Teaching Hindi as a 'Second Language' to Non-Hindi Speaking Children

Predicament of learning Hindi as a new language in schools

Teaching Hindi as a Second Language to non-Hindi speaking children has long been felt to be desirable from the point of view of developing Hindi as a link language for India. Yet, from all across the country, there is plenty of anecdotal evidence to suggest that second language classes in Hindi do not adequately engage this category of students. From the early years, Hindi lessons usually tend to follow a standard pedagogy that not only becomes boring but increasingly burdensome for the student. More often than not, at the end of some 10 years of language lessons in school, the non-native learner of Hindi may just about pass the exams, but gains no proficiency in the actual use of the language. The question may well be raised—by these students and their parents—whether it is even worth teaching a second language in schools. This would be more an expression of the frustration with the language learning process (and a fear of failure in examinations), and not so much a doubting of the advantages of learning Hindi in a multi-lingual society. There is also, on the other hand, anecdotal evidence that most Indians, when thrown into a linguistic milieu other than that of their home language, in fact, seem to have the ability to pick up a new language successfully. Within a few months they are able to understand, communicate their needs and even converse with their counterparts. This evident success of informal language learning stands in sharp contrast with the failure of the formal learning of Hindi as a 'second language' in schools. Despite 50 years of a three language formula that advocates the teaching of Hindi across the states of India, Hindi still remains almost a 'foreign language' to large sections of Indians.

In this article, I will present my analysis of this situation and then suggest some principles for developing a curriculum and pedagogy of Hindi as a second language to non-Hindi speaking children. Articulation of such principles, drawing upon a range of developmental, pedagogic and linguistic considerations, and the development of a field of practical enquiry in this domain, are to my mind essential if any 'fresh air' is to blow through the process of Hindi language teaching in Indian schools.

Hindi: Second language or a 'foreign' language for some?

A word in connection with the nomenclature of 'second language' and 'foreign language'. A second language is usually defined as a language that is not used at home but is often available in ample measure in the environment. A foreign language, on the other hand, is a language to which the learner has hardly any exposure other than in the classroom. The complex linguistic map of India presents a picture that gives multiple meanings to what is ostensibly dubbed as 'second language' in school timetables. For

example, in English-medium schools within the Hindi belt, children often end up opting to study essentially what is their 'first language' ie Hindi, as a 'second language' in school (here, I call first language, the language that the child has picked up in his infancy and early childhood, without the intervention of formal schooling). In states such as Gujarat, Rajasthan and Maharashtra, where there is higher exposure to Hindi and where the similarities between script, syntax and vocabulary of the first and second language are high, the nomenclature of 'second language' comes close to the basic definition of 'second language'. As for the Telugu, Tamil and Malayalam speaking children studying in schools of South India, or children in schools of the North-east (whether the medium is English or the state language), Hindi may not quite fit the defintion of 'second language'; it is in fact no less a 'foreign language' than, say, French. For though the students may have some exposure to Bollywood movies and television serials in Hindi through the national networks, they are for the most part not much exposed to Hindi in their day-to-day life. Though the nomenclature of 'foreign language' might strike an odd note with regard to Hindi in India, pedagogically speaking this seems to describe the reality of the latter section of students more closely. For essentially the difference between learning a second and a foreign language lies in the amount and type of exposure to the language outside of the classroom.

Keeping the above in view, it is the principles and methodolgies developed for teaching second as well as foreign languages that we need to look to, if we are to develop successful curricula and pedagogy for teaching Hindi to major sections of non-Hindi speaking children across the states in India (This would then be equally applicable for teaching Hindi to the children of the Indian diaspora in various other parts of the world). A wide range of pedagogical methodologies and materials have been developed over the last century for teaching languages such as French, German and English as second and foreign languages to adults as well as children. These guide the teacher to establish realisable objectives and adopt appropriate pedagogical approaches in the classroom. A similar effort in the domain of teaching Hindi to non-Hindi speaking children, to my mind, is much needed.

Issues and problems in learning Hindi as a new language

In order to bring into sharper focus the issues underlying the learning of a new language, I now present a tabular delineation of the so-called 'second language learner' in comparison with the first language learner.   The table contrasts the situation and classroom experience of two students who begin as 6-year olds with a course in Hindi as a 'second language' and are, over the years, exposed to the standard pedagogy current in Indian schools. Whereas the former student has grown up speaking Hindi, the latter could have grown up speaking Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam or Assamese at home.

	The Hindi-Speaking Child	**The Non-Hindi Speaking Child**
1.	Has typically had approximately 18,000 hours of interactive exposure to the language, at home, by the time he is 5 years old. (The language learning experience of the 1st language follows the rhythm of the waking hours of the baby and child which may be calculated at 10 hours a day - a conservative estimate. It then follows that in one year this child's language experience in his 1st language is 10 hours X 360 days = 3600. Thus in 5 years he has been exposed to approximately 3600 X 5 = 18,000 hours of interactive Hindi.)	Begins his exposure to Hindi through a maximum of 180 hours of class time in a school year. (This is based on the fact that most schools allocate at most 6 periods of approximately 40 minutes duration each per week to Second Language. This adds up to not more than 5 hours per week. Taking into account the holidays, we can count upto 36 weeks in one academic year *ie* 36 X 5 = 180 hours of exposure to Hindi in the classroom.)
2.	Is comfortable in listening to and being addressed in Hindi. Though he has yet to become at ease in the unfamiliar world of school, he understands the teachers' discourse in the classroom.	Is often puzzled by what he hears and may be anxious due to the 'foreignness' of the experience of spoken Hindi. Is comforted when the teacher speaks in a familiar language. However, if the teacher resorts to frequently explaining or translating into his own language, this ends up reducing his total exposure to the new language.
3.	Has grown up hearing Hindi and so can distinguish its various sounds with clarity. Is able to pronounce all the sounds and most words of Hindi quite effortlessly.	Is often unable to hear certain sounds of the new language – especially the ones that are not common in the phonetic structure of his first language. Hence, with the limited classroom expsoure, he is not able to learn to distinguish and pronounce all the new sounds and words.

	The Hindi-Speaking Child	**The Non-Hindi Speaking Child**
	Is able to respond to oral tasks in Hindi, either individually or in a group. Enjoys participating in plays or reciting poems in Assemblies and other school programmes.	I Hindi when in a group. May enjoy singing songs and reciting poems in a group, but is quite tongue-tied when he is asked a question individually.
5.	Comprehends the simple stories being read out to him easily and, once he is able to write, is able to do the question-answers without too much effort.	Is initially on high alert and makes efforts to comprehend the stories being told/read aloud by catching any cues that help him to make meaning of the language. (Children being mentally active learners, who usually try to find a meaning and a purpose for activities presented to them). But the teachers' verbal explanations of the many difficult words are simply too hard to catch. When the cues for real meaning-making are too few, he gives up trying to make sense and becomes progressively more passive, less interested.
6.	When he reads a text in Hindi, he can usually read with some understanding. Once he is able to write, is able to do the question-answers without too much effort.	When he reads a text in Hindi, he doesn't necessarily understand what he reads. Most of the words are not familiar. He can, however, become adept at decoding and reading aloud, but is still unable to make sense of what he is being asked to read. He resorts to learning answers to standard questions by heart. He also tries to pick out and copy verbatim the relevant parts from comprehension texts.
7.	When he writes from dictation, he can	When he writes from dictation, he often

	The Hindi-Speaking Child	The Non-Hindi Speaking Child
	usually understand the words and the sentences, and hear the sounds accurately. This facilitates his writing. Matras may confound him at times, but that is a small obstacle.	has little clue to the meaning and his ear does not necessarily hear all the sounds of Hindi accurately. His difficulty in writing thus gets compounded. He tries to make up for this lack by memorising the spellings of certain words.
8.	Is able to build on his previous language competency, by adding on and retaining new vocabulary and structures. Is able to use new vocabulary and structures appropriately.	Tends to easily forget new vocabulary and structures taught. Needs regular reinforcement and support from the teacher to re-use new words in a different situation. However, since often this support is absent, his vocabulary development is uneven and sporadic. Most of the time he is unaware of the register of the word learnt and uses synonyms interchangeably, leading to some awkward sentence formations.
9.	Has implicitly absorbed the gender of many nouns and usually expresses himself with more or less correct grammatical structures.	Is unfamiliar with the gender of nouns and continues to make elementary mistakes in constructing sentences that require modifications due to gender.
10.	Is well placed to develop greater proficiency in learning and using the language, and so is easier to motivate.	Repeated 'failures' and difficulties tend to cause demotivation and frustration. As the exams approach, mindless mugging of compositions and question-answers, often supplemented by Hindi tuition, are his only recourse.

Teaching Hindi to new learners: a pedagogic challenge

The above picture of the non-Hindi speaking student's trajectory in a typical Hindi course makes evident the several levels of difficulties a new learner of the language is likely to experience. It also points the way to specific ingredients that must be incorporated into a curriculum and pedagogy of Hindi for non-Hindi speaking learners. Indeed, as in the meaningful teaching of any foreign language, it is a unique challenge to be able to introduce the language through a process that is not only enjoyable, but which in due course also leads to a systematic development of the use of Hindi. In this second part of the article I will draw upon my experience of teaching Hindi as a 'foreign language' to young learners to suggest some key principles on which to base a curriculum and pedagogy for Hindi as a new language. This exposition implictly draws upon persepectives from developmental psychology, linguistics, varied approaches to second and foreign language teaching, and the specificity of Hindi language.

Creating motivation to learn a new language

At the outset, one needs to recognize that the task of getting students to enter the world of a new language within the allotted time period in the classroom requires a richer pedagogy than is currently practised in most language classrooms in India. Successful teaching of Hindi as a new language ought to involve the affective, cognitive, psychomotor as well as social abilities of the learner. A language need not be learnt by exclusive paper and pencil exercises. And the textbook should not be seen as the sole repository of linguistic knowledge. The closer the language class comes to the multi-faceted and exciting world that children are a part of, the more the child is likely to develop an ownership of the new language. In order to make this possible, the teacher needs to attune his sensibilities to the specific situation of the new language learner and strive to create an atmosphere of learning that nurtures instrinsic motivation in the students. Even though they may not have immediate use for a new language, children's curiosity and natural learning capacities can be evoked. To quote Lynne Cameron comparing children to adult learners of language: "children are often more enthusiastic and lively as learners. They want to please the teacher rather than their peer group. They will have a go at an activity even when they don't quite understand why or how. However, they also lose interest more quickly and are less able to keep themselves motivated on tasks they find difficult."[1] Every little success builds the confidence and motivation of the child, and creating opportunities for this to happen ought to be an over-arching goal of the teacher.

The teacher can do this in several ways.

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[1]Cameron, Lynne (2001), Teaching Language to Young Learners, Cambridge University Press

1. Demonsrate that Hindi can be fun. Get children to 'do' things with even the little language that they begin to imbibe, rather than expecting them to be passive listeners and reproducers. Encourage children to communicate with whatever facilties they have at their disposal (using mime, gesture, key words, drawings). This encourages them to begin to feel an 'ownership' for the language.

2. Establish a trusting relationship with children. Encourage them to do the same with their classmates. In such an atmosphere, errors are accepted as part of the learning process and children are not mocked or put down for making mistakes.

3. Give children the experience of using Hindi in a wide range of non-threatening situations. Story-telling and story-reading is only one such experience. In addition, playing games, making things by following instructions, demonstrating actions and getting children to imitate, cleaning and decorating the classroom, changing displays, 'show and tell', are all language-related experiences that young children and even middle school children enjoy and respond to with enthusiasm.

Principles underlying curriculum and pedagogy of Hindi as a new language

The curriculum and pedagogy for learning Hindi as a new language can fruitfully draw upon a framework that derives from principles and methodolgies developed for teaching French or English as second/foreign languages. I would higlight the following key principles:

- Providing age-appropriate, rich exposure to Hindi

- Giving ample room for repetition, revision and memorisation

- Encouraging and harnessing the cognitive capacities of observation of data, pattern spotting, classifications, hypothesizing etc.

- Calibrating the expected output from students with carefully formulated goals

- Providing opportunities for using the language in 'real' situations

  Each of these principles is elaborated below and illustrated with some examples taken from my own experience of teaching Hindi.

  Providing age-appropriate, rich exposure to Hindi

  What should be the quality of the early exposure to Hindi? It is necessary that the child encounters a rich sampling of the language, whether this is in the form of what is said by the teacher or the textbook. However, the manner of input should

be such that children can actively 'make sense' of it and act upon it. Early on, gestures, mime, and instructions in a 'real language context' is a good way to help children make sense of, for example, the routines of the class such as 'let us sit in a circle, go back to your seat, look at this picture, clean the blackboard, take out your notebook, sharpen your pencil, throw the pencil shreddings into the dustbin and not on the floor etc.' 'Total Physical Response'[2] is a methodology which works very well in developing, through a set of commands, an active understanding of such elements of the language.

It is good to expose children to rich and textured language texts and NOT, in the name of simplicity, to an impoverished, utterly contrived and boring text of basic words, sentences or stories, as found in some Hindi primers. However, at the early stages, texts—whether poems or stories—must have ample pictorial clues to allow the child to make some sense of the situation or narrative. Of course this is not sufficient and the teacher will need to use his voice and bodily movements to dramatise certain parts of the text. He will also need to draw the child's attention to specific elements of the text that carry meaning, for this is something the child cannot do without support.

Later on, at the intermediary and advanced stage, after children have acquired a basic vocabulary and reading abilities, it will still be necessary to do some pre-reading exercises through which some of the new words or ideas appearing in a text are introduced even before a story is read out. This helps in students getting more out of the actual reading of the story. The point is that helping the student to make sense of the language is not restricted to the early stages alone and must be consciously built into the pedagogy throughout the different stages of language learning.

Another thing to be kept in mind is that the texts brought to the language class be age-appropriate for the student. A delightful little story such as 'Sonali ka mitra', in which a crow snatches the buiscuit from a baby's hand, may work wonderfully for the 6-8 year old beginner but fall totally flat on the 11-13 year old child who is also a beginner in Hindi. For such students good texts might include jokes converted into picture stories, or cartoon strips such as Tenali Rama and Akbar-Birbal. Bringing interesting snippets from newspapers and magazines and getting the older students to re-create the essential ideas of the text also work well. Age-appropriate and rich texts, which students are helped to make sense of, are one key element that paves the way for successful language learning.

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2   Asher, James J., (1983) Learning Another Language Through Actions: The Complete Teacher's Guidebook, 2nd Edition, Sky Oaks Publications, Inc

Giving ample room for repetition, revision and memorisation

Anyone who has tried to learn a new language will know that it is very easy to forget what has been learnt unless what has been 'learnt' is revisited often. Why, even remembering foreign names is hard enough unless one has either repeated them several times in one's mind or found some association with a known reality! Processes of imitation, repetition, and recall play a key role in language learning; they lay the foundation of pronunciation, intonation and inflexion, apart from the absorption of various language elements and structures.

Repetition is only one stage in the acquisition of the new language and its role and place in the second language classroom needs to be well understood. A distinction needs to be made between rote and repetition. Rote is the vibrations of vocal chords in a given sequence with little regard to meaning or context. Repetition is the conscious re-utilisation of particular elements of language, in order to internalize and reproduce these in appropriate contexts. Due to his limited exposure to the language, if opportunities for revision are not consciously built into the pedagogical process, the new learner fails to retain linguistic elements in his active repertoire and will at best be able to recall these passively. However, as familiarity with the language increases, repetition becomes less and less necessary.

Games offer a wonderful opportunity for repetition in an enjoyable context. Games using flash cards or bingo cards can be designed to re-inforce memory of language elements, new vocabulary, the gender of nouns and much else. In the activity book of the language learning programme, <u>Hindi Ki Duniya, Pehle Kadam</u>[3], many such games are described. At later stages, games involving repetitive elements can be deviced to use correct sentence structures in specific situations (for instance when to use तुम or आप) or to transform one structure to another (for example, a statement into a question).

Encourage and harness the cognitive capacities of observation of data, pattern spotting, classifications, hypothesizing etc.

A successful language learner does not remain at the level of repetition and memorization. He uses his cognitive abilities to observe the language data presented to him either in his textbook or his teacher's discourse; he constantly tries to spot patterns, make classifications and hypothesizes about different language phenomenon. These processes can begin at the earliest stages of language learning, and textbooks need to be designed to support them. Even more crucial, teachers need to make space for the exercise of these cognitive abilities in

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3   Mathur, Chandrika, (2004) Hindi Ki Duniya, Pehle Kadam, Scholastics India Ltd.

the classroom.

Students can be asked to apply their mind in a wide range of situations. For instance, they can spot the occurrence of a given matra in a continuous text; they can 'see' how different matras change the way a letter is sounded out; they can sort nouns occuring in a text according to gender; they can pick out nouns from a text and group them in categories; they can be asked to collect samples of occurrence of a given structure such as देना-लेना in the position of auxiliary verbs (आपने खाना खा लिया? ये पैसे उन्हें दे दो। and hypothesise as to why in some cases the verb लेना is used and in other cases देना; they can be asked to pick out sentences using a relative pronoun such as जो, जिसने and see the pattern in their usage and how they impact the meaning.

A number of cognitive processes need to be especially encouraged when it comes to reading. Reading is a complex act involving analysis, decoding and synthesis; sightword recognition; strategies for meaning-making; hypothesising on meanings of unfamiliar words; anticipating elements of the text; and making links with other elements on the page such as pictures, diagrams etc. Students need to be given opportunities to simultaneously put into practice all these levels while reading, even at the earliest stages. Only if this is done will the new language learner learn to read with confidence and understanding, rather than remain at the level of decoding the script and vocalising sounds.

When students begin to meet more complex texts, they need to be taught how to recreate the sequence of actions in a narrative text, pick out the main idea and the supporting ideas in a paragraph; they need to be able to see what constitutes an argument and what is an example etc. All these are analytical skills which not just enhance their comprehension but help them draw out meaningful information from texts such as those appearing in magazines or newspapers.

Calibrating the expected output from students with carefully formulated goals

It is now widely recognised that too early an expectation of language output—whether oral or written—often results in 'failure' of the language acquisition process. Space and time needs to be provided to the student to 'take in' the language. Expectations of children's output in a new language must be gradual and realistic, and aim at making children experience success in using Hindi at all stages of learning. This can only be achieved if the teacher has clearly articulated the specific goals for each activity that his students will be engaged in, rather than hold some generalized language learning expectations.

Setting clear language learning goals helps the teacher in supporting his students differentially in accomplishing tasks. "This support may consist of breaking the task down to manageable steps, each with its own subgoals. The teacher takes the responsibility for the whole task while learners work on a step at a time. Careful design of sub-goals should help ensure success and achievement at each step, and of the task as a whole. Young learners face many years of classroom lessons and it is important that they feel, and are, successful from the start"[4]

For example, one such language learning goal in the early stages of learning Hindi might be the expression of possession (राधा की नाव, राम का आम). This main goal can be divided into sub-goals and adequate support needs to be given for each set of output expected from the child. The sub-goals could include: recognising and naming a limited set of concrete nouns; becoming familiar with the gender of these nouns; beoming aware of ka-ki as the possessive links, which depend on gender of the noun; practising the articulation, and later the writing, of the possessive expression with the given nouns. Many of these goals can be met in a step-by-step manner using flash card activities as well as games. Initial scaffolding provided in the form of a reference chart where the correct gender of nouns is indicated should help ensure successful mastery of the main goal.

At a later stage of language learning, a teacher may have the goal of getting his students to write a descriptive, evocative text about their favourite fruit. This may be done in a variety of ways: an interview, a short composition, or even a riddle. Suppose the teacher decides that he will get the students to write a riddle, giving enough clues about the favorite fruit so that others may be able to guess it. Now, various subgoals could be identified before working on the main task. These may include: evoking the names of various fruits and their spellings; generating words that describe shape, smell, taste, colour, texture of fruits; identifying seasons when different fruits are available; asking students to think of special qualities and associations with the fruit of their choice; then getting students to write a first draft of their riddle, after providing a sample or two of such riddles; trying it out on a friend; helping them refine it in terms of effective language use. A very interesting collection of riddles may emerge from this exercise and students would enjoy guessing the answer to each others' riddles. At the same time several key language learning goals would be achieved.

Providing opportunities for using the language in 'real' situations

Language is a key tool through which humans have learnt to engage with reality, and a second language learner too must begin to use the language in real situations. The school-going child learning Hindi as a second language in, say,

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4 Cameron, Lynne (2001), Teaching Language to Young Learners, Cambridge University Press

Tamil Nadu, will have little occasion to use it outside of his classroom. Therefore, it is within the classroom that graded opportunities need to be created for him to use it meaningfully.

At the early stage, children are often taught the names of colours in abstraction. This however is not sufficient. Children need to colour things and speak or write about it; they can mix different colours and say which ones get produced; they also need to be shown that colour adjectives get modified depending on the gender of the noun they are associated with; they need to bring different objects to class and then say – मैं एक काला पत्थर लाई। मैं एक हरी पत्ती लाई। मैं एक सफ़ेद और नीला पंख लाया।;they need to see how the sentence structure changes (यह आम पीला है। यह आम पीले रंग का है - यह पत्ती पीली है। यह पत्ती पीले रंग की है);

As their language learning develops, opportunities need to be created for children to use language in real communicative situations (for instance, to ask for information, to give directions, to complain about somebody). They must also learn social codes (we use आप to address older people). They must learn to use the appropriate word in the appropriate context (for example, choosing between भूमि-ज़मीन, दर्पण-शीशा). Children can be asked to respond to simulated situations: तुम्हारी एक छोटी, दो साल की बहन है, मीना। एक दिन जब तुम अपने कमरे में आए तो तुमने देखा कि उसने तुम्हारा सारा टैल्कम पाउडर ज़मीन पर गिरा दिया है। मम्मी से शिकायत करो।   The expected output would be something like this: मम्मी, मम्मी, जल्दी आईये। देखिए मीना ने क्या किया। उसने मेरा सारा टैल्कम पाउडर ज़मीन पर गिरा दिया है। There may of course be many variations of this. In this manner students feel empowered to use the language and this will reflect in greater fluency, if not complete accuracy, in their writing too.

And finally, I might emphasize that whenever a foreign/second language is taught in the classroom, the teacher needs to constantly build bridges between the linguistic content being taught and the child's own experiential world.Therefore, even when we begin using a standard textbook with more advanced students, each selected lesson is always to be 'recreated' or 'recast' by the teacher keeping in view the time-space-local conditions of his/her specific classroom. A language class needs to be as much the place for processing, reflecting and articulating the student's own life and experiences, as an arena for gaining a cultural literacy that allows access to the world of that language.

Conclusion: the way ahead

Through this article I have tried to highlight major principles that make for a successful learning of a new language. To begin with, as far as language learning

goes, there is no motivation as good as 'success in performing limited but meaningful tasks'. Therefore it becomes essential that we prepare children for these small 'successes' and do not expect them to speak, do, or write things for which their capacities have not yet been developed. The balance between demand and support is thus a key principle in fostering confidence among learners. I have made a plea for bringing in age-appropriate, relevant and interesting texts to the language class, and aiding them in making sense of these, so that student interest is ignited and sustained. I have also tried to show that often enough what is *learnt* in a language classroom is the direct consequence of what is in fact *taught*, that is, it depends on where the emphasis gets places, and the nature of activities that students are invited to do. The quality of the student output is thus in proportion to his quality of 'preparation' for the task.   I have also tried to demonstrate that learning a language is not only about gaining words, grammatical structures and their exceptions; nor is it restricted to comprehending and communicating ideas ; it is as much about learning to think, about using and developing one's cognitive skills. It is thus necessary that this dimension be brought in consciously into the second language classroom. Finally, it is worth restating that every language is rooted in a cultural reality and this rootedness needs to become palpable to the young learner through the process of learning a new language.

These ideas naturally imply a shift in the nature of teacher preparation courses, to include a more fine-tuned understanding of the real needs of students of second language as well as a range of ways in which these needs may be met.

The kind of directions in curriculum and pedagogy that these ideas suggest also need to find greater concrete expression: through the creation of new kinds of textbooks; the availability of reference books for teaching Hindi as a second language; write ups that share practical 'bags of tricks' that have worked for teachers of Hindi as second language; as well as more theoretical writing in this area. With a flowering of such a literature and the opening up of better channels of communication and distribution of such literature, teaching Hindi as a second language could well become a vibrant field of enquiry. Hindi being among the top ten most widely spoken languages in the world today, this is an enterprise that is surely worth undertaking.