

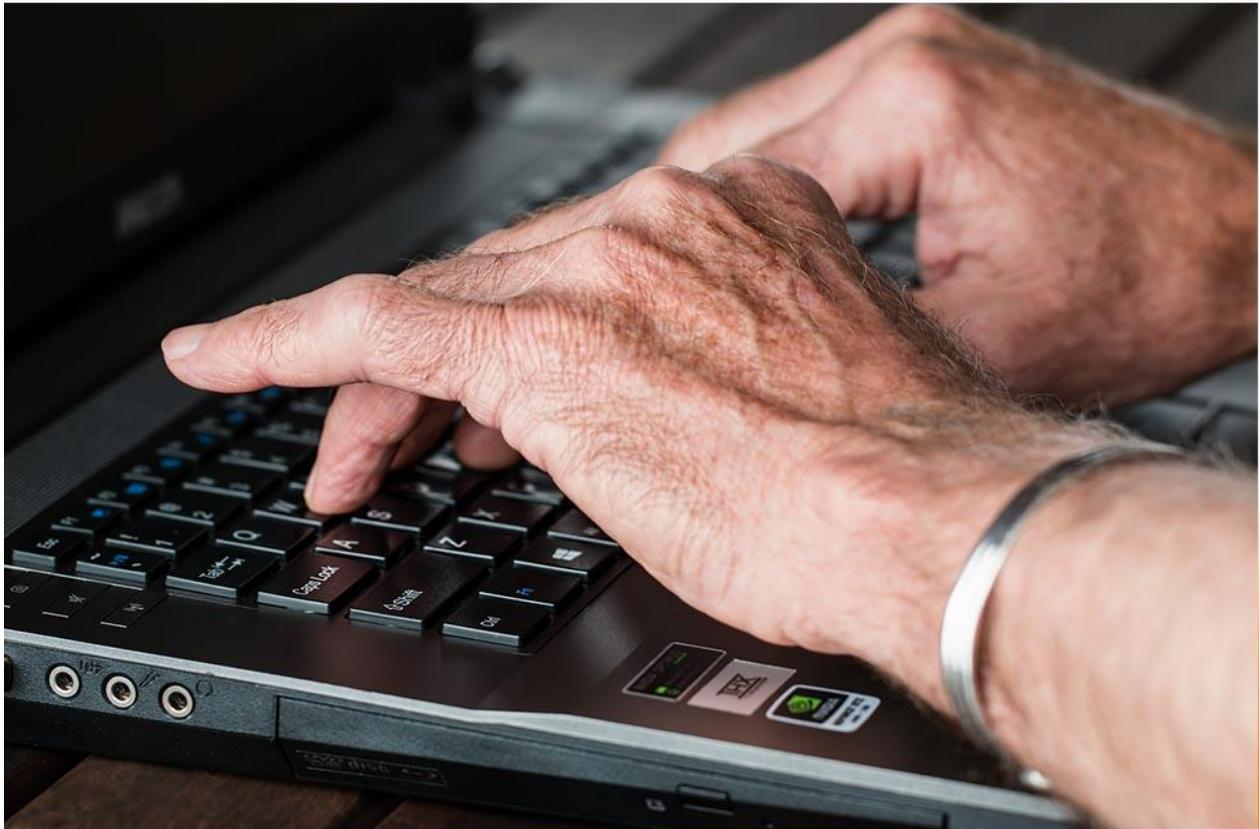
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Indian Linguistic Tradition and the Influence of Sanskrit: A Discussion

Abstract

Linguistics means the Science of language which deals with the history and scientific investigation of languages. It does not however, stand in isolation from other sciences, but as one of the most important developments of the human race it is intimately connected with many of languages, casting new light upon them, and receiving indispensable illumination from them. The earliest literary works in any Indo-European languages are undoubtedly the samples of the Vedas. These consisted largely of hymns addressed to various divine powers. From the very beginning these mantras were looked upon as specially sacred and special efforts were made to memorize them, to analyse them and to understand their meaning. As this language of the Vedas became obsolete and difficult to interpret, their devotees prepared commentaries. The result of such linguistic analysis was a standardized language. So completely described and regulated (Samskr̥ta) that it underwent few further changes. This 'Samskr̥tais' known to us as 'Sanskrit'. Beside the Samskr̥ta "regulated, cultivated, corrected" there existed spoken language is called Prakr̥ta. We have neglected so far the study of language from the human point of view. We must study language as such, as a living human subject for mental discipline. Today every sane and impartial human being is thinking that a full

realization of human brotherhood is the only hope for mankind. And every subject to be taught in our Schools and Colleges should emphasis this human unity.

Key words: Sanskrit, Vedas, Hymns, Astadhyayi, Vyākaraṇa, Prākṛta

Introduction:

The most striking aspect of linguistic competence is what we may call the 'creativity of language,' that is, the speaker's ability to produce new sentences, sentences that are immediately UNDERSTOOD by other speakers although they bear no physical resemblance to sentences which are 'familiar. (Noam Chomsky, 42)

Linguistics mean the science of language, it deals with the history and scientific investigation of languages. It does not however, stand in isolation from other sciences, but as one of the most important developments of the human race. It is intimately connected with many of the languages, casting new light upon them and receiving indispensable illumination from them. Language is much more than mere vehicle for communication of thought. It is a known fact that language is a social property. No one neither needs language for oneself nor can learn on its own. It is used in the society and also learnt within the society or from the society. But at the formal level we learn it through a well mechanised and organised system known as education system. As we know that in ancient Indian tradition Vedas have been central point of all kind of the educational activities. Learning of the language was not the exception to it. The whole education system has been developed on the periphery of the Vedas. There was a time when nothing could have been imagined without Vedas.

Significance of the study

Linguistics is main as any other science, comprises accurately defined laws based on the past, developing and reformulating the traditional doctrines of the language. The position of linguistics among the science is a matter of dispute. It is evident that it is not an exact science in the sense that mathematics and chemistry are exact. It is also connected with Psychology because behind the vocal and auditory apparatus conditioned by Physics and Physiology, lie mental and Psychological process.

It is to be understood that Linguistics in India had been an inseparable part of the Veda which is known as the Vedanga. The elements of Indian Linguistics is very much addressed and incorporated in six parts of the Vedanga. Out of these 'Siskha'(Phonetics) acquired the very first and prominent position. Other significant elements of linguistics are also discussed here. The sound system (Phonetics) of the word/alphabet, Kalpa (Rituals), Vyakaran (Grammar), Nirukta (Etymology), Chandah (Prosody) and Jyotish (Astrology and Astronomy) are also discussed here (Bhattacharjee 103).

Describing शिक्षा तैत्तिरीय उपनिषद् says - "शिक्षा स्वरवर्णोपदेशकं शास्त्रम्" that means the scripture which deals with the individual sounds accent, quality and other aspects of phonetic study known as शिक्षा. In the language teaching the correct pronunciation is one of the essential conditions. Therefore, it becomes necessary for the learner of a language to know the ways and means of correct pronunciation. That is why शिक्षा undertakes the study of all aspects of speech sound production; like place of articulation, manners of articulation, internal efforts of articulation, external efforts of articulation known as distinctive features of phones and allophones, length of consonants and vowels sounds, position of articulatory organs or vocal apparatus and pitch, Accent etc.

Language may also be an important political factor particularly in the creation and maintenance of national consciousness. It became a social fact to realize that the human brain was sufficiently developed to use it. Individual could have developed a language only

because they were already prepared to do so. This is as true of language as of all human inventions. Psychologically the original linguistic act consists in giving to assign a symbolic value. This Psychological process distinguishes the language of man from that of animals.

Objectives of the study

Language is a mode of conveyance of ideas. The result of linguistical analysis is standardization of language. So we must study language as such as a living human subject for mental discipline. Sanskrit language is coming under Indo- European family of languages. Panini's grammar has a fundamental principle of modern linguistic sciences. The objective of the present study is to examine the influence of Sanskrit on the linguistics in India. Moreover, an attempt is made to point out the chief features of languages from a linguistic point of view.

We know the fact regarding the production of speech sound that the aggressive air is an essential material. Therefore, release of some air out of mouth is compulsory during the production of a speech sound. No speech sound can be unaspirated. Yes, less aspiration may be there. On the other hand the nomenclature aspirated cannot be a distinctive feature, because, due to aspiration in each and every speech sound it becomes a common feature of all the speech sounds. Therefore, it is not capable of showing any distinctiveness or difference between one and the other sounds. Only the unique feature can be a definition or laksana व्यावर्तकं लक्षणम्. Whereas in शिक्षा literature the same situation has been described by two technical terms which are more appropriate namely अल्पप्राण and महाप्राण. Here अल्प means less, महा means more and प्राण means aspiration. Thus, the term अल्पप्राण is used for those speech sounds where comparatively less aspiration takes place during there production. In the same way the term महाप्राण is used for those speech sounds where comparatively more

aspiration takes place during their production. So, we can see that description of शिक्षा is more accurate and scientific in comparison of modern linguistics.

Pininian शिक्षा also cautions the speakers about some other possible mistakes during the pronunciation. It says:

उपांशु दष्टं त्वरितं निरस्तं विलम्बितं गदगदितम् प्रगीतम् ।
निष्पीदितं ग्रस्तपदाक्षरं च वदेन्न दीनं न तु सानुनास्यम् ॥

Vatrhari also talks about the prerequisite of language in the mind of a speaker while producing the language (v.p. 51, 122).

One should also not read a passage in undertone, between one's teeth, quickly or in haste, haltingly slowly with a choked voice, in a Sing-song manner, with repressed voice, omitting words occasionally and in a plaintive voice. The demerits of a speech or appreciation and faults of a speaker or of a reader are also possible in modern languages or language teaching learning system. Without knowing these demerits it is difficult to avoid these demerits.

Discussions

Indian grammatical studies had their origin in the necessity of preserving intact not only the text, but also the pronunciations of the Vedic hymns. As a result the work of Indian linguistics in Phonetics may be held superior to Western traditional grammar. Secondly in the study of the internal structure of words, the Indian grammarians excel others. A part of the energy with which historical linguistic study was pursued in the nineteenth century derived from the discovery that the ancient and modern languages of much of India were related to the Germanic languages and to the classical languages as well. When this discovery was made, scholars were greatly concerned with the origins and the early institutions of mankind.

The origin of linguistics which applies scientific methods (so it is a science among other sciences) may indeed be traced back to Jones's discourse to the passage on the Sanskrit language. It was even for this purpose that the famous passage has been taken out of its context and quoted by linguists on several occasions as the first words of their science. In attempting to set up any language family the oldest known forms of a language are of great importance, as their time of origin. An understanding of linguistic development also requires that we determine the interrelationships of language subgroups and languages within a family. We can find in grammars devoted to individual languages, such as Germanic, the group to which Old English belongs. Moreover, till the present, successive stages of any languages have been only approximately determined. Most of them are based on non-linguistic evidence.

After this beginning, linguistics continues at once. When scholars and men of letters in Europe heard about Sanskrit, it is true, they were deeply impressed. They were very interested to learn about this Sanskrit language. Detailed study of the Indo-European family is important for the understanding of historical linguistic method as well as for knowledge of the interrelationships of some of the world's most widely spoken languages. The earliest literary works in any Indo-European languages are undoubtedly the Samhitas of 'Vedas'. These consisted largely of hymns addressed to various divine powers. From the very beginning these 'mantras' were looked upon as specially sacred and special efforts were made to memorize them, to analyze them and to understand their meaning. The first step was to separate each word in these hymns, and this gave us the 'Pada-Patha'. For this the rules of phonetic combinations (Sandhi) and of the accent system had to be investigated. All these were embodied in the Pratisakhya, which embody the first linguistic investigation undertaken in India.

Indo-Aryan is the name of the subgroup which was carried to the area of Iran

and India. It consists of two subgroups of which 'Indic' is more important for materials in Iran dates from a considerably later period and is less abundant. Earliest Indic material is contained in the Rig-Veda, a collection of hymns which is as large as the 'Iliad and Odyssey' combination. The oldest hymns are Cosmological poems, composed somewhat before 1000BC. The poems of Rig-Veda and the other Vedas were considered sacred; they were memorized and transmitted orally "for many generations".

It is not possible within the limits set for this study of Middle Indo-Aryan (MIA) to enter into any great details about the comparative grammar of MIA languages. But it is necessary for us to know the chief characteristics of these languages which separate them from dialects of Old Indo-Aryan (OIA). For a detailed comparative grammar there is as yet no single work which taken into account the entire MIA. Recently a comparative Grammar of Middle Indo-Aryan by Sukumar Sen has been published by the linguistic society of India. We have to consider Sanskrit as having stayed dormant for a whole millennium as a vernacular as well as literary medium, which is quite contrary to what we know about Sanskrit literature which had such a glorious revival during the Gupta age in India.

There are moreover a large number of inscriptions in mixed Sanskrit and Prakrit, showing the use of both languages as current at a given period, over a large part of India. Sanskrit being used by the learned and cultured classes while Prakrit became the vehicle for the general population.

Old Indo-Aryan (OIA) consists of not only classical Sanskrit, but also the rich Vedic dialects, the literary traces of which are found in Vedic literature. The period covered by these two distinct phases of OIA; namely Vedic and classical Sanskrit, is almost as vast as that during which the MIA languages developed and contributed, so vitally to the common culture of India. But while the Vedic grammar is very rich and

complicated, classical Sanskrit has become less complex but more normalized, losing the rich morphological character of the earlier Vedic language by sacrificing of the various morphemes and keeping strictly to single morphemes selected out of the earlier ones by natural growth. Vedic Sanskrit is the oldest dialect of the Aryan branch in India. It has preserved some of the old features of the original Indo-European language. Its consonant system is almost the same as the old I.E system although it has suffered losses in the vowel system. In conjugation and inflection too, it has preserved many of the old peculiarities which the other languages have lost. Vedic Sanskrit is distinguished from classical Sanskrit by its more verbal forms, differencing vocabulary and phonetics.

In fact, Sanskrit already been studied for the purpose of what we can call now preliminary linguistics research, before the English learned Sanskrit in Bengal and before Father Coeurdoux wrote his famous letter to the French academy. Charles De Brosses (1709-1777) had already made use of what he knew about Sanskrit. He had read about it in the Letters Edifiantes, reports sent from India by French missionaries. De Brosses book which was partially on Sanskrit grammar had been circulating among his scholar friends for some year until it was finally published in 1765. The veneration accorded the Vedas led to their careful preservations that yielded another result of importance to linguistics. As the languages of Vedas became obsolete and difficult to interpret, their devotees prepared commentaries. The result of such linguistic analysis was a standardized language. So completely described and regulated (Samskrta) that it underwent few further changes. This 'Samskrta' is known to us as "Sanskrit". Beside the Samskrta "regulated, cultivated, corrected" there existed spoken languages called Prakrta. We are much better informed about Sanskrit than about the Prakrts; for a tremendous amount of learned material has been produced in India.

Many learned texts are religious writings; the Brahmanas are interpretative tracks in Sanskrit, as are the Upanishads. Moreover, the classical works of Indian literature were

composed in Sanskrit, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana are epics that were composed in Sanskrit and are much longer than any composed in Europe.

Side by side, grammatical investigations were also carried out and several grammatical works were produced. Of these remain only the names of some authors. At the end of this period and as the culminations of all the early linguistic investigation we get “Astadhyayi” of Panini. This is a masterly analysis of the Sanskrit language as it existed in his days. Panini has done the work very thoroughly and with deep insight. And it appears from a study of this masterly analysis that Panini has grasped quite clearly many fundamental principles of modern linguistic science.

Indian civilization is older than Iranian both linguistically and in historical records. It is true that its earliest dated texts inscriptions of King Asoka in the middle of the third Century B.C, but its first documents are, in reality, the hymns of the Rig-Veda. This collection of 1017 poems is conventionally dated between 2000 or 1500 and 500 BC. The other three Vedas (Sama, Yajus, Atharva) are also accented, as are certain somewhat later texts.

In the Brahmana the verb is becoming simplified, a process carried almost to an extreme in classical Sanskrit or Sanskrit proper, which seems to have begun to receive literary cultivation about the third century B.C. Sanskrit is not a direct descendant of the Vedic language, but is derived from some lost dialect closely akin to it. In Sanskrit the old tonic accent has disappeared in favour of one of stress and this tonic accentuation, which is like that of classical Latin, except that the stress may go back to the fourth syllable if the penultimate and antepenultimate are short, may be a survival of Indo-European conditions. No classical Sanskrit text is accented graphically, but information may occasionally be gleaned from certain phonological phenomena in middle and modern Indian equivalents of classical Sanskrit words. There seems to be no reason to doubt, as some scholars have done,

that Sanskrit was actually a spoken language, and not a mere learned figment. As a matter of fact, it is still spoken in India by the learned and literary works are composed in it today.

The success of historical linguistic study depends on the state of descriptive linguistics. Indo-European historical linguistics developed rapidly in the 19th century because thorough descriptions and were available for Latin, Greek and Sanskrit it was the pattern of these descriptions that grammars were produced for other early Indo-European languages, such as Gothic, Old church Slavic, Old Irish and subsequently for the remaining Indo-European languages, such as Armenian and Albanian.

Jones's inauguration of linguistics was canonized by linguistics itself as its beginning. This is, in itself, an hypothesis in linguistics theory. As long as this hypothesis will not be overruled by new facts, or by facts which were previously overlooked, we can still maintain that the history of all linguistics science started in India. This means that we can regard all new directions in linguistics research of the last two centuries as branches of a tree which has its roots in Sanskrit studies, unless a new linguistics science can be found, based on entirely different principles or on principle existing already before Jones.

Conclusion

Panini's grammar as an auxiliary science to the 'Veda' is one of the most important aids to Vedic exegesis. All the same it is surprising that even the traditional grammarians (Vaiyakaranas) do not generally pay much attention to the 'Vedic' rules of Panini; separately treated by Bhattoji in his 'Svaravaidiki Prakriya' and are always occupied with those dealing with classical Sanskrit. One who independently studies the Paninian sutras would clearly see that Panini treats the Sanskrit language as a whole and gives rules for the Vedic language in a separate series of sutras, only when they are not applicable to the classical, and gives exceptions to the general rules by the famous "Chandasibahulam".

After Panini there was no further progress in the field of language study in India with the solitary exception of Patanjali and his Mahabhasya. There is at present an utter neglect of the cultural aspect of our languages. Students learn about the grammatical aspect but nothing at all about the culture. The language studied must be treated historically. The stages of its development and progress should be systematically pointed out. Linguistics helps in our understanding of the culture of a people and is conducive to the emotional integration of different peoples. Besides being “historical” and “human” language, studies must be ‘comparative’, so that the student may get a fair idea of the modern science of linguistics. We can assert that our country gave birth to the science of language.

If we follow the course of life of any language, we can see that ‘no language is ever in a static condition’ and that it changes and grows. We find the Vedic language more archaic than the languages of the epics and the classical Sanskrit. Between the language of epics and later Kavyas there are differences that are equally obvious. We have neglected so far the study of language from the human point of view. We must study language as such, as a living human subject for mental discipline. In the seventeenth century, when British civil servants in India began studying Sanskrit scientifically, something started that made history- in more ways than one. A part from the fact that studying Sanskrit has its own history, all activities which were at the time, somehow related with studying languages or with thinking about human language in general. History of any branch of science or learning, after all, is not just history, but constitutes one of the integrant parts of that area. So history of linguistics, the historical research itself as well as the object of this research, is also linguistics. Today every sane and impartial human being is thinking that a full realization of human brotherhood is the only hope for mankind. And every subject to be taught in our Schools and Colleges should emphasize this human unity. As Chomsky rightly said:

A language is not just words. It's a culture, a tradition, a unification of a community, a

whole history that creates what a community is. It's all embodied in a language.

(Noam Chomsky, 56)

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