

SANSKRIT: A VAARADHI TO ENGLISH VOCABULARY

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ABSTRACT

Words, the building blocks of language, illumine everything. Words are, in general, acquired through a constant exposure to language during the critical period in the first language acquisition. In second language acquisition, on the other hand, the teaching-learning setting of words poses to be a highly challenging task for teachers as well as learners on the ground of various morphological inflections and phonological patterns of the words of L2 which may be different from those of the L1 of the learner.

Sanskrit, an ancient and scholarly language, is the indweller of all Indian languages because of which an Indian can fairly make out the words of Sanskrit and does not require a formal learning of it. As established by the West, it also has a very close connection to Indo-European languages and thus English. The English teaching community in India has been on a relentless quest to come up with even better word-teaching practices for so many decades now. If the community can make use of the phenomenon of morphological and phonological transformations between Sanskrit and English, it will not only help the students learn words but also make them own the L2 through the Sanskrit words.

The present paper concentrates on the morphological and phonological transformation of words between Sanskrit and English which is by no means exhaustive. The impetus set here is expected to stir up the interest in the teachers to carry out some research on the phenomenon and thus provide the learners the incentive for better learning.

KEYWORDS: Morphological and Phonological Transformations, Sanskrit, Second Language Learning, Vocabulary

INTRODUCTION

‘A word is a microcosm of human consciousnesses.’ (Vygotsky)

Language emerges first as words like river emerging first as water. Lexis and language are inseparable just like water and river. While the usual passage of water determines the length, width and depth of a river, the number of lexical items and their myriad nuances of meanings present in a language constitute the richness of it. Language, with its unceasing flux in all its manifestations of phonological, lexical, structural and semantic domains, flourishes borrowing and re-borrowing lexical items and meanings from tongues that co-exist like river expanding its horizon welcoming waters from diverse sources.

It’s been a relentless quest on the part of the teacher to employ highly efficacious practices that can aid the teaching –learning process of words. As a result, there has been a revival in the exercise which is conspicuous in the present approaches that are more word-centered.

Words, the building blocks of language, stand highly challenging in terms of the pedagogical arena defying any single strategy since the learning of words, on the part of the students, is determined by various facets. However, there are

a large number of well practiced and fairly efficient word-teaching techniques used by teachers which, irrespective of the disparate group of the learners, facilitate the learning of words. Here is a list of such strategies used by teachers which encompasses almost all the present day techniques.

- Definition or paraphrase of the meanings
- Pictorial representation of meanings
- Using known vocabulary to familiarize new words
- Using mother tongue
- Making a list of kindred vocabulary
- Incidental word learning through wide reading (Herman, Anderson, Pearson, & Nagy, 1987; Miller & Gildea, 1987)
- Teaching multiple-meaning words: Semantic maps (Johnson & Pearson, 1984; Pittelman, Heimlich, Berglund, & French, 1991)
- Collocations
- Teaching words for New and Complex Concepts (Frayer, Frederick, & Klausmeier, 1969)
- Using dictionaries and other reference aids (Armbrusher et al., 2001, p.38)
- Connotative and denotative meanings
- Using word-part clues or morphology (Carlisle, 2004)
- Word classes
- Using context clues (Armbrusher et al., 2001)
- Word families
- Synonyms and antonyms
- Prefixes and suffixes
- Root words

In addition to the aforementioned strategies, there is another even better practice especially for Indian students, which is highly engaging but hardly made use of, which we will discuss a little later.

The L1 of the learner having its own repertoire of lexis and their morphological and inflectional derivations and positive and/or negative evidences plays a vital role either in stymieing or in assisting the process of learning of words of the target language. Also, the morphological structure may not be concatenative i.e., the word structure may not be composed by assembling morphemes in a linear fashion posing a problem for the learners who have a certain system of word structure depending on the L1. Moreover, the culturally alienating teaching material or method adopted in teaching will even impede the learning (Prodromou, 1988). Thus, the teaching of vocabulary ultimately turns to be a challenging task.

Fortunately, the Indian vernaculars belonging to different language families, facilitate the learning of lexical items of English through Sanskrit which has been left unexplored for decades now. This edge, which Indians subconsciously have, will prove to be a highly efficacious strategy providing the learner the incentive for learning if implemented in the arena of English-teaching in India. Nevertheless, the Indian teachers are either ignorant of it or averse to it for various reasons. On the other hand, the culturally unappealing teaching materials and the methods practiced for centuries is still the well-celebrated content of the teacher-training programs offered by universities. Such kind of rigmarole of training and being trained will ultimately make the natural language learning a mere academic subject not serving the purpose.

SANSKRIT: A SAARADHI FOR INDIAN LANGUAGES AND VAARADHI FOR ENGLISH

Sanskrit, an inflectional language, to define which all other languages will remain scarce, can be defined only by itself. An ancient and indigenous language of India, which redefines what language is, underlies all the vernaculars of present India enlivening, enriching and refining them in terms of lexemes and structures across language families. As for learning the words of English, Sanskrit will be of effective aid underlying many words of English which, unfortunately, is not utilized by ELT experts in designing materials. All the root words of English get introduced to Indians as Latin, Greek, French, Scandinavian and so on but not as Sanskrit words. William Jones (1786) and other western Scholars in the late 18th century made a discovery which ascertains that Sanskrit, Latin, Greek, Germanic and Celtic languages constitute one branch of Indo-European family of languages on the ground of sound correspondences, lexemes (cognates) and structures. In such case, obviously, there will be corresponding Sanskrit roots for the root words of Latin or Greek which underlie English vocabulary. Here, the point is not as to whether Sanskrit predates the so called classical languages of Europe but the fact that Sanskrit belongs to the same family obviates the reliance on alien languages. A renowned Sanskrit scholar P. N. Oak (1992) states:-

‘Apart from the academic debate whether English is an offshoot of Sanskrit or an amalgam of several languages, a practical proof is that a number of lingual problems of English can be solved only through recourse to Sanskrit.’

There surface many other scholars like Heinrich Roth.(1620-68), Arthur Berriedale Keith (1879-1944), Theodor Goldstücker (1821-72) and others who made a detailed observation on the phenomenon and reconstructed Sanskrit words through English. Thus, there appears Sanskrit in English at a deeper level once the layer of camouflage of certain phonological transformations is removed.

ENGLISH TEACHER TO ‘INDIAN TEACHER’

The Indian English teachers, for that matter any Indian, naturally get to acquire Sanskrit reasonably well through their mother tongue but the knowledge of which is not brought to the aid of teaching /learning words of English which maybe out of ignorance. Moreover, an English teacher in India is generally characterized by being indifferent or even averse to native vernaculars and being of the widely held view that English is the language of the rich and the elite group. In such a scenario, the present proposal may pose to be infeasible. However, there are ‘language teachers’ trying to explore language-mechanism and its manifestations in different forms making contrastive and error analyses so as to facilitate pedagogical practices and also resort to techniques that best suit the learning abilities of the pupils.

Concerning the main concern, it is prerequisite for the word-trainer to be primarily cognizant of certain phonological and morphological transformations without the knowledge of which the reconstruction of Sanskrit words out of those of English becomes a hard nut to crack from the point of view of the instructor. Jacob Grimm (1822) explained the

consonant sound shifts among cognates in Indo-European languages followed by Verner's law by Karl Verner (1875) which further explained certain irregular phonemic shifts to explain which the Grimm's law falls short of. Such systematic observations drive linguists or teachers to group certain languages as genetically or typologically related. Concerning the phonetic correspondences between Sanskrit and English, Philologists like William Jones and other scholars listed out some regular shifts. Though there appears a regular paradigm in the shift in terms of phonemes, the correspondences are, of course, not always unmarked demanding a special treatment. Adopting their contribution and incorporating our own insights into the phenomenon, we will now make an account of some of the unmarked regular sound patterns which happen between Sanskrit and English.

Table 1: Phonemic Pattern

Sanskrit	English	Data
/p/ (Voiceless bilabial plosive)	→ /p/ and/or /f/ (Voiceless bilabial plosive) and (voiceless labiodental fricative)	As in <i>pitaa</i> becoming <i>father</i> and/or <i>paternal</i> .
/k/ (Voiceless velar plosive)	→ /k/ and/or /s/ (Voiceless velar plosive) and (voiceless alveolar fricative)	As in <i>karam</i> becoming <i>chiromancy</i> and <i>kendram</i> becoming <i>centre</i> .
/b/ (Voiced bilabial plosive)	→ /b/ and/or /p/ (Voiced bilabial plosive) and (voiceless bilabial plosive)	As in <i>braata</i> becoming <i>brother</i> and <i>baadha</i> becoming <i>pathetic</i> .
/θ/ (Voiceless dental fricative)	→ /t/ (Voiceless alveolar plosive)	As in <i>maata</i> becoming <i>maternal</i> .
/ḍ/ (Voiced dental fricative)	→ /d/ (Voiced alveolar plosive)	As in <i>daanam</i> becoming <i>donation</i> .

Now let us turn our attention to some of the morphological transformations.

Table 2: Morphological Transformations

Sanskrit	English	Data
<i>a</i> 'not'	<i>a</i> 'not'	apathy, apolitical, atheist, anarchy, anomaly etc.
<i>pra</i> 'towards'	<i>pro</i> 'towards'	as in pro voke, prop ose, proj ect etc.
<i>madhya</i> 'middle'	<i>medi</i>	medi ocre, medi eal, medi al
<i>para</i> 'next to, beside'	<i>Para</i>	parallel , paradox , paraphrase etc.
<i>pari</i> 'around'	<i>per</i> 'completely, wrong' <i>peri</i> 'around'	persistent , perplex , permeate , perimeter , peripheral , peripatetic
<i>pura</i> 'before'	<i>pre</i> 'before'	prelude , premonition , presume
<i>prushTa</i> 'behind'	<i>post</i> 'after'	posthumous , posterior , ex post facto
<i>sta</i> 'to be'	<i>sTa</i> 'stability'	static , stagnant , stationary , etc.
<i>tra</i> 'movement'	<i>Tra</i> 'across'	transfer , transaction , transport , transition , transient , etc.

We will now have a look at some of the Sanskrit roots in English vocabulary.

Table 3: Lexemes (Word Roots)

Sanskrit Roots	Meaning	English Words
nava	new	innovate , renovate , novice , novelty , neologism ,
danta	teeth	dental , denture , orthodontics, dentist , orthodontia, dentistry
jananam	birth, creation, race, kind	generate , genius , photogenic, genuine , genealogy , genre , genesis , congenial, indigenous, congenital, progeny , generic and so on.
jnana	know	Ignore , ignoramus , recognize , diagnose , agnostic , cognitive , cognizant etc.
baadha	Feeling, suffering	Apathy , sympathy , empathy , antipathy , pathos , pathology , sociopath , psychopath etc.
varthana	to turn	controversy , revert , subvert , perverse , invert , divert , aversion , extrovert , introvert , covert , overt , avert etc.
vaak	Voice	vocabulary , provocative , advocate , equivocate , vocation , convoke , vociferous , irrevocable , evoke , revoke , invoke , provoke etc.

CONCLUSIONS

We use English not necessarily to integrate ourselves into English-speaking culture, but to communicate among ourselves or with other users of English in specific contexts.

(Sudharsan Anuradha, 2014)

We require the language English for the realization of which we should obligatorily make use of all possible means we are acquainted with and available to us in our Indian context so as to get a favorable result. Like what we have given above in table-1, 2 and 3 at different linguistic levels, if the English teacher in India can make a determined attempt to perceive the contribution of Sanskrit and make the learners taste it, the conscious and effortful learning will turn into a natural acquisition which is the intended target of today's English teachers.

However, though it's a bit disappointing, it is apparent and goes unsaid that all roots can't be Sanskrit words! Then, the teacher can, of course, resort to the help of other languages which has been the regular practice for decades now.

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