



Swamy Vivekananda Vidya Samsthe (R)

Kumadvathi College of Education, Shikaripura

SUBJECT

LANGUAGE ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

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Unit : 1.3

Classification of Languages

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## Unit : 1.3 Classification of Languages

India is the home of a very large number of languages. In fact, so many languages and dialects are spoken in India that it is often described as a '*museum of languages*'. The language diversity is by all means baffling. In popular parlance it is often described as '*linguistic pluralism*'. But this may not be a correct description. The prevailing situation in the country is not pluralistic but that of a continuum.

One dialect merges into the other almost imperceptibly; one language replaces the other gradually. Moreover, along the line of contact between two languages, there is a zone of transition in which people are bilingual.

On the country, the give-and-take between the languages groups has been very common, often resulting in systematic borrow-ings from one language to the other. The cases of assimilation of one language into the other are also not uncommon. Let us look at the nature of linguistic diversity observed in India today.

According to the Linguistic Survey of India conducted by Sir George Abraham Grierson towards the end of the nineteenth century, there were 179 languages and as many as 544 dialects in the country.

Even the 1961 census recorded 187 languages. This was despite the fact that the census investigation was far more systematic and the classification was based on modern linguistic criteria.

The diversity of languages and dialects is a reality and it is not the numerical strength of the speakers of a language which is important. The important fact is that there are people who claim a certain language as their mother tongue. Another related development which contributed to linguistic diversity was the development of script. Different Indian languages were written in different scripts.

This made learning of different languages a difficult exercise. However, with the growth of scripts, written languages have been successful in maintaining their record with the consequence that literary traditions have evolved.

## LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY IN INDIA

In India, various linguistic groups are living. Linguistic diversity is a general problem in India. In the past **Sanskrit** was serving as a link language. After independence Hindi is considered as link language. Constitutionally it is approved as national language. English is also serving as link language of educated people.

The problem in relation to language comes to the forefront for, all the states do not agree to accept Hindi as national language. The southern states particularly don't want to accept Hindi as the link language. They think that it is the imposition on them by the northern people.

Linguist indicates loyalty of a group towards a particular language. While doing so they don't consider the welfare of any other linguistic group. So, this is a blind loyalty towards a particular language at the cost of other languages. The group wants to take political advantages by using a particular language as a means to an end.

## **1. Geographical location:**

Geographical location may isolate a particular region from other regions. So, the people of that region, who use same language, think that they are separated from other regions. They develop a sense of parochialism.

## **2. Political cause:**

Politics is also playing its role in creating linguist. To

### **3. Blind loyalty:**

A group when develops blind livingness towards their own language that creates the problem of linguism. They think that their language and their literature are superior and rich than any other language.

### **4. Other causes:**

There are also historical, psychological and social causes for the development of linguism.

## Measures To Eradicate Linguism:

- (a) Development of communication not to isolate any region.
- (b) Attempts must be taken for wider cultural contact, like translation of literature of a particular region in various languages.
- (c) Steps should be taken to abolish political parties who create feeling of linguism among the people to get vote.
- (d) A language which will be accepted by all, north and south must be evolved to solve the problem of linguism.

All these problems like linguism, casteism, communalism etc. give threatening to the unity and integrity of the nation. With all these problems there are some areas, which provide scope for creation of unity among the different groups.



## CLASSIFICATION OF INDIAN LANGUAGES

The classification is based upon the number of people speaking each family of languages. The first is the Aryan family which is numerically and also culturally, the most important in India.

People of India speak a large number of languages which are broadly divided into the following four families:

1. Indo-European Family (Arya)
2. Dravidian Family (Dravida)
3. Austric Family (Nishada)
4. Sino Tibetan Family (Kirata)

# Linguistic Diversity in India



## **1. The Aryan Languages (Indo-European Family )**

This is the most important of all the families of languages and spoken by a little less than three fourths of the Indian population. The Aryan languages are divided into following two main branches

(i) The Dardic Aryan Languages and

(ii) The Indo Aryan Languages

### **(i) The Dardic Aryan Languages:**

This group comprises a number of languages which are current among very small mountain communities in Kashmir. Out of India, it is spoken by small communities living on the Border between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The Dardic languages into three branches: (a) Shina including Kashmiri, Shina proper and Kohistani; (b) Khowar or Chatran or Chitrali and (c) Kafuistan (or Nuristani) dialects.

## **(ii) The Indo-Aryan Languages:**

This is the second sub-group of the Aryan languages in which Hindi, Bengali, Punjabi, Rajasthan, Gujarati, Sindhi, Kachchi, Marathi, Oriya, Sanskrit, Assamese and Urdu are included. Based upon the regional distribution of the people speaking these languages, they are Six grouped as under:

### **(a) Northern Aryan Languages:**

Languages of this group belong to the dialects spoken by the hilly people in North India. They include Nepali, Central Pahari and Western Pahari Aryan languages.

### **(b) North-Western Aryan Languages:**

Khanda, Kachchi and Sindhi are the well-known Aryan languages which are spoken by the people living in the north-western part of the country.

### **(c) Southern Aryan Languages:**

Marathi and Konkani are the languages included in the Southern group of Aryan languages.

### **(d) Eastern Aryan Languages:**

The region of these languages lies in the eastern parts of the country, Bihari, Oriya, Bengali and Assamese languages constitute this group of Aryan languages.

### **(e) East Central Aryan Languages:**

Avadh, Bundelkhand and Chhattisgarh regions include these languages as the languages of the people living there. Avadhi, Bugheli and Chhattisgarhi are their languages.

### **(f) Central Aryan Languages:**

The central region of India is the region of Central Aryan languages. The major languages of this region are Hindi, Punjabi, Rajasthani and Alawari.

## **2. Dravidian Languages**

Dravidian languages are older than the Aryan languages. According to an estimate, Dravidians entered India much before the Aryans. Other estimates indicate that they are the original people of the country, who were driven away towards south by the Aryans at a later stage.

Today, the Dravidian languages form a well knit family by themselves and unlike the Aryan, the Austric and the Sino- Tibetan speeches they have no relations outside the Indian subcontinent. The Dravidian languages fall into several groups. Two major groups are as under:

### **(i) The North Dravidian Languages:**

Telugu and a number of other languages such as various Gondi dialects, Kuruth or Orion, Maler or Malpahariya, Kui or Kandh, Parji, Kolami and a few others are included in this group. Telugu is numerically the most important of all the Dravidian languages and has a very rich literature.

This language has spread outside India also - in Myanmar, Indo-China and South Africa. It is usually called the Italian of the East by its admirers. Its vocabulary is much influenced by Sanskrit.

## **(ii) South Dravidian Languages:**

This group of languages includes Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam. A number of speeches like Tulu, Kota, Kurgi (or Kodagu) and Toda are also included in this group. Tamil is spoken in large parts of Tamil Nadu. Outside India, it is spoken by a large number of people in Sri Lanka.

This language has preserved the old Dravidian spirit in its original form to a great extent. Tamil literature goes back to many centuries before Christ. Tamil presents certain new literary types which are not found in Sanskrit and other Aryan languages. While it includes extensive Sanskrit element, this language has retained the purity of its Dravidian vocabulary to a much greater extent than any other cultivated Dravidian language.



**Malayalam** is currently the language of Kerala and Lakshadweep. It had its origin in the old Tamil about 1,500 years ago. The Old Tamil speech started showing simplifications as early as 10th century A.D. Then it followed its own path away from its sister dialects. The speech of Kerala developed independently and became transformed into Malayalam.

The first Malayalam writings are said to go back into the period from 13th century to 15th century, when it was established as an independent language. Malayalam has been influenced by Sanskrit more than any other language of India.

**Kannada** is the main language of the present Karnataka state. The literary cultivation of this language began from the middle of the first millennium A.D. Kannada has passed through three stages: (a) Old Kannada up to 13th century (b) Medieval Kannada up to 16th century and (c) Hosa Kannada which is the language of the present day.

### **3. Austric Languages:**

The Austric languages of India belong to the Austro-Asiatic sub-family. This category is further sub-divided into Munda and Mon-Khmer.

#### **(i) Munda or Kol Languages:**

Munda languages are the largest of the Austric group of languages. They consist of fourteen tribal languages. The Kherwari is the major group, which is current in Eastern India (Chota Nagpur, Orissa, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal) and includes Santhali, Mundari, Ho, Birhor, Bhumiej, Korwa and Korku (or Kurku). Santhali, Mundari, and Ho languages have a Important literature preserved orally, consisting of songs and mythological romantic stories.

## **(ii) Mon-Khmer Languages:**

Mon-Khmer group of Austric languages has two sub-groups— Khasi and Nicobari. Khasi languages are spoken by Khasi tribal people of Meghalaya, while Nicobari languages are the languages of the tribal people of the Nicobar Islands. Khasi used to be written in Bengali-Assamese script about a century ago. Through the influence of Welsh Methodist missionaries, the Roman alphabet has been adopted for Khasi and some literature has been produced.

## ***4. Sino-Tibetan Languages:***

The Sino-Tibetan languages are spoken by a variety of people. Depending upon the region of settlement, these languages are put into several groups and sub-groups. Sino-Tibetan languages have three major sub-divisions:

- (i) The Tibeto-Himalayan.
- (ii) The North-Assam
- (iii) The Assam-Myanmari (Burmese)

### **(i) The Tibetan-Himalayan Languages:**

This sub-division of the Sino-Tibetan group of languages is further subdivided as the Himalayan group and the Bhutia group.

#### **(a) The Himalayan Group:**

The Himalayan group consists of 4 languages. They are Chamba, Lahauli, Kannaure and Lepcha. Kannaure is the most widely spoken language of the Himalayan group.

#### **(b) The Bhutia Group:**

Tibetan, Balti, Ladakhi, Lahauli, Sherpa and Sikkim Bhutia are included in the Bhutia group of Sino-Tibetan languages. Ladakhi has largest number of Bhutia speakers. It is followed by Sikkim Bhutia and the Tibetan languages in that order.

## **(ii) North Assam Languages:**

The North Assam branch of languages of the Sino-Tibetan group is also called the Arunachal branch. It consists of six languages, such as Aka, Daflta, Abor, Miri, Mishnil and Mishing. Largest number of people speaks Miri language.

## **(iii) The Assam Myanmari Languages:**

This group of languages includes Boro or Bodo, Naga, Cochin, Kukichin and Myanmar groups. Naga is the largest speaking language of this group. Besides these, the Sino-Tibetan group of languages have some other important languages. They are Manipuri, Garo, Tripuri, Mikir and Lusai. Lusai is also termed as Mizo.