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16 Fiji Hindi in Fiji

Nikhat Shameem

Introduction

Fiji Hindi (FH), which developed as a result of plantation contact during the indenture period (1870–1920), is identified by about 37.5% of Fiji's total population and by a considerable diasporic Indo-Fijian population as their mother tongue (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2007; Mangubhai & Mugler, 2006, p. 97). Although this speech community perceives FH as its heritage language, an identifiable generic term has never been adopted to describe this or any other heritage language in Fiji.¹ FH is the language of *girmitya* descendants – indentured laborers brought to Fiji by the British to work on sugar and cotton plantations from 1870 to 1920.²

The absence of a label for heritage languages is not unique to Fiji. The definition changes from place to place, differing with community power, language proficiency, and individual heritage (see Fishman, 2001). Hornberger and Wang (2008) define heritage language users as individuals with familial or ancestral ties to a language other than English who exercise their agency in classifying themselves as users of a heritage language. They state that this determines how these individuals negotiate their identity with other dominant cultures and standard languages they come into contact with (Hornberger & Wang, 2008, p. 6). The critical aspect of this definition requires self-selective membership of the heritage language community.

Differing definitions of heritage languages, when incorporated into policy, affect who takes responsibility for their inclusion in all spheres of life and the resources needed for their maintenance and transmission – the government, the educational system, the communities, or individuals themselves. Indo-Fijians, who learn their heritage language FH at home, have only interpersonal listening and speaking skills in FH, which is a preliterate language. FH is not taught at school. In 1987, Indo-Fijians were at the brunt of a racially motivated military coup, which saw large numbers emigrate to the diaspora in the following two decades. Very little state support has been extended to maintain or extend the use of FH as anything other than a conversational preliterate language.

Positive attitudes to FH, which is informally standardized and used as the language of choice for most intraethnic communication, means that Indo-Fijians feel strong ownership towards it. The shared history of *girmitya* and the historical

evolution of the language in the plantations a century ago underpin and influence the 'heritage' links that Indo-Fijians have to their language (Mugler & Tent, 1998; Siegel, 1973). As researchers point out, pockets of proficient speakers continue to exist in Fiji, among speakers of the other 'Indian' minority languages of Punjabi, Gujarati, and the Dravidian languages. Despite the presence and use of these other heritage languages, the language preferred for interpersonal communication among Indo-Fijians, in mono- and multiracial settings, and in urban and rural areas is FH (Mangubhai & Mugler, 2006, p. 60; Shameem, 2002b, p. 280). FH is an identity marker for all Indo-Fijians who consider their language Indigenous to Fiji (Shameem, 1994).

For heritage languages to be viable languages of communication and learning, a strong policy response is needed. Fiji's 2013 constitution recognizes the roles that English, Fijian, and FH play in Fiji but does not single out any official language. A translation of the constitution into *Shudh Hindi* (SH),³ using Devanagari script, is available for the first time on the Government of Fiji's website (as is a Fijian version). FH is recognized in the preamble as the language of descendants of the Indian laborers from British India (Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, 2013, p. 1). In the 1997 Constitution, there was greater recognition of FH as an official language of Fiji even though the language identified as the official language was 'Hindustani' rather than 'Fiji Hindi', causing some confusion around whether the named language was FH or Hindustani (Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, 1998, p. 2). Hindustani, a century ago, was the label given to the 'mixed' Hindi-Urdu spoken language in India to encourage Hindu-Muslim integration and is much closer to standard SH than FH. It is also the standard spoken language, which is taught in 'Hindi' classes in mono-ethnic Indian and some multiracial schools in Fiji. Schools in Fiji were established by the colonial government and the missions and then later by Hindu and Muslim organizations along ethnic and religious lines, which made it simpler to choose the language of instruction and the languages for study. To this day, these divisions, although much more blurred, still exist.

In the past few decades, there has been recognition of FH as the heritage language of Indo-Fijians, evidenced by the call for mandatory teaching of conversational Hindi alongside Fijian in schools (Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, 2013). Social media websites linking Indo-Fijian Facebook users to YouTube videos of jokes and skits are widely accessed by FH speakers in Fiji and in the diaspora. However, despite its increasing use in alternative media outlets, on Fiji's Hindi radio stations, and in film, any standardization efforts have been initiated by individual writers using the Roman or Devanagari script with personal variations in spelling (Bible Society of the South Pacific, 2002; Pillai, 1990; Subramani, 2000, 2001). This is so for many heritage languages around the world. Where state support is not available or the language has not been formally standardized, individuals creatively use their heritage language to express the strong messages they have (Fishman, 2001).

Because of its colonial heritage, its role in the Pacific, and its close relationship with Australia and New Zealand, Fiji has adopted the use of English in most formal and official spheres. Gradually, English has replaced the vernaculars

as the medium of instruction in most primary schools with significant numbers of Indo-Fijian children (Shameem, 2002a, 2007b). English use is pervasive in many spheres of economic life, especially during interethnic communication in the larger urban centers (Tent & Mugler, 1996) and since the early 1970s even within urban Indo-Fijian homes (Moag, 1979; Naidu, 1980). For Indo-Fijians in urban areas, English may be used for intraethnic communication, although FH and Fijian are also used regularly for intra- and interethnic communication in rural Fiji (Mugler & Tent, 1998; Shameem, 2002b).

Fijian has a standardized orthography and is used a lot more in formal domains than FH, which is seen as a language for ‘humor’, family, and home, an attitude articulated both by Indo-Fijians who have emigrated to the diaspora and among school children and their teachers in Fiji (Shameem, 1994, 2004). When used in cross-cultural discourse, with non-Indo-Fijians, a ‘pidgin’, FH could be used by both interlocutors, even if one of them is Indo-Fijian (Siegel, 1973, 1987).

This chapter discusses the ad hoc development of Fiji’s informal language policies, especially in education, in this complex plurilingual environment. It identifies the language proficiency, use, and attitudes towards FH among FH speakers in Fiji to demonstrate how a *girmitya* heritage language such as FH is faring 100 years after indenture was abolished. Perhaps the strongest contributing factor in the recent rise in status and use of FH has been its support through social media, which is now at the forefront of an inadvertent Indo-Fijian culture and language revival among Indo-Fijians in Fiji and in the diaspora.

Background and history of Fiji Hindi

The era of colonialism and the shift of human labor has seen the world alter in complex ways in the past two centuries with resulting effects on languages. Of the 60,965 Indian indentured laborers⁴ who came to Fiji from 1870 to 1920, 30,000 chose to remain (Gillion, 1977). The current generation has few, if any, ties to India. The laborers spoke a range of Indian languages and dialects, not all of them mutually intelligible. The majority of the *girmitya* were either Awadhi or Bhojpuri speakers from northern India; hence, these two dialects had the greatest influence on FH. Dravidian languages, which were later arrivals during the indenture period, Fijian and English, as well as the languages of the free traders who arrived after indenture have also influenced FH (Siegel, 1987). In 1929, W. J. Hands, a British missionary and linguist who had worked in India, called FH a virtually unrecognizable form of Hindustani (as cited in Siegel, 1987). FH is now the home language and the language of identity and culture for Indo-Fijians in Fiji and for a considerable number in the diaspora. Indo-Fijians also understand the standard, SH, and speak it with varying degrees of fluency because of its influence as language of choice on formal occasions, within the media, as a school subject, and as the Bollywood language.

In 1987, a racially motivated military coup carved a rift between the Indo and Fijian populations, with nationalist Fijians asking for *girmitya* descendants to be repatriated to India (Robertson & Tamanisau, 1988). Political and social

insecurity in the two decades following the 1987 coup led to Fiji's Indo-Fijian population falling from 48.7% to the current 37.5%, mainly through emigration (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2007). Such a drop in population has implications for the status and functions of a language, both for everyday use and as a language for learning.

In the 2013 Constitution, all Fiji citizens are given the common label 'Fijian' (Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, 2013, p. 1). While the intention may be to unite Fiji citizens under a common name, for Indo-Fijians, it confuses the line between their Indo-Fijian identity as *girmitya* and their wish to be part of the integrated fabric of Fiji, their home for the past century and half and towards which they feel very nationalistic. Emigration has not changed that. Writers on heritage languages believe that ethnic identity largely depends on a people's 'self-identity', and this centers in relational and social groupings, not just in naming systems. Furthermore, they say, language is a key factor in any group's self-identity (Hornberger & Wang, 2008; Jenkins, 2013).

The language situation in Fiji is complex. Aural and oral proficiency in their heritage languages and in English among all Fijians is high. English is often chosen for communication in urban areas (Mangubhai & Mugler, 2006; Mugler & Tent, 1998). Indo-Fijian urbanization has been common with the expiry of leases on Indo-Fijian managed cane farms since the late 1990s. Chain migration after the 1987 military coup, the gradual decline of the Indo-Fijian population, urbanization, and the preliterate nature of FH put additional pressure on FH.

Language policies in Fiji

Ad hoc language policies in Fiji have been influenced by colonial language policies and the Australian and New Zealand education systems. Teachers in Fiji schools usually came from within the community, since schools were established along ethnic or religious lines. Indian 'purists' who arrived in Fiji after indenture in the early part of last century were appalled at the merging of Hindu and Muslim religious practices among the remaining *girmitya* and proceeded to re-religionize Indo-Fijian Hindus and Muslims and to prioritize the teaching, learning, and formal use of SH and Urdu (Gillion, 1977, p. 107). Anyone with oral proficiency in these standard languages was held in great regard.

Over the years, while competence in SH and Urdu has declined, there has been a revived interest in FH in Fiji and abroad through social media. In Fiji, the respect for people being able to speak in SH or Urdu has been replaced by ambivalence on the choice of formal language, although English is still preferred over FH (Mangubhai & Mugler, 2006; Shameem, 2004).

With the interest in national integration through the constitutional designation of the common name 'Fijian' to all citizens, the Ministry of Education, through its Education Sector Strategic Development Plans (ESSDP) 2012–2014 and 2015–2018 and the Fiji National Curriculum Framework developed in 2007 (revised 2013), strongly supports the learning and transmission of all Fiji's cultures in the multi-ethnic population. Plans for the implementation of a language

policy, referred to as a target in the ESSDP 2012–2014 are not as clear (Fiji Curriculum Framework, 2007; Fiji Ministry of Education, 2015). A national language policy or a languages-in-education policy, which is publicly available, will provide safeguards for an at-risk language such as FH.

Language policy in education fails to be real if it does not accurately reflect patterns of proficiency and use in the community. A mapping of skills, gaps, and needs is required so that policy response and appropriate actions are directed to maintenance and transmission efforts. The past decade has seen little research on the status and use of FH in Fiji that may support policy decisions. The last comprehensive survey undertaken by Tent and Mugler (1996) determined language proficiency and use of all Indian languages among Indo-Fijians.⁵ A survey of language proficiency, use, and attitudes in Fiji primary school classrooms added to data on Indo-Fijian children's competencies and patterns of use in their known languages (Shameem, 2002b). A new study focusing on language proficiency, use, and attitudes in the Fiji Indo-Fijian community is needed to determine what the current needs of the community are in order for appropriate policy decisions to be made.

In 2016, Mohit Prasad of the University of the South Pacific, launched a language survey to compare FH in Fiji with use of heritage languages in Canada, which are protected through policy (M. Prasad, personal communication, February 24, 2016). This is an ideal opportunity for up-to-date data to be used for language planning. With global trends of language shift, loss and death of indentity languages, documenting current status, and supporting transmission efforts means the language will have a greater chance of survival and transmission.

Language in education

Research evidence, especially since the 1980s, showing the academic and social benefits of additive bilingualism and late exit bilingual and multilingual programs (Cummins, 1996), has barely influenced education policy in Fiji. This is because the colonial education system that Fiji inherited in 1970 at independence, has, since the late 1940s, supported the use of English as the medium of instruction in Fiji schools. In addition, the absence of any constitutional protection, or a formal language policy protecting Fiji's heritage languages, means that the government has no obligation to provide services in these languages.⁶ The Fiji education sector continues to support the transitional use of languages in the classroom (which really means submersion in English as early as possible), and teachers make ad hoc attempts to integrate heritage language learning and use into the heavily culture-focused curriculum (Fiji Ministry of Education, 2015; Shameem 2002b, p. 280). In 2005, the Ministry of Education released a press statement on the proposed launch of a compulsory vernacular⁷ teaching program in schools (Rarabici, 2005); the current status of this is unclear. If FH is taught at all, it is as a second language, for non-FH speakers rather than as a mother tongue or heritage language for Indo-Fijians, which means that its teaching pedagogy is influenced by this goal.

The Fiji Curriculum Framework (2007, revised 2013), the ESSDP (2012–2014 and 2015–2018) and the Annual Reports of the Ministry of Education (2016) give little guidance on any language-in-education policy or on methods of language teaching and use in schools. Teaching guidelines or a syllabus for FH teaching and learning (as a mother tongue or as an additional language) are unavailable on the Internet or in online curriculum documents. Reference to the compulsory teaching of conversational FH and Fijian in schools is unaccompanied by references or links to resources. Ministry resources show the availability of a good curriculum on cross-cultural teaching with the different ethnic groups in Fiji; language studies could systematically be integrated into this (Fiji Ministry of Education, 2016).

The curriculum framework names Fijian, Hindi [*sic*], Urdu, Punjabi, Tamil and Rotuman⁸ as languages that can be taught as school subjects from early childhood to Form Seven. This move may protect some of the heritage languages of Fiji, although not all are included in this list. Unfortunately, positive statements do not always translate to action, and communities continue to face difficulties in accessing practical and financial support to maintain, preserve, or extend their heritage languages or to use them as languages for learning, even informally, in the classroom.

Language proficiency

Indo-Fijians have varying proficiencies in the languages they know. They speak FH fluently; have varying degrees of proficiency in English and SH; and have minimal competence in Fijian, Urdu, and the few remaining Indian heritage languages, such as Gujarati, Punjabi, Malayalam, and Tamil (Mugler & Tent, 1998; Shameem, 2002a).

All 48 case study students from eight rural and urban Fiji schools who were interviewed and responded to questions requiring answers on a self-reported language proficiency scale (validated by matched teacher perception of student proficiency) had complex multilingual skills in their speech repertoire, which were not being harnessed for learning (Shameem, 2002a).

To determine their proficiency level, respondents rated their ability to perform functional tasks using each of their languages. The tasks were graded from easy and conversational to more demanding in terms of content, purpose, and interlocutor (see Shameem, 1994, 2002a for scale). While teachers and their students generally had matched views of high student oral FH and aural and oral English proficiency, the research showed that teachers had little knowledge of learner aural FH proficiency, which was not assessed at school (Shameem, 2002a).

In addition, this study showed an increased English preference for all classroom functions, and a significantly lower mean oral FH proficiency among class 6 students in mono-ethnic Indian and multi-ethnic schools. Class 1 and class 3 children who participated in this study scored higher on the self-report FH proficiency scale than class 6 children (Shameem, 2002a). This is a worrying trend, which without specific school level intervention will be difficult to reverse. FH

proficiency was significantly higher in rural schools, while English language proficiency across both urban and rural locations was matched. Rural school children were acquiring English and maintaining their FH. Literacy in English surpassed all other languages. Children had minimal ability to read or write SH (offered in Hindu and secular schools) or Urdu (Muslim schools).

Whether the new emphasis on teaching conversational languages has begun to address this shift noted in schools is not clear, visible, or easily extractable from online government documents. According to UNESCO's World Education Report for Fiji, conversational languages were to be taught in Fiji classrooms from class 5 in 2008 (UNESCO, 2011). Attempts to engage with various members of the Ministry of Education (including old associates) via email for a response to queries on the status of the program and whether they are primarily for mother-tongue users or for speakers of other languages were unsuccessful.

Language use

A responsive language policy identifies who speaks what language to whom and when (Fishman, 1972). In Fiji, language use is diglossic, with language choice dependent on interlocutor, function, and situation. Fijians use Fijian, and Indo-Fijians use FH (which they code switch with Fiji English in urban areas) as the language of intraethnic communication. Fiji English is used for interethnic communication, with some use of Fijian or FH in rural Fiji. English use in Fiji ranges from the acrolectal variety for formal use and a basilectal variety (Fiji English) for interethnic communication (Tent & Mugler, 1996). English is generally the language of instruction, with other languages SH, Urdu, Fijian, a Dravidian language, Punjabi, or Gujarati taught as subjects in various arrangements, depending on the ethnic composition of the school and the targeted learner (Shameem, 2007a).

In the classroom, interlocutors include peers, teachers, and headteachers. The purpose of discourse influences language choice. Research shows that teacher-pupil consultation is often in English, but conversations between peers who share the same ethnicity might be in FH or Fijian. Peers of different ethnic backgrounds prefer to use Fiji English (Shameem, 2007b).

Language use in Fiji's education system is perceived as transitional. English is a language in waiting, and children ostensibly use their mother tongue until they are competent enough to transit to using English for learning. Research shows that on the main island of Viti Levu, this transitional system is a myth in primary schools, where Indo-Fijian children make up 50% or more of the school population. In eight representatively sampled schools, FH had a limited classroom role, with its main contribution being its support for English acquisition. All meaningful and cognitively demanding work was done using English. Teachers communicated in English in all except the vernacular classes. This was so in urban, rural, mono-ethnic, and multi-ethnic primary schools. There was little evidence of FH use in education, except as a language for discipline, or rarely, for explanation to a child struggling to understand something. Even to call the program an early-exit bilingual program would be untrue (Shameem, 2002b, 2007b).

Support for FH continues to be community and family driven, and the greatest use is between intimate interlocutors, in the home, in the community, with family, and in other informal contexts. Few, if any, school texts are written in any language other than English. For formal situations, Indo-Fijians prefer to use English with some attempt at times to use SH (Shameem, 2002b). Two urban studies, in 1986 with preschoolers, and in 1998 with class-one children, concurred that submersion in English was pervasive and regular in both situations (Deverell, 1986; Lotherington, 1998).

Geraghty (1984), seven years after independence, pointed out that past taboos on the use of the mother tongue and the ad hoc nature of bilingual education in Fiji was leading to fluency only in Fiji English (referred to as basilectal Fiji English by Tent & Mugler, 1996) and semi-lingualism in both Standard English and Fiji's heritage languages. Fiji English, as Fiji's main urban *lingua franca*, is now used extensively in urban and rural Fiji (Geraghty, 1984; Mangubhai & Mugler, 2006).

Language attitudes

Attitudes to language and language varieties are notoriously difficult to assess. In a complex situation like Fiji's, where at least two varieties of each language exist, attitudes to languages have shaped the difference between school language policies and actual practice. Attitudes to language use in education systems in multilingual societies are often responsible for the shift and loss of languages and shape current day declining use of heritage languages (Benton, 1981). The fate of Plantation FH and the death of the diasporic Hindis that formed during indenture (Barz & Siegel, 1988; Mesthrie, 1992) show the vulnerability of FH.

Recent research on the relationship between attitudes to a language and successful language learning confirms that younger children are heavily influenced by the attitudes of their parents, peers, and teachers (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). Parents also push for school-level policies without understanding the implications of a populist stand. Such was the parental desire for English-medium schooling even in the 1920s among Indo-Fijians (Report of the Education Commission, 1926). Later, with all high stakes exams (from New Zealand) in English, it made no sense to parents that their children should use their mother tongue at school or for learning (Geraghty, 1984; Shameem, 1995).

In Fiji's multilingual context, the use of many languages, language choice, frequency of code mixing and code switching in different contexts, multiracial classrooms, and varying proficiencies in the various languages children bring to school make the choice of language of instruction or learning more difficult. With no clear policy on how this should be done and little preservice training on managing multilingual classrooms, most teachers and schools follow their instincts, which invariably means the increasing use of English from the day the child enters school (Lotherington, 1998; Shameem 2002b, 2007a). Deverell notes some use of vernaculars mainly to facilitate use of English in her 1986 study with preschoolers (Deverell, 1986).

Attitudes to the status and maintenance of FH in Fiji vary considerably. In 2002, a FH translation of the Bible invoked fresh debate on whether a bastardized, low-status language such as FH should be used for translating the revered Bible. A mostly aging, but influential Indo-Fijian population is ready to show disdain at efforts to standardize FH or to use it in formal contexts (Mangubhai & Mugler, 2006; New Zealand Indian Newslink, 2011).

The 2000 Education Commission's strong recommendation for a Fiji language policy has been lost somewhat in the political events since then (Report of the Fiji Islands Education Commission/Panel, 2000). Although the role of FH as the main language of communication among Indo-Fijians in Fiji seems assured, any expansion into other domains is still uncertain.

Early this century, research in Fiji schools showed children and teachers had positive attitudes towards all their languages and saw a role for each one, depending on the function and context. Participants said that the role of English in the classroom was clear but that they strongly favored the informal use of FH in school playgrounds, a turnaround from 60 years ago, when schools banned the use of the heritage languages altogether. While the research showed widespread belief in the usefulness of English as medium of instruction, responses to questions on possible FH use showed support for its integrative use in the classroom as language of learning (Shameem, 2004). A rationale for the functional use of languages at schools and the possible uses of all languages as resources for learning could be part of guidelines prepared by the Ministry for teachers and parents (see suggested guidelines in Shameem, 2007a, pp. 42–44).

A clear policy directive and teacher education support for teaching multilinguals will help teachers, parents, and learners understand how a heritage language may be used at school to achieve learning outcomes. In research conducted by Shameem (2004), neither the eight headteachers nor the 24 teachers who participated had bi- or multilingual education or TESOL training. All believed that English should be taught as early as possible in the school system and, of greater concern, was the belief held by two thirds of these participants that English should be taught monolingually in the school system (Shameem, 2004, 2007a). Teacher education programs on classroom multilingualism for pluralistic goals will contribute considerably to a change in attitudes.

Current developments

The 2000 Education Commission recommended a plurilingual education system for Fiji with defined instructional roles for SH, English, and Fijian and strong support for the teaching of FH as L1 and L2 (Subramani, 2000, p. 292). This, however, has not happened.

Although in the past three decades, increasing numbers of Indo-Fijian writers, artists, stand-up comedians, and songwriters are expressing themselves in FH, these efforts are not enough to bring about a radical change at the level of policy support for FH. Two further Fiji coups in 2000 and 2006 have hindered progress on language policy initiatives.

Politically, Fiji is stable, with national elections held in 2015, after nine years of military rule. This is a good time for a new Education Commission to call for a clear language-in-education policy based on research evidence. With evidence of Fiji's linguistic profile, policy interventions can be targeted for preserving, protecting, and enhancing Fiji's precious linguistic resources.

Expanding Fiji Hindi use

Recently, FH use for literary purposes has received a tremendous boost from talented Indo-Fijian artists. Fusion of Indo-Fijian and Fijian cultures is a common theme, as is the desire for separateness – an identity that is linked to the history and culture of each community. Artists who have devised their own nonstandardized Romanized FH script include Raymond Pillai, who wrote the first FH play, *Adhura Sapna* (unpublished until 2001), which was to enjoy notoriety in its stage and film versions. When staged in Wellington, New Zealand, in 1993,⁹ more than half of the 80 who returned questionnaires after the play expressed discomfort with the 'low' language of the play. The film version (produced and directed by Indo-Fijian Vimal Reddy) was banned in Fiji by the censor board because its 'racial' themes would have incited ethnic tensions (Fairfax Media, 2007). Subramani (2001) published *Dauka Puraan*, which although a significant achievement, has been more talked about than read widely. His second FH novel, *Fiji Maa*, is in press. Subramani uses the Devanagari script – a deterrent for Indo-Fijian readers with limited SH literacy competence. Film maker Satish Rai's FH film, *Sahara*, which screened in Fiji, Australia, the US, and the UK, explores the contentious racial and political issues, which Pillai had earlier explored (Satish Rai, personal communication, March 6, 2016).

Most Indo-Fijian writers choose English as their medium in the absence of a standardized FH orthography. Writings by Indo-Fijians in English explore a number of themes which concern this community. They form an excellent pool of resources for specialized culture, literature, language, or history studies and can be easily integrated into school curricula. Some already are, although the change of literature texts in Fiji schools takes time. With the exploration of more modern themes, Indo-Fijian literature will appeal to learners.

A group of Indo-Fijian academics at the University of the South Pacific have established an annual FH forum called *Kaise Baat*, which has been attracting linguists, scholars, journalists, song writers and writers to a shared space (Mohit Prasad, personal communication, March 3, 2016). This space encourages and rejuvenates writers who wish to use this medium of expression.

The most popular use of FH outside the home is by the Hindi radio stations, where its use alongside SH creates interest and lends local humor. Songwriters, too, are crafting local *sobar*¹⁰ to tell the story of *girmit* and other themes salient to the Indo-Fijian experience. YouTube videos¹¹ in FH, featuring local and diasporic Indo-Fijians, are extremely popular on social media and have a substantive following in Fiji and overseas. These often feature young people who take a gender-balanced look at Indo-Fijian culture – especially spoofing cultural and

language nuances and practices that are endemic to the culture and language of the Indo-Fijians. In the past decade, websites such as *Ethnologue* and *Wikipedia* have included FH in their list of world languages – a significant move for the language, as recognition is the first step to preservation and expansion (Lewis, Simons, & Fennig, 2016; Wikipedia, 2008).

Conclusions

For FH to survive as a living heritage language, an amendment to the 2013 Constitution and the Bill of Rights is needed for inclusion of a clause protecting all Fiji languages by name, roles, and functions and with provision for their preservation, teaching, and transmission. The current Constitution includes a strong component on culture preservation and transmission, and language needs similar attention.

Following the amendment to the 2013 Constitution, the Education Act (currently of 1978) needs revision to incorporate curriculum and assessment needs around the teaching and learning of languages. The Act, a legal document, can call for an Education Commission to support a language-in-education policy as an ESSDP priority.

In line with the revision of the 1978 Education Act and the recommendations of an Education Commission, the establishment of a commission for the preservation of heritage languages (a Fiji Heritage Language Commission) would regulate and preserve all Fiji languages. This would support all heritage languages of Fiji. Research on proficiencies, use, and attitudes to Fiji's languages as one of the priorities of the Commission is critical in determining policy. Earlier language surveys will provide baseline evidence for maintenance or shift.

The UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) provides clear obligations for the state to protect the languages of its linguistic groups. Attention to expansion and transmission of FH would be an important step in the right direction for Fiji.

Evidence from commissioned research should inform language policy development, education sector planning, and the development of a department and school level strategy. The curriculum framework should reflect how languages should be taught, learned, and used in Fiji classrooms. Some guidelines on learner choice of language for group and peer discussions in the classroom would be helpful for teachers who do not share the language of all their learners. The Commission would need to work closely with the Curriculum Development Unit of the Ministry for development of a standardized FH orthography to support creative literacy in the FH syllabus.

A syllabus that teaches FH as a heritage language needs also to teach about the language. A component of study must be devoted to *girit* and the history and background of the Indo-Fijians. For example, the BBC documentary *How Britain Re-invented Slavery* (BBC, 2012) and the work of Brij Lal (1983), a prolific writer on the subject, could easily be incorporated into a responsive syllabus. Dhupelia-Mesthrie (2000) presents an eloquent picture essay on the wider *girit* experience. Other readings could include autobiographies of influential MP, A.

D. Patel, who founded Fiji's sound pension scheme; Vijay R. Singh, another former MP and a strong advocate of labor law; Jai Ram Reddy, who was to preside in the commission of enquiry into the Rwandan genocide; and Anand Satyanand, New Zealand Governor General. Some of this work can be easily simplified for younger learners. Other courses offered under this syllabus could be media, communication, and language studies, linguistics, and applied linguistics – in short, a structured syllabus with specific learning and assessment outcomes.

Indo-Fijian women have played important roles in Indo-Fijian history with far less fanfare; the work of these women will need documenting and writing before incorporation into the syllabus, a priority area for a Fiji Heritage Language Commission.

The best lessons are learned from other similar contexts. The Commission would need to organize several research studies, including a desk review and visits to countries with multilingual populations that have also undergone this process. A particular look at middle- and low-income countries that have language policies supporting plurilingual goals may be most appropriate, although countries such as Canada and Australia also have much to contribute.

To ensure that heritage languages survive and thrive, language policies need both upstream support (through the constitution and legislation) and downstream support (through implementation at the school and community levels). For a language such as FH, the recent resurgence of interest and use in social media and film is a good sign.

After a language is accorded status as an official, national, or heritage language in a country, there is greater hope for its survival and transmission. However, even with the protection of an actionable language policy, the survival of a heritage language cannot be assured.

Notes

- 1 'Vernacular' is frequently used to describe the mother tongues of Fiji's ethnic groups.
- 2 *Girmit*, a Hindi adaptation of the word 'agreement', was used by indentured Indian laborers to identify their contractual period with the British Government to serve in the colonies. This usually heralded a five-year bondage period in Fiji, Guyana, Mauritius, South Africa, Surinam, or Trinidad. For paid passage back to India, a further five-year bondage was required. The laborers referred to themselves as *girmitya* (Dhupelia-Mesthrie, 2000; Lal, 1983).
- 3 *Shudh Hindi* is 'pure Hindi'.
- 4 Of the total 3.5 million indentured laborers who went to the colonies.
- 5 These include Punjabi, Gujarati, and Tamil.
- 6 Similar to the unofficial language situation in NZ that Seals and Olsen-Reeder (this volume) discuss.
- 7 'Vernacular' used synonymously with 'heritage'.
- 8 Indigenous to Rotuma, a small island in the northwest of Fiji, which is governed by Fiji.
- 9 Produced by Nikhat Shameem, September 1993. A questionnaire recorded audience opinions of the play. A total of 80 of 200 questionnaires were returned. The audience was Indo- and non-Indo-Fijian.

- 10 Indo-Fijians have adapted old Bhojpuri-type songs in the *sohar* form, which is popular at weddings. These days, specialist songwriters and singers tour the wedding circuit on paid demand in Fiji. Previously, the skill was passed down the generations.
- 11 These include YouTube videos (2016) of Sri Kallidai, Desi Girl, Findian Kid, Findian Diva, meezaAleeh, and Bobby Darling.

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