
The Impact of Sanskrit on the English Language: Tracing Linguistic Connections Across Civilizations

Mr V.Bujji Babu (PhD)

Assistant Professor of English, DVR& Dr HS MIC College of Technology,
Knachikacherla, Andhra Pradesh

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Abstract: This paper explores the influence of Sanskrit, one of the oldest Indo-European languages, on the English language. While the direct impact may be limited, both languages share a deep-rooted historical and linguistic lineage through the Proto-Indo-European language family. The paper examines etymological roots, shared grammatical features, lexical borrowings, and cultural transmissions that have shaped certain aspects of English vocabulary and linguistic thought. It also highlights the resurgence of interest in Sanskrit among Western scholars and its indirect impact on philosophical and scientific terminology in English.

Keywords: Sanskrit, etymological roots, shared grammatical features, lexical borrowings, and cultural transmissions.

1. Introduction

The English language, a prominent global lingua franca, has evolved through a rich interplay of various linguistic and cultural influences. Among these, Sanskrit stands out due to its ancient origins and structural sophistication. Although Sanskrit and English evolved in different regions and eras, both belong to the Indo-European family of languages, offering a fascinating field of comparative linguistic analysis.

2. Historical Context

Sanskrit dates back to at least 1500 BCE and was formalized in Panini's *Ashtadhyayi*, a sophisticated grammatical treatise. English, on the other hand, evolved from Germanic roots around the 5th century CE. Both languages descend from a common ancestor: Proto-Indo-European (PIE). The linguistic connection between Sanskrit and many European languages, including English, was first identified by Sir William Jones in 1786, marking the birth of comparative linguistics.

3. Etymological Connections

Several English words have etymological roots that trace back to Sanskrit via PIE. Examples include:

- **Mother** (English) ← *Mātr* (Sanskrit)
- **Brother** ← *Bhrātṛ*
- **Three** ← *Traya*
- **Name** ← *Nāma*

These examples indicate a shared linguistic ancestry, not direct borrowing, but inherited linguistic features.

4. Lexical Influences and Borrowings

While direct borrowings from Sanskrit to English are limited, several words entered English through academic and cultural exchanges, especially during the British colonial period. These include:

- **Guru** – spiritual teacher
- **Yoga** – union, a spiritual discipline
- **Avatar** – incarnation
- **Mantra** – sacred utterance
- **Karma, Dharma, Nirvana**, etc.

Such words have become part of the English lexicon, especially in philosophical, spiritual, and wellness contexts.

5. Grammatical and Structural Observations

Both languages share PIE-origin grammar traits, such as noun declensions, verb conjugations, and use of root words. However, English evolved into a more analytical language over time, whereas Sanskrit retained its synthetic structure.

An interesting aspect is Panini's influence on modern computational linguistics. His rule-based grammar system has inspired developments in natural language processing (NLP), which indirectly influences English-based AI systems.

6. Sanskrit and Modern English Thought

The resurgence of Sanskrit studies in the West, especially in fields like linguistics, philosophy, and science, has led to a renewed appreciation of its contributions. Scholars like Schlegel, Max Müller, and modern-day linguists have emphasized Sanskrit's logical structure, which complements English as a scientific and academic language.

The English language, like many others, is a product of centuries of evolution and interaction with various cultures and linguistic systems. Among the ancient languages that have subtly influenced English, Sanskrit holds a unique place. As the classical language of ancient India, Sanskrit has contributed to the English lexicon, phonetics, and even

philosophical thought. While the influence may not be as direct or widespread as Latin or Greek, its presence is undeniable and fascinating.

7. Etymological Influence

Sanskrit has contributed to English primarily through indirect borrowings via other languages such as Hindi, Persian, and Latin. Words like *guru*, *karma*, *mantra*, *nirvana*, and *yoga* have become common in English, especially in spiritual, philosophical, and wellness contexts. These words carry deep meanings in Sanskrit and have been adopted into English with similar connotations, reflecting a cultural and conceptual transfer that enriches the English vocabulary.

8. Phonetic and Grammatical Parallels

Interestingly, both Sanskrit and English belong to the Indo-European language family. This shared ancestry explains certain phonetic and grammatical similarities. For instance, the Sanskrit word *mātr* (mother) and the English word "mother" share both phonetic elements and meaning. Similar parallels can be drawn with words like *pitar* (father) and *bhrātṛ* (brother), highlighting a deep-rooted linguistic connection that dates back to Proto-Indo-European origins.

9. Influence on Thought and Literature

Sanskrit has also impacted English through the transmission of Indian philosophical and literary ideas. Translations of Sanskrit texts like the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Upanishads*, and *Rigveda* have influenced Western thinkers such as Emerson, Thoreau, and Schopenhauer. These philosophical concepts, once translated, often required English to expand its vocabulary and adopt Sanskrit terms to convey nuanced ideas, further embedding Sanskrit into English discourse.

Conclusion

While Sanskrit's direct influence on English vocabulary may appear minimal, the two languages share profound linguistic ancestry. The structural, phonetic, and philosophical contributions of Sanskrit continue to inspire English linguistic studies, proving that ancient languages still echo in modern tongues. The impact of Sanskrit on English is thus more foundational and scholarly than lexical or conversational.

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