



# IIT Madras

## BSc Degree

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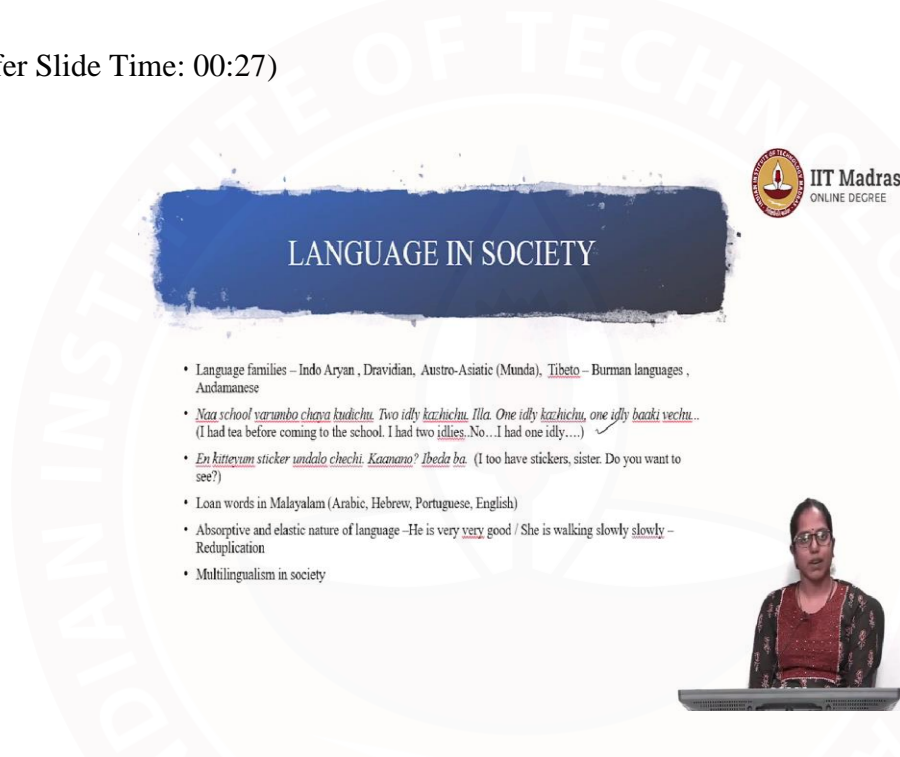
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**English 2 (Advanced English)**  
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**Language Use**


Hello, welcome all. The topic for today's module is Language Use. So, what does that mean? What is this module all about? Discover that in course of time.

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**LANGUAGE IN SOCIETY**

- Language families – Indo Aryan , Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic (Munda), Tibeto – Burman languages , Andamanese
- *Naa school varumbo cheya kudichu. Ila. One idly kazhichu, one idly baaki vechu..*  
(I had tea before coming to the school. I had two idlies..No...I had one idly....)
- *En kittayam sticker undalo chechi. Kaanano? Ibeda ba.* (I too have stickers, sister. Do you want to see?)
- Loan words in Malayalam (Arabic, Hebrew, Portuguese, English)
- Absorptive and elastic nature of language –He is very very good / She is walking slowly slowly – Reduplication
- Multilingualism in society



Now, let us understand the concept of language in society, that is, the language that is external to us. Let us first start by understanding the different language families of India. So, there are five main language families of India, which is the Indo Aryan, Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic or Munda language family, Andamanese language family, the Tibeto-Burman language family.

Hindi and Assamese are examples of Indo-Aryan languages. These are usually spoken in the northern part of India. Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu are all examples of Dravidian languages and these are seen in the southern part of the country. Santali, Mundari, Ho, Sora are examples of Munda or Austro-Asiatic languages, and these languages are usually spoken in and around Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Odisha.

Examples of Tibeto-Burman languages are Tibetic, Tani, Naga etc. And these languages are spoken around the Himalayan regions and some parts of the Northeast. Jarawa, Sentinelese and Aka-Kol are all examples of Andamanese languages. As the name suggests, these languages are spoken around Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Now let us look at point number two and three. So, these are the utterances of a six-year-old boy; I walked to a classroom, a first standard classroom in Chennai back in 2015 and interacted with a few kids there and when I asked the boy, what he had for breakfast?

He said this as a reply to my question. So he said, Naa school varumbo chaya kudichu. Two idly kazhichu, Illa. One idly kazhichu, one idly baaki vechu which means I had tea before coming to school. I had two idlies No, I had one idly. Similarly, in a different context, the boy said, En kitteyum sticker undalo chichi. Kaanano? Ibeda ba, which means I too have stickers, sister. Do you want to see it? Come here.

So, if you analyze the sentence at a peripheral level, you might feel like this is proper Malayalam sentences with few English words in that, such as one, two and stickers. But that is not true. If you go for a deeper analysis, you see that the sentence consists of Malayalam loan words, that is, the words that Malayalam has borrowed from other languages, which a lot of Malayalam speakers might feel as a Malayalam word.

And what are these? There is an Arabic word *baaki*, the Hebrew word *ba*. Well, it tells us that languages are quite open; they are quite fluid. They lend, they borrow words from other languages, they are very flexible in nature. Now, let us look at another interesting phenomenon, and that is called reduplication. So I am going to explain this concept of reduplication through a couple of English sentences that we often hear around us.

Examples are, he is very, very good. She is walking slowly, slowly. He is very, very good. He is very, very bad. He is very, very talkative. Well, these are all the expressions or sentences that our teachers tell our parents during the parent-teacher meeting. Yeah. Similarly, expressions like she is walking slowly, slowly. Well, I do not think you would come across expressions of these kinds among native speakers. Maybe they say very, very to emphasize or as a form of emphasis. But you would not see them reduplicating words like slow or adverbs, like slowly, fastly and all that.

So, this feature is called reduplication, and this is prevalent in languages of our countries such as Tamil, Malayalam, Hindi; I am not sure about other languages. But these are the

languages that I speak, and I know that in all of these languages, reduplication is prevalent, dheere dheere chal raha tha, romba romba mocam, valare valare mosam.

So, reduplication is used to emphasize a little more to give an additional emphasis. So, English does not have a reduplication feature and what we do is a feature of our language; we transfer that to a new language or since we are talking about a society, let us not talk about the we part.

So, the rule of one language is taken by another language. That is the rule of, let us say Hindi or Malayalam or Tamil is openly accepted by English. So, look how elastic, look how absorptive, look how open languages are. So, this also tells us that the very fabric of our society is multilingualism. We are all multilingual in nature. So, are our languages. They are quite open, if you look at the features of the language, you see that they are quite open to change, they are very flexible, they are very absorptive and elastic in nature.

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### LANGUAGE IN SCHOOL - ENGLISH VS REGIONAL LANGUAGES

Excerpt from a lecture given by the Principal to the parents of students of the first grade (on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the academic year) – On linguistics and cognitive differences

*"... your child might have gone to pre-KG, LKG and UKG classes. They might know to read, write and speak English effortlessly. But there are students in the class who have not had the privilege to go to preprimary classes. Once the classes begin, your child might approach you and tell you Mother/Father, the boy who sits next to me in class doesn't know to write the English letters. Please don't ask him to not sit beside his illiterate friend. What you can tell him is to teach his friend what he knows. Parents often approach us requesting if their children can be made to sit with the studious and 'good' children in the class. Let us not follow any kind of discrimination in our school."*



Now, armed with an understanding of how language works, external to us, that is how language works in society. There is now see how language is perceived, used and treated in schools. So, let me start with an excerpt from a lecture given by a principal to the

parents of students of the first grade on the first day of the academic year. This is on linguistic and cognitive differences. I am going to read it out loud.

Your child might have gone to pre-KG, LKG and UKG classes. They might know to read, write and speak English effortlessly. But there are students in the class who have not had the privilege to go to preprimary classes. Once the classes begin, your child might approach you and tell you, Mother/Father, the boy who sits next to me in the class, does not know to write the English letters.

Please do not ask him to not sit beside his illiterate friend. What you can tell him is to teach his friend what he knows. Parents often approach us requesting if their children can be made to sit with the studious and the good children in the class. Let us not follow any kind of discrimination in our school.

We are all not alien to these kinds of experiences, are we? We would have been told by our parents or teachers or relatives or neighbours at some point of time during our school days to befriend the studious in the smart kids of the class. Students who can speak well, write well, do math well, who are all-round performers of the school, there has always been admiration, and there is an admiration for students who use good English.

In most Private, English Medium and Central Government schools, regional languages are strictly prohibited for communication among students. There are a lot of studies and researches done on English versus regional languages in schools and its impact on students. This is a very interesting topic. However, because of time constraints, I am not getting into that; if you are interested, do write to us. We will send you certain articles and reading materials. They will give you a good idea of the role of language in schools.

So, because of lack of time or time constraints, I am going to very briefly touch upon some interesting observations that I have made during the school visits. That is when I did my research in 2015. So with that, we will understand the different kinds of misconceptions and stereotypes surrounding language in the domain of education.

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## LANGUAGE IN SCHOOL - ENGLISH vs REGIONAL LANGUAGES



A teacher's opinion on teaching regional languages in school.

*"This is the era of globalization. English is the dominant language now. The outside world awaiting every kid is fiercely competitive. Without English...you are out of the race. The school should not waste time teaching regional languages that will be of no or little use to the students."*

- An early start – the ideal condition ? ( Critical Period Hypothesis / Input Hypothesis )
- Mother tongue – an obstacle ?
- Monolingualism – a misconception ?



Now, I am going to read out one; a teacher is an opinion on teaching regional languages in schools. So she says, this is the era of globalization. English is a dominant language now. The outside world awaiting every kid is fiercely competitive. Without English, you are out of the race. The school should not waste time teaching regional languages that will be of no use or little use to the students.

So, please note that I have received various responses from teachers to this question. There a lot of teachers who felt that regional languages should definitely be taught. But because we are talking about linguistic stereotypes and misconceptions, I am quoting this particular response, this particular teacher is response.

Now let us, so through these, with just this one teacher response, we will quickly analyze and understand certain linguistic misconceptions or stereotypes that teachers hold or for that matter a lot of us hold. The first misconception that a lot of us have, a lot of teachers also have, is that an early start is an ideal condition. Well, that is not really true. What matters more is the quality of the input. That is the quality of the language received by the student because we are talking about language in schools or by a learner.



There is a debated theory that says that it is known as a critical period hypothesis. It states that children below 14 years of age acquire language or acquire languages faster than adults. But there are researchers that have proven that, if at all adults are slow at learning, it is because of certain inhibitions such as shame or fear of committing errors and children do not have that, or a lot of children do not bother themselves with shame or fear of committing errors and therefore, they pick up the language faster.

So, if adults kind of stay away from such negative inhibitors such as fear, fear of committing errors and shame, then adults could learn like anybody else. The second misconception is that the mother tongue stands in the way of learning a foreign language. That is, again, not true.

It is a very common misconception among people that a child's mother tongue is an obstacle or a hindrance to language learning. In fact, the opposite is true. That is mother tongue, aides foreign language learning. There are a lot of researchers that have proven that having a sound knowledge in mother tongue can only aid second language learning.

The third common misconception is that of monolingualism. A lot of teachers feel that child should be exposed only to a single language that is the English language. That is the language that brings him success. Not true. Multilingualism is a very fabric of our society.

Our brain is equipped to be multilingual; we are multilingual in nature. And multilingualism has a lot of benefits, especially cognitive benefits. So with that, let us say goodbye to the sub-topic language in schools. We will now talk about English in Indian society. So when we are talking about it, I am going to tell you why English has flourished in India.

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## ENGLISH IN INDIA : INDIAN ENGLISH

- People generally tend to see that elevation of one language to the status of official language endows great benefits and advantages to those whose mother tongue it is which also places a discriminatory burden on others. This can lead speakers of non-favored language to push a foreign language as a link medium to neutralize this imbalance.
- The reasons that helped English keep its place in India are : Fluidity, willingness to change and openness
- Indian English : Reduplication, Retroflex sounds , Use of article, Prepositional stranding, tense (never fronted), Tag questions etc.



One primary reason is that, of course, it is a global language, that is, the language that is equated with success. But beyond that, what are the other reasons why English has flourished in India? Why not Hindi or Assamese or Sanskrit or Tamil or Marathi or Odia or Malayalam? Why English?

Well, one reason is that English is nobodies language. Had Hindi rose to power or Malayalam rose to power, one of the Indian languages was declared as the national language of India, things would go really bad. Well, since I am making this point, let me take a quick detour and tell you, for those of you who do not know, Hindi is not the national language of our country, Hindi is the official language of our country, and English is the Associate Official Language.

So, the question is, why do we have English as the associate official language? And why has English flourished in Indian society when compared to so many other regional Indian languages? Well, the reason is, people generally tend to see the elevation of one language to the status of official language and those great benefits and advantages to those whose mother tongue it is, which means it also places a discriminatory burden on others.



So, this is what people generally believe. So this can actually lead speakers of the non-favoured language to push a foreign language as the link language or the link medium to neutralize the same balance that explains why English is our Associate Official Language. Now, let us look at the history. Sanskrit was one of the most coveted languages; it was considered the language of scholars; why did it not flourish? Why did Latin or Greek not flourish?

Again, both of these languages were the language of the elites. Because when elites controlled these languages, these languages became rigid, they did not mix with others, these languages were seen as the language of a particular class of people that is the language of elites. So, these languages were not accessible to the general public, and therefore these languages did not flourish.

So, against this backdrop, you must be able to understand why English kept its place in India. Reason one, it was fluid. It travelled all across the country, forming different variants like Hinglish, Manglish and Tanglish, meaning it was open to change. The fact that English had so many different variants or accents shows how fluid and porous the languages, so when English mixed with Indian languages, it took a new shape and evolved into what is known as Indian English.

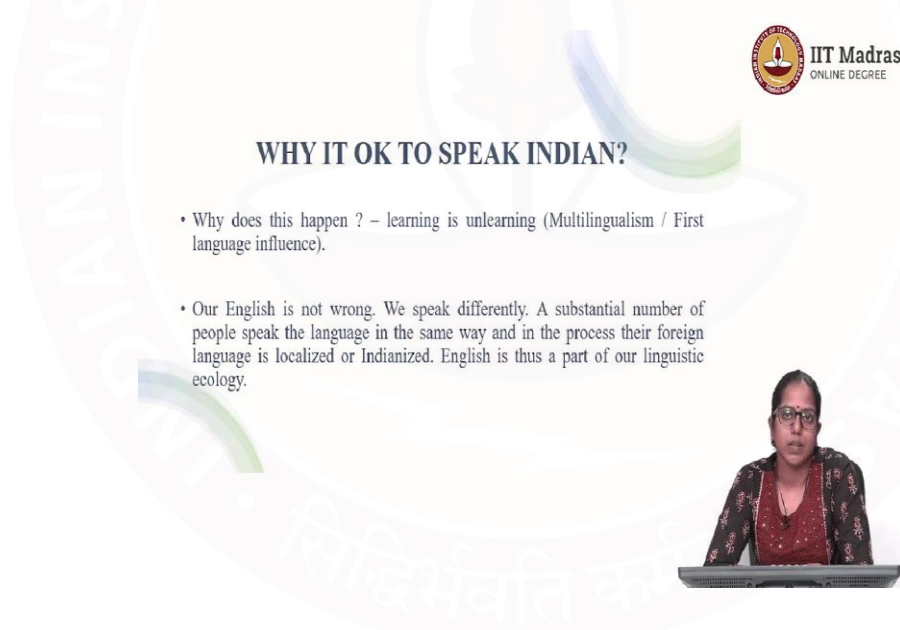
So, there are certain features to this Indian English. The first one is reduplication like I have already discussed, expressions like slowly, slowly, very, very, these are all examples of reduplication. Then you have what is known as retroflex sounds, that is, t sound as in when we say table, it is different from how native speakers pronounce, they pronounce it is table and not table.

Then we have the wrong use of the article, that is and one fat man instead of a fat man. Instead of and one fat man, that is an erroneous expression, we need to say and a fat man. Similarly, another example of wrong use of articles is we are going to the temple. You need to say we are going to a temple or we are going to the temple you visited last week. There again, you need to have an article before the word temple.

Now, another feature is what is known as a tense fronting. I know what is your name, this expression is quite common. But the grammatically right sentence is, I know what your name is. Another feature is what is known as a preposition stranding. An example of that is to whom did you give it? That is wrong. Instead, you need to ask, whom did you give it to?

Another feature is tag questions. That is, it is beautiful, no. This no actually comes from something like *sundar hai na*, that *na* gets transferred or the use of *na* at the end of this question or the sentence gets transferred to English and therefore, we end up saying things like, it is beautiful, no. It was bad, no. It was good, no et cetera.

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**WHY IT OK TO SPEAK INDIAN?**

- Why does this happen ? – learning is unlearning (Multilingualism / First language influence).
- Our English is not wrong. We speak differently. A substantial number of people speak the language in the same way and in the process their foreign language is localized or Indianized. English is thus a part of our linguistic ecology.

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सिद्धिर्भवति कर्मजा

Why do we have these features in Indian English? And why does this happen? The simple answer is there is a good influence of mother tongue on any foreign language that we speak. Is that good? Is that bad? Well, it is definitely not bad, because it is quite natural.

Any speaker of any language will definitely have the influence of his or her mother tongue on the foreign languages they speak. So, please understand that it is quite normal,

and it is quite natural to have accents to have transferred the features of your language to the foreign language that you are speaking. It is all quite normal as a learner.

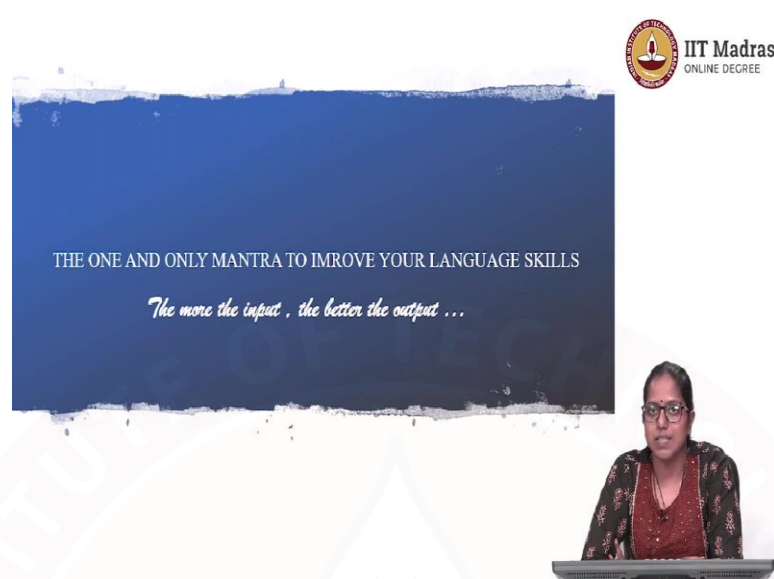
You may always read more expose yourself to the target language so that you improve your proficiency in the language that is always possible. Please remember that wherever you are as a language learner, please do not feel ashamed or have fears of committing errors that can only stop you from achieving proficiency in the language.

And why is it okay to speak Indian or okay to speak the way that comes naturally to you? Because the whole world is multilingual in nature, our country is very multilingual, and our human brains are also multilingual by default; our brains are equipped to handle multiple languages.

So, what do we understand with all that? With all this, with this entire lecture, having talked about how language is external to us? How it is in Indian society? How it is treated in schools and the different features of Indian English, and why English has become the link language or the medium language in Indian society with all that we have covered so far?

So, what we need to understand from all that we have discussed so far is that our English is not wrong. We speak differently, and a substantial number of people speak the language the same way, and in the process, the foreign language English is localized and Indianized. English is thus a part of our linguistic ecology, and therefore, never feel bad about the accent or the way you speak. Speak it the way it comes to you naturally, and nothing is more graceful than speaking the way that comes to you naturally.

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So, with all this again, what did you learn about language learning and use? Well, there can be hundreds of theories about language learning, about language use, but the one undebatable mantra for improving your language skills or, for that matter, in any language is to expose yourself more to the target language. Here, in this case, it is English.

So, expose yourself more to the English language, it could be in the form of songs, essays and novels and speech, public speeches, news, every different form, any piece of writing that you come across, make sure that you read. In that process, you are exposing yourself to the target language, and this is the only workable mantra that is the more the input, the better the output.

So, with that, we come to the end of this class. So by now, I hope you have understood why I have included this particular module in a language course, English language course you could say that it has got nothing to do with improving my language skills. It does not give any input or rules about using the English language. But this definitely helps you get rid of a lot of misconceptions about language learning and use, be it any language.

When you embark on a journey, on a journey of language learning, be it any target, the target language could be any; in this case, it is English. I feel it is important that you

understand how language is internal to us, how language is external to us, and this understanding will definitely help you or aid you to get rid of a lot of misconceptions or stereotypes that hold us back from speaking confidently.

In fact, I believe that everyone should know how language learning takes place within us. How language is present or how language exists outside us and what its features are. It can help us grow. It can help us use languages effectively and efficiently. So with that, we are coming to the end of the session. I hope you enjoyed the session. I will meet you with a different topic on a different day. Until then, stay safe. Take care. Bye.

