Holding a Heritage Language Summer Camp
By Dr. Surendra Gambhir, University of Pennsylvania

This Heritage Voice describes the key components of an intensive summer language camp for heritage language speakers. It is based on the experience of the successful ten-day Hindi summer language camps held in Atlanta, Georgia in 2010, and in Newark, Delaware in 2011.

Organizing a summer language camp, whether residential or non-residential, is a challenging undertaking. A language camp is a guided exploration of language and culture, focused on how students learn about the culture and perform in the target language to accomplish various real-life tasks. All educational and recreational activities are designed with an eye toward language development. Based on linguistic and cultural immersion, the camp activities are age-appropriate, cognitively challenging, and built on the natural propensity of youth to socialize and connect enthusiastically.

The following elements contributed to the success of the two camps:

- Strong camp leadership
- A clear vision for the academic focus of the camp
- Professional development for instructional staff
- A well-articulated, performance-based curriculum
- Clear lesson plans
- Learner-centered, hands-on activities
- Use of formative and summative assessments
- Interactions with families and local businesses

It is my hope that sharing our experiences and learning from planning and hosting this camp will encourage others to hold summer camps for heritage language learners.

The Camp Experience

Discussing an interactive project

With funding from STARTALK, a group of language professionals from Yuva Hindi Sansthan planned and implemented the Yuva STARTALK Summer Hindi Camp in Atlanta, Georgia in 2010, and in Newark, Delaware in 2011.

One hundred middle school students (ages 10-13) participated in the Atlanta camp, and seventy-eight middle and high school students (ages 10-17) participated in the Newark camp.

Our plan was to recruit 100 students for each camp. In Atlanta the first year, recruitment was a challenge. Local teachers and volunteers distributed information about the camp in local public schools, neighborhoods, Indian restaurants, grocery stores, shopping malls, and temples, and on community listservs. The word gradually spread in the community, and we were able to recruit 100 students. Later, happy parents and children made the camp the talk of the town, which facilitated recruitment for the second year in Atlanta, the summer of 2011. In Delaware, we were able to recruit 78 students the first year. Although we were short of our targeted number, we hope that the work carried out will smooth the process in future years.

In both the camps, about 30% of the students came from families where Hindi is spoken in addition to English. Other students came from families where other Indic languages are spoken, such as Bengali, Bhutanese, Gujarati, Marathi, Nepali, Panjabi, and Urdu. Despite the fact that most of the heritage students came from non-Hindi speaking families, they had some familiarity with Hindi in the form of a few words or phrases, which they had presumably learned from Bollywood movies. Hindi, being the language of wider communication in South Asia and within the South Asian diaspora, is not totally unfamiliar to most South Asian students. In almost all cases, students' comprehension of Hindi was better than their ability to speak in it. About 20% of the students had basic literacy skills.

The goal of the camps was to provide total immersion in the target language and culture. With a thematic curriculum and guidance from the STARTALK website, lesson plans and assessment tools were supplemented with technology, sports, arts and crafts, music, dance, and a field trip. The community connection was strong, as students prepared Hindi signs for various stores in the area. In a bazaar, one of the camp activities, students bargained and bought various items with real money. Teachers wore a sign on their arm

Helping individual students

that said "Help," and students could ask them how to say certain things in Hindi. In a cultural show on the final day, students made presentations in Hindi for their parents and other invited guests.

Remembering to speak Hindi

All classes and extra-mural activities were conducted in Hindi. Teachers made themselves understood with the help of visuals, body language, and the contexts in which the language was presented. The principle of comprehensible input (i+1; Krashen, 1985) helped tremendously. Teachers built up their use of the language (input) gradually to ensure that students understood. Students who talked with each other in English were gently reminded that everyone in the camp was expected to use Hindi only. The only exception was the last five minutes in every class, which were earmarked for asking and answering questions in English.

Both the camps had long hours, 9 AM to 6 PM, and keeping the participants productively engaged was possible through a combination of scholastic and entertaining activities. (The daily schedule of the camps can be found at the end of this document.) Entertaining activities included language games, use of technology, arts and crafts, singing, dancing, and sports. All of these activities included the use of the target language for instructions, names of relevant paraphernalia, expressions of compliments and exclamations, etc. This was the contextualized language that the participants listened to and used with each other. These activities generated tremendous enthusiasm in using the language. For example, singing high notes in Hindi songs under the tutelage of a professional instructor helped to loosen the learners' vocal chords, which otherwise showed hesitation, wavering, and sub-vocalization.

We found our program goals to be challenging but realistic. Our performance objectives for each day were clearly laid out and shared with the students, and everyone (instructors and students) knew what needed to be accomplished by the end of the day. Our linguistic and cultural objectives included vocabulary, language structures, and a few formulaic expressions. In classroom activities, teachers reviewed previously used forms and introduced new ones. Classroom activities incorporated work sheets and performance of language functions and tasks at the appropriate competency level.

All of the teachers were trained in the STARTALK teacher training program. In addition, extensive online and face-to face training workshops were organized, where teachers received additional training in lesson planning, assessment, and classroom management. Many of the concepts presented were easy to grasp, but their successful implementation required experience. For example, putting the concept of comprehensible input into practice was not easy in the beginning for some of the teachers. Teachers who are native speakers of a language need to know what is simple and what is complex for novice learners. Small elements that come naturally in native speakers' speech can be baffling for learners. The challenge for the teachers in the camps was to be conscious of such elements and use them at the appropriate levels.

We received informal feedback from parents almost every day. We were pleased to learn that the children returning home in the evening were often humming Hindi songs and asking their moms in Hindi for dinner. We also learned that the following morning they were excited to get back to the camp. Only one student dropped out of the first camp for personal reasons. All of these factors led us to believe that both camps were hugely successful. In the official STARTALK evaluation, both scored highly and were described as model programs.

The coming together of the students, their parents, volunteers, local vendors, the media, and community organizations resulted in such a successful experience that many observations and statements were made about the camp in family get-togethers and in local community newspapers. This discourse helped to build awareness in the local communities about the value of preserving heritage languages for cultural and national reasons and for personal enrichment of participating students.

Playing Kho-Kho

Key Components of the Camps
The following components helped make the camps a success.

Camp Leadership
There are two aspects of organizing a camp, administrative and academic, and division of work is essential. Experience shows that the success of a camp is directly related to the level of professionalism of its leaders and advance planning of the program. The roles and responsibilities of camp leaders are as follows.

Administrative Tasks
In consultation with the program director, the camp administrator manages the following pre-program, during the program, and post-program responsibilities:

- Selection of an appropriate site with sufficient space for activities
- Managing student applications
- Communicating with parents
- Making purchases (materials, food, equipment, office supplies, first-aid kit)
- Managing housing, meals, and activities if the camp is residential
- Checking students in and out at the beginning and end of each day
- Ensuring that equipment is set up in classes and for extra-mural activities
- Copying and distributing materials to instructors
- Managing transportation for field trips
- Managing budgets, revenue, and expenses
- Storing equipment and materials at the end of the camp
- Finalizing and submitting accounts

Academic Tasks
Academic leadership is often the responsibility of the program director. The academic leader is responsible for understanding, explaining, and implementing all educational aspects of the program. It is a tremendous job, and the successful academic leader/director works collaboratively with others to articulate and carry out the program planning.

Speak Hindi Artwork

The academic plan for the camps includes the following:

a. Backward Design for Curriculum Planning
The principle of backward design encompasses a number of pedagogic concepts under one umbrella.
- The 5 C's of Communication, Culture, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities (ACTFL, *Standards for foreign language learning,* 1996) guide the development of themes and lessons.
- An overarching theme shapes the content of the camp and is divided into sub-themes.
- Multi-media resources for each sub-theme are collected.
- Specific performance objectives for use of the target language are established.
- Performance assessment tools are devised. These tools facilitate the collection and interpretation of information, followed by evaluation of student performance.
- Structural components (vocabulary, syntactic structures, and language functions) required for reaching the performance objectives are identified.

The reason for listing performance objectives and assessment tools before structural components is that a proficiency-oriented thematic curriculum does not focus primarily on building knowledge of structural components of the language, such as vocabulary and grammar, but rather on students' holistic performance in the target language.

b. Thematic Curriculum
A thematic curriculum represents a multidisciplinary approach, where a unifying, overarching theme provides the framework for all camp activities. A theme is a big idea, under which multiple related sub-themes can be subsumed, and can have an enduring impact after the program is over. For example, the curriculum in the Atlanta camp was based on the over-arching theme, *A Passage to India*, which included the following four sub-themes:

1. *Planning to visit India* – Students come together to greet each other and introduce themselves in the target language. The teacher presents a map of India, introduces India, and shows the cities they are planning to visit as a group through the use of technology.
2. *Visiting Mumbai* – Students are introduced to important points of interest in the city, Bollywood movies, movie stars, and the culture of dance and music.
3. *Visiting an Indian village* – Students learn about village life, rural occupations, rural food, and rural games.

4. *Visiting Delhi* – Students visit important points in the city, see the crowds, and learn about the game of cricket and the language used for shopping.

In the Delaware camp, our overall theme was *India's Popular Culture and Indian Diaspora,* with four sub-themes: India's foods, fashions, music and dance, and sports. Students were able to compare the thematic aspects of life in India with the lives of people in the Indian diaspora in the United States. This gave them the opportunity to draw Venn Diagrams and use the target language to make comparisons.

c. Philosophy of Linguistic and Cultural Immersion
Staying in the target language and using cultural artifacts, performances, and viewpoints, along with the appropriate level of language exposure, provides a positive learning environment. Teachers need to be committed to the total immersion experience and use the target language almost exclusively without slipping into English. The target language is made comprehensible with the help of context, visuals, body language, and classroom activities.

d. Integration of National Language Standards
ACTFL's 5 C's (ACTFL, 1996) provide the framework for language learning in the camp, with a focus on three modes of Communication (Interpretive, Interpersonal, and Presentational) and three aspects of Culture (Products, Practices, and Perspectives), making linguistic and cultural Comparisons, and making Connections with other disciplines and with Communities.

e. Appropriate Language Functions and Tasks
In order to keep learners meaningfully engaged, introduction of appropriate language functions and tasks with real-life relevance reduces the gap between classroom and real-life activities and paves the way for meaningful use of the target language in the outside world.

f. Project-Based Learning
In project-based learning, students participate in small groups to converse with each other in the target language and find answers or solutions to questions and situations that they face to complete the project. Learners focus on meaning rather than on the structure of the language. (This is not the focus in classes with novice-level learners.)

g. Language Games
For keeping learners engaged and cognitively challenged, it is important that activities are both interesting and age-appropriate. This includes playing language games in the classroom, which allows exciting engagement with the language.

Instructional Staff and Professional Development

Teachers in camp classes are trained professionals with at least an Advanced High level of proficiency in the target language. If they are not sufficiently trained, there should be a clear plan for providing them with pre-program training. Understanding and assimilating key concepts of language pedagogy makes a significant difference in teachers' classroom performance as well as in student learning. Teachers need to be familiar with the following:

Playing Kabaddi

- *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines: Speaking*
- *ACTFL Performance Guidelines for K-12 Learners*
- The notion of proficiency (as opposed to grammar) as the organizing principle for the curriculum
- The notion of comprehensible input (language used at a level that students understand; Krashen, 1985)
- Assessment tools
- Instructional practices
- Creativity to keep learners meaningfully engaged

Teachers with professional training, who have a genuine interest in working with young learners, may not be easy to find, especially for a short-term job in the summer. There may be educated native speakers of the target language in the community, but teaching a language successfully requires much more than knowing the language.

Name the colors – art class

Professional development for teachers needs to begin at least two months prior to the opening of the camp, as it takes time for concepts and practices to sink in. In addition, a workshop immediately before the program is often useful to revisit the overall plan and discuss last-minute details. During such a workshop, reviewing the following ideas as a team brings everyone together on the same page and prepares them for instructional planning:

- Concepts of language pedagogy
- Student placement
- Lesson plans
- Instructional materials
- Assessment procedures and tools
- A rehearsal session for teachers to present a lesson for peer critique

Teaching Materials

A classroom project about seasons in India

Teaching materials in today's language classrooms need to go beyond traditional textbooks. Multi-media authentic materials provide a treasure for linguistic and cultural input. Resources include a wide variety of multimedia materials on the Internet, books, newspapers, advertisements, audio and video materials on CDs and DVDs, movies, TV, menu cards, invitation cards, family photographs of trips and events, charts, and graphs. YouTube is an extremely useful resource for a wide variety of materials.

Such diverse materials connect the target language with the real world in meaningful ways and make learning attractive. Teachers need to go through the language and vocabulary to determine which materials to use at which levels. If the material is potentially useful, but the level is higher or lower than that of the students, activities can be designed at a higher or lower level to make up for the gap. Materials at the Novice level are most difficult to find, but word- and phrase-level texts can be found in menus, road signs, and advertisements. In countries like India, the wide prevalence of English makes availability of authentic materials in the native language difficult.

Student Placement

When participating students have varying levels of proficiency in the language, placement becomes challenging. When students have learned the language in bits and pieces for limited use at home or in the community, their varying knowledge can pose challenges for placement. Some understand the target language in varying degrees, while others don't understand it beyond a few words. Some can

Playing cricket

speak a little, while others are tight-lipped. Some are literate, while others are not. Dividing such a diverse group into homogeneous groups is not easy. In the case of our camps, we had multiple classes, and it was not very difficult to group students in homogeneous groups based on their different linguistic abilities in the target language.

Our placement process was done in two steps. First, we asked students via email to rate their proficiency in speaking, listening, reading, and writing on a scale of 0 to 10. This gave us a clear indication of who was at the Novice-level (0-1) in oral-aural skills. We then conducted an oral proficiency interview, via phone or skype, with those who rated themselves 2 or above on the scale. The email we had sent also elicited information about the extent to which students were familiar with the Hindi script. Based on the results of the self-assessment survey and the interview, we were able to place them in different classes. Even after such an extensive placement exercise, some students had to be re-placed on the first day of camp.

Lesson Plans

Lesson plans represent the implementation of curriculum goals and include specific performance objectives for particular days. In addition to performance objectives, a detailed lesson plan also records other details that are helpful in organizing all aspects of a unit before the teacher enters the classroom. A lesson plan helps the teacher to conduct classroom activities in a well thought-out sequence and to accomplish the performance objective(s) in a timely manner. A lesson plan can vary in details, and thus is a personal document of every teacher. A lesson plan may incorporate the following:

- Unit objectives (major theme and sub-themes)
- Specific performance objectives (what students will know and be able to do at the end of the lesson)
- ACTFL standards addressed
- Assessment (evidence of students' work and learning)
- Instructional activities (textual input, worksheets, games, project-based learning activities)
- Multimedia materials (including word lists and hyperlinks on the Internet)

Interesting and Culturally Appropriate Instructional Activities

Field trip to Martin Luther King museum in Atlanta

Since time spent learning a language in a classroom environment is limited, it is imperative that we use methodologies and materials that are efficient and effective. Classes need to be designed to create an environment in which fun-filled and meaningful activities dominate the scene and students acquire the target language in the most advantageous conditions. Young children are neurologically equipped to learn a new language with limited effort (Yang, 2006), and we want to create conditions where this can happen.

Experience shows that a mix of role plays, singing, presentations, movie clips, language games, arts and crafts, and sports is helpful in creating a healthy environment that reproduces the real world in a program environment. In these activities, students are engaged in learning through performance activities and not through grammar or vocabulary drills. Such interesting, engaging activities operate below the threshold of learners' awareness, which is parallel to how children acquire a language naturally.

Assessment of Student Progress
Assessment is carried out not to determine if students are passing or failing, but to continuously track their progress and give them timely and helpful feedback while they are learning. A combination of analytic and holistic formative assessment is useful. A summative assessment at the end of each unit and later at the end of the program helps students to consolidate what they have learned. Student self-assessment is another way to document learning and raise students' awareness about what they can and cannot do in the language. LinguaFolio is a good example of a self-assessment. Finally, student portfolios can be used to document students' progress on projects and other activities.

Conclusion
Holding a language camp can be a fun and effective way to improve heritage language learning, raise cultural awareness, and increase community connections. A language camp that provides an immersion experience is the closest parallel to a natural environment for learning a language. A language camp has the added advantage of being a focused program, where the process of language acquisition can be accelerated. In order to make the best use of everyone's time and resources, a professional understanding of the key components of an effective language learning experience, and careful planning and implementation of those concepts, are imperative.

Field trip to the Swaminarayan temple in Atlanta

About the STARTALK Program

The STARTALK initiative, managed by the National Foreign Language Center at the University of Maryland, College Park, seeks to expand and improve the teaching and learning of strategically important world languages that are currently not widely taught in the United States. STARTALK's mission is to increase the number of Americans learning, speaking, and teaching these critical foreign languages. For this, they have been offering students (in grades K–16) and teachers of these languages creative and engaging summer experiences. STARTALK programs exemplify best practices in language education and language teacher development, forming an extensive community of practitioners that seek continuous improvement in such areas as outcomes-driven program design, standards-based curriculum planning, learner-centered approaches, selection and development of materials, and assessment of outcomes. Learn more at the STARTALK website.

Daily Schedule of the Yuva STARTALK Summer Hindi Programs

8:30 – 8:45 am	Arrival/Students are dropped off
9:00 – 9:25 am	Yoga (Students are advised to have very light breakfast)
9:30 – 11:10 am	Exploration I
11:25 am – 12:15 pm	Activity Period I – Hindi group projects
12:15 – 1:30 pm	Lunch – Food is served by camp staff
1:30 – 2:20 pm	Activity Period II – Computer Lab (for guided work in Hindi)
2:20 – 3:00 pm	Individualized Help
3:00 – 4:00 pm	Activity Period III – Arts and crafts, games of the target culture, stage performances (singing, folk and Bollywood dance, theater, music, skits), and nature walks
4:00 – 4:15 pm	Afternoon Break
4:15 – 5:15 pm	Sports – Cricket, chess, kho-kho, bhaiyaa-bhaiyaa kahaanN ho, piTThoo, ping poing, kite (patang) flying
5:15 – 5:30 pm	Exploration II - Sing-along
5:30 – 6:00 pm	Final Gathering – Recapping the day, getting a hint about the next day's program, getting ready to go home

References

American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. (ACTFL). *Performance guidelines* for K-12 learners.

ACTFL. (revised 1999). *Proficiency guidelines: Speaking*.

ACTFL. (1996). *Standards* for foreign language learning in the 21st century. Lawrence, KS: Allen Press.

Krashen, S. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications*. New York, NY: Longman.

Yang, C. (2006). *The infinite gift: How children learn and unlearn the languages of the world.* New York, NY: Scribner.

About the Author

This Heritage Voice was prepared by Dr. Surendra Gambhir for the Alliance for the Advancement of Heritage Languages (Alliance), Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), Washington DC, and was peer reviewed.

Dr. Gambhir is the language representative for South Asian languages for the Alliance. He served as Director of the Yuva STARTALK Summer Hindi Camp held in Atlanta, Georgia in 2010, and in Newark, Delaware in 2011. He is the Chairman of Yuva Hindi Sansthan.

■■

The Heritage Voices Collection is designed to spotlight individual heritage language speakers and programs. The information presented does not necessarily represent the views of the Alliance for the Advancement of Heritage Languages or the Center for Applied Linguistics.

Heritage Languages IN AMERICA

Visit us online at www.cal.org/heritage