

Vedic (vaidikī) is the oldest extant form of Sanskrit or Old Indo Aryan (OIA). It roughly dates back to 2000 BCE and includes the four Vedas (ṛg veda, sāma veda, yajur-veda, atharva-veda), their pāṭha and samhitā traditions – for example taittirīya and maitrāyini samhitās of kṛṣṇa yajurveda, and vājasaneyī samhitā of śukla-yajurveda. Based on linguistic similarities, the later pre-classical phase of Sanskrit – the language before the emergence of classical Sanskrit – can also be included as vedic. This phase includes brāhmaṇas, āraṇyakas, upaniṣadas and kalpasūtras.

The refined (“Sanskrit”) variety emerged after Pāṇini’s grammar around 700 BCE. This phase typically includes epics, purāṇas and classical Sanskrit literature and is referred as laukikī or ‘the current language’

Linguistic changes from Vedic to laukika Sanskrit

The language changed from Vedic to classical Sanskrit and can be shown at all levels of language. At the level of sounds, there were significant simplifications from Vedic to laukika. For example, *l/h* in Vedic changed to *ḍ/ḍh* in laukika. Combinations *-iy / -uw* changed to *y/w* in the laukika Sanskrit. Diphthongs got simplified in pure vowels, and so did Vedic accents and pitches

At the morphological level, there were fewer forms in the laukika. Very few *-yu* ending words like *manyu*, *dasyu* are found in the laukika. Many Vedic compounds got extinct, and so did many verb forms. The Vedic subjunctive mood disappeared in the laukika variety

Many Vedic words fell into disuse in the laukika variety like *atka* (garment), *apas* (work), *andhas* (juice), *ama* (strength), *iṣira* (vigorous, strong), *titau* (sieve), *gnā* (wife of god), *tvakṣ* (to be active). Among homonym pairs one of them lost currency, for example – out of *asura* (possessed), *asura* (demon) only the latter sense stayed. Of *ari* (devoted, trustworthy) and *ari* (enemy) the latter stayed.

Many words changed their meaning in the laukika, for example *vahni* (it meant ‘carrier’) changed to ‘fire’, *dasyu* (‘non Aryan’) changed to ‘robber’, *dāsa* (meaning ‘name of a tribe’) changed to ‘slave’, *sūdra* (‘name of a tribe’) changed to meaning ‘fourth varṇa’

Misunderstanding of Vedic words also led to change of meaning in laukika. For example, *kratu* (meaning ‘wisdom’, ‘insight’) was understood as ‘sacrifice’ in the laukika. Similarly, *mātariśvan* (meaning ‘divine being who discovered fire by rubbing two sticks’) was used to mean ‘wind’ in the laukika

Sometimes false etymologies also led to change in meaning. For example ‘a’ was considered a negative particle in words like *asura* (demon), *asita* (black) leading to words like *sura* (god), *sita* (white) in the laukika. This confusion with the etymology was so great that Yāska had to compile *nirukta* an etymological text for such words.

Another important change from Vedic to laukika was a large number of words from other sources got into laukika Sanskrit due to various influences like Dravidian, Iranian, and Greek.

Laukika Sanskrit may be represented using the existing Devanagari character set whereas Vedic Sanskrit needs many other characters and symbols.