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Meanings Out of Rules. Definitions, Functions and Uses of *Paribhāṣā*s in Śrautasūtras, Gṛhyasūtras, Vyākaraṇa, Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta

Abstract: The study of the concept of meta-language, meta-linguistic devices, meta-rules and hermeneutic rules is pivotal to understand the linguistic as well as philosophical development of Indian textual history. While writing their works, the authors recur to linguistic, lexical, stylistic and doctrinal peculiarities. Sometime, in order to facilitate the reading, the authors themselves insert into their treatises some hermeneutical rules concerning concepts and technical terms. When such insertions are not present, it is likely to find signs, suggestions or abbreviations referring to those interpretative tools. All these devices are collectively called *paribhāṣā*s. The word of *paribhāṣā* variously translated as "meta-rule", "interpretative-rule", "hermeneutic-key", "indication", "technical definition" has been very scarcely investigated within the history of Indology. This is a proposal of a series of 6 articles, an introduction and a series of abstracts and biodata of the authors.

Keywords: *paribhāṣā*, meta-rules, interpretative rules, hermeneutic rules

Preface: The genesis

The study of the concept of meta-language, meta-linguistic devices, meta-rules and hermeneutic rules is pivotal for exploring not only the linguistic horizons of Indian textual history but also its philosophical developments.

While composing their texts, authors usually resort to linguistic, lexical, stylistic and doctrinal characteristic. Occasionally, in order to facilitate the reading, *śāstrakāra*s themselves insert into their treatises some hermeneutical rules regarding concepts and technical terms. Moreover, when there are no such insertions, we are likely to find signs, suggestions or abbreviations referring to those interpretative tools. These typical devices are collectively called *paribhāṣā*s.

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The term *paribhāṣā* is linked in particular to grammatical literature, and specifically to the most famous and authoritative Indian book of grammar (*vyākaraṇa*), the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* of Pāṇini, where the *paribhāṣā* tool is fully developed throughout the *sūtra*s. Often translated as "meta-rule", the word *paribhāṣā* is a primary derivative from the Sanskrit root *bhāṣ*, which means "to express, to speak clearly, to talk", preceded by the prefix *pari* "around", "beyond", used to indicate a discourse that encircles a crucial theme.[1] Thus a *paribhāṣā* represents a link with the context, an element placed between text and context in order to ensure the fulfilment of the purpose of the text. Hence it is to be interpreted as an element beyond discourse but which simultaneously surrounds and contains the discourse itself, providing special hermeneutical tools (see Chierichetti, this volume).

Furthermore, a *paribhāṣā* can be seen as an explanation, as a rule aptly employed in a wider context, a validating rule that becomes effective by means of other rules: a rule explaining rules, namely a meta-rule. *Ergo*, the term *paribhāṣā* has been variously translated as "meta-rule", "interpretative-rule", "hermeneutic-key", "indication", "technical definition".

It is precisely this issue, briefly outlined in these few lines, that will be analyzed in the following pages. It is a fact that although the *paribhāṣā* issue is not new in the history of Indological studies, it has been only slightly investigated and never treated from a broader unifying perspective.

For the first time the series of articles presented here cover and analyze an important technical field, which crosses transversally – temporally as well as philosophically – several disciplines of Indian intellectual history. Wherever this same issue has been seriously examined, the analysis is limited to specific fields such as the ritualistic or the grammatical. In this volume, which focuses entirely on the concept, functions and uses of *paribhāṣā*, we have attempted to include the research of specialists of the principal disciplines concerned with *paribhāṣā*s and to connect the various stages of development of this concept. I believe that these articles propose some interesting developments and innovations in the study of meta-rules in the South-Asian milieu. While the volume obviously does not pretend to be exhaustive, I perceive it as a useful technical introduction to such a truly important issue.

Everything began with the GSMI (Turin, 23 June 2012), when Alberto Pelissero (Department of Humanities, University of Turin) decided to convene a group of colleagues in order to discuss a subject which would concern all our different fields of research: this was the concept of *paribhāṣā*. As far as I know this is the first attempt to bring together different *śāstra*s on the common ground of *paribhāṣā*.

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1 The prefix *pari* is very close to the Greek prefix *meta-* "after, above, beyond", which convey the idea of transcendence see Chierichetti, this volume.

Thanks go to Alberto Pelissero not only for the idea and the work that went into organizing our first meeting, but also for the idea of the title, which he borrowed playing with Frits Staal's "*Ritual and Mantras: Rules Without Meaning*" (Staal 1990). Along the way, we gained the precious contribution of Julieta Rotaru who agreed to publish here the second part of an article which had appeared in 2010 (see Rotaru, this volume).

As will be shown throughout the volume, the many faces and declensions of the concept of *paribhāṣā* permit a multi-disciplinary Indological approach and leave room for a rather multifarious range of interpretations. This is the reason why I see this volume as being merely a preliminary step towards wider research, perhaps including all those disciplines which we have not been able to include in this first labor. And for this reason the volume embodies all the merits as well as all the shortcomings of a preliminary survey. There are, indeed, other Indological fields which should be investigated under the magnifying glass of *paribhāṣā*. I do believe that a future endeavor also involving Nyāya, old and new, Dharmaśāstra, Alaṃkāraśāstra, Āyurveda, Jyotiṣa, Mathematics, etc., might prove quite interesting for the world of Indology. Clearly, in order to solve those problems and answer the questions raised while working on the Śrautasūtras, new themes should also accompany a further analysis of the very origins of *paribhāṣā*, namely Śrautasūtras, Pūrva Mīmāṃsā, as well as the almost inexhaustible Vyākaraṇa.

The reader will find here a short selection of articles concerning the main disciplines involved in the use of *paribhāṣā*s, highlighting their major definitions, purposes and functions, whether such tools are considered as meta-rules, interpretative-rules, hermeneutical tools, restrictions/limitations, conventions, definitions or maxims.

The first of these articles is by Alberto Pelissero who through a compulsory general survey lists the main disciplines concerned with *paribhāṣā* and focuses on the problems surrounding this concept throughout the history of the Indian intellectual tradition.

The second work, that takes shape out of the analysis of S.C. Chakrabarti (1980), attempts to outline a story of the *paribhāṣā*s in the Śrautasūtras. Here Pietro Chierichetti shows that *paribhāṣā* is an explanation, an element acting around the discourse as a framework for what is said: it is a rule that is valid in a wider context than that of the object under analysis, that goes "beyond" discourse. A *paribhā* represents a unique opportunity for taking a look at the ritual in itself, at the "ritual string", in opposition to every "discourse of the ritual". This rule's validity is put into effect through the other rules expressed within the text; it is, in other words, a meta-rule. However, the subject of the relationship between *paribhāṣā*s and the texts of the *śruti* is still uncharted territory: the

categorizations that have thus far been suggested are weak or not useful and necessitate stronger foundations.

In the third section, Julieta Rotaru technically deals with a Gṛhyasūtra, the *Kauśikasūtra* of the *Atharvaveda*. The *Kauśikasūtra* has three sets of general rules: the first two (1.1–8 *cum* 1.9–23) opening up the *sūtra*-text consecutively, having an application to the adjoining context, and the third one (7.1–9.7) seemingly prescribed for the rest of the text. The understanding of the *Kauśikasūtra* draws heavily on ascertaining the correct meaning of these *paribhāṣā*s. The general rule 8.10 is an instance of such *crux filologorum*, wherein, regardless of the emendation, the enunciation apparently has little meaning and the *paribhāṣā*, as a whole, seems inapplicable. Here sixteen cases are discussed in which the *paribhāṣā* 8.10 might be applied, beginning with the instances indicated by the two commentators, Dārila and Keśava.

The fourth article, jointly written by Maria-Piera Candotti and Tiziana Pontillo, targets three landmarks in the history of the *paribhāṣā*s' development. Two of these landmarks descended from the earliest testimony of Vyākaraṇa meta-rules, i. e. those included in Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī* (fifth–fourth century BCE), and one has been handed down as the first independent collection of *paribhāṣā*s, attributed to Vyāḍi. In particular, the authors highlight a shift between Kātyāyaṇa's (third century BCE) integrative approach (*vacana*) and Patañjali's (second century BCE) recourse to implicit *paribhāṣā*s in the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* as a powerful hermeneutical tool. A shift that helps interpret the need for a validation and collection of implicit Pāṇinian *paribhāṣā*s as carried out by authors such as Vyāḍi.

The analysis which is the subject of the next article is concerned with Pūrva Mīmāṃsā, where we find two types of *paribhāṣā*s (called *nyāya*s), namely general rules and meta-rules. Here Elisa Freschi points out that the entire Pūrva Mīmāṃsā is a system of meta-rules for the interpretation of the sentences found mainly in the Brāhmaṇas and argues that it is this systematicity which distinguishes the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā from its Śrautasūtra forerunners. Finally, the author notes, interestingly, that the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā meta-rules are not strictly formalized like those of the Vyākaraṇa. Hence, in this fourth section *paribhāṣā*s common to these two systems are detected and discussed.

The last article re-analyzes some standpoints of the notion of *paribhāṣā* under the magnifying glass of later Advaita Vedānta, limiting itself to a single text, namely Dharmarāja Adhvarīndra's (seventeenth–eighteenth century) *Vedānta Paribhāṣā*. This text does not present the peculiarities of earlier *paribhāṣā*s, hence the title *paribhāṣā* takes on a meaning somewhat closer to

"Elucidation" or "Manual". Nevertheless, placing the *Vedānta Paribhāṣā* within a wider historical and philosophical milieu, an attempt is made to investigate the reasons why the author wittingly chooses such an evocative title, which is solidly rooted in a technical background. Gianni Pellegrini aims to show that in such a late context the term *paribhāṣā* assumes many meanings, somehow de-formalizing the technical term and simultaneously specifying it with a non-technical use. Furthermore, a number of hypotheses and case-studies concerning Dharmarāja's understanding of *paribhāṣā* are proposed.

The volume closes with a brief final overview proposed by the editor, where through a bird's eye view the main points analyzed by each author are briefly restated. Moreover, while summarizing the positions held in the single articles the editor attempts to trace a sort of historical development of the functions and concept of *paribhāṣā*.

It is therefore my hope that in this volume it will be shown that while developing its literal significance in multifarious ways, the term *paribhāṣā* assumes quite a wide range of meanings, thus conveying many semantic nuances throughout its textual history.

I am aware that this is simply a first step towards what I do hope will become much more extensive research. Even so, just like any first step it has the merit of being the first but is of course endowed with its intrinsic insecurity.

Before leaving the reader to the pages that follow, let me express my gratitude and esteem to all the friends and colleagues who have taken part in the project, to the Editors of *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatique* who have continued to show sincere interest in and a constant care for our work, and to the anonymous peer-reviewers.

In closing, let me convey my inner hopes and feelings with a well-known stanza:

> *gacchataḥ skhalanaṃ kvāpi bhavaty eva pramādataḥ |*
> *hasanti durjanās tatra samādadhati sajjanāḥ ||*

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