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Autor: Palissero, Alberto

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Alberto Pelissero*

A General Overview

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Abstract: This paper is a brief survey on the concept of *paribhāṣā* throughout the whole Indian textual tradition. The contribute displays in a general way what is well developed by other articles of the volume. The most striking feature of this overview is that it highlights some issues concerning the translation of the word *paribhāṣā* as well as the general definitions formulated across Indian literary history. Possible alternative translations of the term *paribhāṣā*, from the history of ideas' perspective, are as follows: meta-rule, hermeneutic rule, interpretative rule. The paper hints at the very core of the problem, namely the multi-tasking function of the *paribhāṣā*.

Keywords: *paribhāṣā*, meta-rule, hermeneutic rule, interpretative rule, history of ideas

A *paribhāṣā* is a normative sentence used in order to restrict, specify, limit, or *vice versa* broaden, or even simply modify, the context of application of another normative sentence. From this point of view, the term *paribhāṣā* could possibly be translated with words such as "meta-rule" or "interpretative (or hermeneutic) rule". These two terms, meta-rule and interpretative rule, refer respectively to a meta-linguistic use (i. e. how to use a technical language in order to discuss about language) and to a hermeneutic use (i. e. how to interpret an existing norm through normative criteria, these criteria being foreign to the very same norm under scrutiny). The term *paribhāṣā* and its use are extremely diffused, almost ubiquitous, in the Indian cultural world. They can be found in such contexts as e. g. ritual (*śrautasūtra*); grammar (*vyākaraṇa*); two important and contiguous philosophical schools, i. e. the two exegeses (*pūrvamīmāṃsā, uttaramīmāṃsā*); and, out of the philosophical domain, even in a theistic school (*śaivasiddhānta*). Within the realm of medicine the word *paribhāṣā* is also found, though here its semantic value is probably different from its etymological origin and it has less to do with its meaning in the purely hermeneutic context. Within medicine, its meaning is somewhat similar to "technical term". The normative

***Corresponding author: Alberto Pelissero,** Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici StudiUm, Università degli studi di Torino, via Giulia di Barolo 3a, 10124 Torino, Italy.
E-mail: alberto.pelissero@unito.it

value of *paribhāṣā* is stated by a quotation of the term in the domain of ornate poetry (*kāvya*).[1]

Within the ritual context, the Śrautasūtras try to purify each and every sacrificial prescription from the risk of being polluted with some sort of misunderstanding (a linguist would say, to disambiguate them). This can be done only through the systematic harmonization of all those passages that may determine a *prima facie* hermeneutic ambiguousness, that is, through an authoritative interpretation of potentially reciprocally contradictory passages, and in force of other similar hermeneutic devices. A very powerful and useful tool in order to obtain disambiguation is precisely the recourse to a set of *paribhāṣā*s. The very word *paribhāṣā* is nevertheless far from being defined in univocal terms within the ritual context. In the Śrautasūtras, the main aim of a *paribhāṣā* is to clarify a ritual prescription, removing from it any ambiguousness or contradiction whatsoever. An interpretative rule can be endowed with a generic applicability or with a specific one. Its main feature consists in this: it serves the purpose of another (*pārarthya*), i. e. it is useful in order to make clear the range of applicability of the prescription upon which it is itself being applied. If it is disjoined from the prescription upon which it is applied, a *paribhāṣā* is perfectly useless. In other terms, a meta-rule is always a contextual rule, it is useless out of its context; it is impossible to use it in a general way, since it always has a specific domain of application. Quite often, its application is extremely practical, being devoid of any speculative content. For instance, when a prescription concerns the material with which the sacrificial pole (*yūpa*) is to be made, it is said that it has to be made with the wood of a *khadira* (*Acacia catechu*) tree. But if no piece of such wood is to be found, it is always possible to substitute it with a different piece of wood, according to the principle that the goal prevails upon the material. This principle is stated by a *paribhāṣa*.[2] A *paribhāṣā* superimposes itself upon the features of other hermeneutic tools (such as *saṃjñā, atideśa, vidhi, niṣedha*), and can

1 See Māgha's *Śiśupālavadha* (16.80): *paritaḥ pramitākṣarāpi sarvaṃ viṣayaṃ prāpnuvatī gatā pratiṣṭhām | na khalu pratihanyate kutaścit paribhāṣeva garīyasī yadājñā* ||, "While his royal decree may be succinct, it is weighty in implication, encompassing all regions and enacted everywhere, meeting no opposition. It is like a governing rule in grammar – highly condensed while covering every possibility, sound and authoritative, uncontradicted by another rule" (tr. Dundas 2017: 563, see the translator's note thereupon: "The comparison, conveyed through wordplay, of Shishupala's command with the metarules (*paribhāṣā*) that structure Panini's grammar would have been appreciated by all knowing Sanskrit", Dundas 2017: 752). The term *paribhāṣā* is glossed by Mallinātha – quoting Patañjali's well-known statement – as *paribhāṣā hy ekadeśe sthitvā sarvaśāstram abhijjvalayati dīpavad iti bhāṣyakāraḥ*: note the interesting verb *abhijjvalayati* "enlightens", showing that according to the commentator a metarule is able to enlighten the whole of a treatise like a lamp, though being situated in a specific place (ŚV 1905: 424).

2 *Āpastambaśrautasūtra* 24.3.48: *arthadravyavirodhe 'rtho balīyān*. See Chierichetti, this volume.

be divided into two main categories: a meta-rule specific for a particular Śrautasūtra, and a generic meta-rule, i. e. a rule which is applicable to any Śrautasūtra whatsoever, and even to the domain of the Brāhmaṇas. According to an etiological criterion, *paribhāṣās* can be defined in these terms: (1) those born out of principles descending from the *brāhmaṇas* (*śrautī*, e. g. *Āpastambaśrautasūtra* 24.1.8–9), (2) those which are implicit in Vedic passages and are codified as such by the *sūtrakāra* (*jñāpitā*, e. g. *Āpastambaśrautasūtra* 24.1.2), and (3) last but not least, those born out of an argument, i. e. the conventional ones, consisting of examples drawn from everyday use (*sautrī*, e. g. *Āpastambaśrautasūtra* 24.1.10; see Chierichetti, this volume).

Beside the vast field of the Śrautasūtras, we also find the telling example of the *Kauśikasūtra*, the only Gṛhyasūtra of the Atharvavedins. This late Vedic text presents contents which stand between the Śrautasūtras and the Gṛhyasūtras. In the *Kauśikasūtra, paribhāṣās* were added by later redactors for the sake of clarity and consistency. Some of these *paribhāṣās* are included in the *incipit* of the text, in three sets (1.1–8 cum 1.9–23, and 7.1–9.7), others were inserted next to the *sūtras* to which they apply (e. g. KauśS 11.11, 12.4, 21.21, etc.). Even without these clear-cut *paribhāṣās*, the *Kauśikasūtra* presents certain implicit devices for clarification (see Rotaru, this volume).

In the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā there are two types of *paribhāṣās*, preferably called *nyāyas*, namely general rules and meta-rules properly. The whole Pūrva Mīmāṃsā should be considered as a system of meta-rules for the interpretation of the Brāhmaṇas (the portion of the Veda prescribing sacrifices) and it is precisely this systematic character which distinguishes the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā from its Śrautasūtra forerunners. Furthermore, Pūrva Mīmāṃsā meta-rules are applied to language itself, though it should be noted that they are not strictly formalized like the Vyākaraṇa ones.

But the thinkers that offer to the *paribhāṣā* system the most solid comprehensive theoretical framework are the grammarians (the same is true with reference to other keywords in Indian philosophy, such as *sphoṭa*). Within the context of Vyākaraṇa, a *paribhāṣā* is an authoritative sentence able to offer the correct interpretation of a *sūtra*; it removes a real or possible conflict between two rules simultaneously applicable to the making of a word; it guarantees the correctness of a word. The term is variously defined by the commentators to the *trimunivyākaraṇa*, but Patañjali himself had already stated that "a *paribhāṣā*, even if situated within a specific place, enlightens the entire grammatical science, like a lamp. See the example: a lamp endowed with a blazing light, even though placed in a particular place, enlightens the entire house".[3] A *paribhāṣā* has a general hermeneutic value according to a

3 *Mahābhāṣya ad Aṣṭādhyāyī* 2.1.1 (where the difference between *adhikāra* and *paribhāṣā* is discussed). See Candotti-Pontillo and Freschi, this volume.

paretymology suggested by Jinendrabuddhi (*Nyāsa ad Aṣṭādhyāyī* 2.1.1): "it is being named *paribhāṣā* because it is a sentence (*bhāṣā*) that works actively (*vyāprtā*) all around (*paritaḥ*)" (see Candotti-Pontillo, this volume), that is, its applicability is not limited to a single passage from a treatise but concerns the treatise in its entirety, or even an entire *śāstra*, an entire literary genre and not a specific treatise which is part of that scientific domain. A *paribhāṣā* serves to facilitate the interpretation of Pāṇinian rules; to disambiguate the order of application if two or more rules appear *prima facie* in reciprocal conflict; to guide the interpretation or decide the rules to be applied in order to derive the desired correct word. The concept of *paribhāṣā* partially overlaps with that of *adhikāra* (see Candotti-Pontillo, this volume). *Paribhāṣā*s are diffused within all grammatical schools, not only in the Pāṇinian branch. A famous collection of *paribhāṣā*s has been gathered and edited (1967) by K. V. Abhyankar (*Paribhāṣāsaṃgraha*). It comprises seventeen works, amounting to a total of 550 meta-rules: (1) *Paribhāṣāsūcana* by Vyāḍi (considered by Haribhāskara the first author of a collection of *paribhāṣā*s, item n. 15 in this list), 93 meta-rules; (2) *Vyāḍīyaparibhāṣāpāṭha*, 140 meta-rules from the school of Vyāḍi; (3) *Śākaṭāyanaparibhāṣāsūtra*, 98 meta-rules by Śākaṭāyana or from his school; (4) *Cāndraparibhāṣāsūtra*, 86 meta-rules placed in an appendix to this work by Candragomin; (5) *Kātantraparibhāṣāsūtravṛtti*, 65 meta-rules by Durgasiṃha, belonging to the *Kātantra* school[4]; (6) *Kātantraparibhāṣāsūtravṛtti*, 62 meta-rules by Bhāvamiśra, belonging to the *Kātantra* school; (7) *Kātantraparibhāṣāsūtra*, 96 meta-rules by an anonymous figure belonging to the *Kātantra* school; (8) *Kālāpaparibhāṣāsūtra*, 118 meta-rules by an anonymous figure belonging to the *Kālāpa* school; (9) *Jainendraparibhāṣāvṛtti*, a gloss by K.V. Abhyankar to 108 meta-rules to be found in the *Mahāvṛtti* by Abhayanandin to the *Jainendravyākaraṇa* of Pūjyapāda Devanandin; (10) *Bhojadevakṛtaparibhāṣāsūtra*, 118 meta-rules offered by Bhoja, *Sarasvatīkaṇṭhābharaṇa* (1.2); (11) *Nyāyasaṃgraha*, 140 meta-rules (in fact, they are not called *paribhāṣā* but rather *nyāya*) by Hemahaṃsagaṇī; (12) *Laghuparibhāṣāvṛtti* by Puruṣottamadeva belonging to the school of Pāṇini, 120 meta-rules; (13) *Bṛhatparibhāṣāvṛtti*, 130 meta-rules with a commentary by Sīradeva and a short sub-commentary by Śrīmānaśarman; (14) *Paribhāṣāvṛtti* by Nīlakaṇṭha belonging to the school of Pāṇini, a short gloss to 140 meta-rules; (15) *Paribhāṣābhāskara* by Haribhāskara Agnihotrī, 132 meta-rules with a commentary; (16) the naked text of meta-rules offered and glossed by Nāgeśa in his *Paribhāṣenduśekhara*; (17) *Paribhāṣābhāskara* by Śeṣādhrisudhi, 11 meta-rules

4 A sort of systematic abridgment and rearrangement of Pāṇini's treatise, it probably belonged to the Aindra system as opposed to the Māheśvara system. It is also known as *Kāśakṛtsnatantra*, possibly written by one Sarvavarman or Śarvavarman, its last chapter being ascribed to Vararuci. An alternative name of the school is possibly *Kalāpa(tantra)*. See *Aṣṭādhyāyī* 4.3.108.

criticizing Nāgeśa. The most authoritative work is n. 16 (XVIII century CE), which has been commented upon by more than 25 authors, the most important glosses being the ones by Vaidyanātha Pāyaguṇḍa (*Gadā*), Bhairavamiśra (*Miśrī*), and Rāghavendrācārya Gajendragadakara (*Tripathagā*).

Both the first and the second exegesis (*pūrvamīmāṃsā, uttaramīmāṃsā*), at least in their late developments, feel an urge to insert the term *paribhāṣā* within the title of some of their relevant works: as far as Pūrva Mīmāṃsā is concerned, one is reminded of the *Mīmāṃsāparibhāṣā* by Kṛṣṇa Yajvan; as far as Uttara Mīmāṃsā is concerned, one is reminded of the *Vedāntaparibhāṣā* by Dharmarājādhvarīndra. The term *paribhāṣā* is perceived as somewhat trendy, as it is also found in the title of an important work from a theistic *śaiva* school, the Śaiva Siddhānta (the *Śaivaparibhāṣā* by Śivāgrayogīndrajñānaśivācārya).

Could this kind of terminological cross-reference correspond to a sort of philosophical equivalence? In these three cases, it will be necessary to verify the following hypothesis: does the presence of the same key-term within the title of generally late works correspond to a cultural trend that could not be ignored? Is it a mere cultural trend, devoid of any deep speculative content, or is it something peculiarly relevant to Indian thought? This issue is not at all trivial: e. g. we may rightfully ask if the perfectly self-aware use of the technical language of Navya Nyāya by Dharmarāja is simply a trendy habit or rather something which is particularly significant from a philosophical point of view. Does Dharmarāja adopt the Navya Nyāya style simply because it is trendy, or rather because he (self-consciously or not) adheres to some of the tenets of the new school of logic? The scholars who have accepted to discuss this issue will perhaps offer some possible answers to this kind of question: the way is open to all conclusions resulting from the different conceptual domains.

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