

Towards a unified interpretation of the cognitive process behind two types of negation in the Sanskrit grammatical tradition

Traditionally, Sanskrit grammarians distinguish between non-implicative, verbal (*prasajya*) and implicative, nominal (*paryudāsa*) negation. In their analysis they point out that the former requires a two-tier process (Staal 1962); firstly, a rule/action is prescribed or established only to be rejected/denied at the next stage. In other words, in order to negate an action, you need to establish it first. In the case of *paryudāsa* type negation, exhibited by negative compounds (*nañsamāsa*), such a process is not described. Early grammarians, such as Patañjali, emphasise that the reason behind using negative compounds (e.g. *abrāhmaṇa* = ‘a non-Brahmin’) at all is a mistake (or erroneous cognition) which has led us to use the wrong word (noun, in this case *brāhmaṇa*), and this mistake has to be rectified with the use of negation.

One could argue, however, that both these cases are in essence very similar, almost identical; in that the process of cognition behind them comprises two stages both in the case of *prasajya* as well as *paryudāsa* negation. In my presentation I will show how this two-staged interpretation of the latter clarified in the school of Vyākaraṇa starting from the 10th century and the works of Kaiyaṭa, Helārāja or Haradatta, all of whom begin to employ the notion of superimposition (*āropa*) in their interpretation of *paryudāsa* negation. So in later grammatical tradition, the mistake (or erroneous cognition) is what causes the superimposition of a wrong concept onto an object (step 1), and this mistake is subsequently corrected (step 2). I will also show how such an interpretation culminates in the works of Kauṇḍabhāṭṭa in the 17th century, who emphasises that words contain in their meaning the existing as well as non-existing aspect; the latter being revealed with the help of negation. This procedure of revealing the “hidden” or secondary meaning (*lakṣaṇā*) also suggests that process behind the cognition of negation is two-tier. I will finally try to demonstrate how this semantics-oriented approach to negation developed in the second millennium CE correlates with the formal description of Pāṇini.

References

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