

REFLECTIONS ON THE GRAMMATICAL TRADITION
IN TIBET AND ITS CONNECTION
WITH INDIAN BUDDHISTIC SPECULATION ON LANGUAGE

The Indian concept of sentence is an extremely interesting object of study, not least because it provides insight into many non-linguistic aspects of Indian thought. Ancient Indian linguistics is a manifestation of a mode of thinking which is common to Indian philosophy in general, most clearly to be observed, perhaps, in the *Vākyapadīya*. However, in the same manner as is the case in our modern cultural sphere, the Indian grammarians cherished the illusion that grammar is a totally autonomous branch of study which demands special methods, often technical in the extreme. This technicality of presentation of Indian grammar has in modern Indology produced the prejudice that the study of *vyākaraṇa* is a study of no real interest outside a narrow circle of specialists. The fact, however, that grammar was considered to be the entrance to all sciences (*sarvavidyānām mukhaṃ vyākaraṇam*) ought to be sufficient to guarantee grammar a place of honour in all studies that have Indian culture as their object. It would be easy to show, also, that the *vyākaraṇa* and the methods of the Nirukta and the *kośas* have played an important rôle in the work of translating Indian texts into other Asiatic languages, Tibetan in the first place¹, but also Chinese and Manchu, Uigurian, Mongolian, Khotanese and so on.

1. Cf. the following quotation from the introduction to the *Madhyavyutpatti* (Sgra sbyor bam po gñis pa), see N. SIMONSSON, *Indo-tibetische Studien*, in «Die Methoden der tibetischen Übersetzer, untersucht im Hinblick auf die Bedeutung ihrer Übersetzungen für die Sanskritphilologie», I, Uppsala, 1957, p. 244:

*skad kyi miñ gces so 'chal gyis kyañ bsnan nas theg pa che chuñ gi gzuñ las
ji ltar 'byuñ ba dañ / gna'i mkhan po chen po nā gā rju na dañ / ba su
bhandu la sogs pas ji ltar bśad pa dañ / byā ka ra na'i sgra'i lugs las ji
skad du 'dren pa dañ yañ bstun te / mjal dka'ba rnams kyañ chig so sor
phral nas getan chigs kyis bśad de gzuñ du bris /*

Nachdem man an Hand der wichtigsten Wörter der Sprache (*skad kyi miñ gces so 'chal gyis*) eine Erweiterung (*bsnan*) [des genannten Registers] gemacht hatte,

I will take the definition of *vākya* found in the Mahābhāṣya (2, 1, 1, vt. 9) as the starting-point for some reflections on the Indian grammatical tradition in Tibet: *ākhyātaṃ sa-avyaya-kāraka-viśeṣaṇaṃ vākyaṃ*, « a verb qualified by uninflected words (i.e. adverbs) and case-inflected nouns is a sentence ». Since this was found to be too circumlocutory the definition was boiled down to what was absolutely necessary:

ākhyātaṃ saviśeṣaṇaṃ vākyaṃ: « a verb with qualification is a sentence ». The gist of this is that the verb, which constitutes the center of the sentence, is *viśeṣya*, the element qualified, the rest is *viśeṣaṇa*, qualification.

Before going into details, I want to state my general position, viz. that this view of the sentence is the reflection of a Hinduistic mode of thinking, whereas a Buddhistic pattern of thought would be expected to lead to a differing theory of the sentence. This is actually the case, but proving it would be too tiresome in a short lecture, because the discussion of very complicated philosophic texts would be involved. Therefore, I will limit myself to some random observations in the present lecture.

Yāska's definition of the verb, *ākhyāta*, is in its turn on the line of Patañjali's definition of the sentence. It runs: *bhāva-pradhānam ākhyātam*. In the same manner as the sentence, the verb may be regarded as containing two elements, a *viśeṣya*, called *bhāva*, and a *viśeṣaṇa*, consisting of the sense of the root. It would be idle pains, should I enter into an exhaustive discussion of *bhāva*, but a reference to Durga's commentary on Nirukta I, 1, 2 appears necessary, because it shows that, acc. to Durga, the *bhāva* is something whose existence does not disappear, even in the *pralaya*, it is *ātmā atyanta-avināśadharmā*, acc. to this quotation: *yena ātmabhāvena bhavana-mātra-abhisambandhinā pralayakāle 'vatiṣṭhate so ātmā atyanta-avināśa-dharmā bhāva ity ucyate*. *Bhāva*, then, might be conceived as something « absolute », « *asaṃskṛta* », a conception which ought to render thoughts like these unpalatable to Buddhists who adhered to the idea of *kṣaṇavāda* and of *saṃskṛta* and *asaṃskṛta dharmas*.

The reason for the assumption of *bhāva* is the following. Just as we refer to a substance, to a « thing », by a (demonstrative) pronom (*adas*, that cow, that horse, etc.), in the same way we refer to verbal actions by a *pro-verb*: *bhavati*. *Adas* and *bhavati* are characterized as *sāmānyavācīn* by Durga, as instances of *viśeṣavācīn* contrasting to *bhavati* he gives *āste*, *śete*, *vrajati*, *tiṣṭhati*. (*Bhavati iti sarvakriyāprasavabījabhūtam*

brachte man [diese Wörter] in Einklang (*bstun*) mit dem, wie sie den Texten des Mahāyāna und des Hīnayāna zu entnehmen sind, mit dem, wie sie von den alten grossen Gelehrten Nāgārjuna, Vasubandhu und anderen erklärt wurden, sowie mit dem wie sie nach der Sprachmethode (*sgrā'i lugs*) des Vyākaraṇa analysiert wurden und die schwer verständlichen [aus mehreren Wörtern zusammengesetzten] Ausdrücke wurden in die einzelnen Wörter (*chig*) zerlegt und mit Gründen (*gtan chig kyi*) erklärt, und [das Ganze] wurde in ein Buch (*gžun*) geschrieben.

astitvamātram eva nirupapadena bhavatiśabdena ucyate ity upapannam bhavati sāmānyavācivam. Bhavati: « Since mere *astitva* which is, as it were, the seed for the birth of all verbs, is expressed by the word *bhavati* without any subordinate word, the characterization as expressiveness of generality is appropriate »).

In this connection I think a reference to Aristotle's linguistic thought is pertinent, in any case the similarity demands a certain amount of interest. The following quotation dealing with *noun* and *verb* I take from *περὶ ἑρμηνείας*, as found in the following edition: Aristote, *Organon*, I: Catégories; II: De l'interprétation. Nouvelle traduction et notes par J. Tricot, Paris, 1936:

Ὅνομα μὲν οὖν ἐστὶ φωνὴ σημαντικὴ κατὰ συνθήκην
ἀνευ χρόνου, ἧς μηδὲν μέρος ἐστὶ σημαντικὸν κεχωρι-
σμένον· ἐν γὰρ τῷ Κάλλιππος τὸ ἵππος οὐδὲν καθ' αὐτὸ
σημαίνει, ὥσπερ ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῷ καλὸς ἵππος.

« Le nom est un son vocal, possédant une signification conventionnelle, sans référence au temps, et dont aucune partie ne présente de signification quand elle est prise séparément. Dans le nom Κάλλιππος, en effet, ἵππος n'a en lui-même et par lui-même aucune signification, comme dans l'expression καλὸς ἵππος ».

Ῥῆμα δέ ἐστι τὸ προσσημαῖνον χρόνον, οὗ μέρος οὐδὲν
σημαίνει χωρὶς· ἐστὶ δὲ τῶν καθ' ἑτέρου λεγομένων σημείων.
λέγω δ' ὅτι προσσημαίνει χρόνον, οἷον ὑγίεια μὲν ὄνομα, τὸ
δ' ὑγιαίνει ῥῆμα· προσσημαίνει γὰρ τὸ νῦν ὑπάρχειν.

« Le verbe est ce qui ajoute à sa propre signification celle du temps: aucune de ses parties ne signifie rien prise séparément, et il indique toujours quelque chose d'affirmé de quelque autre chose. Je dis qu'il signifie, en plus de sa signification propre, le temps: par exemple, *santé* est un nom, tandis que *est en bon santé* est un verbe, car il ajoute à sa propre signification l'existence actuelle de cet état ».

In his work *Metaphysics*, which I quote after Steinthal: *Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft bei den Griechen und Römern*, Berlin, 1863 (p. 236), Aristotle is more outspoken: *ἄνθρωπος βαδίζει* is equivalent to *ἄνθρωπος βαδίζων ἐστί*.

In view of the fact that the description of the Tibetan grammar given by Thon-mi Sambhoṭa and others owes much of its inspiration to Indian *vyākaraṇa*, it comes as a surprise that the most striking characteristic of the Pāṇinian *vyākaraṇa* is missing from it. I refer (1) to the fact that the verb is the center of the sentence and (2) to the reciprocal dependence of (3) *kāraka* and (4) verb in the sentence, and (5) to the beautifully balanced system of *kāraka* and *vibhakti*. These factors form a harmonious pattern in the Pāṇinian system.

If the harmony of the pattern is disturbed, e.g. by a change of one factor, another factor may be expected to undergo changes in function. This is what is likely to have happened in the case of *kāraka* and *vibhakti* in a noun-centered Tibetan system. This is an hypothesis which requires

preliminary studies of a great number of details before it can be confirmed or refuted.

In this paper I wish to draw attention to some passages in the Tibetan national grammar as compared with certain Indian texts and some generally known facts.

For the texts of the Tibetan grammar I refer to the following editions: Les *śloka*s grammaticaux de Thonmi Sambhoṭa, avec leurs commentaires. Traduits du Tibétain et annotés par Jacques Bacot, Paris, 1928.

Tibetische Nationalgrammatik. Das Sum cu pa und Rtags kyi 'ajug pa des Grosslamas von Peking Rol pa i rdo rje. Mit Übersetzung und Anmerkungen versehen von Johannes Schubert, Leipzig, 1937.

Roy A. Miller, *Studies in the Grammatical Tradition in Tibet*, Amsterdam, 1976.

The sūtras ascribed to an otherwise unknown author Thon-mi Sambhoṭa are written in an extremely laconic style which makes them difficult to interpret but easy to distort by commentators who cherish opinions of their own. The following sūtra in the beginning of the grammar is a good instance of this (Sum ču pa 1):

- (1) *yi ge* (2) *ā li* (3) *kā li* (4) *gñis* /
 (5) *āli* (6) *gsal byed* (7) *i sogs* (8) *bži* /
 (9) *kā li* (10) *sum ču* (11) *tham pa'o* /

There are (4) two groups of (1) letters, (2) *āli* and (3) *kāli*.

(6) The phonemes (5) *āli* are (8) four: (7) *i*, etc. (=i, u, e, o);

(6) the phonemes (9) *kāli* are (10) (11) thirty in number.

Gsal byed « making clear » renders Sanskrit *vyañjana*. In the Indian grammatical terminology *vyañjana* means « consonant ». Also the etymology *anvag bhavati* which we know from the Mahābhāṣya, « being after [the vowels] », is known to the Tibetans, in the form of *phyi mo*. (This is given a Chinese etymology by Roy A. Miller, *Studies* p. 53, referring to Chos kyi grags pa's Tibetan-Chinese Dictionary). The context forbids us to interpret (6) *gsal byed* as consonant. Tibetan commentators as well as modern Tibetologists have tried to interpret it as a verb (see Miller, *Studies* pp. 33-5). The attempts have not been successful. In my opinion the only reasonable interpretation is phoneme. The reason is that *vyañjana* means phoneme in the linguistic speculations of the Buddhist philosophers. See Yaśomitra's commentary on Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa* (*Abhidharmakośa* and *Bhāṣya* of Ācārya Vasubandhu with *Sphuṭārthā* Commentary of Ācārya Yaśomitra, critically ed. by Swami Dwarikadas Shastri. *Bauddha Bharati* Series 5, Vārāṇasī, 1970).

Vasubandhu: *vyañjanam akṣaram iti / varṇa ity arthaḥ* /

Yaśomitra: *na tu hal eva; acāma api vyañjanakatvena iṣṭatvāt* /

« *Vyañjana* is the same as *akṣara*. The meaning is phoneme (*varṇa*).

Not only the consonants are called *vyañjana*, for also the vowels (*ac*) are in our system considered as *vyañjana* ».

Rtags 'jug 32:

(1) *yi ge 'i* (2) *khoṅs nas* (3) *miñ* (4) *dbyuñ ste /*

(5) *miñ gi* (6) *khoṅs nas* (7) *chig* (8) *phyuñ nas /*

(9) *chig gia* (10) *don rnams* (11) *ston par byed /*

(2) Out of (1) letters (4) let come (3) names,

(6) out of (5) names (8) let come (7) phrases;

(9) by phrases (10) meanings (11) are shown.

(9) *chig* is equivalent to *pada* in Sanskrit, not, however, in the Pāṇinian sense of « word », but in the Buddhist sense of *pada*, more or less corresponding to « text » or in the Pāṇinian sense of *vākya* as opposed to *ṛtti* « expression combinée... qui consiste en l'emploi d'un dérivé et plus souvent d'un composé » (Renou, Terminologie grammaticale du sanskrit, s.v. *ṛtti* and *vākya*). The commentary on the second line (5) *miñ gi* (6) *khoṅs nas* etc. is important: (5) *miñ gi* (6) *khoṅs nas te miñ du ma 'dus pa las chig can dan gyi ka ba lta du dbye ba phyuñ nas* « Out of names », i.e. out of a set of several names « let come » « phrases », i.e. jointed (*dbye ba*) [expressions] such as *can dan gyi ka ba* (pillar [made] of sandal-tree). The *chig can dan gyi ka ba* is opposed to *can da ka ba* characterized as *miñ* in the commentary on the first line *yi ge'i khoṅs nas*, etc.².

Vasubandhu gives the following etymology of *pada*: *padam... yena kriyā-guṇa-kāla-sambandhaviśeṣā gamyante*. This, of course, is founded on the well-known *karāṇa-sādhana* explanation: *padayate anena iti padam*, and on the rule *sarve gatyarthā jñānārthāḥ*. Yaśomitra gives this as the *vigraha* of the long *saṃāsa*: *kriyā-guṇa-kālānām sambandhaviśeṣāḥ*, which is a bit surprising to me, as I personally would find another interpretation more reasonable: not a *tatpuruṣa*, but a *karmadhāraya*: *kriyā-guṇa-kālāś ca te sambandhaviśeṣāś ca*. Yaśomitra gives as examples of *kriyā*: *pacati*, *paṭhati*, *gacchati*, of *guṇa*: *kṛṣṇaḥ*, *gaurah*, *raktaḥ*; of *kāla*: *pacati*, *pakṣyati*, *apākṣīt*. In terms of *viśeṣya* and *viśeṣaṇa*, this view of the sentence would amount to *nāman* being the *viśeṣya*, whereas verbs, expressive of *action* and *time*, and adjectives (expressive of *qualities*) would be *viśeṣaṇa*. This theory of the sentence must, I suggest, be considered as more in accordance with the Buddhistic presuppositions than the verb-centered sentence. The time at my disposal does not allow me

2. Cf. my essay *On the concept of sentence in ancient Indian and Tibetan theory and on the function of case particles in Tibetan according to Tibetan grammarians*, in « *Fenno-ugrica Suecana* », 5. In honorem Bo Wickman. Uppsala, 1982, pp. 287 ff.

to enter deeper into the problems caused secondarily by this Buddhist view. Just one thing: the interpretation of the Buddhist speculations on language must of necessity be made in connection with the study of the theories of the dharmas. For my part, I think these studies will have to wait until one of my students has completed his thesis on the dharmas in the different Buddhist schools. The problem of the *paññatti-dhammas* is of particular interest in this connection. Quite especially so in the interpretation of some passages of Aggavaṃsa's *Saddanīti*. One of the relevant passages is Sutta 549 *asantaṃ santaṃ (i)va kappīyati tañca* and the illustrative example given by Aggavaṃsa: *saññogo jāyati*. (By the way, this example is in fact to the point, since in Theravādic abhidhamma *saññoga* is a *paññatti-dhamma*, and therefore considered to be *asantaṃ*).

Yaśomitra enters into a most interesting discussion of whether *nāman* is a *saṃjñā*, i.e. a *caitasika-dharma*, or a *saṃjñākaraṇa*, an element that makes a *caitasika-dharma* appear. I think these two examples indicate sufficiently the importance of the study of *Abhidharma* for the understanding of the speculations on language in Buddhism. Otherwise the studies of Buddhist linguistics will certainly run the risk of resulting in complete chaos.

In conclusion to these observations I would like to say that, to my mind, it seems fairly natural that the Tibetans, being ardent Buddhists, tried to create a theory of grammar that was not in glaring contrast to the fundamental tenets of Buddhist philosophy. Bearing in mind that Buddhist grammarians like Candragomin and Aggavaṃsa did accept the Pāṇinian system of *kāraka* and the verb-centered sentence, this is, indeed, a fact more surprising and more in need of explanation than the fact that the Tibetan chose to derive inspiration from the philosophical linguistics of their Indian fellow-buddhists.