

PROPOSAL FOR AN APABHRAṂṢA DICTIONARY

In view of the importance of Apabhraṁṣa both as a medium of literary expression and as a stage in the evolution of the Indo-Aryan languages, it is surprising that no dictionary of the language is available. Of course there are reasons both theoretical and practical why this should be so. Apabhraṁṣa is distinguished from related languages by, in decreasing significance, its phonology, morphology, syntax and vocabulary. Because its vocabulary is only marginally distinctive, it could be argued that a dictionary is, of all possible aids to the study of the language, the least urgently required. In any case, the composition of a dictionary being an enormous undertaking, one may well question the viability of a project that sets off without firm prospects of collaboration or publication. In proposing such a project, I would say in its defence, firstly, that Apabhraṁṣa texts are difficult to read not only because of the vocabulary of the language but also because of the poetics of the texts: the figures of style based on homonymity and synonymity which are common to all kāvya, and those phonic and expressive figures of repetition that are characteristic of Apabhraṁṣa. A dictionary could help the reader with these, as well as throwing some light on the working of the language. Secondly, if the lexical work is done from the outset in an electronic medium, as I propose to do it, progressive printouts could be issued to interested scholars. One can not expect lexicographical miracles from computers, but they can perform certain tedious operations very efficiently, notably the manipulation of files and the sorting of data. The interval of time between the writing-in of additional material or revisions and the production of a complete new printed version is negligible. The material is easily portable, in the form of a magnetic tape, and the project could be taken over in working order by other scholars. I propose to work on two fronts, the compilation of existing glossaries such as those of Jacobi and Alsdorf, and the preparation of indices verborum of certain texts; the embryonic dictionary will be nourished with material derived from both fronts.

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