

Zeitschrift: Asiatische Studien : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft = Études asiatiques : revue de la Société Suisse-Asie

Herausgeber: Schweizerische Asiengesellschaft

Band: 47 (1993)

Heft: 1: Proceedings of the first international conference on Bhartrhari : University of Poona, January 6 - 8, 1992

Artikel: Pratibh and the meaning of the sentence in Bhartrhari's Vkyapadya

Autor: Akamatsu, Akihiko

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-146999>

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: 15.01.2026

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

PRATIBHĀ AND THE MEANING OF THE SENTENCE IN BHARTṚHARI'S VĀKYAPADĪYA

Akihiko Akamatsu, Fukuoka

1.1 In the second book of the Vākyapadīya (VP), Bhartṛhari sets forth a theory that *pratibhā* 'intuition' or 'flash of understanding' is the meaning of the sentence (*vākyārtha*). He discusses the issue of *pratibhā* in kārikās 2.143-152. The first kārikā of this section is as follows¹:

When we understand the meanings [of the individual words in a sentence] by discriminating them from each other, there arises flash of understanding (*pratibhā*) which is totally different [from every knowledge of the meanings of the words]. We call that [*pratibhā*], caused by the meanings of the words, the meaning of the sentence.

As a beginning, by placing this statement in the philosophical and historical context about the linguistic theory in India, I will reconsider the reason Bhartṛhari introduced the concept of *pratibhā* into his linguistic theory.

2.1 In the VP, Bhartṛhari makes a distinction between two types of meaningful unit of language: (1) the word and (2) the sentence. The question whether the word could be the linguistic unit is one of the famous subjects discussed in many grammatical and philosophical works; for example, the views of Vṛttikāra in the Śābarabhāṣya. Central to this issue is the problem of the existence of the word, as a meaningful unit, which is distinguished from the constituent phonemes². Vṛttikāra declares: "[When we hear a word, *gauḥ* for example,] the word [as a meaningful unit], which is different from the constituent phonemes /g/-/au/-/h/, is not perceived immediately by us. We hear only the individual phoneme /g/ and so on³. Therefore [the collection of] the individual phonemes is truly *pada*⁴."

* The author is happy to acknowledge the financial assistance he received from the Kyushu University Fukuoka, which enabled him to present this paper at the Bhartṛhari Conference at the University of Poona (January 6-8, 1992).

1 VP 2.143: *vicchedagrahane 'rthānām pratibhānyaiva jāyate /
vākyārtha iti tām āhuh padārthair upapāditām //*

2 Cf. ŚBh 38.9-10: *ato gakārādivyatirikto 'nyo gośabdo 'sti, yato 'rthapratipattih syāt.*

3 ŚBh 40.7-9: *na ca pratyakṣo gakārādibhyo 'nyo gośabda iti. ... gakārādīni hi pratyakṣāni.*

4 ŚBh 40.12: *tasmād akṣarāṇy eva padam.*

Because anything not being grasped by our perception (*pratyakṣa*) does not exist, he denies the existence of the word as a meaningful unit.

Posterity regards this statement as criticism of the *sphoṭa*-theory. If, then, the upholders of the *sphoṭa* insist on the independent existence of the word as a meaningful unit against this criticism, they must show the perceptibility of it.

The later grammarians, for example, state that *pada-sphoṭa* (indivisible linguistic unit of word) can be grasped through perception (*pratyakṣa*). But Bhartṛhari himself states nowhere clearly how or by which means of cognition (*pramāṇa*) one recognizes the word as a single unit, though I find a reference to an 'indivisible word' view in the VP. It is the following⁵:

The indivisible (*avibhakta*) word expressing (*vācaka*) the meaning arises from [a certain number of] individual [phonemes] (*vibhakta*). Therefore the word [as an indivisible unit] (*śabda*) whose nature is the meaningfulness goes to the state of being mixed together [with the individual phonemes as component parts of an audible word].

"According to Bhartṛhari," says S.D. Joshi, "the listener may perceive each phoneme, but he cannot perceive the word as a whole. Only the perception of the phonemes gives rise to the mental image of a single whole⁶." This drives us to the important question. If the word as a single meaningful unit could be perceived by perception, as the later grammarians contend, it would be possible to regard it as arising in the mind with a concrete image. Does Bhartṛhari too think so? 'The mental image of a single whole' has a concrete form? This question concerns his views on perception as well as on the meaning of the word. I shall return to this point later.

2.2 Another type of meaningful unit of language is the sentence. In the VP, he draws an analogy between the words and the sentences. The words, however, are extracted from the indivisible sentence analytically, and the meanings of the words from the indivisible meaning of the sentence⁷. Therefore between two meaningful units, the word and the sentence,

5 VP 1.45: *avibhakto vibhaktebhyo jāyate 'rthasya vācakah /
śabdāḥ tatrārtharūpātmā sambhedam upagacchati //*

6 See Joshi 1967: 39 (Introduction).

7 Cf. VP 2.10: *yathā pade vibhajyante prakṛtipratyayādayaḥ /
apoddhāras tathā vākye padānām upapadyate //*
VP 2.269: *vākyasyārthāt padārthānām apoddhāre prakalpite /
śabdāntareṇa sambandhaḥ kasyaikasyopapadyate //*

Bhartrhari considers the latter as the primary. If so, Dharmakīrti's following argument, which treats the sentences on a level with the words, is not to the point.

The sentence [as a meaningful unit] (*vākya*), which is different from the constituent phonemes (*varṇa*), does not exist. It is because we have no means to perceive it⁸. In fact, when we hear a word or a sentence, 'Devadatta' for example, we perceive there no appearance of the mental image [of a single whole] but of the individual phoneme /d/ and so on. ... If [the mental image] that is regarded as an object of the cognition does not appear anywhere in the cognition, we cannot determine it as existent or as different⁹.

Clearly this is the same type of criticism as Vṛttikāra's mentioned before. Dharmakīrti refuses the existence of the single whole on the grounds of its non-perceptibility.

3.1 When we place the statement of Bhartrhari quoted at the beginning between these two criticisms of Vṛttikāra and of Dharmakīrti, we shall understand clearly the motive he regards *pratibhā* as the meaning of the sentence. According to Bhartrhari, the sentence would be the primary unit of language. He examines language always from the point of view of meaningfulness. The sentence is the primary meaningful unit, and the words as meaningful units, extracted from the sentence analytically, are only fictional parts. We understand the meaning as a single whole immediately after the speaker's utterance of a sentence. The meaning, in this case, is not brought forth by relating with each other the different meanings of individual words articulated one by one according to the arrangement of things in the external world. Understanding of the meaning must be the immediate and intuitive grasp of the world as a whole.

From the structuralist point of view, it would be reasonable to say that there is no word besides the phonemes; nor is there any sentence besides the phonemes and the words, as Vṛttikāra or Dharmakīrti insists¹⁰. Bhartrhari, opposing these standpoints, declares: "There are no phonemes

8 PV I. kārikā 247cd: *vākyam na bhinnam varṇebhyo vidyate 'nupalambhanāt //*

9 PV I. 127.2-5.

10 Cf. VP 1.73: *na varṇavyatirekeṇa padam anyac ca vidyate /
vākyam varṇapādābhyām ca vyatiriktaṁ na kiṁ ca na //*

in the word; nor are there any parts in the phoneme. It is entirely impossible to separate the words from the sentence¹¹.”

Bhartrhari introduced the concept of *pratibhā* (intuition) with a view to maintaining the idea that the sentence is an indivisible linguistic unit. Against the criticism of the existence of the sentence as a linguistic unit on the grounds of the non-perceptibility, he points out the fact that the meaning of the sentence is understood intuitively and immediately, and he supports the existence of the sentence as a linguistic unit, namely the sentence as a meaningful indivisible unit.

4.1 But why does Bhartrhari not say that the meaning of the sentence is perceived by perception (*pratyakṣa*)? Does he suggest that *pratibhā* is a different type of cognition from perception? What characteristics distinguish *pratibhā* from perception? These are our next questions. In *kārikās* 2.144-147, Bhartrhari gives the following explanation¹²:

Pratibhā cannot be explained [concretely] (*anākhyeya*) to others in the form ‘this is that’. Though *pratibhā* is accepted in common as being realized in every person, it is not defined even by its author.

Pratibhā, understood incorrectly, seems to make a combination of the meanings [of individual words].

Pratibhā, which appears to have all shapes [of the things denoted by the individual words], acts as object [of the cognition].

When we understand what to do, we cannot go beyond [the knowledge of] *pratibhā*, that is either caused immediately by the language or formed according to the impression of regular practice [in the previous lives as well as the present life].

The whole world accepts *pratibhā* as a reliable means for action [in everyday life]. Even animals begin their activities by its force.

Aklujkar says: “The *pramānas* presupposed by Bhartrhari are *pratyakṣa*, *anumāna*, and *āgama*¹³.” Basically I agree with his conclusion. However, considering these two points: (1) It is after Dignāga that the *pramāna*-

11 VP 1.74: *pade na varnā vidyante varṇeṣv avayavā na ca /
vākyāt padānām atyantam pravibhāgo na kaś ca na //*

12 144: *idaṃ tad iti sānyesām anākhyeyā katham ca na /
pratyātmavrtti siddhā sā kartrāpi na nirūpyate //*

145: *upaśleṣam ivārthānām sā karoty avicāritā /
sārvarūpyam ivāpannā viśayatvena vartate //*

146: *sāksāc chabdena janitām bhāvanānugamena vā /
itikartavyatāyām tām na kaś cid ativartate //*

147: *pramānatvena tām lokah sarvah samanugacchati /
samārambhāḥ pratāyante tiraścām api tadvaśāt //*

13 See Aklujkar 1989: 153.

theory is systematized, (2) Bhartṛhari discusses chiefly the authority of *āgama* and the insufficiency of *anumāna* by contrast in VP 1.30-43, it ought to be admitted that Bhartṛhari's ideas about *pratyakṣa* remain obscure. I only suppose that Bhartṛhari regards *pratyakṣa* as a direct cognition of external objects by perception, especially by seeing (*darśana*), and *anumāna* as an indirect cognition of it through reasoning (*yukti*).

4.2 Here I would like to note the similarity of terminology between two sections; *kārikās* 1.35-37, in which Bhartṛhari discusses 'extraordinary perception' (cf. Aklujkar 1989:154), and *kārikās* 2.143-152, the section of *pratibhā*, discussed above¹⁴. *Kārikā* 35 is as follows¹⁵:

The expert's knowledge of precious stones and metals, that is inexplicable (*asamākhyeya*) to others, is caused only by regular practice (*abhyāsa*); it is not the knowledge derived from an inference.

Bhartṛhari insists that extraordinary perceptions result from regular practice (*abhyāsa*) and/or from lasting invisible force accumulated by regular practice in previous lives (*karman/adrṣṭa/dharma*), and that this invisible force is ultimately dependent on *āgama*¹⁶ of which the essential characteristic is uninterrupted continuity.

As Subramania Iyer already pointed out and we have seen above, *abhyāsa*, *āgama* and *bhāvanā* are mentioned by Bhartṛhari as causes of *pratibhā*¹⁷. Clearly Bhartṛhari treats *pratibhā* as the same type of cognition as extraordinary perceptions. Aklujkar is correct when he says: "It is clearly stated in TK (= VP) 2.117 that *pratibhā* arises out of all kinds of linguistic expressions, which implies that it does not depend exclusively on means of any special kind. There are also several other indications in the TK to the effect that, in the philosophy of B (= Bhartṛhari), the domain of *pratibhā* is not concomitant with the domain of the extraordinary¹⁸." However, I think that *pratibhā* and extraordinary perceptions share the characteristics regarding the process of cognition.

14 Subramania Iyer (1969: 89-90) suggested already this resemblance in Bhartṛhari's terminology. See also Aklujkar 1989: 154, n.12.

15 VP 1.35: *paresām asamākhyeyam abhyāsād eva jāyate /
manirūpyādivijñānam tadvidām nānumānikam //*

16 Cf. Subramania Iyer 1969: 93. See also Aklujkar 1989: 155.

17 Ibid. 89.

18 Aklujkar 1989: 154, n.12.

5.1 In that case, *pratibhā* and extraordinary perceptions have what characteristics in common? I want to refer to the views of Dignāga as to this point. As Hattori pointed out¹⁹, Dignāga adopted the concept of *pratibhā* from Bhartṛhari to establish his views on the meaning of the sentence²⁰. After declaring that ‘the meaning of the sentence, which is called *pratibhā* (intuition), first arises by dint of that [meaning of the word]’ (PS V. 46cd), Dignāga continues²¹:

Even when there is no external object, from [only hearing] the sentences, various understandings are produced not only on account of regular practice (*abhyāsa*) but also in conformity with [listener’s] own notions (*svapratyaya*).

Dignāga regards *pratibhā* as cognition without reference to the external objects. Concerning this point, Bhartṛhari would take the same view. The important point to note is the fact that Dignāga mentions as causes of *pratibhā* the listener’s own notions as well as regular practice. As to the latter, Bhartṛhari regards it as one of the causes of *pratibhā* as we have seen before, but the listener’s own notions, according to him, are the cause of various understandings of the meaning of the word²². The meaning of the word is extracted analytically from the meaning of the sentence. Therefore the understanding of the meaning of the word is a false cognition caused by the listener’s illusion for Bhartṛhari. Dignāga, in this point, confuses the meaning of the sentence and the meaning of the word. To Dignāga, these two are the same linguistic illusional cognition since they are formed by conceptual construction, not taking account of the external objects. Bhartṛhari could not allow this confusion. Certainly the meaning of the sentence, namely *pratibhā*, does not have a counterpart in the external world, but it is a trustworthy cognition based on *āgama*, beyond perception (*pratyakṣa*) and inference (*anumāna*), like extraordinary perception²³.

19 Hattori 1979: 64.

20 PS V. kārikā 46cd: *vākyārthah pratibhākyo ’yam tenādāv upajāyate*// I have quoted Hattori’s translation (1979: 63).

21 PS V. kārikā 47. See Hattori 1979: 65. Jayanta Bhatta criticizes the view that *pratibhā* is the meaning of the sentence in NM 335.24-336.9. It is not Bhartṛhari’s, but this Dignāga’s view to which he referred there.

22 Cf. VP 2.135: *vaktrānyathaiva prakrānto bhinneṣu pratipattiṣu / svapratyayānukāreṇa śabdārthah pravibhajyate //*

23 Cf. VP 1.36: *pratyakṣam anumānam ca vyatikramya vyavasthitāḥ / pitṛakṣahpiśācānām karmajā eva siddhayah //*

5.2 In the philosophy of Bhartrhari, the sentence represents wholeness and reality. *Pratibhā* is the essential cognition of the world as a whole. In this sense, *pratibhā* cannot be *pratyakṣa*. *Pratyakṣa* is a direct perception of the parts of the world, various things as meanings of the words (*padārtha*). *Pratibhā*, on the other hand, is the internal cognition of the world as a whole, that is to say the sentence as a meaningful unit.

Abbreviations

- NM = Sukla's edition: *Nyāyamañjarī of Jayanta Bhaṭṭa*. Part I, edited with notes by S.N. Sukla. Varanasi 1971.
- PV I = Gnoli's edition: *The Pramānavārttikam of Dharmakīrti, the first chapter with the autocommentary*. Roma 1960.
- PS V = Hattori's edition: *The Pramānasamuccayavṛtti of Dignāga, with Jinendrabuddhi's Commentary, Chapter Five: Anyāpohaparīkṣā, Tibetan Text with Sanskrit Fragments*. Kyoto 1982.
- VP = Bhartrhari's *Vākyapadīya*; references to the *kārikās* follow W. Rau's critical edition of the *kārikās* (Rau 1977).
- SBh = Frauwallner's edition: *Materialien zur ältesten Erkenntnislehre der Karmamīmāṃsā*. Wien 1968. (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften Philosophisch-Historische Klasse. Sitzungsberichte 259. Band, 2. Abhandlung).

Bibliography

- Aklujkar, Ashok, 1989: The Number of Pramāṇas According to Bhartrhari. *WZKS* 33.151-158.
- Biardeau, Madeleine, 1964: *Théorie de la connaissance et philosophie de la parole dans le brahmanisme classique*. Paris - La Haye. (École Pratique des Hautes Études - Sorbonne. Sixième Section: Sciences Économiques et Sociales. Le Monde d'Outre-Mer. Passé et Présent. Première Série: études XXIII).
- Hattori, Masaaki, 1979: Apoha and Pratibhā, in: *Sanskrit and Indian Studies. Festschrift in Honor of Daniel H.H. Ingalls*. Dordrecht - Boston. 61-73.
- Joshi, S.D., 1967: *The Sphotanīmaya of Kaṇḍa Bhaṭṭa*. Poona.
- Rau, Wilhelm, 1977: (ed.) *Die mūlakārikās nach den Handschriften herausgegeben und mit einem pāda-index versehen von Wilhelm Rau*. Wiesbaden. (Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes XLII, 4).
- Subramania Iyer, K.A., 1969: *Bhartrhari. A Study of the Vākyapadīya in the Light of the Ancient Commentaries*. Poona. (Deccan College Building Centenary and Silver Jubilee Series 68).

