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Sanskrit Theories on Homonymy and Polysemy

Émilie AUSSANT

Introduction¹

Homonymy and polysemy concern the scope of meanings a word may have, which some Western linguists, for instance Vincent Nyckees (1998: 193), call the “semantic area” of a word. Polysemy is a very productive phenomenon and as such it plays a central role in natural languages; the most common words are generally those which have a large variety of uses. In this paper, I will investigate the way traditional Sanskrit scholars dealt with these two kinds of internal semantic relations.² In this perspective, I will take as a starting point the distinction between *ekaśabdadarśana* the “single word view” and *anekaśabdadarśana* the “multiple word view” and I will attempt to determine its basis. *Ekaśabdadarśana* means that one considers that there is one and the same (*eka*) word (*śabda*) which has different meanings; *anekaśabdadarśana* means that one considers that there are different (*aneka*) words with the same phonic form. The question asked in the first part of this paper is whether this distinction is based on the “related meaning criterion”, as we understand the difference between homonymy and polysemy in Western linguistics, or whether it is built on something else. In the second part of this paper, I will try to explain how Indian grammarians, exegetes and logicians have dealt with plurivocal relations between words and meanings. In the third part, I will show how they have described figurative or secondary meaning.

1 *ekaśabdadarśana* versus *anekaśabdadarśana*: a philosophical issue

In Western linguistics, a polysemous word is defined as a word which expresses different meanings

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² A distinction is usually made between external semantic relations, such as synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, hyperonymy and internal semantic relations, such as polysemy, monosemy and homonymy.

between which a relation is recognised by speakers. The word *key*, in the two following sentences, provides a good illustration of this phenomenon:

a) George is bringing the key to unlock the car.

b) We have found the key to the mystery.

The semantic relation between *a* and *b* is that the object <key> enables exclusive access to the car and to the mystery.³ When speakers do not recognise any semantic relation between the different uses of a linguistic form, Western linguists consider that we are dealing with homonyms, namely different words having the same phonic form as, for example, in the case of the linguistic form *cleave*, which means “to cut something into separate parts”⁴ or “to stick”.⁵

The existence of one word having different meanings and of several words having the same phonic form has been clearly noticed within the Sanskrit traditions of language study. The idea of one word having different meanings is found, probably for the first time, in the *Mahābhāṣya* of Patañjali (2nd century B.C.), in the commentary on the *vārttika* 9 (3rd century B.C.) on the Pāṇinian *sūtra* 1.2.45 (5th century B.C.).⁶ The context is the following: the *vārttika* 9 teaches that one can determine the meaning of a nominal base by the process of analysis called *anvaya-vyatireka* (“[concurrent] occurrence and absence”, see Cardona 1967-68). Then an opponent objects that in some cases, this process fails:

bahavo hi śabdā ekārthāḥ bhavanti / tad yathā / indraḥ śakraḥ puruhūtaḥ purandaraḥ / kanduḥ koṣṭhaḥ kusūla iti / ekaś ca śabdo bahvarthaḥ / tad yathā / akṣāḥ pādāḥ māṣā iti / ataḥ kiṃ / na sādhiyo 'rthavattā siddhā bhavati /

(M on V 9 ad A 1.2.45, vol. 1: 219-220)

Indeed, many are those words which have a single meaning/object. For example: *indraḥ śakraḥ puruhūtaḥ purandaraḥ* (names of Indra); *kanduḥ koṣṭhaḥ kusūla* (words denoting a granary). And a single word [may have] many meanings/objects. For example: *akṣāḥ* (“axle, cart, dice, seed, organ of sense...”), *pādāḥ* (“foot, quarter, art, ray of light, verse...”), *māṣāḥ* (“bean, weight of gold...”).⁷ – Then what? – Meaningfulness is not

³ These examples are borrowed from Tracy (1997: 74-77).

⁴ As in “The wooden door had been cleft in two”.

⁵ As in “Mary’s tongue was cleaving to the roof of her mouth”.

⁶ A 1.2.45: *arthavad adhātur apratyayaḥ prātipadikam* // “[The technical term] *prātipadika* [denotes] a meaningful [linguistic entity] other than a verbal stem or an affix.”

⁷ The idea is the following: concurrent occurrence and absence (of a form and a meaning/object) does not function systematically. Difference of form does not always mean difference of meaning/object, as is shown by words like *indraḥ śakraḥ puruhūtaḥ* and *purandaraḥ*. Likewise, different meanings/objects are not always associated with different forms, as is shown by forms like *akṣa*.

firmly established.⁸

It is interesting to note that in this passage *śabdā ekārthā*, words that have a single meaning/object, namely synonyms, are opposed to *ekaḥ śabdo bahvarthaḥ*, single words which have many meanings/objects, namely polysemous words.⁹ This means that, at a more general level, a distinction is made between univocal relations (to one lexical unit corresponds one meaning/object) and plurivocal relations (to one lexical unit correspond several meanings/objects or to one meaning/object correspond several lexical units). In other words, what seems to be brought into play in this context, is the relation between words and objects, that is to say, a philosophical matter. As far as I know, the first Sanskrit scholar to mention the *ekaśabdadarśana/anekaśabdadarśana* distinction is the grammarian Bhartṛhari (5th century). He says, in his *Vākyapadīya*:

*ekam āhur anekārthaṃ śabdān anye parīkṣakāḥ /
nimittabhedād ekasya sārvarthyam tasya bhidyate //*
(VP 2.250)

Other theoreticians say that a single word has several meanings/objects; the property of this single [word] of having all these meanings/objects is differentiated because of the diversity of the causes of [application of the word].

Puṅyarāja, in his *Ṭīkā* (10th century?), comments as follows:

*sarveṣv apy artheṣv eka eva gośabdo vācakaḥ / yady evaṃ yugapad eva sārvarthaprakāśanam kasmān na
karotīty āha nimittabhedāt ity ādi /*
(Ṭīkā: 104)

The single word *go* expresses all the meanings/objects.¹⁰ If that is so, why does it not convey all the meanings/objects simultaneously? That is why [Bhartṛhari] says “because of the diversity of the causes [of application of the word]”, etc.

Bhartṛhari mentions the *anekaśabda* view some stanzas further on:

*ekatvaṃ tu sarūpatvāc chabdayor gaṇnamukhyayoḥ /
prāhur atyantabhede 'pi bheda mārgānudarśinaḥ //*
(VP 2.257)

But those who keep in mind the way of the difference say that, even though there is a total difference [of meanings/objects], there is a unicity of both [kinds of] words, primary and secondary, because of their common form.

⁸ In other words: the association of a form to that meaning/object (or the opposite) is not constant.

⁹ Note that the very distinction (synonyms versus homonyms/polysemous words) structures lexicographical works such as *Kośas*. The purpose of these lexica was to help poets in metrical composition where synonyms of varying syllable-structure are required to satisfy metrical constraints (see Vogel 1979).

¹⁰ This is perhaps a reference to the well-known axiom *sarve sarvārthavācakaḥ* “Every [word] expresses every meaning/object”. This principle is rooted in the idea according to which the ultimate meaning/object of words is the Brahman. If the Brahman manifests itself in everything and words express the Brahman, then words have the capacity to express everything. See Aussant 2009: 132.

Puṅyarāja comments as follows:

*bhedamārgānusāriṇaḥ*¹¹ *śabdabhedavādināḥ* / *gauṇamukhyārthābhīdhāyinor gośabdāyor bhedam evāhuḥ* / *te hy arthabhedāc chabdabhedam manyante* / *yataḥ śabdārthāyor iha adhyāsalakṣaṇaḥ sambandho vyavasthitaḥ* / *ekatra ced adhyastā tasmīms tenaivābhedam āpannaḥ katham anyena saḥādhyāsam upeyād ity arthaḥ* / *tad evaṃśabdabheda evopapannaḥ* /
(*Ṭīkā*: 105)

“Those who follow the way of the difference” [that is to say] the upholders of the difference of words, they say that the word *go* which expresses a primary meaning/object and the word *go* which expresses a secondary meaning/object, are different. Indeed, they think that, by virtue of the difference of meanings/objects, there is a difference of words, because here, [in this view], the relationship between the word and its meaning/object is established as being a superimposition.¹² The meaning is: if in the case of one [object the word] which is superimposed on this [object] becomes non-different from it, how can [this word] be superimposed on something else? Thus, only the difference of words is possible.

In these passages of the *Vākyapadīya* and the *Ṭīkā*, three elements have to be taken into consideration.

- 1) First: when a phonic form is associated with several meanings/objects, two points of view can be considered: one may say that there is a single phonic form which is used to express different meanings/objects (the case of plurivocal relations), or one may say that there are as many phonic forms as meanings/objects even though the phonic forms are identical (the case of univocal relations).
- 2) Second: in the stanza 2.257, it is said that those who adhere to the second point of view concede a kind of unicity, because of the common form. I will come back to this idea later.
- 3) Third: the *ekaśabdadarśana*/*anekaśabdadarśana* distinction concerns words like *go* which are frequently used to denote a cow and, by a transfer of meaning, a dull-witted person (*vāhīka*). But words like *akṣa*, which equally expresses several meanings such as “axle”, “seed”, “dice”, etc., namely meanings that speakers do not feel to be linked by a semantic transfer, are also subjected to this distinction of views (see especially in VP 2.473-474),¹³ as

¹¹ K.A. Subramanya Iyer’s edition reads *bhedamārgānusāriṇaḥ* instead of *bhedamārgānudarśinaḥ*.

¹² Superimposition is a mental process. When the speaker uses the word *go* to denote a cow, he operates a mental association between the cause of application of the word (*gotva* “cowness”) and the mental representation of the individual cow that he intends to designate. See Aussant 2009: 68.

¹³ The stanzas concern the *tantra* process illustrated by the sentence *akṣā bhajyantām bhujyantām dīvyantām* “let the axle be broken, [the seeds] be eaten, [the dice] be thrown”. The theorisation of this process originates in the Mīmāṃsaka analysis of the scope of entire sacrificial acts (*prakṛti* or *vikṛti*): some ritual acts, when performed once, serve the purpose of several other acts, by their single performance (see Garge 1952: 285-286). VP 2.473: *dviṣṭhāni yāni vākyāni teṣv apy ekatvadarśinām* / *anekaśakter ekasya svaśaktiḥ pravibhajyate* // “For those who consider the unicity [of the word], when there are sentences which have two fields [of application], it is the particular expressive

well as words and their autonym, as shown by Kaṇḍabhaṭṭa in his *Bṛhadvaiyākaraṇabhūṣaṇa* (17th century):

ānupūrvībheda eva śabdabhede tantram / ata eva nānārthatvavyavasthā / tathā ca svābhinnāśabdāmātratātparyakoccāraṇaviśayatvārthatātparyakoccāraṇaviśayatvasvarūpe 'mukāryatvānukaraṇatve katham viruddhe? [...] anye tv ita evārthabhedāc chabdabhedañ ca manvānāḥ śabdārthavācakatvābhyām anayor bhedaṃ icchanti /

(BV: 141)

[According to some grammarians], the basis¹⁴ for the difference in words, is the difference in [phonic] sequences only. For this reason, the multiplicity of meanings/objects [of a single word] is well-established. Thus, an imitated word is one uttered with the intention [of signifying] a meaning/object and an imitation word is one uttered with the intention of only [referring to] a word identical with itself;¹⁵ how could these two contradict each other? [...] But other [grammarians] think that because there is a difference in meaning/object, there is a difference in words; they consider that there is a difference between both [words, namely the imitated word and the imitation word] for one expresses a meaning/object while the other expresses a word.

The *ekaśabdadarśana/anekaśabdadarśana* distinction then applies to three different cases, namely 1) the case of a word the meanings of which are usually perceived as connected (*go*), 2) the case of words the different meanings of which are not usually perceived as connected (*akṣa*), 3) the case of words and their autonym (*agni* meaning “fire” versus *agni* meaning “the word /agni/”, see Aussant 2005). This shows that the *ekaśabdadarśana/anekaśabdadarśana* distinction goes beyond the mere question of the relationship between meanings. In the Western tradition, the distinction between the “single word view” (polysemy) and the “multiple word view” (homonymy) contrasts a word like *go* with a word like *akṣa*, whereas in the Sanskrit tradition, the same distinction contrasts the case of plurivocal relationship with the case of univocal relationship. The latter opposition is not based on the relationship between meanings but on the way the word – meaning/object connection is conceived.

2 Plurivocal relationship: different approaches

The problem raised by plurivocal relationship which, I believe, conditions the distinction between *ekaśabdadarśana* and *anekaśabdadarśana*, has been variously solved in the Sanskrit traditions of

capacity of only one [word] which has a multiple expressive capacity, which is divided.” VP 2.474: *atyantabhinnaṃ vā syāt prayoge tantralakṣaṇaḥ / upāyas tatra saṃsargaḥ pratipatṛṣu bhidyate //* “Or, when two absolutely different [words] are used, the means is the *tantra*; in this case, it is the relation [between each word and the whole sentence], which is differentiated by the hearer.”

¹⁴ Here, the word *tantra* does not refer to the process mentioned in the previous note, but means “basis”.

¹⁵ Note that, here, the logical principle called *yathāsaṃkhyam* is broken.

language study. The present section deals with both cases of plurivocal relationship, namely 1) several meanings/objects for one linguistic form and 2) several linguistic forms for one meaning/object, as well as with the way Sanskrit scholars dealt with them.

Concerning the first case of plurivocal relationship, both views (i.e. *ekāśabdadarśana* and *anekāśabdadarśana*) seem to have been current among Vaiyākaraṇas, as shown in the *Bṛhadvaiyākaraṇabhūṣaṇa* quotation above.¹⁶ Grammarians who consider that the difference in words depends on the difference in phonic shape support the *ekāśabda* view, while those who consider that the difference in words depends on the difference in meaning/object support the *anekāśabda* view. However, two elements suggest that the *ekāśabda* view would most often have been favoured.

- 1) Firstly, in the stanza 2.257 of the *Vākyapadīya*, as we have seen above, it is said that even in the *anekāśabda* view, one concedes a kind of unicity, because of the common form.¹⁷ This idea of identity of form as leading to the unicity of the word seems to have had some weight within the grammatical tradition for, even in cases such as the word *akṣa* which is frequently given as a typical example of homonymy, grammarians – Pāṇinians at least – manage to find a connection between the different meanings/objects. This is clearly stated in the following passage of the *Mahābhāṣya* commenting on the Pāṇinian rule which teaches the *ekāśeṣa* “single remainder” principle:¹⁸

vibhinnārtheṣu ca sāmānyāt siddham sarvam / aśnoter akṣaḥ / padyateḥ pādaḥ / mimīter māśaḥ / tatra kriyāsāmānyāt siddham // aparas tv āha / purākalpa etad āsīt ṣoḍaśa māśāḥ kārṣāpaṇam ṣoḍaśapalāś ca māśaśambaṭyaḥ / tatra saṅkhyāsāmānyāt siddham //
(M on V 59 ad A 1.2.64, vol. 1: 247)

Everything is realised by virtue of the universal,¹⁹ including the case of those [words] which have different

¹⁶ To grasp the context of this quotation fully, see Deshpande 1992: 235-256.

¹⁷ This idea is mentioned in another passage of the *Vākyapadīya*: *tāni dhātvantarāṇy eva pacisiddhyativad viduḥ / bhede 'pi tulyarūpatvād ekatvaparikalpanā //* (VP 3.7.57 or 3.313) “[Some] consider these roots (*lūnāti* etc.) as different, like *pac-* and *sidh-*; even though there is a difference, by virtue of the similarity of the form, one assumes a unicity.”

¹⁸ The *ekāśeṣa* principle consists in the retention of a single element among several having the same phonic form and the same case ending. E.g., the plural *vrkṣāḥ* “trees” is the single remainder of the sequence *vrkṣaḥ* “tree” + *vrkṣaḥ* “tree” + *vrkṣaḥ* “tree”; in the same way, the plural *akṣāḥ* (in *akṣā bhajyantām bhakṣyantām dīvyantām*, see note 13) is the single remainder of the sequence *akṣaḥ* “axle” + *akṣaḥ* “seed” + *akṣaḥ* “dice”.

¹⁹ See Filliozat (1980: 370 footnote 2): “tous les cas d’application possible du maintien de l’objet unique seront réalisés sans nécessité d’en formuler la prescription. Le cas des homonymes restait seul à justifier. [...] Il est

meanings/objects. *akṣa* comes from *aś-* (“to pervade”), *pāda* comes from *pad-* (“to go”), *māṣa* comes from *mā-* (“to measure”). In this case, because of the universal which is the action, [the principle of the single remainder] is realised.²⁰ But someone else says: in the past, it was like that: one *kārṣāpaṇa* [was equivalent to] sixteen *māṣas* and the *māṣasambaṭis* [were equivalent to] sixteen *palas*. In this case, because of the universal which is the number [sixteen],²¹ [the principle of the single remainder] is realised.²²

The identity of form prompts grammarians to find a connection between the different meanings/objects of the words *akṣa*, *pāda* and *māṣa*; and here they have recourse to their derivation to show the existence of such a connection. Note that another solution is proposed in the case of *māṣa*, which is completely unexpected within the Sanskrit context because it implies a diachronic point of view:²³ one recalls a more ancient state of the language when the link between the different uses of the word was still clearly felt by speakers.

- 2) The second element, as we will see in the third part of this paper, is that grammarians consider that the word has a single signification function and that it has the capacity to express everything if the speaker wants it to do so. The sole restriction, one might say, is that some meanings of the word are well-known, while some others are not.

Concerning the second case of plurivocal relationship (several linguistic forms for one meaning/object), there are also two views that seem to have been accepted among grammarians.

On the one hand, words such as *gāṇī*, *goṇī*, etc., which are considered as corruptions – *apabhraṃśa*, *apaśabda* – of the Sanskrit term *go*, have, on their own, the capacity to express the object <cow>.

maintenant montré que même dans cette vue (i.e. the view which postulates that the meaning/object of the word is the universal), l’on peut trouver un facteur commun aux divers homonymes, facteur commun qui détermine l’emploi d’un seul mot pour eux tous, ce qui rend inutile le maintien de l’objet unique.”

²⁰ See Filliozat (1980: 370 footnote 3): “Les divers mots *akṣa* ‘dé, graine, essieu’ dérivent de la même racine *ásū vyāptau* ‘englober’. L’action signifiée par cette racine sera un facteur commun aux trois sens. Ce facteur commun déterminera l’emploi d’un seul mot pour les sens multiples. La prescription du maintien de l’objet unique sera inutile.”

²¹ See Filliozat (1980: 371 footnote 4): “[...] le mot *māṣa* est le nom de deux mesures de poids différentes (un seizième de *kārṣāpaṇa* et un seizième de *sambati*), mais qui ont en commun d’être le seizième de quelque chose. Ce facteur commun, la qualité de seizième partie, permettra la formation directe du pluriel [...]” The right understanding of this passage is a problematic issue: according to the Monier-Williams dictionary, the word *sambati* is used only here.

²² Some theoreticians go even further, saying that the noun *akṣi* (“eye”) is the same word as the verb *akṣi* (Vedic form?), as is shown in the *Vṛtti* on VP 1.71 (VP 1.72 in Rau’s edition): *vākyeṣu ca praviveki nirjñātārthabhedam vā yāvat tulyarūpaṃ padaṃ gaur akṣa iti sarvaṃ tad ekam / nāmākhyātabhede ’pi caikam evākṣyaśva ity evaṃprakāraṃ padam // (Vṛtti: 135) “As long as a word has the same form, whether it is distinguished [by its use] in [different] sentences or it has several known meanings/objects, like *gauḥ akṣaḥ* etc., it is still one [and the same word]. Even if a noun and a verb are different, a word like *akṣi* or *aśva* is also still the same.”*

²³ The Sanskrit language is traditionally conceived as eternal and unique.

This is stated in the following *kārikās* of Bhartṛhari:

*śiṣṭebhya āgamāt siddhāḥ sādhave dharmasāadhanam /
arthapratyāyanābhede viparītās tv asādhavaḥ //*
(VP 1.27)

Correct [words], which are established by the learned according to tradition, are a means of accomplishing *dharma* because they always make the same meaning/object known; incorrect [words] are the opposite (i.e., do not lead to *dharma*).

*asādhur anumānena vācakaḥ kaiś cid iṣyate /
vācakatvāviśeṣe vā niyamaḥ puṇyapāpayoḥ //*
(VP 3.3.30)

Some consider that incorrect [words] are expressive by inference [of the correct word]; or, while there is no difference [between correct and incorrect words] in being expressive, there is a restriction regarding merit and demerit.

According to this view then, *gāvī*, *goṇī*, etc., though considered as corruptions, are true or independent words which denote one and the same object: plurivocal relationship is therefore acknowledged.

On the other hand, as it appears already in the first part of the stanza quoted above, some consider that words such as *gāvī* do not denote their object directly:

*te sādhuṣv anumānena pratyayotpattihetavaḥ /
tādātmyam upagamyeva śabdārthasya prakāśakāḥ //*
(VP 1.177)

These [forms *asva*, *goṇī*, etc.] cause, by inference, the birth of the cognition of the correct [forms]; attaining, as it were, identity [with these correct forms], they bring to light the meaning/object of the word.

The *Vṛtti* comments as follows:

[...] *atha kasmād ete gośabdasya gāvīdayaḥ paryāyā na vijñāyante / na hi śiṣṭa- samācāraprasiddher anyad
evamprakāreṣu smṛtinibandhaneṣv artheṣu nimittam abhidhīyate / gāvīdayaś cet paryāyāḥ syur ete 'pi śiṣṭair
lakṣaṇair anugamyeran prayujyeraṃś ca / yaś ca pratyakṣapakṣeṇa prayojakeṣv abhidheyeṣu pravartate sa
sādhuḥ / sākṣāt tu prayojakaṃ vācyam artharūpaṃ sādhubhiḥ pratyāyyate / tasmād āha –*
(*Vṛtti*: 231)

[...] Now, why are these [forms] *gāvī*, etc., not considered as synonyms of the word *go*? When things of this kind are dealt with indeed, [things] which are based on the tradition, nothing except what is known from the practice of learned people is considered as a cause. If [forms such as] *gāvī*, etc. were synonyms [of *go*], learned people would describe them with rules and would use them. And [a word] which denotes directly the object which causes its use is a correct [word]; the object to be expressed which causes the use [of the word] is directly known by correct [words]. That is why [Bhartṛhari] says:

*na śiṣṭair anugamyante paryāyā iva sādhaveḥ /
te yataḥ smṛtiśāstreṇa tasmāt sākṣād avācakāḥ //*
(VP 1.178)

Learned people, because they [take as a basis] the treatise of the tradition (i.e. the grammar), do not accept [these incorrect forms] as correct synonyms; for this reason, [these incorrect forms] do not express [their meaning/object] directly.

*ambvambv iti yathā bālaḥ śikṣamāṇo 'pabhāṣate /
avyaktaṃ tadvidāṃ tena vyaktau bhavati niścayaḥ //*
(VP 1.179)

As [when] a child, learning [to speak], articulates incorrectly an indistinct “*ambu ambu*”,²⁴ through this, those who know it (i.e. the correct form) get a clear idea of the distinct [corresponding word];

*evaṃ sādhou prayoktavye yo 'pabhraṃśaḥ prayujyate /
tena sādhuvyavahitaḥ kaś cid artho 'bhidhīyate //*
(VP 1.180)

so the deviant form which is used where a correct form has to be used denotes an object through the medium of the correct [form].

Vṛtti:

*saṅkīrṇāyāṃ vāci sādhuviśaye 'paśabdāḥ prayujyante / taiḥ śiṣṭā lakṣaṇavidāḥ sādhūn pratipadyante / tair eva
sādhubhis tad artham abhidhīyamānaṃ paśyanti / anumānas tu dhūma ivāgner asādhur itareṣāṃ //*
(*Vṛtti:* 232)

In the mixed language, deviant forms are used instead of correct [words]. From these [deviant forms], learned people who know [grammatical] rules recover correct [words]. It is by these very correct [words] that they see the expressed object; this is an inference: it is the incorrect [form which makes] the other [correct one] inferred, as the smoke [makes] the fire [inferred].

According to this second view then, words such as *gāvī*, *goṇī*, etc., are not true or independent words which express meanings/objects on their own, they depend on the functioning of the correct word which, alone, has the capacity to express. In this context, plurivocal relationship is not acknowledged.

Among later Vaiyākaraṇas, it appears that the first view is favored. Nāgeśa indeed says in his

Paramalaghumañjūṣā:

*yat tu tārikāḥ asādhuśabdena sādhusmaraṇadvārārbhadha ity āhuḥ / tan na sādhusmaraṇaṃ vināpi
bodhānubhavāt / tadvācakasādhuśabdāṃ ajānatāṃ bodhānāpatteś ca /* (PLM: 45-46)

As for logicians, who say that one understands an object from a corrupt word through the medium of recalling the correct [word], this is not so [not only] because one understands [an object] even without the recalling of the correct [word],²⁵ [but also and above all] because those who do not know what is expressed by the correct word get an understanding [of the object of the corrupt word].²⁶

Mīmāṃsakas, for whom the first task is to explain the meaning of the *Vedas* in order to guarantee the correctness of ritual practice,²⁷ wish to avoid ambiguity as far as possible. According to them, it is not proper for a meaning/object to be expressed by several words (synonyms), nor is it proper for a word to have more than one meaning/object (polysemous words). This conception clearly appears in the following aphorism of Jaimini (beginning of the common era?):

²⁴ The term *ambu* can be understood in two ways, as Jan E. M. Houben (1996: footnote 29) notes: it can be an incorrect pronunciation of *ambā* “mother” (vocative case: *amba*) or of *ambu* “water” (vocative case: *ambo*).

²⁵ In other words, someone who knows the word *go*, when he hears *gāvī*, understands the individual cow without going through the recalling of the word *go*. The latter is not involved in the cognitive process.

²⁶ The meaning is: even those who do not know the word *go* understand an object from the form *gāvī*.

²⁷ Unlike grammarians whose discipline, as a *Vedāṅga* “auxiliary member of the *Veda*”, is a tool which allows for the explaining of words and sentences through a system of rules and as such warrants the correctness of the material transmission of the Vedic texts.

anyāyyaś²⁸ cānekaśabdatvam //

(MS 1.3.26, 77)

And the multiplicity of words [for one and the same meaning/object] is improper.

This formulation reappears in the *Bhāṣya* of Śabara (first centuries of the common era?) *ad Mīmāṃsāsūtra* 3.2.1, but this time, the emphasis is on the level of meaning/object:

uktam (1.3.26) anyāyyaś cānekārthatvam iti /

(ŚB on MS 3.2.1, 244)

It is said: “and the multiplicity of meanings/objects [for one and the same word] is improper”.

In this context, polysemy is conceived as a failure of natural language because it breaks the single form – single meaning/object correspondence. The exegetical principles of word interpretation tend to preserve univocal relationship as far as possible: when a word can be taken in its primary as well as in its secondary meaning, one must understand the primary meaning (see. ŚB on MS 3.2.1, 243-246); when a word is used by Āryan speakers to denote one thing and is used by Mlecchas (“barbarians”) to denote another thing, one must understand the Āryan usage (see. ŚB on MS 1.3.8-9, 70-71); when a Mleccha word is used in Sanskrit, one must understand the Mleccha meaning and not try to find another meaning with the help of the Sanskrit etymology (see. ŚB on MS 1.3.10, 71). Regarding synonymy, the same attitude is observed: exegetes try to avoid plurivocal relationship as far as possible:

na caiṣa nyāyo yat sadrśāḥ śabdāḥ ekam artham abhiniviśamānāḥ, sarvāvicchinnaṅpāramparyā eva iti, pratyayamātradarśanād abhyupagamyate, sādṛśyāt sādhuśabde 'py avagate pratyayo 'vakalpyate / tasmāt amīśām eko 'nādiḥ, anye 'pabhraṃśāḥ / hastāḥ karaḥ pāñir ity evam ādiṣu tu abhiyuktopadeśāt anādir amīśām arthena sambandha iti //

(ŚB on MS 1.3.26, 77)

And the fact that similar words denoting the same object depend on a universal and a non-interrupted instruction is not an hermeneutical rule. It is admitted because one can see that knowledge occurs, [but] the knowledge [that everyone has of the meaning/object of the word *gāvī*, etc.] is explained when one has understood the correct word because of [its] similarity [with the corrupt word]. That is why, concerning these [similar words], one [word only] is without beginning (i.e. has an eternal relation with the object), the others are corrupt words. On the other hand, among *hasta*, *kara*, *pāñi*, etc. (“hand”), because of the instruction of learned people, [all] these [similar words] have an eternal relation with the meaning/object.

According to this passage then, corrupt words such as *gāvī*, *goñī*, etc. do not *directly* express their object, they do not have, on their own, the capacity for making an object known; it is the correct word *go* which – once recalled – ultimately expresses the object. However, Sanskrit (or “true”) synonymy is fully accepted. When plurivocal relationship can be avoided (as in the case of *go*, *gāvī*,

²⁸ I propose reading *anyāyya-* instead of *anyāya-*.

goṇī, etc.) every effort is made to do so; when plurivocal relationship cannot be avoided (as in the case of *hasta*, *kara*, *pāṇi*, etc.), one accepts facts as they are. These elements tend to show that Mīmāṃsakas, wherever it is possible, would rather be upholders of the *anekaśabda* view.

Naiyāyikas consider that the word – meaning/object relationship is not natural but conventional (*sāmayika*). According to them, this conception is particularly justified by the fact that one word can express different meanings/objects (polysemy) and that one meaning/object can be expressed by different words (synonymy) (see Raja 1963: 22). If the word – meaning/object relationship were really a natural one, such variations (or such plurivocal relationships) could not arise. This is clearly stated in the following extract of Vātsyāyana’s *Bhāṣya* (3rd-4th centuries) on the *Nyāyasūtra* 2.1.57 (2nd century?):

*sāmayikaḥ śabdād arthasampratyayo na svābhāvikaḥ / ṛṣyāryamlecchānāṃ yathākāmaṃ
śabdavinīyogo ’rthapratyāyanāya pravarttate / svābhāvike hi śabdasyārthapratyāyakatve yathākāmaṃ na
syāt /*

(VB on NS 2.1.57, 326)

The understanding of the meaning/object [obtained] from the word is conventional, not natural. The Sages, Āryans and Mlecchas use words to convey meanings/objects according to their wish. Indeed, if it is [considered as] natural, the property the word has of making meanings/objects known cannot be dependent on the wish [of someone].

This approach makes it possible to explain why the phonic form *yava* expresses “barley” in the Āryan usage and “pepper” in the Mleccha usage. But, as far as I know, Naiyāyikas do not explicitly say that *yava* is one and the same word which would then be connected to different objects through different conventions. The question is partially answered in discussions concerning modern conventions (*ādhunika-saṃketa*), as in the case of proper names, technical terms and coded languages. As Gerdi Gerschheimer points out (1987: 126-127), according to the traditional Naiyāyika view, words of a coded language first recall the word to which they were connected through a human convention and it is the latter (i.e. the original word which has been instituted) which causes the knowledge of the object. If the word *go* were used, in a coded language, as denoting a horse, the cognitive process would be the following:

go ----- aśva ----- <horse>

modern śakti
convention

This analysis would imply that, in the case of words such as *akṣa*, only one object (<eye>, for instance) has to be considered as the original one, the others (<dice>, <axis>, <cart>) being indirectly or secondarily denoted by the word; therefore, plurivocal relationship would not be acknowledged.

According to some Navya-Naiyāyikas, however, there is a capacity to express even in the case of modern conventions. Within this context, *go*, as denoting a horse, does have a *śakti* (as does *akṣa* when denoting <dice> or <axis> or <cart>).

Regarding corrupt words (*gāvī*, *goṇī*, etc.), the approach of ancient Naiyāyikas is the following:

ucyate / ekatra śaktyāpy anyatra tadāropāt tadarthapratītyupapattāv ekatraiva śaktir lāghavāt ananyalabhyasyaiva śabdārthatvāt / tad āha bhagavān jaiminiḥ anyāyaś cānekaśabdatvam iti / sā ca śaktiḥ saṃskṛta eva sarvadeśe tasyaikatvāt nāpabhraṃśeṣu teṣāṃ pratideśam ekatrārthe bhinnabhinnarūpāṇāṃ tāvac chaktikalpane gauravāt paryāyabahutaratvañ cobhayatrāpi / na ca deśabhede 'pi prākṛtasyaika rūpatvāt tatraiva śaktiḥ, saṃskṛtaprabhavatatsamadeśibhedena tasyāpy anekatvāt / evam ekatra śaktyāropād arthapratyayopapattau nāpabhraṃśe śaktiḥ / [...] / kenacid gaur iti śabde prayoktavye pramādād gāvīśabde prayokte vyutpannas tena gośabdān unnīya tato gāṃ pratītya vyavahṛtavān, yathāhuḥ, 'ambāmbeti yadā bālah śikṣyamānaḥ prabhāṣate / avyaktaṃ tadvidāṃ tena vyakte bhavati nirṇayaḥ' //
(TC IV: 641-642)

[Regarding the objection: corrupt words also have a capacity to express,] we answer [the following]. When the knowledge of the object of such [a corrupt word] is obtained from a capacity to express which, being in a [word], was superimposed to another [word], the capacity to express which exists in the original word alone [is relevant], because the property of being the object of a word only belongs to what is understood by no other [means and] owing to brevity. Regarding this, Jaimini says : 'And the multiplicity of words [for one and the same meaning/object] is out of the norm' (MS 1.3.26). And this capacity to express [exists] in Sanskrit only, because of its unicity in all regions, [it does] not [exist] in corrupt [words], because of the heaviness [of the functioning] of these [corrupt words] concerning the grasping of the capacity to express, [corrupt words which], according to the region, take very different forms for one [and the same] object and which have the property of being numerous synonyms in both cases also. And in this case, nor is there a capacity to express in Prakrit because of its difference in each region [and] because of its multiplicity, owing to the difference between [words] derived from Sanskrit, [words] identical [with Sanskrit and] regional [words]. Thus, when the knowledge of an object is obtained, it comes from the superimposition of a capacity to express which exists in one [word to another word], there is no capacity to express in a corrupt word. [...] When someone utters, through negligence, the word *gāvī* where the word *gauḥ* should be uttered, the one who knows [the Sanskrit word], having guessed the word *go* from [*gāvī*], understands, from this [corrupt word], [the object] <cow> denoted; thus they say *ambāmbeti yadā bālah śikṣyamānaḥ prabhāṣate / avyaktaṃ tadvidāṃ tena vyakte bhavati nirṇayaḥ* // (VP 1.179).

According to them then, corrupt words do not express their object directly, they express it through the medium of the correct word, which is inferred. The relation between the object and the different

linguistic forms which can be used to denote it, is therefore brought down to a univocal one.

For the Navya-Nyāya, things are put in a slightly different way. From Vācaspati onwards (10th century), Nyāya asserts that the convention is established by God at the beginning of Creation, and this has become the orthodox thesis of the school. As Gerdi Gerschheimer clearly shows (1996 vol. 1: 63-64), if the cognition of an object arises from a word then this word has, by the will of God, the capacity to express that object. This theory confers a great flexibility to the word – meaning/object relationship which makes it possible to take into account all kinds of plurivocal connections. But for the Navya-Nyāya, this flexibility is problematic because it leads to an undesirable consequence, namely: corrupt words and words used in a figurative way would become expressive.²⁹ To solve this problem, Navya-Nyāya states that the divine convention is restricted to desirable cases, that is to say is rejected in the case of corrupt words and words used in a figurative way (see Gerschheimer 1987: 123-128 and 1996 vol. 1: 64).

To put it briefly, because it conceives the meaning/object relationship as a conventional one, the – ancient as well as modern – Naiyāyika approach enables, in theory, to take into account plurivocal relationships between words and meanings/objects. But in effect, the latter are reduced to univocal ones, in the case of polysemy as well as synonymy. The main reason seems to be the same as for Mīmāṃsakas: to avoid ambiguity as far as possible.

3 The status of figurative meaning

When the different meanings/objects expressed by a single phonic shape are felt, by speakers, to be related – as in the case of the word *go* which denotes a cow and, by a meaning transfer, a dull-witted person – the question of the nature of the link between the two meanings/objects becomes relevant. This has always been a topic of great interest for Western linguists as well as for

²⁹ More precisely: they would become *directly* expressive.

traditional Sanskrit scholars.³⁰

The latter generally agree about the conditions of semantic transfer: 1) the primary meaning of a word or the meaning usually associated to it is incompatible with the context (*mukhyārthabādha* or °*anupapatti*), 2) the secondary or unusual meaning is connected in one way or another to the primary or usual meaning, and 3) the secondary or unusual meaning is sanctioned by speakers.

Concerning the relation between the primary and the secondary meanings of a word, mainly conceived as a metaphorical extension,³¹ many classifications have been proposed within the Sanskrit traditions of language study. As shown by K. Kunjunni Raja in his *Indian Theories of meaning* (1963: 231 and following),³² these classifications distinguish mainly between:

- different kinds of semantic transfer (e.g., *sahacaraṇa* “association”,³³ *sthāna* “location”,³⁴ etc.),³⁵
- different degrees of proximity between the primary and the secondary meanings (the distinction is mainly made between *jahallakṣaṇā* or *jahatsvārthā lakṣaṇā* “*lakṣaṇā* losing (the original meaning)”³⁶ and *ajahallakṣaṇā* or *ajahatsvārthā lakṣaṇā* “*lakṣaṇā* not losing (the original meaning)”³⁷),³⁸
- two kinds of purpose (the distinction is made between *prayojanavatī lakṣaṇā*: the understanding of the secondary meaning is produced by the intention of the speaker, and *nirūḍhā lakṣaṇā*: the understanding of the secondary meaning is not produced by the intention of the speaker but by the popular usage of the word).

³⁰ For an outline of the Western theories, see Nyckees 1998: 193-204 and Kleiber 1999.

³¹ “Metaphorical extension” includes metaphors and metonymies.

³² For a more recent study on Indian analyses of metaphorical usage, see Gren-Eklund 1986.

³³ As in *yaṣṭikāṃ bhojaya* “feed the stick” for “feed the Brahmin who carries his stick”.

³⁴ As in *mañcā hasanti* “the cots laugh” for “the children in the cots laugh”.

³⁵ For grammatical views of the different kinds of semantic transfer: *Mahābhāṣya* on V 3 *ad* A 4.1.48, vol. 2: 218 and *Paramalaghumañjūṣā* (17th-18th centuries): 55; for a logician view: *Nyāyasūtra* 2.2.64, 422; for an exegetical view: *Mīmāṃsāsūtras* 1.4.23-28, 100-105.

³⁶ As in *gaṅgāyām ghoṣaḥ* “the village on the Ganges” where the primary meaning of the word *gaṅgā* (“the river Ganges”) is abandoned in favour of the meaning “bank”.

³⁷ As in *chattriṇo yānti* “people with parasols are going” where *chattrin* denotes a group consisting of some with and others without parasols.

³⁸ For Nāgeśa’s view on the different degrees of proximity between the primary and the secondary meanings, see PLM: 54-55.

What is much more interesting in the studies of semantic transfer in Sanskrit, is to see how traditional Sanskrit scholars have dealt with the problem raised by the relationship between one word and its primary and secondary meanings, that is to say a plurivocal relationship.

Vaiyākaraṇas – and particularly Pāṇinīyas – seem always to have considered that words have only one signification function (*śakti*), whatever their uses. Secondary or figurative meaning does not result from any particular signification function. According to some later Pāṇinīyas, this conception is already present in the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* of Pāṇini.³⁹ Some of them, like Nāgeśa, explain the difference between the various meanings of a word – which are all considered as primary – saying that some are well-known (*prasiddha*) while others are not or less well-known (*aprasiddha*):

sati tātparye sarve sarvārthavācakā iti bhāṣyāl lakṣaṇāyā abhāvāt vṛttidvayāvachedakadvayakalpane gauravāt / [...] katham tarhi gaṅgādīpadāt tīrapratyayah / [...] tathā hi – śaktir dvividhā prasiddhāprasiddhā ca / āmandabuddhivedyātvaṃ prasiddhātvaṃ / sahrdayahrdayamātravedyātvaṃ aprasiddhātvaṃ / tatra gaṅgādīpadānām pravāhādaṃ prasiddhā śaktiḥ, tīrādaṃ cāprasiddheti [...] /
(PLM: 62-63)

The secondary signification function being non-existent by virtue of the *Bhāṣya*'s sentence “every [word] has the capacity to express all the meanings/objects if the intention [of the speaker] is there”, it is needlessly complicated to consider that the two [meanings/objects] are determined by two signification functions. [...] How is it possible then to understand [the meaning] “bank” from such words as *gaṅgā*? [...] Indeed, the expressive capacity is of two kinds: well-known or not well-known. The fact of being well-known is the fact of being understood even by a dull-witted man; the fact of being not well-known is the fact of being understood by a learned man only. In this case, the well-known expressive capacity of such words as *gaṅgā* is a meaning such as “river”, and the not well-known is a meaning such as “bank” [...].

This idea according to which the difference between the primary and the secondary meaning comes from the well-known or not well-known use of the word appears for the first time in the *Vākyapadīya* of Bhartṛhari.⁴⁰ This conception – a single signification function which allows for expressing every meaning/object, some being better-known than others – perfectly fits the *ekasabda* view: it enables one to explain – and then, to accept – plurivocal relationships. Vaiyākaraṇas,

³⁹ See *Pradīpa* on *M ad A 2.3.46* (vol. 3: 301-302). S.D. Joshi and J.A.F. Roodbergen note: “Kaiyaṭa explains what to him seems to be the deeper meaning of the *Bhāṣya*. The words *drona*, etc. may stand for a measure of capacity, but they may also stand for a quantity measured on account of the particular relation between the two meanings. But the meaning (*pari*)*meya*: ‘quantity to be measured’ is not invariably present to our mind, when we hear the words *drona*, etc. Therefore its meaning cannot be regarded as part of the *prātipadikārtha* *drona*. To justify the nominative endings after *drona*, etc. in the sense of *parimēya*, the word *parimāṇa* has been specially mentioned in P. 2.3.46.” (1981: 19-20) The commentary of Nāgeśa is as follows: *ataḥ parimāṇagrahaṇam lakṣyārthopalakṣaṇam iti kaiyaṭāśayam anye /* “That is why, according to some, Kaiyaṭa’s intention [is to say]: the mention *parimāṇa* implies [the idea of] figurative meaning.” (U, vol. 3: 302)

⁴⁰ *sarvaśaktes tu tasyaiva śabdasyānekadharmaṇaḥ / prasiddhibhedāt gaṇatvaṃ mukhyatvaṃ copajāyate //* (VP 2.253) “The primariness or secondariness of a word which [expresses] multiple qualities [and] which has the capacity of expressing everything, comes from the difference between what is well-known [and what is not well-known].”

though conceiving the word – meaning/object relationship as natural (*svābhāvika*), have then adopted a theoretical approach which enables them to take into account plurivocal relationships, by far the most frequent in wordly usage.

For Mīmāṃsakas, the word has three signification functions: 1) a primary signification function (*abhidhā*); 2) a signification function dependent on qualitative similarity between the primary meaning/object and the secondary meaning/object (*gauṇī* (i.e., metaphors based on similarity)) and 3) a secondary signification function (*lakṣaṇā* (i.e., metaphors based on other relations)). *Lakṣaṇā* and *gauṇīvṛtti* are clearly distinguished by Kumārilabhaṭṭa (7th century):

*abhidheyāvinābhūte pravṛttir lakṣaṇeṣyate
lakṣyamāṇaguṇair yogād vṛtter iṣṭā tu gauṇatā
(TV: 354)*

Lakṣaṇā is considered as a use [of the word] relative to the [meaning/object] which is connected to the primary [meaning/object]; but the secondariness of the designation relation (i.e. *gauṇīvṛtti*) is considered to be due to the relation with the qualities of the secondary [meaning/object].

According to exegetes, only the primary meaning is the true meaning of the word; the figurative meaning is derived from the primary meaning, as stated by Kumārilabhaṭṭa:

*ajahatsvārthāḥ sarvāḥ śabdappravṛttayaḥ pūrvaśaktyanusārasambhave śaktyantarakalpane
pramāṇābhāvāt /
(TV: 356)*

All the significations of a word are *ajahatsvārtha* [*lakṣaṇās*, namely *lakṣaṇās* where the primary meaning/object, which is left out, does not disappear], because there is no reason to think that there is another signification function when it is possible to [understand the secondary meaning/object of a word] as coming from the primary signification function.

For Naiyāyikas, the word has two signification functions (*vyāpāra*): one is primary (*mukhyavṛtti*, *śakti* or *abhidhā*) and the other is secondary (*lakṣaṇā*).⁴¹ The secondary signification function associates a secondary meaning/object to a word through the medium of its primary meaning/object, that is to say the secondary meaning is *indirectly* expressed. This is shown in the following definition, borrowed from Śalikanātha:

*svaśakyasambandho lakṣaṇā
(TC IV: 679)*

The secondary signification function is a relation of the primary meaning/object [of the word] *x* [to a secondary meaning/object].

As has been pointed by Gerdi Gerschheimer (1996 vol. 1: 82), it is an indirect relation of the form:

⁴¹ *vṛttis ca śaktīlakṣaṇānyatarasambandhaḥ / (Siddhāntamuktāvalī (17th century): 357) “And the vṛtti is a relation which is either an expressive capacity or a metaphor.”*

word ----- primary meaning/object ----- secondary meaning/object

śakti

relation

So, for Mīmāṃsakas as well as for Naiyāyikas, figurative meaning is indirectly expressed through the primary meaning. This conception, I believe, attempts to preserve, as far as possible, a univocal relation between words and meanings/objects. For Vaiyākaraṇas, as shown above, the not well-known meanings of a word are expressed by the same expressive capacity as the well-known ones; we grasp them directly, without the mediation of the latter.

I will end this paper by mentioning another topic which has always been of great interest to Western linguists as well as to traditional Sanskrit scholars working on homonymy/polysemy: the removal of ambiguity.⁴²

As pointed out by K. Kunjuni Raja in his *Indian Theories of Meaning* (1963: 50 and following), Bhartṛhari gives a list of the contextual factors which determine the exact meaning of a word in the case of ambiguous sequences.⁴³ This list seems to have been adopted by most later traditional Sanskrit scholars. It is mentioned in the following extract from the *Vākyapadīya*:

*saṃsargo viprayogaś ca sāhacaryaṃ virodhitā /
arthaḥ prakaraṇaṃ liṅgaṃ śabdasyānyasya saṃnidhiḥ //
(VP 2.315)
sāmarthyam aucitī deśaḥ kālo vyaktiḥ svarādayaḥ /
śabdārthasyānavacchede viśeṣasmṛtihetavaḥ //
(VP 2.316)*

Association (*saṃsarga*), dissociation (*viprayoga*), companionship (*sāhacarya*), opposition (*virodhitā*), meaning [of co-occurring words]/purpose (*artha*), context (*prakaraṇa*), indication (*liṅga*), vicinity (*saṃnidhi*) of a specifying word, capacity (*sāmarthyā*), propriety/suitability (*aucitī*), spatial context (*deśa*), temporal context (*kāla*), gender (*vyakti*), accent (*svara*), etc. are the causes of the understanding [of something] different when the meaning of a word is not determinate.⁴⁴

⁴² For an outline of Western theories, see Kleiber 1999: 56.

⁴³ Some of these factors are already mentioned in the *Bṛhaddevatā* (see Raja 1963: 48).

⁴⁴ These factors are respectively illustrated as follows: 1) *dhenu* which signifies “cow” as well as “mare” is restricted to the meaning “cow” in the sentence *savatsā dhenuḥ* “a *dhenu* with its calf”, because of the relation which exists between cow and calf; 2) in the sentence *avatsā dhenuḥ* “a *dhenu* without its calf”, *dhenu* means “cow” because of the dissociation of the relation which exists between cow and calf; 3) the name *Rāma* in *rāmalakṣmaṇau* “Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa” refers to the brother of Lakṣmaṇa and not to Paraśurāma, because of the well-known companionship which exists between both (this kind of determination concerns compounds only); 4) the name *Arjuna* in *karṇārjunau* “Karna and Arjuna” refers to the enemy of Karna and not to the son of Kṛtavīrya, because of the well-known hostility which exists between them; 5) *sthāṇu* which signifies “pillar” as well as “Śiva” is restricted to the denotation of the god Śiva in the sentence *sthāṇuṃ bhaja* “worship *sthāṇu*” because of the purpose of the action; 6) *saindhava* which signifies “salt” as well as “horse” is restricted to the meaning “salt” in the sentence *saindhavam*

This list clearly shows that the linguistic context as well as the situational context is taken into account in the removal of ambiguity. Puṅyarāja specifies in his commentary that this list of contextual factors is accepted whether one is in favour of the *ekaśabda* view or of the *anekaśabda* view:

iha kaiś cid arthabhedāc chabdabhedo 'bhyupagataḥ / tad aparair ekaśabdateti dvau pakṣau / tatra nānāvapakṣe svabhāvabhinneṣu tulyaśrutiṣu rūpābhedād anavacchinneṣu nimittāntaraiḥ saṃsargādibhir avacchedaḥ kriyate / ekatvapakṣe tv arthābhidhāne bhinnāsu śaktiṣu śrutisārūpyamātrād alabdhavibhāgāsu tathaiva saṃsargādibhir arthanirṇayaḥ kriyate ity ubhayatrāpi prakaraṇādayaḥ śabdārthanirṇayanipuṇā [...] / (Ṭīkā: 127)

Here, there are two views: by virtue of the difference in meanings/objects, a difference in words is understood by some; according to others, there is a single word. Then, in the view that maintains the multiplicity [of the word], when [words] are different by their nature (i.e., their meaning/object), standing in the same nominal case [and] not distinguished by a difference of form, the distinction is made with the help of other causes like association, etc. But in the view that maintains the singleness [of the word], when expressive capacities differentiated according to the expression of meanings/objects are not grasped as distinct because of the mere identity of hearing, the determination of the meaning/object is made with the help of association, etc.; and in both [views], context, etc. allow the determination of the meaning/object of the word [...].

Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried primarily to provide an overview of the approaches in the indigenous Sanskrit study of language to facts of polysemy/homonymy, and, more particularly, I have attempted to highlight two points:

- First: in the Sanskrit traditions of language study, polysemy is generally presented in association with synonymy whereas in Western linguistics it is presented in association with homonymy.

ānaya “bring *saindhava*” if it is uttered when the speaker is taking his meal; 7) in the Vedic sentence *aktāḥ śarkarāḥ upadadhāti* “he places the anointed pebbles on [it]”, the meaning of *aktāḥ* “anointed” is not clear: we do not know what kind of liquid has to be used. But another passage mentions clarified butter in the same context; because of this indicative sign, we know that the pebbles have to be anointed with clarified butter; 8) *purārāti* “enemy of cities” may denote any one who has destroyed a city, but in the expression *devasya purārāteḥ* “of the god destroyer of cities”, because of the vicinity of the word *deva*, we understand that it refers only to the god Śiva; 9) in the sentence *madhumattaḥ kokilāḥ* “the cuckoo is intoxicated by *madhu*”, *madhu* means “spring season” and not “honey” because only the spring season has the capacity to intoxicate the cuckoo; 10) in the sentence *pātu vo dayitāmukham* “may your beloved girl’s *mukha* protect you”, *mukha* means “favour” and not “face”, because only the former meaning suits the context; 11) in the sentence *bhātītha parameśvaraḥ* “here appears *parameśvaraḥ*”, the reference to the place by the word *iha* “here” indicates that *parameśvaraḥ* refers to a king and not to the god Śiva; 12) *citrabhānu* which signifies “sun” as well as “light of fire” is restricted to the meaning “sun” if the sentence *citrabhānur vibhāty asau* “*citrabhānu* is now shining” is uttered during the day; if the sentence is uttered at night, it means “light of fire”; 13) *mitra* means “sun” when used in the masculine gender and “friend” when used in the neuter gender; 14) in Vedic Sanskrit, accent has a distinctive function. The sequence *indraśatrūḥ* (accent on the last syllable) means “killer of Indra” whereas *indraśatruḥ* (accent on the first syllable) means “one whose killer is Indra”.

This asymmetry reveals a difference of foundation: a philosophical foundation in the case of the Sanskrit traditions (word – meaning/object relationship), a linguistic foundation in the case of the Western tradition (status of figurative meaning).

- Second: the opposition *ekaśabdadarśana/anekaśabdadarśana* is based on one's conception of the word – meaning/object relationship. If one accepts plurivocal relationship as some Vaiyākaraṇas do, one will have a tendency to favour the *ekaśabda* view; on the other hand, if one considers univocal relations as the norm, as Mīmāṃsakas and the majority of Naiyāyikas do, the tendency will be to favour the *anekaśabda* view.

Abbreviations

A	<i>Aṣṭādhyāyī</i>
BV	<i>Bṛhadvaidyākaraṇabhūṣaṇa</i>
M	<i>Mahābhāṣya</i>
MS	<i>Mīmāṃsāsūtras</i>
NS	<i>Nyāyasūtras</i>
PLM	<i>Paramalaghumañjūṣā</i>
ŚB	<i>Śabara's Bhāṣya</i>
TC	<i>Tattvacintāmaṇi</i>
TV	<i>Tantravārttika</i>
U	<i>Uddyota</i>
V	<i>Vārttika</i>
VB	<i>Vātsyāyana's Bhāṣya</i>
VP	<i>Vākyapadīya</i>

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