MARIO PIANTELLI

ATTENTION AND COMMUNICATION: SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF ŚAṄKARA TO THE LEXICON OF SANSKRIT AS A METALANGUAGE IN *TAITTIRĪYOPANIṢADBHĀṢYA* 2,1,1

If we consider metalanguage in a somewhat more elastic way than that in which logical Semantics uses it, namely as compassing not only fully formalized languages as its object languages, but also the whole range of facts, processes and problems relating to the relationship between verbal signs and their referents in daily uses, it is possible to discover many an interesting contribution on the part of Indian thought in such a field, albeit the central interest from which such contributions happen to develope themselves is often quite far from the motives governing modern logicians' and linguists' attitude in regard of such matters.

I propose here to discuss in its general outlines a particularly stimulating instance of these contributions, which is represented by the configuration of relationship verbal sign-referent in the double mode of *Viśeṣaṇa* and *Lakṣaṇa* on the part of Śaṅkarācārya in his *Taittirīyopaniṣadbhāṣya*, 2,1,1. We owe the introduction of this distinction to a conundrum arisen from the apophatical approach of the great *advaitin* to the core of Upaniṣadic teaching about *Brahman*.

In fact, the problems implied by negative theology possess a sort of family-likeness even across the wide gaps separating different civilizations and cultures: we are usually confronted by a more or less rich series of descriptions of a Divine *Quid* in terms of actual daily human experience, simultaneously with the peremptory denial that such a *Quid* can ever be the referent of any word, due to its being over and above human verbally-coloured articulate process of understanding and reconstructing the world of perception. Such a denial can be a purely metalinguistic proposition, as in the case of e.g. *Kenopaniṣad* 1,4, or a device of extolling the Divine *Quid*, in a way somewhat similar to the likewise denial of expressibility in the case of feelings connected with aesthetic or erotic experience: such is apparently the case of e.g. *Ecclesiasticus* 43,30 ff. It is also possible that both these functions coexist, as in the pseudo-Aeropagitical *Mystic Theology*. The very fact that

denial may be taken as praise, while does not necessarily prejudice the possibility of an exegetical construction of it as an epistemological limitative statement, shows that a strong emotional aspect may be involved and explains the equally powerfully emotional reactions to negative theology from anthropomorphically-oriented exegetes in all cultures. The conflict is between the noble urgency to destroy every human limitation and misery on one side, and the preoccupation to save the letter of the sacred utterances to whose authority one is committed on the other one. When such a conflict takes place inside the mind of a single thinker of great ingenuity and intelligence, the necessity of bridging somehow the abyss between the two diverging exigences can bring him to interesting achievements like the Scholastic theory of analogical application of positive predicates to the Divine *Quid* or the Palamite distinction between trinitary incomprehensible essence and kataphatical communicable energies in the same. It is a riddle of such kind that confronts Śaṅkara in dependence upon his peculiar treatment of *Nirguṇatva* in the Divine *Quid*, engaging him in a fight to stretch the limits of the expressive powers of human language. On one hand, he is bound by his deepest experience to take in their full import the *vākya*-s stating the inaccessibility of *Brahman* to the scope of linguistic facts; on the other hand, his sense of concreteness in face of exegetical reading of *Śruti* combined with his epistemological doctrine, recognizing *Śabda* as an independent *pramāṇa* in its own right, compels him not to desert the traditional positive descriptions. Śaṅkara's general position is made clear in this connexion by a very important passage of his *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣadbhāṣya* (2,3,6). Here he maintains that the operational efficacity of a verbal sign (*śabdapravṛtti*) can subsist, or come into being, only through its association to some specific individuating feature (*viśeṣa*) of the referent: to witness, either through association with a designation possessed by the referent (which seems to be different from, albeit intimately connected with, the verbal sign expressing it, like De Saussure's signified in respect of signifier), or through association with the peculiar appearance of the referent as apprehended by human perception, or through association with a specific connection with a known activity on the part of the referent, or through association with some distinctive character possessed by the referent in respect to other referents lacking it, or through association with the belonging of the referent to a class (this being only one instance of *viśeṣa*, and not the only mode of it, as it would seem from Śaṅkara's discussion of proper names in his *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*, 1,3,28), or, again, through association with some intrinsic quality of the referent (« ... *nāma vā rūpaṃ vā karma vā bhedo vā jātir vā guṇo vā* »). Such an inventory of the correspondences between the verbal sign and the topological features of the object-

world is obviously indebted in some degree to the linguistic categories implicit in the morphological structure of Sanskrit (for a Western parallel, cfr. Clemens Alexandrinus, *Stromata*, 5,11,81,3). It is instructive the comparison with Śaṅkara's *Bhagavadgītābhāṣya* (On whose authorship cfr. our *Śaṅkara e la rinascita del Brāhmanesimo*, Fossano, 1974, pp. 193 f.; additional evidence, triumphingly proving the correctness of traditional attribution, is given by V. Raghavan, *Bhāskara's Gītābhāṣya*, in *Beiträge zur Geistesgeschichte Indiens, Festscrift für Erich Frauwallner*, WZKSO Band XII-XIII [1968-1969] pp. 281 ff.) 13,12, where the same list is to be found with minor changes: leaving aside designation, appearance and distinctive characters, Śaṅkara puts forth the association with a connection or relationship (*saṃbandha*) of the referent with some other referent already known, exemplified as possession of wealth or cattle (*dhanī gomān*). When the verbal sign helps us in individuating a significative component in the external objective world, when it is somehow iconical (not in the sense of an onomatopoeia) in respect of such component, the primary function of the sign, viz. communication, is possible: when heard (*śrūyamāṇaś ca śrotṛbhiḥ, Bh.Gī.Bh.* 13, 12) it leads attention towards the referent, ascertaining it through a notion (*arthaṃ pratyāyayati, ibidem*). It is to such an end, that Śaṅkara considers as an illumination of the referent, brought into the field of attention as something suddendly lighted up against a background in dimness (*arthaprakāśanāya, ibidem*), that the verbal sign is uttered. What in Semantics is known as motivation in relationship between verbal sign and referent is apparently all-important in the outlook of the great *advaitin*. The referent is object, in the process of verbal enunciation, of a descriptive specification (*nirdeśa, Bṛ.Up.Bh.* 2,3,6). To utter is to describe, from the point of view of Śaṅkara. Now, all these features are grasped by linguistic knowledge in objects inside the scope of normal dual epistemological pattern, but such a scope is not ultimate, such a pattern is but a temporary building of *avidyā*. *Brahman*, albeit a condition of every epistemological level in human apprehension of the world, which cannot in any case be done away with, does not fill up an objectificable position in the dual pattern. Since in the case of *Brahman* the perception of their very ground is impossible, individuating features are not susceptible of discovery, to serve as *points d'appui* to a meaningful verbal portrayal. Verbal signs purporting to be *nirdeśa*-s of the referent *Brahman*, being unanchored to actual experience of the object, can be taken only as dispensable articial disguises (*upādhi*-s) put on it. The actual *svarūpa* of *Brahman* is not to be descriptively specified in any way (« ... *yadā punaḥ svarūpam eva nirdidikṣitaṃ bhavati nirastasarvopādhiviśeṣaṃ tadā na śakyate kenacid api prakāreṇa nirdeṣṭum* », *ibidem*). The fact that the referent

is to be linguistically comprehended in its *svarūpa*, as Śaṅkara seems to imply with his denial of such a possibility in regard of *Brahman*, is quite important: it shows that the function of verbal sign is already in itself what in Indian theory of definition is normally the function of *Lakṣaṇa*: hit the mark of the object by catching its *svarūpa*, intended not as essence like in Aristoteles' Real Definition, but as a structural configuration of experience in presence of the object, according to which the object is recognizable without errors (on this theory, cfr. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, vol. II, London[7] 1962, pp. 47 f.; M. Biardeau, *La définition dans la pensée indienne*, in *Journal Asiatique* 245 [1957], pp. 371 ff.; J. F. Staal, *The theory of definition in Indian Logic*, in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 81 [1961], pp. 122 ff.).

It is keeping in mind this at least semi-definitional function of verbal sign, that we can better understand the reading of « *Neti neti* » on the part of Śaṅkara: recurring to a metalinguistic approach, and treating as an object language the normal semantic level referring to dual experience of any given language, he employs as a device of *nirdeśa* the very denial of applicability of verbal signs in their normal relationship of linguistic description to *Brahman* as a referent. He constructs a second level relationship between this negation at the metalinguistic level and *Brahman* as a referent, understanding the fact of being a referent as the fact of being individuated in the semi-definitional way in which normally verbal signs should point out objects. *Brahman* can be recognized as it were by eliminating all other referents at the first level, that of object language. Instead of guiding the attention to a certain section of the world of objects, the *vākya* extrudes from the field of attention severally each object of such world, leaving *Brahman* alone as a not-objective subject. The warding off of all the descriptive specifications which may be given and of their referents (*prāptinirdeśa-pratiṣedha, Bṛ.Up.Bh.* 2,3,6) is the only ascertainable detail of the Divine *Quid*. It is possible that Śaṅkara be indebted for this delimitative function of negation to the *Vijñānavāda* semantic doctrine of *Apoha*, rediscovered at phonemic level by De Saussure in the West, since the *advaitin* makes use of this very term in our context to express the removal of any objectual disguise suggested by verbal signs as operational value of the Upaniṣadic negative statement (*sarvopādhiviśeṣāpohena*). But we must be cautious in the acknowledgement of this coincidence of approach between Śaṅkara and Buddhists: in fact, he is prepared to take *Apoka* only in this specific connexion. Śaṅkara refuses to accept its application whenever the individuating function through negation is to be exercised by a not negative verbal description. It is only the fact that *all* possible variables are included into refusal by « *Neti neti* », that legitimates us in taking it as a *nirdeśa* of a sort (« ... *Yad yat prāptaṃ tat tat niṣidhyate tathā ca sati anirdiṣṭāsaṅkā brahmaṇaḥ parihṛtā bhavati anyathā hi nakāradvayena prakṛtadvaya-pratiṣedhe yad anyat prakṛtāt pratiṣiddhadvayāt brahma tan na nirdiṣṭam kīdṛśaṃ nu khalu ity āśaṅkā na nivartiṣyate tathā ca anarthakaś*

ca sa nirdeśaḥ », *ibidem*), whereas the alleged individuating efficacity of *Apoha* in other, and less comprehensive, instances, covering but an indefinite multitude of variables without any guarantee of all-inclusiveness, is a logical impossibility. To quote Śaṅkara's *Upadeśasāhasrī* 2,18,148):

Apoho yadi bhinnānāṃ vṛttis tasya kathaṃ gavi /
nābhavā bhedakāḥ sarve viśeṣā vā kathañcana //

Such being the general perspective of his approach in regard of negative theology, Śaṅkara is confronted in *Taittirīyopaniṣad* 2,1,1 with the famous *vākya* « *Satyaṃ jñānam anantam brahma* ». He has to bring out the distinctive flavour of each designation in the Upaniṣadic description, being well conscious that only one of them is susceptible of being constructed as a negative individuation (« ... *Tatra anantaśabdaḥ antavattvapratiṣedhadvāreṇa viśeṣaṇam / satyajñānaśabdau tu svārthasamarpaṇenaiva viśeṣaṇe bhavataḥ //* »), and in the same time to keep on denying the applicability of these designations to *Brahman*. He succeeds in this difficult task *inter alia* by sketching the distinction between the two different modes of relationship between verbal sign and referent about which we are concerned here.

Śaṅkara begins with pointing out that the verbal signs in the *vākya* are normally associated with individuating features (« ... *Viśeṣaṇārthāni padāni* », *ibidem*). As referent (*viśeṣya*) of them, *Brahman* can be object of a legitimate psychological pulsion to apprehend it by verbal means (*vivakṣitatva*), and so the *Śruti* is in its own right meaningful. As in worldly contexts, we are here in a situation in which our attention is brought on the referent by distinguishing it from a background of other referents (« *viśeṣyāntarebhyo nirdhāryate* », *ibidem*), and such is the proper function of every verbal description. The difficulty is, as Śaṅkara himself admits, that we cannot treat the relationship between *Brahman* and its background as the one between other referents and the same: *Brahman* is not on the stage, if we can use this metaphor, but the spectator of it, and the only one besides that. The so-called *viśeṣya* is such in a way so wholly different from other ones, that one might even doubt its being a *viśeṣya* at all. As Sureśvarācārya cleanly puts it,

Nanu vyabhicarad vastu syād viśeṣyaṃ viśeṣaṇaiḥ /
brahmāntarād ṛte tv atra kuto brūhi viśeṣyatā //

(*Taittirīyopanisadbhāṣyavārtika* 2,49). The *pūrvapakṣin* in Śaṅkara contends that there can be meaningfulness in the operation of verbally enucleating a referent (*viśeṣaṇasyārthattvam*) when, and only when, our attention is thereby fixed on a member of a given class, arresting, as it were, our scanning over the class as a complex of possible referents, each one susceptible of being individuated by apt specification (« *yadā hy anekāni dravyāṇi ekajātīyāny anekaviśeṣaṇayogīni ca* », *Tai. Up. Bh.* 2,1,1). But *Brahman* is totally set apart, as the sun in respect of the objects that it illuminates. The *uttarapakṣin* answers by introducing

the distinction between *Viśeṣaṇa* and *Lakṣaṇa*. With *Brahman* we have not an instance of simple de-finition, individuation, taking away of the referent from a collection of more or less similar objects, it is true. We must apprehend it in itself, without any reference to background, in its concrete irreplaceable peculiarity. And whereas the normal function of communicating individuating features, *viśeṣaṇa*-s, as performed by verbal signs in regard of objects correlated to them as *viśeṣya*-s, would have been sufficient to distinguish *Brahman*, if it could be brought inside the field of attention like any other referent, the actual impossibility of such en epistemological operation makes necessary to construct a new function, more wide in its scope and application, to conserve the meaningfulness of verbal signs in respect of the Divine *Quid*. Śaṅkara is quite aware that every possible positive predicate is susceptible to be read just as the negation of the symmetrically contrary negative predicate, without implying any adfirmation of its own (such is the case with the instrumental *pratijñā* on the part of *Mādhyamika*-s, and we find the very same negative approach in *Kevalādvaitavāda*, for instance in Vācaspatimiśra's treatment of *ananyatva* in *Bhāmatī*, 2,1,14), and he suggests that even in this way the Upaniṣadic descriptions could be disentangled by the riddle of the apparent application to *Brahman* on their part of illegitimate *viśeṣaṇa*-s, conveyed through verbal signs. But such an exegetical treatment, so like the Buddhist attainment of *Lakṣaṇaśūnyatā*, would imply to the eyes of the great *advaitin* a price seemingly too high, as one can understand from the objection put in the mouth of the *pūrvapakṣin* that verbal signs simply negative in their function cannot have any referent, as in the case of the witty nonsense *śloka*:

Mṛgatṛṣṇāmbhasi snātaḥ khapuṣpakṛtaśekharaḥ /
eṣa vandhyāsuto yāti śaśaśṛṅgadhanurdharaḥ //.

He states in the answer to such a remark that *Śruti*'s descriptions conserve their power of restricting somehow to their referent the range of their designative function (*viśeṣyaniyantṛtva*). Even if their original semantic function is to be substituted with a new, different one, *arthavattva* is to be conserved. We could say that the fact of having a referent, of being meaningful in respect of it, is the minimum commune factor between the two different functions given by Śaṅkara to verbal signs. The new function is called by him « *Lakṣaṇa* ». This term has many technical meanings in Sanskrit uses. Śaṅkara delimits its particular import in his metalinguistic construction by distinguishing the structure *lakṣaṇa-lakṣya* from the normal one *viśeṣaṇa-viśeṣya* in respect of the scope of delimitation by verbal means. A *lakṣaṇa*-description is universal as the negative individuation by the « *Neti neti* » *vākya*, it forms its positive counterpart as contrasted with the normal conveying of individuating features on the part of language: both metalinguistic *apoha* and *lakṣaṇa* are opposed to *viśeṣaṇa* under such aspect. But here the similarity stops. While the negation is not bringing our awareness on any particular referent, but only drawing it away from any referent known,

lakṣaṇa concentrates immediately our awareness on the referent, while the rest of the universe is left out. The scanning on the part of attention of the series of possible referents is eliminated in both instances, but whereas in the first one such scanning is prevented by the utter denial of its efficacity, in the second one it is replaced by a shifting in verbal sign's appeal to attention. I would like to make use here of a photographical metaphore for the sake of clearness. *Lakṣaṇa* has the same ratio to *viśeṣaṇa* as a blown-up picture to a normal one: the interesting detail fills the entire screen, making from the very beginning of cognitive process unnecessary to point out it, as it would be the case with a more complex image, containing several details barring out the possibility of immediate individuation of every one of them. In *lakṣaṇa*, verbal communication, instead of guiding with its descriptive role the listener's awareness in its search for the referent, brings such awareness to the referent with not-delayed, lightning-like, immediacy. Its appeal to awareness implies a different process of apprehension that one would be tempted to call intuition, if such a term were not conveying a note of lack of clearness utterly extraneous to *brahmānubhūti*. The example given by Śaṅkara to illustrate this kind of *anapekṣa* pointing out of referent is the description apparently semi-tautological of *ākāśa* as *avakāśapradātṛ*, which speaks to our feelings of room-awareness without any relationship to a background of objectual experience. By making use of the term « *Lakṣaṇa* », Śaṅkara shows his keen semantic sensibility: whether one be commited to derive it from the root √ *Lakṣ* or from the root √ *Lag*, its import of device whose operational efficacity is to bring on immediate attention on the part of observer-listener is unmistakable, when we take into account its semantic interplay with the cognate or phonetically convergent term « *Lakṣa* », whose figurative force as a pointer out as target/mark has never been lessened by technical uses. One must admit that very often « *Lakṣaṇa* » stands in normal Indian uses for what Śaṅkara calls « *Viśeṣaṇa* » (such is the case, for instance, with *svalakṣaṇa*-s as datation features in Dhanyaviṣṇu's inscription on the great Gupta *Varāha* at Ēraṇ, on which cfr. *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* vol. III, p. 159, line 2 f.; with the sense of « individuating marks » that is to be found already in Kauṭilya (cfr. 1,12,1; 2,7,33; 2,10,40; 2,11,116; 2,14,7; 2,18,4; 2,29,11; 7,6,41 [near to the sense of the perhaps related term « *Liṅga* » in its logical meaning of sign in the process of *anumāna*]; 7,9,12. But in 3,1,15 the sense is more akin to Śaṅkara's one — I owe the signalling of these passes to the courtesy of Prof. Oscar Botto —; with the very terminology of logic definition, in its relational context; with the designation of *lakṣaṇa* given to phenomenization of *ālayavijñāna* in *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* 37,10 ff. and 38,5 ff.; with the same designation given to secondary characteristics in Patañjali's *Yogasūtra* 3,13; with the sense of grammatical rules embodied in *sūtra*-s [cfr. Renou, *Terminologie grammaticale du sanskrit*, Paris, 1957, pp. 261 and 483], and so on).

A very near disciple of Śaṅkara as Padmapāda is so aware of this fact, that he substitutes his teacher's *viśeṣaṇa* with *viśeṣalakṣaṇa*, distinguishing from it Śaṅkara's *lakṣaṇa* specified as *upalakṣaṇa* (cfr. *Pañcapādikā, varṇaka* 5,2 [Madras Government Oriental Series n. 155, p. 296]).

In delineating the new relationship between verbal sign and referent, Śaṅkara takes into account also the alteration of meaning undergone by the normal verbal picture in its becoming instrumental to *lakṣaṇa*: its original descriptive function is in fact eliminated by such redirection (« ... *lakṣaṇārthapradhānāni viśeṣaṇāni na viśeṣaṇapradhānāny eva* », *Tai. Up. Bh.* 2,1,1). The proper referents of verbal signs as *viśeṣaṇa*-s, in this case a *buddhidharma* for « *Jñāna* » and *bāhyasattāsāmānya* for « *Satya* », are subordinated to the individuation of a collective referent, in regard of which every verbal sign is not enunciative, but indicative (*tal lakṣyate na ca ucyate, ibidem*): if *arthavattva* of words is rescued, *avākyārthatva* of *Brahman* must be saved too. Śaṅkara knows quite well the semantic device of *lakṣaṇā* as suggestive indirect use of the verbal sign (cfr. for instance his *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*, 3,1,22 and 4,1,6, where he states that it is based on connection in some degree between two different referents: « *lakṣaṇā ca yathāsaṃbhavaṃ saṃnikṛṣṭena viprakṛṣṭena vā svārthasaṃbandhena pravartate* / ». He is somewhat less strict in this respect than Kumārila (on whose views, cfr. the clear exposition by Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat, *Le Pratāparudrīya de Vidyānātha*, Pondichéry 1963, pp. 303 ff.), and it is possible that his *lakṣaṇa* feels the effects of such familiarity. The indicative function in our text is nevertheless different than in the case of *lakṣaṇā* in Śaṅkara's time (here we must dissent from the reading by Hòng-Sy-Quy, *Le moi qui me dépasse selon le Vedānta*, Saigon, 1971, p. 108 ff.). It shall be brought inside *lakṣaṇā* as a broader category later as *jahadajahallakṣaṇā* (cfr. the brilliant synthesis by Veermani Prasad Upadhyaya, *Lights on Vedānta*, Chowkhamba S.S.S. vol. 6, 1959, p. 233 f.), but for Śaṅkara it is a new, autonomous way of employing verbal description: his emphasis is not on the simple change of meaning on the part of verbal sign, but on a richer and subtler semantic phenomenon, namely that of collective relationship with a referent (on which argument see our: *Śaṅkara* cit., pp. 128; for some instances of such a phenomenon, characteristic of Śaṅkara's exegesis, cfr. *Chāndogyopaniṣadbhāṣya* 5,11,1 and *Upadeśasāhasrī* 2,18,181 ff. and 195 ff., where the *anvayavyatireka* approach is clearly exposed). Such relationship is not a change of meaning, but a mutual revelation of semantic hues that verbal signs left alone could never have explicited: each one enters a superior *Gestalt* in which the sum is someting new and different from the parts. To put it in the beautiful form of *Upadeśasāhasrī* 2,18,173,

Svārthasya hy aprahāṇena viśiṣṭārthasamarpakau /
pratyagātmāvagatyantau nānyo 'rtho 'rthād virodhyataḥ //.

It has been suggested that *Viśeṣaṇa* and *Lakṣaṇa* anticipate the two kinds of relationship between word and meaning introduced by John Stuart Mill, namely connotation and denotation. But such comparison

is misleading: on one hand, there is no distinction between sense and referent in *Viśeṣaṇa*, while such distinction emerges in *Lakṣaṇa*; on the other hand, denotation seems to be exactly corresponding to the *viśeṣaṇa* through association with designation in Śaṅkara's typology.

Not being an object, *Brahman* could not enter inside the scope of designation any more than inside that of connotation. To sum things up, the contribution to Sanskrit lexicon as a metalanguage on the part of Śaṅkara that we have been here briefly taking into account is an entirely new and vital contribution to metalinguistics in general, and it proves once more how deep and supple an instrument of thinking Sanskrit language can afford us.