Vyakarana

Vyākaraṇa (Sanskrit: vyakarana, lit. 'explanation, analysis') refers to one of the six ancient Vedangas, subsidiary sciences associated with the Vedas, which are scriptures in Hinduism. Vyākaraṇa is the study of grammar and linguistic analysis in Sanskrit.

Pāṇini and Yāska are two famous ancient scholars of Vyākaraṇa; both are dated to several centuries before the beginning of the common era, with Pāṇini probably from the fifth century BCE. Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī is the most important surviving text of the Vyākaraṇa traditions. This text, as its name suggests, consists of eight chapters, each divided into four padas, which together contain 4000 sutras. Abbreviation rules grouping Sanskrit phonemes precede the text. Pāṇini quotes ten ancient authorities whose texts have not survived but are believed to have been Vyākaraṇa scholars.

Vyākaraṇa is related to the fourth Vedānga called Nirukta. Vyākaraṇa scholarship dealt with linguistic analysis to determine the exact form of words to properly express ideas, and Nirukta scholarship focused on linguistic analysis to help establish the correct meaning of words in context.

Etymology

Vyākaraṇa means "separation, distinction, discernment, analysis, explanation" of something. It also refers to one of the six Vedangas, or Vedic fields of linguistic analysis, namely grammatical analysis, grammar, linguistic conventions that create, polish, help the writer express themselves, and help the reader discern precise language.

The word Vyākaraṇa is also found in the Mahayana Sutras and Mahayana Buddhist texts of the first millennium, but with a different meaning. Vyākaraṇa in these Buddhist texts means a prediction or prophecy by the Buddha to a bodhisattva who has just embarked on the path of attaining enlightenment and becoming a buddha, in other words, an enlightened one.

History

Vyākaraṇa emerged in ancient times as a special subsidiary field of Vedic study. Its aim was to prevent careless use and transmission of Vedic knowledge, says Howard Coward – professor emeritus at the University of Victoria and founding editor of the Journal for Hindu-Christian Studies. Vyākaraṇa helped ensure that the Vedic scriptures of Hinduism and its message of "Sabda Brahman" (explanation of metaphysical truths through words) realized through the efforts of the Vedic rishis remained available to all in a pristine form. In the Indian traditions, Vyākaraṇa has been one of the most important sciences that has been thoroughly studied through its history, leading to great treatises on the philosophy of language.

Pāṇini and Yāska, two famous ancient scholars of Vyākaraṇa, are both dated several centuries before the beginning of the common era, probably to the 5th century BCE. However, both cite earlier scholars and texts which, although lost to history, suggest that the field of Vyākaraṇa was an established and developed science of language before them. Between the two, Yaksa may be the older and better known for Nirukta (etymology)—the fourth subsidiary field of Vedic studies, but the evidence for him predating Pāṇini is limited and uncertain. Regarding the scholarly treatise on Vyākaraṇa, Pāṇini is the most respected ancient Hindu scholar, and his Aṣṭādhyāyī ("Eight Chapters") is the most studied ancient manuscript of Sanskrit grammar. Pāṇini's fame spread beyond India, and reverence for ancient Pāṇini in northwest India is mentioned in the Chinese texts of Xuanzang, a 7th-century traveler and scholar.

The study of grammar and language structure can be traced back to the Rigveda, or 2nd millennium BCE, in hymns attributed to the sage Sakalya. Sakalya is recognized by Pāṇini's works. Literary evidence that the science of Vyākaraṇa existed in Vedic times abounds in the Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads, according to Moriz Winternitz. The surviving manuscripts of Pāṇini and Yaksa indicate that the Vedic age had competing schools of grammar. For example, one school held that all nouns have verbal roots, while another held that not all nouns have verbal roots. However, it is unclear how, by whom, or when these ancient Vedic theories of grammar originated, as these texts have not survived into modern times.

Pre-Pāṇinian schools

There were many schools of Sanskrit grammar in ancient India, all established before the middle of the 1st millennium BC. Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī, which overshadowed all other ancient schools of grammar, lists the names of ten grammarians. Some of these pre-Pani scholars mentioned by Pāṇini include Apisali, Kasyapa, Gargya, Galava, Cakravarman, Bharadvaja, Sakatayana, Sakalya, Senaka and Sphoṭayana.

The works of most of these authors are lost, but references to their ideas can be found in the commentaries and rebuttals of later authors. Yaska's Nirukta is one of the earlier extant texts and mentions Śākaṭāyana, Krauṣṭuki, Gārgya among others.

Post-Pāṇinian schools

Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī is the oldest surviving manuscript on Vyākaraṇa. It is a complete and descriptive treatise on Sanskrit grammar in the format of aphoristic sutras. This text attracted the famous and one of the oldest commentaries (bhāṣya) called Mahābhāṣya. The author of the Mahābhāṣya is named Patañjali, who may or may not be the same person as the author of the Yogasutra. The Mahābhāṣya, or "Great Commentary", is more than just a commentary on the Aṣṭādhyāyī, it is the oldest known philosophical text of Hindu grammarians. Non-Hindu texts and traditions of grammar emerged after Patañjali, some of which include the Sanskrit grammar by the Jain author Jainendra and the Cāndra grammar by the Buddhist Candragomina.

> Patanjali's Great Grammatical Discourse [Vyakrana-Mahābhāṣya] is regarded as
> the classical model for academic texts. It is written with a great deal of didactic skill

Later Indian scholars simplified Pāṇini's rules and trimmed his compilation of sutras to the necessary 1,400 of the full 4,000, eliminating those they considered too difficult and complicated, or those that dealt closely with the Vedic language. Non-Hindu traditions such as Jainism and Buddhism developed their own Vyākaraṇa literature, but all date to the 1st millennium CE, all condensed by Pāṇini, adopted and flourished largely from his theories about Vyākaraṇa.

The 5th century Hindu scholar Bhartṛhari was the next most influential Vyākaraṇa thinker, presenting his philosophy of grammar and how language affects thought. His theories on the "philosophical problem of meaning" contained in the Vākyapadīya are unique, says Howard Coward. Bhartṛhari is considered the main architect of the "sfoṭa theory" of meaning in Hindu traditions.

Bhartṛhari's ideas were widely studied but also challenged in the latter half of the first millennium, especially by the ritual-driven Mīmāṃsā school of Hindu philosophy and Dharmakirti Buddhism. The Advaita Vedanta school of Hinduism defended the ideas of Bhartṛhari.

Around the seventh century, the Kāśikāvṛtti were co-authored by Jayaditya and Vamana, and Helaraja's study of Vyākaraṇa in the tenth century was another important milestone. These Hindu texts were not only commented upon in the Hindu tradition, but formed the basis of the works of the Buddhist Jinendrabuddhi, who is known for his grammatical insights in Buddhist literature.

The most studied scholars of Vyākaraṇa in the early and mid-second millennium are Ksirasvamin, Haradatta, Maitreya Rakshita and Kaiyata. Modern scholars of Vyākaraṇa included Bhattoji Dikshita, Konda Bhatta and Nagesha Bhatta.

Between 1250 and 1450, Anubhūti Svarūpācārya created a simplified grammatical system called Sārasvatavyākaraṇa.

In the 14th century, the grammarian Padmanabhadatta, the founder of the Supadma school, composed the Supadmavyākaraṇa. The text is based on Pāṇini's Ashtadhyayi, but revised and rearranged with explanatory notes. It is written in the Bengali alphabet, making it accessible to the Bengali provinces by removing the complexities of Sanskrit grammar. Padmanabhadatta's main aim was to make the knowledge of Sanskrit grammar clear and simple and to Sanskritize the new words that had evolved in the language.

Texts

Pāṇini's text Aṣṭādhyāyī is in sutra format, has eight chapters and a total of 4000 sutras. These rules are preceded by a list of fourteen groups of sounds, in three parts called the Siva-sutra, the Pratyahara-sutra, and the Maheshvara-sutra. Aṣṭādhyāyī groups the rules of language for clear expression and understanding into two, verbal (Dhatupatha) and nominal bases (Ganapatha). The text consists of an analytical part included in the first five chapters and a synthetic part included in the last three chapters.

The Aṣṭādhyāyī manuscript survives with sets of auxiliary texts (appendices) whose composition dates and authors are disputed. The main text is notable for its detail and systematicity, syntactic functions, and arrangement of the sutras in an algorithmic manner, where grammatical rules are typically applied in the order of the sutras.

The Aṣṭādhyāyī sutras have been widely studied and have been the subject of the Hindu bhāṣya (survey and commentary) tradition. The earliest editing and commentary on the Aṣṭādhyāyī is attributed to Kātyāyana (~3rd century BCE), followed by the famous Mahābhāṣya of Patañjali (~2nd century BCE), which survived into modern times. Other commentaries on the Aṣṭādhyāyī probably existed as they were quoted by other Indian scholars, but these texts are considered lost to history.

Discussion

Pāṇini writes that Anjna (the popular usage of the word) is the superior authority and the theoretically derived meaning of the word must be discarded and replaced instead by what is the popular usage. The artha (meaning) of a shabda (word) is based on popular usage at the time the text was composed, not on etymological theory or historical usage or later usage.

A sentence is a collection of words, a word is a collection of phonemes, says Pāṇini. The meaning of the Vedic passages must be understood through the context, the stated purpose, keeping in mind the subject being discussed, what is being said, how, where and when.

The Aṣṭādhyāyī tradition of Sanskrit accepts with some caveats the assumption that all words have verbal roots and that words are formed by attaching fragments to these roots. However, Pāṇini argues that it is impossible to derive all nouns from verbal roots.

Aṣṭādhyāyī focuses primarily on the study of words, how words are formed and their proper architecture. However, it does not rule out syntax. Pāṇini includes a discussion of sentence structure. The text, Howard and Raja state, describes the formation of compound words based on syntactic and semantic considerations, such as in sutra 2.1.1.

What is a correct sentence?

Pāṇini argues that a proper sentence has a single purpose and is made up of a group of words in such a way that, on analysis, the individual words are found to expect each other. A sentence, says Pāṇini, must have a syntactic unity that includes the mutual anticipation (Akansha) of the words and the phonetic connection (Sannidhi) of the construction. Pāṇini adds semantic

qualification (Yogayata), but not tacitly. It admits that a sentence can be grammatically correct even if it is semantically inappropriate or deviant.

What does a word mean?

Aṣṭādhyāyī describes the numerous uses of words and how the meaning of a word is governed by the overall context of the sentences and composition in which it is found. The popular usage and meaning of the word at the time the text was composed supersedes the historical or etymological derived meanings of the word. A word has a conventional meaning at the time the text was composed, but it does not when it is cited (cited or referenced) from another prior art text. In the second case, the Sanskrit word is suffixed with iti (so literally), after which it means what the previous text meant.

Yāska argued that both the meaning and etymology of words are always context dependent.