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Teaching Elementary Hindi through Children's Books

初級ヒンディー語教育における児童書の活用

松木園 久子

要約

本稿の目的は、初級ヒンディー語の学習において、児童書を用いる利点と課題を検討することである。現在、インターネット上で膨大な数の語学教材にアクセスできる時代になったが、初学者にとってその信憑性を判断することは困難だろう。このような状況を踏まえ、筆者が実際に大阪大学ヒンディー語専攻 1 年生の授業で 3 編の児童書・物語を使用した例を紹介しつつ、児童書の活用について考察する。

最初の例として“*Khichri ... Ek Lokkathā*”(『民話キチュリー』)を見ると、日本人学習者にとって難解な文法事項が、簡易な短文に含まれている。同じ表現がさまざまな場面で使われていることにより、学習者は具体的な用法になじむことが期待できる。物語の背景も有意義であり、登場人物を通して家族制度や親族名称を、食事の場面からは食文化に関連する語彙や知識を習得できる。何よりインドの子供を対象として書かれているため、ごく自然なヒンディー語の文章に触れることができる。次に、“*Mammī kī Mez*”(『ママのデスク』)では挿絵も有益である。文章に出てくるモノすなわち名詞を挿絵に書かれたモノから探し出すことにより、日本人が見落としがちな名詞の単数・複数を意識することに役立つ。また、この作品は場面によって動詞の時制が明確に使い分けられているため、学習者は「繰り返しの動作」と「一回だけの動作」を表す時制のニュアンスの違いを場面に即して学ぶことができる。最後の“*Suar kā Doṣṭ*”(『ブタ君のともだち』)は一見素朴な動物たちの友達づくりの物語だが、彼らの会話を介して、差別や疎外といったインド社会の内実を垣間見ることができる。これらの物語の目的は子供たちを楽しませることであるから、繰り返し読んだり、暗唱するといった、初級の学習に有効な作業も必然的に楽しんで行えるという長所を併せ持っている。

一方、課題としては、授業に適した物語を見つけることが非常に困難だという点である。授業で求められるのは、文法的に正しく、標準的な文章である。あまりに口語的であったり、綴りが不正確な場合、説明や指導が煩瑣になり、結果的に学生も気が散ってしまいかねない。分量も大きな鍵である。さらに内容だが、あまりにかわいらしい、当たり障りのない物語では大学生には物足りない。しかしこの点では出版社側も「子供に対してどんな内容も語り掛けよう」という姿勢を示しており、今後さらに期待が持てる。以上のことから筆者は、体系的に文法を学んだ上で、それを補う形で物語を取り入れることが理想的と考える。日本の生活ではたしかにヒンディー語に触れる機会は少ないが、裏を返せば、学習環境を選び、作ることができるともいえる。効率的に、きちんとしたヒンディー語を学ぶために、児童書は実用的な手段のひとつだといえるだろう。

キーワード：Hindi Education, Children's Books, ヒンディー語教育、児童書

1. Introduction

It has already become common to make use of the Internet for studying languages. Today we can easily reach so many websites and even take courses online. I find some of them useful and informative, but a multitude of teaching materials also confuse us. In the first place, it is difficult for beginners to determine whether they are reliable or not. Considering this situation, I would like to focus on children's books as teaching material. In this paper, I intend to examine the benefits and limitations of teaching and studying elementary Hindi through children's books based on my own experiences.

I have been in charge of an elementary Hindi class at Osaka University, Japan for 16 years. The first year, beginning with Devanagari script, is supposed to cover the basic grammar. The teacher-in-charge is primarily free to choose the textbook for his/her course. However, most of the textbooks employ short sentences devoted to a certain grammatical topic, often resulting in a lack of context. I have no intention of criticizing these textbooks or focusing on a single grammatical topic. On the other hand, it is also known that repetition and recitation of short sentences is an efficient way to learn a language. That is why I have sought to combine grammatical knowledge with short sentences which are coherent and enjoyable. Fortunately, I have found some children's books which could meet my demand. Now let me elaborate on how I actually used these short story books in my class.

2. Adoption of Children's Books in Elementary Hindi language Classes

2.1 A case-study of “*Khicri ... Ek Lokkathā*”

The first book I would like to talk about is “*Khicri ... Ek Lokkathā* (*Khichri ... a Folktale; खिचड़ी ... एक लोककथा*)” published by Eklavya. I happened to find it at the New Delhi World Book Fair in 2015 and quickly noticed that it was exactly what I had wanted; the impressive cover and illustrations of Gond art; the simple and enjoyable story; and the low price of Rs. 25.00. I introduced it to my class in December that year, when we had almost finished basic grammar.

This is the story in which a man named Birjū visited his mother-in-law and liked the dish of khicrī. He planned to eat it at his home, so he recited “khicrī, khicrī ...” not to forget the name on his way back home. However, some funny accidents prevented him from repeating the name correctly, “khicrī” was changed into some ridiculous names. Fortunately, Birjū remembered the right name in the end.

There are some grammatical expressions in Hindi which are difficult for Japanese learners to understand. The story “*Khicri ... Ek Lokkathā*” turned out to be rich in such good examples. For instance, the first sentence is “*Ek bār Birjū apnī sasurāl gayā*. (Once Birju went to the house of his mother-in-law.; एक बार बिरजू अपनी ससुराल गया।)”. Many students often confuse the possessive adjective “apnā (अपना)”

with the possessive form of personal pronoun “uskā (उसका)”. In this sentence the possessive adjective is explained as ‘the subject Birjū and the person to whom “sasurāl (house of mother-in-law; ससुराल)” belongs are the same. If “uskī (उसकी)” is used instead of “apnī (अपनी)”, it means “Birjū went to the house of another person’s mother-in-law’. Another difficulty is the ergative case using the postposition “ne (ने)” because this kind of sentence construction is usually not found in Japanese or English. This expression appears in the second sentence as “Birjū kī sāsū mā ne use dāl aur cāval se banī ek cīz khilāi. (Birju’s mother-in-law served him the thing made from pulse and rice.; बिरजू की सासू माँ ने उसे दाल और चावल से बनी एक चीज़ खिलाई।)”. When I see the students confused with this sentence, I try to simplify my explanation as ‘ne (ने) ONLY appears when the verb is transitive and perfective’. In addition, I contrast with the intransitive verb “gayā (gone; गया)” in the first sentence. When we later come across other sentences in this story like “usne pūchā (he asked; उसने पूछा)” and “Birjū ne socā (Birju thought; बिरजू ने सोचा)”, I repeat the same formula “the verb is transitive and perfective” to familiarize students with the grammatical construction. The third sentence in the story continues as “Birjū ko uskā svād bahut acchā lagā. (To Birju, its taste felt good.; बिरजू को उसका स्वाद बहुत अच्छा लगा।)”. This reflects another difficulty of the dative case using the postposition “ko (को)”. In my analysis, it perplexes the students when we interpret this sentence as “Birju felt its taste very good”. This causes us to mistake Birjū as the subject of this sentence and “lagā (feel; लगना)” as the verb which concords with Birjū. So, in this case, I make it a rule to translate into Japanese as “To Birju, its taste felt good”. I give the similar explanation to other sentences with “ko (को)” such as “use jhatkā lagā (To him, a blow came; उसे झटका लगा)” and “use [...] gussā āyā (To him, anger came; उसे [...] गुस्सा आया)”¹. In this way, there are appropriate sentences in the story, which allows us to understand the key points in Hindi grammar through natural flow of the story.

In addition to useful grammatical usages, we can learn the cultural context from these children’s stories. For example, the words “sasurāl (house of mother-in-law; ससुराल)” and “sāsū mā (mother-in-law; सासू माँ)” are related to kinship. Understanding of kinship terminology in Hindi is extremely important as it is not only unique and complicated but also essential for it reflects the lives of Indian people. These words give us an opportunity to deepen our understanding about family system in India. Also, the title of the book khicrī (खिचड़ी) is equally significant, as cuisine is indispensable part of Indian culture. We learn the terms related to Indian cuisine such as “dāl (pulse; दाल)” and “cāval (rice; चावल)”, as well as the fact that they are crucial to Indian people. Interestingly enough, some English words need attention too, because they don’t always mean the same thing in Hindi and Japanese. Let’s take “hotel” for example. In Hindi “hoṭel (hotel; होटल)” includes the place only to dine at, while for a Japanese, the term “hoteru (hotel; ホテル)” is a place to stay in as

well.

The final and the strongest reason for selecting “*Khicri ... Ek Lokkathā*” is that it is a story written for Indian children. It may sound like a paradox, but a story written for native readers is more valuable for foreigners learning Hindi because its language is entirely natural. This is an essential difference from ordinary textbooks written for foreign learners. It enables the language learners understand the minute nuances and expressions of the native speakers. Another benefit is that we can have fun in repeating and reciting the sentences in the story. As Kṛṣṇa Kumār, an educationist, puts “Being attracted to stories is fundamental part of human nature” (Kumār 2019: 42-43), stories are there for entertaining us. We have similar stories in Japanese to “*Khicri ... Ek Lokkathā*”, so some of us can feel familiarity with Indian stories. In conclusion, this story provides us with the grammatical examples, cultural information and a plot interesting enough to read over and over.

On top of all that, I’d like to value and appreciate the splendid illustrations by Durgābāi Vyām, a prominent Gond artist. It opens up the door to the rich world of Indian folk art. As a teacher, I hope through these storybooks my students will be exposed to the traditional “Indian” illustrations and art rather than non-characteristic or universal images. One of my students said to me a few years after reading, “I remember the book *Khicri* very well”. I believe that a story book created with deep consideration for children would have additional value, that a conventional language textbook misses to offer.

2.2 A case-study of “Mammī kī Mez”

The next story I would like to take up is “Mammī kī Mez (Mummy’s Desk; मम्मी की मेज़)”, which appeared in the bi-monthly magazine *Sāikil* (Cycle; साइकिल) published by Ektara. It is a lovely story of a young girl secretly sitting on her mother’s desk and imitating her work during her absence. The girl writes a letter to herself as no one writes her. She seals, opens and reads the letter just the way her mother does. One day she found a letter addressed to her on the desk, with a photo of herself sitting at the desk. The story ends here, but we feel warm to find that the mother also enjoys watching her daughter secretly.

Let us take a closer look at the benefits this story brings to Japanese learners. From a teacher’s viewpoint, the story is abundant in good and distinctive examples of noun and verb. There is a variety of things or nouns on the mother’s desk – a pen stand, pens, a pencil, a piece of paper, a paper-weight, and letters etc. When I told my students to match the item in the story with its counterpart in the illustration, they enjoyed the activity. This activity turned out effective to direct their attention to the number of nouns. As the Japanese language doesn’t have specific forms indicating singular and plural, it is usual that we don’t refer to the number of nouns

when speaking in Japanese. I have often seen the students overlooking the number of nouns both in my Hindi classes and English. While the difference between “ciṭṭhī (a letter; चिट्ठी)” and “ciṭṭhiyā (letters; चिट्ठियाँ)” is clear, some words like “per (tree; पेड़)” require special attention. For example, the difference of pers (पेड़) in the sentences “Khirī se per dikhte haī. (Tree are visible from the window.; खिड़की से पेड़ दिखते हैं।)” and “Lāl phul nīm ke per par khil jāte haī. (Red flowers bloom on the Neem tree.; लाल फूल नीम के पेड़ पर खिल जाते हैं।)” is not so clear at first glance. In this case, I suggest as ‘in many cases we can judge the number of a nouns from other parts of the sentence. In the first sentence, the verb “dikhte haī (दिखते हैं)” means the “per (पेड़)” is plural. Because if “per (पेड़)” represents singular, the verb should be “dikhtā hai (दिखता है)”. In the second sentence, you should pay attention to the part “per par (पेड़ पर)”. If “per (पेड़)” represents plural, it should be “perō par (पेड़ों पर)”.’

Considering the forms of verbs, this story can be divided largely into two parts – one consisting of general present and the other perfective form. We can understand that general present expresses the habitual and repeated actions through the sentences such as “Jab ve apne kamre mẽ nahī hotī, to māi uskī kursī par baiṭh jāti hū. (When she is not in her room, I take her chair.; जब वे अपने कमरे में नहीं होतीं, तो मैं उनकी कुर्सी पर बैठ जाती हूँ।)” and “Māi dhyān se sab cīzē unkī jagahō par rakh detī hū. (I carefully put all the things away into their original places.; मैं ध्यान से सब चीज़ें उनकी जगहों पर रख देती हूँ।)”. Perfective form, on the other hand, indicates the actions which is completed and done only once as the movements on the day the girl received the letter indicate, such as “Āj skūl se āne ke bād māi mammī kī kursī par baiṭhī. (Today I took my mother's chair after coming back from school.; आज स्कूल से आने के बाद मैं मम्मी की कुर्सी पर बैठी।)” and “Māine kaṭar se liphāphā kholā. (I opened an envelope with an with a cutter knife.; मैंने कटर से लिफाफा खोला।)”. Needless to say, “Mammī kī Mez” also includes the examples like “apnā (अपना)”, and sentences using the postposition ne (ने) such as “Māine ... kholā. (I opened ...; मैंने ... खोला)” and etc. as in “*Khichī ... Ek Lokkathā*”. Reading different stories allows us to consolidate our understanding of the occasion where each expression applies.

2.3 A case-study of “*Suar kā Dost*”

The third story I would like to pick up is “*Suar kā Dost*” (*A Pig's Friend*; सुअर का दोस्त) published by Muskaan, an NGO which is engaged in educating children from marginalized communities. It is a story of a lonely pig searching for a friend. One day the pig, rolling in the mud, thought of going out for making friends with someone. He came across a horse, a camel and a monkey, all of whom declined his offer insultingly. Finally, he met a donkey, who willingly agreed to become his friend, and the two enjoyed rolling in the mud together. This story is also written in natural Hindi and includes sentences such as “Rāste mẽ use ek ghorā milā. (He met a horse

on the way.; रास्ते में उसे एक घोड़ा मिला।)” as an example of the dative case using the postposition “ko (को)” and “Suar ne ghoṛe se pūchā (A pig asked a horse; सुअर ने घोड़े से पूछा)” as an example of the ergative case using the postposition “ne (ने)”. It is composed of about 30 short sentences and has the recurrent patterns of proposals and refusals. I found it suitable for practice drills and so gave a recitation assignment to students.

Now let me examine what the story teaches us. There are so many stories and tales featuring animals in Indian languages. We may regard this story as just one of them, but I have something more to have my students to look at: social connotations. “Suar (pig; सुअर)” and “gadhā (donkey; गधा)” are not only regarded as foolish animals but are also used as abuse in Hindi. But the pig in this story has fortitude and never gives up finding friends in spite of being abused until he finds a real one. In the end, the pig and donkey enjoy themselves without criticizing any other animals. While on the contrary, the other animals deny pig’s friendship with prejudice. For example, the horse says, “Maī choṭe jānvarō se dostī nahī kartā. Maī to sirph ghoṛō se dostī kartā hū. (I don’t make friends with small animals. I only make friends with fellow horses.; मैं छोटे जानवरों से दोस्ती नहीं करता। मैं तो सिर्फ घोड़ों से दोस्ती करता हूँ।)” He thinks light of physically smaller species and assumes an exclusive attitude. Next, the camel says, “Tum to kīcaṛ mẽ rahte ho. Mujhe tumhārā dost nahī bannā. (You stay in the mud. I’m not the one to become your friend.; तुम तो कीचड़ में रहते हो। मुझे तुम्हारा दोस्त नहीं बनना।)” He despises the place the pig stays in and declines his proposal. Lastly, the monkey says, “Tum merī tarah kūd nahī pāoge. Ham dostī kaise nibhāēge? (You can’t leap [from tree to tree] like me. How can our friendship be possible?; तुम मेरी तरह कूद नहीं पाओगे। हम दोस्ती कैसे निभाएँगे?)” He disapproves of inability of the pig and denies their friendship. The story certainly is a deep reflection of the human world. Essentially, the basis on which these animals discriminate against the pig are his species, living condition and physical attributes. Reading this story in the first year’s class leads me to introduce the social structure behind the discrimination. And I think it important for us to pay attention to this aspect of Indian society and the activities by the organizations including Muskaan. It impressed me that one of my students associated this story with a Dalit’s story which she was reading in her third-year class. That was when I realized that stories could remain in the students’ mind ever after.

3. Limitations in Using Children’s Books in Classes

Even though children’s books provide so many benefits, however, there are challenges too while taking up these texts. First of all, it is difficult to find stories to meet the students’ needs. The first-year students are supposed to master the basic grammar and learn standard, correct Hindi. In fact, I have given up so many

attractive stories owing to being too colloquial and not grammatical. For example, every time we see “vo (वो)” instead of “voh (वह)”, and “hūṃ (हूँ)” not “hũ (हँ)”, we teachers explain the situation and tell to remember the correct spelling. Too many exceptions require a lengthy explanation and distract the students. In my opinion, it is desirable that in class stories should be adopted to enhance and supplement the basic grammatical knowledge. The length of a story is another major point of concern because class hours are fixed.

The second issue relates to the content; many of children's stories seem childish and boring given the university students are over 18 years old. It is important but difficult to select suitable materials. However, I have an expectation that children's books will feature a wider range of topics. As Shashi Sablok at Ektara, says “We think that we can speak to children about almost anything. Bachche nahi samjhenge [Children won't understand – translation mine] – that idea we leave outside”. Actually Muskaan has also published some books related to complicated social matters like gender issues (as in *The New Potter*, and *Guthli Has Wings*) and lifestyle of tribal people (as in *The Pardhi Rule*), which are unfortunately available only in English now. I hope I can find more and more children's books which will convey various aspects of Indian society in simple Hindi language.

4. Conclusion

My own first Hindi book was a textbook for elementary school used in India, which my teacher adopted in his class. Though it was more than thirty years ago, but I still recollect some sentences from it. Moreover, I still remember the pleasure of touching “something Indian” with my hand. I used to feel that Indian story books depict Indian society more vividly than any other textbooks. Now a wide variety of quality children's books in Hindi has become available. They could tell the now students the contemporary Indian society and encourage them to study Hindi more effectively.

As Dr. Ved Prakash Singh notes on his teaching experiences at Osaka University, “one of the problems I noticed is that they [students] have almost no chances to study and speak in Hindi other than classes”(Singh 2018: 234, translation mine), I admit to a lack of opportunities to use Hindi in our daily life. Though “Hindi shower” so to speak seems unviable in Japan, we still have the advantage of choosing and creating our own learning environment unlike native speakers. Then we could teach and learn a decent and likable Hindi. It can be said that children's books are one of practical means for that goal.

NOTES

- 1) “use (उसे)” is a form of personal pronoun which includes the postposition “ko (को)” in it.

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