

Order and Meaning in Sanskrit Preverbs

In Classical Sanskrit, there are numerous verbal prefixes ('preverbs') that combine with verbs to give new meanings (gam 'go', versus sam+gam 'accompany'). Many other Indo-European languages have comparable structures, with Celtic and Slavic being notorious for multiple instances of these elements.

In discussing preverbs in his Sanskrit Grammar, Whitney makes the following claims: first, more than one preverb may be put before a verb. Second, The order of preverbs is determined by the meaning, which is compositional (such that the meaning of X+Y+Z+VERB, is analyzed as VERB, then Z+VERB, then Y+[Z+VERB], etc.) but there are lexical constraints; in particular, a: 'to' must always be the most interior preverb.

I evaluate these claims against my own data, taken from an exhaustive search through Monier-Williams' Sanskrit-English Dictionary. My data do not clearly follow Whitney's model, and many examples synchronically seem to contradict his claims entirely.

The Classical situation is also of interest from a diachronic perspective, in its relation to preverb behavior in earlier Vedic Sanskrit. Vedic preverbs were free words, and not affixed to the verb. This fact raises the question of whether the Classical ordering constraints were present in Vedic. Here I report on my own findings from a study of Vedic preverbs, but note that Macdonell, in his Vedic Grammar, claims that some of the same lexical constraints of Classical Sanskrit applied in the earlier language, e.g. regarding a:. Thus, though the realization of the preverbs changes between Vedic and Classical Sanskrit, there is considerable stability in their behavior.

I. Introduction

A) Goals

- 1) This is a preliminary study considering aspects of the diachrony of preverb ordering and meaning between Vedic and Classical Sanskrit.
- 2) It will attempt to verify and expand on observations about preverb behavior made in William Dwight Whitney's *Sanskrit Grammar*.
- 3) It will also attempt to relate the development of these preverbs to the issue of diachronic stability (Nichols, 2003)

B) In Classical Sanskrit, verbal prefixes combine with verbs to give new meanings

gam	'go'
ā+gam	'to' + 'go' = 'go to'
sam+gam	'with' + 'go' = 'accompany'

C) The following is the commonly accepted list of common preverbs:

ati	beyond, over
adhi	above, besides
anu	after, along, alongside
antar	interior, within
apa	down, off, back

api	unto, close upon or on
abhi	to, towards, into, over, upon
ava	off, away, down, down from
ā	near, near to, towards- change of direction
ud	up, upwards, upon, on, over, above
upa	towards, near to, by the side of, with
ni	down, in, into
nis	out, forth
parā	away, forth
pra	forward, onward, forth, fore
prati	back to, in reversed direction
pari	round about, around
vi	apart, asunder, away, out
sam	along, with, together

II. Classical Sanskrit

A) Whitney makes the following claims in his *Sanskrit Grammar*:

1) “More than one prefix may be set before the same root. Combinations of two are quite usual; of three, much less common; of more than three, rare. Their order is in general determined only by the requirements of the meaning, each added prefix bringing a further modification to the combination before which it is set. But ā is almost never allowed, either earlier or later, to be put in front of the others.” –Whitney’s *Sanskrit Grammar*, 1080

2) Whitney’s claims:

- a. More than one preverb may be put before a root, but three is the upper limit in common use.
- b. The order of the preverbs is determined by the meaning, which is compositional-
- c. Except in the case of ā, which must always be the most interior preverb.

B) Sources

- 1) I surveyed the incidence of multiple preverbs in the entirety of Monier-Williams’ *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*.
- 2) The following figures are taken from the 2,182 instances that I catalogued.
- 3) It is important to note that these numbers represent unique types in the dictionary, and not tokens in a text.

III. Evaluating Whitney

A) More than one preverb may be put before a root:

- 1) I found 2056 cases of two preverbs before a root.
- 2) I found 125 cases of three preverbs before a root.
- 3) I found one examples of four preverbs before a root.

ā-rabh	‘reach/keep fast’
anv-ā-rabh	‘touch from behind’
sam-anv-ā-rabh	‘take hold of together’
sam-abhi-vy-ā-hṛ	‘to mention together; associate together’

B) Meaning-determined order

- 1) According to Whitney, each preverb adds meaning to the combinations that came before it.

VERB	‘verb’
X-VERB	‘x’+‘verb’
Y-[X-VERB]	‘y’+‘x+verb’
Z-[Y-[X-VERB]]	‘z’+‘y+x+verb’

2) Cases that support Whitney’s claim

a.	vṛt	‘turn’
	vi-vṛt	‘apart’+‘turn’=‘sever’
	ati-[vi-vṛt]	‘beyond’+‘sever’=‘separate too far’
b.	vṛt	‘turn’
	ati-vṛt	‘beyond’+‘turn’=‘cross’
	vi-[ati-vṛt]	‘apart’+‘cross’=‘escape’
c.	sṛ	‘flow, go’
	vi-sṛ	‘apart’+‘flow’=‘spread out’
	anu-[vi-sṛ]	‘along, after’+‘spread out’=‘extend over’
d.	sṛ	‘flow, go’
	anu-sṛ	‘along, after’+‘go’=‘go after’
	vi-[anu-sṛ]	‘apart’+‘go after’=‘roam, pervade’

3) Non-compositional cases

a.	pad	‘fall’
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	sam-pad	'together' + 'fall' = 'succeed'
	abhi-[sam-pad]	'towards' + 'succeed' = 'become similar to'
b.	car	'move'
	abhi-pad	'towards' + 'move' = 'enchant'
	vy-[abhi-pad]	'apart' + 'enchant' = 'sin against'

4) Quasi-compositional cases

a.	īkṣ	'see'
	pra-īkṣ	'forward' + 'see' = 'look at'
	sam-[pra-īkṣ]	'together' + 'look at' = 'perceive'
	abhi-[sam-[pra-īkṣ]]	'towards' + 'perceive' = 'look at'
b.	īkṣ	'see'
	pra-īkṣ	'forward' + 'see' = 'look at'
	abhi-[pra-īkṣ]	'towards' + 'look at' = 'perceive'
	sam-[abhi-[pra-īkṣ]]	'together' + 'perceive' = 'look at'
c.	i	'go'
	ud-i	'up' + 'go' = 'go up'
	abhy-[ud-i]	'towards' + 'go up' = 'rise over'
d.	i	'go'
	abhi-i	'towards' + 'go' = 'approach'
	ud-[abhi-i]	'up' + 'approach' = 'rise over'

C) Lexical constraints

- 1) \tilde{a} is nearly always the most interior preverb. There are a few exceptions that I know of- two that I found, and two that Whitney notes:

a.	\tilde{a} -vi-han	'to hew at'
	\tilde{a} -prati-ni-vṛt	'to cease completely'

- b. Whitney lists two exceptions to this rule: *āvihanti* MBh., *āvitanvānā* , BhP.

- 2) While \tilde{a} is the only preverb that Whitney recognized as being lexically constrained in its ordering, a survey of the data shows that there are probably remnants of Vedic constraints.

IV. Diachronic stability

A) Sources

- 1) I surveyed the incidence of multiple preverbs in the entirety of Grassmann's *Wörterbuch zum Rig-Veda*.
- 2) I used only Grassman's judgments about whether a preverb modified a specific verb.
- 3) I used Macdonell's *Vedic Grammar* for information about preverb behavior.
- 4) The following numbers represent a token count, not a type count.

B) Vedic preverbs

- 1) Preverbs were separate words rather than affixes.
- 2) *pārā, ā, áva, úd, ní* and *prá* tended to be most interior to the verb.

PV ₁	Total	PV ₁ PV ₂ V	PV ₂ PV ₁ V	PV ₂ V PV ₁
pārā	5	0	5 (100%)	0
ā	180	42 (23%)	133 (74%)	5 (3%)
áva	8	3 (37%) (3 ā)	5 (63%)	0
úd	14	5 (35%) (4 ā)	9 (65%)	0
ní	27	8 (30%) (7 ā)	19 (70%)	0

- 3) *abhí, ádhi, ánu, úpa* and *práti* tended to be most exterior to the verb.

PV ₁	Total	PV ₁ PV ₂ V	PV ₂ PV ₁ V	PV ₂ V PV ₁
abhí	115	92 (80%)	8 (7%)	15 (13%)
ádhi	10	7 (70%)	1 (10%)	2 (20%)
ánu	34	29 (85%)	2 (6%)	3 (9%)
úpa	81	46 (57%)	21 (26%)	15 (19%)
práti	13	11 (85%)	2 (15%)	0

C) Classical preverbs

1) *pārā, ā, áva, úd, ní* and *prá* still tend to be interior.

PV ₁	Total	PV ₁ PV ₂ V	PV ₂ PV ₁ V
pārā	13	0	13 (100%)
ā	404	2 (1%)	402 (99%)
áva	169	8 (5%)	161 (95%)
úd	257	34 (13%)	223 (87%)
ní	151	7 (5%)	144 (95%)
prá	388	89 (23%)	299 (77%)

(2) *abhí, ádhi, ánu, úpa* and *práti* still tend to be exterior

PV ₁	Total	PV ₁ PV ₂ V	PV ₂ PV ₁ V
abhí	461	370 (80%)	91 (20%)
ádhi	47	33 (70%)	14 (30%)
ánu	298	233 (78%)	65 (22%)
úpa	279	160 (57%)	119 (43%)
práti	228	198 (87%)	30 (13%)

V. Conclusion

Of Whitney's three statements, only the first- regarding the number of preverbs able to be combined with a single verb- is completely accurate. His second statement, regarding the effect of preverb ordering on meaning, does not adequately account for the facts. This is true both in regard to the set of forms shown above, where order does not seem to affect meaning, and also in regard to his statement that meaning is the sole motivation for preverb ordering. His third claim, that *ā* is an exception to this rule is true but incomplete, as it can be seen that further lexical constraints on ordering still hold.

Specifically, the preverbs under consideration seem to show diachronic stability in their ordering. This is shown by a comparison to ordering in an earlier stage of the language, implying that the order is perseverant through inheritance. This could also be considered the property of persistence, as discussed in Hopper 1991.

While data collection and analysis methods in this study are less than perfect, they show that there are interesting trends that warrant further investigation.

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