
The influence of ‘absence’ on Sanskrit morphology – the case of negative compounds

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1 Compounds and negation – general remarks

Sanskrit linguistic tradition distinguishes various types of compounds with different relations between their constituent elements: *avyayībhāva* (indeclinable compounds), *tatpuruṣa* (where the second member is treated as primary), *dvandva* (with two, or more, constituents of equal status) and *bahuvrīhi* (compounds that refer to an outside entity). One of the most important factors which helps us to determine the final meaning of the formation is the primacy assigned to one of the members in a compound. In my presentation I would like to discuss negative compounds in Sanskrit, which are an extremely interesting phenomenon from the perspective of linguistic, as well as philosophical, description as they could be classified in different categories, which would, consequently, influence their morphological behaviour.

There are two important factors to be taken into account while determining the semantic value of a negative compound. Firstly, it is the actual meaning of a negative particle (nañ). According to the earliest known Indian etymological treatise *Nirukta* (Yāska, c. 5th century BCE), this particle can express both ‘absence’ as well as ‘comparison’ (later grammatical tradition makes the semantic domain of negation more detailed). Based on the examples, I would like to show that both these meanings can actually be present at the same time. Secondly, it is the potential meaning carrier properties of particles in general. Sanskrit linguistic and philosophical schools considered parts of speech either independently expressive (*vācaka*), with their own meaning that they bring into the final meaning of a formation, or merely indicative (*dyotaka*), which meant that they helped to reveal the meaning that was inherently present in the word they accompanied. This latter issue bears particular significance for the formation of compounds and the establishment of qualifier-qualified relation between its members as it is closely connected with an issue of the subject of negation.

In my presentation I will refer to the formal system of Sanskrit grammar as well as the related philosophical description of the Indian school of philosophers-grammarians. I will demonstrate the influence of the semantics component on the morphological behaviour of a negative compound, both as an independent formation and as a part of a sentence, where those mutual interactions can be most visibly seen.

2 The analysis of negative compounds

The negative particle nañ, which Sanskrit grammarians adopt as representing the main notion of negation, stands for both the prefix *a/an* in compounds as well as to the verbal negation *na*. The first Indian grammatical treatise, *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, composed by Pāṇini (4th century BCE) introduces this particle in the section describing *tatpuruṣa* compounds such as *abrāhmaṇa* (‘a non-Brahmin’), *adr̥ṣṭa* (‘not seen’) or *aneka* (‘not one, many’). Pāṇini’s approach to negative compounds, therefore, seems to be non-controversial; in such

compounds meaning predominance (*pradhānya*) is awarded to the second member, which is preceded by a qualifier. From the structural point of view, the form *abrāhmaṇa* is identical to *nīlakamala* ('a blue lotus') and as such, the entire compound adopts the gender and number of its last member.

Grammarians and philosophers that followed Pāṇini were not convinced as to the simplicity of such formations. Starting with Patañjali (c. 2nd century BCE) and his *Mahābhāṣya*, a commentary on the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, various possibilities of classification were discussed. The particular character of negative formations, which lies in denying the existence of the accompanying word, gives rise to questions regarding the predominant meaning in negative compounds. The options that were given most attention were the primacy of the second member of a compound, resulting in a *tatpuruṣa*, and the initial one with the result of an *avyayībhāva*. This discussion was prompted by the fact that the particle *nañ* is, naturally, classified in Pāṇinian system as an indeclinable. This discussion is not purely academic but it holds serious morphological consequences. Morphological behaviour of these constructions is different, both during derivational process as well as at the final outcome. In a *tatpuruṣa* compound both (or more) elements are – at least theoretically – subject to declension and the addition of case endings which are subsequently deleted; despite being a particle, *nañ* is also treated in the same way during the process of forming a compound. The gender and number of the final formation is determined based on the qualities of the second member of a compound. If an *avyayībhāva* compound is formed, however, the particle – being an indeclinable – is not subject to declension and, consequently, the entire formation adopts a fixed nominal ending and neuter gender. It would then also serve as an adverb in a sentence. These varying approaches prompted questions regarding the semantic value of the negative particle (as mentioned earlier) and its influence on constructing negative compounds, and as a consequence, their morphological and syntactic behaviour. It has been believed that semantics does not play a major role in the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*; it seems, however, that this role has been underestimated and Pāṇini does acknowledge the importance of the semantic component in forming a meaningful utterance. The thought that it is the whole sentence that is a proper meaning carrier was explored by all the commentators of Pāṇini's work and heavily developed by the later emerged school of philosophers-grammarians. This thought is believed to have originated with the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* itself. This is the reason why the analysis of the semantic value of the particle *nañ* was crucial for the understanding of the formation, which influences the meaning of a sentence it was a part of. The discussion regarding the extent to which the meaning of a final construction, such as a compound, is composed of the meanings of its individual parts was heated in Sanskrit linguistics.

3 Research questions

In my presentation I would like to discuss the morphological implications of negative compounds in Sanskrit being assigned to different categories based on the analysis of excerpts from grammatical and philosophical treatises such as the *Mahābhāṣya* of Patañjali (2nd century BCE) or the *Vākyapadīya* by Bharṭṛhari (5th century CE). I will show the problems we might face on either morphological or semantic grounds when we analyse compounds such as *aneka* or *abrāhmaṇa*. I would also like to consider whether it is possible for a compound to be assigned two categories, namely if it is possible for a negative formation to be a *tatpuruṣa* and *bahuvrīhi* at the same time. This final option (of a negative formation being a *bahuvrīhi*) was briefly discussed in Sanskrit grammatical literature, and quickly discarded, based on morphological grounds. The exocentric characteristic of *bahuvrīhi* compounds is manifested

in the gender and number they adopt, that is one of the external referent. This very characteristic was the reason for its rejection with reference to negative compounds, which in principle accept the gender and number of the second member of a compound. However, I do believe that certain aspects of *bahuvrīhi* formations should be taken into account while talking about negative compounds. I will show that, due to their semantic uniqueness, they cannot be clearly classified and that the semantic component has to play a crucial role in the compounding process itself. A significant number of negative formations, despite expressing a form of ‘absence’, are, in fact, positive in their denotation. The meaning ‘comparison’ (mentioned in 1.1), which the particle *nañ* was supposed to express, comes in handy when determining this positive denotation. This is where the domains of *tatpuruṣa* and *bahuvrīhi* meet and this is why their classification can be cross-categorical.

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