

## SPOKEN SANSKRIT IN A GUJARAT ASHRAM

### **Abstract**

According to the Indian Census, Sanskrit was spoken by almost fifteen thousand people in 2001. This paper presents the results of ethnographic fieldwork conducted during 2009 in Gujarat, India. The focus of the study was to generate a clearer understanding of the functions of spoken Sanskrit in a multilingual boarding school in Valsad district, southern Gujarat. The goals were to determine the domains in which Sanskrit is spoken, the number of speakers, their level of fluency, and the attitudes of the speakers towards the functionality, future, and prestige of the language. This synchronic study applied typical sociolinguistic methodology of participant observation, reading passage analysis, and interviews to understand more clearly the relevance of speaking Sanskrit.

**Key Words:** spoken Sanskrit, code-mixing, language vitality, linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics, Gujarat, India

### **Introduction**

This paper seeks to enrich our current understanding of the role spoken Sanskrit plays in India today. While much attention has been paid to the textual analysis of the Sanskrit corpus, and the thought world recorded therein, scant sociolinguistic attention has been paid to those who speak Sanskrit, and why they continue to speak it.

Previous sociolinguistic research that has informed this present paper has been conducted by: Aralikatti (1991), Ganesan (1972), Ganguly (1972), Hock (1983, 1992a, 1992b), Hock and Pandaripande (1976), Masica (2007), Pandharipande (1995, 1996), Patnaik (1985), Singh (1995), and Hastings (2004). Aralikatti looked at word order in modern spoken Sanskrit. Ganesan focused on semantic variation of Sanskrit words in Hindi and the major Dravidian languages. Hock was interested in any grammatical evidence of language death phenomena with reference to Sanskrit as a dying prestige language. Pandharipande focused on the case of language shift with maintenance. Patnaik's interest was in education and language policies. Singh dealt with code-switching and stratification in North India, while Hastings' interest was on Sanskrit revivalism as a tool of Hindu nationalists. My study has sought to understand the previous sociolinguistic research in order to show what is occurring in educational language policies, language shift, and the struggle of a prestige language to remain relevant.

This study focused on the sociolinguistic situation in one particular Sanskrit boarding school in Gujarat, India. The reason for using the term *Sanskrit boarding school* is because it is more accessible than *gurukula* (house of the teacher) or *pāṭhaśālā* (school). I had already developed a rapport with the staff and students due to several previous visits to this school. Furthermore, because I already knew something about the language policy of the school, this was the perfect location for the modest project I had in mind. Within India, there are similar schools that choose to enforce the use of spoken Sanskrit at all times. I was, however, looking for a

school where I could observe how Hindi and Sanskrit operate in a more relaxed, or natural environment.<sup>1</sup>

This paper has two sections. The first part describes the school, its history, its location, an overview of the students and staff, and the organisation that oversees the school. The second section provides linguistic evidence on the following points.

1. Native speakers and the languages spoken at the school
2. Domains and frequency of use
3. Attitudes towards spoken Sanskrit
4. Interesting grammatical features
5. Summary of major findings
6. Future Research

This paper is the result of two months ethnographic fieldwork conducted at Śrī Muktānanda Saṃskṛt Mahāvīdyālaya from September to October 2009. The school is located within the grounds of Shanti Mandir's ([www.shantimandir.com](http://www.shantimandir.com)) main ashram in the village of Magod, which is approximately ten kilometres from the coastal town of Valsad, Gujarat. Valsad has a population of approximately seventy thousand residents, and is approximately two hundred kilometres north of Mumbai.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Soon after I arrived to begin the survey, more than half of the sixty students returned home for their annual six-week holiday. I was not informed of this before I arrived, and was under the impression that the annual holidays occurred during June – July, and had made my plans around these dates. However, it was explained to me that the students are sent home in two batches because the ashram and temple need a certain amount of students to ensure that both keep functioning. As a result I was unable to interview and observe approximately half of the students.

<sup>2</sup> Which equates to roughly 4-5 hours travel in a car.

The school is in its fourteenth year of operation; and while relatively young, it models itself on the traditional *gurukula*<sup>3</sup> education system promoting the philosophy of *Kaśmiri Śaivism*.<sup>4</sup> The students are able to complete their primary, secondary, and tertiary education at the school, as it is a *mahā viśvavidyālaya* (college). To satisfy the requirements of primary and secondary education, the students need to complete twelve years of schooling. The students can then complete the *Śāstri* degree, which is the equivalent of an undergraduate bachelor's degree (BA). This course takes an average of three years to complete. The *Ācārya* qualification is a traditional title awarded to students who complete the equivalent of a post-graduate master's degree (MA). This course requires another two years of full-time study. Four students have graduated from the *Ācārya* program. Many of the students intend to work as Sanskrit teachers; therefore, they will also complete a Diploma of Education, which takes another one year to complete. So far, no student has graduated with the equivalent of a PhD, which in this education system is known as *Vaidya*.

The curriculum follows the guidelines of the government of Gujarat's education policies. The students learn *gaṇita* (mathematics), *sāhitya* (Hindi and Sanskrit literature), *vyākaraṇa* (grammar), the Vedas, especially the *Śukla Yajurveda*, *darśana* (philosophy), *saṃsargavidyā* (social science), *itihāsa* (history), *saṃgīta* (music) and computing. There is also an ESL<sup>5</sup> class for students and staff taught by the ashram's manager.

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<sup>3</sup> A gurukul is a type of residential school where the students live with their teacher.

<sup>4</sup> The first Kaśmiri Śaiva texts were written in the early ninth century CE. The central principle of Kaśmiri Śaivism is that matter is not separate from consciousness, but rather identical to it. Simply put, God and the world are one and the same.

<sup>5</sup> English as a Second Language

The facilities at the school include accommodation, a modest library, computer suite, several classrooms, and a main hall. During the BA and MA courses, students choose to focus on a major discipline. The majority of the students select grammar or philosophy.

All the students and staff live together in a boarding school situation within the grounds of the ashram. The school consists of sixty students and six teachers. Some of the teachers also have young families that live on campus with them. The oldest student was twenty-six and the youngest was ten. All of the students and teaching staff were male.

Each day begins in the temple at 5:00am for the chanting of the *Śrī Rudra*. The *Rudra* is a Vedic chant, which is recited to appease *Rudra*, the Vedic form of *Śiva*.

Intertwined with the recitation of the *Rudra* is the *abhiṣeka* of the ashram's patron, *Bhagavān Nityānanda*, an *avadhūta guru* from Ganeśpūri, Maharashtra. *Abhiṣeka* means consecration or sprinkling and involves the ritual bathing and dressing of *Bhagavān Nityānanda's* statue. *Sarasvatī*<sup>6</sup>, *Ganeśa*<sup>7</sup>, and *Śiva*<sup>8</sup> are also treated in like manner. As the *Rudra* is chanted, some of the students are engaged in cleaning and dressing the *mūrtis* (statues). Following this, *Śiva ārti* is performed. *Ārti* usually consists of songs sung in praise of a particular deity as lamps are offered. Following this, depending on the day of the week, a particular text is chanted. For example on Thursday and Sunday the *Guru Gītā* is recited. The morning program concludes at 7:00am.

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<sup>6</sup> The goddess of learning.

<sup>7</sup> The patron of science/mathematics, and the remover of obstacles.

<sup>8</sup> The auspicious one.

Breakfast follows, and the school bell sounds at 7:55am, giving the students five minutes to gather in the hall for a roll call, announcements, and a brief class on spoken Sanskrit. The school day finishes at 4:00pm. As is normal in India, classes are also held on Saturdays.

There are two more official times of worship in the temple. Midday *ārtī* (worship) occurs just before lunch, while the evening session begins after dinner from 6.30pm until 8:00pm. Overseen by the teachers, it is the role of the students, on a rotational basis, to maintain the upkeep of the temple, and perform the obligatory duties. As a result, the older more experienced students teach the younger, less experienced students by way of apprenticeship. The evening session begins with some informal *kīrtana*. Usually led by someone singing and playing the harmonium (a bellows type keyboard), and accompanied by a percussionist, simple songs are sung in a call and response fashion as a way to elevate people's minds in preparation for the official program of chanting Sanskrit texts such as the *Nitya Stotra*, *Śiva Mahimna Stotra*, *Śiva Manasa Pūjā*, and *Śanti Patha*. To conclude, a brief meditation of ten minutes is followed by *darśana* (personal honouring of the teacher), and the distribution of *prasāda*. *Prasāda* means grace, and it usually refers to the distribution of some blessed food, usually a sweet dish of some description.

The school is partly subsidised by the international patronage of Shanti Mandir's devotees. Shanti Mandir has several ashrams and centres located throughout the world. The school is one of Shanti Mandir's charitable works. Shanti Mandir also has a mobile health clinic, another school for local village children, and a handicrafts department, which employs local villagers. Furthermore, the ashram is located

amongst several acres of mango and *chikku* orchards, which provide a further source of funding.

## 1. Native speakers and the languages spoken at the school

The second section details the sociolinguistic phenomena I observed, with particular reference to certain linguistic features.

Like any multilingual setting, the situation for spoken Sanskrit in this school is complex. Table 1 provides a list of the languages spoken in the ashram. Hindi is the super-ordinate language in this speech community. Not only is Hindi the national language, but most of the students and staff were born and raised in the Hindi-speaking belt of North India. In order to assess the languages spoken, each student and staff member received a list of languages and was asked to indicate, in order of fluency, the particular languages they spoke, starting with the first language they learnt to speak with their immediate family.

The languages listed below in Table 1 are ranked according to the number of L1 (first language) speakers. Hindi's dominance is clear. Almost a quarter of the student body is from Nepal, with the rest speaking other North Indian languages.

	<u>L1</u>	<u>L2</u>	<u>L3</u>	<u>L4</u>
Hindi	7	12	0	0
Nepali	5	0	0	0
Kumouni	4	0	0	0
Gujarati	3	0	0	0
Rajasthani	1	0	0	0
Oriyan	1	0	0	0
Marathi	1	0	0	0

<b>Garwhali</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Sanskrit</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>English</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>

Table 1. Languages Spoken by Teachers and Students.

Table 1 shows that English is not an L1 or L2. Only two students and one teacher were able to hold a conversation in English. Many of the students and teachers who identified Hindi as their L1 were fluent in Hindi. Most of the students who marked their L2 or L3 as Sanskrit could not be considered fluent. If a student or teacher did not have Hindi as their L1, then it was likely they were multilingual and Hindi was their L2. No one identified Sanskrit as their L1. Every student or teacher identified Sanskrit as either their L2 or L3.

All the teachers and students interviewed reported that they were fluent in spoken Sanskrit, regardless of whether or not they were capable of sustaining a grammatically correct conversation. Due to my daily interactions and conversations, I consider all six teachers and approximately five of the senior students to be fluent in spoken Sanskrit.

Other Sanskrit schools that I have visited in India have little interaction with the public, and are afforded the opportunity to enforce stricter language policies. The school at Magod accepts that it shares space with the ashram's other residents and visitors who, more than likely, do not speak Sanskrit. For this reason, the students and staff often communicate in Hindi with the other residents and visitors.



## 2 Domains and frequency of use

In this section I will describe the use of spoken Sanskrit in various domains of the ashram including meal times, spoken Sanskrit classes, the classroom, and the temple.

### 2.1 Meal Times

Apart from breakfast, morning tea, and afternoon tea, each meal usually began and concluded with a variety of Vedic prayers. Breakfast, and morning/afternoon teas were much less formal. If required, after any meal announcements were delivered in Hindi. If there were international guests who required a translation, the message was also delivered in English. Generally a brief prayer was uttered in Sanskrit. The food attendants, who were always students, walked up and down between the several rows of people waiting to be served announcing what food they have to offer, generally in Hindi, but perhaps Sanskrit and English. Once again it depended on the number of international guests as to whether English was used. Generally, the distributor of the food used the Hindi terms for many of the Indian food items as they have found their way into English. On occasion, I did notice some students use the English words *rice* and *bread* when distributing food to international guests. This does not mean that those students could speak English.

For instance, the following terms were used:

ENGLISH	HINDI	SANSKRIT
rice	cāval- <b>rām</b>	odanam
soup	dāl- <b>rām</b>	sūpam
water	jal- <b>rām</b>	jalam
bread	chapati- <b>rām</b>	roṭikā
vegetables	sabzi- <b>rām</b>	śākam

I was informed that the *-ram* suffix is used because people should have *darśan* (vision) of Lord Rām prior to eating. Sometimes I heard the use of the feminine accusative of *roṭikām* instead of the nominative form *roṭikā*. It appeared that most of the students used this form, perhaps unaware of the grammatical mistake, as all the other Sanskrit food terms have an *-am* suffix.

For the older people and international guests, there were some tables and chairs. It was interesting at meal times to observe the students and teachers interacting in a more relaxed manner. Most people conversed almost exclusively in Hindi. If however, a group of Gujarati speakers sat together, they would speak Gujarati. The same was true of the Nepali students, who clearly preferred to use Nepali with fellow Nepali speakers. Sanskrit was observed during meal times when I sat with students who wanted to speak with me in Sanskrit. As I was aware of the Observer's Paradox, that my participation could influence the research findings, I did on a few occasions not sit with the Sanskrit speaking students to observe, within earshot, whether they would speak in Hindi or Sanskrit. This group of students seemed to prefer speaking in Sanskrit, and only on some occasions did I notice their

preference for Hindi. When I asked the teachers why they did not use this time to promote conversing in Sanskrit, they replied that they just wanted to relax and enjoy their food.

## 2.2 Spoken Sanskrit Classes

Before classes begin the school meets to check attendance, make announcements, and participate in a short class on spoken Sanskrit. This is the only official class for the purpose of teaching and encouraging the students to speak Sanskrit. An example from this lesson is given below on how to conjugate a sentence from singular to plural and how adjectives must decline in order to agree with the object and its number. The teacher would first explain the main point of the lesson in Hindi. Then he would provide examples in spoken Sanskrit followed by any necessary explanation in Hindi. Once the point was understood, he would get the entire school to repeat the sentence in spoken Sanskrit. He then called several students to the microphone, one at a time, to repeat the example in Spoken Sanskrit. The following example shows how the students were taught to turn a neuter singular object into the plural form and have its adjective agree.

*Vanaraḥ vṛkṣe upasthitya pakkvaṃ phalaṃ khādati*

The monkey, having sat in the tree, eats the **ripe fruit**.

*Vanaraḥ vṛkṣe upasthitya pakkvāni phalāni khādati*

The monkey, having sat in the tree, eats the **ripe fruits**.

Most of these lessons that I attended did not get any more complex than one-sentence examples. The majority of the students did not appear too interested in this class. The teaching staff believes that as a result of a thorough education in *vyākaraṇa* (grammar), the students will eventually learn, rather passively, how to speak Sanskrit. Even though the staff said they would like to speak Sanskrit with the students as much as possible, it seems that more effort could be applied toward achieving this goal. Several reasons were given, though the biggest limiting factors were time, energy, and the willingness of the students and staff to participate. This does not seem to correspond with a nearly 100% affirmative response to the question, “Do you consider yourself to be fluent in spoken Sanskrit?” If the staff and students are all *fluent* then there should be little reason to avoid speaking in Sanskrit, especially with regards to energy levels and time restraints. It would therefore seem that the positive answer to my question relates more to pride than reality.

### 2.3 The Classroom

Sanskrit was used for prayers in the lower classes and in a minimal amount of conversation. Generally, it was used by a teacher issuing a command in Sanskrit, rather than engaging in a dialogue with students. In the *Śāstrī* classes (equivalent to an undergraduate level of study) some conversation (about 30%) occurred in Sanskrit, however, Hindi was usually the language of exchange. In some of the *Ācārya* classes (post graduate level), Sanskrit was used almost exclusively. It depended on the class and whether there was a critical mass of willing and competent participants. Students who were not as competent in speaking Sanskrit

were generally more passive. It seemed there was no rule that Sanskrit should be spoken, as on several occasions questions and answers were given in Hindi and possibly a short conversation would continue, until at some point, the conversation switched back to Sanskrit. In the *Ācārya* class, however, there seemed to be a particular status assigned to being able to converse proficiently in spoken Sanskrit, which would make the less competent students also apply themselves. This attitude was not shared by many of the younger students. On several occasions I participated in a class on literature, where we studied several texts including the *Mahābhārata*. In this class, 90% of the conversation occurred in spoken Sanskrit. It was only when a particular rare word or phrase in Sanskrit was not known, or a synonym could not be found, that the conversation would briefly move back into Hindi. The use of Sanskrit also seemed to be determined by the particular teacher running the class. Some of the teachers were less sympathetic to student's mistakes, whereas others were more encouraging. Also, the amount of spoken Sanskrit used in any classroom seemed to be ultimately determined by the group's energy level. In the mathematics class, Hindi is used exclusively, while in the English class, English is used almost exclusively. As a result of this investigation, I am able to provide the following figures, which reflect the fluency of the student Sanskrit speakers.

Fluent:	5
Conversational with some mistakes:	5-10
Conversational with many mistakes:	5-10
Unable to converse:	10

## 2.4 The Temple

Except for its use in chanted liturgies and *kīrtana*, the use of spoken Sanskrit in the temple is minimal. It is not used for any official purpose. During *Navarātri* (a ten-day ceremony that occurs twice a year to mark the change of season) the daily recitation of mantras for several hours did not correlate with an increase in the use of spoken Sanskrit. During the performance of *yajñas* (fire ceremonies), at no time did I observe Sanskrit used to convey an instruction between the priests in charge of proceedings. All communication occurred in Hindi. The only time that I observed conversational Sanskrit in use was at the end of a program when people would mingle and converse in a relaxed manner.

## 2.5 Sport and Recreation

The students had very little free time to relax and divert their attention from their studies. When the students were playing sport, it was generally either cricket or volleyball. Some students played football. The other main recreational pursuit of the students was to play music. Throughout the week, a classically trained musician came to the school to teach the students about classical Indian music. The students would learn to sing, or to play the tabla (percussion), and harmonium (keyboard). Most of the conversations that I observed or participated in during periods of playing sport or music occurred in Hindi, except for conversations with some of the more enthusiastic Sanskrit speaking students.

This section presented where Hindi and Sanskrit were spoken and its frequency of use. The next section explains the attitudes of the students and staff towards speaking Sanskrit.

### **3. Attitudes towards spoken Sanskrit**

All of the participants who were interviewed claimed they wanted to either learn to speak Sanskrit or to speak it more fluently. The teaching staff believes that once the student body grows from sixty to the anticipated three hundred, a critical mass of established students will encourage more frequent use of spoken Sanskrit. Even among the other residents of the ashram, there is a willingness to be involved in speaking Sanskrit. In fact, all respondents expressed a desire to one day hear Sanskrit being spoken as the super-ordinate or dominant language. When pressed to respond to the question regarding why people want Sanskrit to be spoken more, most believed that it would give not only the school, but also the whole organisation more prestige and authority. This community believed that the use of Sanskrit as the preferred language will happen sometime in the future, and did not seem to be in a rush to push for its immediate inception. For now, its use is mostly restricted to some classrooms and the leisure time of the teachers and some of the more enthusiastic students. Most of the students who did not show much enthusiasm for conversing in Sanskrit responded by either saying they were too lazy, not confident, or did not feel they had enough practice. As for practice, all the residents are pressed for time, and any chance to study or practice conversing in Sanskrit is severely limited. During their holidays, some of the more enthusiastic residents, students, and staff have travelled to New Delhi to attend two-week

spoken Sanskrit camps at Saṃskṛta Bhāratī's camp<sup>9</sup>. Previously, a similar camp was run at the school, but there was no plan to hold another camp in the future.

The majority of students felt that laziness was the main reason why they did not speak Sanskrit more frequently. While the teachers invited the students to speak as much Sanskrit as they could, the students also felt that if they made mistakes then they would be punished. When pressed about their individual preference, the majority were not eager to speak Sanskrit themselves, regarding this as the responsibility of other people.

### **3.1 Students' future careers**

All the interviewed students received a sheet outlining several different options for possible future careers. The overwhelming response was to become a Sanskrit teacher. The other minor preferences included IT professional, priest, and monk.

## **4. Interesting grammatical features of Spoken Sanskrit**

In this section I move away from the ethnographic side of the research to explain some of the more prominent features of spoken Sanskrit that I observed. First, phonological differences are compared from a reading passage analysis to show how a speaker's L1 influences the way they produce utterances in Sanskrit. Following

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<sup>9</sup> Saṃskṛta Bhāratī is a national umbrella organisation that runs two-week intensive language camps outside Delhi. As an alumnus of these camps I can attest to their efficiency at getting people to speak Sanskrit.



this, are discussions on several morpho-syntactic and grammatical features, including code switching.

#### 4.1 Phonological Analysis

Below are five samples taken from a spoken Sanskrit rendering of the epic *Mahābhārata* story. It was obtained from a Saṃskṛta Bhāratī publication that seeks to teach people how to read, write, and speak Sanskrit . Unlike the original *Mahābhārata* story, this version is read and not sung in poetic metres.

The purpose of this study was to identify if the utterance of Sanskrit by people from different regions of South Asia would produce any phonological variety.

The students are from three different regions and their L1's are Hindi, Kumouni, or Nepali. One striking feature is the flexibility of the sibilants. Many native speakers of modern Indian languages take little notice of the fact that the sibilants of [s], [ʃ], and [ś] are actually different and mix them up without any regularity. Below is an example of the way sibilants are used in Sanskrit. Also notice the way vowels operate in these examples:

#### L1 Bhīṣma kauravānam

Student 1)	Kumouni	b <sup>h</sup> i:smə <sup>h</sup> kəruvā <sup>h</sup> em
Student 2)	Hindi	b <sup>h</sup> i:smə <sup>h</sup> kəruvənəm

**Student 3)**                      Nepali                      b<sup>h</sup>i:ʂma\_kɔrvana:m

**Student 5)**                      Nepali                      k<sup>h</sup>eʂma kɔrəvanəm

From these four examples, there is a significant amount of variety when it comes to the pronunciation of the vowels and sibilants. The varieties of [ʊ] show a preference for a more open apparatus with centralised and back vowels [ə], [ʌ].

**Ekamapi na māritavān iti matvā**

**Student 1)**                      Kumouni                      ekaməpi\_na\_maritəvan\_iti\_mətva

**Student 2)**                      Hindi                      ekəməpi\_nə\_mə:ritəvən iti matva

**Student 3)**                      Nepali                      ekaməpi\_na ma:ritəva:n iti\_matva

**Student 4)**                      Kumouni                      ekəmapi na maritəvan iti mətva

**Student 5)**                      Nepali                      ekaməpi na\_maritəvan iti mətva

Analysis focused on the labio-dental fricative [v] and the lateral approximant [ʋ].

In all modern Indian languages the two are used interchangeably, with the reality of the utterance being somewhere between the two phonemes. However, it would seem that all the students have a preference for the latter. The lateral approximant

generally follows an unvoiced alveolar stop [t]. It was assumed that the voiced fricative [v] would more likely follow.

A general rule could be:  $v \rightarrow \upsilon / \_ (C) (V)$

The open-front vowel [a] also showed similar variety through utterances using more centrally placed vowels like [ə], [æ], [e:].

The purpose of this section is to show the phonetic variety of utterances made in Sanskrit. Careful observation shows that the two students (1 and 4) who have Kumouni as their L1 have produced almost identical utterances. Compared with the other utterances, particularly the Nepali students (2 and 5). This evidence does suggest that a person's L1 influences the way in which Sanskrit is pronounced.

## 4.2 Morpho-syntactic Analysis

A striking feature of the Sanskrit spoken in the ashram is its flexibility to incorporate words from other languages into its lexicon simply by adding a sanskritic suffix. All of the examples below were observed during conversations with real people who possessed different levels of competency and fluency with Sanskrit. Therefore, in most of the examples, there are obvious grammatical errors, which are not the author's editing mistakes. The rest of this chapter seeks to demonstrate how utterances in Sanskrit, including code-switching and mixing to Hindi (section 4.8) are realised.

It would seem that a Hindi word can easily be *sanskritised* by adding the *-am* suffix. Grammatically this produces a masculine or neuter accusative singular noun. There is no attention paid to the gender of the loan word being incorporated.

English words are *sanskritised* in like manner. For instance, when a particular word in Sanskrit is not known or temporarily forgotten, the Hindi or English word would be *sanskritised* by simply adding the *-am* suffix. This was especially true for English loan words.

For example:

compost =>	compost-am	good =>	good-am
pocket =>	pocket-am	bed =>	bed-am
room =>	room-am	food=>	food-am

While I did not observe the teachers using this *-am* suffix, it was not discouraged. Both students and teachers alike regarded its use as trivial with it generally producing brief bursts of laughter from everyone involved in the conversation.

An example follows:

*mama pocket-**am** dhanam nāsti, parantu mama room-**am** madhye bhavati*

In my pocket there is no money, but in my room there is (money)

### 4.3 Past Participles

Pandharipande (1996) observed that there is a tendency to construct past participles instead of using finite verbs in spoken Sanskrit. I observed the same phenomena in this speech community. Both examples use the verb 1√gam-go. The first example was observed during a conversation I had with a student regarding the welfare of another student. In answer to my question, “*Manish kutra bhavati?*” (Where is Manish?) the answer was:

Participle construction:

*saḥ gr̥ham gataḥ*

He **went** home.

Below is an example of how the respondent could have answered, using the infinite construction. In general, the imperfect tense was used less often.

Infinite construction:

*saḥ gr̥ham agacchat*

He **went** home.

The reason for using the past participle is that it can be built directly from the verb stem. It requires less augmentation than an infinite construction and is thus easier for the students to create.

### 4.3.1 Past active participle

When describing a past action or event, there was a marked preference within the speech community to use the past active participle. The following sentence demonstrates the use of two past active participles.

*Prakāśaḥ kim **abhavat**?*

What **happened** to Prakash?

*Tasya prakoṣṭam saḥ **gatvā śayanam-krtavān***

**Having gone** to his room he slept.

*Abhavat* is an infinite construction from the 1√*bhū* ‘to become’ and is one of the most commonly used verbs in the imperfect conjugation. *Gatvā* is a past active participle of 1√*gam*, while *krtavān* is from 8√*kṛ* ‘to do or make’.

One feature of the past active participle is its use in expressing the act of finding or meeting with someone or something. On several occasions, normally when consulting the dictionary to find the meaning of a word, my interlocutor would ask, “*militavān?*” With a high rising intonation to form a question, the literal translation is, “Having met?” In other words, “Have you found it?”

#### 4.4 Future Passive Participle or Gerundive

The future passive participle adds the suffix *-tavya* or *-aniya* to the strengthened root. For instance the verb  $1\sqrt{gam}$  becomes *gantavya*. The gerundive form carries with it a sense of moral obligation, as in the example below, it could mean, *I ought to go for food*. As Sanskrit is a pro-drop language, meaning the use of pronouns is not obligatory, from the current example it is difficult to determine whether two or more people were included in this conversation. This example was observed during a conversation between one of the senior teachers and myself when the dinner bell sounded; shortly after he said to me:

*Bhojana + artham gantavyam*

For the purpose of food, it is **to be gone**.

The use of *artham* – object / purpose – works adverbially to describe the reason of an event.

Included in the following example is the first person singular future formation of the verb  $\sqrt{1gam} - gamiṣyāmi$ . This example was produced after asking a student where he was going and why:

*Mitra kutra gacchati? Kim+artham?*

O Friend, where are you going? Why? (For what purpose)

*Deva pūjāna + artham mandiram gamiṣyāmi*

For the **purpose of** worshipping God, I will go to the temple.

#### 4.5 Passive Construction

Some other Sanskrit speech communities prefer the passive construction as it is seen as a more refined or pleasant way of speaking. In this school the preference was to use the active construction. In an introductory letter I wrote the following.

*Anusaṃdhāna + artham atra mayā agamaye*

For the purpose of an investigation, here is **arrived by me** (I have **arrived** here).

The school registrar insisted that I incorporate his suggested correction, omitting the use of the passive and using instead the past active participle.

*Aham atra anusaṃdhāna + artham āgatavān*

**I have come** here for the purpose of an investigation.

#### 4.6 The *sma* particle

This community hardly used the *sma* particle. *Sma* is a verbal suffix that changes a present continuous verb into the historical present tense. Macdonell says it carries the sense of “formerly”. This community’s reliance on the present indicative active did not correlate with the employment of *sma* more than the one time it was observed in order to denote a completed action.



The conversation using **sma**:

*bhavān bhavataḥ kāryam kṛtavān vā?*

Sir, have you **done** your work?

*ām, dhanyavādaḥ māma kāryam karomi sma*

Yes, thankyou, my work is **done**.

#### 4.7 Compound Verbs

The compound verb is used sparingly. Sanskrit has the option of incorporating a compound verb, whereas Hindi uses the compound verb almost exclusively. For instance, during a conversation with the school's principal I asked him about his own education:

*bhavān kutra paṭhitavān?*

Sir, where did you **study**?

*Utkale, Pūryām*

In Orissa, in Puri.

*Idānīm atra aham saṁskṛtam pāṭhanam + karomi*

Now, I **teach** Sanskrit here.

For another example refer to 4.3.1 – śayanam+kṛtavān.

#### 4.7.1 Summary

The use of participles like *-vān* and *-tava* make constructing a sentence in Sanskrit easier and it was not surprising to find these two participles being used quite frequently. The use of the *-am* suffix to Sanskritise a word, with time, may result in speakers using this more often in the future. Compound verbs are not used as frequently because it is an optional construction for Sanskrit. The most interesting observation was the avoidance of the passive construction by this community and an insistence on the use of active construction, albeit coinciding with an almost complete avoidance of the *sma* particle.

#### 4.8 Code Switching

Code switching was observed occurring daily in the ashram. Code switching was generally employed because at a certain point in a conversation, the use of Spoken Sanskrit would become inefficient. As a result the group would swap to Hindi. An example of this occurred when I was introduced to the teaching staff. Our conversation started in Sanskrit and after about five minutes switched to Hindi. After about five minutes of Hindi, the conversation switched back to conclude in Sanskrit. This conversation was not organised in advance, which left me unable to prepare or record. We started the conversation in Sanskrit, but at a certain point, we were discussing my project, the teachers switched to Hindi because the teachers needed to. I asked the registrar why this occurred and he responded by telling me that the teachers could not discuss certain points in Sanskrit and needed to switch to Hindi. The final switch back to Sanskrit occurred because the teachers knew that

my understanding of Sanskrit was better than my Hindi, so in order to clarify what they had been discussing, the conversation ended in Sanskrit.

I observed that while there were English speaking international guests staying at the ashram that some students would try and speak both Sanskrit and English with more frequency. It can also be assumed that due to my own presence as a Sanskrit speaking enthusiast, there was an increase in the frequency in which Sanskrit was spoken. The students and teachers would approach me speaking Sanskrit while I was talking with other international guests. This seemed to be a technique to promote themselves as learned Brahmins. The English speaking guests could not distinguish between Sanskrit and Hindi.

The students more confident in English would try to communicate with the foreigners. An example of a younger student who was observed talking to a group that included students and foreigners said the following:

*Āp kaise hai? Kim karoti? Aham cricket khelna gacchati. I'm cricket playing go.*

*Āp kaise hai* is a Hindi phrase that means **How are you?**

*Kim karoti* is a Sanskrit phrase which means **What are you doing?**

*Aham cricket khelnā gacchati* - is almost a grammatically correct Sanskrit sentence that employs the Hindi infinitive verb *khelnā* (to play) instead of the Sanskrit infinitive participle *kṛīdatum* from 1√*kṛīd-* to play.

*Aham* (Sanskrit) *cricket* (English) *khelnā* (Hindi – infinitive – to play) *gacchati* (Sanskrit – present indicative 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular – he goes). The correct form of the

verb *gacchati* should have been *gacchāmi* (1<sup>st</sup> person singular present indicative active) as this would indicate he was going to play cricket and not a third party. **I'm cricket playing go** is a reasonable attempt at trying to communicate in English. Perhaps he thought I did not understand his sentence, for he repeated it once again in English. Notice how the English sentence follows a similar SOV syntactic pattern to Hindi and Sanskrit.

Another example is from a conversation with one student who always asked me the same question, no matter whether I was sitting down, standing up, or walking.

*Kahām jā rahā ho? Aham X gacchāmi. Phir mileṅge.*

*Kahām jā rahā ho* is an informal way of asking someone in Hindi **Where are you going?**

*Aham X gacchāmi* means **I am going to X** in Sanskrit.

*Phir mileṅge* is Hindi and means **We'll meet again**. This particular student could not speak English, hence its total absence from his statements.

For the speaker of another language whose L2 was more likely Hindi, the norm was to resort to the super-ordinate national language to continue communicating in larger groups. The teachers and students gave several reasons for reverting from Sanskrit to Hindi. The most common reasons were mental fatigue and lack of time (i.e. time was pressing, and therefore it was necessary to speak in Hindi to ensure the message was transmitted more efficiently). Both are inconsistent with everyone's claim to be fluent speakers of Sanskrit, as these two characteristics are irrelevant when one is proficient in a language.

Code switching occurs quite frequently amongst speakers of Sanskrit because there are no native speakers, at least in this speech community. Due to necessity, one may revert to the super-ordinate language in order to be intelligible. It was observed that most of the Sanskrit speakers could only talk about a limited range of topics, whereas an even smaller percentage were able to extend their conversation to the same standards as their L1 or L2. The implications for this are that until a larger number of students are competent and have expanded their communicative range, Sanskrit will not be the main language of discourse and will serve as a secondary or even tertiary language.

#### 4.9 A Typical Conversation

Conversations in Sanskrit could be heard anywhere within the ashram, however, its use was generally limited to greeting someone and an exchange of stock questions and responses before continuing the conversation in Hindi. Below is an example of a brief conversation observed in the ashram.

1. *Namo Namaḥ, kuśalam asti vā?*

Good afternoon, how are you?

2. *Mitra, sarvam kuśalam aham asmi, dhanyavādaḥ, tvam api*

*asi kim?*

O Friend, I am very well, thank you, how are you?

3. *Aham api.*

I am also fine.

4. *Bhavān, kutra gacchati idānīm?*

Sir, where are you going now?

5. *Aham, mama prakoṣṭam gacchāmi. Śranto'smi. Anantaram  
āvām mandīre meliṣyāvaḥ. Pancha vādane, spaṣṭam vā?*

I am going to my room. I am tired. Afterwards we two shall meet in  
the temple. At five o'clock, ok?

6. *Tathāstu mitra. Pancha vādane meliṣyāvaḥ.*

Let it be O friend. We two shall meet at five o'clock.

7. *Punar darśanāya, Hariḥ Om.*

See you again. Goodbye.

This is typical of the length of many of the conversations I experienced or observed in the ashram, generally as two people passed one another walking between buildings, or perhaps, waiting to get a drink from the water fountain. I also was part of, and a witness to, several conversations that lasted in excess of thirty minutes, which occurred almost exclusively in Sanskrit.

Few students were capable of extending a conversation beyond simple greetings. Even though the above conversation would have been understood by most of the

younger students (below 15 years), the ability to produce Sanskrit sentences and sustain even a simple conversation was generally limited.

An interesting feature of this sample conversation is observable above in lines 2, 4, and 6. In spoken Sanskrit, the usual convention is to use the third person form (he, she, it). However, it is interesting that in this brief conversation, the use of both *asi* (2<sup>nd</sup> person singular) and *gacchati* (3<sup>rd</sup> person singular) were used. The example from line 6 shows the use of *melisyāvaḥ* (first person dual future). While this is acceptable, it was observed that regardless of the number of people involved, generally, both students and teachers employed the use *melisyāmaḥ* (first person plural forms).

## 5. Summary of Major Findings

The school does permit non-Brahmin boys to attend and thus far, only four non-Brahmins have studied at the school. While I was at the school, there were two non-Brahmin students studying. Both want to become Sanskrit teachers. Non-Brahmin students follow the same curriculum as all the other students, except that they are not allowed to study the Vedic scriptures, or learn how to perform the *kārma kaṇḍ* (religious) rituals in order to become *pujārīs* (priests). Instead, during these classes, non-Brahmin students focus on another subject like *vyākaraṇa* (grammar) or *sahitya* (literature). The school's administration and the teachers are not opposed to the inclusion of non-Brahmin students or their participation in the Vedic traditions. However, the teachers explained the situation to be the result of larger (somewhat

vague) influence from outside the school that have, in the past, caused trouble for the school. Essentially, the current policy is an attempt 'not to ruffle any feathers'.

At this school in Gujarat, Sanskrit has the potential to become the super-ordinate language of this speech community. However, until more time is set aside for the promotion of speaking Sanskrit little headway will be made. Perhaps, as the teachers hope, when the younger students progress to a more proficient level, and the number of students increases, Sanskrit will be able to compete with its modern Indian descendant, Hindi.

Furthermore, there are no native speakers of Sanskrit in the school. For this reason, code mixing and students tend to converge towards the L1 or L2 languages. Sanskrit is the L3 of the majority of those people interviewed. Sanskrit, although liturgically prestigious, appears to have less prestige than Hindi and English as a spoken vernacular. Students, teachers and the other residents want to speak more Sanskrit but seem relaxed about the timeline needed to create such a phenomenon. The majority of students want to become Sanskrit teachers. There are 29 people who can speak Sanskrit, and of this figure, only 10 were considered to be fluent. The student population has grown fifty-percent in the past two years, from forty to sixty students. This figure is expected to grow to a desired three hundred students. With this growth it is anticipated that more students will speak Sanskrit. However, until students are motivated to speak Sanskrit and also overcome their inhibitions through encouragement, support, and practice, Sanskrit will not become the super-ordinate language. Sanskrit relies heavily upon the syntax of Hindi when spoken or written.



For now, the claims made in this paper should not be taken as a general rule applying across all of South Asia. However, the study has provided many new and interesting questions, opening up several possibilities for further research.

## **6. Future Research**

My intention is to conduct further linguistic anthropological fieldwork at this school in Gujarat. I would like to also be able to incorporate a deeper investigation of the relationship between Sanskrit, Hindi, Gujarati, and Nepali.

Furthermore, I would like to explore how notions of power and social inclusion operate between and within communities, or language nests who speak Sanskrit and those that do not. Finally, in light of modernisation, language diversity, language vitality, globalisation, and nationalism, my focus would be to understand more explicitly, how, why, and where Sanskrit fits within the sociolinguistic and cultural landscape of South Asia today.

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