

## Bharthari on Language, Perception, and Consciousness



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### Abstract and Keywords

This chapter looks at the theory of knowledge of Bhartṛhari (c.5th cent.), the philosopher of language and grammarian, from the angle of perception and the awareness of oneself in the world. It is argued that, even though these topics are not systematically treated in Bhartṛhari's work, in the context of his epistemology, which emphasizes the centrality of language, it is of crucial importance to show how language-based categories operate even in perception. After a brief introduction dealing with the role of grammar in the intellectual history of ancient India and Bhartṛhari's place in the Pāṇinian tradition, the chapter examines a number of passages from his work that touch upon perception, its relation to the body, its intrinsic limitations in apprehending external objects, and the role of the mind in selecting and organizing the sense data, even when these remain at the periphery of individual awareness.

Keywords: Bhartṛhari, language, grammar, perception, consciousness, speaker's intention, upalipsā, self-awareness

## Bhartṛhari the Philosopher-Grammarian

BHARTṚHARI (probably 5th cent. CE),<sup>1</sup> the author of the *Vākyapadīya* ("On the sentence and the word")<sup>2</sup> and one of the most original and influential figures in the history of Indian philosophy, stands out among other ancient Indian thinkers in many significant respects. He firmly positions himself in the Brahmanical field, and yet his work shows clear traces of the influence of the early Buddhist philosophy of Mādhyamika and Yogācāra/Vijñānavāda, with their pointed critique of realism and of any fundamental correspondence between human cognition and language, on the one hand, and the external reality on the other.<sup>3</sup> He is neither the founder nor a follower of any philosophical school or movement, but an exponent of the grammatical tradition founded by Pāṇini<sup>4</sup> (c. 4th cent. BCE). Nevertheless, he presents his views on language and cognition within the framework of a grand nondualist metaphysical vision, agilely moving from the ultimate essence of reality

to the technicalities of Pāṇinian grammar, not unusually in the context of the same argument, but he does not advocate or espouse any clearly-spelled-out soteriological path.<sup>5</sup> And although it is generally acknowledged that his ideas have had a profound and far-reaching impact on Indian philosophical discourse, he had no direct continuators, not even among later grammarians.<sup>6</sup>

Bharthari's allegiance to the Pāṇinian tradition should be seen in the context of the key role grammar played in the formation of early Indian thought. The Indian fascination with language goes back to the Veda, in which language is often hypostatized as the goddess Vāc,<sup>7</sup> frequently described in cosmogonic myths as one of the first emanations in the process of (p. 232) creation of the universe by the primordial creator god. The power of words, manifesting itself in the poetical religious vision of the Vedic hymns and especially impregnating the mantras and formulas of the sacrificial ritual, was believed to have the capacity to affect not just the destiny of humans on earth but their afterlife and the overall balance of the cosmos. From early times, however, the mystical and lyrical discourse on language<sup>8</sup> was paralleled by the careful observation of its structures and features—its phonology, initially, but soon also its morphology, with the early realization that the mechanisms of nominal and verbal inflection entailed a great number of regularly recurring elements. Starting from these premises and prompted by the desire to preserve the Vedic scriptures in pristine condition both in form and content, a proper grammatical speculation began to emerge, with grammar (*vyākaraṇa*) becoming one of the traditional ancillary disciplines (*vedāṅga*) of the Veda.

However, grammar is also likely to have been the first Indian intellectual tradition to emancipate itself from its Vedic roots. Its seminal work, Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī* ("The treatise in eight chapters"), is the earliest complete grammar of Sanskrit, a theoretically sophisticated work in the *sūtra* genre based on principles of formalism and economy of description.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, it also marks a momentous epistemic rupture in Indian intellectual history: while earlier grammarians had focused on the language of finite corpora (the sacred texts of the specific Vedic school to which they belonged), Pāṇini extends his investigation to the whole language, giving preeminence in fact to the ordinary (*laukika*, literally "worldly," in the jargon of later Grammarians) variety that could be used in any context of everyday life over the Vedic (*vaidika*).<sup>10</sup> For the first time in the Brahmanical tradition a phenomenon that was not primarily or exclusively linked to the Vedic ritual was raised to the status of a worthy object of intellectual investigation, opening the way to similar pursuits in other fields of knowledge.

Given the pioneering role of grammar, it is hardly surprising that the earliest known example of theoretical treatise is the *Vyākaraṇa-Mahābhāṣya* ("Great commentary on grammar") of Patañjali (probably 2nd cent. BCE), an extensive prose commentary on the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* incorporating an earlier work, the *Vārttika* ("Glosses") of Kātyāyana (possibly 3rd cent. BCE). The *Mahābhāṣya* establishes many of the conventions of classical intellectual discourse (reflecting, in all likelihood, the nature of oral debates in contemporary scholarly circles) and sets a template for later independent works and commentaries in all fields. The *Mahābhāṣya* does not confine itself to the technical aspects of Pāṇinian grammar,

though, but explores many key issues of philosophical relevance about the nature of language, the relation between word and meaning, the extent to which language reflects external reality, the speaker's intention, and so on. It is here that we find the first germ of the unique philosophical/methodological approach later espoused by Bhartrhari: "We [the Grammarians] consider language a reliable means of knowledge. What language states, that is our source of knowledge."<sup>11</sup> To put it differently, the Grammarians are not concerned with reality as such, but rather with the way it is represented and referred to by language. This implies that—at some level—they consciously embrace the commonsense view of reality, as Bhartrhari notes: "People consider language a reliable means of knowledge, and this science [i.e., grammar] follows it," namely the people's point of view.<sup>12</sup>

### (p. 233) The Centrality of Language in Bhartrhari's Philosophy

Among the followers of the three sages (*munis*)—Pāṇini, Kātyāyana, and Patañjali—Bhartrhari is the first whose works<sup>13</sup> are extant. But rather than focusing primarily on the technical side of grammar, in his magnum opus, the *Vākyapadīya*, Bhartrhari develops the reflection on semantics initiated by Patañjali. This reflection is elaborated within the framework of his unique metaphysical vision according to which the very essence of *brahman*, the Absolute, is language (*śabda*), the ordering principle that is the fountainhead of the light of consciousness shining inside all living beings as well as the ultimate source of the physical world.<sup>14</sup>

If the language principle (*śabda-tattva*) is the stuff the universe is made of, it follows that its sentient manifestations, and in particular human beings, are never divorced from language, for their capacity for knowledge (in fact their very consciousness and self-awareness, as will be argued below) is innately infused with language. The epistemological counterpart of Bhartrhari's ontological monism is epitomized in this much-quoted verse from the first book of the VP: "In ordinary experience there is no cognition that does not conform to language. All knowledge appears as if it were transfixed by language."<sup>15</sup> This position certainly has metaphysical underpinnings, as I have mentioned, but at the same time it is rooted—like all of the Grammarians' statements on language and epistemology—in the insightful observation of the actual linguistic practices and mental processes at play in everyday experience. And yet, the content of this particular statement may seem counterintuitive, because we are not normally aware of language playing any evident role in the sensory apprehension of physical objects. For Bhartrhari's epistemology, it is of crucial importance, then, to show how language operates in a subtle but pervasive way even in perception, the most immediate mode of cognition.<sup>16</sup>

## Perception as a Bodily Function

One difficulty in presenting Bhartrhari's views on perception is that, unlike other Indian philosophers, nowhere does he give a definition of perception or, for that matter, of any other means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*). His goal is not to establish a comprehensive philosophical system, but rather to show that our understanding of the world is inevitably shaped in a myriad subtle and fundamental ways by the structures of language—those structures that Pāṇini had laid bare, as it were, in his grammar.<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, many of the references to perceptual cognition found in the VP appear in the context of parallels Bhartrhari draws between the ways in which these essential vital functions—perception and speech—operate, as if to stress their being an integral part of the same psycho-physical complex that is the human being.<sup>18</sup> (p. 234)

Around Bhartrhari's time most of the Brahmanical schools that had begun to emerge in the previous centuries<sup>19</sup> accepted that perception is a source of valid knowledge capable of making the external objects known, unless adverse factors (such as defects of the sense organs, poor light, excessive distance, etc.) interfere, and did not question its efficacy and autonomy. On the other hand, as Aklujkar has pointed out, Bhartrhari acknowledges the three means of valid knowledge generally accepted by most Indian philosophers—perception (*pratyakṣa*), inference (*anumāna*), and “inherited knowledge” (*āgama*)<sup>20</sup>—but insists that none of them is self-sufficient or intrinsically superior to the other two in all circumstances. Without specifically tackling the issue, he outlines a much more nuanced view of cognition in which there is no rigid separation between the various means of knowledge.<sup>21</sup> At best, perception is one of the components of complex cognitive processes that invariably involve conceptualization and inferential reasoning, and therefore language.

A number of references to perception in the VP reveal Bhartrhari's familiarity with certain theories current in his time. Notably, he is undeniably acquainted with the physiology of perception advocated by the Vaiśeṣika school,<sup>22</sup> according to which each sense organ shares a fundamental component with its objects, namely one of the elements (fire, earth, water, etc.) that constitute the universe, so that there is mutual suitability (*yogyatā*) between the senses and their respective objects. Thus, there is fire—more precisely, atoms of fire, possessing the quality of color—both in the organ of sight and in visible objects (which, in Vaiśeṣika terms, are particulars possessed with size and color), earth in the organ of smell and in odorous objects, and so on.<sup>23</sup> Bhartrhari is also aware that some thinkers conceived this connection in terms of an actual physical contact between the ocular rays, sent out by the eyes, and the visible objects, both of which—as explained above—contain fire atoms.<sup>24</sup>

Elsewhere, Bhartrhari refers in more general terms to the fact that the senses are dependent on the body. For example, in VP 2.423–424 [SI 419–420] the senses are compared to the words occurring in an utterance: “Just as the senses, which are possessed with distinct natures and fall upon distinct objects, do not produce their effect without the body, in the same way all words, getting hold of distinct meanings, bear no meaning when they

are detached from the sentences [in which they occur].”<sup>25</sup> This parallel is clearly meant to give force to the idea that the sentence is an organic whole, from which words can be parsed for descriptive and analytical purposes; but taken in isolation, words are unable to operate as signifiers.<sup>26</sup> As far as the senses are concerned, this might seem like the statement of a self-evident truth, but it is also a reminder of the fact, often neglected in the philosophical treatment of sensory perception, that the senses are not discarnate. On the contrary, they are rooted in the physicality of living creatures and play a key function in their survival (or the failure thereof) and well-being.

Thus, it appears that according to Bhartrhari the response of the sense organs to the external stimulations, as a basic bodily function, takes place somewhat mechanically, that is, regardless of the subject’s will, provided that the necessary conditions obtain, namely if the body is properly functioning and the external objects are accessible to the senses. This logically implies in its turn that, when one is awake, the reception of sensory (p. 235) stimulations is an incessant process,<sup>27</sup> because normally these conditions do occur for one object or another—in fact, for several objects simultaneously—and for one or many senses at once. However, according to Bhartrhari these contacts between the senses and the sense objects do not constitute cognition, for proper perceptual cognition is the result of more complex mental operations involving the cooperation with other modes of cognition. In Aklujkar’s words, for him “there is no acceptance of pure sense data or unalloyed *pratyakṣa*” (i.e., perception).<sup>28</sup> The sense data are processed by the mind, which plays an active role in giving form to the contents of perception, as a number of passages in the VP point out.

To begin with, things are never known in themselves, namely stripped of their association with adventitious limiting factors (*upādhis*) such as universals, qualities and actions, for any conceptualization involves a web of interrelated notions situated within specific space-time frames. As stated in VP 3.14.474, “The nature of things in isolation is not ascertained; no verbal expression refers to them when their natures have no [mental] representation.”<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, perception is subject to certain inherent physical limitations, which are offset through the recollection of previous experiences of similar objects and spontaneous deductive processes. For example, quite trivially, one never sees an object in its entirety but at best one side of it. As Bhartrhari observes in VP 2.156 [SI 161], “In ordinary experience it is difficult for anyone to perceive all the parts [of an object]; the entire object is inferred by means of [those] parts that are perceived.”<sup>30</sup> Thus, when somebody looks at a pot, only one side of it is actually visible, but the *whole* pot is cognized through an inference in which, according to Bhartrhari, the mind arranges the sense-data according to notions—such as what a pot is and what it is for—that are mediated by language. Unless the subject already had the notion of pot, he/she would not be able to recognize one immediately on the basis of the perception of just one part of it.

Similarly, in the “Chapter on Action” (*Kriyāsamuddeśa*) of the third book of the VP, Bhartrhari compares the hearing of spoken words to the cognition of actions, stressing

the role the mind plays in both cases in organizing the perceptual data into coherent wholes: “Just as the complete collection [of sounds that constitutes the word] ‘cow’ is not a sense object,<sup>31</sup> but the form of what is perceived part by part is conceived [as a whole] in the mind, [similarly,] after it is grasped in one way through the senses that fall upon the different portions [of the process], the form of actions is constructed [by the mind] in another way [i.e., as a whole], like a pinwheel.”<sup>32</sup>

The passage just quoted points out that the senses are unable to apprehend actions—again, a statement that seems to contradict common sense—because strictly speaking an action, being a process, never exists in its entirety at any given moment, while perceptual cognition consists in the momentary contact between two entities, the perceiving subject and the perceived object.<sup>33</sup> Thus, any action can be disassembled, as it were, into several intermediate constituent actions; pushing this analytical procedure to its limit one arrives at the things involved in the process: “The word ‘action’ does not apply to that single [entity] that is understood to be reached at the lower end [of the analysis of an action into its constituents].”<sup>34</sup> (p. 236)

Thus, at any given moment in the course of the action one perceives some object(s) in a particular state or position; however, what we call action is not a direct percept, but rather a mental construct, subjectively assembled by each individual according to their needs and circumstances. As Bhartṛhari puts it: “The natures of those complexes [i.e., actions], which are both existing and non-existing<sup>35</sup> because [they occur in] a sequence, do not have a [direct] relation with sight etc., whose objects are real things.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, the classical example “Devadatta is cooking rice in the pot with firewood” (*devadattaḥ sthālyām odanam edhaiḥ pacati*) is an account of the fact the speaker has witnessed Devadatta moving around in the kitchen and performing certain operations with a certain goal in view, the rice gradually changing from raw and hard to soft and edible, the firewood burning, and so on. But while each of the factors (*sādhana*s) involved in the action is directly seen in one stage or another of the process (say, the speaker sees Devadatta pouring water into the pot, the uncooked rice grains being washed, the firewood lighting up, etc.), the synthesis of the perceived events made in the sentence quoted above links the various momentary perceptions together. The resulting utterance is a highly subjective account that depends on the speaker’s intention (*vivakṣā*), namely the individual’s personal interest in the situation, his/her motivation for verbalizing thoughts and feelings at that particular moment, his/her choice of wording, and so on.

To put it differently, what one perceives makes sense only insofar as it is processed by the mind, and it can make sense in more than one way. As Bhartṛhari remarks in a verse of the second book of the VP, “Perception varies even with regard to a single perceivable object. Even the same [individual] sees it differently [when perceiving it] again at different times.”<sup>37</sup> Previous experiences, cultural presuppositions, contingent needs, expectations, and so on, all affect the way we perceive things.<sup>38</sup>

## The “Intention to Perceive”

As the above considerations show, for the Grammarians the speaker’s intention appears to be more than the simple relative<sup>39</sup> freedom the speaker enjoys in choosing the words that express his thoughts and feelings. It also encompasses the individual view of a certain situation or event, namely the subjective and arbitrary segmentation of reality operating at the ideational level and revealed by each utterance.<sup>40</sup> According to Bhartṛhari, as far as perception is concerned, the speaker’s intention (*vivakṣā*) has a counterpart in what he calls the subject’s “intention to perceive” (*upalipsā*). Grammatically both words are action nouns from the desiderative stems of *vac-* “to speak” and *upalabh-* “to perceive,” respectively, a lexical choice that emphasizes the affinity between the two concepts.<sup>41</sup> The term *upalipsā* implies that, while sensation occurs as an involuntary physical response to external stimulations (as argued above), proper perceptual cognition involves some degree of intentionality on the subject’s part, namely the ability to focus on those aspects of the surrounding environment that are most immediately relevant to one’s needs. (p. 237)

Bhartṛhari draws an explicit parallel between *vivakṣā* and the “intention to perceive” (*upalipsā*) in a passage of the *Vṛtti* on VP 1.13. In the verse Bhartṛhari states that words alone are the foundation of the essential nature of the constitution of meaning, and there is no comprehension of the nature of words without grammar.<sup>42</sup> The commentary explains that at the heart of the constitution of meaning is the speaker’s intention (*vivakṣā*), not the existence or non-existence of the signified things as real objects,<sup>43</sup> and in its turn the speaker’s intention is based on the availability of adequate (*yogya*) verbal expressions. Without engaging with the question of the ontological truth of the external world,<sup>44</sup> Bhartṛhari firmly points out that the external objects and events are established only to the extent they are amenable to mental representation, namely, as far as they are constituted as meanings in the mind, a condition of which is the existence of appropriate means to express them verbally.<sup>45</sup> He then adds: “To explain, in the [act of] perception one who intends to perceive [something] directs the sense organ that alone is adequate toward a [given] sense object.”<sup>46</sup> This explanation suggests in fact that, when the subject’s attention is oriented outward, the intention to perceive is virtually one dimension or possibly the first stage of *vivakṣā*, in which the mind, as the seat of volition (*icchā*),<sup>47</sup> deliberately turns (*pranidhāte*) the senses toward certain external objects to the detriment of others (as pointed out in the next passage I examine below), thus initiating that process of selective segmentation of reality that leads to thoughts, plans, and eventually to verbalization and/or action.

The way in which the senses operate is described again in the *Vṛtti* on VP 2.250–251,<sup>48</sup> in a section where Bhartṛhari discusses different views in favor of and against polysemy. In the following passage he explicitly connects the intention to perceive with the activity of the mind: “The capacity of the mind to embrace all [possible] objects is delimited by the intention to perceive, etc.”<sup>49</sup> and by the senses. Even the capacity of the senses to embrace all [sense] objects is delimited by the relation with the objects one intends to perceive, etc.”<sup>50</sup> Thus, at any given moment, out of the totality of possible contents the

subject's mind carves out a set of mental contents that come to the fore, and the outcome of this selection process depends, among other things, on the inevitable interaction between the individual and the external world, as is presupposed by the reference to the senses and the intention to perceive. The senses themselves do not indiscriminately apprehend all the external objects that are perceivable at any moment, but are marshaled by the mind, which picks up certain sensory stimulations and excludes or marginalizes others.

The stress on the volitional component of perception is also noticeable in VP 2.404 [SI 400], once again in the context of a parallel with speech: "Just as sight leads to seeing once [it is] directed [toward an object], similarly a word becomes expressive of a meaning [when] used<sup>51</sup> intentionally."<sup>52</sup> The *Vṛtti* elaborates: "In this respect, just as sight, when it has the abilities [required] to [apprehend] the contents of the perception of all perceivable [things], performs the perception of this or that [thing] on which it is intentionally directed, in the same way even a word, which is able to convey several meanings, embraces the [particular] meaning for which it is used—[i.e.,] it makes [that meaning] merge<sup>53</sup> in itself, it reveals [that meaning]."<sup>54</sup> As in the *Vṛtti* on VP 1.13 quoted (p. 238) above, here Bhartrhari uses the verb *praṇidhā-* both in the verse (the passive participle *praṇihita*) and the commentary (the finite passive form *praṇidhīyate*) to designate the subject's ability to focus a sensory faculty on a specific object. And in order to emphasize the intentionality (which is semantically inbuilt in the desiderative stem *upalipsā*, as I explained above), in the commentary he adds the word "intentionally" (*saṃkalpena*).

But if perception or—more accurately—the perceptual component of cognition is a selective and discriminating process, as the term *upalipsā* implies, what happens to the mass of contacts between the senses and the sense objects that do not take center stage? Are they simply ignored and discarded? Or, to consider the issue from a different angle, what does the mind make of the body's relation with its surroundings? For, after all, a constantly present object of perception in everyone's experience is one's own body as an object situated in a space populated by other objects. Thus, the issue of perception ends up being linked to the broader issue of self-consciousness. And to what extent is this awareness of oneself-in-the-world permeated with language? Clearly, this is no minor point for Bhartrhari, who advocates the ontological and epistemological centrality of language. In the next paragraph I will consider his remarks on these issues.

## Liminal Perception

If the contact between the sense organ and the sense object is only momentary, and therefore proper perception depends on the unifying and discriminating power of the mind, how does Bhartrhari account for that liminal<sup>55</sup> stage after the sense data have first reached the sense organs and elicited their response? It is an obvious fact of everyday experience that we are continuously exposed to stimulations of all sorts regardless of our will. However, the majority of the minute sensory details—visual, acoustic, olfactory, and so on—that make up our immediate surroundings escape our attention. Presumably, when



faced with them, the mind lacks the “intention to perceive” (*upalipsā*) or has it at a lower intensity, and therefore the sense organs are not specifically directed (*praṇidhā-*) toward the objects in the background. Nevertheless, we are aware of them in a general way and ready to respond, under normal circumstances, to any object that for some reason becomes prominent in our attention.

Bhartrhari discusses such an instance of liminal perception at the very beginning of the *Vṛtti* on VP 1.131 [SI 115], the verse (quoted above) in which he peremptorily asserts that there is no knowledge without language:

In the same way as one’s disposition [to speech] is in a withdrawn form, similarly a cognition devoid of conceptualization (*avikalpena*) does not produce any effect<sup>56</sup> even though it has arisen in relation to cognizable objects. To illustrate: even though a cognition occurs in a man who is walking in a hurry because he touches upon grass, lumps of earth, etc., [in him] there is just a sort of cognitive state in which, as the seed of the disposition to speech is close at hand, once the powers, confined to given (p. 239) meanings, of the verbal expressions that grasp the [perceived] objects and whose form can be conveyed<sup>57</sup> have manifested, the reality being apprehended—shaped by knowledge infused with language, [i.e., by knowledge] falling under the power of language—conforms to [such] knowledge, appears with a distinct form [and] is expressed by [the awareness] “I know x.” And when the seeds of speech have manifested themselves because of other conditions, this [reality] becomes the cause of recollection. Thus, according to some teachers the continuity in the operation of knowledge is similar to [what it is in] the mode of wakefulness even when one is asleep. But in that state (i.e., sleep) the seeds of the disposition to speech only operate in a subtle manner.<sup>58</sup>

Here Bhartrhari appears to admit the existence of a cognitive state in which the mind records the sense data but does not process them into full-blown cognitions. However, he insists that even such an inchoate mental state of which the subject is barely aware is inherently infused with language, as is shown by the fact that, when triggered by the appropriate circumstances, it can be recollected—namely, it can become the object of a distinct conceptualization and thereby verbalized.

The fact that this passage occurs at the beginning of the *Vṛtti* on VP 1.131, shows, I think, that Bhartrhari is aware this is not a marginal issue in the frame of his theory of knowledge, which insists on the centrality of language. Interestingly, in it he uses the phrase *avikalpa jñāna*,<sup>59</sup> which at first sight may seem an oxymoron in terms of Bhartrhari’s epistemology, for taken at face value it appears to describe a kind of cognition devoid of conceptualization. In this regard, Akujkar remarks that the “concept of *nirvikalpa jñāna* in the sense of ‘a cognition devoid of expressions’<sup>60</sup> is also missing”<sup>61</sup> in Bhartrhari’s work.<sup>62</sup> This is undoubtedly a correct representation of Bhartrhari’s stance, and yet, as the passage quoted above shows, it needs to be qualified. In everyday experience the mind is normally focused on some contents, which may be of perceptual origin or generated in the mind itself or both, but at the same time it has some more or less vague general

awareness of the surrounding environment in which the subject happens to be located. According to Bhartrhari, this awareness already contains in itself the “seed”—namely the potential—of language, as is shown by the fact that it is retrievable by memory. In it the external sense data stop just short of being fully articulated but they are at hand, as it were. It is this kind of mental configuration, I think, that Bhartrhari calls “cognition devoid of conceptualization.”

In fact, according to Bhartrhari the mind is infused with language not just when the subject is actively engaged in the effort to apprehend external objects or pursue some reasoning, but at its very core, in the self-consciousness that is its default state, so to speak, as is stated in the next verse: “If knowledge ceased to have the perennial nature of language, the light [of consciousness] would not shine for that [nature] makes reflective awareness possible.”<sup>63</sup> In the commentary, Bhartrhari once again raises the issue of liminal perception, arguing that even the most peripheral areas of human experience partake of the same nature as ordinary conceptual cognitions: “Even in a state of unconsciousness<sup>64</sup> there is a subtle conformity [of knowledge] to the nature of language. The light [of knowledge]<sup>65</sup> that initially falls upon external things reveals their mere nature (p. 240) of objects without seizing the causes<sup>66</sup> [of their manifestation] in a manner that cannot be expressed (*avyapadeśya*)<sup>67</sup> as ‘this is x’.”<sup>68</sup>

With the expression “mere nature of objects” (*vastusvarūpamātram*) Bhartrhari refers to the incipient stage of any as yet unfocused perception consisting in the subject’s bare awareness that there is “something out there,” as it were. As observed above, such unfocused perceptions form the constant background of our awareness of the world around us and may or may not evolve into distinct cognitions amenable to full verbalization. At this level, even the simple act of recognition of things, although possible, does not take place because the sense objects are lacking the network of associations—with generalities, and so on—that accompany and constitute conceptualizations. Nevertheless, their existence as external objects—rather than as figments of the imagination—is acknowledged.<sup>69</sup> And yet one may argue—even though, admittedly, this is nowhere spelled out in the VP—that, as the backdrop of people’s focused perceptions is not a messy blur but rather a coherent orderly picture of their surroundings, this is in itself proof that the mind is at work ranging the uninterrupted flux of sensory stimulations according to distinctions that are fundamentally shaped by language. The external world does not stop making sense to us simply because we are not paying attention to it.

Clearly in these passages language should not be understood in the sense of articulated, audible speech, but rather as internal speech, that is, thought, which despite being devoid of sequence—unlike audible speech—has an inbuilt potential for articulation. By positing that knowledge is intrinsically and invariably linguistic in nature, in fact, Bhartrhari establishes a virtual equivalence between intellect and language, as two sides of the same coin.<sup>70</sup> Thus, when sense data are apprehended, even though subliminally, this amounts to a conceptualization that is steeped in language even though, paradoxically, one may lack the words to express it.<sup>71</sup>

## The Nature of Consciousness

Bhartrhari's claim that all knowledge is infused with language rests on metaphysical assumptions, namely his belief that the essential nature of the Absolute (*brahman*) is language and his uncompromising nondualism. But is there in his work any attempt at building an epistemological argument for the linguistic nature of individual consciousness in terms of ordinary experience, which is supposed to be the Grammarians' compass? A number of statements and remarks found in the VP can be read in this light.

Discussing Bhartrhari's theory of cognition, Aklujkar identifies three entities in it—"sentience" or "pure consciousness" (*cit*, *citi*, or *caitanya*); "determinate consciousness or intellect" (*buddhi*), as the cognizer; and a "state, act or event of cognizing" (*jñāna*)—which, he explains, are correlated "with the levels of language he [i.e., Bhartrhari] accepts."<sup>72</sup> He also notes that the intellect (*buddhi*) is not distinguished from the mind (*manas*), the sense of ego (*ahaṃkāra*), and so on, and that "it is simply *citi* or *caitanya* in its aspect of holding the entire diversity of linguistic units (phonemes, words and (p. 241) sentences), ... of which a person is aware. There is no physical or material distinction between *citi* and *buddhi*." There is in fact a certain degree of overlap in Bhartrhari's use of these terms, and in the VP we come across references to *caitanya*, "consciousness," in which this term is variously qualified in order to bring out its individual cognitive dimension.<sup>73</sup>

I showed above that Bhartrhari regards consciousness as the connective tissue, as it were, underlying all the cognitions of individual subjects. In VP 1.41, in the context of a series of verses dealing with received knowledge/tradition (*āgama*), the latter is said to be uninterrupted like consciousness.<sup>74</sup> The *Vṛtti* elaborates on consciousness, explicitly connecting it with the sense of ego: "... that inborn beginningless consciousness that is accompanied by cognitions such as 'I am,' etc. is never disrupted in everyday dealings even for those whose self is liberated because [such] is the convention among people, even though trustworthy individuals teach that [in reality] you are not this, this is not yours'..."<sup>75</sup> Thus, in ordinary experience consciousness is never disjoined from the awareness of oneself as an individual, an awareness that is said to be inborn and without beginning, namely inextricable from sentience. Even *yogins*, who are supposed to have transcended the sense of ego, cannot help referring to themselves as "I" to the extent they interact with other people.

This consciousness, which always implies self-awareness and whose fundamental nature is language, exists in all living beings, as is stated in VP 1.134 [SI 118]: "This<sup>76</sup> is the cognition (*saṃjñā*) of all beings undergoing rebirth; it exists internally and externally; the consciousness of all kinds of creatures does not transcend that mere [nature of language]."<sup>77</sup> In the *Vṛtti* Bhartrhari remarks that it is consciousness that regulates the recognition of sentience in other beings: "In ordinary experience people call [something] 'sentient' or 'insentient' because of that which conforms [or does not conform] to the nature of language in consciousness."<sup>78</sup> It then explains "internally" (*antah*) and "externally" (*bahih*) as referring to internal (i.e., self-) and external perception: "The nature of language is constantly present as long as there is [even] the slightest awareness of pleasure

and pain, even for those<sup>79</sup> whose knowledge is directed inward. As for those whose knowledge is directed outward, worldly dealings are based on it; they would definitely cease because of its absence."<sup>80</sup>

The *Vṛtti* further links this awareness to the distinction between self and non-self: "For there is no creature possessed with consciousness in which the awareness of oneself or others is not accompanied by language."<sup>81</sup> As Bhartṛhari points out in the opening verse of the "Chapter on the [Grammatical] Person" (*Puruṣasamuddeśa*) of the third book of the VP, grammatically this basic opposition between self and other is encapsulated in the use of first-person verbal forms versus second-person forms, by which the other is also acknowledged as a sentient being: "Individuality and otherness are both limiting factors of the agent and the object. The first- and second-person grammatical endings express them by means of specific speech units."<sup>82</sup>

The term *pratyaktā*, which I have translated as "individuality," is explained in Helārāja's commentary as the nature of the "individual" (*pratyāñc*),<sup>83</sup> namely "that (p. 242) which goes (*añcati*) or moves in each person, uniquely, [namely] the internal regulator, the individual soul." He then adds: "It is confined within each body. Its existence is the meaning expressed by the first person. The sense is that the first person refers to an action understood from a finite verb as having the same substratum as the sense of ego."<sup>84</sup>

From this selection of passages one can draw certain plausible conclusions. For Bhartṛhari the linguistic nature of consciousness is evidenced by the fact that, in the state of waking, the subject is always self-aware, and by its very nature this awareness entails the fundamental distinction between self and non-self, between subject and object. Furthermore, in ordinary experience one never experiences consciousness in a pure state, but always as colored by external objects.<sup>85</sup> Therefore, at any given moment the state of consciousness must include the perception of oneself as a material entity because, as shown above, sensory apprehension is a bodily process that takes place to a large extent outside the subject's control, and for that matter it must also include the perception of the surrounding environment (no matter how dimly), since all material entities are conceptually located in space.<sup>86</sup> Therefore, the argument that—in Aklujkar's words—"in Bhartṛhari's view, there has never been a situation in which there was only pure perception, unattended by conceptualization, of something in the world,"<sup>87</sup> can also be understood in the sense that, for Bhartṛhari, the mental state of any conscious subject at any given moment is usually not exclusively occupied by a single cognition, whether primarily perceptual or not, but rather is a complex configuration accommodating different cognitions at various levels of awareness. The unavoidable perception of the subject's own body, with the accompanying innate sense of the self as distinct from the world around it, is one component of any mental state—a distinction that is inherently shaped by language, for example through the opposition inside/outside recalled in VP 1.134 (quoted above). In this way, Bhartṛhari appears to adumbrate a holistic model of cognition, closer to the actual experience of ordinary human beings and in line with the traditional empiri-

cist approach of the intellectual lineage to which he belonged, that of the early Pāṇinian grammarians.

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### Notes:

(1.) This dating has been established on the basis of the earliest available quotations of Bhartrhari's work, but virtually nothing is known about Bhartrhari's life. Little progress has been made since the publication of K. A. Subramania Iyer's seminal monograph *Bhartrhari: A Study of the Vākyapadīya in the Light of Ancient Commentaries* (Poona: Deccan College, 1969). For a more recent survey and assessment of the available infor-

mation, see Jan E. M. Houben, *The Saṃbandha-Samuddeśa (Chapter on Relation), and Bhartrhari's Philosophy of Language* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1995), 3–10.

(2.) The *Vākyapadīya* is a treatise of less than two thousand verses, divided into three books (*kāṇḍas*) of unequal length. The first two books also comprise a commentary, the *Vṛtti*, which the Sanskrit tradition unanimously recognises as Bhartrhari's work. This attribution has been questioned by some modern scholars (notably, Madeleine Biardeau, Johannes Bronkhorst, and, more cautiously, Jan Houben) and reasserted by others (Subramania Iyer, Ashok Aklujkar, George Cardona). A survey of the debate is found in George Cardona, *Recent Research in Pāṇinian Studies* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999), 250–265. See also Ole Pind's article "Did Dignāga and Mallavādin Know the Old *Vākya-Padīya-Vṛtti* Attributed to Bhartrhari?," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 31 (2003): 257–270, which brings fresh evidence that confirms Bhartrhari's authorship. I have not personally investigated the matter, but the more I study the first two books of the *Vākyapadīya* with the *Vṛtti*, the more I become convinced that they are the work of the same author. Accordingly, here I will simply refer to Bhartrhari as the author of the *Vṛtti*.

Unlike the first two books, the third does not have (and likely never had) an autocommentary, but it was extensively commented upon by Helārāja, a Kashmiri author who was probably active in the 10th cent. See Vincenzo Vergiani, "Helārāja on Omniscience, *Āgama* and the Origin of Language," in *Around Abhinavagupta. Aspects of the Intellectual History of Kashmir from the 9th to the 11th Centuries*, edited by Eli Franco and Isabelle Ratié (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2016), which discusses Helārāja's philosophy and cultural context.

(3.) The influence Buddhist views may have had on Bhartrhari's philosophy is still to be investigated in depth. For a general treatment of the topic, see David Seyfort Ruegg's pioneering (albeit somewhat outdated) essay "Le *Vākyapadīya*," in *Contributions à l'histoire de la philosophie linguistique indienne* (Paris: de Boccard, 1959), 57–93; Hajime Nakamura, "Buddhist Influence upon the *Vākyapadīya*," *Journal of the Ganganath Jha Research Institute* 29 (1973): 367–388; Johannes Bronkhorst, "Etudes sur Bhartrhari, 4: l'absolu dans le *Vākyapadīya* et son lien avec le Madhyamaka," *Asiatische Studien/Études asiatiques* 46.1 (*Études bouddhiques offertes à Jacques May*) (1992): 56–80; Christian Lindtner, "Linking up Bhartrhari and the Bauddhas," in *Proceedings of the First International Conference on Bhartrhari, University of Poona, January 6–8, 1992, Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques* 47.1 (1993): 195–213.

(4.) For a survey of the scholarship about Pāṇini's date see George Cardona, *Pāṇini: A Survey of Research* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980), 260–262. Oskar von Hinüber, *Der Beginn der Schrift und frühe Schriftlichkeit in Indien* (Wiesbaden: Steiner Verlag, 1989), 34, presents evidence that suggests dating Pāṇini to the 4th cent.

(5.) The few references to a *śabdapūrva(ka) yoga* in the first book of the *Vākyapadīya* are simply too vague to allow us to draw any firm conclusion on this matter. In *Bhartrhari: A Study* (pp. 141–142) Subramania Iyer remarks that in "all the occurrences, there is a reference to the attainment of union with the inner, eternal, undifferentiated, sequenceless

Word,” and argues that “some kind of Yoga practice for the attainment of Brahman-Śabdatattva is an integral part of the philosophy of Bhartrhari,” but at the same time cautions: “It is not that the meaning of these passages is clear.”

(6.) A. Aklujkar (“The Epistemological Point of View of Bhartrhari,” in *Concepts of Knowledge: East and West*, ed. Swami Prabhananda and J. L. Shaw [Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 2000], 2) notes that the later Pāṇinīyas did not show much interest in restating, extending, or modifying Bhartrhari’s epistemology—with the exception, I would say, of his direct commentator Helārāja. On the other hand, as already noted by Subramania Iyer and Aklujkar, it would be hard to overestimate the importance that Bhartrhari’s ideas had on the views of one of the major intellectual traditions of medieval India, the Pratyabhijñā school of nondualist Śaivism. Not only did the Kashmiri Śaivas embrace the notion of the centrality of language in ordinary cognition, but even Bhartrhari’s metaphysical vision resonates in their works despite its non-theism. On Bhartrhari’s influence on the Pratyabhijñā school, see R. Torella, “From an Adversary to the Main Ally: The Place of Bhartrhari in the Kashmirian Śaiva Advaita,” in *Linguistic Traditions of Kashmir: Essays in Memory of Pandit Dinanath Yaksha*, ed. M. Kaul and A. Aklujkar (New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 2008), 508–524, and “The Word in Abhinavagupta’s Bṛhadvi-marśinī,” in *Le Parole e i Marmi, Studi in onore di Raniero Gnoli nel suo 70° compleanno*, 2 vols., ed. R. Torella et al., Serie Orientale Roma XCII 1–2 (Roma: IsIAO, 2001), 853–874. Another tradition that was profoundly indebted to Bhartrhari’s philosophy was the Buddhist Pramāṇa, which I briefly refer to below. It is also worth mentioning that the Mīmāṃsaka author Maṇḍana Miśra (late 7th–early 8th cent.) responded to some of Bhartrhari’s views and tried to accommodate them into his own theoretical framework, for example in his *Sphoṭasiddhi*.

(7.) The feminine noun *vāc* (nominative singular *vāk*) means “speech.”

(8.) In the early period the only language grammarians pay any attention to is Sanskrit, which is in a sense regarded as the language par excellence. In later times (and at different epochs) some of the literary vernaculars become the object of grammatical investigation and description, generally modeled after Sanskrit grammar.

(9.) Pāṇini’s approach may be called derivational: it presupposes that the words and sentences of ordinary language are made up of a number of abstract elements—bases (*prakṛti*), either verbal or nominal, and affixes (*pratyaya*)—and it lays down the rules that allow them to combine, leading through a sequence of operations to the correct derivation of current speech forms. For the purposes of grammatical description Pāṇini elaborates a complex and rigorous metalanguage, integrating the nomenclature inherited from his Vedic predecessors with a system of phonic tags and newly coined artificial terms. On Pāṇini’s grammar, see G. Cardona, *Pāṇini: His Work and Its Traditions, vol. 1: Background and Introduction* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988).

(10.) In his influential book *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), Sheldon Pollock insists that the language described by Pāṇini is exclusively associated with a “sacerdotal function” that “characterises both reg-



isters of the language: on the one hand, the idiom actually used for the Vedic texts themselves ... ; on the other, the rigorously normative idiolect restricted to (Vedic) pedagogical environments” (p. 46). On the contrary, I maintain that Pāṇini’s *Aṣṭādhyāyī* marks the beginning of the long and successful life of Sanskrit as a literary language, which eventually became the pan-Indian idiom of the courtly poetry (*kāvya*) that was born in the early centuries of the first millennium CE. The latter phenomenon is the pivot of Pollock’s argument, which however ignores or plays down its historical antecedents. Evidence, both internal to the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* and external to it (such as the adoption of Sanskrit, already in the late first millennium BCE, as a doctrinal language by some Buddhist sects and by a “secular” and non-sectarian intellectual tradition like Āyurveda, just to mention two examples), shows that well before the birth of *kāvya* Sanskrit had ceased being confined to liturgical or para-liturgical contexts (provided that it had ever been), but a discussion of it would be beyond the scope of this article.

(11.) *śabdapramāṇakā vayam. yac chabda āha tad asmākaṃ pramāṇam*. This line occurs twice in the *Mahābhāṣya*: in the introductory section known as *Paspaśāhnika* (in *Vyākaraṇa-mahābhāṣya of Patañjali*, edited by F. Kielhorn [Bombay: Government Central Press, 1880–1885], 3rd ed. by K. V. Abhyankar [Poona: BORI, 1962–1972], vol. 1, p. 11, lines 1–2, and in the commentary on *Aṣṭādhyāyī* 2.1.1, vol. 1, p. 366, lines 12–13.

(12.) *Vākyapadīya* (henceforth VP) 3.7.38cd: *śabdapramāṇako lokaḥ sa śāstreṇānugamyate*. Here, as elsewhere in this article, verses in the VP are quoted following the numeration in Rau’s 1977 critical edition, followed by the number in the edition of Subramania Iyer (= SI) in brackets, whenever this is different; when I quote or refer to the *Vṛtti* on the first two books or Helārāja’s commentary on the third, reference is also given to the appropriate volume of Subramania Iyer’s edition, followed by page (and line in the case of the first and third book). All translations are mine unless otherwise specified.

(13.) Besides the *Vākyapadīya*, the only other work of Bhartrhari that has come down to us is the *Mahābhāṣya-ṭīkā* or *-dīpikā* (“The Commentary or Lamp on the *Mahābhāṣya*”), which has survived in fragmentary form in a single manuscript. This is the earliest known sub-commentary on Patañjali’s work, seemingly covering only the portion of the *Mahābhāṣya* on the first three sections (*pādas*) of the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*. The *Ṭīkā* is almost certainly earlier than the VP. The choice of abandoning the format of the commentary and composing an independent treatise such as the VP may be seen as a sign that Bhartrhari was aware of the novelty of the views he expounds, even though he plays it down repeatedly claiming to be entirely relying on the authority of his predecessors.

(14.) See VP 1.1: “The Brahman who is without beginning or end, whose very essence is the Word, who is the cause of the manifested phonemes, who appears as the objects, from whom the creation of the world proceeds, ...” (*anādinidhanaṃ brahma śabdatattvaṃ yad akṣaram | vivartate ’rthabhāvena prakriyā jagato yataḥ*; translation by Subramania Iyer, 1965, p. 1). However, Bhartrhari does not discuss how the actual process of emanation/creation of the physical universe may have been like. According to Aklujkar (“Epistemological Point of View of Bhartrhari,” 9), this question is left open because “[f]ollowing his

general tendency or strategy of going beyond specific conflicting positions to a non-conflicting common factor or meta-position,” Bhartṛhari “declines to be further involved in possibilities that probably cannot, in his view, be proved or disproved logically.”

(15.) VP 1.131 [SI 115]: *na so 'sti pratyayo loke yaḥ śabdānugamād rte | anuviddham iva jñānaṃ sarvaṃ śabdena bhāsate*. What I have translated here as “ordinary experience” is *loka*, literally the “world,” a term that on the cosmological level generally designates the dimension of reality populated by humans and therefore, by extension, ordinary people or even, especially in grammatical discourse, what we may call the speech community.

(16.) Bhartṛhari’s views on the pervasiveness of language in cognition were far from being universally accepted in ancient India. Buddhist thinkers such as Dignāga (probably a junior contemporary of Bhartṛhari) and Dharmakīrti—who were strongly influenced by Bhartṛhari’s ideas (see, e.g., the contribution by John Taber and Kei Kataoka in this volume)—assert that “true” perception is free from conceptual construction (*kalpanāpoḍha*) and define conceptual construction as “the association of an immediate awareness with a word” (in Hattori’s words), in direct and certainly intentional opposition to Bhartṛhari. See Masaaki Hattori, *Dignāga, On Perception* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), in particular 82–85. On the place of perception in classical Indian epistemologies, see Bimal K. Matilal, *Perception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

(17.) In this respect, the views of philosophers and theologians are themselves entangled in the same fundamental—and, according to Bhartṛhari, ultimately unreal—dichotomies and contradictions that are constitutive of ordinary language and thought, thus proving unable to grasp the ultimate reality that, in his view, is essentially one and undivided.

(18.) As a matter of fact, there are a number of places in the VP where Bhartṛhari refers to animals or sentient beings in general, admitting that they too are possessed with consciousness. It would be interesting to collect and analyze these passages to understand their implications, something that to my knowledge has never been done.

(19.) If the generally accepted date (5th cent.) is correct, Bhartṛhari flourished after the period when the major philosophical *sūtras* (Jaimini, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika) were composed and is roughly contemporary with some of the earliest commentators of these seminal works, such as Śabara, Vātsyāyana, and Praśastapāda.

(20.) On the notion of *āgama* in Bhartṛhari’s work, see the remarks in Ashok Aklujkar’s article “Prāmāṇya in the Philosophy of the Grammarians,” in *Studies in Indology: Prof. Rasik Vihari Joshi Felicitation Volume*, ed. Avanindra Kumar et al. (New Delhi: Shree Publishing House, 1989), in particular 17–18.

(21.) Aklujkar (“Prāmāṇya in the Philosophy of the Grammarians,” 17) points out that for Bhartṛhari, “because of the particular thrust of his philosophy, attempts to draw clear boundaries between these *pramāṇas* which other philosophical schools like Nyāya or Mīmāṃsā make, need not be made; at a certain level, the boundaries turn out to be just

matters of convenience in philosophical discourse.” See also the chapter on “Bhartrhari and the *pramāṇas*” in K. A. Subramania Iyer’s *Bhartrhari: A Study*, 83–97.

(22.) On the VP as a source for the history of early Vaiśeṣika see Johannes Bronkhorst, “Studies on Bhartrhari, 5: Bhartrhari and Vaiśeṣika,” in *Proceedings of the First International Conference on Bhartrhari, University of Poona, January 6–8, 1992, Asiatische Studien/Etudes Asiatiques* 47.1 (1993): 75–94.

(23.) VP 1.100 (SI 97): “Just as it is established that there is a specific suitability between the apprehending organs and the apprehended [objects], so there is [mutual suitability] between sounds and the disclosure of meaning (*sphoṭa*) through their relation as manifestors and manifested” (*grahaṇagrāhyayoḥ siddhā योग्यता नियता यथा | व्याङ्ग्यव्याञ्जकabhāve ’pi tathaiva sphoṭanādayoḥ*).

(24.) This theory, known as *prāpyakāritva*, namely the “effectiveness” (*-kāritva*) of the sense when the object is “attained” (*prāpya-*), is recorded in VP 1.82 [SI 80], which states: “If sight operates once [the object] has been reached, it is admitted that light enhances both the sense and the object; this is (also) the process in the case of (manifesting) sounds” (*cakṣuṣaḥ prāpyakāritve tejasā tu dvayor api | viṣayendriyayor iṣṭaḥ saṃskarāḥ sa kramo dhvaneḥ*). The opposite view, *aprāpyakāritva*, is also mentioned in the *Vṛtti* (VP 1, p. 146, lines 6–7).

(25.) VP 2.423–424 [SI 419–420]: *prthanniviṣṭatattvānām prthagarthānupātinām | indriyāṇām yathā kāryam ṛte dehān na kalpate || tathā padānām sarveṣām prthagarthaniveśinām | vākyebhyaḥ pravibhaktānām arthavattā na vidyate*.

(26.) According to Bhartrhari the basic unit of language is the sentence, which is unitary both formally (as the signifier) and semantically (as the meaning) even though it is revealed through the sequence of articulated sounds. Isolated words have no currency in ordinary communication: people speak in sentences (even though these may occasionally consist of a single word), and they do not make up sentences by stringing words together; nor do they understand sentences, on hearing them, by adding up the individual word meanings. However, in order to describe language, the Grammarians provisionally admit that one can analyze sentences into words through the method of “extraction” (*apod-dhāra*), and further analyze words into bases and affixes, which should equally be regarded as theoretical fictions that play no role in the process of communication.

(27.) See, e.g., the following remark made in passing by Vṛṣabhadeva (possibly 8th cent.) in his commentary on the first book of the VP, the *Paddhati*, published alongside the main text in Subramania Iyer’s edition: *nayanaraśmayāḥ sūkṣmā nayanāt santataṃ nirgatya ...* “the imperceptible ocular rays, continuously emanating from the eye ...” (VP 1, p. 146, lines 23–25). On this little studied work, whose title was probably *Sphuṭākṣarā*, see recently Marco Ferrante, “Vṛṣabhadeva’s *Sphuṭākṣarā* on Bhartrhari’s Metaphysics: Commentarial Strategy and New Interpretations,” in *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 41 (2013): 133–149.

(28.) Ashok Aklujkar, “Prāmāṇya in the Philosophy of the Grammarians,” 20.

(29.) *kevalānāṃ tu bhāvānāṃ na rūpaṃ avadhāryate | anirūpitarūpeṣu teṣu śabda na var-tate*. Note that for *avadhāryate* Rau reports a variant *upalabhyate* “is [not] perceived.”

(30.) *durlabhaṃ kasya cil loke sarvāvayavadarśanam | kaiś cit tv avayavair dr̥ṣṭair arthaḥ kṛtsno 'numīyate*.

(31.) The idea behind this statement is that, since the sounds that together form the word come in a sequence, they cannot be heard simultaneously, and therefore a single perception cannot grasp the whole word, which is in fact “put together” mentally combining the mnemonic traces left by each sound.

(32.) VP 3.8.8–9: *yathā gaur iti samghātaḥ sarvo nendriyagocaraḥ | bhāgaśas tūpalabdhasya buddhau rūpaṃ nirūpyate || indriyair anyathāprāptau bhedaṃśopanipātibhiḥ | alā-tacakraṃ rūpaṃ kriyāṇāṃ parikalpyate ||*. The pinwheel or Catherine wheel (Sanskrit *alātacakra*) is a classical example of mental construct based on perceptual data: the spinning firebrand is cognised as a revolving circle of fire, while in reality there is no circle.

(33.) This view is already found in the *Mahābhāṣya*, where Patañjali notes that actions are not directly perceivable, but can only be inferred. See *Mahābhāṣya* (*Vyākaraṇamahābhāṣya of Patañjali*, ed. F. Kielhorn [Bombay: Government Central Press, 1880–1885], 3rd ed. by K. V. Abhyankar [Poona: BORI, 1962–1972], vol. 2, p. 120, line 9: *kriyā nāmeyam atyantāparidr̥ṣṭānumānagamyā* “What we call action is altogether beyond perception: it can be grasped [only] through inference”; the same statement is also found in vol. 2, p. 114, line 10, and with a slightly different wording in vol. 1, p. 254, lines 15–17.

(34.) VP 3.8.10: *yaś cāpakarṣaparyantam anuprāptaḥ pratīyate | tatraikasmin kriyāśabdaḥ kevale na prayujyate ||*

(35.) In the sense that in a process, what exists at any given time is nonexistent before and after its occurrence, but the overall process is conceptualised as a unitary action.

(36.) VP 3.8.7–9: *kramāt sadasatām teṣām ātmāno na samūhinām | sadvastuviṣayair yānti sambandhaṃ cakṣurādibhiḥ ||*

(37.) VP 2.136: *ekasminn api dr̥śye 'rthe darśanaṃ bhidyate pṛthak | kālāntareṇa caiko 'pi taṃ paśyaty anyathā punaḥ ||*

(38.) VP 2.296: “That which is seen variously according to differences of space, time and [conditions of] the senses, is determined [by the intellect] according to the common understanding of people” (*deśakāleṇdriyagatair bhedair yad dr̥śyate 'nyathā || yathā prasiddhir lokasya tathā tad avasīyate*).

(39.) As already pointed out by Patañjali (*Vyākaraṇamahābhāṣya*, vol. 2, 342–343), the speaker’s intention is generally constrained by the consensus of the community he/she

belongs to, for the obvious reason that, being a tool for communication, speech cannot be exceedingly idiosyncratic.

(40.) See, e.g., VP 3.7.2: “The whole [universe] is an aggregate of parts that are capacities and has manifold properties. Because it always exists in all its modes, something [of it] is expressed in this or that context according to the speaker’s intention” (*śak-timātrāsamūhasya viśvasyānekadharmaṇaḥ | sarvadā sarvathā bhāvāt kva cit kiṃ cid vi-vakṣyate.*).

(41.) The “intention to perceive” (*upalipsā*) that is discussed here should be understood in a weak sense, as a physical and mental disposition toward the apprehension of an external object involving some degree of self-awareness on the subject’s part, rather than as a conscious, rationally thought-out deliberation. The same considerations may apply, *mutatis mutandis*, also to *vivakṣā*.

(42.) VP 1.13: *arthapravṛttitattvānām śabdā eva nibandhanam | tattvāvabodhaḥ śabd-dānām nāsti vyākaraṇād rte ||*

(43.) *Vṛtti*, VP 1, p. 44, line 3: *arthasya pravṛttitattvaṃ vivakṣā. na tu vastusvarūpatayā sattvaṃ asattvaṃ vā.*

(44.) This is in line with the Grammarians’ *śabdapramāṇaka* ontology: language operates on the implicit assumption that the things people talk about exist.

(45.) “The speaker’s intention is based in fact on [the availability of] adequate words, for the speaker employs the adequate verbal expression for each meaning once the [contents] to be expressed have become present [to the mind] as made available through the speaker’s intention.” (*Vṛtti*, VP 1, p. 44, lines 3–5: *vivakṣā hi yogyaśabdanibandhanā. yogyaṃ hi śabdaṃ prayuktā vivakṣāprāpitassannidhāneṣv abhidheyeṣu pratyartham upādat-te.*). From this formulation it transpires that both the signified (*abhidheya*) and the signifier (*abhidhāna*) depend on *vivakṣā*. This may seem to suggest a kind of solipsism except the Grammarians are always well aware of the social (*laukika*) inter-subjective dimension of language. Thus, one should not forget that the linguistic resources the individual speaker’s intention taps are those of the shared language, which pre-exists all individual users and in Bhartrhari’s view is ultimately rooted in the *śabda-tattva*.

(46.) *Vṛtti*, VP 1, p. 44, line 5: *tad yathopalipsamānaḥ prativṣayaṃ yogyaṃ evendriyam upalabdhaḥ prapīdhatte.*

(47.) Note that in Pāṇini’s grammar the desiderative suffix *saN* is introduced under the semantic condition *icchāyām* “to denote desire”; see *Aṣṭādhyāyī* 3.1.7, *dhātoḥ karmaṇaḥ samānakartṛkāḍ icchāyām vā*.

(48.) VP 2.250: “Other thinkers say that a single word has multiple meanings. The power of a single [word] to express all [its various] meanings varies [i.e., is circumscribed] according to the different conditions [for its use]” (*ekam āhur anekārthaṃ śabdam anye parīkṣakāḥ | nimittabhedād ekasya sārvarthyaṃ tasya bhidyate||*); VP 2.251: “Moving be-

yond the simultaneity [of meanings], [a word] applies in turn [to one or the other meaning] because of the context or the purpose or because of the connection with another word” (*yaugapadyam atikramya paryāye vyavatiṣṭhate | arthaprakaraṇābhyaṃ vā yogāc chabdāntareṇa vā||*).

(49.) Possibly “etc.” is meant to suggest that the contents of the individual mind at any given moment—out of the totality of possible conceivable meanings—are determined by the concurrence of external factors (apprehended through perception) as much as by internal, that is purely mental, factors.

(50.) *Vṛtti*, VP 2: *buddheḥ sārvarthyam upalipsādhībhīr indriyaiś cāvacchidyate. indriyasyāpi sārvarthyam upalipsārthasambandhādhībhīr avacchidyate.*

(51.) The word *abhisamhita* literally means “aimed at.”

(52.) *yathā praṇihitaṃ cakṣur darśanāyopakalpate | tathābhisamhitaḥ śabda bhavaty arthasya vācakaḥ.*

(53.) The causative form *sanniveśayati* literally means “makes it penetrate.” The idea is that, when an expression is used to convey a particular meaning, the signifier and the signified are inextricably joined together in the awareness of the speaker.

(54.) *Vṛtti*, VP 2, p. 302: *tatra cakṣur yathā sarvadṛśyopalabdhiviśayābhīr yogyatābhīr yuktaṃ yatra yatra saṅkalpena praṇidhīyate tatra tatropalabdhim karoti tathā śabda ‘py anekārthapratyāyanayogyo yam arthaṃ praty abhisamhito bhavati tam upasamgrhṇāti, svātmani sanniveśayati, prakāśayati.*

(55.) I use “liminal” in the sense of “relating to a sensory threshold” (see s.v. in *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, last accessed 20 December 2015, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/liminal>), but also, more generally, “relating to a transitional or initial stage” (see s.v. *Oxford English Dictionary*). The implications of this phrase will be clarified below.

This article, and in particular this section and the next, partly rework the contents of my contribution to Prof. Aklujkar’s felicitation volume: see Vincenzo Vergiani, “Bharṭṛhari’s Views on the Role of Liminal Perception in Individual Self-Awareness,” in *Samskṛta-Sādhutā “Goodness of Sanskrit”: Studies in Honour of Professor Ashok Aklujkar*, ed. Y. Honda, M. Desmarais, and C. Watanabe (New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 2012), 509–527.

(56.) Namely, it does not lead to speech and action.

(57.) That is, they can be articulated through speech sounds.

(58.) *yathāsyā samhṛtarūpā śabdabhāvanā tathā jñeyeshv artheṣūtpannenāpy avikalpena jñānena kāryam na kriyate. tad yathā. tvaṛitaṃ gacchataḥ tṛṇaloṣṭādisamsparsāt saty api jñāne, kācid eva sā jñānāvasthā yasyām abhimukhībhūtaśabdabhāvanābījāyām, āvirbhūtāsv arthopagrāhiṇām ākhyeyarūpāṇām ca śabdānām pratyarthaniyatāsu śaktiṣu, śabdānuviddhena śabdaśaktyanupātinā jñānenākriyamāṇa upagrhyamāṇo vastvātmā*

*jñānānugato vyaktarūpapratyavabhāso jñāyata ity abhidhīyate. sa ca, nimittāntarād āvirbhavatsu śrutibījeṣu, smṛtihetur bhavati. tathaikeṣām ācāryāṇām suptasyāpi jāgradvṛtṭyā sadṛśo jñānavṛttiprabandhaḥ. kevalam tu śabdabhāvanābījāni tadā sūkṣmāṃ vṛtṭim pratilabhante* (Vṛtti, VP 1, p. 188, line 5–189, line 5)

(59.) In the inflected form *avikalpena jñānena*.

(60.) The term *nirvikalpa* literally means “devoid of conceptualization,” but Aklujkar’s translation reflects the fact that for Bhartrhari there is substantial identity between thought and language.

(61.) Aklujkar, “Prāmānya in the Philosophy of the Grammarians,” 20.

(62.) For Buddhist criticisms of Bhartrhari’s views on non-conceptual cognition, see Toshiya Unebe, “Cognition and Language: A Discussion of Vākyapadīya 1.131 with Regard to Criticism from the Buddhists,” in *Samskṛta-Sādhutā “Goodness of Sanskrit”: Studies in Honour of Professor Ashok Aklujkar*, ed. Y. Honda, M. Desmarais, and C. Watanabe, (New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 2012), 488–508.

(63.) VP 1.132 [SI 116]: *vāgrūpatā ced utkrāmed avabodhasya śāśvatī | na prakāśaḥ prakāśeta sā hi pratyavamarśinī* || For my translation of the term *pratyavamarśinī* cf. K. A. Subramania Iyer, *The Vākyapadīya of Bhartrhari with the Vṛtti, Chapter I; translation* (Poona: Deccan College, 1965), 111, and Raffaele Torella, *The Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā of Utpaladeva with the author’s Vṛtti* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2002), 125, n. 41.

(64.) Vṛṣabhadeva interprets this as a reference to sleep (*svapna*): *katham svapne yatra na vāgrūpānuṣaṅga ity āha sūkṣmo ’pi iti* (*Paddhati*, in VP 1, p. 190, line 21).

(65.) Note that Vṛṣabhadeva explicitly takes *prakāśa* in the sense of “first direct knowledge” (*prathamah pratyakṣaḥ pratyayaḥ*; see *Paddhati*, in VP 1, p. 190, lines 23–24).

(66.) Vṛṣabhadeva interprets these causes (*nimitta*) as “the correlates of an entity that are its specific traits, such as cowness, etc.” (*teṣāṃ vastusaṃbandhinām gotvādīnām viśeṣāṇām*; see *Paddhati*, in VP 1, p. 190, lines 24–25). As I have pointed out above, according to Bhartrhari things can never be known by themselves, but only as part of a network of related notions.

(67.) See Vṛṣabhadeva’s gloss of *avyapadeśya*: “Although present, the disposition to speech does not operate here because its effect [i.e., verbalization] is absent. Therefore, it only makes the thing known without its qualifiers” (*śabdabhāvanā vidyamānāpi sā kāryābhāvān na tatra vṛtṭim labheta. tato viśeṣaṇarahitam eva vastu pratyāyayati*; see *Paddhati*, in VP 1, p. 190, line 25–p. 191, line 1). By “qualifiers” Vṛṣabhadeva means those adjuncts or delimiting factors (*upādhi*) such as universal, quality, action, etc., which are the necessary components in the apprehension of any entity.

(68.) *Vṛtti* ad VP 1.132 [SI 116], p. 190, lines 6–8: *yāpy asañcetitāvasthā tasyām api sūkṣmo vāgrūpānugamo* [SI: *vāgdharmānugamo*] *’bhyāvartate. yo ’pi prathamopanipātī*

*bāhyeṣv artheṣu prakāśaḥ sa nimittānām aparigraheṇa vastusvarūpamātram idaṃ tad ity avyapadeśyayā vṛttyā pratyavabhāsayati.* For different interpretations of this passage by other scholars, see Vergiani, “Bhartrhari’s Views on the Role of Liminal Perception in Individual Self-Awareness,” 520.

(69.) In the “Further Chapter on Substance” (*Bhūyodravyasamuddeśa*), v. 3, Bhartrhari defines a “substance” as anything one can indicate with a pronoun. The linguistic act of referring to something as “that” implies the predication of its existence, i.e., gives it some ontological substantiveness, regardless of its existence in reality.

(70.) For the correlation between epistemic entities and levels of language in Bhartrhari’s philosophy, see Aklujkar, “The Epistemological Point of View of Bhartrhari,” 5–6.

(71.) A similar case for the linguistic nature of certain inexpressible mental contents is made in the *Vṛtti* for the behavioral responses of infants, which are said to depend on an understanding based on—literally—“language that cannot be expressed” (*anākhyeyaśabdānibandhanā pratipatti[ḥ]*; see *Vṛtti*, VP 1, p. 187, lines 1–2), i.e., cannot be articulated into speech sounds.

(72.) Aklujkar, “The Epistemological Point of View of Bhartrhari,” 5–6. A discussion of these levels (*śabda-tattva-brahman*, *paśyantī* [vāc] and *madhyamā* [vāc], below which there is articulated speech, called *vaikharī*) is beyond the scope of this paper.

(73.) The first occurrence of the term in the VP is in the expression *pratyakcaitanya*, i.e., “internal/individual consciousness,” found in the *Vṛtti* on the opening verse: “The manifestation of that [language principle] that resides inside the internal consciousness takes place in order to make others know [one’s thoughts/feelings]” (*Vṛtti*, VP 1, p. 7, line 3: *pratyakcaitanya ’ntaḥsanniveśitas tasya parasambodhanārthā vyaktir abhiṣyandate*).

(74.) “One who venerates that tradition which exists without interruption, just like consciousness, is not impeded by argumentative doctrines” (*caitanyaṃ iva yaś cāyam avicchedena vartate | āgamas tam upāsīno hetuvādair na bādhyate ||*).

(75.) *Vṛtti*, VP 1, p. 98, lines 3–5: . . . ; *aham asmīty evamādi pratyayānugataṃ sahaṃ anādi yac caitanyaṃ tan nāsmi na mamety evam āptopadeśe saty api loke rūḍhatvān muktātmanām api vyavahāraṃ prati na vyavacchidyate ...*

(76.) The pronominal forms *sā* and *eṣā* refer back to *vāgrūpatā* “the fact of having the nature of speech” in VP 1.132 [SI 116].

(77.) VP 1.134 [SI 118]: *saiṣā saṃsāriṇām saṃjñā bahir antaś ca vartate | tanmātrām avyatikrāntaṃ caitanyaṃ sarvajātiṣu.*

(78.) *Vṛtti* ad VP 1.134 [SI 118], p. 193, line 3: *yo ’yaṃ caitanye vāgrūpatānugamas tena loke asaṃjñō viṣaṃjñā iti vyapadeśaḥ kriyate.*

(79.) Presumably *yogins*.



(80.) *Vṛtti* ad VP 1.134 [SI 118], p. 193, lines 7–8: *antaḥsaṃjñānām api sukhaduḥkhasaṃv-inmātrā yāvad vāgrūpatānuvṛttis tāvad eva bhavati. bahiḥsaṃjñeṣu tannibandhano lokavyavahāras tadabhāvān niyatam utsīdet.*

(81.) *Vṛtti* ad VP 1.134 [SI 118], p. 193, lines 8–10: *na hi caitanyenānāviṣṭā* [conjectural emendation: *caitanyenāviṣṭā*] *jātir asti yasyāṃ svaparasaṃbodho yo vācā nānugamyate tasmāc citikriyārūpam alabdhavākśaktiparigrahaṃ na vidyate.*

(82.) VP 3.10.1: *pratyaktā parabhavaś cāpy upādhi kartṛkarmaṇoḥ | tayoh śrutiviśeṣeṇa vācaku madhyamottamau ||*

(83.) The term *pratyaktā* is an abstract noun derived from the adjective *pratyāñc* (“turned inward, inner”) through the addition of the suffix *-tā*.

(84.) *Prakīrṇaprakāśa*, in VP 3, p. 91, lines 6–8: *pratipuruṣaṃ pratiniyataṃ vāñcati ceṣṭa-ta iti pratyāñ, antaryāmī jīvātmā. sa hi pratideham niyato vartate. tadbhāva uttamapu-ruṣavācyo ’rthaḥ. ahaṃkārasamānāśrayatvaṃ yad ākhyātāt pratīyate kriyāyāḥ sa uttama-puruṣaviśaya iti arthaḥ.*

(85.) See, e.g., VP 3.1.110 [SI 106], “As the form of the knowledge is not cognized as an object, its form as distinct from that of the object is not grasped” (*yato viṣayarūpeṇa jñā-narūpaṃ na gṛhyate | artharūpaviviktaṃ ca svarūpaṃ nāvadhāryate ||*; translation by K. A. Subramania Iyer, *The Vākyapadīya of Bhartṛhari, Chapter III, Part 1; English translation* [Poona: Deccan College, 1969], p. 63.).

(86.) There are several places in the VP where Bhartṛhari emphasizes that space and time are fundamental inbuilt dimensions of cognition, e.g., in the “Chapter on Space” (*Dik-samuddeśa*), v. 18: *caitanyavat sthitā loke dikkālaparikalpanā | prakṛtiṃ prāṇinām tām hi ko ’nyathā sthāpayiṣyati* “Constructs of space and time exist in ordinary experience like consciousness (itself): for, who will otherwise establish the nature of living beings?” Thus, these three components should be regarded as the pre-conditions of higher cognitive processes, which are in turn the basis for any purposeful action (*arthakriyā*).

(87.) In “Epistemological Point of View of Bhartṛhari,” 10.

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