

**Zeitschrift:** Asiatische Studien : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft = Études asiatiques : revue de la Société Suisse-Asie  
**Herausgeber:** Schweizerische Asiengesellschaft  
**Band:** 45 (1991)  
**Heft:** 1

**Artikel:** Studies on Bhartrhari, 3: Bhartrhari on sphota and universals  
**Autor:** Bronkhorst, Johannes  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-146911>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 27.08.2025

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

## STUDIES ON BHARTṚHARI, 3.

### *Bhartṛhari on sphoṭa and universals.*<sup>1</sup>

Johannes Bronkhorst, Université de Lausanne

1. It will soon be 40 years since John Brough's influential article "Theories of general linguistics in the Sanskrit grammarians" appeared in print.<sup>2</sup> Among the topics discussed is the *sphoṭa*. Brough complains that "this term *sphoṭa*, which is of prime importance for Indian linguistic theory, has unfortunately been subjected by modern writers to a great deal of unnecessary mystification" (p. 405). Two writers in particular are mentioned, A. Berriedale Keith and S.K. De. Keith had described the *sphoṭa* as "a mysterious entity, a sort of hypostatization of sound", while De had used the expression "a somewhat mystical conception". Brough concludes that "it is hardly to be wondered at if the western reader, in the face of numerous comparable accounts, should come to the conclusion that the *sphoṭa*-theory represents a departure from lucidity which, coming as it does from men whose professional task was the clear presentation of linguistic facts, is quite inexplicable" (p. 406).

For Brough the *sphoṭa* is "simply the linguistic sign in its aspect of meaning-bearer (*Bedeutungsträger*)" (p. 406), or "simply the word considered as a single meaningful symbol" (p. 409). "In this conception of the *sphoṭa*," Brough continues, "it seems to me that there is nothing 'mysterious': it is merely an abstraction to assist us in the handling of our linguistic material". He concludes on p. 410: "It will thus be seen that the *sphoṭa*-doctrine, so far from being something 'mysterious', is in fact of central importance for the theory of language-symbolism."

It may be that Brough's observations are useful for general linguistics and linguistic philosophy. Indeed, this is what Brough had in mind, for he wrote this article – as he put it – "not merely as a matter of antiquarian curiosity, but because in their extraordinary linguistic and philosophic acumen these ancient authors are still, I believe, worthy of our respect" (p. 402). But whether or not

1 Thanks are due to the Rockefeller Foundation which enabled me, for a period of one month, to direct my undivided attention to Bhartṛhari's *Vākyapadīya*, in the Villa Serbelloni, Bellagio, Italy. Studies in Bhartṛhari 1 and 2 have appeared in *Bulletin d'Études Indiennes* 6 (1988), pp. 105-143, and *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 15 (1989), pp. 101-117, respectively.

2 Transactions of the Philological Society, 1951, pp. 27-46. Reprinted in *A Reader on the Sanskrit Grammarians*, edited by J.F. Staal, MIT Press, Cambridge – Massachusetts and London – England, 1972, pp. 402-414. Page numbers refer to the reprint.

similar ideas are, or should be, present in modern linguistics, this has nothing to do with the question whether Brough's observations help us to understand the ancient Indian grammarians – and among them Bhartr̥hari in particular.

Brough was aware that there may be more to the *sphoṭa* than is clear from his above-quoted remarks. He mentions in passing “the fact that the Indians themselves appear to have given 'ontological status' to this abstraction, and to have considered it as a sort of quasi-Kantian 'Wort-an-sich'” (p. 409). On another page he mentions “the fact that on the basis of the *sphoṭa*-theory there was erected a metaphysical superstructure” (p. 411). Towards the end of the article (p. 412) he even quotes one of the few stanzas of the *Vākyapadīya* which make a statement about the ontological status of the *sphoṭa*; VP 1.96 (ed. Rau) says that 'according to some' the *sphoṭa* is a *jāti* 'universal'.<sup>3</sup> Brough rejects this view and claims that Bhartr̥hari's *sphoṭa* was rather an individual. Nothing further is however said about the 'metaphysical superstructure'.

We have to face the question whether we really understand Bhartr̥hari any better by knowing that one of his concepts corresponds to a modern linguistic one, without knowing how it fits in his 'metaphysical superstructure'. As long as the *sphoṭa* is not satisfactorily accounted for within the context of Bhartr̥hari's theory, are we not correct in describing it as a 'mysterious entity', or as a 'somewhat mystical conception'?

The main effect of Brough's article is that it creates in us a sense of familiarity with respect to the *sphoṭa*, but familiarity is not the same as understanding. For example, Brough's exposition may make us receptive to the idea that the sentence is an undivided entity (cf. p. 412 f.); but this does not help us to understand why, for Bhartr̥hari, also objects like pots are indivisible (VP 3.243). Nor can Brough's arguments explain why the whole of the *Rigveda* is considered a unity by Bhartr̥hari (VP 3.553).

There can be no doubt that the transcultural assimilation of concepts can remove the feeling of strangeness, but this should not be confused with understanding. It may, on the contrary, in certain cases give rise to confusion. The comparison of Panini's grammar with modern linguistics, for example, – besides contributing greatly to the general appreciation of Panini – has tended to overlook, or even misinterpret, certain aspects of this grammar. Brough's stated aim to demystify the concept of *sphoṭa*, therefore, appears to be an attractive slogan rather than an achieved goal.

2. The second publication I will consider is *Bhartr̥hari and the Buddhists, An Essay in the Development of Fifth and Sixth Century Indian Thought*, by

3 Brough translates 'class', but 'universal' seems more appropriate.

Radhika Herzberger.<sup>4</sup> Only a part of this book deals with Bhartrhari's ideas, and only some aspects of this part will here be discussed.

Herzberger complains about "the absence of an integrated portrait of Bhartrhari's thought, a portrait that would convey the essential links between his grammatical ideas and his metaphysical ones" (p. 10). This shows that she attaches more value to Bhartrhari's metaphysical ideas than Brough did. Yet she describes Brough's above-discussed article as a first step in the direction of a demystification of Bhartrhari's metaphysical ideas (id.). How does Herzberger do justice to these ideas?

The basic question of her approach is: "What is the basis on which names are given to things?" (p. xvii-xviii, xxi). The main ideas which she attributes to Bhartrhari in this context can be briefly described as follows:

Bhartrhari distinguishes two kinds of universals: thing-universals (*arthajāti*) and word-universals (*śabdajāti*). From among these two, word-universals are by far the more important; indeed, "the status of the thing universals is ignored" (p. 37). Word-universals – Herzberger calls them sometimes simply 'universals', as in the last line of p. 20 –, on the other hand, are "made up of three strands: a phonological strand, a syntactic strand and a semantic strand" (p. 21). The result is clear: "The speaker on the basis of the form of a word has immediate and unerring access to its meaning, its syntactic and phonological features" (p. 21). The semantic aspect of a word-universal makes the next step possible: word-universals participate in a hierarchical structure. "Thus the name *śimśapā* has access through its universal *śimśapātvam* (sic!) to *vrkṣatvam* (sic!) (treeness) which is located in the name *vrkṣa*" (p. 33). This hierarchy can be extended upward. A *śimśapā* is a tree, and for that reason animate, etc. At the top of this hierarchy we find the Great Being, which is the Supreme Universal, and which is consequently designated by all words (p. 35-36).

In order to confront this scheme with the text of the *Vākyapadīya*, I lift out the following points:

- 1) There are two kinds of universals: thing-universals and word-universals.
- 2) Word-universals have a semantic aspect.
- 3) Word-universals participate in a hierarchical structure.
- 4) The top of this structure is constituted by the Great Being, which is the Supreme Universal.

Let us now deal with these points one by one.

4 Dordrecht / Boston / Lancaster / Tokyo: D. Reidel. 1986. (Studies of Classical India, 8.)

1) The first point is easily established, and is obviously correct. VP 3.6 is thus translated by Herzberger (p. 29):<sup>5</sup>

All words first of all express their own universal; thereafter this universal (lit. it) is thought to be superimposed upon the forms of universals of [external] things.

2) The second point is more problematic. The stanza which supposedly shows that word-universals have a semantic aspect, is VP 3.3:

*keṣāmcit sāhacaryeṇa jātiḥ śaktyupalakṣaṇam/  
khaḍirādiṣv aśakteṣu śaktaḥ pratinidhīyate//*

Herzberger translates (p. 20):<sup>6</sup>

According to some, the universal indicates a capacity by way of accompaniment [of the individual]; when [a post made of] *khaḍira* lacks the capacity [to perform the function enjoined by the injunction] something which has the capacity is substituted.

She concludes: “There does not seem to be, in view of this stanza, any reason for denying that universals belonging in words lack semantic features.”

This conclusion shows – and the word ‘indicates’ in the translation suggested it already – that in Herzberger’s opinion this stanza is about word-universals. It isn’t, but it is easy to see how Herzberger arrived at this incorrect opinion. It is the result of her incorrect understanding of the preceding stanza VP 3.2. She translates it correctly (p. 71):<sup>7</sup>

In the artificial analysis of meanings / objects of words, a universal or an individual have been described as the two really eternal objects / meanings of all words.

This stanza obviously concerns *things*. Yet Herzberger concludes from it that “Bharṭṛhari preferred the two-fold division of *words* into individuals (*dravya*) and universals (*jāti*)” (p. 71), as if a division of words rather than of meanings / objects of words were here under consideration. It is true that the preceding stanza VP 3.1 deals with the division of words, but Herzberger is clearly mistaken in thinking that “Bharṭṛhari had meant to subsume the former classification (of VP 3.1) within the latter, more embracing categories (of VP 3.2)” (p. 20). One does not subsume a classification of words within a classification of meanings / objects of words.

5 The reading accepted by Herzberger is (p. 28): *svā jātiḥ prathamam śabdaiḥ sarvair evābhidhīyate/ tato 'rthajātirūpeṣu tadadhyāropakalpanā//*

6 The translation of the same stanza on p. 75 is slightly different.

7 VP 3.2: *padārthānām apoddhāre jātir vā dravyam eva vā/ padārthau sarvaśabdānām nityāv evopavarnītau//*

In the translation of VP 3.3 we may replace the word 'indicates' with 'co-implies', a term which renders the Sanskrit *upalakṣaṇa* at least as well, and makes very good sense. In the injunction "Tie up the beast to a post of *khadira*," the word *khadira* refers to the universal of *khadira* wood and, by co-implication, to the capacity of *khadira* wood to perform its function.

3) In order to substantiate the hierarchical structure of word universals, Herzberger adduces several stanzas. Consider first her translation of VP 3.7-8 (p. 31, 85; what follows is really an amalgamation based on these two translations):<sup>8</sup>

Just as the essence (*tattva*), which is in the quality red, is designated in lacquer (*kaṣāya*) and, as a result of contact with the conjoint (*saṃyogisannikarṣa*), is grasped even in garments; so also the universal, which is fixed in a word, as a result of the relation between word and object, brings about the effect of universals (*jātikārya*), when universals belonging in things are designated.

Herzberger makes much of the phrase 'the effect of universals' (*jātikārya*) in the second of these two stanzas. "The effect of universals'," she observes on p. 33, "derives from the hierarchical structure to which a universal located in a name has access. ... Thus the name *śimśapā* has access through its universal, *śimśapātvam* to *vrkṣatvam* (treeness) which is located in the name *vrkṣa*. The name, on the basis of its own universal, has negative access to the universal located in the name *palāśa*." Later on the same page she sums up: "Thus 'the effect of universals' ... represents a theory of the analytic and antonymic content of names."

These statements do not, of course, constitute evidence for the correctness of their contents, and Herzberger is aware of it. The evidence, as she indicates on p. 33, follows these statements, and it seems clear that VP 3.10 is adduced to fulfil this role. This stanza has to be read in combination with the one that precedes it, and I reproduce both of them as found in Rau's critical edition:

VP 3.9: *jātiśabdaikaśeṣe sā jātinām jātir iṣyate/*

*śabdajātaya ity atra tajjātiḥ śabdajātiṣu/*

VP 3.10: *yā śabdajātiśabdeṣu śabdebhyo bhinnalakṣaṇā/*

*jātiḥ sā śabdajātitvam avyatikramya vartate/*

The two stanzas deal with certain complications arising in connection with *ekaśeṣa* – translated by Herzberger as 'Remaindering of One'. An ordinary ex-

8 VP 3.7-8: *yathā rakte guṇe tattvaṃ kaṣāye vyapadiśyate/ saṃyogisannikarṣāc ca vastrādiṣv api gr̥hyate/ tathā śabdārthasambandhāc chabde jātir avasthitā/ vyapadeṣe 'rthajātinām jātikāryāya kalpate/*

ample of *ekaśeṣa* is *vrkṣaś ca vrkṣaś ca vrkṣaś ca vrkṣāḥ*, which justifies the use of one single word *vrkṣāḥ* 'trees' to refer to three or more objects, with the help of a plural ending. The discussion in the *Mahābhāṣya* shows that this is possible because words do not only refer to individuals, but also to universals.<sup>9</sup>

If now we wish to form the plural *jātayah* 'universals', we need the universal of the individuals referred to by the word *jāti*, i.e., the universal of universals. To justify the plural *śabdajātayah* 'word-universals', similarly, we need the universal located in word-universals. However, no universals inhere in universals. How, then, is the formation of the plurals *jātayah* and *śabdajātayah* to be explained? The answer is provided by VP 3.8 (see above), which stipulates that there where thing-universals (in the plural) are designated (*vyapadeśe 'rthajātīnām*), the corresponding word-universal (*[ś]abde jātir avasthitā*) brings about the effect of universals (*jātikāryāya kalpate*), i.e., justifies the plural. The role of the thing-universal – which in this particular case does not exist – is taken over by the word-universal. This is possible because of the link that unites words and things (*śabdārthasambandhā[t]*) and therefore, indirectly, word-universals and thing-universals.

This explanation is confirmed by VP 3.9-10, which can be translated as follows:

In the case of *ekaśeṣa* of the word *jāti* (i.e., in the formation of the plural *jātayah*), we need that universal of universals (viz., the universal inhering in the word *jāti*). In the case of [the plural] *śabdajātayah*, the universal of that [word *śabdajāti*] resides (in the manner indicated in stanzas 7-8) in the word-universals (*śabdajāti*).

The universal which [inheres] in the words *śabdajāti* [and makes the plural *śabdajātayah* possible] is different from [those] words, [but] is nothing beyond a word-universal.

In order to understand Herzberger's interpretation of these stanzas, we must know that she follows the reading found in Iyer's non-critical edition, which deviates from Rau's in the case of stanza 10. Iyer has here:

*yā śabdajātiḥ śabdeṣu śabdebhyo bhinnalakṣaṇā/  
jātiḥ sā śabdajātitvam apy atikramya vartate//*

Herzberger translates the two stanzas as follows (p. 34, 90, cp. p. 93):

It [i.e. the higher word universal] is held to be the universal of [lower, more specific] universals when [the operation] Remaindering of One is performed for words which signify universals as: '[these are] word universals here'; the higher word universal [lit.

9 Cf. *Mahābhāṣya* on P. 1.2.64 vt. 53 (ed. Kielhorn vol. I p. 246 l. 14-15: *na hy ākṛti-padārthikasya dravyam na padārtho dravyapadārthikasya vāktir na padārthaḥ ubhaya ubhayaṁ padārthaḥ*)

it] is located in word universals. That word universal which is located in [all] words, [but] which is different from the words [in which it is located], resides there having even crossed over [its own] word universalness.

Note that even this translation should leave no doubt that these stanzas concern the very special case of the plural of words which signify universals. It is hard to see how they could possibly be considered to justify a hierarchy of word-universals. We must assume that Herzberger drew some inspiration from the obscurity of stanza 10.

But we have already seen that this obscurity can be avoided by accepting the reading which is anyway to be preferred on the basis of Rau's critical comparison of the Mss., and which gives a perfectly satisfactory meaning. Note that the reading accepted by Herzberger, and indeed her own translation, are still far removed from the 'hierarchy of word-universals', which can only be read into them with great effort. Indeed, Herzberger seems to be aware of this, for she introduces her explanatory remarks with the words: "I read this stanza in the following manner" (p. 34). She then continues: "A universal has the capacity to cross over both its own substratum as well as the phonetic features associated with it. Thus *vrkṣatva* loses its phonetic marks when it lodges in *śimsāpā*. *Śimsāpā* has the sense of *vrkṣa*, but not its phonetic features." A far-fetched interpretation indeed!

4) VP 3.33 is quoted in order to show that "the hierarchy [of universals] reaches all the way up to the Supreme Universal, (*mahāsāmānya*), the Great Plenum in which all words are properly fixed" (p. 35). Herzberger translates it as follows:<sup>10</sup>

Divided into cows and so forth through distinctions present in those things which are its relata, [this] Being is called the [Supreme] Universal; and all words are fixed in this Universal.

Again it is difficult to find support for Herzberger's point of view in this stanza. The only hint in that direction which I find in the translation is the word 'Supreme'. But this word is rightly put between hooks, for no word in the Sanskrit text corresponds to it; the addition of 'Supreme' is clearly an invention of the translator.<sup>11</sup>

I shall not here discuss the question in how far Herzberger's interpretation – which does not fit the text of the *Vākyapadīya*, as we have seen – represents

10 VP 3.33: *sambandhibhedāt sattaiva bhidyamānā gavādiṣu/ jātir ity ucyate tasyām sarve śabdā vyavasthitāḥ* //

11 Note that Brough, too, made a similar addition while translating this stanza; he has "the Class (par excellence)". See however below.

Helaraja's views. Herzberger herself expresses her 'surprise' at the 'discovery' that Helārāja deviates from her interpretation at a crucial junction (p. 54). Nor does her interpretation of Bhartṛhari find much support in her understanding of Dignāga, which – as she frankly admits on p. xxiii – “is shaped largely by my reading of Bhartṛhari”.<sup>12</sup> The conclusion is inevitable that Herzberger has not succeeded in her courageous attempt to elucidate Bhartṛhari's ideas on the subject of universals.

3. Both Brough and Herzberger worked from 'below' 'upward' in their attempt to understand Bhartṛhari's thought. Brough never reaches the metaphysical 'superstructure', whose existence he none-the-less does not deny. For Herzberger the 'superstructure' is the 'top' of a construction built by her 'from below'. For Bhartṛhari, however, we can be sure that the metaphysical superstructure did not come at the end, but rather at the beginning. It comes at the beginning literally, for the first stanzas of the Vākyapadīya speak of Brahman. But it must have come at the beginning in another sense as well: Bhartṛhari wrote his work starting from a vision, in which the metaphysical aspects of his thought were already clearly represented. This at any rate seems an extremely reasonable assumption to make.

Let us therefore try to understand Bhartṛhari's ideas – at least in as far as they concern the *sphoṭa* and universals – 'from top to bottom'. We begin with a stanza discussed by both Brough and Herzberger, VP 3.33, which we shall study in its context:<sup>13</sup>

From among the real and the unreal parts which are present in each thing, the real [part] is the universal, while the individuals are traditionally said to be unrels. (32)

Being itself, when divided into cows etc. on account of the different things with which it is connected, is called 'universal'; all words are based on it. (33)

They call it the meaning of the nominal stem and the meaning of the verbal root. It is eternal, it is the great *ātman*; [the abstract suffixes] *tva*, *tal* etc. refer to it. (34)

12 See also p. 106: “Dignāga wrote against the assumed background of Bhartṛhari's thought, and without an awareness of this background Dignāga's laconic statements remain obscure and odd.”

13 VP 3.32-39: *satyāsatyau tu yau bhāgau pratibhāvaṁ vyavasthitau/ satyaṁ yat tatra sā jātir asatyā vyaktayaḥ smṛtāḥ/ sambandhibhedāt sattaiva bhidyamānā gavādiṣu/ jātir ity ucyate tasyāṁ sarve śabdā vyavasthitāḥ/ tāṁ prātipadikārthaṁ ca dhātvarthaṁ ca pracakṣate/ sā nityā sā mahān ātmā tāṁ āhus tvatalādayaḥ/ prāptakramā viśeṣeṣu kriyā saivābhidhīyate/ kramarūpasya saṁhāre tat sattvaṁ iti kathyate/ saiva bhāvavikāreṣu śad avasthāḥ prapadyate/ krameṇa śaktibhiḥ svābhir evaṁ pratyavabhāsat/ ātmabhūtaḥ kramo 'py asyā yatredaṁ kālādarsanam/ paurvāparyādirūpeṇa pravibhaktam iva sthitam/ tirobhāvābhyupagame bhavanam saiva nāstitā/ labdhakrame tirobhāve naśyatīti prātīyate/ pūrvasmāt pracyutā dharmād aprāptā cottaram padam/ tadantarāle bhedaṇām āśrayāj janma kathyate/*

When it assumes sequence in individual cases, it is called 'activity'; when its sequential form is destroyed, it is called 'Being' (*sattva*). (35)

It reaches the six states in the transformations of things, in order; on account of its own powers it appears like that. (36)

Also sequence belongs to it. In it there is the experience of [the power called] 'time', divided as it were in earlier, later, and so on. (37)

It is the [posterior] non-existence of things, when we agree that they have disappeared; when the disappearance is in progress, it is known in the form 'it is being destroyed'. (38)

It is called 'birth' when it has left its earlier characteristic and has not [yet] reached its next position, because in the meantime it is the basis of different [forms of appearance]. (39)

These stanzas undoubtedly describe Bhartṛhari's absolute, which he sometimes calls 'Brahman'. In the next article of the present series I intend to argue that this absolute is conceived of as a whole, as the totality of all there is, was, and will be. The present stanzas support this interpretation. Stanza 33, for example, speaks of Being which is divided into cows etc. The stanzas also refer to the 'powers' of Brahman, which play a role in producing the unreal world of our experience. Reality, on the other hand, only belongs to Brahman.

For further details of Bhartṛhari's vision of the world I must refer to future articles in the present series. Here we must concentrate on universals.

Stanza 33 identifies Being – i.e., Brahman – and 'universal'. Does Bhartṛhari have here some kind of 'supreme universal' in mind, as Brough and Herzberger maintain? Nothing in the stanza – nor indeed in any other stanza – suggests that. Nor is this interpretation in any way necessary. Consider stanza 32. It states that every object (*bhāva*) has a real and an unreal part. The real part is its universal. We may add that the real part of every object is Brahman. How? Stanza 33 explains: it is Brahman as divided into cows etc.

We see that the division of Brahman must be visualized as consisting of two phases. There is the division of Brahman into universals. These universals are essentially identical with Brahman and do not contain any 'unreal' elements. 'Unreal' elements appear when a further division takes place under the influence of the 'powers' of Brahman. These powers introduce spatial and temporal divisions, among other things, and give rise to our 'unreal' phenomenal world. Stanza 35 strongly suggests that the introduction of sequence – the effect of time – is an important factor on the way from 'real' to 'unreal'.

The universals themselves contribute in the continuous creation of the phenomenal world:<sup>14</sup>

14 VP 3.25-27: *na tad utpadyate kimcid yasya jātir na vidyate/ ātmābhivyaktaye jātīḥ kārāṇāṁ prayojikā/ kārāṇeṣu padaṁ kṛtvā nityānityeṣu jātayaḥ/ kvacit kāryeṣv ab-*

Nothing originates which has no universal; the universal urges the causes to manifest it. (25)

The universals, entering both the eternal and the non-eternal causes, manifest themselves again and again in certain effects. (26)

The universal is also effective in producing activity; it urges the activity to manifest the object in which it resides. (27)

The picture which thus evolves of universals is hardly that of an abstract entity different from the things in which it manifests itself, like the universals of the Vaiśeṣika philosophy. In an important way Bhartṛhari's universal rather is the thing. It is not correct to think that there is a pot, and the universal potness which is different from it. Quite on the contrary, the pot in as far as it really exists is the universal; its not really existing shadow in the phenomenal world is the individual. It is therefore not possible to say that pot and potness are different, even though the former has a spatial and a temporal dimension, which the latter has not. Universals, seen in this way, can most easily be compared with Plato's ideas: they are real and unchanging, while the things that figure in our experience are their unreal reflections.

Returning now to Bhartṛhari's *sphoṭa*, if the real pot is the universal, the same must be true of words: the real word, i.e. the *sphoṭa*, is a universal. This is exactly the opinion attributed to 'some' in VP 1.96, the stanza so easily brushed aside by Brough:<sup>15</sup>

Some consider that the *sphoṭa* is the universal revealed by the various individual instances, and they consider that the individuals belonging to this [universal] are the sounds.

If we forget for a moment the attribution of this opinion to 'some', we see that we have arrived at a perfect understanding of the *sphoṭa* in the context of Bhartṛhari's theory. To repeat the main points: Like everything else, words too have two aspects, the real word and its phenomenal manifestations, which are not real. The phenomenal manifestation of the word is sound, the real word its universal, which is the essence of the word (*śabdatattva*), identical with Brahman (VP 1.1).

*hivvyaktim upayānti punaḥ punaḥ// nirvartyamānaṁ yat karma jātis tatrāpi sādhanam/ svāś-rayasyābhiniṣpattyai sā kriyāyāḥ prayojikā//*

- 15 VP 1.96: *anekavyaktyabhivyaṅgyā jātiḥ sphoṭa iti smṛtā/ kaiścid vyaktaya evāsyā dhvanitvena prakalpitāḥ//*

As in the case of the pot, it is not possible to say that *sphoṭa* and sound are different, even though the latter, unlike the former, has a spatial and a temporal dimension. This is exactly what is stated in VP 1.99:<sup>16</sup>

And a connection with space etc. is also seen in the case of corporeal objects (such as pots); [in the same way] there is no difference between sound and word (i.e. *sphoṭa*), even though we distinguish different locations [in the case of sound].<sup>17</sup>

The identical nature of *sphoṭa* and sound is illustrated with the help of the doctrine according to which the sense organ is of the same nature as the objects it perceives:<sup>18</sup>

Just as sense organs and their objects are suited to each other in a way which is fixed and does not change, in the same way *sphoṭa* and sound [are suited to each other] as manifested and manifestor. (100)

In the world the cause which elucidates odour etc. – [which are objects] whose sense organs have the same nature [as they themselves] – is fixed and determined for each substance. (101)

According to this doctrine, the organ of smell is constituted of earth, of which smell is the characteristic property; the organ of sight is fire, which has colour as its characteristic property; and so on. The nature of the sense faculty and its object are therefore identical.

Why is the view of *sphoṭa* as universal attributed to 'some'? Does it mean that Bhartrhari himself did not accept this point of view?

The situation appears to be somewhat more complicated. In point of fact, Bhartrhari recognizes two possible views as to the thing denoted by words: it is the universal or the substance (*dravya*).<sup>19</sup> In the *Jāṭisamuddeśa* (VP 3.1-110) the point of departure is the view that words denote universals; in the following *Dravyasamuddeśa* (VP 3.111-128) words are taken to denote substance. Bhartrhari does not appear to make a choice between these two alternatives.

16 VP 1.99: *deśādibhiś ca sambandho dṛṣṭaḥ kāyavatām api/ deśabhedavikalpe 'pi na bhedo dhvaniśabdayoḥ/*

17 This interpretation of the stanza differs from the one offered in the *Vṛtti*; see Appendix.

18 VP 1.100-101: *grahanagrāhyayoḥ siddhā yogyatā niyatā yathā/ vyaṅgyavyaṅjakabhāvena tathaiva sphoṭanādayoḥ/ sadṛśagrahanānām ca gandhādīnām prakāśakam/ nimittam niyatam loke pratidravyam avasthitam/* I prefer the reading *-bhāvena* in 100c to *-bhāve* 'pi, which is slightly better supported by the Mss.

19 See VP 3.2, quoted and translated above. Herzberger translates *dravya* with 'individual'; I prefer 'substance'.

Consider now the first two stanzas of the *Dravyasamuddeśa*.<sup>20</sup>

'Self' (*ātman*), 'abiding essence' (*vastu*), 'own nature' (*svabhāva*), 'body' (*śarīra*) and 'true principle' (*tattva*), these are synonyms of 'substance' (*dravya*); it is traditionally believed to be eternal. (111)

The abiding essence (*vastu*), which is real, is known through its forms which are unreal. The real [abiding essence] is denoted by words which have unreal delimitations. (112)

The content of the second of these two stanzas resembles to some extent VP 3.32-33, studied above. Here again we find that objects have a real and an unreal part. But in the case of the present stanza the real part is the substance, not the universal. Substance and universal are not the same thing for Bhartṛhari. Bhartṛhari rather deals, in these two sections of the third Kāṇḍa of his *Vākya-padīya*, with the two views regarding the denotation of words, and shows that either way, whether one accepts the one or the other, all words denote Brahman.

Let us again return to the *sphoṭa*. Besides the view that the *sphoṭa* is a universal, we would, in view of the above, expect some stanzas in the first Kāṇḍa which present the opinion of 'others' according to whom the *sphoṭa* is substance.

This is exactly what we find. The discussion of the *sphoṭa* as universal begins in VP 1.96 and extends up to 1.104. VP 1.105-110 and 120-121 (111-119 are really part of the *Vṛtti*)<sup>21</sup> then present the alternative view; 1.105 reads:<sup>22</sup>

Others declare that the *sphoṭa* is [the utterance] produced by the organs [of speech] on account of their contact and separation; the utterances born from [this initial] utterance are the sounds.

The 'substantial' nature of the *sphoṭa* here described becomes especially clear in the stanzas 110 and 120:<sup>23</sup>

Some accept that the [real] word is wind, [others] that it is atoms, [others again] that it is knowledge; for in debates the different points of view are endless. (110) The [real] word (whether it be wind, atoms, or knowledge), though ceaselessly active, is not per-

20 VP 3.111-112: *ātmā vastu svabhāvaś ca śarīraṁ tattvam ity api/ dravyam ity asya paryāyās tac ca nityam iti smṛtaṁ// satyam vastu tadākārair asatyair avadhāryate/ asatyopādhibhiḥ śabdaiḥ satyam evābhidhīyate//*

21 See "Études sur Bhartṛhari, 1. L'auteur et la date de la *Vṛtti*" section 4 (see note 1, above).

22 VP 1.105: *yaḥ saṁyogavibhāgābhyāṁ karaṇair upajanyate/ sa sphoṭaḥ śabdajāḥ śabdā dhvanayo 'nyair udāhṛtāḥ//*

23 VP 1.110, 120: *vāyor anūnām jñānasya śabdatvāpattir iṣyate/ kaiścid darśanabhedo hi pravādeṣv anavasthitaḥ// aśravṛttir yaḥ śabdaḥ sūkṣmatvān nopalabhyate/ vyajanād vāyur iva sa svanimittāt pratiyate//*

ceived because of its subtle nature; it is noticed because of its cause, just as wind [is noticed] on account of a fan [which moves it]. (120)

We see that Bhartṛhari, on the substantialist alternative, pictures sound as a superfine substance which is not noticed until certain causes specific to it have exerted their influence. This substance by itself does not undergo modifications; it is rather its 'power' which does so when words are pronounced:<sup>24</sup>

The power of the [word], which resides in the breath and in the mind, is differentiated when it manifests itself in the points of articulation.

The timelessness of the *sphoṭa* can thus be maintained.

The enumeration of 'knowledge' (*jñāna*) in VP 1.110 might cause surprise; knowledge is not normally considered a substance. This depends however on one's point of view. For an idealist substance derives its reality from, is nothing but, knowledge. And indeed, Bhartṛhari himself, in his commentary on the *Mahābhāṣya*, enumerates knowledge among a number of 'substances' which are all, ultimately, identical with Brahman:<sup>25</sup>

'Because substance is eternal' (Mbh I p. 7 l. 11-12). The element earth is eternal. What is the true [part] in the element earth? The analytic imagination. What is the true [part] in the analytic imagination? Knowledge. What is the true [part] in knowledge? *Om*. And that is Brahman.

Back to VP 1.110. Here, as so often, Bhartṛhari declines to choose between the alternatives. It doesn't matter to him which substance constitutes the *sphoṭa*, as long as it is clear that the view that the *sphoṭa* is a substance is shown to be tenable. As we have seen, it may also be a universal. Either way the duration of the *sphoṭa* is not affected by the duration of the perceived sound (cf. VP 1.106).

### *Appendix: the authorship of the Vṛtti.*

There are a number of reasons which have convinced me that the *Vṛtti* was not composed by the author of the stanzas of the *Vākyapadīya*; these have been presented in another publication.<sup>26</sup> Here I propose to deal with one argument –

24 VP 1.121: *tasya prāṇe ca yā śaktir yā ca buddhau vyavasthitā/ vivartamānā sthāneṣu saiṣā bhedaṁ prapadyate//*

25 *Mahābhāṣyadīpikā* of Bhartṛhari, Fasc. IV, Ahnika I (Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute 1987) p. 22 l. 19-21: *dravyaṁ hi nityaṁ/ nityaṁ prthivīdhātuh/ prthivīdhātāu kiṁ satyaṁ/ vikalpaḥ/ vikalpe kiṁ satyaṁ/ jñānaṁ/ jñāne kiṁ satyaṁ/ om/ atha tad brahma/*

26 "Études sur Bhartṛhari, 1. L'auteur et la date de la *Vṛtti*." (above, note 1.)

admittedly neither the most important nor strongest – which is directly related to the interpretation of VP 1.96-110, 120-121 presented in the last part of the present article. This interpretation deviates from the one given in the *Vṛtti* in some important details. I shall contrast the two interpretations, and show that the one given in the *Vṛtti* is more forced and artificial than its competitor.

The interpretation of the *Vṛtti* leads to difficulties under VP 1.99, translated above. Its last pāda states that there is no difference between sound and word (*na bhedo dhvaniśabdayoh*); this at any rate would be its straightforward interpretation. This interpretation makes good sense in the context of *sphoṭa* conceived as a universal, for universals and individuals represent the same thing, be it from its real and from its unreal side; see VP 3.32 translated above.

According to the *Vṛtti*, on the other hand, there is no denial of difference between sound and *sphoṭa* in this stanza, but denial of difference of location. And pāda c (*deśabhedavikalpe 'pi*) – which we translated 'even though we distinguish different locations [in the case of sound]' – is, of necessity, interpreted in the *Vṛtti* as 'even though we wrongly distinguish different locations [for sound and *sphoṭa*]'.<sup>27</sup> But this makes little sense, for the tendency is to confuse sound and *sphoṭa*, not to assign different locations to them.

Regarding the stanza as a whole, the *Vṛtti* feels obliged to consider it an answer to a rather absurd double objection. The first objection is:<sup>28</sup> “The word is not manifested, because there is a difference of location [between it and that which manifests it]. For pots etc. are manifested by lamps etc. [only] when they are in the same location. But words are perceived at a location different from the conjunctions and disjunctions of the organs [of speech] which manifest them.” This first objection loses its force if one assumes that rather the sounds manifest the word,<sup>29</sup> so the *Vṛtti* raises its second objection:<sup>30</sup> “How is a word, which is located in one single place, manifested by sounds which are located in several places, far removed [from the word]?”

The absurdity of this second objection – the only one that remains – follows from the fact, already stated above, that the tendency is to confuse sound and *sphoṭa*, not to assign different locations to them.

27 Ed. Iyer p. 163 l. 2-3: ... *saty api deśabhedavikalpābhimāne naivāsau tayoṛ bhedo vidyata iti*.

28 Ed. Iyer p. 162 l. 3-5: *deśabhedān nābhivyajyate śabdaḥ/ samānadeśasthā hi ghaṭādayaḥ pradīpādibhir vyajyante/karaṇasaṃyogavibhāgābhyāṃ tu vyañjakābhyāṃ anyatra śabdopalabdhir iti*

29 Id. l. 5: *sa cāyaṃ dhvaniṣu vyañjakeṣv aprasaṅgaḥ*

30 Id. l. 5-6: *katham ekadeśasthaḥ śabdo nānadeśair ativiprakṛṣṭair dhvanibhir vyajyata iti*