

2 Semantics of Nothingness

Bhartṛhari's Philosophy of Negation¹

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Introduction

Bhartṛhari (fl. 450 CE) is one of the foremost philosophers of classical India. While there are many narratives relating the story of his life, that he was a king-turned-hermit, the author of three hundred stanzas, and so on, one thing is certain: he was the author of the masterpiece, the *Vākyapadīya* (VP). There are very few texts in the history of Indian philosophy that have had as penetrating an influence as this one. Although the text primarily relates to the philosophy of Sanskrit grammar, the first section on the Brahman (*brahmakāṇḍa*) discusses the metaphysics of, and provides the philosophy for, non-dualism, with the introduction of terms such as 'transformation/false projection' (*vivarta*) that became pivotal to subsequent philosophers, such as Śaṅkara (700 CE). Bhartṛhari's thought can also be seen unmistakably on the works of another prolific classical Indian philosopher, Maṇḍana Mīśra (700 CE).² The depth to which Bhartṛhari has shaped Indian philosophy has yet to be properly appreciated, as scholars are coming to recognize that even the Pratyabhijñā school of Kashmiri non-dualism is largely derived from Bhartṛhari's philosophy of language.

After the "linguistic turn" in the latter half of the twentieth century, philosophers in the West have been more open to exploring the possibility of solving philosophical problems by understanding more about language.³ It would not be an exaggeration to say, by way of contrast, that philosophical speculation in India has linguistic origins. Early Brahmanical thinking is heavily ritualistic and relies on analyzing Vedic sentences. Classical philosophers primarily derive their conclusions from an exegetical analysis of the *Upaniṣads* or the *Sūtra* literature. The philosophical debate among Hindus, Buddhists, and the Jains oftentimes goes back to linguistic issues. The linguistic philosophy of Bhartṛhari needs to be addressed in his milieu. His speculations about the nature of language and his analysis of Sanskrit both transcend the boundaries of language and relate to metaphysics, epistemology, and ontology.

Since understanding some of the most pivotal issues in the history of Indian philosophy, and particularly those issues involving debates about nonbeing and being, are so dependent on traditional Indian philosophy of language, understanding how classical Indian thinkers understood negation and how it functions

linguistically is fundamentally important. This paper will therefore examine what the seminal grammarian Bhartṛhari had to say about negation, particularly in debates with rival philosophers and schools. Reading Bhartṛhari's philosophy of negation is therefore not restricted to merely analyzing Sanskrit syntax. While he was an original thinker, many of his ideas have evolved historically, and we cannot address Bhartṛhari's philosophy without seeing it in the context of his predecessors. This, however, is not to indulge in only history of philosophy, but only to point out that history of ideas should not be ignored while exploring answers to philosophical questions.

Negation: From Patañjali to Bhartṛhari

Patañjali (150 BCE) is one of the earliest scholars to explicitly describe two types of negation: *prasajya* and *paryudāsa*,⁴ generally translated as nonimplicative and implicative negations. The first one is used to simply negate the existence of X (there is no X), while the other refers to negation of X in Y (a Y that is not X). This twofold schema of negation is used in Indian philosophy for morphological analysis (as in Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*), sentence analysis (primarily in the tradition of Mīmāṃsā), and metaphysical analysis (both in the Nyāya tradition and in the Mādhyamika of Nāgārjuna). However, the way negation has been analyzed and applied varies from one school to another. Around the same time as Patañjali, Jaimini (200 BCE) explored primarily the sentences used in ritual injunction and systematized a framework of threefold negation, including the injunction of an alternative by means of negation.⁵ Semantically, both forms of negations are expressed by the negative particle *nañ*,⁶ and both are addressed in the semantic and morphological analysis of Patañjali and Bhartṛhari. This paper is limited to the meaning of negation in the work of these two grammarians. I will also briefly engage the views of negation of both Jaimini and Śabara and analyze some of their crucial positions in an attempt to expand upon the semantic analysis of *nañ*.

It has already been mentioned that there are implicative and nonimplicative forms of negation. The implicative negation affirms something (y) by means of negating one entity (x). By contrast, the nonimplicative type of negation simply negates a purported fact. Sanskrit grammarians often cite the following verse to identify these forms of negation:

If the negative particle corresponds with the final term [in a compound], this should be known as implicative negation. If the negative particle corresponds with the verb [in a sentence], this should be considered the non-implicative negation.⁷

Fritz Staal writes nonimplicative negation as $\sim F(x)$ and implicative negation as $F(\sim x)$ (1962; see also 1988, 260). The most oft-cited example of implicative negation is *abrāhmaṇa*, where the term is not used in negating a *brāhmaṇa* but in the affirmation of someone else who bears some of the characteristics of a

brāhmaṇa. While all classical discussions on negation can be categorized as word-negation and sentence-negation, the position of Bhartṛhari favors sentence negation, as words are not independently meaningful in his paradigm of the non-divisible sentence, *sphoṭa*. In this metaphysics, whether expressions are made in words or sentences, they all stem from speech (*vāc*) identified with the Brahman, and no form of negation can negate this foundation. Evidently, even the word used for negation is nonetheless a word.⁸

Bhartṛhari's Analysis of Sentential Negation

The word 'na' is used in the Sanskrit language for both implicative and non-implicative negation. In compounds, the particle 'nañ' or its derivative (*an*, if followed by a vowel) expresses the concept of negation. Commentators suggest that twofold negation is implicit in Pāṇini's (fourth century BCE) *Aṣṭādhyāyī* (AA).⁹ George Cardona synthesizes this position by accepting two types of negation in Pāṇini's rules, where one is constructed with the nominal following the negative particle in the compound (e.g. "non-X" or F(~X)), and the other is linked with the verb (e.g. ~F(x)). He further explains that the first is the positive rule, as it provides operation in the domain restricted by the negative particle and the second negates operation, thereby stopping an operation that has already been given by other rules (Cardona 1967).

In Indian philosophy, grammarians primarily focused on morphology, with words being their immediate concern. Mīmāṃsakas, the ritualist philosophers from classical India, fulfilled the need of contemplating upon sentential meaning. In order to advance the analysis of sentence negation in Sanskrit grammar, I will briefly explore examples from the Mīmāṃsā school, although a detailed study of this aspect would require a much larger space. Below are three examples they give of sentential negation:

1. One should not eat *kalañja*.¹⁰
2. [The phrase] 'ye *yajāmahe*' is cited during sacrifices except for the Anuyājas.¹¹
3. [The sacrificer] does not hold the *ṣodaśi* vessel in the Atirātra.

The first is an example of imperative negation, which I will set aside, as it demands a separate treatment. Something positive is derived from the second sentence, while the third sentence simply negates a fact. In the Sanskrit language, the way negation is linked, whether with the antecedent term or with the verb, determines which type of negation is used in a sentence. For instance:

phalamnāsti |
S neg. V.

1. There is no fruit.
2. [This] is not a fruit.

In the above example, the sentence can be understood either way. In the first translation, negation corresponds to the verb, negating the existence of fruit. In the second translation, negation corresponds to the subject, while the object under consideration, such as a plastic replica, is not a fruit. This distinctive understanding evokes the classical debate between the particularists, those who maintained that sentence meaning is gleaned from the meanings of the words in the sentence, and the wholists, who maintained that sentence meaning is indivisible.

Whether the sentential meaning is derived from words that independently express meaning, or whether meaning is a collective or unitary expression of a sentence, is one of the classical debates involving multiple schools in Indian history. The wholists, such as Bhartṛhari and the Prābhākaras, and the particularists, such as Naiyāyikas and the Bhāṭṭas, wrestled over what the term ‘*na*’ negates. Even when we engage the position of the particularists who state that negation relates to specific terms in a sentence, there are various ways in which the negative particle can be analyzed. For instance, (1) what we negate is the cognition of the existence of what has been negated; (2) negation affirms the falsity of cognition; (3) negation not only denotes itself but also its substratum; and (4) negation in a sentence indicates the sense communicated by the word with which the negative particle is linked.

These are therefore the four possible analyses of ‘*na*’ according to the particularists:

1. Negation in a sentence negates the existence of the referent linked with the negative particle *nañ*. The sentence would be “There is no fruit” in the above example.
2. Negation makes known the falsity of cognition. The sentence, then, is “This is not a fruit” (but a plastic replica).
3. The negative particle denotes both negation and the substratum of that negation. In an example, “There is no book on the table,” the substratum of the negation, the table, is also referred to by this negation. In this manner, the referent of the negative particle is not the table but the book, but the table is implicitly referred to as existent.
4. The negative particle is not independently meaningful. Since it means something by being affiliated with other words, it is therefore ‘coreferential’ (*dyotaka*). Negation, in this sense, is intrinsic to the meaning of the word itself, as is affirmation. For instance, the word ‘table,’ when articulated, has the potential to both affirm and negate the table. That is, negation is already there as a potential within the term, and the negative particle only brings to the spotlight what is already there as the meaning of the term.

Although Bhartṛhari maintains a holistic approach, he does not reject some of the arguments discussed above. In particular, he addresses at length the fourth point. This approach highlights his broader agenda to synthesize all the existing positions as far as possible. Returning to our example, the term ‘table,’ for

instance, can mean both the being and absence of table, and the negative particle simply highlights negation. This, however, is not to say that Bhartṛhari surrenders to the particularists, as he rejects their viewpoint and concludes that words such as ‘asymmetry’ cannot be broken into parts and analyzed separately. This position of Bhartṛhari tallies with that of Wittgenstein: “The positive proposition necessarily presupposes the existence of the negative proposition and vice versa” (T 5.5151). For Bhartṛhari, both assertion and negation rest on speech (*vāc*), equated with the highest universal (*mahāsāmānya*) that involves all that exists. For Wittgenstein, both positive and negative facts are “facts.” Negation is crucial for Bhartṛhari not just for comprehending sentence meaning, but also because it represents his primary strategy for describing reality: both of the terms that he uses in the first verse of VP to describe the absolute that is identical to speech are constructed in the negative form (*anādinidhanam* and *akṣaram*). This negation, however, does not go all the way, because for Bhartṛhari, the absolute is the Brahman, or the *Śabda-tattva*, a positive entity.

This analysis of the negative particle needs to be read in light of the ways classical philosophers have assigned meaning to it. There is not one single position, even among the grammarians, regarding the role of *nipātas*, a class of word elements of which the negative particle is a member. Whether these particles are the signifiers (*vācaka*), or the cosignifiers (*dyotaka*) is another question where the classical philosophers differ. For grammarians such as Bhartṛhari, these particles appear to be merely cosignifiers. This needs to be understood within the context that ‘meaning’ in Bhartṛhari’s philosophy is understood in terms of ‘primary’ and ‘secondary.’ Cosignifiers bring the secondary meaning to the spotlight. In words such as ‘asymmetry,’ if *negation* of symmetry were the primary meaning, the negative particle /a/ would be the signifier and not cosignifier. Grammarians such as Bhaṭṭoji Dīkṣita (seventeenth century), however, maintain that the particles are both the signifiers and cosignifiers. The Nyāya philosophers, in yet another variation, maintain that select particles in the group of ‘*pra*’ that are prefixes are only cosignifiers and the other particles in the group of ‘*ca*’ are only signifiers. Grammarians reject this position (VSM 1977, 56).

Although these positions may appear to be merely linguistic, philosophy in India is closely intertwined with linguistic issues such that one cannot be addressed without the other. Whether there is a primacy of the particle (i.e., negation, rather than an affirmation of something positive) or not can change the course of ritual for the ritual philosophers, the Mīmāṃsakas. One of the central categories of the Advaitins is ignorance or *avidyā*, a negative term, and the difference in understanding leads to the position of one sub-school or the other. The school of logic, Navya-Nyāya, advances its argument to counter the Sautrāntika-Mādhyamika arguments of negation. And even within the Mādhyamika school of Buddhism, the division of Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika primarily rests on how to interpret negation. Therefore, linguistic speculation about negation is a gateway to enter the many schools of classical Indian philosophy.

Bhartṛhari addresses negation at length in two different sections of his writings, first when establishing sentence meaning (VP 2.240–45), and second in the last section of his *magnum opus* when addressing compounds (VP 3.14.248–315). In the first instance, Bhartṛhari deals with the issue of negation when addressing sentence meaning, maintaining that meaning cannot be reduced to single words and that a sentence gives a unitary meaning and must be read as a whole. In Sanskrit, one can place the negative particle at the end. For instance, *aśvatthaś chedanīyo na* (one should *not* cut the ficus tree). Bhartṛhari argues that, if each word were to independently give rise to meaning, the sentence could be considered complete before the negative particle appears, enjoining one to cut the tree (VP 2.240). If words were to independently convey meaning, in sentences such as *vrkṣo nāsti* (tree, there is *not*), one would have in mind first the existence of tree as affirmed by the term ‘tree,’ and the negative particle would deny its existence (VP 2.241). It then would mean that a single sentence gives rise to two contradictory concepts. Puṇyarāja (1000 CE) adds in his commentary an interesting argument: if something exists, it cannot be denied, and something that does not exist does not need to be negated. Either way, the negative particle is meaningless.¹² This argument is given to negate the particularist’s position that each word in a sentence gives meaning independently. If the meaning is given by sentence holistically, on the other hand, the aforementioned consequence will not ensue.

One can argue that the positive terms in a sentence give rise to the object in the mind, and the negative particles negate only what exists in the mind and not the external reality. Bhartṛhari at this point states that it is not the cognition but the real object that is denoted by the negating term (VP 2.242). Puṇyarāja’s commentary upon this verse is crucial:

The particle *nañ* negates the meaning expressed by the word. A concept is not denoted by a word. The word denotes an external object. Concept, dependent upon [external] object, cannot be referred to by a word. This being the case, how can this concept {*sā*} be negated by [the particle] *nañ*?¹³

Embedded within this position is the thesis that language describes reality. The opposite position is that language only expresses our concepts and therefore cannot describe the thing-in-itself. For Bhartṛhari, the word principle itself is the Brahman, the absolute. Language, in his metaphysics, has a higher status and is capable of describing the object, not just its concept. Bhartṛhari is explicit in the following verse: “If the [negative particle] *nañ* establishes that the concept that arises [by hearing negation] is false, [in that case] the [negative term] *nañ* will have a separate operation [and] how can [its] absence be comprehended?” (VP 2.243) With this meaning of negation, when one says ‘not a tree’ one would be only negating the idea of a tree, not the tree as such. Puṇyarāja also adds in the commentary that since the objective of the verb is to simply negate existence, the negation in ‘*nāsti*’ is of the nonimplicative (*prasajya*) type. Bhartṛhari rejects the argument that a negative particle does

not correspond to any object or the substrate that it is negating. The argument is that negation always accompanies something that is being negated. If negation were generic, in the sense that what it negates is the substrate and not the particular object, the terms that accompany negation would lack referential meaning other than the substrate of negation (VP 2.244). Whatever its position in the sentence, on this view, the negative particle would be referring to both negation and its substrate and the words that accompany the particle would be irrelevant.

Another alternative is that instead of finding an independent reference for the negative particle, it is read as coreferential. This would allow one to escape from the above dilemma and the meaning could still be broken into words. The question is, does this particle *nañ* refer to its meaning directly (*vācaka*) or is it coreferential (*dyotaka*)? If the particle is merely a coreferent, this would mean that both ‘tree’ and ‘negation’ would be identified by the first term, ‘*vrkṣa*,’ and the particle *nañ* would only be coreferring to what has been established by the first term, or this negative term would simply be dangling, having no independent meaning of its own. It would then be merely delimiting, that it is not-tree (VP 2.245). Bhartṛhari thus reaches the conclusion that sentential meaning is indivisible and words do not have independent meaning.

Compounds with Negative Particles and the Metaphysics of Negation

An oft-cited verse identifies six different meanings of the negative particle:

The negative particle has six different meanings: similarity with and contradiction to X, otherness and diminution, reproach and absence.

Accordingly, the negative particle expresses the following meanings, depending upon the context:

1. Similarity: e.g. the term *anaśva* (non-horse) refers to an animal that is similar to but exclusive of a horse, such as a mule, donkey, or zebra.
2. Contradiction: e.g. the term *apunya* (non-virtue) refers to vice.
3. Otherness: e.g. *abrāhmaṇa* (non-Brahmin) refers to Kṣatriyas etc.
4. Diminution: e.g. *anudarā* refers to a girl with a slim waist.
5. Impropriety or reproach: e.g. *apaśavaḥ* (non-animals) used to refer to the animals that are not to be sacrificed.
6. Absence: e.g. *abrāhmaṇo grāmaḥ* (a village without Brahmins) demonstrates the absence of Brahmins in a village.

Opinions vary about which meaning is primary. Kauṇḍa Bhaṭṭa maintains that only the final one, absence, is the primary meaning of the negative particle, the rest being secondary (Coward and Raja 1990, 288). According to Naiyāyikas, both contradiction and absence are the primary meanings of the negative particle. Patañjali’s commentary on the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* (AA) 2.2.6 also

raises issues relevant to understanding the meaning of negation in a compound term. A section in *Vṛttisamuddheśa* (VS 248–315) reads as a commentary upon Patañjali's MB (AA 2.2.6).¹⁴

Patañjali argues that the term *abrāhmaṇa* can be explained in three different ways, being dependent upon the primacy of the second term (or *brāhmaṇa*), an external term (someone else being referred to by this term), or the first term (the negative particle).¹⁵ When reading Patañjali, it becomes clear that he considers the second term to be primary and he also defends the position that, in different contexts, even the negative particle can be primary. The position that an external term is primary has here been abandoned altogether. Bhartṛhari's treatment of negation in a compound (VS 248–315) primarily rests on these assumptions. We should not, however, conclude that all grammarians maintain the same position.¹⁶

The issue of which among the parts of a compound is primary in comprehending its meaning is broadly philosophical, and what has been addressed by classical philosophers about negation rests on their underlying metaphysics and epistemology. However we interpret negation, all the interpretations provided lead to the question of whether negation negates something that exists or whether it negates something nonexistent. In his attempt to resolve the apparent paradox, Bhartṛhari goes back to the absolute *vāc*, the reality-constituting-speech, and argues that even when negation is affirmed, the affirming represents the foundation of all epistemic and ontological considerations. When we say, "There is no book on the table," the negation relates to the book that has no existence while the application of the term 'book' affirms its categorical existence. Negation can negate only things that exist, and at the time of negation, there is no existence: a paradoxical situation. It would, however, be too hasty to draw further parallels. Sanskrit grammarians escape the paradox by adding one level to existence: the superimposed existence (*upacārasattā*).¹⁷ The existence of what has been negated, accordingly, is superimposed upon what is being negated. Rather than *nañ*, the negative particle that has its own reference, the negative particle becomes a coreference (*dyotaka*),¹⁸ indicating that the term 'book' refers both to its existence and nonexistence, and the particle indicates negation that is linked with the term 'book.' This position relates to the earlier argument regarding the primacy of the terms if compounded with *nañ*, with an application that the negative particle does not have an independent meaning.

The tradition of the Sanskrit grammarians weighs the primacy of the second term in a compound with the negative particle.¹⁹ The issue, however, is how can something that does not exist (e.g., a *brāhmaṇa* in the case of *abrāhmaṇa*) be primary? When even the primacy of the first or second term in the compound is called into question, the primacy of an external term is impossible. Unlike sentential negation, this negation cannot give meaning by corresponding to the verb either. When, for instance, we say, "There is an asymmetrical pattern on the wall," we cannot derive the meaning that there is the absence of a symmetrical pattern, but rather that there is existence of a pattern that is asymmetrical.

Bhartṛhari argues on this ground that this negation can only correspond to the subject and not to the verb (VS 251). This suggestion of the grammarians that the negative particle has only coreferentiality further distances them from the way Parmenides understood negation. Rather than accepting negation as a case of paradox, the approaches of the grammarians appear to resolve it by advancing different epistemic and ontic structures.

This position, however, does not satisfy Bhartṛhari, who instead invites further scrutiny. If *nañ* is just coreferential, the issue of it having three different positions with regard to the primacy of meaning in a compound would not even arise.²⁰ If the argument is that the action that is subordinate to the agent in a compound, such as *pācaka*, is what the negative particle corresponds to when in a compound, since there is not even a subordinate action expressed by the term *brāhmaṇa*, the negative particle in the compound *abrāhmaṇa* would not corefer to anything (VS and VST 252). Helārāja (980 CE) concludes on this ground that in the case of compounds (and not in sentences), the particle has to be understood as referring directly to something.²¹ What is directly negated then, when in a compound, is the existence of its referent (given that this existence is superimposed).

It has been postulated that being (*sat*) is given with every single term and what a term ‘book’ means, for instance, is ‘a book exists.’ Bhartṛhari presents a position that rejects this understanding and instead maintains that the term *nañ* does not express nonexistence (*asattā*) but only prohibits (*niṣedha*) what has been postulated by its referent. This position of the negative particle referring to prohibition, rather than negation, stems from the following reasoning:

1. Existence is embedded with all terms (as all terms refer to something that exists).
2. The term existence (*sattā*), if the above position is correct, then refers to the existence of existence (as existence is given to all terms including the term ‘existence’ itself).
3. The negation of existence (*asattā*), then, would mean the negation of the existence of existence, a tautology (VS 253).

In Sanskrit, one can make compounds where the suffix expresses repetition of action, and so the meaning of the suffix is similar to that conveyed by the verbal root. Verbs, it must be noted, convey process. However, negation can be linked only with what can be negated, and if the negative particle is to be understood as nonexistence, there would be no relation between it and the referent term. The conclusion, then, is that the negative particle, instead of meaning nonexistence, only means negation.²² By relying on the above-mentioned argument that words directly refer to reality, Bhartṛhari escapes the tautology that the term ‘existence’ refers to the existence of existence.

The above argument, however, is not applicable in the case of *abrāhmaṇa*, where existence is part of the base term (*brāhmaṇa*) and what exists cannot be negated. This raises a bigger issue. One can make the same argument regarding

the terms *asan* or *akṛtvā*, as they both refer to a positive nature (*bhāva*). This leads to the argument that the negative particle is merely coreferential rather than having its own primary meaning. Helārāja points out that there are two options, even when the particle is understood as coreferential:

- (1) *nañ* is understood as revealing an object which is the substratum of a particular action.
- (2) It is understood as revealing an object which is the substratum of objects in general (Iyer 1974, 240).

The problem is, if the first position is maintained, a compound with the negative particle would not be possible, as there would be no semantic connection. Even if some connection is maintained, the three possibilities of interpreting negation will not arise. In the second alternative, if the action in general coreferred to by *nañ* is linked with the second term expressing only the objects in general, this will lead to an infinite regression. It cannot be linked to the second term that is expressive only of a particular. If the particle is considered to be coreferring, it will be linked with the meaning that is coreferred (*dyotyā*) to, and there will only be primacy of the second term. Either way, the possibility of three alternative meanings of negation will not arise in this case. Only when negation is considered as having its own independent meaning among the terms that have come in the compound word would it make sense to argue whether the negative particle or the second term is primary.

Relating to the previous conversation, whether *nañ* refers to nonexistence or negation, Bhartṛhari maintains that even when the meaning of the particle is maintained as nonexistence, there will be no consequence in examples such as *asan* or *akṛtvā*. Bhartṛhari argues:

The negative particle relates to the generic substrate of the agency of action. Due to this, [the particle] is [also] linked with particular substrates such as *brāhmaṇa* [in the example *abrāhmaṇa*]. (VS 255)

When the negative particle is explained as referring to nonexistence, absence is explained in terms of its substrate. Since the particle is explained as referring to the substrate, existence in general, there will be no consequence in the example *asan*. Since the verb *√as* is intransitive, the instrument (*sādhana*) that accomplishes this action is the very agent itself. Accordingly, absence is explained in terms of its substrate (i.e., absence is the absence of something). The particle, then, is negation in general. The words that accompany the particle particularize negation. As Iyer summarizes, “In a compound, the negative particle is expressive of the substratum in general, colored by non-existence, of the action of existence. So the meaning of *nañ* amounts to *nāsti* = ‘it does not exist’” (Iyer 1974, 241). Accordingly, in terms such as *abrāhmaṇa*, the negative particle expresses the nonexistence of the substrate in general and the term *brāhmaṇa* refers to a particular substrate.

From this emerges the crux of the problem: when two meanings are combined, which meaning is primary, the particle referring to the substratum in general, or the second term referring to the particular? The issue is this: if the particle is interpreted as prohibition, three possibilities (of the primacy of the second term in a compound, the primacy of the external term, and the primacy of negation or the particle itself) would not arise. When negation in general is linked with a particular entity, with negation referring to its substrate, or when the substratum is negated, this raises the issue of the primacy of the terms in a compound. That is, shall this be understood as $\sim(P)$, or $P(\sim)$, or $\sim P(Q)$, where Q stands for an external term?

It needs to be explained how the particle corefers in a sentence while directly referring to something in a word. Bhartṛhari adds that particles do not just negate; they also involve action. For instance, when one uses the term ‘*niṣkauśāmbiḥ*’ (one who has exited out of Kauśāmbi), the prefix *niṣ* does not simply stand for negation but also for the act of exiting (VS 256). The particle here does not just denote nonexistence, but existence. If the particle here were to simply negate existence, it could not combine with the second term that refers to being. It is therefore reasonable to say that the compound term denotes the agent of the action of exiting from Kauśāmbi. This leads to the issue of which meaning is primary. It is commonly seen that when there are multiple qualifiers, it is upon the speaker to decide which among them is primary.²³ This makes the discussion of three alternative ways of describing negation relevant. We shall now turn to these three possibilities.

(1) *The Primacy of the Final Term in a Compound*

A significant section in VS (259–315) focuses on the primacy of meaning among terms when a term is combined with a negative particle.²⁴ In this discourse, Bhartṛhari first examines the case where there is a primacy of the final term. In the example “non-Brahmaṇa” (*abrāhmaṇa*), while the negative particle refers to nonexistence, the second term describes a positive entity. When primacy is given to the second term, this means ‘someone in whom the quality of being a *brāhmaṇa* does not exist.’ While the particle *nañ* refers to nonexistence in general, *brāhmaṇa* particularizes this nonbeing. Bhartṛhari compares this negation with any other qualifier. If we say, “a fair lady,” the term ‘fair’ makes explicit what is implicit in the lady, and the term ‘fair’ does not invent something what is not in the lady.

One can argue that if the very existence of *brāhmaṇa* has been denied by the particle, why would someone utilize the positive term that also contains the meaning of existence? Bhartṛhari addresses this question by maintaining a distinction between language and reality. In language, we do use *san brāhmaṇa*, where existence that has already been affirmed by the term *brāhmaṇa*, is twice affirmed by the use of the qualifier *sat* (VS 261). Along these lines, the negative particle as a qualifier and that which is being negated are thus inherently related and inseparable. When we say, “a blue lily,” there is no such thing as

‘blue’ that is distinct from the lily. In language or in conceptualization, however, this distinction is obvious. When a compound with a negative particle is used, Bhartṛhari argues, a mistaken identity is corrected (VS 262). When we say, for instance, “This dairy is non-organic,” we are correcting a mistaken identity (or a presumed mistaken identity) that the dairy was organic.

A problem, however, still remains. In terms such as *abhāva*, nonexistence, what is comprehended by negation is not “some other entity similar to existence” (*bhāva*). Rather, a simple negation of existence is comprehended. In such instances, Bhartṛhari maintains that the meaning is comprehended by assuming a cognitive entity even in the absence of its external reference (VS 263). This explanation of negative compounds rests on “superimposed existence,” rather than the real entity. In other words, every word, when pronounced, gives a mental presence of the entity, and negation denies the entity having a real reference. Here, Bhartṛhari deviates from Patañjali, who maintains that a word, *brāhmaṇa* for instance, refers to a constellation of properties, and by means of referring to the constellation of properties, it also stands for the particular properties.²⁵ Bhartṛhari does present this position (VS 264), albeit as an alternative to what he has presented before. The negative particle *nañ*, along these lines, reveals the absence of those properties, and accordingly, the term *abrāhmaṇa* describes the lack of the properties of a *brāhmaṇa* in someone other than the *brāhmaṇa* (VS 264). In other words, in the term *abrāhmaṇa*, the term *brāhmaṇa* stands for the partial qualities of a *brāhmaṇa*.

A question emerges: if the negative particle refers to the absence of properties in its substrate, how can it be connected with the term in making a compound? The question is, the part that has been negated is what has not even been described by the second term. When we say *abrāhmaṇa*, the *nañ* is negating the properties that do not exist in its referent, *ḷṣatriya* (a warrior) for instance. Bhartṛhari responds to this by saying that when something is half-accomplished, both terms are used to denote it, as accomplished and not accomplished (VS 265). What he means is, when we use the term ‘*abrāhmaṇa*,’ it refers to someone who is neither a *brāhmaṇa* nor someone that entirely lacks the properties of a *brāhmaṇa*.

This response, however, invites further problems. Even the term *brāhmaṇa* would then refer to *abrāhmaṇa*, for there may be some expected properties lacking in any individual *brāhmaṇa*. Furthermore, there will be no distinction between the tasks that have been fully accomplished and those half-accomplished, if the term ‘accomplished’ is used in such a loose sense (VS 266). Bhartṛhari responds to this objection by showing how a term can be used in both a primary and secondary sense. *Brāhmaṇa*, for instance, is used to denote a person with a particular blood lineage, and to describe the person’s tendency to ascetic practices and studies. There is a secondary use of the term to describe someone with a tendency of austerities and studies. Bhartṛhari says that the term *abrāhmaṇa* is used to negate the primary meaning in a subject who has some qualities of a *brāhmaṇa* (VS 267). This exposition is required particularly when the compound is interpreted with respect to the primacy

of the second term. If the negative particle were to negate the meaning of the second term, the particle could not be considered an attribute, because it does not reject its substrate but only qualifies it. Along these lines, a negative particle only negates a part of the attributes among those expressed by the second term in a generic sense and thus the remaining attributes describe the referent (VS 268). When we use a term ‘non-chemical’ to refer to something, the entity being referred to does not have a total absence of chemical properties. Instead, it only lacks certain properties, such as toxicity.

Another problem arises. There may be a lack of one or another property in every *brāhmaṇa*. The above interpretation of the term *abrāhmaṇa* with a negative particle presumes that the term *brāhmaṇa* refers to one with all the properties assigned to a *brāhmaṇa*, and its negation will relate to someone with only some of such properties. In the absence of such *brāhmaṇas* that have all the assigned properties, this negative particle will be meaningless (VS 269–70). Bhartṛhari responds, when in a compound, the term loses its primary meaning and is used only in the secondary sense. As has been described earlier, Bhartṛhari maintains that both existence and nonexistence are embedded in the terminal meaning and the negative particle only underscores nonexistence that is intrinsic to the word meaning. He further explains that the same is found in other compounds, such as a ‘king’s officer,’ where the qualifier stands for something that already exists in what is qualified (VS 271–2).

However, a problem still persists. How can a term be used to refer to something that has only partial properties?²⁶ Bhartṛhari responds to the objection by saying that a word in a compound cannot exclude both its primary meaning and the reference by the negative particle that is identified by the term (VS 277–8). Independent of external referents, words convey the meaning that is linked with their concepts, and negation, along these lines, limits the scope of meaning of the word only to the negative aspect (VS 279).

Bhartṛhari claims, following a similar argument, that the term *aneka* can also be explained where the second term means ‘one,’ and the compound stands for ‘many.’ If the second term were not primary, he argues, the term would not be declined similar to the term *eka*, and the formations such as *anekasmai* would not be possible (VS 281–3). Bhartṛhari explains that, just as *abrāhmaṇa* describes some qualities ascribed to a *brāhmaṇa*, oneness is superimposed in what is more than one (VS 284). This passage is an explicit reference that describes a superimposed concept on the primary meaning. What the negative particle represents in such instances, according to Bhartṛhari, is the removal of the error that has superimposed oneness onto something that is more than one. This negation, therefore, does not negate the word ‘one’ but rejects the erroneous cognition of oneness (VS 285). In his understanding, the negative particle in a compound *aneka* is similar to its use in a sentence: such as, “This is not one,” where the term ‘one’ refers to other than one due to its association with ‘not’ (VS 286). Although the meaning of the term ‘one’ is not what is derived from ‘not-one,’ the second term is used only to reject what has been superimposed on a substrate that is not one. Just as the term ‘non-white’ refers

to something that is of any color but white, so does the term ‘*aneka*’ refer to something that is not singular (VS 287–8).

This conversation reinforces Bhartṛhari’s underlying philosophy that terms directly refer to concepts rather than external entities. When one term is uttered, all possible meanings have the potential to manifest, and the negative particle restricts meaning, limiting it only to what has been meant. When one says “Seat them all,” the first term, ‘seat,’ does not express the scope of the imperative. In the same way, *anekam āsaya* (seat no-one) restricts the scope of the injunction (VS 289). A mere negation of number cannot be the meaning of *aneka*, as the term is understood in the meaning of the number that is more than one. Accordingly, this cannot be interpreted as the nonimplicative (*prasajya*) type of negation (VS 290). Whether in a sentence or in a compound, this category of negation needs to be explained along these lines (VS 294). When one says, “I do not take sugar,” he may still take a sugar substitute. If what is meant is a total rejection of all that is sweet, that is, a nonimplicative negation, the negation would be different from when a substitute is comprehended through negation, a case of implicative (*paryudāsa*) negation.

(2) *The Primacy of the External Term*

Having extensively addressed the argument that a compound with a negative particle places primacy in the second term, Bhartṛhari addresses the position that there can also be primacy in an external term in a compound with a negative particle (VS 296–315). Although it does have a certain logical appeal to it, this alternative seems to have been abandoned by Patañjali as well as by Bhartṛhari. The argument in favor of the primacy of the external term goes along these lines. The term *abrāhmaṇa* has been analyzed in earlier conversation by accepting that the second term in the compound denotes the superimposed meaning, rather than the meaning of the term itself. This is to say that the term *kṣatriya* (or one like it) is understood to be superimposed on the term *brāhmaṇa*, and when the terminal meaning is derived, there is still the primacy of the second term in a negative compound. However, if the negative particle is interpreted as a qualifier, with the second term being qualified by it, the meaning derived is something external. Accordingly, the term *abrāhmaṇa* would be interpreted as “someone who lacks the properties that qualify a *brāhmaṇa*.” In this unique situation, although the negative particle in general denotes nonexistence, it denotes the same external object as does the second term that is positive in essence, and thus the negative particle and the positive term both have the same substrate, affirming the primacy of an external term.²⁷ In this regard, this compound functions similarly to a relative or adjectival compound.

If the view that words refer to a class and not particular entities is adopted, its negation relates to a particular entity external to both terms in the compound when the second term refers to the class (VS 302). When this position is followed, a clear distinction can be made between a compound with a negative

particle and a relative compound. In Sanskrit, there are two ways a compound with the negative particle can be made:

- (1) If the term is referring to someone who lacks cows, the compound will be *agu* (a case of the *bahuvrīhi*).
- (2) If the term is referring to an animal that is not a cow, the compound will be *agau* (a case of the *tatpuruṣa*) (VS 303).

This is to show that the primacy of the external entity cannot be confused with that of the second term in compounds.

(3) The Primacy of the Negative Particle

Bhartṛhari eventually addresses the position that, in a compound, primacy belongs to the negative particle which is the first term. If this position is followed, the positive term, for instance *brāhmaṇa*, would qualify the negative particle, since the meaning would be derived with the primacy of negation (VS 305). An interlocutor raises the question: if negation is considered the terminal meaning, how can it be linked with action, the verbal meaning, as in the case of ‘feed the non-*brāhmaṇa*’? Bhartṛhari replies, that what is considered as non-existent also exists in another way. In other words, while negation is primary, the verb still relates to something existent, a case of implicative negation (VS 306).

Bhartṛhari points out that there should be no confusion over the issue of the primacy of negation in a compound, as the Sanskrit language offers two different types of compounds that explicitly highlight this difference.²⁸ Words have innate power, but unlike in a sentence where a negative particle can simply negate something, they denote what has been negated when applied in compounds, and thus what has been negated has primacy over the particle or negation as its meaning. Because of this, the compound terms follow the gender and number of the final term (VS 308). Furthermore, if they are not related to verbs, there would be no grammatical applicability of such terms, and sentences such as “bring a non-*brāhmin*” would have no meaning (VS 309).

The objection regarding the gender of the term, that the term should be indeclinable if the negative particle is primary, is also not tenable, as the gender, following Sanskrit grammar, is considered inherent to words themselves (VS 310). The genders of name-words, along these lines, are not necessarily congruent with the objects they identify, since gender in Sanskrit is grammatical and not natural. The term *dāra*, referring to wife, for example, is in the masculine. The term *kṣātra* has a neuter gender and possesses the same meaning as the term *kṣatriya* (warrior) in the masculine. Accordingly, the nonexistence that is expressed by the negative particle is comprehended in the form of some positive substrate, along with the gender and the number which correspond to the substrate (VS 312). Bhartṛhari concludes by maintaining that the terms that refer to two distinct entities refer to a single object in a compound, and since the negative prefix represents all the deviations from the second term, there is primacy of the first

term (VS 313). The second term, *brāhmaṇa* in the aforementioned example, is only coreferring to what is meant.²⁹ Consequently, the second term expresses the particular from among what have been generically referred to by the first term.

Bhartṛhari assimilates the position that there is primacy of an external term within the perspective of the primacy of the first term, arguing that the primacy of negation also accommodates the arguments for the primacy of the external term (VS 314). Helārāja expounds on this by saying that the notion that the external term has primacy in negation arises due to error.³⁰ If the immediate term after a compound is a noun, the primacy of that noun is assumed due to association, and in cases where it is not, a pronoun is superimposed. In either case, the primacy of the external term does not stand a chance. The issue regarding gender and number is followed in this case with a meta-rule (*atideśa*) of negation according to which negation implies a superimposition of the properties of an associated term.

Bhartṛhari points out that the same problems regarding gender and number that forced one alternative to be dropped solidify the alternative that there is primacy in the first term. Following this argument, if the second term is not predominant, the number and gender of the compound cannot be regulated (VS 315). The argument is, in the absence of the compound term qualifying a second term, the term should be referring to something generic, and when there is no particular as a referent, the term should be used in neuter gender singular.³¹ Helārāja explicitly concludes on this ground that the only supportable position to be maintained is that there is primacy in the second term.³² He also rejects that gender and number are understood with superimposition. He gives an example in which both the cases of the external term being in neuter and masculine, the compound term remains in the masculine (VST 315). This argument, however, does not counter the argument that gender and number are inherent with the term. On this ground, Helārāja, returning to the primacy of the first term, maintains that even this position should not be abandoned.³³ He also points out that Patañjali has supported this argument by refuting the objections against it.³⁴ This, then, allows the declination of the compound term with a pronoun.³⁵ Helārāja's final word on this matter is that the primacy of the first term is established.³⁶ Therefore, it would be wrong to countenance that there is only the primacy of the final term in the particular compound under consideration and not a primacy to negation.

Conclusion

This discussion of Sanskrit semantics has multiple philosophical implications. Bhartṛhari's treatment of negation as ultimately grounded on being, and his assertion that there is no absolute negation of speech, removes it from the paradox that underlies negating something. This speech, or *vāc*, of Bhartṛhari is not just a means of communication though. When speech is identified with the absolute, the Brahman, the consequence is that no negation of the foundational being is possible, a rejection of the Nāgārjunian approach.

Bhartṛhari's treatment of sentence negation and word negation further illuminate other issues. It has been discussed above that negation in a sentence relates

to the verb and negation in compounds relate to the second word. The consequence is that word negations do not simply negate something. Bhartṛhari's logic rests on three-tiered negation:

$$\begin{aligned}\sim P &= Q \\ \sim P &= \sim \\ \sim &= P'\end{aligned}$$

(Where P' stands for something that is neither identical to P nor is absolutely different from it, in the sense that P' shares many of the constituents of P but not all.) While Bhartṛhari rejects the position that $\sim P = Q$, this is only in the context of the compound terms. His analysis of three-tiered negation (which stems from Patañjali's analysis) still has relevance in understanding negation in the issues outside of semantics.

The consequence of Bhartṛhari's conclusion is that $\sim P = P'$ leaves negation as affirming something existing. For the Advaitins, 'ignorance' (*avidyā*) is of the essential character of being (*bhāvarūpa*). This understanding of ignorance as something phenomenal (while not having its own intrinsic being) would be semantically impossible had not the philosophy of language allowed such interpretation. Along the same lines, the Svāntrika-Prāsaṅgika discourse on negation also stems from the semantic issue of whether the negative terms simply negate being or affirm something else. The discourse on language is therefore pivotal to understanding a wide range of philosophical issues that originated in classical India. Although I have restricted myself to the philosophy of Bhartṛhari, his answers to the issues regarding negation are relevant for a wider discourse not only on language but also epistemology.

Abbreviations

AA	=	Aṣṭādhyāyī
MB	=	Mahābhāṣya of Patañjali
MS	=	Mīmāṃsāsūtra
T	=	Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus
VP	=	Vākyapadīya
VPT	=	Vākyapadīyaṭīkā of Helārāja
VS	=	Vṛttisamuddeśa (Vākyapadīya 3.14)
VSM	=	Vaiyākaraṇasiddhāntamañjūṣā
VST	=	Vṛttisamuddeśaṭīkā of Helārāja

Notes

- 1 I am thankful to Drs. JeeLoo Liu, Douglas Berger, Madhav Sharan Upadhyaya, Diwakar Acharya, David Buchta, and Boris Marjanovich for their valuable insights. I am equally thankful to Mrs. Mary Hicks for reading an earlier draft of this chapter.

42 *Sthaneshwar Timalisina*

- 2 See Timalisina (2009a and 2009b).
- 3 I am directly referring to Rorty (1992, particularly the Introduction pp. 1–39).
- 4 Patañjali's MB on AA 8.4.47. According to Kaiyata, this reading is corrupt due to a copier's error. Even in his suggested reading, both terms of negation are present. Cf. AA 8.4.47.
- 5 Jaimini's terminology for threefold negation is *pratiṣedha*, *vikalpa*, and *pariyudāsa*. For a detailed analysis of negation in Mīmāṃsā, see MS 10.8.1–22. See Staal (1962, 52–71) for the Mīmāṃsā and Vyākaraṇa exegeses of negation. Stall (1962, 61) analyzes two types of *pariyudāsa*: 1) “the door should be unlocked”; and 2) “another door should be locked,” basically expanding upon the concept of *vikalpa* and *pariyudāsa*. While *pratiṣedha* and *vikalpa* are spelled in MS 10.8.1, *itarapariyudāsa* is mentioned in MS 10.8.15. That Pāṇini does consider *vikalpa* as a type of negation is affirmed by ‘*na veti vibhāṣā*’ AA 1.1.44.
- 6 While the particles *mā/mān* refer to negation, this imperative negation requires a much wider discussion that involves the ritual theory of Mīmāṃsā, and due to limitation of space, I am not addressing this aspect of negation in this paper. In English, besides ‘not’ and ‘no,’ the varied appearances of negation in compound words such as unimaginative, non-reliable, atheist, incomplete or dysfunctional can be included in Sanskrit *nañ*.
- 7 Cited in *Mīmāṃsānyāyaparakāśa* (262, Niṣedha section). For *prasajya* and *pariyudāsa*, see also VP (2.84). A slight variant of this verse is cited by Staal (1962).
- 8 What underlies Bhartṛhari's argument is that all negation rests on something positive as its foundation. Nyāya philosophers argue that the absence of a jar, for instance, is located on the surface upon which the jar is negated. Advaita Vedantins argue that Brahman is the foundation upon which entities are affirmed or negated but which in itself cannot be negated. Bhartṛhari here appears to counter the Buddhist doctrine of emptiness, particularly the one grounded on Nāgārjunian arguments that rest on negation. Bhartṛhari's discussion of sentential negation also has a great relevance for the historical analysis of the Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika arguments of negation.
- 9 When Pāṇini gives a rule that *prātipadika* is any meaningful word that is exclusive of the verb and the suffix (AA 1.2.45), implicative negation is implicit. In another rule (AA 8.4.47), Pāṇini states that all the consonants except for /h/ that are subsequent to a vowel can be optionally duplicated, and so both formations (e.g., *klpta* and *klppta*) are correct. However, this rule does not apply to those consonants if there is a vowel subsequent to it. This negation is non-implicative, and in this case the sentence is divided into two when analyzing meaning.
- 10 The Sanskrit sentence is: *na kalañjaṃ bhakṣayet* | It is likely that *kalañja* meant the red garlic. For discussion, see Edgerton (1986, 164n213).
- 11 For a detailed treatment of this sentence in the context of negation, see Staal (1962, 59).
- 12 This argument, evident in the following verse cited by Puṅyarāja, resonates the position of Dharmakīrti:
*satām ca na niṣedho 'sti so 'satsu ca na vidyate | jagaty anena nyāyena nañarthah
 pralayaṅgatah || Pramāṇavinīścaya 226.*
 Cited by Puṅyarāja in his commentary (VP 2.241).
- 13 VP 2.242.
- 14 Most of the philosophical issues raised by Bhartṛhari while addressing negation are seminally present in MB in AA 2.2.6. There is a stylistic difference in their presentation though. Patañjali first addresses the primacy of the second term, and with a brief objection, goes on to address the sides of the primacy of the external and the first terms. Bhartṛhari, on the other hand, addresses the central position, the primacy of the second term, and then addresses the positions of the primacy of external and first terms.
 For a summary of this section, see Iyer (1992, 390–401). For this discussion, I have primarily relied on Helārāja's commentary for understanding the VP passage. I have also utilized Iyer (1974, 236–271) in summarizing the concepts.

- 15 See MB (AA 2.2.6) for discussion.
- 16 This is visible in Nāgeśa's statement. See Uddyota on MB (AA 2.2.6).
- 17 Helārāja uses the term in this particular context: (*upacārasattā* VP 3.14.250).
- 18 See VP 3.14.250cd.
- 19 Pāṇini reads *nañ* (AA 2.2.6) as an independent *sūtra* in the sequence of addressing *taipuruṣa*, a type of compound where the second term is primary. Patañjali's elaboration upon the passage maintains the same position, demonstrating the primacy of the second term.
- 20 VP 3.14.250.
- 21 VP 3.14.252.
- 22 In the case of terms such as *akṛtvā*, the particle simply negates what is denoted by the verbal root, and so the relation between the negative particle and the referent term is established. Based on VS 254 and Helārāja's Ṭīkā thereon.
- 23 For discussion, see VS 257–258.
- 24 Bhartṛhari raises a wide range of issues, primarily inspired by the MB, with regard to the meaning of the negative particle in a compound. For the primacy of the final term in a compound with a negative particle, see VS 259–295; for the primacy of the external term, see *Sambandhasamuddeśa* 296–304; and for the primacy of the first term or the negative particle, see VS 305–315.
- 25 Mahābhāṣya on AA 2.2.6. This passage is read with 'hi' instead of 'ca' in VST 264.
- 26 The situation is even worse with terms that are used in two opposite senses. For instance, the term *ārāt* is used to refer to both 'near' and 'far' (VS 273–5). Bhartṛhari clarifies his position by adding that, while the base words have a wide range of meanings, particles exclude certain aspects. In this sense, a negative particle only highlights what is already there in the term itself. He gives an example of the root $\sqrt{sthā}$, which has both the meanings of staying and going away, but the second meaning is manifest only when the term is combined with the prefix *pra* (as in *prasthāna*) (VS 276).
- 27 See Helārāja's exposition for illustration. VP 3.14.296.
- 28 Bhartṛhari addresses the problem with an acceptance of the above position as follows. When the negative particle is primary in a compound, the formation would be '*abrāhmaṇya*,' which is an indeclinable (*avyaya*), while a formations such as *abrāhmaṇāḥ* etc. would not be possible.
- 29 VST 313.
- 30 VST 314.
- 31 Although verse VS 315 comes in a sequence of arguments rejecting the position that there is primacy in the external term, in the discussion initiated in VS 314, Helārāja expands on this and also defends the position that there is a primacy of the first term. Helārāja provides several examples in the list where the gender of the qualifier does not match that of the qualified. See VST 315.
- 32 VST 315.
- 33 VST 315.
- 34 VST 315.
- 35 In consequence, formation of the terms such as *asarvasmai* remains possible.
- 36 *tasmād upapannaṃ pūrvapadārthaprādhānyadarśanam* | VST 315. Noteworthy in this context is that Iyer (1974, 270–1; 1992, 399–40) considers that grammarians maintained only the position of the primacy of the final term. This understanding not only contradicts Helārāja and in contemporary times, the commentator Raghunātha Śarmā, this goes explicitly against Patañjali's defense of this position by maintaining that the gender and number of the terms are innate and not controlled by any external terms.