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A Surplus of Meaning

The Intent of Irregularity in Vedic Poetry

door Werner Franz Knobl

1. Mind-reading the Vedic poet does not only mean reading *his* mind, but also reading it *with* — and even *within* — the scholar’s own mind.

2. Silence and empty space are integral parts of poetical language. We may even say that *l’espace entre les mots est le mot le plus parlant*.

3. Surprisingly, many, if not most, of the rhetorical figures classical authors of Latin and Greek were well acquainted with — from *anacoluthon* to *zeugma* — can also be found in Vedic poetry.

4. Different portmanteau formations have to be distinguished. They range from forms that are based upon two words with an almost complete phonetic overlap, to blends whose ingredient base words show no phonetic overlap at all.

The limited use linguists make of ‘portmanteau’ as a technical term — by applying it, e.g., to the single *s* in, let’s say, *the poets’ philosophy of language*, where the *s* is charged with the double weight of two meanings, ‘plural’ and ‘genitive’ — may strike us as a blatant misuse of Lewis Carroll’s poetic word creation.

5. The *final* sense of the present participle is scarcely taken into account by Sanskrit scholars; and yet, this very sense is as undeniably to be reckoned with in Vedic as it is in Ancient Latin and Greek. However, the *intentional* meaning should only be considered a preferable possibility if the participle is subordinate to a verbal action that denotes *going* or *coming*, *sending* or *summoning*, in exact parallel to the classical languages.

The *hetu*-function of the present participle as taught by later grammatical tradition is not specific enough, and Pāṇini’s rule 3.2.126 *lakṣaṇa-hetvoḥ kriyāyāḥ* may lead to over-application.

See Werner Knobl, “Studies on the Present Participle: 1. The Present Participle Expressive of Intentionality”. *Journal of Indological Studies* 16 & 17, Kyoto University, Graduate School of Letters, Department of Indological Studies, 2004/2005, 65–108.

6. This is a very strange fact: While the present participle of other verbs has the capacity to express many different shades of meaning, such as causal, temporal, conditional, hypothetical, concessive, consecutive, and final — in addition to being used in a simply descriptive manner — the participle of *as/s* ‘to be [there], to exist (as)’,

whenever it occurs in a subordinate clause, is employed in an almost exclusively *adversative* sense. The Vedic usage of *sánt-* is thus quite parallel to that of *έόντ-* in the epics of Homer.

7. The early Vedic (multifunctional) sense of the deceptively well-known demonstrative pronoun *ETAD* — allegedly meaning only ‘this’ — has not yet been described in a satisfying way. While the *hier-deiktische IDAM* points at what is near by, and the *dort-deiktische ADAS* at what is far away, *ETAD* refers to anything that lies at a *middle* distance, somewhere *in between* those two extreme points of reference. This specific intermediary function of the pronoun *ETAD* may be characterized as *da-deiktisch*.

8. In English, for example, or in Hittite, verbs may occasionally be formed from adverbs; cf. Engl. ‘to in’ and ‘to out’, ‘to up’ and ‘to down’; or Hitt. *āppai-*, *p(a)rā-* and *šanna-* (see H. Craig Melchert, “Hittite *hi-*Verbs from Adverbs”, Fachtagung Krakova 2004). Similarly, verbs may be derived from particles, too, in a morphological process that I suggest to style ‘radicalization’.

See Werner Knobl, “A *departicular da-deictic* verb in Sanskrit: *śay/śi* ‘be lying there’ as attested in the earliest Vedic texts”, paper read at the 14th World Sanskrit Conference, Kyoto University, September 2009.

9. Around the middle of the last century, the meaning of *bráhman-* n. was controversially discussed by three of the greatest indologists of their time: Louis Renou (1949), Jan Gonda (1950), and Paul Thieme (1952). Even if we combine the different definitions suggested by these antagonistic scholars into one, and thus try to reconcile the apparently disparate aspects they seemed to see with mutually exclusive clarity, something essential is still missing. A comprehensive meaning ‘the power (Gonda) to formulate truth (Thieme) as enigmatic speech (Renou)’ appears to be all-embracing; but this close embrace would also be all-too-exclusive, for it does exclude an important feature of *bráhman-*, the sadly neglected aspect that we may call — with a word of infinite fascination — ‘beauty’.

10. The linguist’s witticism, “Etymologies are either obvious or wrong”, is neither true nor particularly funny.

11. Poems of the haiku poet Bashô are a challenge to any Indo-European poet. Although their specific ‘lightness’ (*karumi*) and an almost total absence of rhetorical figures makes them strangely attractive to us, only few occidental poets have ventured to take up the challenge.

12. A scholar who seriously studies Vedic poetry and tries to read the poet’s mind *within* his own mind, will make the discovery that wanting to write Vedic poetry himself is a quite natural consequence of his research.