

## Structural Differences between English and Indian Languages at the Sentence and Discourse Level

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper is a very preliminary attempt to look at how languages encode information. Different languages use different linguistic devices. Indian languages encode information morphologically or lexically. This provides flexibility in their word order. English, on the other hand, uses position for encoding information which results in a relatively rigid word order. This basic structural difference between English and Indian languages has consequences on how meaning is organized in these languages all the way to the discourse level. This is an important factor that needs to be considered while dealing with the Indian languages for any linguistic application.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

If we look at language as an information encoding mechanism/system used for effective communication, we notice that language composes larger information by joining smaller building blocks. Linguistic elements such as words, phrases and sentences form these building blocks. Words are arranged in a structural pattern to provide the composite meaning of a sentence. Sentences or parts of sentences are combined to provide cohesive meaning at the discourse level. Languages differ in the way they organise information in these entities. In other words, different languages apply different devices/mechanisms to encode information. Of these, some are common across certain languages and some are different. Therefore, languages vary grammatically.

India is a linguistic giant. In the Indian subcontinent multilingualism is the norm. This is a result of a long history of groups of people coming from different linguistic backgrounds living in close proximity. According to 2001 Census of India, there exist a total of 122 languages and another 234 “mother tongues” (<http://censusindia.gov.in/>).