity system was nested within the larger context of an academic class and institution, the system demanded that certain explicit rules be set to ensure the HLLs' participation. There were at least three explicit rules that the HLLs were expected to follow: a. two discussion posts each week (first in Hindi and second in English); b. minimum word limits (150 words in Hindi and 200 words in English); and c. weekly deadlines (first post due on Tuesday evening and responses due on Thursday evening).

These rules created a higher degree of co-dependence for communication in the system than what is normally required in a more naturally occurring dialogue. the HLLs' responses depended on whether, what, and how much their partners wrote in the discussion forum. Most groups started off with the HLLs only responding to the ELLs' comments in the group, and switched to responding to their classmates' (other the HLLs

in the group) posts only when participation from the ELLs dropped. There were two exceptions to this trend.

Each member from group 3—Tara (HLL), Colleen (HLL), and Pooja (ELL)—always responded to the other two members every week; often both the responses were included within a single discussion post. For example, in week 3, after addressing Pooja and agreeing with her analysis of Shashi’s character in the film, Colleen addressed Tara and discussed her comments about the film:

Tara,  
I agree with what you mentioned about self-sufficiency/independence. The movie is very much about Shashi realizing and exploring her own independence. I've always thought that traveling and exploring different cultures (like Shashi does in the movie) are great ways to become more self-sufficient and independent-- you can learn a lot about yourself while learning about other people :)

On the other hand, Roshini and Justin from group 5 never addressed each other, even when the ELL in their group (Kalindi) stopped participating in the discussions. This is how Roshini began her English responses in week 5 and 6:

Since I don't have anyone to reply to, I will just a general reply to the topic in English—  
Week 5

Again, I will be posting a general response in English since only Justin responded in the forum.—Week 6

The rule around weekly deadlines remained fluid through the collaboration. The ELLs’ irregular and limited participation impacted the HLLs’ weekly deadlines. In some groups, the HLLs waited for two weeks before posting their English responses. In

addition, the HLLs' overall adherence to weekly deadlines also fluctuated over the six weeks. While they were more particular about meeting deadlines in the first couple of weeks, some of the responses in later weeks were posted very late in some groups.

Another instance of rules impacting the HLLs' discourse emerged in group 4, where in order to fulfill the requirement of posting an English response, Simi, Shweta, and Andy appeared to be re-voicing each other's opinions. During my analysis of their discussions, I had noticed a reoccurring pattern of paraphrasing in their responses to each other, especially in weeks 5 and 6 when the ELL in their group did not write anything. This interpretation was indirectly confirmed by Shweta in her interview when she explained why she did not like her group structure. She said, "there was only one person in our group to respond to really because me, Andy, and Simi were around the same sphere...we were saying the same thing, so it was like, 'Ok I guess I'll respond to you, I agree with everything you said.' it was kind of that...I agree with what you said and rewrite whatever you said".

An instance of explicit rule negation between subjects in the system also emerged early on in the project. A week before the online discussions started, I was discussing the project with the HLLs in class, when Roshini asked me what the English proficiency-level for students in India was. I told her that Maneesh had told me that their proficiency level in English is not very advanced, but that their Hindi is excellent. Upon hearing this, another HLL in class, Kyle, asked me if "we should dumb down our English then?" As I

was trying to tell him that I didn't want to answer the question for him and that he could decide once the exchange started, Maya and Andy simultaneously quipped, "American English is pretty dumb anyway."

This to me felt like a very telling moment to understand how participants used language to construct their own sense of self and the 'other'. I explore this theme further in the following section on community.

## **Community**

Community in an activity system refers to a group of multiple individuals who share the same goals and who construct themselves differently as compared to other groups in the system. The HLLs' discourse in this online exchange revealed the ideas of communities they identified with and how they perceived the other, foreign, community.

### **Identifying with the immigrant experience**

Although there were no discussion questions directly asking participants to respond to the representation of their culture in the film, some participants brought up the issue in their discussions. Three of the ELLs (Pooja, Abhijeet, and Kalindi) commented that Shashi's experiences with her family in India were very similar to what many people in India, especially women, who cannot speak English often face. For some the HLLs, on the other hand, Shashi's experiences were symbolic of their own and their parents' immigrant experiences in the United States.

Shashi's limited English skills and the humiliation that she suffers at the hands of her daughter (Sapna) evoked strong emotional responses in Andy (Group 4), Shweta (Group 4), and Roshini (Group 5). In his interview, Andy opened up about his mother's journey to the US and his relationship with her. He described how his mother had moved to the US after marriage and had dedicated her life to being a homemaker, and that as a result she never "really put herself out there to interact with Americans". As a child, Andy found it difficult to accept this 'non-American' side of his mother, which explained why he so strongly identified with Sapna's character in the film:

It was actually really funny because I was watching this movie and then I saw how Sapna was like you know interacting with her Mom and then I just went back to all these moments when I was a little kid and I was just so mean to my Mom just because you know she didn't understand these cultural things that were really important for my childhood, right? That like every other kid's Mom knew but my Mom didn't and I was like...literally after I saw the movie I texted my Mom and I was like Mom I just need to apologize to you again for my childhood. I'm so sorry.

Similarly, Shweta expressed a strong dislike for Sapna's character. In her interview, she mentioned that she had actually seen the movie before because her mother really wanted to watch it when it had released. Her mom, she added, could relate to Shashi's character because her mom too could not speak English when she had moved to the US almost twenty years ago, and was made fun of at work for not being able to read and speak English correctly. Shweta mentioned that while watching the movie together, her mother pointed out Sapna's behavior in the film to remind Shweta that she too would

mock her mother similarly and try to correct her errors. Shweta confessed that this was the reason why she “despised” Sapna in the film.

Roshini similarly felt that the film spoke to her Chinese parents’ immigrant experience and her challenges in being able to appreciate those experiences as a child:

As I mentioned in my previous post, this movie had a substantial impact on me, because I am a first generation Chinese-American with parents who speak broken English. Looking back, I must have caused my parents a great deal of pain as a kid. I was constantly reprimanding them for embarrassing me in front of my American friends with their broken English. Yes, I was a child that didn't really know any better, but I was still unforgivingly cruel. I turned their broken English, something that should have given them a sense of pride at having successfully established a stable occupation and home in a foreign country, into a source of shame and humiliation. We have a very loving relationship now, but I definitely still regret some of my previous actions. ( Post from Week 3)

### **Misrepresentation of the immigrant experience**

The film also evoked discussions around how America and American culture, as the HLLs’ conceptualized it, was represented in the film. Shashi’s experiences in the United States elicited strong reactions around how non-native speakers of English get perceived in America. While discussing the topic of language and power in week 4, Justin stated that in America people did not attach too much value to being a bilingual, and that no one judged you for not knowing a second language (other than English). Whereas, he added, in India knowing English along with Hindi appeared to matter a lot more. (I discuss this comment in more detail in chapter 5.) His classmate, Roshini, responded to this post and argued that non-English speakers or non-native speakers of English are harshly judged in America:

This is interesting. I actually disagree with Justin in that I've found, from my experiences, that foreigners are greatly looked down upon if they don't know English or speak with an accent in America. It's ironic, really, because most English-speaking Westerners that travel to Asian countries like Korea and China are practically idolized regardless of their knowledge of the country's language.

However, two other HLLs from a different group (Group 1), Riya and Stacey, responded critically to how American culture was represented in the film, especially in the scene where Shashi tries to order coffee in New York City. In her discussion posts Riya argued that American characters were shown to be very rude in the film, whereas in real life they are usually polite:

मुझे लगता है कि इस फिल्म में थोड़ी सी अतिशयोक्ति थी अमेरिकन संस्कृति के मामले में। जैसे कि उस सीन में, जब शशि कॉफी खरीद रही थी अर अमेरिकन दुकानदार बहुत नीची थी। इस तरह से वीसा अफसर भी नीचा था। अमेरिकन लोगों का आदाब शायद कभी-कभी नकली होता है, लेकिन आम तौर पर अमेरिकन लोगों बहुत विनीत होते हैं आम रूप में। तो इस फिल्म में शशि को इस तरह की नकारात्मक भावनाओं का सामना करना पड़ता है क्योंकि फिल्म अमेरिकन आचरण (aur) वे नकली आदाब अतिशयोक्ति करती है। फलस्वरूप अमेरिकन बहुत असभ्य लगते हैं फिल्म में। दूसरी संस्कृतियाँ को स्वीकार नहीं करते हैं।

I think that in this film there was an exaggeration regarding American culture. Like in that scene, where Shashi was buying coffee and the American shopkeeper was very rude. Similarly the visa officer was also very rude. American people's civility is sometimes fake, but usually American people are very polite. So Shashi has to face these kinds of negative feelings because film exaggerates American behavior and their fake civility. Consequently, Americans come across as uncivilized in the film. They don't accept other cultures.

Her group-mate Stacey strongly agreed with Riya and added:

Riya, I had the exact same reaction you had to that scene. I thought it portrayed Americans as boorish and rude which I don't think is accurate at all. In my opinion, America is one of the most welcoming nations when it comes to immigrants, especially compared to Europe where racism is pretty blunt, prevalent and ongoing at the same levels it has been before. Although we do have problems with the way we treat Hispanic

immigrants or Islamophobia, I don't think it compares to Europe. And although there are people who do think poorly of strangers, it is rare that you would see them be so direct about it like the scene portrays. It should have been much more toned down to where maybe only the cashier is rude but not the entire restaurant because that would have been much more sense because the way the scene was made there, it definitely exaggerated it.

During the interview when I asked Stacey to elaborate on her response, she said that her own immigrant experience played an important role in how she saw the film and that she could not help but feel angry at how Americans were portrayed. She described how her own immigrant experience of moving from Romania to the US had been “really easy”, and that her parents and friends from other immigrant communities had never experienced the kind of rudeness shown in the film. She added that it was one of the things that she most “loves about America” because compared to other European countries, especially compared to “places like Italy where Romanians are really looked down upon”, America is much more welcoming to foreigners. She acknowledged that immigrant experiences for other communities in the US, like Hispanics and undocumented immigrants, is very different, but generally things in the US were not as bad, and that this level of xenophobia would not be visible in a public place like a restaurant:

It seems like here in the US, there is so much emphasis on being politically correct and being really nice and really welcoming, especially to immigrants....some kind of immigrants. I can see that (rudeness in the scene) at an individual level, but it's hard to see that in a restaurant setting.

When I brought up what Roshini had said in her discussion regarding her parents being judged for not knowing English, Stacey responded that something like that may happen on an individual level, but that American culture is not like that.

Another HLL from group 2, Amanda, also argued in her discussions that Americans are generally more gracious than what had been represented in the film

यह फिल्म भाषाओं और संस्कृति के बारे में है। भारत में शाशी को लोग गुस्ताख हैं क्योंकि उसको अंग्रेज़ी नहीं आती है। फिर अमरीका में कुछ लोग भी शाशी को गुस्ताख हैं। लेकिन मेरे ख्याल में अमरीकी लोग ऐसे नहीं हैं। अमरीका में बहुत ही लोग दूसरे देशों से हैं। बहुत लोग को अंग्रेज़ी नहीं आती है। कुछ अमरीकी लोग को लगता है कि अमरीका में सब लोग को अंग्रेज़ी बोलना चाहिए। लेकिन फिल्म में लोग कैफ़े में शाशी को चिल्लाए। मुझे लगता है कि हकीकत में अमरीकी लोग ज़्यादा मेहरबान हैं।

This film is about languages and cultures. In India people are rude to Shashi because she does not know English. Then in America also some people are rude to Shashi. But I think American people are not like this. Many people in America are from different countries. Many people don't know English. Some American people think that everyone in America should speak English. But in the film people in cafe yelled at Shashi. I think in reality American people are more gracious.

In his response to Amanda, her group-mate Bob agreed that the film did “exaggerate and produce caricatures of Americans”, but perhaps it was done to bring out the foreignness of the situation for Shashi. Bob also brought up reference to an online racist video (“recent OU video”) to argue that while many Americans are accepting, some are not. Amanda ended the discussion by agreeing with Bob and adding that, “you're right about the OU example; America may be a melting pot but we still have a long way to go regarding race relations and tolerance”.

### **Constructing the other community**

The discussion questions focusing on the film's depiction of gender relations in the form of Shashi and Satish, her husband, also evoked strong responses from the HLLs. All the HLLs who answered that prompt agreed that Satish was not a good husband to Shashi and that their marriage was unequal in that Satish had more power, prestige, and control. Some of the HLLs argued, often hesitatingly, that Satish and Shashi's relationship was symbolic of general sexism that exists in Indian society.

During her interview, Stacey was at first reluctant to talk about the topic stating that she did not want to sound "politically incorrect" and claim that Shashi and Satish's relationship was specific to their culture. When I assured her it was fine for her to express herself freely, she opened-up a little and said that the film actually presented a subdued version of what she knew of gender inequalities in India:

I have a lot of Indian friends and hearing about the households they have grown up in, it seemed...what I saw in the film seemed pretty accurate. It seemed toned down actually, compared to what...the experiences that I have heard from my Indian friends. And growing up in a really male-dominated household (referring to Indian friend)...and honestly, Romania for example, the families that I know that is pretty rare and especially my family and other families, it's not...the male isn't usually such a dominant figure as was seen in this movie or the way it was conveyed. So, I guess some parts of it was culture specific and compared to what I have heard from my Indian friends.

John, an HLL from Group 6, also wondered if Satish's misogynistic behavior was common in India:

And yeah, Satish was a horrible husband until like the last 5 minutes. He was really misogynistic—is that kind of thinking common in Indian culture? Having little experience, it sort of seems like it, but I don't know for sure.

One HLL in particular had a strong response to this topic—Elizabeth. Her English response to her group-mate, Arjun (HLL), in week 5 was more than 400 words. In her post she agreed with Arjun that Satish had more power in the relationship and that he was more entitled because of his job and his knowledge of English. However, she disagreed with Arjun’s opinion that Satish and Shashi will have an equal status after the wedding they attended in America. She explained that Satish is fundamentally a disrespectful and insensitive husband, which was evident in how he forced his wife to go alone to a foreign country when she was not ready. She added that Satish did not really love Shashi and in fact, guilted her into staying with him at the end. She self-consciously called her long post her “rant” and ended her argument by saying that Shashi is too good for Satish and that her learning English will not change anything in their relationship.

Elizabeth and I had the following conversation regarding her response to the film:

**Elizabeth:** It was a good movie...I didn’t really like whatever his name was...Satish, yeah...I don’t know...especially the part where it said like after a while they’ll end up being OK and stuff...I felt like you know...it’s not necessarily going to be that way...you don’t know what’s going to happen...just like from personal experience and stuff...I have feelings that you know he’s not that good of a guy, I guess in my standards...she definitely deserves a lot better

**Shilpa:** How would you have wanted the movie to end?

**Elizabeth:** See I don’t necessarily think that she should have necessarily gone with the other guy either...because then she’s throwing away every aspect of her life and stuff...umm...it’s a hard question...and I don’t want to say that she should have divorced him or something like that because I know that would be pretty bad...

**Shilpa:** Bad for her?

**Elizabeth:** Yeah, I mean the way she would be looked at socially

**Shilpa:** You mean in terms of her context?

**Elizabeth:** Yeah

**Shilpa:** Why?

**Elizabeth:** Most of what I have seen and...like talking to different people, like it's not something that's held in high regard...like giving a divorce or something is shoved under the table, not talked about or something if it does happen...in a lot of cases I mean. I felt like it was a realistic ending in that sense, although it didn't necessarily make me happy...it's good that it ended where it did because I wouldn't have liked to see what happened afterwards...I feel like the cycle would have just repeated itself

Elizabeth's passionate responses undoubtedly indicated a deep level of engagement with the film and gender-related issues. Her criticism of Satish and interpretation of Shashi's decisions regarding her marriage appeared to be situated in her larger perception about Indian culture, which she perceived to be conservative and closed as far as gender roles within the institution of marriage was concerned. Her perception became further evident in her last post in the project in week 6, where she said that Arjun and she had similar opinions about Satish because they were both from America and in America relationships are different from the relationships in India; in America, she argued, equality is more important.

Another HLL from a different group, Amanda (Group 2), was more reluctant to construct America and India on opposite ends with respect to the issue of sexism and gender-roles. In her final post in the project she told Bob that both countries are struggling with similar challenges:

I think it's interesting that you said that one of the reasons that Shaashi doesn't get respect is because of the way women are viewed in her society. I am not Indian and I've never lived in India, so I don't know if this is true. But I do know that, like in the United States, gender issues are currently a hot topic in India. Both of our societies are patriarchal, with histories of sexism, gender prejudices, and rape culture. I think most Americans would regard India as a more sexist country, but I don't know if this is true. India has had a

female president, for example, and the United States has not. Certainly both countries have a long way to go regarding gender equality, but from what I can tell, both countries are also making some progress. Especially since the brutal gang rape/murder of a 23 year old woman in Delhi in 2012, Indian women (and presumably men as well) have started to speak out about the changes they want to see.

### **Division of labor**

Division of labor explains how tasks are divided horizontally and how power is divided vertically among members of an activity system. There were three types of divisions of labor that shaped interactions within this activity system: a. divisions between the HLLs and the ELLs; b. between the two teacher collaborators, Maneesh and I; and c. divisions between the HLLs. The first two types of divisions caused certain conflicts in the system, which ultimately limited the HLLs and the ELLs' interactions with each other. I will discuss these contradictions more in the second section of this chapter. In the following sections, I describe these divisions briefly.

### **Between the HLLs and the ELLs**

In terms of the structure of the tasks, the division of labor was horizontal between the HLLs and the ELLs, since both groups were required to answer weekly prompts in the language that they were more proficient in (English for the HLLs; Hindi for the ELLs) and the language that they were learning. However, the two groups were unequally positioned in terms of access to personal computers, Internet, and prior experience with the technological tool. The HLLs did not report any problems using Canvas and were able to successfully post their comments online in Hindi and in English through the six

weeks. On the other hand, the ELLs had to put in more effort to not only get more familiar with the tool, but even to get added to the course website on Canvas. The HLLs were also better positioned with regard to getting more immediate academic benefits for this exchange in the form of grades.

### **Between the teacher-collaborators**

There was also a vertical division of labor and power between Maneesh and me as teachers. Maneesh was limited by certain institutional and contextual constraints. The first institutional constraint became apparent right at the beginning, when he told me that he could not make this project a required assignment for his students. His PhD students were not taking any courses and were mostly doing independent research under him. And for the class (“Teaching of English”) that he was teaching the B.Ed. (Bachelors of Education) students, he was required to follow a centralized syllabus (see appendix E) that had been issued by the institute’s national governing authorities. And even though there were no prescribed textbooks and he was free to choose his course materials, he had limited control over the grading scheme, since the final grade for the class was primarily determined by the end of term annual examinations. When I asked him how this project would fit into his class, he described it as an “additional” opportunity to learn to use new forms of technology and practice their English; skills that he thought both his PhD and B.Ed. students “really” needed to learn.

Maneesh's institutional constraint conflicted, to some extent, with my position as a teaching assistant (TA) in a university-level Hindi class in the US. As part of a relatively smaller language program, the second year Hindi class here only offered one section, and hence the primary instructor had more freedom in designing his own syllabus and grading scheme. Since I had assisted this instructor in teaching this Hindi class for almost five years up until the time of this study, I was familiar with the kinds of assignments that he preferred to give, one of them being weekly blogs. I was thus able to adapt this project to strongly align with the goals and grading criteria for the weekly blogs, and successfully persuade the instructor to have our students participate in the discussion forums for six weeks in the semester. Unlike Maneesh, we had the added freedom to offer a completion grade for students' discussion posts as a way of encouraging them to practice their Hindi writing skills and not feel worried about losing points due to errors.

### **Between the HLLs**

There was horizontal division of labor between the HLLs in the system in terms of the tasks they were doing and how they were evaluated on it. Each sub-group had at least two HLLs, which offered them opportunities to read each other's comments and build their own opinions. In addition, each group was an open group, so the HLLs had access to their other classmates' (who were not part of their immediate group) comments also. In a way, this allowed the HLLs to share their labor in the system. Most of the HLLs

reported that they clicked on other groups to read other people's comments, at least in the initial few weeks of the project. In group 4, which received relatively higher response from the participant in India, Simi and Shweta said that they would read the other HLLs' posts in their group to sometimes understand the ELL's comment and to frame their own ideas on the topic of discussion. Simi also added that she would check out other groups initially to ensure that what she was posting was in-depth enough.

The vertical division of power between the HLLs emerged with regard to differences in their proficiency levels in Hindi. In group 6, John reported that his classmate's (Maya's) higher proficiency in Hindi made it difficult for him to understand her comments in the online discussions. In addition to language proficiency, power differential in John and Maya's case was also situated in cultural familiarity. Maya had moved to the United States when she was six years old, and was the only HLL in the group who was not officially an American citizen (she was a green card holder at the time of this study). Throughout the discussions, Maya displayed a deep engagement with social issues in India and positioned herself as the cultural insider while talking about these issues, like when she commented on English education in India:

It's great that Shashi does not allow her family's shame to get in the way of her learning the language anyway, if only to throw back at them. I think nowadays the youth see English as a language smart people speak, which is untrue, but makes sense if you think about it. Those who are better off, and have money to send their kids to English medium schools (schools that teach only in English - costs more for admission & tuition), do it. In a way, english is seen as equal to respectable socioeconomic status and a symbol for intellectuals. the question now is, how can we fight this stigma and still teach our generation the language necessary for the global market?

John too responded to Maya's insider position in the system and in fact half-jokingly thanked Maya in his last post for being his "Indian" in the group.

### **Object**

Object define the why in the system. They refer to the goals that drive actions in the activity system. As a researcher and instructor, I was primarily responsible for shaping the objects of the online system under study. My goals were to create meaningful opportunities for participants to: first, critically engage with issues of language and culture as raised by the film; and second, have opportunities to build interpersonal understanding and connections. The latter goal was achieved to varying degrees in the system, which I discuss in detail in the outcomes section of this chapter.

As for the first goal, language itself became an important topic of study in this intercultural exchange. My own intellectual struggles with understanding the complex relationship between Hindi and English and English's role in India were central to leading participants into discussing these issues through the film. Data revealed that the HLLs were engaged with the issue and presented different arguments to explain the complexity of issues of language dominance. For instance, Elizabeth critiqued the film's narrative for upholding the discourse that English is superior, which according to her, was proved when Shashi went out of her way to learn English to earn her family's respect:

I think learning English was an important thing for Shashi to impress her family. However, I don't think she should be obligated to impress her family. Her family shouldn't treat her the way they do just because she doesn't speak English. She's not of a

lower species, she just hasn't committed herself to learning the language! I think Shashi should have talked with her daughter to teach her to not be so spoiled. It could have been a good opportunity for Shashi's daughter to learn about diversity and patience. Different people have different talents, and Shashi could have taught her daughter to not be such a bully. When Shashi went so far out of her way as to take a secret English course while she was in America, she just showed her daughter that it's okay to point out people's flaws until the point that they are in tears. That over time, if you bother them enough, they'll change and be the person YOU think they should be.

Another HLL from a different group, Tara, made a contrasting argument in her post, where she pointed out that the film subtly subverts the dominance of English in the last scene when Shashi asks for a Hindi newspaper on her flight back to India. (more details about Tara's comment in chapter 5).

On the other hand, some of the HLLs interpreted the film's depiction of the issue in light of their own experiences with English, and argued that its global power cannot be denied. In their exchange, Kyle and Vijay, two HLLs from group 8, discussed how the widespread presence of English in different countries made it less important for them to learn the country's native language. Kyle mentioned in his post that during his study abroad experience in Turkey he noticed that that everyone could speak English and that he was never expected to learn another language, adding that "even with spending an entire semester there, I wasn't required to learn another language except English. It just shows how important English is and how powerful of a language it is. Even residents of Turkey from all different backgrounds still know English." To which Vijay responded as follows:

I absolutely agree with you, Kyle, that English is the lingua franca of our times and it is extremely useful to know how to read, write, and speak it. I am glad that I am learning Hindi and that it will come in handy when I visit India in the future but it is also no longer a necessity since there are more English speakers in India than there are in the US. You can manage anywhere in the world as long as you speak English.

Another HLL, Roshini, appeared more conflicted about the issue and what implications English's global reach would have for other languages in the world. During her interview, she commented that this topic stood out for her in the discussions, and that she had tried to build on those discussions to prepare the topic for her final presentation for the Hindi class. As the following quote indicates, Roshini had critically thought about the issue, where she recognized that it wasn't the language itself, but the surrounding socio-historical and political discourses that impart power to the language:

There was a week when we were talking about like...bilingualism and how prevalent English was. Umm...and we had like really similar thoughts on it. It's not like...English doesn't inherently have power it's just like the culture has contributed to the power so...we were talking about how like most people idolize White skin and how that kind of evolved into like all aspects of the culture and that kinda seeped into like language itself and that's why English is probably just so revered as the language to know around the world.

When I asked her if she had known that this was an issue in India before watching the film, Roshini said she had known a little about it from watching Bollywood movies before. She added that it didn't surprise her because she was well aware of English's presence in Korea and China as well. She concluded her statement by arguing that perhaps these linguistic influxes and intermixing were a natural phenomenon, and that in the future English would just get incorporated into all other languages:

I really don't know where's that gonna go but like in terms of the languages I actually feel like it's kinda interesting because languages are like...I took a linguistics course...and they just talk about how everyday like languages appear languages disappear. And they are all constantly evolving so whether like...I was also thinking like you know how Sanskrit in the past like evolved like...it split up into so many different...so many things take influence of Sanskrit like maybe in the future like just because English is such a powerful language doesn't necessarily mean like...it'll...like...it won't mean like other languages will be lost maybe it'll just be incorporated into all languages...yeah it'll be really cool.

### **Contradictions in the Activity System**

Contradictions are conflicts or tensions among or between different components that disrupt the functioning of an activity system and cause changes in it. The initial stages of data analysis revealed a gap between the expected and actual level of participation in the online exchange from students in India, referred to as the ELLs in this study. I conceptualize this gap as a contradiction within the activity system of this online exchange. My subsequent analysis with regard to this initial finding was hence driven by a desire to understand how this gap developed over the course of the project and what factors contributed to it. To understand this process and reasons, I closely examined the following sources of data: my researcher-reflective journal; my online interactions (mobile-chat and email) with Maneesh, my peer collaborator from India, and with the ELLs; and a post-collaboration interview with Maneesh. Analysis revealed that ELL's and Maneesh's other academic commitments and technological challenges contributed to their lack of participation. It also showed how my own positionality and affective responses as a researcher conflicted with Maneesh's situation and resulted in a

communication breakdown between us. I describe these tensions and how they affected the dynamics of the online exchange in the sections below.

### **Desire to learn something new**

As mentioned in the previous section, there was a marked vertical division of labor in this activity system right from the beginning. The ELLs and the HLLs were unequally positioned in terms of their access to and experience with Canvas and immediate academic returns from this project. Maneesh and I also had different degrees of freedom to incorporate this project into our mainstream curricular goals and requirements. These divisions, however, did not diminish the potential value of this intercultural dialogue. My desire to conduct a pedagogical experiment in the form of this exchange was reciprocated by Maneesh, who also happens to be an educational researcher and innovative teacher.

When I first approached Maneesh with this project in Fall 2014, he expressed great interest in it and was eager to collaborate. He believed the project's emphasis on collaboration and dialogue strongly aligned with the pedagogical goals proposed by the Indian National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in their working paper on effective teacher-training methodologies. While discussing the paper, he told me that this exchange could be very relevant for his students as it would give them opportunities to get more experience working with technology and to “learn something new”.

In the weeks leading up to the project, he was closely involved in working out the logistics on his end. He followed up on my emails to the head of the institute to ensure that I had official permission to work with students there. And most importantly, he facilitated my communications with his students, both onsite (when I visited them in December) and online before the project began. I met around 18 students during my onsite visit, all of whom seemed enthusiastic about participating in the project. At this time they also shared their personal details with me, including their email IDs and phone numbers, which later became important in the project. Around two weeks before the online discussions began, Maneesh helped me organize a conference call with all of his students. I took the following notes after the call:

The call went very well (3.50-5am). All the technological set up was in place thanks to Maneesh! All students were able to get together in the conference room. We waited for a few minutes for the BE.d. students to arrive. I didn't turn on the video at first because I was very self-conscious...and also I thought turning on the video might create lag and slow down the process in general. So the video was off for major part of the talk and towards the end I turned it on to see everyone and say Hi. The affordance of screen share in Google plus is very valuable. I needed this to walk them through Canvas and the EID process. I showed them our course on Canvas. Showed home screen, discussion board, modules, explained how to post, where to type, how they (can) access questions. Throughout the explanation I was getting very self-aware of all the English words I have had to use. I was trying to explain as many of them as possible, explained 'post'...all of this must be new jargon for them...or so I assume...since I couldn't see their faces I couldn't pick up on contextual and paralinguistic cues to confirm or check if they were getting it! I made a joke about it and asked them to say 'han' (yes) loudly else I wouldn't understand if they are with me! Their collective 'han' -'han's (yes) didn't last very long...stopped after a couple of times, but Maneesh was good about it for the most part so that was assuring. At least he understands I think. He also has more background knowledge so it's easier.

The notes indicate that I was conscious of the potential challenges that the ELLs could face in this project due to their unfamiliarity with the technological tools and their lower proficiency in English. However, I had also developed high expectations from Maneesh that he would be able to mentor his students through this project and help bridge the anticipated gaps.

### **Increasing gaps**

The gaps began to widen quite early on in the collaboration. A week before the discussions were expected to start, most of the ELLs had not created their electronic identifications (EIDs) and hence they did not have access to the course website on Canvas. This resulted in me feeling nervous, as I recorded in my journal:

I'm a little concerned about slow response from India. Not as many people have emailed as I had expected. No one has even tried making EIDs yet. Talked to Maneesh this morning. He has assured that it will be manageable. But at the same time the students there do have a lot going on, especially the B.Ed. students....Everything is on such a strict deadline-every consecutive step depends on the previous one. If (institute name omitted) students don't get their EIDs soon, I won't be able to add them to Canvas. I would like them to have some practice or some experience exploring the platform before they start interacting with the students (in the US) next week.

My concerns about “the slow response from India” anticipated what emerged, over the course of the collaboration, as real contextual issues and challenges for the ELLs and Maneesh.

## **Technological divide**

Regular access to Internet and personal computers became a difficult challenge to overcome for the ELLs. The earliest proof of this divide appeared when Maneesh himself created all participants' EIDs and emailed them to me, since his students had not been able to access Internet that week. While discussing the project initially, Maneesh had informed me that he would be able to provide extra time to his students so that they can access computers at the institute's computer labs. And this seemed to have worked out to some extent in the first two weeks of the online discussions, when about eleven the ELLs were able to post at least one comment. However, as I discovered through my chats with Maneesh, Internet connectivity at the institute even during this time was not very consistent.

With the aim to better communicate with the ELLs and understand their problems, I created a group chat on a mobile-based chat application called WhatsApp. I created the group during the middle of the first week and added around ten of the ELLs whose phone numbers I had and who had the app installed on their phone. Nine of these ELLs checked their messages regularly (WhatsApp has a built-in feature that allows you to see if members have read your messages.), and eight of them posted something on the group chat. One of these chat-based interactions revealed that the genre of computer-based online discussions was not very familiar to the ELLs and that they had trouble understanding what they were expected to say in these discussions. Two of the ELLs,

Kavita (pseudonym) from group 2 and Sukanya (pseudonym) from group 8, had already posted their introductions and responses online, but as the following conversation reveals, even they did not seem very clear about the norms of interactions required in online discussions. They also seemed confused about the rules of this project, which appears to indicate that all of this was a lot of new information for them. English translation for each line are italicized in brackets.

2/18/15, 1:30:00 PM: You created group “Online Exchange”

**2/18/15, 1:33:02 PM: Shilpa Parnami:** Hello everyone! Maine yah group banaya hai taki aap log directly project ke bare me mujh se baat kar saken 😊

*(I have created this group so that you all can directly talk to me about the project)*

**2/18/15, 8:39:05 PM: Kavita:** Thanku maim

*(Thank you Ma’am)*

**2/18/15, 8:44:29 PM: Sukanya:** gud morning & Thanks mem 😊

*(Good morning & Thanks M’am)*

**2/18/15, 9:23:14 PM: Sukanya:** Mem hame ye bataiye ki jaise waha ke students ne reply kiya h . To kya hume isi tarah se baat karna h ya fir kuch or process h . Kya hum unse project ke bare m bhi kuch puch sakte ?

*(Ma’am tell us this, like students from there have responded. So do we have to talk similarly or is there a different process. Can we also ask them about the project? )*

**2/18/15, 9:25:25 PM: Shilpa Parnami:** Bilkul, aap unn logon ke introduction par reply kar sakte hain ya project ke bare me bhi sawal puch sakte hain

*(Absolutely, you can reply to their introduction or ask them questions about the project)*

**2/18/15, 9:25:52 PM: Shilpa Parnami:** Iss week ka goal yahi hai ki aap log ek dusre ke behtar janen

*(The goal of this week is for you all to get to know each other better)*

**2/25/15, 11:45:45 PM: Shilpa Parnami:** Hello everyone! Aapko 3 baten yaad dilani thin: 1) projects ke rules ke hisab se aapko hafte me kam se kam 2 bar post karna hai, pehle post me apne khud ke vichar...ho sake toh English me

*(Hello everyone! I wanted to remind you three things: 1) as per the rules of the project you have to post at least twice in the group, your views in the first post...in English, if possible)*

**2/25/15, 11:46:47 PM: Shilpa Parnami:** Dusre post me apne group member ke post par comment ya reply kijiye..yah Hindi me

*(In the second post reply to your group member's comment...this in Hindi)*

**2/25/15, 11:47:32 PM: Kavita:** 😊

**2/25/15, 11:47:57 PM: Shilpa Parnami:** 2) iss hafte ke discussion question yani task canvas par hain toh unke bare me post karna mat bhuliyega

*(The questions for this week are on Canvas so don't forget to post about them)*

**2/25/15, 11:48:19 PM: Kavita:** Mtlb?

*(Meaning? )*

**2/25/15, 11:48:50 PM: Shilpa Parnami:** And finally, ham agle hafte se movie ke bare me baat karenge...english-vinglish toh movie dehkna mat bhooliyega 😊

*(And finally, from next week we will start talking about the movie...english-vinglish so don't forget to watch the movie )*

**2/25/15, 11:48:51 PM: Sukanya:** Kuch samghe ni hum

*(We didn't quite understand)*

**2/25/15, 11:49:16 PM: Kavita:** Ok discussion ni hoga

*(Ok so the discussion won't happen)*

**2/25/15, 11:49:16 PM: Sukanya:** Ok

*(OK)*

**2/25/15, 11:49:30 PM: Shilpa Parnami:** Discussion hoga

*(Discussion will happen)*

**2/25/15, 11:49:40 PM: Shilpa Parnami:** Discussion toh har hafte hoga 😊

*(We'll have discussions every week)*

**2/25/15, 11:49:49 PM: Sukanya:** Fir

*Then?*

**2/25/15, 11:49:55 PM: Shilpa Parnami:** Lekin agle hafte directly movie ke bare me hoga

*But next week the discussion would be directly about the movie*

**2/25/15, 11:49:59 PM: Kavita:** Only english winglish p hoga?

*It will only be on english-vinglish ?*

**2/25/15, 11:50:02 PM: Kavita:** Hmm

**2/25/15, 11:50:05 PM: Shilpa Parnami:** Jaise question hoga

*Like the question would be*

**2/25/15, 11:50:14 PM: Sukanya:** Ok

*OK*

**2/25/15, 11:50:17 PM: Shilpa Parnami:** Aapko film kaisi lagi

*How did you like the film*

**2/25/15, 11:50:21 PM: Shilpa Parnami:** Etc.

2/25/15, 11:50:44 PM: Sukanya: Hu hu

*Yes yes*

2/25/15, 11:50:54 PM: Sukanya: Hmm

2/25/15, 11:52:08 PM: Shilpa Parnami: 😊

2/25/15, 11:52:22 PM: Kavita: 😊

### **Academic and other constraints**

The ELLs' other academic commitments also contributed to their lack of participation in the online exchange. Originally, the project was expected to benefit the B.Ed. (Bachelor of Education) students more directly, since they were all taking a course on English language teaching with Maneesh. Of the nine B.Ed. students added to the project, only two (Pooja from group 3 and Abhijeet from group 4) were able to participate for more than two weeks in the discussions. When I asked Maneesh about this gap during the interview, he explained that their regular class schedule had suffered due to many departmental events and unanticipated school cancellations. He mentioned that starting mid-February, he had to spend a lot of time catching students up to speed with the remaining syllabus and help them prepare for their upcoming annual examinations, which were scheduled to take place at end of March and early April. These academic demands made it difficult for Maneesh to allocate time from his class for this project.

Timing and other commitments also became a challenge for the PhD students participating in this project. In his interview, Maneesh explained that even at the time of recruiting PhD students, he had known that all of them would perhaps not take the project seriously, but he knew that five of them were “really good students” whom he had

expected to participate consistently. However the timing did not work out for these five students due to unexpected occurrences. For instance, Kavita, who had posted comments in the first two weeks, went on a long leave of absence due to personal reasons. Other students took leave to prepare for competitive entrance exams. Maneesh in his interview said that, “a lot of my students told me often that sorry, sir we are unable to find the time”.

### **Affective tensions**

As these gaps in technological resources and academic commitments began to grow in the system, I started to experience a lot of anxiety and frustration as a researcher.

These negative reactions appeared multiple times in my journal:

Feb 18

Not everyone has posted their introductions yet. Few more (students from US) have missed deadline and many from (India) have not posted (frustrating!!!!)

Feb 19

The whole of Thursday has gone by in India and yet no new participant has responded :- ( I checked my whatsapp message. It has been read by at least 4 other people than Kavita and Sukanya..and yet no response from them :- ( I wonder if it's a still matter of them not having access to internet....maybe (institute name omitted) internet is still not working...maybe I should ask them directly on whatsapp and check what's going on  
March 1

I had been feeling extremely discouraged, dejected, frustrated, and honestly even angry at how things were going after the first week. I almost felt that Maneesh had let me down for not giving me realistic and professional sense of how this project will be done...

An honest and critical look at my own discourse here allowed me to understand some reasons that contributed to these strong affective reactions. The first reason relates to how as a researcher and instructor I was deeply implicated in this system. When

participation from students in India started to dwindle, I personally felt responsible for not delivering on the promise I had made to the Hindi class and its primary instructor in the US. This feeling was further reinforced when I heard many of the HLLs complaining about not receiving any responses from their partners in India early on.

In addition, as a researcher I was emotionally and intellectually more invested than any other participating subject in the system. At an intellectual level I was aware of the possibility of these challenges based on my discussions with Maneesh and also based on the research I had read in this field—misalignment of academic calendars and unequal access to technology have often been reported as reasons for communication breakdown in similar international tele-collaborative projects. However, I was too caught up in wanting this project to be ‘successful’ to retain that perspective in the moment. My emotional response also marked a shift in power within the system as my research agenda connected to this collaboration became more important than this being an opportunity for the ELLs to learn something new.

### **Perceived communication gap**

My negative affect was also rooted in what I perceived to be a communication gap between Maneesh and me, and also between me and the students in India. In one of the early journal entries I recorded feeling upset because Maneesh would not communicate his students’ commitments and other challenges clearly to me:

Feb 16 entry describing a phone call with Maneesh

I never get clear information all at once from Maneesh. It's like he tries to be super nice and super super helpful, but somehow I never get a clear sense of what's going on there. We'll be discussing something and in an off hand way he'll tell me things like B.Ed. people are busy in workshop this week or something like that...I don't know how to express but something always seems unclear about his information. But I also need to remember that this is not his priority. He is not consumed by the process as much as I am. Same goes for the students there. It frustrates me to no end not having any kind of response from them. Even though I have also given me phone number for whatsapp now!

In another entry from March 1, I expressed unhappiness at Maneesh not telling me beforehand that his PhD students have competitive exams in the month of March and would not be back in college until March 20. At this point in the collaboration I was less worried about why the ELLs were not participating, but more upset at not being able to comprehensively record the problems they were facing on a day-to-day basis. In the initial stages I had been emailing them, but once I realized that email may not be their preferred mode of online communication (only two of the ELLs ever responded to my emails), I created the aforementioned group chat on WhatsApp. However, like mentioned before, most of the ELLs did not respond to my messages on the group chat either.

In hindsight, I believe that this expectation was very unreasonably placed. Considering that most of the ELLs did not know me personally and had never taken any classes with me, they had no reason to maintain a regular dialogue with me.

### **Communication breakdown**

All this negative tension culminated in Maneesh breaking all communication about half way through the project. Around week three, he deleted WhatsApp from his phone and exited from the chat group I had created:

3/9/15, 8:42:07 AM: Maneesh was removed (from online exchange, WhatsApp chat group)

Our communication was finally restored after he responded to a thank-you email I sent him once I had finished collecting interview data from the HLLs. After a few friendly email exchanges, he agreed to my request for an interview. It was during this interview that I discovered that he had picked up on my negative emotions during our conversations earlier. This created a face-threatening situation for him, where he felt that he had let me down as friend and colleague. He added, “I became so upset (at students’ lack of response) that I didn’t even open the (Canvas) page” (translated from Hindi).

We ended the interview on a positive note, where Maneesh provided the following feedback on the project:

“Planning was very good, structure was very clear, the steps were very clear. It was easy. There was nothing technically too difficult about it. Just...that time was a problem. And sometimes network was an issue.”(translated from Hindi).

### **Outcomes of the Activity System**

This section looks at the outcomes that emerged as a result of different process, patterns of interactions, and contradictions within this online system. I approach the study of these outcomes by explaining the multiple changes that occurred in the system, and how the HLLs’ perceived their experiences and opportunities for intercultural learning within this system.

### **Changes in the system**

The ELLs' limited response in the early weeks resulted in a critical change in the project design. Contrary to the original plan, the ELLs did not share their detailed languacultural autobiographies. This absence and their restricted communication contributed to their perspectives and experiences being less represented in the reporting of this system.

Another change related to similar reasons was the addition of three new the ELLs in week 2: Pooja (group 3), Abhijeet (group 4), and Kalindi (group 5). I personally knew these students from before, and they had participated in a similar trial experiment that I had conducted in 2014, where I had paired the HLLs in the United States and the ELLs in India via Google Groups. It is likely that their previous experience with a similar asynchronous online exchange contributed to them being able to participate in the current study more regularly and to maintaining some level of sustained intercultural dialogue with their partner HLLs. (Pooja participated in the discussions for all six weeks, while Abhijeet and Kalindi posted comments for the first four weeks.)

As mentioned before, a perceived communication gap with the ELLs also led me to create a mobile-based chat group with them. While there was little response from them on this group regarding the project, the ELLs often shared other messages (like jokes, pictures from Holi celebration etc.) on this group. These discursive tendencies seem to

indicate that there was a potential for community building among the ELLs using mobile-based technologies.

### **Moments of interpersonal connections**

Some moments of interpersonal relationship-building also emerged between the HLLs and the ELLs. These connections were constructed through different discursive moves: asking questions; sharing detailed information about one's interests and experiences; and finding similarities in opinions and interests in movies. For instance, in group 2, Kavita (ELL) initiated the conversation by welcoming everyone to the weekly task and asking her partners (Amanda and Bob) questions about their interests in movies. Amanda responded to Kavita's questions in detail and asked Kavita to recommend some Hindi movies for her. On the other hand, Bob responded to Kavita's questions in detail, but did not ask any questions of his own. A couple of excerpts from these conversations are as follows:

हैलो दोस्तो! दूसरे टास्क मे हम सभी का स्वागत है :):)

Hello friends! A welcome to all of us in the second task :):) —**Kavita**

नमस्ते Amanda, "Meet the Robinsons" किस प्रकार की कहानी पर आधारित है? इस फिल्म मे वो क्या है जिससे आप सबसे ज्यादा प्रभावित हुई हों? आपको फिल्मे देखना पसंद है? क्या आपने कोई हिन्दी फिल्मे देखी है ?

(Namaste Amanda, What story is "Meet the Robinsons" based on? What about this film impressed you the most? Do you like watching films? Have you seen any Hindi films?)

— **Kavita**

Hi, Kavita! "Meet the Robinsons" is actually based on a children's book. I saw it when I was young but I still love it. It's about time-travel and science fiction, but mostly it's about family which is why I love it. In my opinion family is probably the most important thing in the world.

.....I really like watching all kinds of movies. Recently I have been watching a lot of documentaries. One of my favorite documentaries is called "Miss Representation." It's about feminism and the way that women are portrayed in the media. I think that this is a really important issue. Do you watch documentaries? Have you seen any that you would recommend?

.....I just finished watching my first Hindi movie, which was "English Vinglish" (I watched it for this collaboration). Before that I had never seen any Hindi movies! I had only seen short video clips in Hindi and Urdu class. I enjoyed English Vinglish, though! Do you have any Hindi movies that you would recommend?— **Amanda**

हाँ बॉब! ये बात बिलकुल सही है की फिल्मे सिर्फ मनोरंजन के लिए ही नहीं होती है....फिल्मों में वो सब भी होता है जो हमारे जीवन का एक अहम हिस्सा है। और आपको किस प्रकार की फिल्मे देखना पसंद है ?

Yes, Bob! This is absolutely true that films are not only meant for entertainment...films include everything that is an important part of our life. And what kind of films do you like watching?— **Kavita**

Bob responded to this question by telling Kavita that he likes films that use unique imagery and plot devices to compel audiences to interact deeper with the film.

Similarly, in Group 5, Roshini (HLL) was surprised to discover that her partner in India, Kalindi, had seen similar movies to her:

It's so cool how we've basically seen the same Bollywood and American movies, even though you're in India and I'm in America. :) Do you like any other animated/cartoon movies? Like How to Train Your Dragon (probably my favorite Disney movie of all time), Spirited Away, Wreck it Ralph?

In Group 4, Shweta and Simi were also pleasantly surprised to discover that their partner from India, Abhijeet, had seen two of the Hollywood movies that they both really liked. They both were also familiar with the Bollywood film (Three Idiots) that Abhijeet had mentioned in his post.

I also remember watching the movie Three Idiots when it first released. It was hilarious and full of wonderful humor but at the same time, I really appreciated how the director

managed to convey the significance of love, loyalty, friendship, and adventure. I have watched Ocean's 11 as well as all four of the Pirates of the Caribbean movies. My favorite one was the 3rd movie: Pirates of the Caribbean, At World's End. I saw that one in theatres 7 times (which is the most I've ever watched any movie in theaters). I am excited because there is supposed to be a fifth movie releasing sometime soon, and Johnny Depp, the actor who plays Jack Sparrow, is one of my all-time favorite American actors. — **Simi**

I loved Pirates of Caribbean! The movies were so good. Johnny Deep is a great actor. Have you seen any of his other movies? Also have you seen all three of the Oceans movies?! I recently watched all of them and they are great! You need to watch them all. Anyways I hope to get you know over the semester! —**Shweta**

Shweta, Simi, and Andy (another HLL in group 4) also found common ground with Abhijeet with respect to language learning experiences. In their final reflective post, all three of them talked about the similarities of their experiences and opinions with Abhijeet:

It's also pretty cool how Abhijeet and I can connect and agree with similar experiences even though we're so far away and in different environments.— **Andy**  
Just like you (and as I mentioned in my post), I think it's interesting how even though we are living here and Abishek is in India, we all understand the importance of learning English, as well the importance of knowing one's own cultures and language. — **Simi**  
And like both of yall said, I'm really surprised that even though we live so far from Abhijeet we understand each other so well. We even have a lot of the same opinions. — **Shweta**

Another discursive move that indicated a desire for interpersonal understanding emerged when participants offered explanations for culture-specific concepts. For example, in group 3, Bharati (ELL) in her introduction mentioned that she was “PG” student. Tara, an HLL in the group, in her response asked Bharati what it meant. While Bharati did not respond to the question, an ELL from a different group, Kavita (group 2), explained to Tara that it meant post-graduate student (a term equivalent to graduate

student in the United States). When Pooja (ELL) was later added to this group, she volunteered the full-form of “B.Ed.” while introducing herself to her group members (Tara and Colleen). This could be interpreted as an act of self-glossing to make culture-specific terms more accessible to one’s audience.

### **HLLs’ perceptions about the project**

The HLLs had mixed reactions about the project. Most participants received few responses from the ELLs and expressed some frustrations. Others stated that project was interesting, but it would have been more beneficial if their partners had responded to their comments. I present some examples from the HLLs’ post-collaboration journals and discussion posts below.

Bob’s last post strongly communicated this frustration, where he appeared to sarcastically question the relevance of reflecting on similarities and differences in opinions on the discussion board (prompt for week 6) when diverse opinions hadn’t even been presented in his discussion group:

मुझे लगता है कि अमानडा की सोच बहुत अच्छा है, क्योंकि वह सिर्फ दुसरा व्यक्ति इस thread में है। मैं अपने आप को नहीं चुन सकते हैं, तो अमानडा मेरी चन है। मैं अर अमानडा भी एक-दूसरे के साथ सहमत। यह हम "common sense" के पास में पले क्योंकि है। कविता "common sense" भी के पास है। मैं "विवादास्पद" नहीं हूँ। लेकिन मैं दुसरे पद समझ सकता हूँ। वे बात जारी होता है।

I think that Amanda’s views are very good because she’s only other person in this thread. I can’t choose myself, so Amanda is my choice. Amanda and I agreed with each other. This is because we have grown up with “common sense”. Kavita also has “common sense”. I am not (trying to be) “controversial”. But I can understand the other aspect. That conversation continues.

Bob's argument that the opinions in his group were similar because everyone in the group had common sense also seem to imply that perhaps the discussion questions demanded obvious responses. He referred to a similar idea in his post-collaboration journal, where he said that the discussions topics were too long and boring:

मुझे लगता है कि प्रोजेक्ट को ज़्यादा विषय की ज़रूरत है क्योंकि मैं ऊब गया aur छह हफ़ते बहुत समय है। मैं विवधता चाहता हूँ।

I think that the project needs more topic because I got bored and six weeks is a long time. I want variety.

John from group 6 similarly stated that the discussion prompts were too long. He also questioned the relevance of the project arguing that he doesn't need an online exchange to talk to his own classmate (Maya), since they could have done on campus:

मुझे लगता है कि वह प्रोजेक्ट ठीक है। मेरे साथियों भारत से नहीं पोस्ट किया इसलिये मैंने माया से बात किया। मुझे बहुत अच्छा लगता है कि मैंने माया से बात किया था लेकिन वह प्रोजेक्ट नहीं ज़रूरी है — हमने campus पर हिन्दी अभ्यास किया जा सकता थे। मुझे माया के राय के बारे में शिखने अच्छा लगता था क्योंकि वह बहुत चतुर aur हिन्दी आती है।

I think this project was fine. My partners from India did not post therefor I talked to Maya. I used to like that I spoke to Maya but (for that) the project is not needed—we could have practiced Hindi on campus. I used to like learning about Maya's views because she is very intelligent and she knows Hindi.

Elizabeth's last post from the discussion forum also echoes frustration about having to compare her opinions with other members in the group, when it was only her and Arjun (HLL) talking in the group:

This is kind of hard to reply to because I feel like we've talked about this several times. However, because no one else really replied this is pretty much the only discussion board post we could compare each other to.

In her post-collaboration journal, Elizabeth added that she found the project “fun” ( मज़ेदार ) and “interesting” ( दिलचस्प ), and that she enjoyed it even though she was only talking to Arjun in the group. She admitted that sometimes talking to Arjun alone did get boring and that she would have benefited from the project more if other people had talked to them during the project. She said that the topics and questions were difficult and that they made her think hard. Her group-member, Arjun, also acknowledged that the project was interesting, but that it would have been more beneficial if there had been more participation from students in India:

मैं इस प्रोजेक्ट के बारे में सोचता हूँ कि यह बहुत दिलचस्प है। मेरा अनुभव था कि मेरा ग्रूप में बहुत बात नहीं थी। हर सप्ताह में और एली बात करते थे लेकिन भारत के छात्रों ने बहुत बात नहीं किये थे। तो मुझे लगता है कि प्रोजेक्ट से कुछ लाभ हुआ, लेकिन अगर भारत से ज़्यादा हिस्सेदारी थी तो ज़्यादा फायदा हो सके। लेकिन बहुत दिलचस्प था, जब पहले पोस्ट में हम लोगों ने हमारे बारे में बात किये। मुझे हमारे डिस्कशन के विषय और सवाल अच्छे लगे थे। बातें दिलचस्प थे, और मैंने अन्य ग्रूप के बातें भी पढ़ा था। About this project I think that this was very interesting. My experience was that there was not much conversation in my group. Every week Elizabeth and I used to talk but students in India did not talk much. So I think that project had some benefits, but if there was more participation from India then it would be more beneficial. But it was very interesting, when in the first post we talked about ourselves. I liked our discussion topics and questions. Conversations were interesting and I also read other groups' conversations.

Simi from group 4 commented that she liked this discussion assignment more than the journal writing assignments given in the last semester of her Hindi class:

मुझे लगता है, यह Discussion board assignment बहुत अच्छा आइडीअ है। मुझे लगता है, पीचले सेमेस्टर का written journal assignments यह discussion posts से ज़्यादा मज़ा और दिलचस्प है। यह assignment यूस्फल और फायदा हुआ था लेकिन, अगर अभि हमे ज़्यादा प्रतिक्रिया दी थी, तो बहुत ही अच्छा हो रहा होगा।

I think that this discussion board assignment is a very good idea. I think that this discussion post is more interesting and fun than the written journal assignments from last

semester. This assignment is useful and it was beneficial but it would have been very good if Abhijeet had given us more response.

In her interview, Simi added that she really liked the discussion prompts because “they made you think and they were meant to incite different answers from people from India vs. people here.” She also appreciated having the opportunity to write both in Hindi and English, since it allowed her convey her opinions more comprehensively, especially when her Hindi skills proved limiting:

Sometimes when you don't know how to say something, you have to say something else to get your point across. And then when you can respond in English, you can say what you really and actually mean so that you can get your point across better.

Her group-mate Shweta also admitted in her interview that some topics were difficult to talk about in Hindi. She added that while the discussion questions were difficult to some extent, they gave her an opportunity to learn new words and also encouraged her to think differently about issues. She said:

I loved the topics because they were very thought-provoking. I don't usually think in those terms, so they were eye-opening in a way. I liked it.

### **HLLs' perceived learning**

The HLLs' post-collaboration reflections revealed that they perceived learning something from the project. Some participants felt the project had primarily contributed to enhancing their Hindi lexicon and writing skills, a few others (the HLLs from group 3,

4, and 5) highlighted discovering new perspective through their interactions with the ELLs.

### **Linguistics gains**

Following are some examples of what participants wrote in their reflections with regard to learning Hindi through this project.

Kyle, from group 8, appreciated having a completion grade for this assignment. He said that this allowed him to experiment with Hindi and learn some new words. His group-mate, Vijay, also said that he enjoyed the project and that it gave him an opportunity to learn something:

इस प्रोजेक्ट के बारे में मैं सोचता हूँ कि यह एक बहुत अच्छा रासता है छात्रों को हिन्दी सिखाने के लिए. हम को कोई शब्द नये ढंग से उपयोग करने के लिए मौका मिलता है जब भारतीय छात्रों की हिन्दी पडते हैं. मुझे मज़ा आया था aur कुछ अजीब लगता था लेकिन कुछ सीखने के लिये मिलता है.  
About this project I think that this that this is a very good way to teach students Hindi. We can opportunity to use words in a new way when we read Indian students' Hindi. I had fun and I also felt a little weird but it used to help us learn.

Elizabeth from group 7 said that there were some words in the discussions that she didn't understand but that it was good because then she had a chance to learn about them. Similarly, Bob from group 2 felt that having to write in Hindi regularly (in the discussions) was an achievement, since he doesn't write so much Hindi normally. He added that even though the project was for a participation grade, he tried to make the most of it and learn Hindi through this process. Riya and Stacey from group 1 also appreciated the opportunity to learn Hindi through this project. Riya wrote this in her journal:

मुझे ये प्रोजेक्ट अच्छा लगा , लेकिन मेरे ख्याल में कुछ समसये थे। कुछ फायदा ज़रूरी था, हमें हिन्दी फिल्म देखने पड़ी, aur यह बहुत अच्छा टेकनीक है भाषा सीखने के लिए । फिल्म बहुत अच्छी aur मजादार भी थी , aur फिल्म ने प्रोजेक्ट aur मजादार बनाया । लेकिन मैं उदास थी कि मेरा भारत वाला पार्टनर ने बहुत थोड़ा लिखा। उसने सिर्फ शायद दो बार कुछ लिखा। लेकिन मुझे नहीं माल कि यह कैसे बदल सकते हैं। मेरे ख्याल में डिस्कशन के विषय और सवाल बहुत अच्छे थे। मुझे सोच पड़ा और यह बाह मुझे अच्छी लगी।

I liked this project, but I think there were some problems. There was certainly some benefit, we had to watch a Hindi film and that is a very good technique to learn a language. Film was very good and fun and the film made the project more fun. But I was upset that my partner from India wrote so less. He only wrote twice maybe. But I don't know how we can change this. I think the discussion topics and questions were very good. They forced me to think and I liked that.

Similarly, Stacey in her interview said that having discussions in Hindi helped her. She explained that being able to understand her classmate's (Riya's) posts gave her a level of confidence, and that their use of similar-level language and vocabulary helped activate her memory of similar terms in Hindi.

### **Discovering new perspectives**

As mentioned before, the HLLs from group 3, 4, and 5 had more consistent opportunities to interact with the ELLs. When reflecting on their experiences, these participants highlighted discovering similarities and differences between their opinions.

For example, Roshini from group 5, wrote the following in her final post:

I really enjoyed this discussion experience! (even if I was not very on top of things) It was interesting to read Kalindi's Hindi's posts, as it gave me more insight into how Hindi is actually spoken/written in India. I was also surprised that Kalindi and I such similar stances on topics like gender equality, language discrimination, marriage, etc. I definitely would have expected her views to vary vastly from mine since we grew up in such different cultures and societies. As I mused in my Hindi post, perhaps this was a result of a similar upbringing? Maybe our parents raised us with the same beliefs? Who knows. Regardless, I'm very grateful for this entire experience.

Roshini reiterated this opinion in her interview where she said that given the difference in cultures between China and India, she was surprised that she and Kalindi shared similar responses to the cultural issues being discussed:

When I was speaking to Kalindi...she...her English is really good so...she...I think that really helped in terms of us understanding where she came from. umm...but I always like...I was always like trying to picture like oh she's a university girl...she like is educated...she does dances...I was like trying to think of it from her perspective and I don't know if you were reading our posts towards the end, but like we agreed on like a LOT (emphasis) of things, which was like not too surprising I guess but in terms of how different the culture is between China and India I was still like somewhat surprised.

Similarly, Shweta, Simi, and Andy from group 4 were also surprised to discover that their opinions, especially on the role of English in the global world, were similar to Abhijeet's views. Interestingly, Andy and Shweta also discovered that their opinions on one of the main characters of the film—Sapna, Shashi's daughter—did not match. While both of them were able to relate to the character based on their own experiences, Shweta was less forgiving of Sapna for being disrespectful to her mother. Andy, on the other hand, was more empathetic towards Sapna's character arguing that she was just being a kid. He acknowledged this difference in his last post:

To be honest I mostly agreed with everyone, even when I disagreed with Shweta, because I totally understand where she's coming from. Sapna was decently disrespectful but I know I was kind of like that growing up so I understand that Sapna is just a kid and that we could be a little understanding. It's also pretty cool how Abhijeet and I can connect and agree with similar experiences even though we're so far away and in different environments.

Finally, Colleen and Tara from group 3 also felt that they learned something from their discussions with each other and with Pooja (ELL) in this collaboration. In her post-collaboration journal, Colleen mentioned that it was Pooja's post that helped her understand the contextual use of reduplication (English-Vinglish) in the film's title:

इस फिल्म के एक अनुबाव के बारे में है कि मैंने कभी नहीं करा, इसलिये मेरे लिये फिल्म बहुत eye-opening थी। मुझे पसंद है कि यह फिल्म अनुबाव कि मैंने कभी नहीं करा के बारे में है। जब मैं फिल्म देकी, मैं नहीं जानती थी कि "English-Vinglish" एक "frustrated" शब्द है (मैं पूजा पोस्ट में यह पदी!)। अब, फिल्म के शीर्षक बहुत उचित शीर्षक है। शशी का अनुबाव बहुत frustrating लगता था . This film is about an experience that I have never done (had), therefore this film was very eye-opening for me. I like that this film is about an experience that I've never experienced. When I saw the film, I didn't know that "English-Vinglish" is a "frustrated" word (I read this in Pooja's post). Now, film's title is very appropriate. Shashi's experience was very frustrating.

In her final post, Colleen said that she was "sad" that this collaboration was coming to an end and that she learned a lot about her group from these discussions. She went on to describe how everyone in the group offered different reasons for why English has more symbolic power in today's world. She attributed these differences in opinions to a difference in everyone's life experiences. In her response, Tara reciprocated Colleen's feelings and shared that she too had learned a lot from this group:

Hi Colleen!

I am also sad that this collaboration is over. I learned a lot from this group - not only the language but also the perspectives of different people. I hope I had been helpful to you guys in learning English/Hindi as you guys have been to me. One of my favorite posts was also talking about movie making as a form of art and also Sashi being a very good mother who eventually found how to live life for herself as well, while being in the boundaries of a traditional Indian housewife. I think this movie was a good one to talk about as it showed the differences in Indian and Western culture as well as the steps that are being taken by women and mothers such as Sashi to build a bridge between them.

To summarize, this chapter presented a thick description of the online intercultural exchange as an activity system, highlighting the different contradictions and outcomes that emerged within the system. A close examination of the system revealed that any given process of interaction within the system was highly contextual and was shaped by different elements of the system functioning together. These elements in turn were embedded in varying discourses related to language, culture, and identity. The chapter also described the technological, academic, and affective tensions that impacted the processes within the system and limited participants' opportunities for intercultural dialogue and discovery.

In the following chapter, I present findings from three case studies that examine three HLLs' identity construction and experiences within the online activity system.

## **Chapter 5: Findings II**

In the following sections I discuss three case studies. These case studies explore how three Hindi Language Learners (HLLs)—Justin, Tara, and Andy— enacted their cultural identities and how that shaped their participation in the online exchange.

### **Case One: Justin**

*“I think language is the only thing I’m missing from the culture”*

#### **Linguacultural Identity: Constructing the self**

##### **Background**

Justin was a junior in college studying nursing. His parents are from Guyana, formerly known as British Guiana, and they moved to the United States for higher education before Justin and his siblings were born. He identifies his cultural roots in India and Guyana. He identified English as his first language. His parents speak Guyanese Creole with their family but speak English with Justin and his siblings. Justin expressed tremendous motivation for learning Hindi and started learning the language in college. He believed Hindi is integral to his culture and he wanted to learn the language to be able to connect with his cultural roots. This was his fourth semester of learning Hindi, and in his pre-collaboration journal and interview he said that he it had been an enjoyable experience so far. He has never visited India or Guyana.

### **Intertwined Heritage**

As a Hindi language learner, Justin does not fit neatly into what is commonly accepted as the definition of a heritage learner ( Ilieva 2012). The story of Justin's relationship with India is intertwined with his heritage in Guyana and begins when his great grandparents migrated to Guyana and brought their home culture with them, as he describes in the interview:

The culture in Guyana is just like that of India. There's many African-Americans and many I'd say brown people like Indians and Pakistanis and stuff. And so, what they try to do in Guyana is to upkeep whatever little Indian culture that they have. My great-grandparents migrated from...great great grandparents both, they were from India. So, I think my grandparents were actually born in Guyana so ...my parents were born in Guyana. I'm the first generation born here in America. What my family tries to do is to upkeep the culture. We still go to mandirs<sup>1</sup>, we go to temples. They taught me how to play tabla<sup>2</sup> and harmonium<sup>3</sup>.

Justin constructs a sense of affiliation with Guyana, or at least with the Indo-Guyanese community, by aligning his family's efforts to "upkeep" Indian culture with what "they" in other words,,the people in Guyana do. When I asked him to elaborate, he explained that even though people in Guyana don't know Hindi they keep the culture alive by making Indian food, playing Indian musical instruments, and following religious traditions, ending his response with, "we try to keep up as best as we can". The discursive shift in his use of pronoun from "they" to "we" indicates a level of identification and

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<sup>1</sup> Hindi word for a Hindu temple.

<sup>2</sup> An Indian percussion instrument

<sup>3</sup> A pump-based Indian instrument similar to an accordion

group membership with Guyana even though its culture is defined within the framework of India and Hinduism.

The theme of preserving and practicing Indian culture, as Justin perceives it, appeared repeatedly in the narratives that he chose to present about himself. In the first week of online discussions where participants were required to introduce themselves and share a picture that best offered a glimpse of their world (appendix C), Justin said that the things that he enjoyed the most in life were basketball and playing the tabla. He added that he loved playing the tabla for the Hindu festivals at his university campus, a sentiment that he reiterated during the interview. He also posted a picture of himself playing the tabla and added the following explanation to go with it:

I have been playing tabla for about ten years now. At first, I did not want to learn tabla. But eventually, I started to really enjoy playing tabla. I am very glad that my parents put me in tabla classes when I was young. Hopefully I can someday teach other young kids how to play. My parents wanted me to play tabla, because they wanted me to upkeep the Indian culture somehow.

Through all these narratives, Justin's Guyanese and Indian identities remain positioned in a dialogic interaction; it is his roots in Guyana that afford meaning and value to the Indian culture that he knows and appreciates. And yet, when asked to define his cultural identity, Justin downplayed his Guyanese connection. In fact, he did not bring up his connection to Guyana in the online discussions or in his pre-collaboration journal. I discovered it only during the interview. In his response to my question during the interview, he foregrounds the American and Indian aspect of his identity by saying:

Umm...I mean I was born here in America. English is my primary language. I think I do fit in very well in American culture. Umm...*at the same time though I do have a lot more Indian culture in me than most people do...most Indians do themselves, you know?* I actually try to keep up both. Umm...the Guyana part of me...like my parents and stuff. I don't know if I like...there's not much...*Guyana doesn't have much culture in itself. There's not much...whatever culture Guyana has is from India.* I feel the strongest with the Indian and American culture those two. I like it, I appreciate it.

His discursive American self in this answer seems more comfortably defined as it relates to two concrete parameters, language and birth, that afford an individual a sense of belonging and membership to a culture. However, his statement about Guyana not having a culture of its own and him having “more Indian culture than most Indians” requires one to understand the complex socio-political, economic, historical, and linguistic discourses that surround the Indian Diaspora.

### **Cultural Displacement**

Justin's Guyanese identity is situated in the history of the Indo-Guyanese people, a history that is defined by the intersection of the slave emancipation movement in the British West Indies and British colonialism in India. After the abolition of slavery in the British colonies in the 19th century, thousands of people from the northern states of India were brought, often by force and deception, to the Caribbean Islands and nearby regions in South America to work as indentured laborers in the sugar plantations (Bahadur 2013). As a displaced migrant community, these Indians held on to their religious and cultural traditions to retain a sense of home and identity in the face of imperialist domination.

It is this displaced identity that gets passed on to Justin through his great grandparents and creates a lens for him where he can only look at Guyana from his great grandparents' Indian eyes. It is as if there is no frame available to him to describe Guyanese culture, a sentiment that is reflected in his statement about Guyana's culture being nonexistent or being identical to the culture in India.

Justin's family experienced one more level of displacement when they immigrated to the United States. During the interview, Justin mentioned that one of reasons why he has never visited Guyana so far is because he does not have much family left there. He explained that most of his family has migrated to America because Guyana is "very very poor" and is "classified as a third world country". He added that his parents still remember and talk about the streets that they grew up on, and if given a chance he would love to visit those places in Guyana with his family. As an immigrant community, Justin's parents and extended family have experienced a certain loss of their Guyanese identity, which was tied to their everyday life experiences in Guyana. One could argue that this identity loss at some level is precipitated by neo-imperialist forces that contribute to economic disparity between nations and position one country as "third world" and another as 'first world'.

### **Linguistic Marginalization**

Justin grew up in a city that has a significant Indian diaspora population with Hindus being the dominant religious group among them. Guyanese Hindus are a relative

minority group, where all community members “know each other” and none of them speak Hindi. The lack of Hindi emerged as a strong and repeated theme in how Justin constructed an Indian identity, an identity that was simultaneously marginalized and supported by the prevailing discourse on what it means to be an Indian-American in his context.

When I asked him if his parents spoke Hindi, he said they did not, and added:

We watch Bollywood movies. We have no idea what they are saying. We watch with subtitles. And it’s kinda awkward because *we are brown and we are supposed to know it*, but..um..that’s why I wanted to learn Hindi. Because a lot of our culture revolves around that, our Indian culture you know

By calling himself “brown” Justin explicitly invokes a socio-political racial identity of a South-Asian. He feels the authenticity of this identity is embedded in the knowledge of Hindi because for him, most Indian culture revolves around Hindi. This supposed expectation of knowing Hindi reveals how he is being excluded and made to feel “awkward” by, what one can assume, a dominant Hindi-knowing Indian immigrant community around him. It is this symbolic India, present in his immediate American surroundings, that is shaping his perception of Hindi and Indian culture being intricately linked.

The linguistic reality in India on the Indian subcontinent, on the other hand, does not completely align with his perception given that more than half of India’s population actually speaks a language other than Hindi. At another level, his perceptions about Hindi

and Indian culture also signal the symbolic power of Hindi and Hindi-based popular cultural products like Bollywood over other Indian languages and cultural products in the United States. There are many other films made in other languages in India and yet Bollywood often symbolizes Indian culture in the West. This also reveals the symbolic power of Hindi over other languages within India and especially within the Indian Diaspora.

Another example where Justin's sense of Indian-ness was excluded from a Hindi-dominated Indian cultural framework around him appeared when he narrated an incident of visiting a Hindu temple as a child. He mentioned that there are a couple of Guyanese Hindu temples in his city, but on that day his parents decided to take him and his siblings to a huge "Indian" temple where everything was in Hindi. To quote his words,

So, I went there and I remember like everything was in Hindi. I was like in the class with my age group and everything was in Hindi and I just felt out of place. And so they are like oh you are brown and you are Hindu, but you don't know how to speak (Hindi). So, I have been labeled as oh I don't know what to...I don't know how to...how I identify myself as. But I mean it's just because I don't know the language. I feel like if I did know the language...I know the scriptures. I know a lot of the...my parents taught me the Mahabharata, the Ramayana everything. I think I do know the...I think the language is the only thing I'm missing from the culture and that's why I really really wanted to take this class.

His feeling of being "out of place" in this situation, where everyone around him expected him to speak Hindi because he was brown and a Hindu, reconfirms the assumption that macro-level linguistic power structures prevalent within Indian Diaspora shaped his Indian identity and positioned him as a marginalized Indian. Justin's

experience relates him to other Diaspora Indians from Guyana and Trinidad who report being perceived as “not really Indians” by Indian immigrants that have emigrated directly from India (Berger 2004).

Justin’s narrative is also a reminder that the social act of positioning is dialogic in nature. While the dominant Hindi language discourse is marginalizing him, it is also affording him the agency to conceptualize Indian culture and construct his identification with it. In this narrative he equates Indian culture with the knowledge of Hindu scriptures, which is a similar discursive move to his earlier statement about him having more Indian culture than most Indians because he can play Indian classical music. Being marginalized as a non-Hindi speaking, first generation Indian-American Hindu gives him the power to recognize an assumed deficiency in his cultural identity that he express as —“I think the language is the only thing I’m missing from the culture.” This realization also gives him the confidence to assert a strong Indian identity by foregrounding his expertise in other aspects of Indian culture, which according to him, is superior to what most (presumably Hindi-speaking) Indians know.

Justin’s desire to learn Hindi can also be seen as an agentic move that serves to complete his Indian cultural identity and assert a strong language learner identity. As a language learner, he is aware of what goals he wants to achieve, which he clearly identifies in his pre-collaboration journal and the online discussions:

I want to learn more about Indian culture, which is why I am studying Hindi. I have never been to India before, but when I go, I want to be able to speak in Hindi with other people.

I want to be able to watch Bollywood movies without subtitles. Hopefully I will become fluent with much practice. This is my second year learning Hindi, and I am enjoying it very much!

In the following sections, I look at how these complex cultural identities shaped Justin's negotiation of interpersonal relations with his peer in India and his engagement with the film.

### **Engagement with the project**

Justin was in group 5 with one of his classmates from the Hindi class, Roshini, and two students from India: Tarun and Kalindi. Tarun only posted one comment in week 1, and there was no direct interaction between him and Justin. I recruited Kalindi and added her to the group during the second week of the project. She posted her introduction when she joined and continued to participate in the discussions until week 4, posting a total of 13 comments, 7 in Hindi and 6 in English. Justin on the other hand posted a total of 14 comments, 6 in Hindi and 8 in English. 6 out of these 8 English responses were directly addressed to Kalindi. Justin never directly talked to Roshini in his posts. Even in weeks 5 and 6, when Kalindi did not write, Justin generally responded to the discussion prompts in English rather than respond to Roshini directly.

### **Interpersonal dialogue**

#### **The artist connection**

As mentioned previously, Justin was a tabla and harmonium player. It was this connection with Indian art that played an important role in igniting his friendship with

Kalindi. Following are the first two messages that they exchanged in week 1. I have edited the names of the city and college in Kalindi's post to maintain anonymity.

A hearty namaste to all !

I apologize for delaying my participation!

I'm Kalindi and I'm from the city of C. I'm studying Sanskrit Literature at N. I've been born and brought up in C. I'm a classical Dancer and am learning the dance form of odissi<sup>4</sup> for the last 16 years. I'm a performer and i teach as well.

I really enjoy dancing (all forms) and I also love to sing and paint. I like driving and riding too.

Something that i would like to do is spreading art to every heart ;)

It's a pleasure meeting you all and I'm sure this will be fun!

The next post would be in Hindi I assure !

Justin's reply, posted on the same date:

Hello Kalindi!

You have very good English, I am impressed!

Wow, I think that classical dancing is amazing. My younger sister actually does classical dancing as well. I have been playing tabla and harmonium for the past ten years now. I also perform and teach! It's so fun and exciting, isn't it? This week, I am playing tabla for my friend as she performs a Kathak-styled dance. It should be very fun!

That is really cool! My favorite hobby is playing basketball. Did you watch the India/Pakistan cricket match last week?!

You must be an artist then! I wish I knew how to draw. :( What kind of art do you like the best? And how do you spread art to every art?

The pleasure is all mine in meeting you. I am looking forward to speaking with you more! Take care and have a great week. :)

Kalindi's artistic identity comes through in her self-description as a "Dancer" and "performer" and her desire to promote art. She reasserts this identity in part 2 of the introduction week, where she posted two pictures related to her dance performances. She

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<sup>4</sup> A classical Indian dance form that originates in the eastern state of Odisha in India.

explained that the reason she chose to share those pictures was because dance is a very important part of her life.

A close look at Justin's reply reveals how he discursively engages in different social acts to connect with Kalindi over their mutual identity as artists. Thematically, almost all of the short paragraphs in his post are linked to Kalindi's mostly one-line paragraphs. In the second paragraph, Justin draws on his sister's and his own relationship with Indian music and dance to negotiate a common ground with Kalindi. He uses multiple positive evaluative expressions ("Wow, I think classical dancing is amazing!"; "It's so fun and exciting, isn't it?"; It should be very fun!; That is really cool!) to convey his enthusiastic appreciation and build an interpersonal relationship with Kalindi. His use of questions and expressions of positive affect ("The pleasure is all mine in meeting you.") towards the end signal his interest and willingness to build this friendship further.

Justin's first evaluative statement about being impressed by Kalindi's "very good English" stands out in terms of how he positions her. I will discuss this in more detail later in this section.

Going back to their relationship building process, Kalindi acknowledges Justin's compliments in her next post by thanking him and adding:

जान के अच्छा लगा की आप दोनों शास्त्रीय कला में रुचि रखते हैं . मुझे भी स्टेज पर परफॉर्म करना बहुत पसंद है . आपके शो के लिए आल द बेस्ट :)

It was great to know that you both take interest in classical art. I also really like (love) to perform on stage. All the best for your show :)

She went on to answer Justin's questions from the previous post and told him that she does not like watching cricket very much. In response to his question about promoting art, Kalindi explained that she would like to introduce Indian classical dance and music to everyone around her. She further argued that everyone in India these days is adopting Western culture, and she wants them to understand their own culture first. Justin did not continue this conversation any further that week. However, in the second week when the project had already moved on to the next series of discussions, Justin revisited Week 1's discussion forum and posted this:

Hello Kalindi,

The performance on Friday went very well! I wanted to share this picture with you :) I am playing the tabla and my friend is playing the violin. I hope you enjoy it!

Justin's initiative to share the picture and update on his performance can be seen as another attempt to build friendship.

### **Growing friendship**

The interpersonal connection between Justin and Kalindi continued to grow in the subsequent weeks. In the second week, the discussion turned towards movies and one of the prompts asked participants to talk about a film that has influenced them deeply. Justin named "पर्सूट अफ़ हेपीनेस (Pursuit Of Happiness)" as his favorite movie because it had inspired him to work hard and be successful. In her first post that week, Kalindi answered the discussion questions in Hindi, in which she described herself as an emotional person

who is sometimes moved to tears by emotional scenes in films. In the last line of her post, she directly addressed Justin and told him:

और जस्टिन .. मैंने भी परसूट ऑफ़ हैप्पिनेस देखी है.सच में बहुत अच्छी है . ( उसे देख कर भी मैं बहुत रोई थी :P)

And Justin...I've also seen Pursuit of Happiness. It's really very good. (I cried a lot after watching that also :P)

Justin replied to this sentiment by telling her—I don't think I have ever cried during a movie....does that make me heartless? I hope not :P .

He brought up the topic again a few lines later in the post when he mentioned that he loved watching Bollywood movies and asked her for recommendations—

(If you have any movie recommendations for me, please let me know! Hopefully none of them make me cry :P)

Kalindi appeared amused at his reply when she told him—“Haha... no , not crying doesn't make you heartless!” She then went on to list five Bollywood movies that she thought Justin would enjoy watching.

The lightheaded and somewhat intimate tone of this exchange reveals that both Justin and Kalindi were receptive to each other's friendship, at least within the context of this telecollaboration. Justin's reflections on the discussions in Week 6 indirectly confirm this interpretation. In his final post, he stated that he learned a lot through this collaboration and had met a “very cool friend in India”. He also appeared to acknowledge the confined scale of their friendship by saying this—“I wish there was a way we could keep in touch more, but all good things must come to an end.”

Justin and Kalindi's friendship became popular in the Hindi class. I discovered this during one of my class observations. During these observations, I would specifically try to keep an ear out for any direct mention of the project in class. One day before class I noticed students teasing Justin about Kalindi referring to Kalindi as Justin's girlfriend. A student later informed me that Roshini had altered a photo so that they appeared together and posted it on the class Facebook page. Both Roshini and Justin appeared reluctant to talk about the episode during the interview, perhaps given my status as their instructor. However, during the interview Justin did mention that he had really enjoyed meeting Kalindi:

Meeting her was really really great and she had a lot of same ideas thoughts that I had about the movie and films, so I think we had a lot of similar ideas...similar thoughts about everything we talked about

Another important theme that emerged in the interpersonal dialogue between Justin and Kalindi relates to perspectives around English in India that Justin discovered.

### **Discovering the 'other'**

At multiple instances during their interaction, Justin discovered unexpected things about Kalindi. When he read her introduction in English, he told her that he is "impressed" by her "very good English". This discursive move acts as a compliment and also conveys that perhaps Justin did not expect Kalindi to have good English. He brought up the issue again in week 2. In her post, when Kalindi discussed three Hollywood

movies (Pursuit of Happyness; Kung Fu Panda; and The Bucket List) that she has enjoyed watching, Justin responded by saying:

It is so cool that we have seen so many of the same movies! I LOVE Kung Fu Panda as well! How do you watch all of these movies? Do you watch them with Hindi subtitles? Whenever I watch Bollywood films, I must have English subtitles because I am not yet able to fully understand Hindi.

His question regarding subtitles can be interpreted as his curiosity and his desire to know Kalindi better. However, the question also appears to be an act of evaluation that is directed both ways. He is evaluating Kalindi's English by assuming that she may not be proficient enough to understand Hollywood films without subtitles. This evaluation is contrasted with his own inability to understand Bollywood films.

In the same discussion thread, Roshini, another Hindi learner participating in this group, built on Justin's evaluation and told Kalindi—"your English is really good! Definitely way better than our (me and J's) Hindi. :p" Kalindi responded to this evaluation by telling them that she does not need subtitles to understand English movies since she knows English well. She added that "whatever little command" she has over English is because she was educated in an English-medium school.

It is important to consider Justin's language learner identity to understand how he perceived Kalindi during these interactions. At the time I introduced the details of the telecollaboration in the Hindi class, I told them that most Indian participants did not have very advanced proficiency in English. (At that time however, I had not recruited Kalindi for this project.) Justin's evaluation of Kalindi's English hence could be situated in how I

as an instructor positioned his potential online collaborators for him. His reference to his own lower Hindi level skills also indicate that he is positioning Kalindi as a fellow foreign language learner and is amazed at her superior foreign language skills, while he is still learning.

Justin was also very surprised to discover that Kalindi had seen many Hollywood movies. During the interview when I asked him to talk about his discussions with Kalindi, he said:

Justin: I got to know her through this collaboration. So, we introduced ourselves and she...she's watched many of the English movies that I've watched. I actually said that Pursuit of Happiness was one of my favorite movies and she said she's watched that movie too...and I was like oh my gosh! You've watched all these...not just Pursuit of Happiness...Finding Nemo and all these other American movies. It's not just one that she has watched...she has watched so many.

Me: And was that a surprise for you?

It was completely surprising for me. I thought they only watched Bollywood movies obviously.

Justin's reaction here could be interpreted within his intertwined Indo-Guyanese and American identities. As a displaced third generation Indo-Guyanese migrant, he has come to associate India with certain cultural products and practices, including religion, art, music, and Bollywood. Similarly, his non-Hindi speaking marginalized position within the larger Indian Diaspora in America has contributed to his perception that Hindi is the gateway to Indian culture. It is possible that for him Hollywood and English somehow do not belong in this narrative of India. Hence, Kalindi's proficiency in English

and her interest in Hollywood films perhaps creates a cultural dissonance, which results in him being surprised.

### **Film Analysis**

Both Justin and Kalindi had similar opinions on how films influence people's thoughts and actions. They saw films as more than means of entertainment. They agreed that films have a social purpose and have the power to influence people. Justin brought his unique experiences to his understanding of the issues raised in the story of *English-Vinglish*.

### **A story about language learning**

Justin's experiences and desires as a Hindi language learner informed his understanding of the movie. An instance of this can be seen in his response to a discussion question in week 3 that required participants to discuss what they thought the movie was about. He said:

मुझे लगता है कि फ़िल्म के बारे में एक व्यक्ति अलग भाषा (another language) सीख सकते हैं।  
I think that film about a person can learn another language.

He saw linguistic exclusion as being a big issue in the film and related to his own experience of being excluded in the past. He talked about the same idea in the interview when I asked him if there were any aspects of the story that he found similar to his own experiences:

I remember we watched the movie *English-Vinglish* and one of the big things was not knowing how to speak the language of the country in that country, so I...I related to that around the time I went to that mandir a long time ago, and I had no idea what was going

on and I felt very embarrassed. I didn't know how to react, so I think that was very very similar

He also appreciated the main character, Shashi for her bravery in learning English while fighting disrespect at home. In his response to Kalindi saying that Shashi is her favorite character, he said:

Shashi dealt with a lot of stress throughout the movie between struggling with learning English and trying to deal with her family that seemed not to appreciate her. For dealing with such hardships, I personally think that Shashi is very noble.

The language learning lens remains his main way of looking at the film. He does not engage with the larger political issue that Kalindi tried to raise in her post in the third week's discussion thread. In week 3's discussion, Kalindi tries to touch on other issues and highlight how Shashi's story is symbolic of a larger problem in Indian society. Justin acknowledges her statement, but does not question it or dwell deeper into it. Instead, he continues to engage with the language learning issue and goes on to construct his position in parallel to what Shashi experienced in the film when she traveled to America. He does this by imagining a future self who wants to connect with Indian culture:

I agree, the film does a great job of portraying how difficult it can be to not know the language in a new place. I think that what you said is very interesting- I did not realize that this is an issue that many woman in India face. But now that I am thinking about it, I would face the same issue if I went to a place and did not know the language. For example, right now I am learning Hindi. However, my Hindi is not that great. I'm sure I would be very lost and confused if I went to a Hindi-speaking city in India. I would probably feel just as Shashi did.

One likely interpretation is that his desire to be part of imagined target language community is strong and that influences his interpretation of the film. However, his

acknowledgement of Kalindi's statement about this being every housewife's issue in India reveals his lack of knowledge of the issue and linguistic landscape in India. It also reveals his privileged linguistic position with respect to English; not only because he lives in America and can speak English, but also because even in his Indian Diaspora community (and perhaps also the global immigrant community) where he is marginalized because of Hindi, he and his family occupy – linguistically speaking – a privileged position because his parents can speak English well, unlike his other brown friends' parents. During the interview when I asked him if his parents spoke English, he said yes, and added:

They both speak English. They speak very very...they speak English very well. My other brown friends when they hear my parents speak English they are very impressed. They speak very very good English so.

In fact, in the same discussion thread his classmate Roshini talked about how her parents' experience was different as they spoke broken English. When I asked Justin about Roshini's comment, he acknowledged that his parents had different circumstances and that they had received English education in Guyana:

They did, they did. I'm surprised how they did but they did. I mean maybe because English is such a worldwide language and stuff. When they came to America they didn't have any problems with language. I think that's why it became very very easy for them to pick up the culture...the American culture and like find a job and make a family here in America

Although Justin did not engage with this issue in this week, he did ask Kalindi questions about it in week 4 when the issues were more explicitly called out in the discussion prompts.

### **‘Discovering’ English in India**

There were two discussion topics given in week 4. Justin initiated the discussion by responding to the questions on language and power. He said Shashi needs English because it is used in daily life in America. He positioned English as a global language and said that it has more power because the US and UK are two very influential nations. So, he answered the question of why it is so important for Shashi to know English from the point of view of a tourist visiting a foreign country. She needs English because she is visiting America and everyone here speaks English, and she is embarrassed because she cannot speak it well.

Kalindi responded to the same prompt from a different perspective. She situated Shashi’s experience with English in the context of India and talked about how people are made to feel ashamed when they can’t speak in English in India:

I think that the film perfectly portrays what a person, who does not speak English very well, faces in the society. It is not his/her problem but something that the society has put upon them. In India, people are looked down upon if they can't speak in English. They are made to feel ashamed if they don't know the language and it becomes a matter of shame.

To this Justin responded as follows:

Wow...I did not realize that people are looked down upon in India if they cannot speak English. I did not expect that at all; however, I find it very interesting. I think it is so

interesting because here, in America, people are rarely ever looked down upon if they do not know a language besides English. It seems like being bilingual is a much bigger matter in India than it is here in America. I honestly thought that only a small population of India would know how to speak English, so this is very surprising to me.

His reaction reveals that Justin is trying to make sense of new cultural information related to English's presence in India. He is surprised to discover that English is more widespread in India than he had anticipated. This response shows that he is perhaps not as aware of India's complex linguistic landscape, where English occupies a prominent position. Most of modern day education in India is in English and it is in fact the local lingua-franca for urban, educated Indians across different regions who speak different regional languages.

The fact that Justin compares English's status in India to that of Hindi's status in America further indicates that he most likely does not know that English is one the official languages in India. When I asked him about this discussion during the interview, he confirmed that he had assumed that English in India would be very uncommon:

I was very surprised. I didn't expect that. I thought that English in...Hindi in America is very very uncommon. For the same reason I thought English in India would be very uncommon

### **Reproducing dominant linguistic discourses**

In these discussions related to power and language, Justin was also (perhaps more) surprised to discover the social value that is attributed to English in India. To make sense of this seemingly unfamiliar cultural concept, Justin draws on the dominant language discourse that surrounds him—the English-centered monolingual discourse in

America (elaborate?). This discourse allows him to argue that there is no social pressure or judgement involved in not being bilingual in America because it is not a “big matter”.

His acceptance of this monolingual discourse is closely linked to his identity as a first generation American. During the interview when I asked him if his parents had ever tried to teach him their Creole English, he said:

They (his parents) speak it here and there with their family, but then again it’s not an official language, so they wouldn’t teach me or teach my siblings how to speak that language because it’s not an official language. And so...I mean they speak it here and there with their siblings and their parents and stuff here and there...I can understand it, but it’s not an official language, so I wouldn’t ever speak it with my friends so it’s not very practical.

The idea that it is not “practical” speaks of linguistic ideology, as his parents thought that the creole language would not have a place in the US society.

Another dominant discourse that remained unchallenged in his data was the idea of English as a global language. It is a powerful discourse. English’s global language status is tied to colonialism. Colonialism resulted in epistemic violence and displaced many world languages. However, there are no easy ways around it in the contemporary world. The discourse is so deep that even language speakers who are marginalized by the global power of English acknowledge its pragmatic use. Kalindi’s post is an example of this:

and yes, some languages are ruling the world and have become a necessity. In this internet age , we are connecting with people from all over the world and english has become a common medium of communication.

Justin replied to this comment by stating:

Yes, I feel that English is one of those languages that are ruling the world and becoming a necessity. However, I believe that it is a very good thing that more and more people are starting to learn English and that it is becoming a common language of the world. It helps people connect with one another. For example, you and I would not have been able to have this conversation if we did not know the same language :)

Justin's comment indicates that the discourse is deep. Even though he and Kalindi have been talking in Hindi, he still recognizes English as the language that allows them to have this conversation.

It is possible that Justin made this comment because he feels that his Hindi is not good enough for him to have these discussions in Hindi. The linguistic proficiency issue certainly needs to be recognized here. However, that is only part of the issue. It is also needs to be recognized that English and Hindi are inequality placed in terms of the social capital they afford its speaker. Some would even argue English has the power to displace Hindi in India; a sentiment that Justin himself indirectly echoed in the interview when he realized that he could survive in India without Hindi:

I was shocked actually, especially when Kalindi told me in the discussion...I was like...I can't believe that. I can't even imagine that. That's why I want to go to India so badly. I feel like I would survive there. I'd actually...even without taking this class I feel like if I went to India I'd be fine now. It's a lot more reassuring to me

### **Perceived learning**

Justin's interview and online discussions with Kalindi appeared to indicate that this online exchange had offered learning opportunities for him, especially with regard to

building interpersonal connections and discovering new perspectives. Justin confirmed these interpretations by summarizing his reflections in the exchange as follows:

I thought that this was a very great experience as well, and that this should be used in the future Hindi classes. I have just realized that the three people who talked the most in this collaboration (me, Roshini, and Kalindi), have backgrounds from three different countries.....Guyana, China, and India. Because of this, there may be several things which we may disagree upon. There were several things that I was surprised to know about India, such as the fact that English is taught in almost all the schools that that it is actually very common for people in India to know English! However, as Roshini stated in her response, I was very surprised to learn that Kalindi's beliefs about other things, such as marriage, family, gender equality, and language discrimination, were similar to our's here in America. Perhaps the culture in India is just changing so quickly and becoming more and more Westernized. Through this collaboration, I certainly learned a great deal and met a very cool friend in India. I wish there was a way we could keep in touch more, but all good things must come to an end. Just as I am sad that this collaboration is coming to an end, I am also sad that this semester of Hindi is coming to an end. I am excited to one day visit India and show off what I know and hopefully survive! I truly enjoyed this experience :)

While this quote efficiently captures Justin's perceived learning, it also reveals that his understanding of the intercultural similarities and differences are rooted in his own cultural framework. He is surprised to discover that he, Roshini, and Kalindi think similarly about critical issues raised in the film, but the reason behind these similarities, as he proposes, could be because of India's growing "Westernization". Interestingly, Roshini in her final reflections offered a different potential reason to explain these intercultural similarities, as she wondered if Kalindi and she thought similarly because of the way they were raised.

## **Case Two: Tara**

*“Sometimes I sit and think what am I?”*

### **Background**

At the time of this study, Tara was eighteen years old, and was studying International Relations, Global Studies, Hindi, and Urdu. She also expressed interest in pursuing a law degree in the future. Her family is from Kathmandu in Nepal and they moved to the United States when she was nine years old. Tara identified Newari as her first language, which is a language spoken by the Newah, or Newari ethnic group in Nepal. She described the Newaris as a mixed ethnic group between Indo-Aryans and Mongolian-Tibetans.

Tara spoke Nepali, English, and some Spanish that she had learned in high school. Her Hindi language learning journey started early in life. Tara pointed out that although she did not formally learn Hindi until she was in college, she had extensive exposure to Indian media and popular culture (like Bollywood films) due to Nepal’s close geographical and cultural proximity to North India. This exposure allowed her to develop a high proficiency in Hindi, especially in the informal register. At the time of this project, she could speak fluent Hindi but had problems in reading and writing in Hindi. She decided to learn Hindi in college because she thought the language was of strategic

importance in South Asia and that knowing the language well would enhance her employment opportunities that demanded knowledge of the region.

### **Linguacultural identity: Constructing the self**

#### **The question of belongingness**

When asked to define her cultural identity, Tara acknowledged that it is a complex concept to explain. In her pre-collaboration journal, she argued that her cultural identity cannot be bound by questions of nationality since it is linked to multiple geopolitical regions:

मेरे खयाल से संस्कृति एक बहुत personal चीज होती है - nationality के सिवाय। मेरी संस्कृतिक पहचान सब नेपाल, एशिया और अमेरिका से जुड़े है - अलग नहीं हो सकते। मैं नेपाल और तेक्सस मे रही हूँ, और दूसरे संस्कृति के कलाकारों को देखती सुन्ती हूँ - मुझे येह बातें बादी दिलचस्प लगती हैं।

I think culture is a very personal thing—other than nationality. My cultural identity is connected to Nepal, Asia, and America—can't be separated. I have lived in Nepal and Texas, and I listen to and watch artists from other cultures—I find these things very interesting.

As a young immigrant who has lived exactly half of her life in Nepal and America respectively, she struggled to understand where she really belonged. Talking about the issue during the interview, she said:

I mean everything just kind of melted together especially since you know I was recently in Nepal. So...I don't know, it's really confusing. Here I don't fit in completely and there I don't fit in completely. I don't fit in exactly in any place.

Tara's use of "here" and "there" signals that she is constructing two cultural worlds. She simultaneously inhabits these two worlds that blend together. At the same time, she also distances herself from both these worlds by saying that she does not

completely belong in either. A part of this struggle comes from Tara finding it difficult to reconcile her two different cultural realities, which she articulated as follows:

It's really hard! Like I don't like to explain that to other people especially... but for myself sometimes I sit and think what am I? And I don't know. But yeah if I figure it out, I'll let you know. (laughs)

This tension between belonging and not belonging can be further understood in how Tara goes on to construct her relationship with Nepal and how she in turn is positioned by what she recognizes as her home community.

### **Identifying the self vs. being identified**

Tara feels emotionally connected to Nepal and identifies it as home. This Nepali identity is more specifically situated in her Newari heritage, which she described as follows in her interview:

But in my heart you know Nepal is always home. So even in Nepal there's a lot of ethnicities that a lot of people don't know about so I identify more with that heritage also. I think it's just...it's called Newari and I think it's just part...those people are really really proud of our heritage so...but collectively you know I don't like to discriminate so I'm parts of everything.

The shift in pronoun from “those people” to “our heritage” in her discourse indicates a level of ownership of her ethnic heritage. This sense of belonging is further accentuated by her emotional connection, which manifests itself through a sense of pride for her community and heritage. Tara's self-positioning as a Nepali and Newari was evident in her discussion posts also. In week 4, when Pooja criticized people in India who were “biased” for associating a sense of “superiority” with English, Tara agreed with her

and critiqued the “emerging generation” in her home country (Nepal) for adopting English and “American and western ways” because they think it is “cooler”. Speaking as an insider, she further critiqued her immediate community of (Nepali) friends, who adopt English at the cost of ignoring their “native” languages:

Since I did grow up in my native country of Nepal, I have experienced these things first hand myself. I also constantly find myself in circle of friends who only speak in English despite knowing their native languages. I think we should encourage people to use their language as it is a key part of preserving their culture. More speakers (native speakers to be exact) should be the ones speaking and promoting their language.

Elaborating on this response in her interview, Tara said that her response to issues of language dominance were shaped by her experiences of being part of a minority ethnic and linguistic community in Nepal. For Tara, these experiences not only defined her perspectives, but also allowed her to construct a self that was ‘not American’, at least when engaging with issues of language ideologies. Reflecting on her experience in the online discussions, she said that she deliberately distanced herself from an American perspective and chose not to talk like an American because she could not do that given what she had experienced as a Newari in Nepal, and continues to experience as a minority in America:

So I feel like my response to that was very strong in like a really unique way because I’ve never really like not been the minority wherever I have grown up. Like even in Nepal as Newari I was a minority amongst other ethnic groups, so I mean I know what it’s like to be made fun of because of your language. So now that I live in America I can’t offer like an American’s perspective like English is a global language or something because it’s...it IS... but it’s also important to preserve your own languages because no one else is going to do that except for you. You know?

While Tara identified as a Newari, people around her appeared to position her differently. Language, as it appeared in her account, was critical in her feeling like an outsider within what she perceived as her home community. Describing a recent visit to Nepal, she mentioned that “so many people” there were talking to her in English, even though they knew she could speak Nepali and Newari “very well”. She also described other socio-cultural changes that, according to her, had changed her community significantly. She seemed particularly conflicted about young people’s attitudes in her community, with whom she perceived a cultural divide:

In certain contexts, yeah (Nepal has changed). I mean with my family it was all good, but I met other kids my age...and I was like...I don’t know...there’s just cultural differences I guess. Because they are just so focused on getting out of Nepal, you know going abroad for studying and I totally understand that, you know, there’s better opportunities here but like...

This sense of cultural divide with her own people surfaced again in her discourse when we discussed the film. During the interview, she mentioned that she had already seen the film and that the basic theme of language dividing people was very familiar to her, especially in the context of her own family. She recognized that these differences were prevalent in her family and explained how her accent and behavioral practices were perceived as “too American” by her parents:

I think for me especially because I'm interested in this stuff and like this is a discussion like everywhere you know like especially in our house because it's so evident...it's like you don't speak this, you don't speak that and there's always that divide between...that is created between languages and cultures. You know coz my parents are always like oh you are getting a little bit too Americanized. And I say in turn like well you're too conservative.

### **Linguaculturally aware**

Throughout her discourse, Tara presented herself as someone who was passionate about and skillful at learning languages, as well as very receptive to new cultural experiences. For her, language was not just another hobby but a “love”. During the interview, when I asked her questions around her previous language learning experiences, especially with Hindi, she commented that she has always been good at learning languages. She explained that she was able to use this ability to not only successfully learn Hindi in Nepal (through watching Bollywood films and Indian media), but also learn English when she moved to America.

An interesting theme that I noticed in Tara’s language learning narratives was how she consciously identified herself as someone who could learn languages, even in situations where others could not. For instance, when talking about her experience learning Hindi in Nepal, she pointed out that everyone in Nepal “knows Hindi” but not everyone is able to speak it:

I mean like in Nepal like everyone just watches Indian media. I mean everyone in Nepal like knows Hindi like they can understand it, but speaking is definitely a problem for them...I mean I'm not bragging about myself but like...when I see my parents they understand Hindi but they can't speak it as well...but somethings just come easier to me than others so I think I've picked it up easily.

Similarly, she mentioned that she never had to take ESL after coming to America, and that she picked up English “very quickly” through media and books. These narratives also provided an insight into her beliefs about language learning. She described language learning as a “game of patterns”, which she is able to apply to learning any new language. The most recent example of which was Korean, which she said she had started picking up through watching Korean dramas.

Tara’s openness to new languages and cultures was reflected in how she made sense of her immigration experience. In her interview, she focused more on highlighting the culturally enriching aspects of her immigration experience, rather than on elaborating on the challenges that she faced in negotiating cultural differences:

I mean needless to say there was culture shock, so...umm...especially because like that was a time of adolescence for me so it was like a lot of change and...I don't know it just...you just see world in a different light. It made me more culturally aware like I was already culturally aware before but it made me even more since I've been here.

#### **Engagement with the project**

Tara was in Group 3 with one of her other classmates from the Hindi class, Colleen, and two students from India: Bharati and Pooja. Bharati participated in the discussions only in the first week. Bharati and Tara exchanged one message that week. Pooja was added to the group during the second week of the project. Pooja posted her introduction when she joined and continued to participate in the discussions until the last week, posting a total of number of 14 comments, 8 in Hindi and 6 in English. Tara on the other hand posted a total of 13 comments, 6 in Hindi and 7 in English. 6 out of these 7

English responses were directly addressed to Pooja. In her responses, Tara always responded to both her group members, Pooja as well as Colleen.

## **Interpersonal dialogue**

### **Alignment**

Overall, there was a high degree of interpersonal alignment among all three participants in Group 3. Tara, Colleen, and Pooja consistently used discursive strategies in English and Hindi to establish interpersonal connections. For instance, they always opened their responses to each other's posts by addressing each other. Every week Pooja would respond to the discussion prompts in her first post and then separately reply to Tara and Colleen's posts. On the other hand, Tara and Colleen would reply to Pooja as well as respond to each other's comments within a single post.

Their interactions were also marked by expressions of appreciation and positive affect, like "I like what you said about..."; and "Thanks for the compliments :)". Similarly, agreement markers like "I totally agree"; "I also think"; and their Hindi equivalent मुझे भी लगता है ; were repeatedly used in their discussions. Tara's English response to Pooja's comments almost always included the expression "I agree with you". Another example of the interpersonal alignment between Tara and Pooja could be seen in how they responded to each other's different interpretations of a given topic. In week 3, they presented different opinions in response to the question about the theme of the

movie. While Pooja argued the movie was about society's attitude towards women in India, Tara emphasized that it was about self-love. The two were quick to acknowledge and appreciate the other's perspectives in their responses, as can be seen in the following exchange:

नमस्ते तारा!

आपने मेरे विचारों से एक भिन्न पक्ष रखा है कि यह चलचित्र आत्मनिर्भरता के विषय में है। मुझे आपका यह विचार बहुत पसन्द आया। इसके साथ मैंने यह भी महसूस किया है कि इसके माध्यम से हमें आत्मसम्मान का महत्त्व बताया गया है।

Namaste Tara!

You have presented a different opinion than mine that this feature film is about self-reliance. I really like your perspective. I realized along with this that we are being told the importance of self-respect through this medium.

Hey Pooja!

Thanks for the compliments :) I totally agree how you said that Sashi's character was the best one amongst all the rest...I also really liked what you said about self-respect and I totally agree!

At the end of the telecollaboration, both Tara and Pooja confirmed that they had agreed on almost everything throughout their discussions. In her final reflective post,

Tara said:

मुझे भी लगता है की यह सहयोग अच्छा रहा क्यूंकि हम एक देसी व्यक्ति से बात कर रहे थे। पूजा और मेरे विचार में मैंने कभी खता नहीं मिली - हम दोनों ज़्यादातर हमेशा सहमत रहते थे।... तीसरे हफ्ते में पूजा ने मुझे यह बताया के मेरी सोच उनसे अलग थी जब मैंने कहा के यह फिल्म आत्मनिर्भरता के बारेमे है। उन्होंने यह भी कहा के इस नए विचार से वोह सहमत है।

I also think that this collaboration went well because we were talking to a desi<sup>5</sup> person. I never found a difference in Pooja and my opinions —we were mostly in agreement. In the third week Pooja told me that my views were different from hers when I said that this is about self-reliance. She also said that she agreed with my new point of view.

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<sup>5</sup> A colloquial Hindi/English term generally used to describe someone who is from South-Asia or has cultural roots in the region

Similarly, Pooja posted the following reflections in the discussion board:

I would like to mention that from the very first week of the discussion we have several points in common having very few differences...

we all agree that the movie is not merely an entertainment ,rather it tries to teach us something or put before some crucial issues we generally do not notice. I and Tara agree that movies create their own reality to give off a dramatic touch...In the movie of discussion there were several things we noticed in common....

Although there was a seemingly high level of interpersonal alignment between Tara and Pooja in the online interactions, Tara indicated in her interview that she and Pooja were different in how they reacted to the discussion topics. I discuss these perceptions in the sections below.

#### **‘Missed’ communication**

In her interview, Tara appeared to problematize the interpersonal alignment that was evident in her online interactions with Pooja. She almost sounded disappointed with how Pooja had consistently agreed with everything that Tara had said in the discussions, and wondered if her own comments were too “strong” for Pooja to accept. As the following excerpt from our conversation shows, Tara perceived a gap in what how she expected Pooja to respond to certain issues versus what Pooja actually said during the discussions:

**Shilpa:** What about Pooja? What did you get out of her posts?

**Tara:** I mean it was just her responses. I mean I don’t know her personally but I felt that like every time she responded she was like 'I really agree with you Tara', and I was like OK thanks! (laughing), you know? She was just really sweet. I felt that. And...I thought my post would be like a little bit too much...a little too much because I feel about it so strongly (the issue of language dominance). If she felt that, she was really nice about it.

**Shilpa:** Too much in the sense that you felt it won't be acceptable?

**Tara:** No, it's just...umm...some people feel about this little bit strongly than others because I've experienced this. How do you say this...I think a lot of people call it cultural appropriation these days or like a culture not having...measuring up as much to another culture because I've always been...that's always been a part of my life so...

**Shilpa:** Her posts didn't show that she was reacting strongly?

**Tara:** No, I don't think...I mean she's a really nice girl. I mean I thought she would respond more like that (strongly), but she didn't.

**Shilpa:** And why do you think that was?

**Tara:** Because...umm...just my post because I feel so strongly about it like I said. I don't think she was expecting that from like an American person, you know.

Tara's opening sentences appear to almost question the credibility of Pooja's positive comments in the discussion board. There is a slight hint of sarcasm, as indicated by her laughter, that casts doubt on the possibility of their dialogue being genuine considering that Pooja never proposed a different point of view. It is also important to note that here Tara is very conscious about separating Pooja as a discussant and Pooja as a person. She is quick to hedge her negative evaluations of Pooja's discussion posts by using complimentary phrases for Pooja (sweet, nice). This to me indicates that while there was a level of interpersonal connection, Tara was left wanting more from this dialogue. This sense of unfulfilled conversation stemmed from Pooja not responding as "strongly" as Tara would have expected, a gap which could be further understood by examining how Tara and Pooja (possibly) perceived their discursive roles in this exchange.

### **Perceived roles and expectations**

As the above data excerpt indicates, Tara interpreted her role in the online discussions as that of a critical-thinker, who was more passionately engaged with issues

given her past experiences. It is difficult to ascertain why she thinks that Pooja would have found her critical engagement with issues (especially those related to English and symbolic power) surprising. Perhaps she meant to imply that Pooja would have not expected for someone in America to be so closely aware of these issues, since they may not appear to be ‘American’ issues.

Since I could not interview Pooja for this study, her own perceptions about how she interpreted her role in this discussion are not available. However, I did notice certain patterns in Pooja’s style of writing that provide some clues on how she constructed her role in this discussion. Pooja’s discourse in Hindi was strongly marked by the use of higher-register words. Lexically speaking, formal register in Hindi heavily borrows direct loan words from Sanskrit, as opposed to the Persio-Arabic linguistic tradition and English. These lexical borrowings and choices can sociolinguistically index different religious and ideological affiliations, where a Sanskritized Hindi could connote an upper-caste Hindu identity. Given Pooja’s academic and regional background, it is perhaps not surprising that she is discursively constructing a “Sanskritic identity” (Snell 1990).

The most telling example of this can be seen in her post from week 2, when she agreed with Tara and Colleen on how films influence society:

नमस्ते Colleen, नमस्ते Tara

सर्वप्रथम मैं आप दोनों को बधाई देती हूँ कि आप इतनी अच्छी हिन्दी बोल रहीं हैं। आप के विचारों को पढ़ कर लगता है कि हमारे निवास स्थान में, संस्कृति में भले ही विविधताएँ हों परन्तु विचारों में समानता है। मैं Colleen की बात से बिलकुल सहमत हूँ कि film नई संस्कृति को दिखाते हैं। अलग अलग स्थान के चलचित्र वहाँ के संस्कृति की झलक दिखाते हैं। कभी कभी वो नई दुनियाँ का भी निर्माण करते

हैं। Tara के विचारों से भी मैं सहमत हूँ कि चलचित्रों में गहरी बातें भी मिलती हैं। आपको चलचित्र देखना पसंद है और आप शायद दिखाए गए भावों को गहराई समझने की कोशिश करते हैं।

Namaste Colleen, Namaste Tara,

First of all I want to congratulate you both that you both are speaking such good Hindi. Upon reading your views it seems that we may live in different places, our culture may have many differences, but our views are similar. I completely agree with Colleen that film shows new culture. Motion-pictures from different places offer a glimpse of their culture. Sometimes they also create a new world. I also agree with Tara's views that we find deep topics in motion-pictures . You (one ) like motion-pictures and you perhaps try to deeply understand the emotions depicted in them.

It is worth examining Pooja's use of the English word 'film' in her Hindi post, which she later changes to the more Sanskritized Hindi word चलचित्र that literally translates to 'motion-pictures'. The English word 'film' is very much part of the Hindi lexicon (spelled as फिल्म in Devanagari), and is in fact the most commonly used 'Hindi' word to mean movies. Hence, Pooja's switch to the more formal word (चलचित्र ) appears to be a deliberate discursive move. The deliberation behind this move is further evident in the fact that while typing her response, Pooja used the Roman script to type out the English word (film) and then switched back to Devanagari to type out her remaining response. This switching between scripts would have required her to change her keyboard preferences while typing.

The use of formal Hindi in Pooja's discourse per se is not very surprising, as mentioned before. However, the fact that she is choosing to communicate in formal, higher-register Hindi in these online discussions could indicate that she perceived her role in this dialogue as that of a language-input provider, and that she interpreted this task

more as an academic discussion rather than as an opportunity to share personal stories and experiences. The latter would have been more likely communicated in informal Hindi, which is often replete with common English and Persio-Arabic words. Her interpretation of her perceived role could be further supported by what she said about Tara and Colleen's Hindi at the beginning of her post (congratulations on speaking such good Hindi).

Pooja's Sanskritized writing style could have potentially interfered with Tara and Colleen's comprehensibility of her arguments. Colleen, in her post-collaboration journal acknowledged that sometimes she could not understand Pooja's posts completely, but overall, she was able to manage. Tara, on the other hand, did not comment on Pooja's language nor did she mention any problems in comprehensibility related to language use.

### **Film Analysis**

Tara saw films as a form of art, which provides new perspectives and knowledge to its consumers. She argued that films offer more than entertainment and that they depict a version of reality. According to her, films, even those that are presumably only made for entertainment purposes, have the power to change people's points of views, provided they are willing to deeply engage with them. Her own discussions around *English-Vinglish* revealed a similar level of critical engagement with the narrative.

### **A familiar story about self-reliance**

For Tara, the story of *English-Vinglish* was about self-reliance and self-love. She argued that English was a “metaphor” in Shashi’s life, and that by learning English she actually learns to love herself. In her discussion post from week 2, she wrote:

मुझे लगता है की यह फिल्म आत्मनिर्भरता के बारे में है। फिल्म के अन्त्य में शशिजी ने कहा था के उन्होंने अपने आप से प्यार करना सीख लिया, अपने परिवार के तानों के बावजूद। अंग्रेजी सिर्फ एक metaphor था। यह शीर्षक “English-Vinglish” उचित था क्यों की यह फिल्म ज़्यादातर अंग्रेजी के बारे में नहीं लेकिन शशिजी के किर्दार की परिवर्धन के बारे में है। वह अपने आप से प्यार करना सीख जाती है, आत्मनिर्भर होना सीख जाती है, और औरों का सम्मान जीत लेती है।

I think that this film is about self-reliance. At the end of the film, Shashi ji said that she has learned to love herself, despite her family’s insults. English was only a metaphor. The title “English-Vinglish” because the film is mostly not about English but about the change in Shashi’s character. She learns to love herself, becomes independent, and wins other people’s respect.

While she liked the film, Tara in her post-collaboration journal also argued that the film was too “generic” for a desi audience and suggested that a different film should be shown in the project next time. Her comment revealed that her identity and experiences as a South-Asian made the film less unique for her. When I asked her to elaborate on this comment during the interview, Tara explained that given her cultural heritage she had seen the issues related to gender-roles and language dominance discussed many times before. Interestingly, she also added that a non-desi audience may not be able to fully understand the film. This argument became clearer when we discussed how the issue of English and social capital was addressed in the film. I describe this in the following section.

### **Striking a balance between languages**

As her previous comments indicate, Tara was conflicted about the presence of English language and ‘Western’ cultural influences on her home community. She appeared concerned about these languacultural forces displacing the native language, especially among her peers in Nepal. She argued that native speakers in a non-English speaking community were responsible for ‘preserving’ their languages, while also finding a way to accept English as a global language.

In her discussions, Tara acknowledged that English’s “cultural dominance” in a global world, as depicted in the film, is a real issue. At the same time, she felt that the film also subtly refutes the privileging of English at the cost of Hindi in the last scene, where Shashi, after having given a fluent speech in English at her niece’s wedding, demands a Hindi newspaper on the flight back to India. In response in week 4, she wrote:

मुझे लगता है की शाही को ऐसा लगता है क्यूंकि हमारी संस्कृति एक "global" संस्कृति होती आ रही है। जो अंग्रेजी को ज्यादा मायने देती है - भाषा और तौर तरीके। अंग्रेजी ना आनेसे आपको शर्म नहीं आणि चाहिए लेकिन और लोगों आपको यही कहते है। मुझे यह भी लगता है की इस फिल्मने यह भी दिखाया है। अन्त्य के scene में शशि प्लेनमें कुछ हिंदी नेव्सपपेर्स मांगती है - यह एक यादगार scene है। फिल्मकारों हमें कुछ subtly बताने की कोशिश कर रहे है।

I think Shashi is made to feel this way (insulted) because our culture is becoming a “global” culture that gives more importance to English—language and manners. You shouldn’t feel ashamed if you don’t know English but others say this to you. I think this also showed this. In the last scene Shashi asks for a Hindi newspaper—this is a memorable scene. Filmmakers are subtly trying to tell us something.

Tara reiterated this point in the interview, where she said that the last scene was in essence the true message of the film, since it showed Shashi not sacrificing her native language even after having learned English. Some viewers, she felt, might have missed this point. It is possible that she could be referring to the non-desi audience here:

Yeah...if you watch the movie closely I think it did a really good job of balancing it but I don't think people noticed it as much, so it's just like the interpretations of the people who like...you know coz some people would say that...so this is the thing that was like...some of the movie was generic but like the ending people didn't give a lot of credit for that was not generic because you can favor an underdog to an extent but you can't not realize the importance of English you know because it is important to learn...because it IS a global language, so I think in the ending scene where like she asks for a newspapers in Hindi...umm...so that was the whole point of the movie is that like it's not that English is better than Hindi or like one thing is better than the other it's just like making a balance of both of the cultures in this new globalized world.

### **Perceived learning**

Tara noted the following reflections in her post-collaboration journal:

मुझे यह प्रोजेक्ट पसंद आया। मुझे लगता है यह एक अच्छी तरकीब थी, क्योंकि हम एक कक्षा के छेत्र से बाहिर अपना हिंदी का इस्तेमाल कर रहे थे। फिल्म विश्लेषण करना भी अच्छा रहा क्योंकि हमने भारतीय समाज को बेहतर समझ सके। और, डिस्कशन के सवाल भी अच्छे थे। हमने देखा की भारतीय समाज कैसी होती है - उनके महिलाओं के बर्ताव, और उन महिलाओं पे मर्दों का बर्ताव, फ़र्क पीडीओं के बीच में अंतर और सबसे ज़्यादा - आत्मनिर्भर होने की एहमियत। मैंने बहुत शब्द जाने - पूजा जी से, और अलग दृश्य से भी फिल्म को देखा।

I liked this project. I think that this was a good technique, because we were using our Hindi outside of class. It was good to analyze the film because we were better able to understand Indian society. And, the discussion questions were also good. We saw that how is Indian society—their behavior towards women, and the behavior of men towards those women, the difference between generations and most of all—the importance of being independent. I learned a lot of words from Pooja ji and also saw the film from a different perspective.

Her final discussion post (as included in Chapter 4) also stated that she had learned a lot from this project. Her written reflections, however, do not exactly align with how she reflected over her interactions with Pooja during her interview with me. As discussed in the previous sections, Tara appeared slightly dissatisfied about her communication with Pooja, since she felt Pooja never presented a different point of view.

In addition, she found the film interesting, but too “generic” in terms of the issues it raised for her. During the interview, when I asked Tara if she had found anything interesting or unique about her other group-mate’s, Colleen’s (HLL), posts, Tara couldn’t recall anything that stood out for her. This perception is supported by the fact that Tara and Colleen constructed very similar opinions on most issues discussed during the collaboration.

Based on these different data points, one could argue that this project offered limited opportunities of learning for Tara, and perhaps this perceived learning remained at the level of new lexical items that Tara discovered in Pooja’s posts. Having said that, Tara’s reflections do indicate that she enjoyed the experience overall, and that perhaps engaging in these discussions reinforced her stance on how non-English speakers can counter the cultural dominance of English, while also learning English.

### **Case Three: Andy**

*“It’s just so much easier for everyone if you just say Andy, right?”*

#### **Background**

Andy was a twenty-year old pre-med student at the time of this study. His family is from Orissa (also called Odisha), a state located on the eastern coast of India. They moved to the United States before Andy was born. Andy identified Oriya, the language spoken in Orissa, as his heritage language, since that is the language that his parents

speak. He comprehends the language well, but can't speak it fluently. Other than English, he also speaks Spanish fluently, a language he had learned in high school.

He decided to learn Hindi because he thinks it is a "beautiful language" and because he wants to be able to travel alone in India. He also mentioned that he has a young cousin in India, who only speaks Hindi, and it is very important for him to be able to communicate with her. He started learning Hindi in college and had been learning it for two years at the time of this study.

It is worth mentioning that when I interviewed Andy, another HLL from a different group, Maya, was present in the room with us for the first forty minutes. Maya was born in India and had moved to the United States when she was six years old. She still holds Indian citizenship and strongly identifies herself as an Indian, although she admits that given her upbringing, her opinions and attitudes may not be compatible with that of an "average Indian" person. She also identifies herself as a thought activist, who actively engages with political issues and expresses her opinions on social media very frequently. Andy is aware of Maya's political activism since they are friends on Facebook. I believe Maya's presence during the interview acted as a catalyst for Andy to open up, and some of his earlier responses were directed towards her. The first forty minutes of the interview unfolded more like a semi-structured conversation between the three of us. Overall, Andy seemed very willing to talk about his experiences and the interview lasted for almost two hours.

## **Linguacultural Identity: Constructing the self**

### **Contradictions of being an Indian-American**

In his pre-collaboration journal, Andy described his cultural identity as “Indian American.” This hybrid sense of self was both embraced and problematized throughout his discourse. During his interview, he offered a rich insight into his journey of recognizing and challenging the tensions that come with having a “hyphenated” identity.

In a candid moment during our conversation, Andy shared that struggling with “a mountain of insecurities” is central to being a “first generation American”. A glimpse of this insecurity emerged when he described his high-school experience, where he struggled to figure out how much of his ‘Indianess’ should he project onto to the world. This confusion in part emerged in response to how he was positioned by everyone around him—he was expected to be the “expert on India” while also being “cool” enough to not be too Indian. He said:

**Andy:** When I was in high school there's all of these conceptions of like what you should be, right, like how Indian should you be and how American should you be? It comes from both sides, right? Yeah, like with my friends at school you have people who say like you know, it's cool to not be Indian, but then on the other side, it's also oh tell us everything about India always and forever and ever until the end of time because you obviously know everything.

**Shilpa:** Who are these people?

**Andy:** Just your friends, teachers, non-Indian friends.

Andy’s subsequent narrative revealed that the “burden of expectations” that he experienced as an Indian-American was exerted as much from within his family and

heritage community as it was from the outside. While describing his family background and childhood experiences, Andy mentioned that he had grown up around a well-connected and socioeconomically strong South-Asian immigrant community that included other Oriya families. The community had provided a strong support system for him and his family, and he appreciated the close relationships he shared with different members of the community, especially with other Indian-American “kids” in the community. While the community provided support, it also demanded that Andy adhere to certain ideas of tradition and religiosity that did not always align with who he really was or how he felt. He said:

That's the toughest part of being Indian...it's like you know...not the toughest part... (laughs) but like the tough part is like culture, religion, and community are all the same thing. Even though...like if I go to the temple, right? Obviously I'm not going to tell anyone that I'm not religious, right? And if the thing comes up just like yes, I'll eat *prasaad*, yes, I did this, I did that. You just can't mention somethings, right?

For Andy, the community and family also allowed little space and no codes to understand his ‘Americanness’. He described how he was left confused growing up because his parents never gave him any “guidance” on how to be an Indian and/or American, whereas he observed other immigrant parents in the community articulating clear expectations around how they wanted their children to be. His following narrative reveals the many complex ways in which immigrant communities construct and reproduce their identities:

I used to be like decently resentful about it...like I was never given any guidance, right...some people say like you have to be American. I'm specifically not gonna teach you, that's perfectly fine. You're perfectly OK. Or you have to be Indian, right? You HAVE to do all these things, so nobody can say to you that you're not India or whatever. And my parents kinda like gave encouragements in certain ways...they may not have done it in the best ways but you know they tried to like give me some room to work...and at first I was decently resentful about it, but now I'm like...first of all, I'm very happy about it because I feel like I'm able to be confident on my own terms as opposed to terms that have been defined for me by my parents and also...I can't even imagine how difficult it is to come to a new country and try to raise a kid...oh I think about if I had to go back to India and raise my kid there...like how lost...it's to the point where I feel bad about being resentful (laughs)

The second half of this narrative also indicates how the internal and external tensions that Andy experienced in trying to discover a well-defined sense of identity opened up spaces for him to negotiate his sense of being on his now terms. His rich interview offered a window into how he developed this agency, which allowed him to confidently accept his hybrid-self.

### **Asserting Agency**

Two narratives in Andy's interview stood out with respect to how he exercised his agency when faced with community-driven and outside expectations. The choices that Andy made in these situations allowed him to reconstruct and reposition the self against the dominant cultural discourses.

The first narrative relates to Andy's decision to pursue Spanish in high school. For him, learning Spanish afforded a 'neutral' space, where he could escape the expectations of being the 'native informant' for India and enjoy being the cultural outsider. As the outsider, he had the freedom to engage with the new culture on his own terms. He said:

In high school because there's like so many expectations associated with being Indian one thing I really fell in love was Spanish because Spanish was this language and this culture that had no expectations attached to it. Nobody expected me to be good at Spanish. Nobody expected me to understand anything about Spanish culture or be able to play Hispanic style music or be able to play flamenco guitar or anything, so I could just enjoy the culture. I could just..you know however much I wanted to be involved with the culture I could involved in that as much as I wanted to be...

Interestingly, learning Spanish and discovering its culture led Andy back to re-discovering aspects of his own heritage that he had previously rejected. Further in the interview he mentioned that while learning Spanish he had become extremely fond of “Hispanic style” music. Until a few years ago, he added, this kind of music offered a refreshing change from Bollywood film music that he found boring and “not so innovative”. But in recent years, he said, he had begun to realize that the two styles of music were not as different. This realization had made him more open to Bollywood and Indian music and he often checked out the Hindi songs that Maya and some of his other classmates posted on Facebook.

In another narrative from his high-school days, Andy explained why he prefers that some people call him by an Anglicized name (Andy), rather than his original Indian (Hindu)-sounding name. Here is what he said:

There was one time I was talking with...so I was with a group of friends and there's this new girl who, she was American, and then the rest of us were something else someone was Iranian, and then....so yeah like hyphenated American...we are all talking, right, and she's trying to say our names but we are just like...it was somebody that we weren't going to meet again...so we were just like...I straight up told her, I was like ‘you can call me Andy, it's fine’...and it's like whatever...if I go to Starbucks or if you know, I put my name down for a reservation, right, you have to like spell your name out, and you have to...pronounce it...at best you just get to see your name misspelled on a Starbucks coffee,

right...it's just so much easier for everyone if you just say Andy, right? Of course, I don't advocate that anyone else do that...it's just that I'm comfortable enough with it so that where I'm like you know I can say Andy...and sometimes people are like...I was like 'you can call me Andy', and she was like 'no, I can never do that, no I wanna get your name right', and the person next to me, who's Iranian, his name is A...(names removed)...I just need White people to be able to say my name. (laughs). For us it's like...we are OK with it because you know we have our own pride with our name or whatever and that pride isn't necessarily dependent on other people understanding it or other people conforming to it.

This narrative reveals the complex ways in which people, especially first generation immigrants, often engage in acts of bargaining their identities. Andy's choice of a western sounding name for his public life is not necessarily situated in a desire to seek assimilation within, what he most likely perceives as, the dominant cultural group (White Americans). Although it does appear to be a sub-conscious desire as is evident from his statement that he just wants White people to get his name right. Nor is this renaming of the self stemmed in a desire to distance himself from his Indian heritage because, as he said, he is proud of his name, and later also added that he "loves his name". This bargaining of name and identity instead is framed simply as a matter of convenience. Andy chooses to be in a situation where he does not have to explain his original name to people and wait for them to get it right.

One could argue that this act of agency is inherently dialogic in nature. While it gives Andy a choice and freedom to be recognized by the majority group on his own terms, it also positions the majority group as the 'other' as it presupposes that most White

people, who presumably have western-sounding names, would not want the ‘inconvenience’ of having to figure out his name.

It is also worth noting that there is a level of privilege at play within what appears to be Andy’s marginal position with respect to a mainstream White culture. As I mentioned before, Andy comes from an upper-middle class, close-knit, South Asian community. This socioeconomically privileged position affords him the power to feel self-assured about his Indian name and heritage, and not feel offended if someone does not get his name right on a Starbucks coffee or a hotel reservation. Moreover, unlike a Sikh or a Muslim male, Andy’s Hindu identity does not get marked by any outward manifestations (a skull cap, beard, or turban for instance). This affords him another level of privilege that potentially limits the explicit prejudice he could face based on his religious identity.

### **Experiencing India**

Andy’s socioeconomic status also emerged relevant in how he experiences India as an Indian-American. He mentioned that he and his family visit India often and that he is very close to his extended family in Orissa. His following description of a typical visit to India indicates that it is often a cushioned experience that limits his interaction with the culture outside of his comfort zone:

Because you know we go to India every year...and it's like...you know we go to India and my Dad is like...my Dad is...he's so connected in India, like we always stay in the nicest

hotels and like if we go to Delhi then we are staying near the airport right like where everything is...we are staying in the Hyatt and we are staying in these five star hotels and if not, we are staying in our parents' houses you know and at best culturally what we get is we go out with all our cousins and just get drunk, you know.

He expressed a strong desire to break out of this tradition and have opportunities to experience India on his own in the future. He cited that as one of his strongest motivations to learn Hindi, saying that his goal was to one day confidently and independently be able to not only visit Orissa, but also travel to other parts of India and explore its culture.

The idea of family was central to how Andy constructed his sense of belongingness to India. In his pre-collaboration journal, he defined culture as family:

मेरे लिए संस्कृति का अर्थ परिवार है  
For me culture is family.

Similarly, he spoke passionately about his family in India and explained how important it was for him to continue to maintain a close relationship with them:

One of the things that I'm most proud of about being Indian is that like I love my family so much and I know my family loves me and you know obviously there's negatives to that because we'll fight all the time etc. etc. but you know I'm really proud of that and the fact that my cousins (in India) had weddings that I didn't go to, devastates me. I want to be able to go and do those things (be there for his family).

The intertwined nature of family and culture emerged in another instance during his interview, when he was commenting on one of his classmate's, Shweta's, views on arranged marriage. During a class presentation, Shweta had mentioned that even though she had grown up in America, she was comfortable with the idea of her parents finding

someone for her to marry. In his comment, Andy described Indian heritage identity within a 'individual vs. collective' cultural framework and positioned himself differently than Shweta within that framework. His comment, as seen below, shows that sociological discourses contribute to how one constructs their culture and identities:

Just because me and Shweta are really different...she's...I'm like...if you were to like...so there's a spectrum, right, between like family and individual, right? And you can like place every single first generation American somewhere on the spectrum, right? And if this individual and this is family, I'm somewhere in the middle probably. Shweta is like closer on this end (the family end). She's not getting an arranged marriage, right, but like her parents are intimately involved in who she's going to marry. And they are finding people for her like right now...and you know she's very much ready to like start that. I want my parents to approve of who I'm getting to before that's really going to be important to me but I don't want them to be that involved in the process.

### **Engagement with the project**

Andy was in group 4 with two of his classmates from the Hindi class, Shweta and Simi, and two students from India: Atul and Abhijeet. Atul could not participate after week 1, so I recruited Abhijeet and added him to the group during the second week of the project. Abhijeet posted his introduction when he joined the group and continued to participate in the discussions until week 4, posting a total of 7 comments 4 in Hindi and 3 in English. Andy on the other hand posted a total of 13 comments, 7 in Hindi and 6 in English. 2 out of these 6 English responses were directly addressed to Abhijeet. Andy also commented on his fellow HLLs' posts, but only during weeks when Abhijeet either did not post any comments or posted his comments late like in week 2.

## Interpersonal dialogue

### Establishing intersubjectivity

Andy engaged in multiple discursive acts to establish interpersonal subjectivity with his interlocutors. Two such acts emerged early in Andy's posts, when in week 1 and week 2 he displayed an awareness of his Indian audience and framed his comments accordingly. In these posts, he voluntarily provided explanations of certain culture-specific concepts that he anticipated would be unclear to his peers in India. For example, in his introduction (see below), he explained what being a pre-med student entails in America. The concept is likely to be new for someone in India, given that in the Indian education system, one does not need an undergraduate degree to get into medical school; students apply for medical college after high-school and are admitted based on their performance on an entrance exam.

मैं जीवविज्ञान पढ़ रहा हूँ क्योंकि मैं डॉक्टर बनना चाहता हूँ। लेकिन मुझे बहुत विषय पसंद है, इसलिये मैं अर्थशास्त्र भी पढ़ रहा हूँ। अमेरिका में, मेडिकल स्कूल जाने से पहले, हम कॉलेज में चार साल के लिये दूसरे विषय पढ़ पाते हैं, और इसलिये, हम बहुत विषय पढ़ सकते हैं।

I am studying biology because I want to become a doctor. But I like many subjects, therefor I am also studying economics. In America, before going to medical school, we are able to study different subjects in college for four years, and therefore, we can study many subjects.

Similarly, in week 2 when responding to the general prompt around films, he defined 'Oscars' in terms of its closest parallel in the mainstream Indian film industry—Filmfare awards.

नहीं, मुझे लगता है कि फ़िल्म बहुत प्रयोजन है। पिछले रविवार को, अमरिका का फ़िल्म फ़ैर (वे कहते “अस्कर्स”) था। अस्कर्स में, बहुत आक्टर ने संस्कृति के समस्यों के बारे में बहाताया और बहुत फ़िल्में इन समस्यों के सामना करते।

No, I think film has many purposes. Last Sunday, America’s Filmfare ( they call it “Oscars” ) was held. During Oscars, many actors talked about cultural problems and many films deal with these problems.

Andy and Abhijeet directly interacted for the first time in week 3. When Abhijeet posted his first comment about the film in English, Andy responded to him with great enthusiasm, stating thrice that he was very happy to receive Abhijeet’s post:

hi..

Andy and Shweta

i show movie last night

i think the film is Good..because it because it Coordinator establishes between two cultures and languages.

And the film show that in present time if you dont know english so you r very backward in the global vision.

the film is about a story who describe that what is the importance of english & any body can learn any language any time and any period of life.

of course the title of the movie is right because it is summery of this movie because normally if we use any other language so ofthn use similar words like English vinglish. i like shashi. beacuse in present my self condition is like shashi. beacuse i not perfect in english. so i like shashi Who show remembered my condition.

Hey Abhijeet! It's great to hear from you! I'm really glad you responded. I agree with your comment about the two cultures, I see these situations with my parents, especially my mom, since they came from Orissa. I also agree that English is the global standard, but I don't like that. I honestly think Hindi and Spanish are much more beautiful languages. I agree that you can learn any language at any point in your life. In 7th grade/standard, we have to choose another language besides English to learn and I chose Spanish and I learned Spanish for the rest of school. Now I'm learning Hindi and am going to work to speak Hindi. I eventually want to learn French and Arabic as well later in life. And that's alright that you're not perfect in English, we're not perfect at Hindi and we hope to get better! I'm glad you responded!

A closer look at Andy's above response reveals a high level of interpersonal alignment. He systematically responded to almost each of Abhijeet's statements and tried to connect to them using his own experiences. For instance, he mentioned his parents' cultural experiences to support Abhijeet's comment that the film was about connecting two languages and cultures. Similarly, he described his different language learning experiences to show agreement with Abhijeet's argument that one can learn any language at any time. Andy's comparison of his Hindi proficiency with Abhijeet's imperfect English can also be seen as a discursive act to build mutual understanding and interpersonal connection.

While the above exchange highlights Andy's genuine desire to connect with Abhijeet, it also revealed that the two participants were not perfectly aligned as far as language and social capital was concerned. As a native speaker of American-English, Andy has the social capital that affords him the power to "not like" English's global reach, whereas for Abhijeet the issue is beyond the level of personal preference and has real life consequences, namely being perceived and feeling socially "backward". Abhijeet brought up another such consequence in his response to prompt from week 4, which I discuss in the following section.

### **Linguistic marginalization**

In his response to the prompt on language and power in week 4, Abhijeet shared his experience of interviewing for a Sanskrit teaching job at a convent school.

Historically, convent schools in India were run by Christian missionaries as part of the colonial project to spread Western education and Christianity in the country. In contemporary times, however, the term 'convent school' often gets associated with a school that offers high quality English language education, and that may or may not be owned by a Christian missionary group. In his post, Abhijeet said:

I think in this time English is very important . so naturally feel ashamed If you dont speak English at present time.

in this film shashi is not English expert , if anywhere she need any thing so feel gulit. because english is international language.

IN Last week in a interview for sanskrit teacher i went there.

After my interview, he asked me...

" this is a convent school & you cant speak fluent english." Then I feel not good.

but i'm a sanskrit student so my command in sanskrit. so i say - sir. i know i cant speak fluent english but i understand english if will my selection so i will I'll learn to speak English in the environment. so they was satisfied.

so i think mother language is important for everyone but english is most language for everyone in present

Andy responded to this post with the following comments:

Hey Abhijeet, yeah I know that feeling it kind of sucks a little. That's what happens whenever people expect me to speak Hindi or Oriya very well but I can't. But I always tried to remember that my parents raised me to speak English well for the exact reason you mentioned, so that I could communicate a lot with other people well. However I do think that languages aren't important just for communication sake, but also for how you express yourself in your language. That's why I agree with your other statement that mother languages are also important because that is how you express yourself.

Both Abhijeet and Andy in their posts describe experiences of feeling linguistically marginalized. Abhijeet's experience at the job interview reveals how English gets privileged over other languages, at least in the professional sphere, in an extremely multilingual Indian society. The fact that Abhijeet's limited English results in

him being made to feel inadequate for a job that he is otherwise well-qualified for (given his education in Sanskrit) further highlights that there is almost an inescapable necessity for him to acquire English language skills for professional success. This leads him to accept and to even reproduce the discourse that English is the “most” important language for everyone.

Andy responds to Abhijeet by describing his own situation, where he too feels like an outsider for not knowing Hindi and Oriya well. One could argue that these marginalized experiences are not completely aligned. For Abhijeet the experience of marginalization is within the community that he physically inhabits, whereas for Andy it is within a community that he emotionally and discursively inhabits. Unlike Abhijeet, Andy chooses to learn the language that otherwise makes him feel like an outsider. Moreover, the consequences of not becoming proficient in Hindi are not as high for Andy as they are for Abhijeet not knowing English well, since Andy is able to communicate in English with his friends and family in India.

I would argue that it is Andy’s loss of his heritage languages in childhood that aligns him closer to Abhijeet’s current situation. In this post, he refers to it by saying that his parents taught him English well so that he could communicate better with other people. This is only one part of the story. A more complete narrative emerged in his interview, where he explained why his parents chose to teach him only English growing up:

I was actually purposefully...I can like speak a little bit of Oriya and I can understand it for the most part, but my brother was taught Oriya as his L1, right, but then he went to school and school was difficult for him and all of his teachers thought he had some sort of mental illness, so my parents were like ok, we need to make sure that you know our second son...his first language is English. Yeah so...it was multilingual in a sense but not really whenever I came around. My parents just wanted me to be successful in school so...you know...

Like for Abhijeet, Andy's knowledge of English was perceived critical for his educational success. In both cases, it is the "mother language" that gets marginalized by the dominant presence of English. Another interesting similarity in their experiences relates to how they assert a sense of agency by recognizing the value of their respective "mother languages" for self-expression. While this recognition does little to challenge their perception about the global necessity for learning English, it does not completely displace native languages out of the frame.

### **Film analysis**

Andy mentioned that he usually did not like Bollywood films because he found them too "dramatic". At the same time, he found them good at depicting human emotions. He went on to argue that when they are "done well," Bollywood films surpass the "finest of Hollywood movies" in how they narrate emotional stories. This perception further became evident in how emotionally Andy connected to the story of *English-Vinglish*.

## **A personal story**

As I mentioned in chapter 4, Andy was moved by Shashi's story as it strongly resembled his Mom's experiences in the United States. He could also relate to Sapna's character because she reminded him of his own experiences with his mother as a child, when he struggled to understand why his mother could not speak English and understand American cultural norms like his friends' mothers could.

His mother's identity, as he described it, closely aligns with the loving, compassionate, mother that Shashi plays on screen. In the following narrative, Andy empathetically and affectionately described how his mother prioritized family over everything else once she moved to the United States and because of that "interacting with American things" was not as important for her. However, the political neutrality of this choice immediately got problematized in his narrative, when he recognized that it is his mother's lack of English skills that limit her interaction with the culture around her:

Umm...I think it's difficult for her I think it's still difficult, but I think she says...she would say it's fine just because she knows she's here to give us a better opportunity...honestly that...Sridevi's character in that movie was so similar to my Mom like if my Mom had to go to a foreign country like if she had to do the same thing she'd be like can I take a child with me? I can't be this far from my children for this long, you know? My Mom came here...she knew good amount of English but she didn't go to an English medium school. So her first flight ever was an international flight to America by herself actually because my Dad was already here. And so...you know...my Mom doesn't go out and she's not really that social with all of these people...and I know it's coz you know...it's for two reasons. I feel like when she came here she just devoted all of her time and energy to us like me and my brother you know. And then on top of that she's devoting her time and energy to us to the point where it's like interacting with all this other stuff like interacting with all these American things is just not important. And it's like...it's not important and also it's difficult. It's difficult to go and put yourself out there in these situations coz you

gonna get a lot of crap because a lot of people do suck. People are wonderful but there are a lot of crappy people, right?

The idea that language or the lack of it can silence people into being something they are not became further evident in Andy's narrative, as seen below, when he described how his mother becomes a completely "different person" when she is visiting India. One could argue that this is one more similarity that his mother shares with Shashi, who also struggles to find her voice without English, both at home and abroad, and eventually emerges as a different person.

So my Mom never did that and so now you know...I feel like it's little bit more difficult for my Mom to put her foot out there, whereas when my Mom's in India she is literally like an entirely different person. She's talking to everyone, she's talking all the time to anyone that will listen and my Mom has like some knee problems so she doesn't do too much here like we have to tell her like you have to get up, you have to go for a walk in the park etc. In India we have to tell her to sit down! We have to tell her to go to sleep coz she's up all night talking with her friends and her cousins and sisters and all of that.

### **Perceived learning**

In his final reflections, Andy expressed appreciation for the project, but also reported benefitting less from the exchange, since he felt he did not receive as many responses from the ELLs as the other groups had:

मैं इस प्रोजेक्ट के बारे में सोचता हूँ कि बहुत अच्छा था। हालाँकि मैंने थोड़े प्रतिक्रियाएं मिले, जो प्रतिक्रियाएं मैंने मिले, मुझे वे प्रतिक्रियाएं बहुत पसंद थीं aur मुझे बहुत मज़ा आया। मैंने थोड़े प्रतिक्रियाएं मिलने की वजह से, मुझे इस प्रोजेक्ट से बहुत लाभ नहीं हुआ, लेकिन मैं जानता हूँ कि दूसरे छात्रों ने बहुत प्रतिक्रियाएं मिले, तो उनको इस प्रोजेक्ट से लाभ हुआ।

I think this project was very good. Although I got fewer responses, the ones that I got, I really liked those responses and I really enjoyed. Because I got fewer responses, I did not benefit a lot from this project, but I know that other students got more responses, so they benefited from this project.

He supported these statements in the interview, where he mentioned that based on the few exchanges that they had with Abhijeet, he and the other HLLs in his group (Shweta and Simi) were able to understand each other's perspectives well. Abhijeet, he added, "really understood" the American perspective and they too "did a decent job of understanding where he was coming from the Indian perspective".

Overall, he responded positively to the project and stated that the film as well as the discussion prompts were relatable and "really relevant" for both the groups. He added the discussion prompts facilitated good dialogue and prevented the student-responses from being "cookie cutter," since they elicited personal stories and experiences. He further acknowledged that while knowing what to say was never difficult for him, constructing his thoughts in Hindi was difficult.

To summarize, in this chapter I discussed three case studies to illustrate how these HLLs engaged in varied discursive acts of identity construction and how that shaped their engagement with the online activity system. A close analysis of their discourse revealed that Justin, Andy, and Tara had complex cultural identities that transcended national and linguistic boundaries. All three subjects had experienced linguistic marginalization in different ways, and recognized that language was important in reclaiming and asserting their respective heritage identities.

Their online interactions revealed varying degrees of interpersonal alignment with their interlocutors in India. The alignment was higher in the case of Justin as he

connected with Kalindi over their mutual interest in Indian music and art. For Tara, there was 'missed' interpersonal alignment with Pooja because of different expectation around discursive roles. In the case of Andy, there was comparatively less interpersonal communication because of Abhijeet's limited participation in the project. All three subjects brought in their unique experiences and identities in how they made meaning of the film. For Justin, the experience of language learning was central, while for Tara the film was about recognizing one's self-worth. Andy, on the other hand, had a deeply emotional response to the film, since for him Shashi's character symbolized his own mother's immigrant experience to the United States. Finally, all three participants reported some level of learning through this project.

## **Chapter 6: Discussion**

In this chapter I summarize findings and discuss how they connect to the theoretical frameworks that have informed this research. I then propose some pedagogical implications that have emerged from this study. Finally, I outline limitations of this study and offer suggestions for future research.

### **Summary of Findings 1: Online Exchange as an Activity System**

This study was a pedagogical experiment to understand how an asynchronous online exchange between Hindi Language Learners (HLLs) in the United States and English Language Learners (ELLs) in India would function. As part of this exchange, seventeen HLLs from an intermediate-level Hindi language class at a large American university and eleven ELLs from a Sanskrit studies institute in India participated in weekly online discussions. The six-week long bilingual discussion forums focused on thematic analysis of a mainstream Hindi (Bollywood) film called *English-Vinglish*. I used Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) to conceptualize the online exchange as a dynamic system and study the various processes and experiences involved in it.

In the first part of the findings (chapter 4), I examine three things: first, what the activity system looked like and how it progressed, second, what tensions emerged in the system, and finally, what outcomes emerged in the system. The analysis of the first component of the activity system, subject, revealed different patterns in how the HLLs perceived culture, language, and identity. For some of the HLLs, Hindi was a way to

complete a missing part of their heritage identity. But these heritage identities were complex. The Indian cultural heritage was associated with different languages like Oriya, Tamil, Gujarati, Bengali, and Punjabi. A loss of these languages in childhood for some of the HLLs resulted in the perceived loss of cultural heritage. For others, language allowed for the construction of new cultural identity—Riya, Roshini, Vijay, Colleen—adding another layer to their multicultural self. There was also the case of Amanda, where language had less of a role to play in identifying oneself within a cultural framework, as she described feeling like an outsider within a sub-community that shared her language, but not her behavioral practice and attitudes.

Three mediating tools were identified within the system: film, language, and technology. Analysis revealed that films were recognized as important cultural tool that offer different social functions. The specific narrative of *English-Vinglish* generated favorable responses overall. Those who had not seen a Bollywood film before liked it. The film was perceived as easy to comprehend and relate to. The story of *English-Vinglish* allowed the HLLs to project their own experiences into the narrative. For instance, Amanda imagined her future-self in India. Elizabeth didn't like the story, but her passionate response indicated that she too had become deeply involved in the story.

In terms of language as the tool, the HLLs engaged in different patterns of code-switching between Hindi and English. Some used English to explain new Hindi words they had used, while others preferred to answer difficult journal questions in Hindi. Most

of the HLLs reported that they were mainly able to understand their interlocutors' posts. Roshini, Riya, and Stacey asked their ELLs direct questions about language use. The gap in communication could be attributed to the difference in register since the two of the ELLs in these groups used higher-register words and Sanskritized spellings, which are not commonly used in everyday speech.

The academic context of the activity shaped its rules. Analysis revealed that the rule around having to post a response every week created the HLLs' dependence on the ELLs. When the ELLs did not respond, most groups resorted to responding to each other, whereas in group 5 Justin and Roshini just posted a general response in English. Group 3 emerged as the only exception, where there was a consistent three-way interaction i.e. Tara, Colleen, and Pooja all talked to each other every week. In group 4, this rule resulted in Shweta, Simi, and Andy re-voicing each other's opinions sometimes.

The HLLs' discourse also revealed the ideas of communities they identified with and how they constructed the other community. Some of the HLLs felt the immigration experience in the film was well represented, as the film accurately captured how Americans would respond to non-English speakers. This interpretation, as in the case of Andy, Shweta, and Roshini, was situated in their own parents' immigrant experiences. They empathized with Shashi and understood her daughter's, Sapna's, character better given their own personal experiences. On the other hand, Riya and Stacey questioned the authenticity of the representation of America. Stacey felt America was grossly

misrepresented in the film since this kind of xenophobic attitude would not be visible in a public place like a restaurant. The other community was constructed within the context of gender relations, where Stacey and John felt that Satish's behavior towards Shashi most likely reflected the sexism and misogyny present in Indian society. Similarly, Elizabeth's negative response to the film was mainly driven by how the film perpetuated sexist behaviors and perspectives. While she was critical of the ending, she felt that the ending was "realistic" given Shashi's cultural context.

With regard to the division of labor between the HLLs and the ELLs, the task division was equal, however the two participating groups were differently positioned in terms of their access to technology and academic benefits from the collaboration. In addition, between the teacher-collaborators, division of labor and power was unequally distributed, since Maneesh had more constraints put on him than me. Finally, between the HLLs the division was horizontal, since they had access to each other's comments; but in at least one group it also appeared to be vertical, where Maya had more background knowledge on the topics under discussion and also had more facility with the Hindi language.

An analysis of the contradictions within the system shows that there were technological and academic tensions that limited the ELLs' participation in the collaboration. The ELLs did not have regular access to Internet and personal computers. The genre of computer-based communication also seemed new to them. In addition, their

academic calendars were also not aligned with that of the HLLs. These technological and academic divides contributed to rising affective tensions and eventually led to a communication breakdown between the teacher-collaborators. My own position as a researcher and instructor conflicted with that of Maneesh's position as a junior faculty at his institute. Based on a close reading of my own discourse, I argued that my own anxieties as a researcher interfered with my being able to retain perspective and understand Maneesh's contextual limitations.

In the final section in chapter 4, I discuss the outcomes that emerged within this activity system. The first outcome was that the ELLs' perspectives did not get recorded and changes had to be made to the system accordingly. Second, moments of interpersonal connections emerged in groups, where there was some intercultural dialogue. Like in group 2, where in the first couple of weeks, Kavita, Bob, and Amanda talked about their interests in movies and similar opinions regarding the social function of films. Similarly interpersonal connections emerged in group 4 and 5, where Shweta, Simi, Roshini, and Justin discovered that the ELLs in their respective groups, Abhijeet and Kalindi, had seen the same movies as them. The final section in the chapter reports the HLLs' mixed perceptions about the online exchange. Most of the HLLs found the exchange interesting, but expressed some frustration at not being able to talk to the ELLs. In terms of perceived learning, some of the HLLs highlighted lexical learning, and having the opportunity to

write more Hindi and learn new words. Some discovered new perspective, like Roshini, who was surprised to discover that she shared similar opinions with Kalindi.

### **Summary of Findings 2: Three Case Studies**

Chapter 5 presents a close analysis of three HLLs' discursive identity construction and how it shaped their online interactions. Justin's case study revealed a complex Indian heritage identity that is situated in violent historical movements of colonialism and mass indentured-labor migration to Guyana. Justin's strong identification with Indian culture empowered him to learn Hindi, and also marginalizes him within the larger Hindi-speaking dominant Indian diaspora community in the United States. His desire to learn Hindi shaped his response to the narrative of *English-Vinglish*, where he identified with Shashi more as a language learner rather than a cultural outsider. Justin's connection with Indian music allowed him to establish interpersonal connections with Kalindi and paved the way for him to discover new perspectives about India and the social importance of English education in India.

In her discourse, Tara displayed a conflicted sense of self, where she found herself divided between a Newari and an American identity. While she identifies herself as Newari, she also gets marginalized by that community for being too American. Throughout the project, Tara positioned herself as someone who is languaculturally aware, and has an emic perspective on issues of language dominance. This subject position allowed her to critically engage with similar themes present in the film, and also

resulted to some extent in her perceiving a lack of meaningful dialogue and connection with Pooja.

In the final case study, Andy shared the challenges that come from negotiating the contradictions of being an Indian-American. His discourse revealed that he simultaneously embraced and problematized his Indian identity, where he experiences the burden of expectations that come from outside and inside of the community. His decision to learn Spanish and choosing an American-sounding name for his public interaction emerge as acts of agency, which are grounded in the socio-economic and religious privilege of being a Hindu. In his limited interactions with Abhijeet, Andy was able to establish intersubjectivity by sharing his own experiences of feeling like outsider in India for not knowing Oriya and Hindi well. I argued that the loss of these heritage languages in the face of an English-only American school system aligns Andy closer with Abhijeet, who is marginalized for not knowing English well at a job interview. The final sections of Andy's case study discussed his strong affective response to the story of *English-Vinglish*, where Shashi's experience reminded him of his mom and her experience of immigrating to the United States.

### **Interpretations and Implications**

To understand the larger implications and interpretations of the findings presented in this study, I explore how this research addresses a few important issues in foreign

language education: first, relationship between language and culture; second, learner and teacher identities; and third, instructional technology and tools.

### **Language and Culture**

My attempt in this research was to move towards a postmodern concept of culture that is marked by heterogeneity, dynamism, and ideological undercurrents. Participants' diverse interpretations of the film's narrative and its critical issues highlight that culture is not a homogenous, normative reality, and that individual experiences influence how culture is shaped and understood. The HLLs' discourse around the issue of immigration and representation of Americans in the film is particularly relevant to this argument. Even though immigration was not directly proposed as a topic of discussion, HLLs like Roshini, Andy, Shweta, Stacey, and Riya brought it up in trying to make sense of Shashi's experience in America (and with Americans in India). For Roshini, Andy, and Shweta, Shashi's experiences were symbolic of their own parents' experiences as non-English speaking immigrants. Their awareness of these experiences afford them a different perspective on American culture, a perspective that does not comfortably align with the mainstream idea of a monolingual, English-speaking American community.

On the other hand, Stacey, Riya, and Amanda evoked a more general definition of American culture, when they argued that Americans in real life are friendlier than their fictional representatives in the film. Stacey's critique of the misrepresentation of

American culture was framed along nationalistic lines, where she explicitly contrasted American cultural attitudes towards foreigners with that of attitudes in Europe. Similarly,

Amanda's defensive stance towards the North-Easterner sub-culture within America was also presented in terms of collective behavior that marks a community.

These different approaches towards defining and understanding one's own and the other culture compel us to recognize two important things. First, individuals define culture based on the discourses that are available to them. In this regard, a nationalistic discourse of culture has deep socio-historical roots, and in the contemporary world it is constantly reinforced through political rhetoric and popular media. The discourse continues to prevail as it almost offers a 'cognitive-comfort' by allowing us to define a highly elusive and complex construct like culture in terms of ideas and language that we historically recognize and intellectually find accessible.

Having said that, one cannot dismiss the notion of a collective cultural behavior and worldview as a mere cognitive convenience, which brings up the second issue. Collective ideas of culture are also to some extent situated in everyday lived experiences. For instance, Stacey's defense of American culture is shaped by what she experienced as a Romanian immigrant in America. Similarly, Amanda's struggles with cultural adjustment in Texas were defined by behavioral differences she encountered in her immediate surroundings.

I would argue that nationalistic and collective ideas of culture cannot be completely dispensed with, however a focus on the individual can highlight the complexity and heterogeneity of the collective. Activity theory's dialectical principle of understanding contradictions as part of the same entity (Roth and Lee 2007) allows one possible approach to conceptualizing the collective and the individual not as binary opposites, but as co-existing concepts within culture.

My other endeavor in this research was to problematize the one-language-one-culture model of teaching culture often adopted within the context of online intercultural exchange. In trying to adopt a more postmodern pedagogical approach, the current study offered opportunities for learners to reflect on language and culture in a multilingual context. The complexity of how language relates to culture itself became a topic of study for the participants. Participants' discourse revealed different degrees of engagement with and understanding of these complexities. Roshini, Maya, and Tara displayed more nuanced understanding of issues of language dominance and the value of cultural capital that comes with the knowledge of English. Tara, for instance, recognized why the young people in her home community of Nepal were so invested in learning English, even though she herself felt uncomfortable with that trend. Similarly, Roshini critiqued the cultural dominance that white, English-speaking Western countries have over countries like China and Korea.

On the other hand, participants like Justin, Andy, Kyle, and Ajay appeared less aware of these issues and did not critically deconstruct the issues around power and language. Justin in particular seemed most unaware of India's multilingual landscape and how English is hierarchically positioned within that landscape. Through this project, he discovered that English language education is common in India. However, the socio-political connotations and consequences associated with that system did not become completely clear to him, even though Kalindi pointed it out in her response to his post. When he said that he would have survived in India without learning Hindi and on the basis of his English, to some extent he reinforced the unequal power structures between the two languages. On the continuum of cultural learning, Justin's engagement with these critical issues remained at the starting point.

These different levels of the HLLs' critical engagement with issues of language and culture emerged in their writings and speech in both Hindi and English. Their discourse was undoubtedly more sophisticated in English than in Hindi, as was evident from the length and linguistic complexity of their reflective journals, online posts, and interviews. English played an important role in what and how they learned about the 'Hindi-speaking' culture through this project. This raises an important pedagogical question around the role of learner's first language (or linguistically more dominant language, L1) in foreign language learning, and more specifically in intercultural learning. An extensive discussion on this critical issue facing the field lies beyond the

scope of this study. However, I draw on recent scholarship on multilingual literacies and translanguaging ( Kramersch 2009, Canagarajah 2006, 2008, 2009) to argue that learners' L1 is instrumental in intercultural learning, particularly in the context of Hindi language learning in the United States.

As a theoretical framework, translanguaging moves beyond the communicative and competence-based conceptualization of language acquisition, where target language is defined along monolingual norms. The concept of the “multilingual subject” (Kramersch 2009), with a unique linguistic repertoire and meaning-making discursive strategies, is central to the translanguaging framework. Canagarajah (2009) highlights the following theoretical assumptions that characterize the study of translanguaging in different disciplines, including applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, and literacy studies: first, multilinguals access more than languages to communicate meaning; second, different languages are part of an integrated system rather than isolated entities in a multilingual; third, multilingual competence involves negotiating multiple languages and local practices for communication ; fourth, multicompetence involves symbolically functioning between different languages, rather than building competence in separate languages; and finally, multicompetence focuses on building a repertoire of discursive strategies rather than only linguistic proficiency.

The focus on multilingual competence in translanguaging theory provides helpful perspective in understanding the relationship between Hindi and English and what it

means for Hindi language teaching. In the case of this study, English is not only the HLLs' L1, but also a language that is to some extent embedded within their target language, as Hinglish. Furthermore, as the film highlights, English's impact on Hindi and on the Hindi-speaking culture is not ideologically neutral. Given these issues, one cannot talk about Hindi teaching within a standard, monolingual framework. A translanguaging approach, on the other hand, allows one to argue that Hindi learning can emerge with English being present in the context. The HLLs' comments regarding their perceived linguistic and cultural learning, where they highlight learning new lexical items and discovering new perspectives, support this argument empirically.

Interpreted within the framework of translanguaging and multicompetence, these findings also compel one to reimagine the conventional definitions of linguistic proficiency, as defined by the oral proficiency guidelines provided by ACTFL. These conventions are situated in a structural understanding of language, where learners successfully move from one context-specific structure to the next. Instead, translanguaging allows for a more creative intermixing of a learners's languages, where the focus is on negotiating meaning through different discursive strategies. Some participants in this study adopted such meaning-making strategies in their discussions and journals, where they provided the English meaning of new Hindi words that they were trying out in brackets, or elaborated on their Hindi responses in English.

### **Learner and Teacher Identities**

As the subjects in this study, the HLLs chose to present themselves at varying intersections of language, culture, and identity. Their powerful narratives, particularly in the three case studies, revealed multicultural selves, who either identified with a hyphenated self situated between two cultures, or who had the desire to cultivate a more culturally aware sense of self. These multicultural identities and experiences shaped how the HLLs made meaning of the cultural texts and how they related to their interlocutors through interpersonal dialogue. For instance, Andy's struggles with negotiating an Indian-America identity allowed him to not only empathize with Shashi's experiences, but also to understand Sapna's attitude towards her mother. Similarly, Justin's strong desire to persevere his Indian heritage identity through music and to 'complete' it through Hindi, made him more receptive and open to Kalindi's views and friendship.

These findings underscore the importance of creating opportunities for learners' identity narratives to emerge in the language classroom. These narratives allow learners to make meaningful connections with the texts under study, while also providing language teachers with an opportunity to appreciate their learners as contextually situated beings, who embody layers of socio-historic changes. In terms of classroom practice, I suggest engaging learners in meta-reflective questions that explicitly ask them to think about their languacultural journeys. As the findings in this study suggest, these questions have the potential to evoke deep self-reflection and critical engagement with cultural issues that otherwise may remain unnoticed. Furthermore, in the context of an online

intercultural exchange, explicit discussions around cultural identities and languacultural experiences are powerful ways of emphasizing the individual diversity inherent within the collective ideas of culture.

The contradictions that emerged between the teacher-collaborators in this study are an important reminder that teacher identities and experiences play an important role in shaping any pedagogical activity. Based on the findings from this study, I advocate for a self-reflexive pedagogical approach that compels teachers to examine how their own emotions and socio-cultural positions shape their instructional designs. This approach is particularly relevant for an online intercultural exchange, where the design and implementation of the project strongly depends on close communication and alignment between the teacher-collaborators. Unlike previous research in the field, this study highlights that unexpected cross-cultural differences and communication gaps can emerge between teacher-collaborators, and not just the student-participants.

The unexpected communication breakdown with Maneesh and limited participation from the ELLs in this study also highlights the dynamic nature of online instruction. These challenges demand that language instructors be equipped with adaptable teaching strategies and instructional designs that allow them to negotiate moment-to-moment changes as and when they emerge in the online system.

## **Instructional Technology and Tools**

The nature of the online project in the current study required participants to adopt a discourse analytical approach towards films, where films are seen as more than a repertoire of cultural information. To facilitate this approach, I positioned *English-Vinglish* in the project as a cultural text that was deconstructed through a series of discussion questions. These questions invited subjects to share their personal experiences and find connections between those experiences and the larger macro-level issues presented in the film. The findings in this study suggest that the HLLs were engaged with this approach. Their personalized and passionate responses to the narrative of *English-Vinglish* suggest that the film worked as a powerful pedagogical tool.

In terms of larger pedagogical implications, I argue that both the choice of the text and the approach adopted to analyze the text are important for cultural teaching. In order to recognize the analytical affordability of a cultural text, it is important that foreign language instructors train themselves in discourse analytical methods. This intellectual skill seems particularly relevant in contemporary times, where popular culture has become so accessible and easy to use in the classroom, courtesy digital platforms like YouTube. In addition, a discourse analytical orientation, especially a critical orientation, would allow language instructors to better deal with the risks of cultural stereotyping that films tend to propagate. In other words, this approach would allow instructors to help

their learners not only recognize but also critique cultural stereotypes by asking deeper questions rather than only look for information.

As a mediating tool, technology presented some challenges for this online intercultural exchange. Findings illustrate that Canvas was not the most effective tool for facilitating dialogue between the HLLs and the ELLs in this study. The ELLs' unfamiliarity with the form of asynchronous online discussions also limited their participation in this project. These findings reinforce an often cited argument in the field: the choice of technological tool must align with not only the pedagogical goals, but also with learners' "cultures of use" (Thorne 2000) that can be broadly understood as learners' socio-historical experiences and socialization with respect to a given tool.

The ELLs' lack of experience with Canvas limiting their participation was clearly only one side of the problem. The absence of a sustained, high-quality Internet connectivity also contributed to their disengagement with the project. This finding highlights the reality of a vast digital-divide across different global communities. There is no easy answer on how this uneven distribution of technological resources can be addressed. At the same time, the ELLs' interactions with mobile-based technologies suggest that digital-divide manifests itself differently in different places.

In terms of digital socialization, many of the ELLs appeared more well-versed with using mobile-based chat applications like WhatsApp. Their use of the Roman script to type in Hindi in WhatsApp (as seen in the case of Kavita and Sukanya) is symbolic of

the online interactional norms prevalent and popular in contemporary India, where Hindi words are spelled out phonetically in the Roman script. However, there are no standardized rules that inform this discursive practice, and as such comprehending the typed discourse usually requires prior knowledge of Hindi. This sociolinguistic phenomenon raises a critical question for using digital technologies for Hindi language teaching, and specifically for implementing a mobile-based online intercultural exchange in the future: how and to what extent can Hindi language learners be taught to negotiate these new online discursive practices in Hindi? This is a boarder issue that the field of Hindi language education needs to address and research.

### **Limitations**

There were some methodological limitations in this study. As I mentioned before, given the design of the project and my own position as a researcher, this study could not capture the ELLs' perspectives in depth. Even before the contradictions in the system emerged, my presence in the United States restricted my ability to observe and understand the ELLs' everyday experience with this project. In addition, my limited interaction and unfamiliarity with them also made me unaware of their prior experiences with using technology and their digital practices.

While my data from the HLLs was more comprehensive and rich, I realized during the analysis process that I had missed asking them more about their expectations from the project in their pre-collaboration journal. Having this data would have allowed

me to understand how and to what extent my goals from this project as an instructor aligned with the participants' goals.

Another important limitation of the study relates to this being an action research. Most of the data collected in this study was assigned as part of a regular course. Class assignments are often highly constructed situations that require the students to perform for the instructor, which makes one recognize that such data is not completely 'naturally occurring' data. An example of this occurred in Tara's case in this study, where there was a discrepancy between how she reported her learning in her online post and what she said about it during the interview. Unlike her discussion post, during the interview she indicated that she had not learned much from her online discussions with Pooja (the ELL in her group).

In my findings, I have highlighted how my own positionality as a researcher and instructor impacted the shape and progression of this online exchange. This positionality interfered with the process of data collection also. The most direct example in this regard was the HLLs' reluctance to talk about their Facebook group with me. While this group was not part of the sources of data in this study, a more detailed discussion about it might have offered some more insights into the HLLs' engagement with the online project and their online practices in general.

## **Future Research**

The current study reveals that an online intercultural exchange between language learners offers tremendous opportunities for learners to share their cultural experiences and identities and reflect critically on important sociocultural issues. I thus argue that this area of research continues to deserve attention in the field of foreign language education. The unique sociolinguistic and technological complexities present within a Hindi (and other South-Asian languages) learning context in particular demand more research. To this effect, I offer some suggestions for future research.

To study a more postmodern, de-territorialized construct of culture, identity, and language, future research should reimagine the traditional model of online intercultural exchanges, where participants are not being predominantly positioned as ‘learners in X country’. The new approach could focus on studying intercultural interactions in more ‘global’ spaces like common interest groups on different international social media platforms (like Facebook, Twitter, etc.) This approach would also allow participants to step out of their language-learner identity and explore contemporary trends in interactional norms present within the linguistic community that they wish to better understand. Within the context of Hindi language education, an alternate global model could include online interactions between different groups of the HLLs across different institutes within the United States. Research in EFL education, where studies have

examined interactions between English learners from different parts of the world, can offer helpful guidelines in this regard.

Future research should also explore how these online exchanges can be incorporated within the larger curriculum design for a given language program. In addition, studies should also look at how in-class pedagogical components can be added to the current and future designs of the online intercultural exchange.

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Information about the collaboration posted on Canvas

#### What is this collaboration about? / यह कोलैबरेशन क्या है?

This online collaboration or exchange is our attempt to bring students from two different parts of the world together for a meaningful learning experience. The goal of this project is to promote an intercultural dialogue through a series of online discussions. To facilitate these discussions, we have chosen to focus on a feature film that raises interesting socio-cultural issues. We hope that you enjoy getting to know each other, and feel inspired to share ideas and engage in rich discussions.

यह ऑनलाइन कोलैबरेशन या एक्सचेंज दुनिया के दो अलग-अलग कोनों से विद्यार्थियों को शिक्षण की दृष्टि से करीब लाने का एक प्रयास है. इस प्रोजेक्ट का उद्देश्य है इंटरनेट के माध्यम से समाज, संस्कृति, और भाषा से जुड़े हुए कुछ अहम मुद्दों पर चर्चा करना. इस प्रोजेक्ट के लिए हमने एक फिल्म चुनी है जिस में कुछ ऐसे अहम मुद्दे उठाये गए हैं. हमे उम्मीद है कि आप को इस प्रोजेक्ट के द्वारा एक दूसरे को जानने का, अपने विचारों को व्यक्त करने का और अपने साथियों के विचारों को बेहतर समझने का मौका मिलेगा और यह कि आपको इस पूरे अनुभव में मज़ा आएगा!

#### What am I expected to do?/इस प्रोजेक्ट में मुझे क्या करना होगा?

Here's what you are expected to do in this project:

1. Post **at least twice** in your discussion groups every week. Your first post should be in your L2 i.e. the language that you are currently learning in this class (if you are learning Hindi, then your first post should be in Hindi), and your second post or response should be in your L1 (if you speak English as your first language, then your response should be in English).
2. You can access the weekly schedule for online posting under the [Syllabus](#) tab on the left.
3. Every week the discussion forum will include some prompts. In addition, modules for every week include some interesting articles based on the topic under discussion. Use these prompts and articles to reflect on the topic and compose your post.
4. Your **first post** should be **at least 150 words**. You are of course strongly encouraged to write more than 150 words. The more you write, the better it is! Remember your first post should be in your L2!
5. In your **second post**, you will respond to your group members' posts. You could comment on their posts and try to answer any questions.
6. Your second post must be **at least 200 words**. You are of course strongly encouraged to write more than 200 words. The more you write, the better it is! Remember your second post must in your L1!

7. You are encouraged to freely express your opinions and pose questions to your peers.

However, please be courteous and follow appropriate etiquette.

8. Finally, we have tried our best to make this experience fun and meaningful for you.

Your sincere participation will help you gain the most out of this interaction.

इस प्रोजेक्ट में आप से निम्नलिखित बातों की उम्मीद की जाएगी:

1) आप हर हफ्ते कम से कम दो बार अपने discussion group में पोस्ट करेंगे: पहला पोस्ट अपनी दूसरी भाषा में यानि कि जो भाषा आप इस प्रोजेक्ट के माध्यम से सीख रहे हैं (अगर आप हिंदी भाषीय हैं तो आपका पहला पोस्ट अंग्रेजी में होना चाहिए) और दूसरा पोस्ट अपनी पहली भाषा में (अगर आप हिंदी भाषीय हैं तो आपका दूसरा पोस्ट हिंदी में होना चाहिए) होना चाहिए.

2) हर हफ्ते पोस्ट करने की तारीख/schedule देखने के लिए आप यहाँ [Syllabus](#) के tab पर क्लिक कीजिये.

3) हर हफ्ते के discussion में कुछ सवाल दिए गए हैं. इसके अलवा हर हफ्ते के module में कुछ दिलचस्प लेख भी शामिल किये गए हैं. इन सवालों और लेखों की मदद से आप दिए गए मुद्दों पर ओर गहराई से विचार करें और अपने पहले पोस्ट में अपने विचार व्यक्त करें.

4) आपका पहला पोस्ट कम से कम **150** शब्द लम्बा होना चाहिए. आप यकीनन 150 से ज्यादा शब्द भी लिख सकते हैं. बल्कि जितना ज्यादा लिखेंगे उतना बेहतर होगा! याद रखिये पहला पोस्ट दूसरी भाषा में!

5) अपने दूसरे पोस्ट में आप अपने ग्रुप के सदस्यों के पोस्ट का जवाब देंगे. यानि आप अपने के ग्रुप के सदस्यों पोस्ट को पढ़िए और फिर उस पर टिपण्णी कीजिये या उसमे पूछे गए सवालों का जवाब दीजिये.

6) दूसरा पोस्ट कम से कम **200** शब्द लम्बा होना चाहिए. आप यकीनन 200 से ज्यादा शब्द भी लिख सकते हैं. बल्कि जितना ज्यादा लिखेंगे उतना बेहतर होगा! याद रखिये दूसरा पोस्ट अपनी पहली भाषा में!

7) आपको पोस्ट लिखते समय अपने विचार व्यक्त करने की और अपने साथियों से सवाल पूछने की पूरी आज़ादी है. लेकिन साथ ही साथ हम यह भी उम्मीद करते हैं कि एक दूसरे से बात करते समय और अपने विचार व्यक्त करते समय आप पूरी विनम्रता से काम लेंगे.

8) आखिरी बात, हमारी पूरी कोशिश है कि यह प्रोजेक्ट आपके लिए एक मज़ेदार और सार्थक अनुभव साबित हो. इस प्रोजेक्ट का पूरा फायदा उठाने के लिए यह बहुत ज़रूरी है कि आप इसमें गंभीरता और ईमानदारी से भाग लें.

## Appendix B: Pre-collaboration journal prompts

In this assignment, we are inviting you to share your life story with us! This journal will help us know you better and allow us to pair you into different groups for the online collaboration starting next week. In addition, this journal could inform your introductory posts next week.

Please answer the following questions in as much detail as possible. There is no upper word limit for this assignment. The minimum word limit is 150 (in Hindi). I strongly encourage you to not restrict yourself to the minimum word limit. Please elaborate on your answers in English (or Hindi) once you have crossed the 150 word limit. We would really like to hear more from you!

Questions to consider:

Personal information

Where are you from?

आप कहाँ से हैं?

Where did you grow up?

आप का बचपन कहाँ बीता?

What are you studying? Why did you choose this field of study?

आप किस क्षेत्र में पढ़ाई कर रहे/रही हैं? आप ने यह क्षेत्र क्यों चुना?

What are your future plans and goals?

आप भविष्य में क्या करना चाहते/चाहती हैं? आपके उद्देश्य क्या हैं?

How would describe yourself as a person?

अगर आपको किसी को अपने बारे में कुछ बताना हो तो आप क्या कहेंगे? आप कौन हैं? आपका स्वभाव कैसा है?

Linguistic experiences

How many languages do you know?

आप को कितनी भाषाएँ आती हैं?

What language(s) does your family speak?

आप के परिवार में कितनी भाषाएँ बोली जाती हैं?

Who else in your family has a multilingual background? What languages do they speak?

आपके परिवार में क्या कोई और भी है जो एक से ज्यादा भाषाएँ बोल सकता/सकती है? कौन-कौन?

और वे कौन-कौन सी भाषाएँ बोलते/बोलती हैं?

What regional variations of English do you and your family speak? What accents, dialects, and registers of English do you engage in?

Why are you learning Hindi? Is it an important language to learn?

आप हिंदी क्यों सीख रहे/रही हैं? क्या यह भाषा सीखना ज़रूरी है?

What have been your language learning experiences so far?

भाषा सीखने का आपका अब तक का अनुभव कैसा रहा है?

Cultural identity:

What does culture mean to you?

आपके लिए 'संस्कृति' शब्द का क्या अर्थ है?

How would you define your cultural identity?

आपकी सांस्कृतिक पहचान क्या है? आप उसे शब्दों में कैसे व्यक्त करेंगे?

Have you ever visited or lived in a new place? What was that experience like?

क्या आप कभी किसी नयी जगह घूमने या रहने के लिए गए हैं? नयी जगह रहने या घूमने का अनुभव कैसा था?

## Appendix C: Discussion prompts

### Week 1 , Part 1

Tell us something about yourself/ हमें कुछ अपने बारे में बताइए

You could answer the following questions in your introduction:

Where are you from?

What are you studying? Why did you choose to pursue this field of study?

What do you enjoy doing the most in life?

Is there anything you hate doing?

Would you like to share an interesting incident or a favorite memory with us?

What else would you like to share about yourself?

अपना परिचय लिखते समय आप इन सवालों का जवाब दे सकते हैं:

आप कहाँ से हैं?

आप किस क्षेत्र में पढ़ाई कर रहे हैं? आप ने यह क्षेत्र क्यों चुना?

आप को जीवन में सबसे ज्यादा आनंद क्या करने में आता है?

क्या ऐसा कोई काम है जो करना आपको बिलकुल पसंद नहीं है?

अपने बारे आप हमें और क्या बताना चाहेंगे?

क्या आप अपने जीवन की कोई मज़ेदार घटना या कोई सुनहरी याद हमारे साथ बाँटना चाहेंगे?

### Week 1, Part 2

If images could talk.../अगर तस्वीरें बोल सकतीं तो...What would they tell us about you?/तो वह आपके बारे में क्या कहतीं?

Please share an image that offers us a glimpse of your world. It could be any kind of image; something that helps us know you better.

हमारे साथ कोई ऐसी तस्वीर बाँटिये जिस में हमे आपकी दुनिया की एक झलक दिखाई दे. वह कोई भी तस्वीर हो सकती है. बस कुछ ऐसा

जिसे देखकर हमें आपको और अधिक जानने का मौका मिले.

### Week 2

Week 2: Why do we watch films?/हम फ़िल्में क्यों देखते हैं?

Do you think films are only meant for entertainment?

क्या फ़िल्में सिर्फ मनोरंजन के लिए होती हैं?

Do they depict reality or do they create new reality?

क्या फ़िल्में यथार्थ दर्शाती हैं? या फिल्मों द्वारा नए यथार्थ का निर्माण होता है?

Do films have the power to influence how people think and behave?

क्या फ़िल्में लोगों की सोच और उनके आचरण को प्रभावित करती हैं?

Tell us about a film that has influenced you deeply.

क्या कोई ऐसी फिल्म है जिस से आप बहुत प्रभावित हुए हैं? हमें उसके बारे में कुछ बताइए.

### Week 3

Week 3: Your response/आपकी प्रतिक्रिया

What did you think of the film?

आप को फिल्म कैसी लगी?

What are your reasons for liking or disliking the film?

आप को फिल्म पसंद आने या नपसंद आने के क्या कारण हैं?

What do you think the film is about?

आप को क्या लगता है फिल्म की कहानी किस बारे में है?

What do you think of the title, *English-Vinglish*? Do you think it is an appropriate title for the film? Why or why not?

फिल्म के शीर्षक के बारे में आप क्या सोचते हैं? क्या यह इस फिल्म के लिए एक उचित शीर्षक है? क्यों या क्यों नहीं?

Did you like any of the characters in particular? Why?

क्या फिल्म में कोई ऐसा किरदार या पात्र है जो आपको अच्छा लगा? यह पात्र आप को अच्छा क्यों लगा?

Was there any character that you did not like? Why?

कोई ऐसा किरदार/पात्र जो आपको अच्छा नहीं लगा? क्यों?

### Week 4

**Week 4: Two critical issues/दो अहम मुद्दे**

I think *English-Vinglish* is a feel-good film that ends with a happy resolution where Shashi succeeds in learning English and earning the respect of her family. The film also raises critical socio-cultural issues that are worth discussing. Let us talk about them!

In the comments section below, I have posted two sets of questions related to two issues that emerged in the film: a) language and power and b) learning to live in a new world.

Please respond to at least one set of questions below.

मुझे लगता है कि इंग्लिश-विंगलिश एक अच्छी फिल्म है जो एक सुखद मोड़ पर खतम होती है जहाँ शशि अंग्रेजी सिखने में कामयाब होती है और साथ-साथ ही अपने घरवालों से सम्मान भी प्राप्त करती है. फिल्म समाज से जुड़े हुए कुछ अहम मुद्दों को भी उजागर करती है जो विचारणीय हैं. आइये इनके बारे में बात करते हैं!

नीचे दिए गए कमेंट सेक्शन में मैंने फिल्म से जुड़े दो मुद्दों के बारे में सवाल पूछे हैं: पहला, भाषा और प्रभुत्वता और दूसरा, एक नयी दुनिया में जीना सीखना. नीचे दिए गए किसी एक विषय से जुड़े सवालों का जवाब दीजिये.

#### **Language and Power**

भाषा और प्रभुत्वता

The film shows how Shashi constantly feels humiliated and incomplete because she does not know English well. Like in this scene where she feels embarrassed to tell the visa officer that her English is weak:

फिल्म में हम देखते हैं कि शशि को अंग्रेजी न आने की वजह से वह बार-बार अपमानित होती है. उसे एक अधूरेपन का एहसास होता है. जैसे कि इस सीन में जहाँ उसे बीसा अफसर को यह बताने में शर्मिंदगी महसूस होती है कि उसकी अंग्रेजी कमज़ोर है

Why do think Shashi is made to feel this way?

आपको क्या लगता है कि शशि को इस तरह की नकारात्मक भावनाओं का सामना क्यों करना पड़ता है?

Why is it so important for her to know English?

उसको अंग्रेजी आये यह इतना महत्वपूर्ण क्यों है?

Do you think certain languages in the world have more power than others? What could be some possible reasons for this?

क्या आपको लगता है कि विश्व में कुछ भाषाओं का प्रभुत्व दूसरी भाषाओं से ज्यादा होता है? इसके पीछे क्या कारण हो सकते हैं?

### **Learning to live in a new world**

एक नयी दुनिया में जीना सीखना

Shashi feels very nervous about travelling alone to New York and faces many challenges along the way. She feels so lost in her new surroundings that she is unable to order even a cup of coffee:

शशि को अकेले न्यू यॉर्क जाने में बहुत घबराहट होती है और रस्ते में उसे कई मुश्किलों का सामना करना पड़ता है. वह अपने नए परिवेश में खुद को इतना बेबस महसूस करती है कि एक कप कॉफ़ी तक नहीं खरीद पाती:

Can you identify with Shashi here?

क्या आप शशि में खुद को देख पाते हैं?

Have you ever been in a situation where you felt like an outsider? How did it make you feel?

क्या आप ने कभी ऐसी परिस्थिति का सामना किया है जहाँ आप ने खुद को 'बाहर वाला' या 'गैर' पाया हो? आपको कैसा महसूस हुआ?

What kind of challenges did you face and how did you manage to overcome them?

ऐसी परिस्थिति में आप को किस तरह की मुश्किलें आयीं और आप ने उनका सामना कैसे किया?

### **Week 5**

In his detailed commentary on the film, blogger Vikas Divykirti

(Links to an external site.) argues that the film leaves the audience wrestling with some uncomfortable questions. Let us talk about some of these issues.

फिल्म पर गहराई से टिपण्णी करते हुए विकास दिव्यकीर्ति अपने ब्लॉग में कहते हैं कि फिल्म दर्शकों के सामने कुछ बेचैन करने वाले सवाल रखती है. आइये ऐसे कुछ मुद्दों के बारे में बात करते हैं

In the comments section below, I have identified two interesting issues based on my reading of his blog and the film: a) parent-child relationship and b) gender roles in a marriage. Please read and respond to at least one of the following sets of questions.

नीचे दिए गए कमेंट सेक्शन में मैंने फिल्म से जुड़े दो मुद्दों के बारे में सवाल पूछे हैं. नीचे दिए गए किसी एक विषय से जुड़े सवालों का जवाब दीजिये.

### **Parent-child relationship**

The writer argues that even though Shashi has not read books on 'parenting tips' like her English speaker counterparts, she is a wise and loving mother:

उसने अंग्रेज़ी जानने वालों की तरह 'पेरेंटिंग टिप्स' की किताबें नहीं पढ़ी हैं पर वह परंपरा के संचित अनुभवों की बदौलत जानती है कि जवान होती हुई बेटी की माँ होने का फ़र्ज़ कैसे निभाया जाता है? उसे पता है कि उसकी बेटी सहेली के पास पढ़ने के बहाने 'कैफ़े कॉफी डे' जाती है पर वह उसे प्यार से हेंडल करती है. वह अपनी बेटी की निजी 'डायरी' को उसकी अलमारी में इसलिए छिपाती है ताकि इस कच्ची उम्र के उसके राज बेपर्दा न हो जाएँ. वह अपनी बेटी के टीचर से सिर्फ़ यह नहीं पूछती कि वह पढ़ने में कैसी है, बल्कि खासतौर पर यह भी पूछती है कि सब लोगों के साथ उसका व्यवहार कैसा है, सभी लोग उसे प्यार करते हैं या नहीं क्योंकि उसे पता है कि सारी पढ़ाई-लिखाई का असली मकसद बच्चे को कायदे का इंसान बनाना है और यदि वही पीछे छूट गया तो कोरे ज्ञान से क्या होगा? इससे बेहतर और समझदार माँ की कल्पना क्या हो सकती है? पर, यह सब बेकार है क्योंकि उसे अंग्रेज़ी नहीं आती....

Do you agree with the writer? Do you think Shashi is a good parent? If yes, why does then her daughter Sapna fail to see that?

क्या आप लेखक से सहमत हैं? क्या आपको लगता है कि शशि एक अच्छी माँ है? अगर हाँ, तो उसकी बेटी सपना यह बात क्यों नहीं समझ पाती?

What do you think being a good parent entails?

आपके अनुसार एक अच्छी माँ या एक अच्छा पिता होना क्या होता है?

### **Gender Roles in a Marriage**

In her emotional speech at the end, Shashi says "marriage is a special friendship...friendship of two people who are equal..."

Do you think Shashi and her husband Satish shared an equal status in their marriage?

क्या आपको लगता है कि उनके शादी-शुदा रिश्ते में शशि और सतीश का दर्जा बराबर का था?

What do you think about what Shashi says about marriage and family in this speech? Do you share Shashi's point of view?

शशि अंत में जो परिवार और शादी के बारे में कहती है उसके बारे में आप क्या सोचते हैं? क्या आप भी शादी और परिवार को इसी नज़रिए से देखते हैं?

### **Week 6**

As we reach the end of our collaboration, let us reflect on our experiences and interactions. Please review the discussion posts from previous weeks and share: a) an instance where a group member presented an interesting counterargument and/or b) an instance where your points of view were very similar. Why do you think your views differed and/or were similar in these instances?

हमारे इस सहयोग के अंतिम सप्ताह में आइये हम लोग अपनी बातचीत और अपने अनुभवों पर एक नज़र डालें. पिछले हफ़्तों के पोस्ट्स को एक बार फिर पढ़िए और: a) एक ऐसे पोस्ट के बारे में हमें

बताइए जहाँ आपके साथियों ने कोई दिलचस्प तर्क रखा हो जो आपके विचारों से मेल न खाता हो और/ या b) एक ऐसा पोस्ट जहाँ आपके विचार आपके साथियों से मेल खाते हों. आपके हिसाब से आपके विचारों में समानता या विभिन्नता होने क्या कारण है?

## Appendix D: Post-Collaboration Journal prompts

Please submit a report on your experiences and reflections on the collaboration project with students in India. Minimum word limit is 150 words (in Hindi). You are welcome to write beyond the minimum word limit and elaborate on your ideas in English. We are genuinely interested in getting your feedback so please don't hesitate to express your opinions. Following are some guiding questions to help you think; please try to answer them in as much detail as possible. Thank You!

What do you think of this project? What was your experience? Did you like it? Was it useful and engaging? If not, what did you not like about it?

आप इस प्रोजेक्ट के बारे में क्या सोचते हैं? इस प्रोजेक्ट में आपका अनुभव कैसा रहा? क्या आपको मज़ा आया? क्या आपको इस प्रोजेक्ट से कुछ लाभ (फायदा) हुआ? अगर आपको यह प्रोजेक्ट अच्छा या मज़ेदार नहीं लगा तो किस वजह से?

What did you think of the discussion topics and prompts?

हमारे डिस्कशन के विषय और सवाल कैसे लगे?

Was it difficult to comprehend your partners' comments? Were there any new concepts, words that you did not understand?

क्या आपको अपने साथियों के पोस्ट समझने में कभी कोई परेशानी हुई? क्या कोई ऐसे शब्द या विचार थे जो आपको समझ नहीं आये?

Do you have any suggestions on how this collaboration can be improved? What should be done differently?

इस सहयोग को भविष्य में कैसे सुधारा जा सकता है? इस बारे में आपके कोई सुझाव हैं? आगे आने वाले प्रोजेक्ट्स में क्या अलग से किया जा सकता है?

## **Appendix E: Interview Protocol**

### **Part 1: Questions around languacultural biography**

1. Relationship with India/Hindi?
2. Cultural affiliations? What does being an American mean to you? How do you perceive yourself, Indian/American?
3. How do you negotiate these different worlds?

### **Part 2: Online discussions**

1. What kind of perspectives did you find yourself taking on in the online discussions?
2. How did you make meaning of the task? What did you think you were expected to do?
3. How were your peers' discussion posts different/similar from yours?
4. Do you think you learned anything?

### **Part 3: Technological experience**

1. What did you think of the project layout?
2. Were there any challenges or problems in accessing Canvas?
3. Did you access the additional links posted each week?
4. Did you check out discussion posts from other groups?
5. Can you tell me anything about the class Facebook group?

**Final question:** Would you like to choose a pseudonym for yourself?

## Appendix F: English Language Learners's (ELLs') syllabus

### **Paper-V (Optional)** **APPROACHES AND PRACTICE IN MODERN SUBJECTS** **(ii) TEACHING OF ENGLISH**

**Marks: 100**

#### **OBJECTIVES**

**On completion of this course the pupil teacher will be able to:**

- understand the importance of English language,
- understand the features of language learning,
- acquire and apply the language teaching skills,
- teach grammar & vocabulary acquisition efficiently,
- acquaint with the evaluation methods of English language teaching.

**Total hours of teaching- 105 hrs.**

#### **Unit-I Objectives of Teaching English at Secondary level 15 hrs.**

- 1.1 English in India.
- 1.2 English in Indian Education.
- 1.3 English as a Second Language and as a foreign language.
- 1.4 Factors affecting language learning.

#### **Unit-II Teaching language skills:. 15 hrs.**

1. Development of four basic skills- listening, speaking, reading and writing.
2. Teaching reference skills (Dictionaries, Thesaurus and Encyclopedias)

#### **Unit-III Approaches, Methods and Techniques of Teaching and Learning of English 15 hrs.**

1. Approaches to teaching English
  1. Oral Approach
  2. Structural approach
  3. Communicative approach
2. Methods of teaching English
  1. Text book method
  2. Grammar Translation method
  3. Direct Method
3. Techniques of Teaching English
  1. Story telling
  2. Dramatization

3. Role Poly
4. Language / communication games
5. Principles of teaching English.
6. Maxims of teaching English

**Unit- IV Planning English Language Teaching** **18 hrs.**

1. Objectives of teaching Prose, Poetry, Supplementary Reader, Grammar and Composition to secondary school students.
2. Lesson plans to teach Prose, Poetry, Grammar & Composition to Secondary School Students.

**Unit- V Evaluation** **12 hrs.**

- 5.1 Concept and process of evaluation and Bloom's taxonomy.
- 5.2 Tools of evaluation, preparing test items, and blue print.
- 5.3 Analysis and interpretation of scores.

**Unit- VI Audio Visual Aids** **15 hrs.**

- 6.1 Need & Importance
- 6.2 Principles of Selection
- 6.3 Types of Audio-Visual Aids and its appropriate uses.
- 6.4 Language Laboratory.
- 6.5 Power-Point Presentation

**Unit- VII The English Teacher** **15 hrs.**

- 7.1 Role of English Teacher
- 7.2 Qualities of good English Teacher
- 7.3 Responsibilities of an English Teacher- organization of curricular activities- essay, elocution, debate & drama, word-games and quiz.

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