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MEANING AND THE LIMITS OF ANALYSIS: BHARTṚHARI AND THE BUDDHISTS, AND POST-STRUCTURALISM*

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I would like to begin with some questions, questions that I offer as my primary contribution to these deliberations. I am still very much a student of Sanskrit grammar and the history of *vyākaraṇa*, my research and study still in progress. So I will focus here on questions, explain my reasons for asking them, and then will outline the directions my efforts to answer them are taking.

Questions

In short, I want to pose two main questions about Bhartṛhari and the Vākyapadīya/Trikāṇḍī text. The first is whether the text is making a general argument that all formal analytic systems are limited in their potential to explain or even describe linguistic phenomena: whether the text is an argument for limits to formal analysis of meaning. The second question is whether this argument, or any of the text's arguments, are directed specifically as a response to Buddhist arguments about language and meaning, especially those of Nāgārjuna or the Vijñānavādins.

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Let me develop the first question first. To begin, what are we to make of the perplexing argumentative style of the Vākyapadīya? On the one hand, from the beginning it clearly presents itself as a text delivering wisdom, wisdom relevant to liberation. But on the other hand it is clearly, in large sections at least, a *saṃgraha*, a collection of views. While more critical of some views than others, the text abjures final judgments of preference on specific analytic questions, especially in the most technical passages of the third kāṇḍa. How do these two aspects of the text cohere? Pandit Vamanśāstri Bhagavat, who showed me the wisdom of reading the text as a *saṃgraha*, directed me to 2.489 as the explanation:

> prajñā vivekaṃ labhate bhinnair āgamadarśanaiḥ /
> kiyad vā śakyam unnetuṃ svatarkam anudhāvatā // 2.489
>
> "The intellect gains discernment by means of the different perceptions (*darśanas*) of tradition. / How much can be ascertained by someone following their own reason?"
>
> tat tad utpreksamāṇānāṃ purāṇair āgamair vinā /
> anupāsitavṛddhānāṃ vidyā nātiprasīdati // 2.490[1]
>
> "The knowledge of those who have not sat at the feet of seniors, who conjecture this and that without the established traditions, will not become clear."

As well as a warning to young scholars, these kārikās might also be the cornerstone for the bridge between the text's own argument and its *saṃgraha* form: the intellect gains discernment by means of *different* darśanas. Thus the text is, as it describes itself in 2.487, an **āgama-saṃgraha**, a collection of traditions.

Is the argument above connected to the argument about *prakriyā*, *avidyā* and *śāstra* in 2.233? Let us first consider 2.233 and a bit of its neighborhood[2]:

1 In my numeration and citation I am following the Rau 1977 text. Aklujkar (1978, 1991) doubts that the controversial set of kārikās at the end of the second kāṇḍa, including the two cited here, are written by Bhartṛhari himself. He prefers to read them as the work of one of Bhartṛhari's students. As he argues for the more controversial kārikās in this much disputed set, they still have great value as comments on the text and its position in the history of vyākaraṇa. However, if he is right it clearly puts more burden on the rest of my evidence for my conjecture concerning Bhartṛhari's attitude towards difference of traditions and limits to analysis.

2 Another kārikā almost identical to 2.233 is included in the Abhyankar and Limaye Vākyapadīya text as 3.14.78, but is not included by Rau. It will be left aside here.

vyavahārāya manyante śāstrārthaprakriyā yataḥ // 2.232/cd

"Thus the constructions (*prakriyā*) of meaning in *śāstra* are thought of for worldly use."

śāstreṣu prakriyābhedair avidyaivopavarṇyate /
anāgamavikalpā tu svayaṃ vidyopavartate // 2.233

"Only *avidyā* is described by the differences of construction in the *śāstras*. / Truth (*vidyā*) arises by itself, not as an alternative of tradition."

anibaddhaṃ nimitteṣu nirupākhyaṃ phalaṃ yathā /
tathā vidyāpy anākhyeyā śāstropāyeva lakṣyate // 2.234

"Just as an effect is indescribable and unconnected to causes, / just so, truth (*vidyā*) also, though not fit to be interpreted, is characterized as if it had *śāstra* as a means."

Bhartṛhari's stance on tradition is quite as complex as the organization of his text. *Śāstra* is indispensable, but is not itself the cause of truth. *Śāstra* is characterized as if it were the means to truth, and it is the best hope the intellect has for becoming clear and achieving understanding, but the truth arises by itself, not dependent on causes nor existing for worldly use. On the one hand, then, Bhartṛhari seems skeptical of the adequacy of any analytic formalism. In kārikās 2.226-227 Bhartṛhari makes it clear that **doṣās tu prakriyāgatāḥ**, "Errors are produced by *prakriyā*," when grammatical *śāstra* devises means for explaining complex formations (*vṛtti*) to the ignorant (*abudha*). The various analyses of negative compounds figure predominance among the imputed elements differently, when the object of analysis is undivided in fact. *Prakriyā* here, and in 2.232-33, seems clearly to refer to analytical constructions, grammatical explanations, and neither these nor *śāstra* are themselves actual means to truth. But on the other hand, Bhartṛhari is clearly a defender of tradition, clearly committed to Vedic ritual, an Upaniṣadic Brahman, and also to Patañjali and Pāṇini in particular.

Why is tradition so useful? Why is Bhartṛhari not a Buddhist? And why is *prakriyā* used, also, in Vākyapadīya 1.1? Is this use of *prakriyā* separate in sense from that in 2.233, as for example the glossary to the Abhyankar and Limaye Vākyapadīya text suggests? Perhaps the various *prakriyā* of grammarians and others are false, the *prakriyā* of Brahman real, the first errors, the second the world. Or perhaps the *prakriyā* of the grammarians are a minor part of the ongoing *prakriyā* of Brahman. Or perhaps both. The same question could also be posed about *artha* as used in 1.1, in relation to *artha* discussed in the rest of the text. Resolving such matters is beyond me, but clearly the theological commitment should not

be bracketed from the position being taken on the *avidyā* of *śāstra*. Let us compare *prakriyābheda*, difference in construction, as discussed in 1.22 and 2.13:

> yad ekaṃ prakriyābhedair bahudhā pravibhajyate /
> tad vyākaraṇam āgamya paraṃ brahmādhigamyate // 1.22
>
> "... that which is one, divided variously by differences in construction, / That highest Brahman is apprehended when the science of grammar is attained."
>
> śabdasya na vibhāgo 'sti kuto 'rthasya bhaviṣyati /
> vibhāgaiḥ prakriyābhedam avidvān pratipadyate // 2.13
>
> "There are no divisions of the uttered word (*śabda*). How will there be divisions of the meaning (*artha*)? The ignorant conceives difference in constructions by divisions."

Kārikā 1.22 caps the discussion explaining why and how a science of grammar is the royal road to Brahman, for those who can learn to see through the manifested forms to the unitary cause of all. Kārikā 2.13 caps the first presentation in the vākya kāṇḍa of the view of word and sentence that comes to be called the *sphoṭavādin* view.[3] Analytical processes based on observation of similarities and differences can, for practical purposes, lead to the separation (*apoddhāra*) of words in a sentence, just as they can lead to division of base and suffix in a word. But these formal techniques are to aid the ignorant: indeed, the kārikās ending the first kāṇḍa seem to suggest that the learned (*śiṣṭa*) create the *smṛti* literature in general, and grammatical treatises in particular, "in deference to the differing capacities of individuals and by taking into consideration the changed capacities of expressions as far as merit and demerit are concerned" (as Aklujkar summarizes, Aklujkar 1990: 137).

Many have traced the connection between Bhartṛhari's theology and the *sphoṭavādin* semiotics, through various paths and into controversial theological matters.[4] I am asking not about where to position Bhartṛhari in relation to other theologies, but about how to read him as a theorist of

3 Joshi (1967) argues persuasively that the author of the kārikās did not use the term *sphoṭa* as freely and widely as has the later tradition in using it to refer to the wholeness of sentence and utterance meaning. However there is surely little doubt that the author of the kārikās intended to present powerful arguments in favor of taking sentence/ utterance meanings as undividable unities. The literature on the *sphoṭa* concept is vast – see also Brough, Dasgupta, Gaurinath Sastri, Raja, Coward, and Matilal.

4 For example, Iyer and Gaurinath Sastri disagree on how to place Bhartṛhari in relation to later Vedāntic arguments; see also Coward 1980: 79ff. Coward himself, and Dasgupta before him, locate Bhartṛhari in close relation to Yoga.

language structure and functions. Let us reformulate the original question, about the *saṃgraha* form of the text, and the emphasis in 2.489 on studying many *different āgamadarśana*. I wonder whether it is part of Bhartṛhari's point that all formalizations are limited, and that reasonable analytical traditions will be plural, because of the way language (and God) really work in the world: that the student gains wisdom from the formal study of language not by deciding on a best formal system but by realizing the virtues, and limits, of each, as each grapples with language phenomena that make, remake, and transcend their own means.

My other question then follows. It can be posed independently of the thoughts above, and simply: Is Bhartṛhari arguing against specific Buddhist arguments about language and meaning? If so, which Buddhists and which arguments?

If I am on the right track in my reconstruction of Bhartṛhari's project, then these questions can be reformulated more precisely: is Bhartṛhari's argument about the unity of sentence/utterance meaning, and the utility of contemplating the powers and limits of formal approaches to linguistic analysis, meant as a response to the deconstructive Madhyamaka dialectics, or to the vijñānavāda psychological formalization of Madhyamaka, or both? Is Bhartṛhari encompassing both into a vision of language and the world that better respects the reality of meaning and the powers of traditions, while still accepting and even privileging the lessons of deconstruction as well?

It is this last question that is most important to me, not simply as a student of Bhartṛhari's thought, but also as a student of anthropological linguistics in particular and contemporary social theory in general. Perhaps there is a post-structuralism in Bhartṛhari's arguments that gets significantly beyond the post-structuralisms now discussed in literary criticism, history, and anthropology.

Bhartṛhari and Post-Structuralism

While I am intent on reading Bhartṛhari in his own terms and in relation to the discourse of his own time, these are not my only interests. I am also interested in trying to relate his ideas to those of my own discipline at present. In this, I don't think I am unusual. B.K. Matilal and many others have done painstaking work reconstructing Indian philosophical systems, while also comparing them with Western philosophy. Harold Coward and many others have worked to raise comparative theological as well as

philosophical questions while reading Bhartṛhari. Linguists working on vyākaraṇa in relation to Western linguistics have abounded. We have works and work in progress juxtaposing Bhartṛhari and Wittgenstein, Nāgārjuna and Nietzsche, Pāṇini and Chomsky, Diṅnāga and Saussure. If I am unusual it is simply that from the perspective of American anthropology, I want to ask questions about meaning in practice, and this leads me to juxtapose Bhartṛhari with Whorf and Bakhtin.

Juxtapositions of this sort have always run against the grain of philological technique and intention, and they have challenged the tendency to separate radically "the Orient" as a thought-world and mentality from "the West" and "the Modern." Along such lines I want to make a few points about my own comparisons. First, I do apologize for my trespasses against philological structures of feeling. George Steiner puts it well: "philology insists on the holiness of the particular" (1989: 106). When philologists criticize comparative juxtapositions of culturally and historically separated thinkers, their concern to protect ancient and obscure texts from misreading is admirable. As Steiner argues, in reading our understandings are always provisional, and there should be "cardinal discretions" in any encounter with a text (1989: 176). If my questions seem to be the sort that "diminish both the object of our questioning and ourselves" (ibid), my defense for posing them is a hope that might be naive, the hope (with Vološinov 1983, but without his rancor) that we might find in the works of Bhartṛhari the kind of meaning that elicits response as well as respect. Second, my comparison will not be of East versus West. We have the privilege of living in interesting times; we inherit many and contradictory disciplines and methods for the study of language and culture. In our present intellectual world it has become risky to assert, or deny, relationships of sameness, or difference, between phenomena across cultures. I am persuaded by Edward Said's critique of the past premises of Orientalist discourse (see Said 1978) that it is dangerous, especially, for the goal of comparative scholarship to be to locate essential differences between Eastern and Western intellectual history. But third, I do not conclude from this that it should be our goal to find and assert essential similarities. Instead, my sense is that judgments of similarity or difference work well as conceits for launching a comparative investigation, but are peculiar as conclusions to them.

It is easy, and arbitrary, to prove that Nāgārjuna's arguments are different from those of Jacques Derrida, for example, or to find that they are fundamentally similar. My right hand is clearly different from my left, and clearly similar to it. Such comparisons need to have a larger purpose.

Otherwise, as Gerald Larson recently argued, they run the risk of being "mechanical, one-dimensional, forced, anachronistic, and worst of all, tedious" (Larson 1989: 15). Heretofore, that purpose has often been the delineation of Oriental difference, even when that difference is positively valued, as for example in Frits Staal's article on "Euclid and Pāṇini" (1965). The cost is then homogenization: in Staal's case, Euclid's method is presented as the classical foundation of all Western science, Pāṇini's as the classical foundation for all Indian sciences. I would rather use comparison to launch in a different direction, into the dialogues and debates within each intellectual history, including debates now raging in my own field. The clearest evidence of a limit to the difference between India's intellectual history and the West's is that the history of linguistics connects them. The Western comparative philologists learned a great deal from Pāṇini, no matter how quickly the debt was suppressed. Despite denigrating gatekeepers such as Whitney, later generations of Western linguists still learned things from vyākaraṇa, including arch-rivals Bloomfield and Whorf and more recent scholars. Recently, French semiotic luminaries Julia Kristeva and Tzvetan Todorov have each tried their hands at interpreting, respectively, Bhartṛhari and Abhinavagupta. But my own premise is that much more can be said: that Bhartṛhari might still have work to do.

I would like to begin, therefore, by asserting the similarity of Derrida and the Buddhists, especially Derrida and Nāgārjuna.[5] Derrida insists on the centrality of language to science and history, on the primacy of signifiers over signifieds, and on the dangers of signification. No one can actually establish the things signified, especially in a written discourse. But

5 Harold Coward has recently called into question "current suggestions that Derrida can be understood as a Mādhyamikan Buddhist" (1991: 157; see also 1990a, 1990b), suggesting instead that the arguments of Bhartṛhari are more similar to those of Derrida. While I agree that one finds the lessons of deconstruction well assimilated in Bhartṛhari's argument, I disagree with Coward mainly in his reading of Derrida. Coward goes so far as to suggest a hidden Christian theology in Derrida's arguments (1991: 155-56); in this and other aspects of his reading I think Coward takes Derrida "beyond" the critique of the metaphysics of presence, and thereby evicts him from his residence. Thus with many others, notably the translator of *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak (personal communication), I see more of a family resemblance between the arguments of Derrida and Nāgārjuna: in both, the primary commitment and tactic is deconstruction. However, my intention in this essay is not to overturn Coward's reading – I became aware of it after this paper was written – but simply to continue, as he suggests, to think about the issues raised by these comparisons. For other interesting efforts to calibrate Indian and Western language theories discussed here see Matilal 1990: 120-32 on Derrida and Bhartṛhari, and Chatterjee 1985 on Whorf and Wittgenstein, with reference also to Derrida and Mādhyamika Buddhism.

the signifiers convey the presence of the objects anyway, by appearing to be dependent on the things they merely stand for. Derrida seeks to "deconstruct" this sense of presence by revealing the entrapping power of the signifiers, to change philosophy and science by "deconstructing" the metaphysics of presence on which they have been founded up to now. Similarly, Nāgārjuna is clearly skeptical about the adequacy of any full signification. If anything, Nāgārjuna's four-fold negation (*catuṣkoṭi*) is more thoroughgoing than anything Derrida offers as a rejection of the possibility of finding truth or reality through use of signs. The way Nāgārjuna reports it, no predications are adequate, and no *dharma* of anything or anyone was asserted by the Buddha. Derrida is more neurotic: he announces that he is "destroying the concept of "sign" and its entire logic" (1974: 7), but many other places insists that the sign concept is "necessary," (e.g., 1974: 13), and that he is simply out to reverse the dependence of semiotics on logic (1974: 48).

Deconstructing *āstika dharma*, among other things, Nāgārjuna's Buddhism identifies predicative cognitions, attachments of signs to each other and agents to signs, as the locus of worst trouble. Derrida's deconstruction leads not to a four-fold negation but to strange sentences - such as "the sign ~~is~~ that ill-named ~~thing~~, the only one, that escapes the instituting question of philosophy, 'what is...?'" (1974: 19) - precisely because his deconstruction of the sign is *less* thoroughgoing. Derrida is conventionally thought of as a "post-structuralist." It is a good label, in a sense, because it connects his thought intrinsically to structuralism, and after all his linguistics still depends deeply on Saussure's.[6] On the Buddhist side, a formal description comparable to Saussure's of signs as arbitrary, gaining their identity by a system of negations, seems not to have arisen until after Nāgārjuna's time: the Indian philosopher whose views most closely resemble Saussure's is probably Diṅnāga, as Raja 1963 was perhaps the first to point out. As Diṅnāga saw it, the things meant by words came into being through exclusion of others, and thus their identities are entirely relational - Saussure would say, their identities are entirely their values in a structure. But for Diṅnāga, as for the other Buddhists, the point was not the utility of such a value system. In Buddhism the deconstructive implications of a structuralist definition of meaning units was obvious from

6 On this point, to stick with *Of Grammatology*, consider his admission: "I should like to approach, as a privileged example, the project and texts of Ferdinand de Saussure. That the particularity of the example does not interfere with the generality of my argument is a point which I shall occasionally try not merely to take for granted" (p. 29).

the beginning of analysis of cognition in terms of systems of concepts (*vikalpa*), and what was deconstructed was *dharmas*.

In the recent past many anthropologists, along with scholars in several other disciplines, committed themselves to privileging formal models of sign systems as the vehicle for interpretation and explanation of everything. To the "structuralists," the sign systems were themselves the core social and cultural realities. My discipline now seeks to find its way back from the interiors of abstracted semiotic realms, and its current favored definition of the real and target for analysis is "practice." It seems to me that it needs to do more thinking about meaning, meaning units, and the general prospects for formal analysis of meaning, and that leads me to Bhartṛhari because he, also, addressed such topics in the wake of, and perhaps in response to, a powerful deconstructive formalization of meaning.

Bhartṛhari and the Buddhists

So what is Bhartṛhari's relationship to the Buddhist semiotic claims? I can only lay out here what I am looking at to try to answer this question. In a preliminary way, let us move backwards. We know Diṅnāga read Bhartṛhari carefully, quoted him respectfully, but sought in the end an approach to meaning focussed on word-level units and **apoha**, meaning-determining exclusion. Hattori (1979) and Herzberger (1986) show that this response to Bhartṛhari was crucial to Diṅnāga's philosophy. However, the way Warder (1980) tells Diṅnāga's story is also interesting: that Diṅnāga was following the critique of the Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma of his teacher Vasubandhu, and developing it into a general theory of knowledge (Here see also Hattori 1977). Hattori's and Herzberger's works are important, though they have more to say about Diṅnāga than Bhartṛhari, because they move against the grain of Buddhist scholarship and *āstika* scholarship, against the tendency to trace the main lines of dialogue and influence simply within purely Buddhist or purely *āstika* genealogies. Indeed, when scholars note a Buddhist influence on an *āstika* thinker, or an *āstika* influence on a Buddhist, it is frequently with subtle or not-so-subtle regret.[7] The Sarvāstivāda/Sautrāntika controversy surely cannot be

7 Consider for example Lindtner on influences on Nāgārjuna: "it must be conceded that he could not escape the impact which orthodox Brahmin dialectics (*vāda*), natural philosophy, arts, crafts and sciences indirectly exerted upon the Buddhist milieu. ... From his birth to his death Nāgārjuna must as a member of the community have received an

separated from themes and questions of *āstika* philosophy, however. Look at the dilemma: The Sarvāstivādins, populating new intellectual centers and writing in Sanskrit under royal patronage, codify and interpret Abhidharma, and even infer lost sūtras, "following probably the Mīmāṃsaka system of inferring the existence of lost Vedic texts" (Warder p. 346). The Buddhists contesting Sarvāstivādin technique have their critiques rejected, and perforce become a new and separate school, the Sautrāntikas. Shortly thereafter Nāgārjuna emerges, also writing in Sanskrit, and argues against definitions and predications altogether. He deconstructs the Abhidharma project, and contests as well with *āstika* schools, especially the emerging Nyāya (see Bronkhorst 1985, Lindtner 1982). Centuries later the Sautrāntika Vasubandhu is still in the business of abhidharma critique but, Warder tells us (p. 449), provokes his student Diṅnāga to shift focus from abhidharma definition dilemmas to the more general problem of pramāṇas.

So we have Diṅnāga influenced by his teacher Vasubandhu and/or his worthy adversary Bhartṛhari. In constructing his story Warder notes the existence of Paramārtha's life of Vasubandhu (and follows Frauwaller in dividing it into the mixed lives of two Vasubandhus), but makes no reference to another interesting character in Vasubandhu's life as described by Paramārtha: grammarian Vasurāta, Bhartṛhari's teacher. Quoting from Takakusu's (1905: 45) account of Paramārtha's text[8]:

> Vasurāta was, according to Paramārtha, a Brahmin, husband of a sister, i.e. a brother-in-law, of King Bālāditya. He was well-versed in the vyākaraṇa treatise. When Vasubandhu composed the Abhidharmakośa, this Brahmin attacked his composition on the authority of the Vyākaraṇa, thinking that the Buddhist disputer would certainly [not?] defend his own work when the grammatical faults were thus pointed out. Vasubandhu answered: - "If I do not understand the Vyākaraṇa, how can I ever understand the admirable truth of Buddhism?" Thereupon he composed a treatise utterly refuting the thirty-two chapters of the Vyākaraṇa. Thus the Vyākaraṇa was lost, while the Abhidharmakośa survived. The King and the Queen-mother gave him some lacs of gold. Vasurāta further tried to defeat him through the intervention of another scholar. The vyākaraṇa mentioned here will in all probability be the "Candra-vyākaraṇa" when we see that what Bhartṛhari (died 650) obtained through Vasurāta (though not necessarily directly) was Candragomin's grammar.

Takakusu's Bhartṛhari date is wrong, obviously. We have a cast of five characters - Vasubandhu and his worthy opponent Vasurāta, their con-

incessant flow of impressions and convictions, prejudices and superstitions from the Hindu society surrounding him" (1982: 250-51).

8 I have not read Paramārtha's text. At this point I am simply working from accounts of its content.

temporary Candragomin, and their students Bhartṛhari and Diṅnāga. I know of no reason not to accept that these five were closely connected in time, perhaps literally connected in face to face dialogues, and definitely connected by these contests for reputation and influence. What a peculiar question: "If I do not understand the Vyākaraṇa, how can I ever understand the admirable truth of Buddhism?" But what text is it that is refuted and "lost"? The thirty-two chapters makes it sound like Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyi. Was Pāṇini's text replaced by another in some sort of official curriculum, replaced, for example, by Candragomin's twentyfour chapter grammar? We also have other candidates for lost texts, of course: Patañjali's Mahābhāṣya, Vyāḍi's Saṃgraha, the latter an interesting candidate especially since it clearly *was* lost at some point. Does this problem remind anyone of another passage about lost and waning texts and struggles over vyākaraṇa? I refer of course to the problematic final kārikās of Bhartṛhari's vākya kāṇḍa.

For certain, I have no new overall interpretation of these problematic kārikās.[9] Perhaps with Bronkhorst (1983) we should see the Saṃgraha lost, the Mahābhāṣya not properly studied, and the Aṣṭādhyāyī suffering.

9 I do have one tiny contribution to offer, in regard to the problematic term **pratikañcuka** in kārikā 2.484. Aklujkar, Bronkhorst and others have debated whether to read this term as "protective armor." In the same kārikā is another puzzling term: **śuṣkatarkānusārin**, "pursuers of dry reason." Why this metaphor? I stumbled across the following aphorism in one of Apte's dictionaries (1988: 326): *nindati kañcukakāraṃ prāyaḥ śuṣkastanī nārī*. "A dry-breasted woman usually reviles her blouse-maker." Apte glosses it by comparing it to "A bad workman quarrels with his tools"; perhaps his reticence is similar to that which drives later scholars away from milk and towards war metaphors. In any case, we have here a connection between *śuṣka* and *kañcuka*:

baijisaubhavaharyakṣaiḥ śuṣkatarkānusāribhiḥ //
ārṣe viplāvite granthe saṃgrahapratikañcuke // 2.484
(alternate reading: *saṃgrahe pratikañcuke*)
"When the Ṛṣi's (or Ṛṣis') book, that was like a blouse for the Saṃgraha (or, for which the Saṃgraha was blouse-like), was mutilated by the dry-reason pursuing Baiji, Saubhava and Haryakṣa..."
(with alternate text:) "When the book of the Ṛṣis, the Saṃgraha, was mutilated like a blouse by the dry-reason pursuing...

Abhyankar and Limaye report this text variant, but Rau does not. Either version makes sense. In the first the wrecked text is either the Mahābhāṣya, blouse for Vyāḍi's Saṃgraha, or in the more grisly version, the Aṣṭādhyāyī, for which the Saṃgraha was blouse-like. The text variant makes the Saṃgraha itself both the blouse and the mutilated text, and is perhaps the best fit with the aphorism. In any case, this way of interpreting the kārikā accords with the second kāṇḍa's humor, confidence, and tendency to cryptic intertextuality. The image of reason (*tarka*) as a dry breast, and implicitly, *śāstra* and *śabda-pramāṇa* as the means to milk, is also in accord with kārikās 489-490, quoted at the outset of this essay.

Going back to Paramārtha's text, the debate between Vasubandhu and Vasurāta is situated in turn in a history of competition for royal bequests between Buddhists and Sāṃkhya philosophers; Vasubandhu avenged defeat of his own teacher, and won royal favor and money, only to be challenged by the grammarian Vasurāta, who was said also to have invited Saṃghabhadra to launch a new Sāṃkhya challenge to Vasubandhu (Takakusu 1905: 46). Should we then expect that the vyākaraṇa of Vasurāta was specifically Sāṃkhya? We may not want to go so far with this account, but unless we disregard it wholly, I think we can conclude that vyākaraṇa's mode of knowing, and *śabda* as a *pramāṇa*, were under debate in Vasurāta's time, and with this in mind I think we should look more closely at Candragomin. What kind of Buddhist was Candragomin? And what was Bhartṛhari's attitude toward his grammar?

In the Candra-vyākaraṇa, "the influence of the Mahābhāṣya is evident," Scharfe tells us, "at every step" (1977: 164). But Candra discarded the rules relating to Vedic forms and accents, and sought to discard, also, all defined terms, calling his vyākaraṇa **asaṃjñaka**, "termless" (II.2.68, quoted in Scharfe 1977: 165). According to Scharfe, "To an astonishing degree he has succeeded in using only enumerations, contractions or descriptive expressions and in avoiding defined terms" (ibid). The most significant casualty of this move is the kārakas; Candra reduces Pāṇini's three levels in syntax logic to two (on this change see also Radicchi's contribution to this volume). "Shall we assume," Scharfe asks, "that Candragomin dropped the objective relations under the influence of Buddhist mentalistic philosophy?" (1977: 166). I think we can move the question closer to those of Vasubandhu and Vasurāta's day. First, returning to the all-Buddhist perspective, where does Candragomin's project fit in? Whose side is he on among the Buddhists? Surely the anxiety to jettison all definition-commitments sounds like an effort to meet Sautrāntika strictures against Sarvāstivādin reifications. Shall we suppose, then, that vyākaraṇa was also attacked for dependence upon reifications? Was Candragomin's grammar an effort to save vyākaraṇa from attachment to definitions, indeed an answer to criticisms of vyākaraṇa made by Vasubandhu, teacher of Diṅnāga?

Second, whose side was Candragomin on, between Vasurāta and Vasubandhu? Jettisoning all the Vedic references and explanations certainly sounds like a Buddhist thing to do, so we need not doubt that he was a Buddhist. But (at least as reported by Takakusu) Paramārtha presents him as an ally of Vasurāta, a defender of vyākaraṇa. The boundary between two sides begins to blur. Perhaps, with friends like this the Pāṇinians did not need enemies. But recall that Candra was cited, apparently favorably,

in one of the closing kārikās (2.486) of the vākya kāṇḍa. By most suggested readings of the disputed kārikās, Candra was favored as a defender of vyākaraṇa technique in general and Patañjali's interpretations in particular. Was it, any port in a storm? How complete was Bhartṛhari's endorsement of Candra?

The key kārikā 2.486 is another obscure one (see Aklujkar 1991, etc.), and I won't attempt a whole translation:

> parvatād āgamaṃ labdhvā bhāṣyabījānusāribhiḥ /
> sa nīto bahuśākhatvaṃ candrācāryādibhiḥ punaḥ // 2.486

Is there any way we can construe the *āgama* from "the mountain" as a reference to Candra and others following, also, a different *āgama*? Whatever the resolution of *parvatād*, here Candra and company are lucky not to be *śuṣkatarkānusārin* but instead *bhāṣyabījānusārin*, following not dry reason (see 2.484, and note 9 above) but the seeds of the Bhāṣya (see also 2.482); in consequence their action carries vyākaraṇa to many-branchedness. In short they get somewhere. The metaphor has switched from milk to seeds and trees, but the contrast is clearly between strategies that do and do not produce growth.

More generally, did Bhartṛhari accept Candra's innovations? Surely Bhartṛhari was a committed and loyal follower of the Pāṇinian tradition. In his texts, discussion abounds of problems in Vedic interpretation. But what about the kāraka theory? Can we say that Bhartṛhari accepted Candra's abandonment of kārakas and other technical definitions? Clearly not. The bulk of the Sādhanasamuddeśa, and much discussion elsewhere, presents and discusses kāraka theory for reader edification, and includes Bhartṛhari's new formulations discussed by Radicchi. But can we say that Bhartṛhari therefore rejected Candra's formulation of vyākaraṇa? No special judgment need be made if all *śāstra* is *avidyā*. And clearly, Candra's vyākaraṇa was presented within the fold of a many-branched vyākaraṇa, itself part of a diversity of edifying, albeit indirectly edifying, darśanas.

If Bhartṛhari was making a general response to Buddhist attacks, in defense of *śabda pramāṇa*, *śruti* and *smṛti*, and Vedic *āgama*, his principal opponent was not Candragomin. How to sort out other candidates? In the absence of direct references, suppose we try to connect works that respond to each other's concepts, metaphors and examples. Which Buddhist discussions did Bhartṛhari play with? Here I will mainly consider Nāgārjuna as a candidate.

In the Paspaśāhnika, the first day-session of Patañjali's Mahābhāṣya, the meaning of **siddha** is discussed, in relationship to Patañjali's argument

that Pāṇini's grammar concerns rules for a language in which word (*śabda*) meaning (*artha*) and their relation (*saṃbandha*) are already established (*siddha*)(Bhāṣya I.1.61; here I follow the numbering in Joshi and Roodbergen). If established meant permanent, then how could the relationship be permanent if the meaning was a particular thing (*dravya*) that could be destroyed, etc.? Patañjali's answer was that the relationship was permanent when the particular things with the meanings, even if themselves impermanent, had a permanent relationship with the meanings (see I.1.74-75). (Something like, the cow is a cow for as long as it exists.) Looking into Bhartṛhari's commentary, the Mahābhāṣyadīpikā, on these Bhāṣyas, we find him going farther into the question of the nature of these permanent relationships. He proposed, and did not reject, the possibility that the relationship is *samavāya*, inherence. Then he suggested that the relationship is **aśūnyatā**, non-emptiness. Rather than insist that the particular cow is inherently a cow, and this connects word and meaning, this version of the established nature of a *dravya* meaning simply asserts that the *śabda* is never empty: the *śabda* can only be if it is in relation to some meaning.

The deconstructionist argument is that such relations are never actually established. Nāgārjuna advanced no arguments out of awareness that all predications are actually **śūnya**. In his first samuddeśa on *dravya* in the Vākyapadīya/Trikāṇḍī, was Bhartṛhari playing with Nāgārjuna's fourfold negation? Discussing *tattva*, the ultimate *dravya*, Bhartṛhari reported that by *āgama atattva* is not different from it, but is simply *tattva* ill considered, given different form. Kārikās 3.2.12 and 3.2.13 sound like versions of the third and fourth planks of a fourfold negation: *na tad asti na tan nāsti*, etc., then, *tan nāsti vidyate tac ca*, etc. But Bhartṛhari *affirmed* the propositions, offering them rather than rejecting them. The next kārikā begins,

> tasya śabdārthasaṃbandharūpam ekasya dṛśyate /
>
> "Of the one, a form as word, meaning and relation is seen."

As he did in his commentary on Mahābhāṣya I.1.75, Bhartṛhari argued here that *dravya* meanings unfold into a unity, oneness, an ultimate substance behind all forms. The words cannot help but refer to the real by means of unreal limiting factors. In the dravya samuddeśa, the example of the gold and the bracelet followed (3.2.15-16). The gold takes on the form of the bracelet, without compromising its purity as gold. (Implicitly, then, the gold is and is not the bracelet, etc.) What is really expressed by all words is the ultimate *prakṛti* that is real beyond all transformations. The words seem plural in nature but are not really separate from this basis,

and express it in all their forms. This would seem a Sāṃkhya style rebuttal (perhaps Vasurāta's?) to the fourfold negation; the next kārikā invokes a key Advaitin metaphor, comparing word plurality to dream images. Can either be said to be Bhartṛhari's *own* solution? Despite the fact that the text, especially the third kāṇḍa, is a *saṃgraha*, I suspect one answer is closer to his heart than the others, but that it is none of these!

Before going on with Bhartṛhari's analysis of the problem of establishment of *dravyas*, let us note that the gold and the bracelet are discussed as well in the Mahābhāṣya itself, in I.1.76, the Bhāṣya immediately after those discussed above. As Joshi and Roodbergen note (p. 113), the Mahābhāṣya shifts remarkably in its discussion of *dravya* from Bhāṣya 75 to Bhāṣya 76, from considering *dravya* as impermanent individuals of permanent types, to considering, with the gold and the bracelet, the *dravya* as the substance, the gold, to be more permanent than the bracelet form. The first clearly is the Mīmāṃsā view of *dravya*. The second, Joshi and Roodbergen speculate, might be a doctrine from Sāṃkhya or Buddhist *vijñānavāda*. I haven't found any Buddhist discussions of the example from Bhartṛhari's time or before, let alone from Patañjali's time or before (which was surely before the rise of the *vijñānavādins* proper); any references would be welcome. But can we speculate that Buddhist/Sāṃkhya contests, or other Buddhist contentions, had changed and raised the philosophical stakes for discussions of meaning, even by Patañjali's time?

As Madhav Deshpande has pointed out, problems in the analysis and practice of encoding, moving into word form, are quite different from problems in the analysis and practice of decoding, moving from word form to meaning.[10] Pāṇini was clearly concerned primarily with the first set of problems, problems still addressed in a vast continuing science of formal linguistics, now including the work of Joshi, Cardona, Kiparsky, and Staal. But by Patañjali's time, questions from the other problem set were also

10 I heard Deshpande make this argument in lectures at the University of Poona in May 1990. This distinction between encoding and decoding sciences could also be applied fruitfully to restate one of Frits Staal's strangest arguments (see Staal 1982, 1988a, 1988b), the argument that only ancient India developed a science of ritual. As an anthropologist, I am still put off by Staal's clearly intentional dismissal of the history of ritual study in cultural anthropology, but the point is well taken if it is simply that the ritual literature from Veda to Mīmāṃsā concerns increasingly complex problems in the analysis and practice of the encoding of rituals, while the Western sciences of ritual have overwhelmingly concerned interpreting rituals already performed and observed.

being posed.[11] Controversy over combining the two types of grammatical inquiry continues; Joshi, for example, calls for separating out the linguistic elements of arguments, even Bhartṛhari's arguments, from the questions of "metaphysical and semantic philosophy of language," thus banishing semantics from linguistics proper (1967: 54). Patañjali would seem to be his ally. As Joshi and Roodbergen note (1986: 106), Patañjali's discussion of the gold and the bracelet has "a different point' than Bhartṛhari's. Patañjali concluded that it is futile to try to specify what about *artha* is *siddha* or *nitya*, except the fact that it is the word meaning (I.1.79). Bhartṛhari agreed that the *dravya* is established (*siddha*) by its relation to the *śabda* - but he sees nothing futile about the point.

Let us return, then, to Bhartṛhari's discussion of options for delineating *dravya*. For the ultimate *tattva* to be a *dravya* would after all place a limiting factor on *tattva*. After discussing *saṃbandha* Bhartṛhari offered his shortest samuddeśa, a further samuddeśa on *dravya*, with a very different point. After announcing that the rest of the samuddeśas will discuss things abstractly separated from sentence meanings by *śāstra*, Bhartṛhari argued in 3.4.3, final kārikā of this samuddeśa, that *dravya* emerge as a power of grammar. *Dravya* are whatever is intended to be separated as things, existing in the grammatical positions where pronouns, thing designators, are used. The point is reaffirmed in the next samuddeśa, on *guṇas*, where he showed that any dependent quality can be grammatically recast into the position of primary substantive under discussion. In one sense, *dravya* is thereby deconstructed: no essential *dravyas* are left. But the signs are saturated with grammatical *śakti*, and cannot be emptied of it.

Similarly, in the jātisammudeśa Bhartṛhari privileged grammatical *śakti* in *artha*, as in the example of the *khadira* post referred to in a Vedic injunction to sacrifice. The *khadira* is clearly a type of tree, but we understand that a *khadira* twig will not do, and what kind of other posts would be suitable alternatives, because we are understanding "*khadira*" within the whole injunction.

11 They are said to have already been under discussion by Vyādi and others as well, especially in the missing Saṃgraha. Very hard to say, when we have neither the text nor a complete and reliable account of it. Was the Saṃgraha Bhartṛhari's model even for his own *saṃgraha* strategy? No doubt, in a simple sense. Quite possibly a Vyādi did launch discussion of sentence as the unit of meaning. But I would be very surprised if the earlier text connected the theological, epistemological, grammatical-formal, and genre issues in as complex, elegant, and coherent a fashion as Bhartṛhari's text does, and in particular if it responded as coherently to deconstructive arguments.

ato jātyabhidhāne 'pi śaktihīnaṃ na gṛhyate //3.1.4cd

"Thus, even though the denotation is of *jāti*, nothing devoid of *śakti* is grasped."

Types of things, and particular things in question, are shaped by the whole sentences. The fact the *khadira* of the injunction is and is not the *khadira* species reveals gaps between signifiers, signifieds, and referents only if we seek a unit of meaning at the level of the sign. The ability of reanalysis to reconfigure the relationships between signs, things and classes is indeed deconstruction of the sign as unit, but only further evidence of the power of grammar to communicate meanings through whole sentences and utterances.

To get back to the search for markers of dialogical relationship, from Nāgārjuna to Bhartṛhari: Another possible connection point is a metaphor, lamps and light. One target of Nāgārjuna's deconstruction was *pramāṇa* theory. As Bronkhorst has recently shown, the Nyāya sūtras and the possibility of a Nyāya darśana distinct from Vaiśeṣika emerged in Nāgārjuna's day, and Nāgārjuna challenged the Nyāya sūtras even while the final form of the Nyāya sūtra text was still being compiled. The Nyāya sūtras, rules for debate, raised the problem of how to establish *pramāṇa* as means of knowledge without an infinite regress, since thinking about them transformed them from means to object of knowledge (*prameya*). The Nyāya solution was that the *pramāṇas* were means of knowledge of themselves as well as other objects, just as the light of a lamp (*pradīpaprakāśa*) illuminated itself and other things. Two of Nāgārjuna's texts, the Vigrahavyāvartanī and the Vaidalyaprakaraṇa, criticized this theory at great length (See Bronkhorst 1985, Lindtner 1982, Bhattacarya 1986, Santina 1986). The subject cannot be the object of its own act; if fire illuminated itself it would also burn itself (see Bhattacharya 1986: 117n[12]). Nāgārjuna may go so far as to argue that the lamp cannot illuminate anything, itself or another object, whether in contact or not (see Lindtner 1982: 88).

Bhartṛhari, on the other hand, gets heavy use out of *prakāśa* metaphors. Does he privilege things known by seeing over those known by hearing, as when *śruti* and *smṛti* are elaborated by all-*seeing* Ṛsis for those who do not already see and understand? (See Vākyapadīya 1.36ff) In any case, in *śabda* he connects seeing to hearing, because *śabda* involves both;

12 Bhattacarya et al point out that Śaṃkara borrows and repeats this argument of Nāgārjuna, when disputing with Vijñānavādins. Thus Śaṃkara moves against the grain of Bhartṛhari's return to self-illuminating means of knowing - in criticism of a Buddhist school!

the words heard, like light, illuminate at least their own form if received, and if received and grasped properly, their meaning as well (Vākyapadīya 1.56ff). This is the crucial general capacity (*śakti*) of *śabda*. How does Bhartṛhari's formulation evade the logical difficulties demonstrated by Nāgārjuna? Perhaps by new deployment of the deconstructionist's main conclusion, that semiotics do not follow logic, but rather the reverse. Relations such as that of subject, means and object are constituted by grammatical powers themselves, as Bhartṛhari discusses at length in the Sādhanasamuddeśa. In such a sentence as "He kills himself with his own hands," a physical unity is established separately and simultaneously as subject, object, and means, with no contradiction.

I am not at all sure that Nāgārjuna himself is the Buddhist theorist most important to Bhartṛhari. (Vasubandhu would be an obvious alternative, still to be investigated; and if Warder is right that there are two Vasubandhus, then both of them, the Vijñānavādin and the Sautrāntika.) But some scholars have emphasized the Nāgārjuna connection. Lindtner, a formidable Nāgārjuna specialist, has declared that Nāgārjuna's distinction of worldly from ultimate truths had "a decisive impact" on Bhartṛhari, "though this fact and its far-reaching implications seem to have escaped the notice of the modern interpreters of the Vākyapadīya" (1982: 280). Has it escaped Lindtner's notice, in turn, how much of Nāgārjuna's theory and method Bhartṛhari encompasses and overturns?

Bhartṛhari, Whorf, Bakhtin and Meaning

The reception and revision of Bhartṛhari's arguments has been widely studied, especially their reception and revision by Diṅnāga, Śaṃkara, the Mīmāṃsakas and the Rhetoriticians (see, e.g., Coward 1980, Matilal 1990). As we know vyākaraṇa itself was eclipsed by other disciplines, later to be revived. If I am right about Bhartṛhari's argument, surely it was greatly revised within vyākaraṇa as well, by his more formalistic successors after the great gap. The process might be poignantly indicated by Nāgeśa's clean, tidy, clear and economical reading of a line of Kaiyaṭa. Kaiyaṭa's introductory verses to the Mahābhāṣya appear, from Joshi and Roodbergen's translation, remarkably close in style and substance to Vākyapadīya formulations. He begins his text, like the Brahman kāṇḍa, with a salute to the ultimate. The highest ātman has no form but takes on all form, has passed beyond a nature of being and nonbeing. How to construe this last

phrase? Joshi and Roodbergen (1986: 4) report and endorse Nāgeśa's explanation, "That is to say, he can be described as *sat* 'being' only."

My own research into Bhartṛhari and his times is clearly impelled by my interest in decoding as well as encoding problems. I am trying to seize the flash - I do not pretend, even to myself, to have accomplished it well - in both Bhartṛhari's sense and also in Walter Benjamin's sense (1968: 255): seizing the flash when a fragment of the past is recalled at a present moment of danger. As I have already said, the present moment that concerns me is the search for a post-structuralist semiotics, a search which sometimes seems to have become a contest between fatuous nihilism based on deconstructive wisdom, and reductive power-functionalisms working from materialist and political-economic premises. My sense is that we need a much more powerful reconsideration of meaning itself to resolve the impasse, and that Bhartṛhari might help.

The two other theorists I find useful here are Benjamin Lee Whorf, an American anthropological linguist of the mid-twentieth century, and Mikhail Bakhtin (and his student V.N. Vološinov), recently rediscovered literary critic whose work was suppressed for its heterodoxy in Stalinist Russia. Both have many points of affinity, and difference, with Bhartṛhari and with each other. What all three have in common is great skepticism about meaning as something built up from real, individual sign units.[13]

Whorf, like Bhartṛhari, suggests that even in our imagination, imputed "word" meanings are the meanings of sentences; to think "chair" is to think "a chair exists" (See Vākyapadīya 2.270, Whorf 1956: 67). The sentence, for Whorf as for Bhartṛhari, is the real meaning-bearing unit. Like Bhartṛhari Whorf focusses upon grammatical powers, what he calls among other things "configurative rapport," that give form to formless

13 Others have suggested comparing Bhartṛhari with George Steiner, especially with respect to Steiner's critique of deconstruction in *Real Presences* (1989). Steiner like Bhartṛhari seeks meaning in sentence and larger units, values formal analytic systems while also insisting on their limits, and unlike Whorf and even Bakhtin, puts explicit weight on divinity, divine presence, as the foundation for creative acts. Ironically, it is in his account of the relation of human and divine creativity that Steiner seems to me to be most different from Bhartṛhari. Steiner finds human creativity in "the impulse to rivalry with a 'jealous God'" (1989: 207); both divinity and humanity seem specifically Judeo-Christian here. But of course the more consequent divergence is no doubt the one between Steiner's "wager on transcendence" (1989: 214) and my own disciplinary commitment to meaning that is, indeed, humanly made and immanent in our world. The disciplinary commitment of anthropology to ethnographic study of real human communities is itself a clear wager that Steiner is wrong to dismiss the mundane, daily, commonsensical, and empirical as a source for real presences (cf. Steiner 1989: 133-34, 199), a wager with Vico on human eloquence and self-fashioning (cf. Said 1985).

whole thoughts and intentions, and allow thoughts and intentions to be determined in the reverse process upon reception of the sentences of others. And the two theorists' linguistic traditions are not wholly separate. Whorf's sources for information on vyākaraṇa and the rest of Indian philosophy were apparently quite pedestrian. But he was impressed both by the linguistic accomplishments,[14] and by what he described, using Sanskrit terms, as the Indian philosophical interest in discussing meaning that was *arūpa* as well as meaning in *nāma* and *rūpa* (1956: 253). Perhaps the most important difference between Whorf and Bhartṛhari is that Whorf insisted on difference, and equality, between the grammars of different languages. He spent his intellectual life comparing different language grammars, especially European languages with Hopi, a Native American language without verb tenses. While the Indo-European languages make "thing" a term of cosmic scope of reference, dividable into formless substances plus forms (alas, no mention of gold and bracelet), in Hopi grammar, temporality is thought intrinsic to substantives. Rather than events being a kind of thing, our "things" are depicted as enduring sorts of events. Like Bhartṛhari, Whorf saw linguistic skills as something to be developed, not mistrusted, not because the formal operations were themselves the vehicle of truth but because insight into their powers led to clearer understanding. His prescription was not devotion to traditional proprieties, however, but study of multiple languages.

In contrast to both, Bakhtin prescribes study of a "translinguistics" above simple encoding linguistics, study of dialogue, genres, and the movement of style into grammar. Bakhtin focusses not on basic syntax, or on sentences, but on the use of "captured speech" in new speech, and on utterances as units of meaning. People may write or say more or less than a grammatically complete sentence, but whatever their utterance's style and length (a word or a book) it is intended to convey something and this is the proper unit of meaning. Further, its method is to use items not out of a dictionary or a Saussurean langue, but to reply to already extant speech and writing, to "capture" fragments of existing discourse and com-

14 Whorf wrote, "the science of linguistics was founded, or put on its present basis, by one Panini ... It was the Greeks who debased the science. They showed how infinitely inferior they were to the Hindus as scientific thinkers, and the effect of their muddling lasted two thousand years. Modern scientific linguistics dates from the rediscovery of Panini by the Western world in the early nineteenth century" (1956: 232). Compare, for example, Kristeva (1989: 104): "By positing the bases of modern reasoning, Greek philosophy also provided the fundamental principles that have enabled language to be thought about up to our day."

ment on them. Unlike Whorf, and like Derrida, Bakhtin and Vološinov directly criticized Saussure, and in this sense are literally "post-structuralists." But their critique took them in this different and productive direction. Like Bhartṛhari, they insist that mere reception of a word and reception of its meaning should be distinguished, and that the latter involves reception and evaluative response to actual claims about truth and falsehood, existence and non-existence, right and wrong, good and evil, etc. (See for example Vākyapadīya 1.56-61 and 2.427-429, Vološinov 1983: 40-41.) From Bhartṛhari they would no doubt wish to hear more about practice (*abhyāsa*), the foundation of the expertise that goes beyond inference (Vāk. 1.35), the practice that might explain the arising of the capacity for *pratibhā*, intuition of meaning (Vāk. 2.116-118, 143-152, 402-403). Like Whorf, Bakhtin and Vološinov are aware of the origins of linguistics in India, but they are less flattering, arguing that the connection of linguistics to priests, sacred texts, and authoritative interpretation of tradition is precisely the problem with all of philology, even to the present. Philologists, they argue, treat all language as dead, and never deal with the kind of meaning that elicits active response (Vološinov 1983: 44-45). On this point they would no doubt criticize Whorf as well as Bhartṛhari.

The theorists would also disagree over whether the genealogy of language leads back to divinity or primates, and over the types of liberation available through understanding of grammatical processes. Not small questions. But all three contribute, as I see it, to getting us past the type of "post-structuralism" that is represented by Derrida in contemporary Western thought: past the discovery of instability in signs, and the irreducibility of acts of power in their use. All three make important contributions to continuing efforts to understand how real meaning arises, abides and changes. I agree with Whorf about the plurality of grammars, and with Bakhtin about the significance of dialogue, captured speech and the utterance as the real meaning-bearing unit. But Bhartṛhari is especially important because, of the three, he is the only one providing a sustained critique of a sign-unit approach to meaning, the only one responding to and encompassing the lessons of a deconstructivist sign theory. We left Derrida stuck on his sentence so difficult to think, "the sign ~~is~~ that ill-named ~~thing~~, the only one, that escapes the instituting question of philosophy: 'what is ...'?" Must we let it escape? Why not find it a better name, or better yet, a clearer way to think about it? Following Whorf (and Bhartṛhari on *dravya*) this "thingness" of the sign is a projection of a grammar in which thingness is a default characteristic of nouns; with Whorf consider the sign an event. Or turn to Bhartṛhari's metaphors: the

sign like light, illuminating an object-meaning received in an event of understanding. Derrida insists that the signifier is a trace, Bhartṛhari that it disappears when the meaning becomes clear (see Vāk. 2.298-299, 2.420). I want to finish, though, with another of Bhartṛhari's metaphors: the sign as a tool. Plows, swords, and pestles have form (*rūpa*) and powers (*śakti*) suiting them as means (*sādhana*) especially for certain activities, but also in other ways for others; they are applied within their limits to the necessary tasks. So it is with *śabda* (Vāk. 2.275-277). Signs don't have their own meanings, they are used to make meanings. Why should we imagine that signs have meaning? Do tools have gardening, fighting, or cooking?

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