

Language and Grammar

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Language of India

- Our ancient scriptures reveal that since the early ages in our country great value has been attached to the study of language in all its dimensions: sounds, words, sentences, metres, etymology and meaning.
- Indian languages may be grouped into two major language families

- 1) Indo Aryan languages: spoken mainly in the northern part of India
 - 2) Dravidian language : languages spoken in the southern part of India, chief ones being Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada.
- Languages spoken by small communities in the North East, the northern Himalayan regions and also in different small areas of Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Andaman etc., belong to the Austro-Asiatic family.
 - Kashmiri belongs to Dardic group (regarded as a subbranch of the Indic branch of the Indo-European family but showing certain Iranian characteristics.).
 - While there are almost 1600 languages spoken in India, the Eighth Schedule of Indian Constitution accepts twenty-two as the official languages of India.
 - India's languages use a number of scripts, though only about 30 of the 1600 languages are written down.
 - Some of the major scripts used in Indian languages, including Inscriptions, are : Brahmi, Kharoshti, Sharada, Devanagari, Dravidian Old Tamil and Perso-Arabic.

Harappan Civilization

- The earliest written documents of our subcontinent go back to the Harappan civilization.
- The language and the script of the Harappans remains undeciphered so far and therefore we are led to only conjectures about several elements of this civilization.



- There are however two views on the Harappan language: some scholars argue that the language belonged to Dravidian family while others suggest that it belongs to Indo-Aryan family of languages.
- The Harappan Script is logo-syllabic i.e. each symbol stood for a word or syllable. Generally written and meant to be read from right to left (reversed on seals).
- A common script has been found all over the Harappan cultural zone which indicates a high level of cultural integration in this civilization.
- The symbols have been found on inscribed objects. Total of 3,700 inscribed objects found at Harappan sites.
- Most writing appears on seals and sealings (moist clay tablets). Some on copper tablets, copper/bronze implements, pottery and miscellaneous objects. Also a possibility that some people wrote on perishable material.
- About 50 percent of inscribed objects found at Mohenjodaro and Harappa.
- Most inscriptions very short with an average of 5 signs. The longest has 26 signs. In total, about 400-450 basic signs have been found.
- The evidence of Harappan script disappeared by c. 1700 BCE (period when Harappan cities declined) and suggests a close connection of writing with city life and lack of sufficient downward percolation of writing.



Vedic Times

- Rig Veda: first scripture, deciphered document

- Was passed on orally for generations
- Written in Classical Sanskrit
- Gave huge importance to language
- The study of language arose from the need to understand Rigveda.
- Rigveda distinguishes between ordinary language (*bhasa*) and good speech (use of language) that should be used to speak the truth and to say what one sees.
- A good speech is characterized by originality, creativity, purpose, and thoughtfulness.
- In the Brahmana texts, speech is rooted in the mind and mind comprehends expression in speech.
- Six disciplines known as *vedangas* developed to articulate and interpret the Vedic texts:
 1. Shiksha: phonetics
 2. Nirukta: etymology
 3. Vyakarana: grammar
 4. Chanda: prosody
 5. Kalpa: ritualistic performances
 6. Jyotisa: astronomy
- **First four pertain to language**, its sounds, words and forms, meaning and metre. These four are today part of modern linguistics.

Features of Language

- Before we study the 4 *vedangas* associated with language and grammar, it is important to note that in Indian tradition language has three important features:

1. Speech: *bhasa, vak, vani, boli* etc. Scriptures assert that language is speech and writing is secondary as it represents speech
2. Thought: thinking is not possible without language
3. Idea and Meaning: language constructs things, experiences, emotions and ideas by naming them.

Shiksha Vedanga: Phonetics

- Treatises on phonetics
- Science of speech-sounds, developed in response to the need to preserve and articulate accurately the Vedic mantras in the oral tradition.
- It has four inter-related aspects:
 1. How speech-sounds are produced
 2. Listing and classification of speech-sounds : varnamala, garland of letters or alphabets
 3. Sounds in context (sandhi)

4. How a sound changes when it is spoken along with other sounds.

- Paniniya Siksa: the most ancient work on Indo-Aryan Phonetics. Teaches the art of speech production involving mental and physical faculties
- Panini's Astadhyay: another important text on phonetics which provides a list of Sanskrit speech-sounds.

Nirukta Vedanga: Etymology

- Science to study the meaning of words in Vedic texts.
- This was composed by Yaska.
- It is a commentary on Nighantu, a classified list of Vedic words compiled by Yaska himself.
- The text is composed in the form of a discussion.
- By the time of Yaska (9th century BCE), the language of the Vedas had become difficult to understand because many words had gone out of use and their meanings were no longer clear. So Yaska prepared a list of such difficult words in Nighantu and then explained their origin and meaning in Nirukta.
- Yaska classifies all words into four classes:
 1. Nama: nouns and pronouns
 2. Akhyata: verbs
 3. Upasarga: Prefixes

4. Nipata: indeclinable (a word that must be determined from its context because it does not have anything added to show a grammatical category such as tense, gender, mood or number. E.g I am having Coffee, Study or you will fail.)

- Yaska explained meanings of words by tracing their verb root, basis of its phonetics and semantic similarities. For example, word paka is made from root pac which is to cook.

Vyakrana: Grammar

- The most important discipline for the study of all other knowledge disciplines.
- Vyakrana literally means an instrument of decision or analysis. Without it, it is not possible to break down a text into sentences and words.
- Panini (7th century BC) : father of Indian Grammar. However, he is not the first one as, about eighty-five grammarians are known to exist before him.
- Panini's Astadhyayi is a grammar of both the spoken language (kautiki) and the compositional language (vaidiki). It is composed in the sutra (abbreviated and exact) style and contains around 4000 sutras. These sutras are arranged in eight chapters, hence the text is called Astadhyayi.
- Each chapter contains four subsections called pada (so a total of 32 subsections).
- This text is a comprehensive description of human language. Sentences that meet the rules of Pāṇini's grammar are accepted as siddha, literally 'ripe' or 'mature'. It remains a model for later grammarians.
- This grammar has also served as a model for grammars of many languages: Persian, Tibetan, Tamil, Prakrit, besides many Indian and central Asian languages. On account of its appropriateness for computational grammar, the Aṣṭādhyāyī has come to be studied in the departments of Linguistics and Computer Science.
- After Pāṇini, there was a succession of thinkers of language, grammar and philosophy of language: Kātyāyana (4th century BCE) who commented on Pāṇini's rules, Patañjali's (2nd century BCE) who composed Mahābhāṣya (literally, 'The grand commentary'), a commentary on Aṣṭādhyāyī, and Bhartṛhari (5th century CE) whose Vākyapadīya is a celebrated work of philosophy of language and grammar. Grammar influenced both philosophy and literary theory thinkers such as Bharata (2nd century BCE), Bhāmaha (6th century CE), Vāmana (7th–8th century) and

Abhinavagupta (9th century) composed works on language and the philosophy of literature. Buddhists and Jainas were also deeply influenced by Paṇini's grammar and composed Cāndra Vyākaraṇa (4th century CE) and Jainendra Vyākaraṇa (5th century CE) respectively. In the long tradition of grammars and grammarians comes Nāgeṣh Bhaṭṭa (1670-1750), who wrote three books on the philosophy of grammar and is accepted as the final authority.

Chanda: Prosody

- The patterns of rhythm and sound used in poetry.
- A major portion of the Vedic compositions is composed in poetic metre, so the science of prosody also developed in India in very early times.
- In oral traditions, prosody helps to maintain the text in its original form.
- A change occurring in a versified text in course of time can be easily traced as it disturbs the rhythm or flow of the text.
- Sage Pingala, supposed to be a contemporary of Panini, composed the earliest prosody text called Pingala sutra or Chanda-sutra.
- Of the many metrical arrangements, *anustubh* is the most frequently employed metre in the classical Sanskrit literature and the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata have used this metre.
- Tamil metres are described in the Tolkappiyam. Apart from these, there are various local metres in

different languages.

Tolkappiyam

- Most ancient surviving Tamil grammar text and the oldest surviving work of Tamil literature.
- The author of the work is Tolkappiyar (Tholkaappiyar).
- As per available records, he lived before 4,200 B.C
- The surviving manuscripts of the Tolkappiyam consists of three books, each with nine chapters, with a cumulative total of 1,612 sutras in the nūrpā meter.
- The first two sections deal with language (linguistics) and the third about the subject matters referred to in Tamil literature, the behavior of the Tamils.

Historical Overview

- The earliest form of written language, Sanskrit is found in the Rig Veda.

- After the Rig Veda was composed, Sanskrit language developed rapidly. The grammar became considerably simplified though still remaining complex. Major contribution: Panini.
- Sanskrit spread to other parts of the country including countries like Cambodia and Srilanka.
- When Buddhism emerged as a new religion people started speaking languages much simpler than Sanskrit. These were known as the Prakrit. In the pre-Gupta period the inscriptions especially the series of Ashoka's edicts are in Prakrit. Prakrit was simpler than Sanskrit in respect of both sound and grammar. One of the early Prakrit of considerable importance was Pali which became the language of one sect of the Buddhists.
- On the other hand, Tamil is the oldest of Dravidian languages with a literature dating back to the earliest centuries after the beginning of the Christian era. These languages form an independent group with a distinctive character.