

Official Languages Act 1963, Sections, Key Features & Significance

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The **Official Languages Act 1963**, is a law passed by the Government of India to regulate the use of languages for official purposes of the Union. It was introduced to ensure a smooth transition in language use after independence, especially regarding the use of Hindi and English in government work. The Act allows the continued use of English along with Hindi for official communication, thereby maintaining balance and avoiding language-related conflicts in a diverse country like India.

Key Provisions of the Official Languages Act 1963

- **Short Title and Commencement**

- The **Official Languages Act, 1963** was enacted to regulate the **use of languages for official purposes of the Union**, including Parliament, laws, and High Courts, ensuring uniformity in administration.
- **Section 3** came into force on **26 January 1965**, marking the completion of the 15-year constitutional transition period.

- The **remaining provisions** were implemented on different dates through **notifications in the Official Gazette** by the Central Government, allowing gradual adaptation.

• Definitions

- The term **“Appointed Day”** refers to **26 January 1965** for Section 3, while for other provisions it means the date on which those provisions came into force.
- **“Hindi”** is defined as Hindi written in the **Devanagari Script**, ensuring standardization in official use.

• Continuation of English Language

- The Act provides for the **continuance of English Language** along with Hindi for **official purposes of the Union**, even after the constitutional deadline.
- English continues to be used for the **transaction of business in Parliament**, ensuring continuity in legislative functioning.
- In **communication between the Union and non-Hindi States**, the use of **English is mandatory** to maintain clarity.
- When **Hindi is used between a Hindi-speaking State and a non-Hindi State**, it must be accompanied by an **English translation**.
- A **non-Hindi State** may choose to communicate in Hindi, and in such cases, English is not compulsory.

• Language in Government Communication

- Communication between **Ministries, Departments, Offices of the Central Government**, or with **government-owned corporations/companies**, must include translation in the **other language (Hindi or English)**.
- This requirement continues until officials acquire a **working knowledge of Hindi**, ensuring administrative efficiency without disruption.

• Mandatory Use of Hindi and English

- Both **Hindi and English must be used together** for important official documents such as **resolutions, rules, notifications, reports, and press communiqués**.
- Documents laid before **Parliament** must be in **both languages**, ensuring accessibility.
- Legal and administrative instruments like **contracts, agreements, licenses, permits, notices, and tender forms** must also be issued in **Hindi and English**.

• Power of Central Government

- The **Central Government** is empowered to decide the **language or languages** to be used for official work through rules.
- While making such rules, it must ensure **efficient administration**, protect **public interest**, and ensure smooth functioning.
- It must also ensure that employees with proficiency in **either Hindi or English** are **not placed at a disadvantage**, ensuring fairness.

• Continuation of English Until Consensus

- The use of English will continue until all **non-Hindi States pass resolutions** agreeing to discontinue it.
- After this, **both Houses of Parliament must approve** the discontinuation through a resolution.
- This ensures that any language shift happens through **national consensus**, not compulsion.

• Committee on Official Language

- A **Committee on Official Language** is constituted **10 years after Section 3 comes into force**.
- It consists of **30 members**, including **20 from Lok Sabha** and **10 from Rajya Sabha**, elected through **proportional representation**.
- The Committee reviews the **progress of Hindi usage**, submits a **report to the President**, and makes recommendations.
- The **President may issue directions** after considering the report and the views of State Governments.
- **Authorized Hindi Translation of Central Laws**
 - A **Hindi translation of Central Acts, Ordinances, rules, and regulations**, published under the authority of the **President**, is considered the **authoritative Hindi text**.
 - All **Bills and amendments in Parliament** must include both the **English version and an authorized Hindi translation**.
- **Hindi Translation of State Laws**
 - If a State uses a language other than Hindi, it may publish a **Hindi translation under the authority of the Governor**.
 - Such translations are treated as the **authoritative Hindi version**, ensuring wider understanding.
- **Language in High Courts**
 - The **Governor**, with the consent of the **President**, may allow the use of **Hindi or the State's official language in High Court judgments, decrees, and orders**.
 - However, an **English translation is compulsory**, ensuring uniformity in the judicial system.
- **Power to Make Rules and Parliamentary Control**
 - The Central Government has the authority to **make rules under the Act**, which must be placed before **Parliament**.
 - Parliament can **modify or reject these rules**, ensuring **accountability and democratic control**.
- **Removal of Special Provision**
 - Earlier, certain provisions did not apply to **Jammu & Kashmir**, but this exception was removed after the **2020 reorganization**, making the Act uniformly applicable.

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