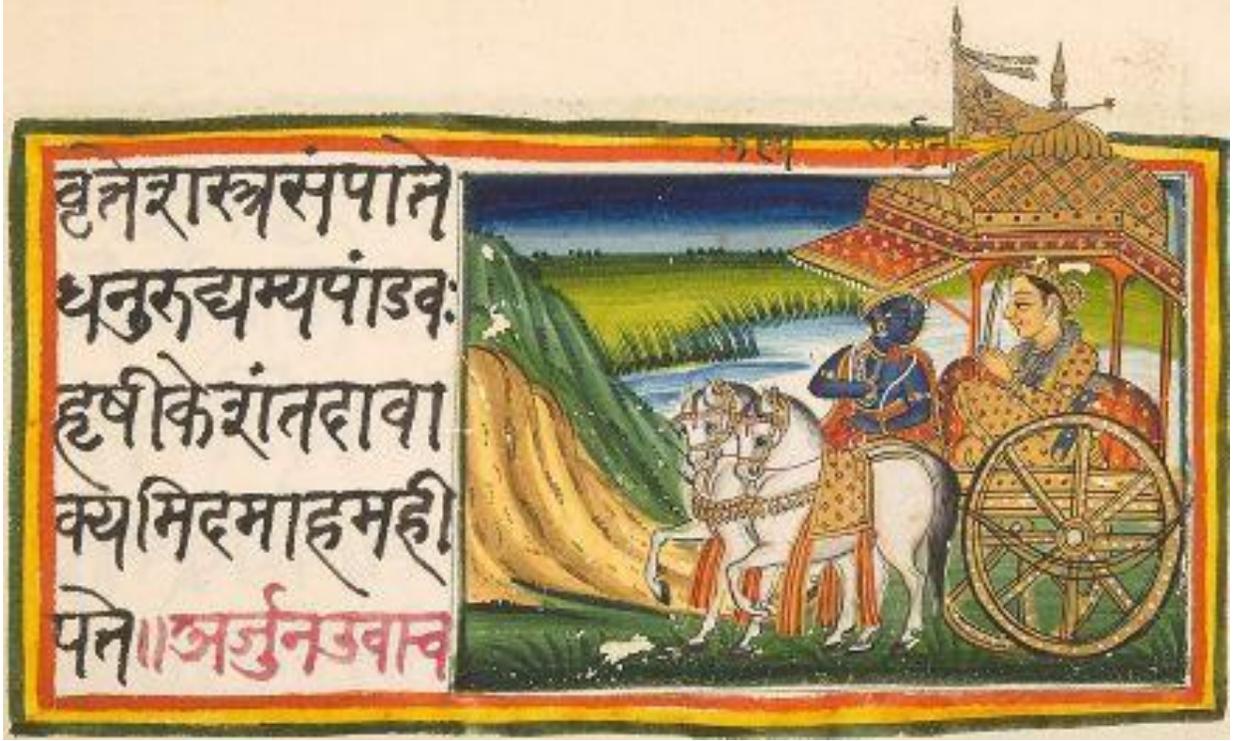


Influence of Sanskrit on Sindhi language



Bhagavad Gita-19th century Illustrated Sanskrit Chapter

The article underscores the significance of Sanskrit as a foundational source for understanding Sindhi's linguistic heritage

Aziz Kingrani

The [Sindhi](#) language, one of the oldest languages of the Indian subcontinent, has deep historical and linguistic ties with [Sanskrit](#) that date back to the Vedic period. Although the roots of Sindhi can also be traced to Proto-Dravidian and Dravidian languages, the linguistic and grammatical similarities between Sindhi and Sanskrit cannot be regarded merely as the influence of one language upon the other.

This paper examines the extent, nature, and degree of Sanskrit's influence on Sindhi, tracing its development within the Indo-Aryan linguistic family. Through a comparative analysis of phonology, Grammar, syntax, and vocabulary, the study highlights the contributions of Proto-Dravidian and Dravidian languages to the evolution of Sindhi's grammatical structure and lexicon prior to the emergence of Sanskrit.

The paper further explores historical interactions between Sanskrit and Sindhi—such as the spread of Vedic culture and early Indo-Aryan migrations—that contributed to the linguistic similarities between the two languages. Despite later influences from Persian, Arabic, Turkish, and English, the enduring imprint of Sanskrit remains evident in Sindhi's core linguistic framework and cultural expressions.

Ultimately, this study underscores the significance of Sanskrit as a foundational source for understanding Sindhi's linguistic heritage and its place within the broader Indo-Aryan language continuum. The shared features in phonology, Grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and other linguistic aspects are discussed in detail.

Introduction

The Sindhi language is one of the most ancient and rich languages, holding a prominent position among Indo-Aryan languages. In reality, Sindhi is a non-Aryan language. Its roots are connected to the language of the Indus Valley Civilization (Alana: 2004:27). Dr. Alana with reference of S. R. Raō states that "Sindhi language is related to the pre-Aryan period" (Alana: 2004:48). According to Sir John Marshall, "The Indus Valley Civilization existed before the Aryan period and its language was certainly among the pre-Aryan languages" (Marshall: 1931:24). Sirajul Haq Memon claims that "the language of Mohenjo-Daro is Sindhi, and it influenced Sanskrit" (Memon Siraj: 1964:100). One may or may not agree with Memon's view, yet comparative study of the books of Krishnamurti and Sanford Steever with same name "The Dravidian Languages" show that Sindhi has roots in both the Proto-Dravidian and Dravidian periods.



From the Vedic era onward, Sindhi did not remain the language of the ruling classes; instead, it settled firmly within the speech of the common people. During the ancient and glorious Indus Civilization, different linguistic and cultural influences played an important role in the evolution of Sindhi language. The presence of Proto-Dravidian and Dravidian lexical stock, phonology, and syntactic structures in Sindhi also indicates that Sindhi is a pre-Vedic language.

To determine or show the influence of one language upon another, four aspects are considered essential. Through these aspects, the influence of one language on another can be clearly understood:

(a) Grammatical influence

(b) Phonological influence

(c) Sentence structure (Syntax)

(d) Lexicon or vocabulary

In the light of above factors, the Connection between Proto-Dravidian and Dravidian Languages can be analyzed as below:

Proto-Dravidian Lexicon

The Proto-Dravidian and Dravidian periods are earlier than the Vedic period. Sindhi contains a large number of Proto-Dravidian words, such as: ka-wāṭi (a stick on shoulders roped to the both ends for carrying load) , vīri/vithī (Space), Vairī (enemy), vairu (enmity), kāṭī (Knife), nīr water, tears), āse (desire, hope), kāṇi (from which kāṇo, one eyed), min or mīnu meaning fish, bright, a glittering object, star, etc. Pīlu originally means "elephant," which is now obsolete in Sindhi, though the idiom "pīl pāyū" is still used means "strong." Many other Proto-Dravidian words exist in Sindhi, but are not listed here for brevity.

Dravidian Lexicon

Sindhi also contains a considerable number of Dravidian words. Examples include:

From Tamil: amān (mother), vīri (space)

From Kannada: pīti (love), kāri (meaning black), amān (mother)

From Telugu: amān (mother), kāṭi (knife), babā (Father)

From Brahui: āyī (lum, mother), sālam (sālu, brother of wife), khan (eye), in Sindhi, kāṇ or kāṇo ((one eyed)

From Gondi: yāyal (āyal, mother), likhan (to write)

From Kolami: kāko (uncle), nek (man; virtuous man), bā (bābā, father)

From Malto: kure kure (for dog), vīrī (space), māmā (brother of mother) etc.

(Murti, 2003; Steever, 1998; Parpola, 2010)

Syntax in Dravidian and Sindhi

The sentence structure of Dravidian languages and Sindhi is the same: first the subject, then the object, and finally the verb (Subject + Object + Verb). For example:

Brahui: Anwar irag/bakho kuneka

Sindhi: Anwar māni khāe tho.

Tamil: Anwar unavai ughirār.

Phonology in Dravidian Languages

Tamil has 12 short and long vowels (Lehmann: 1989: XII–IV), many of which correspond to Sindhi vowels. Telugu has 15 short and long vowels (Brown: 1840:6), also showing strong parallels with Sindhi. Like Sindhi, Telugu and Brahui feature aspirated and unaspirated consonants. Telugu also contains aspirates and consonants similar to those in Sindhi.

a, k, t, d, n, ṭ, p, y, b, r, l, w (v), s, hh, m, sh, gh, ch, chh, jh, th, dh, ph, bh, kh, etc. (Brown: 1840:6)

Although Telugu includes many aspirates due to Sanskrit or other Aryan language influences, it is still classified as a Dravidian language. Sindhi, however, despite sharing such features, is categorized among Indo-Aryan languages. The grammatical connection between Sindhi and Dravidian languages indicate a Dravidian substratum within Sindhi.

Influence of Sanskrit

Sindhi is unquestionably a Proto-Dravidian/Dravidian language before the Vedic period, but as Sanskrit was a language created and controlled by the upper class and religious authorities, it exerted strong influence on many languages—including Sindhi—from the Vedic period onward. As a result, Sindhi adopted many phonological, grammatical, syntactic, and lexical features directly or in modified from Sanskrit. Understanding these influences not only highlights linguistic connections but also reflects the wider cultural and historical connections between the two languages.

(a) Grammatical Influence

Grammatical influence refers to similarities in the formation or structure of words. Comparative study shows that Sindhi and Sanskrit share many grammatical features, though Sanskrit does not fully determine Sindhi grammar. For example:

Sanskrit, like Arabic, has singular, dual, and plural forms (Thibaut: 1930:27; Müller: 1886:189), while Sindhi has only singular and plural. In Sindhi, some nouns use the same form for both singular and plural, e.g., māṇhu (man/men).

Examples of singular/dual/plural:

Arabic: rijil (man), rajlain (two men), rijāl pilural

Sanskrit: puruṣaḥ, puruṣau (two men), puruṣāḥ

Sanskrit has six or seven cases for nouns/pronouns (Thibaut: 1930:27; Müller: 1886:188), while Sindhi has five. Sanskrit has three genders—masculine, feminine, and neuter—whereas Sindhi has four: masculine, feminine, neuter, and common gender.

There are differences in adjective degrees, verb conjugations, and the formation of past and participial forms (Thibaut: 1930:29; Müller: 1886). Sanskrit traditionally counts in units of 30 (two thirties = 60) (Thibaut: 1886:63), while early Sindhi counting was based on twenties (Alana: 2004:39), e.g., two twenties = 40; three twenties = 60. Counting patterns thus differ between the two languages.

Sindhi and Sanskrit both form compound words using prefixes and suffixes. Some prefixes are shared between both languages—su, a, an/aṅ, nir, ku, etc.—while Sindhi has additional prefixes such as ao, ma, ḍu, which Sanskrit lacks.

Gerunds:

In Sanskrit, gerunds are formed by adding *ivtā* or *vtā* suffix to the verbal root, e.g., *krivtā* / *krvtā* "to do."

In Sindhi, gerunds are formed by adding the suffix *-ṅ* (of Dravidian origin) to the imperative or base verb.

(b) Phonology

The phonological systems of Sindhi and Sanskrit are largely similar but differ in some respects. Sanskrit has thirteen vowels (Müller: 1886:42, 242), while Sindhi has about six short and long vowels. Sindhi contains several additional aspirated and unaspirated consonants that Sanskrit does not have (Thibaut: 1930:1), such as:

ḷ, ṣ, ṅ, ḍ, ḡ, ṅḡ, ṛ, ḷh, ṅh, ṭh, ṛh, ṛḥ, ṅh, ṃh, ḡh, etc.

These are unique to Sindhi. The nasal *ṅ* found in Dravidian languages is also present in Sindhi but not in Sanskrit. For example: *nāṅ* (Sindhi) vs. *nāg* (Sanskrit).

(c) Syntax

Sindhi and Sanskrit share the same structure for simple and compound sentences; the same structure also appears in Dravidian, Pāli, and other Indo-Aryan languages. The sentence pattern is Subject-Object-Verb (Müller, 1886):

Sindhi: Rām mevo khāi tho.

Sanskrit: Rāmaḥ phalam khādati.

Given this similarity, and keeping Sirajul Haq Memon's opinion in view, it cannot be claimed with certainty that Sanskrit was influenced by Sindhi; rather, both may reflect influence from a Dravidian or another Aryan language.

(d) Lexicon

Sindhi and Sanskrit share many identical or slightly modified words. Examples include:

Sanskrit: janma, bhūmi, gyāna, ākāśa, vasanta

Sindhi: janam, bhūmi, gyān, ākās, basant

(Baloch, 2006)

After Sanskrit, due to political and religious influence, Sindhi absorbed many words from Turkish, Persian, Arabic, and English.

Conclusion

Although Sindhi is counted among the Indo-Aryan languages, its linguistic character aligns closely with Proto-Dravidian and Dravidian languages. Its lexical stock, grammar, syntax, and phonology reveal clear Dravidian patterns. Sindhi and Brahui are nearly sister languages. Being sister languages and close proximity the opinion given in book "Forgotten Cities of the Indus" edited by Michael Jansen and others can be considered for Sindhi language as well. They write, "The Indus Language is likely to have belonged to the North Dravidian sub-branch represented today by the Brahui language spoken in the mountain valleys and plateaus of Afghanistan and Baluchistan" (Jansen: 1987: 195). Some scholars believe that the influence of Proto-Dravidian and Dravidian languages upon Sindhi and other languages occurred later—but when? During the Vedic period, Sanskrit dominated the linguistic and cultural landscape. If Dravidian languages had already spread outward from the Indus Valley, could they still have influenced Sanskrit-dominant regions? This seems doubtful. Moreover, there are historical references indicating the existence of Sindhi during the Vedic period.

In any case, the influence of Sanskrit on Sindhi is clearly present, which is why Sindhi today is classified among the Indo-Aryan languages.

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