

## An Action (*kriyā*) and Its Cognition: Grammarians' Approach

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0. An action (*kriyā*), according to Pāṇinīyas, is not directly perceived and has to be inferred from its result (*phalānumeyā-kriyā*). To investigate the structure of the inference of an action (*kriyānumāna*) is the aim of this paper.<sup>1)</sup>

1. In early India, a semantic analysis of verbs led to the common understanding that an action is not a single entity but a complex (*samūharūpa*) of those constituent action-moments which, from its commencement up to the accomplishment of its result, occur in a sequence (*pūrvāparibhūta*).<sup>2)</sup> The reason why an action is said to be imperceptible lies in its composite nature, which will be revealed by a close look at what Patañjali [Bh 1.254. 15-16] says in his *Mahābhāṣya* on P1.3.1:

An action is absolutely not visible. An action, being a mass (*piṇḍibhūta*), cannot be pointed out visually as a foetus that has come out of the womb.

Kaiyaṭa [Pr. 1.3.1] succinctly puts it as follows: Atoms (*parāmāṇu-s*) are perceived when in a mass, but not individually; in contrast with them, an action is not perceived for the very reason that it is a mass. The action-moments that constitute an action do not take place concurrently. It, therefore, follows from this that in so far as it is supposed to be a composite of the action-moments, an action, as such, cannot be directly perceived, even if its component action-moments are perceptible.

2. An action, thus, is imperceptible in essence. The question then naturally arises: Through which means of cognition can an action be known? In order to know it, Patañjali argues, one has to resort to inference. Let us then look at what kind of inference he proposes for the

cognition of actions.

Patañjali [Bh I.254. 17-18] begins by making a precondition for the inference of an action, since the meaning of a finite verb form like *pacati*... is cooking' involves two factors: an action and a participant in the act(*sādhana*). The precondition is this:

On condition that all act-participants [that are capable of bringing an activity to fruition] are present, sometimes one rightly says *pacati*, and sometimes one does not.

According to Nāgeśa, Patañjali here intends to demonstrate that an action is distinct from a substance serving as an act-participant(*dravyavyatireka*). In this case, one may reason as follows: Even if all act-participants are present, one does not utter *pacati* if they are inactive; therefore, the utterance *pacati* has for its referent a distinct entity from the act-participants in question; the action, which cannot be an object of verbal expression even if all act-participants are present, is distinct from them. What is ascertained by this reasoning, that is, the distinction of an action from a substance, is of great significance, not only for the following types of inference of an action, but also for the definitional rule for the term *dhātu*: *kriyāvacano dhātuḥ* in that an item referring to a substance cannot be called *dhātu* because of the distinction between an action and a substance.

The two sorts of inference for actions that Patañjali [Bh I.254. 18-19] proposes are as follows:

A) That, as a consequence of whose presence one rightly says *pacati* with reference to an act-participant, is an action. B) Or rather, that on account of which someone like Devadatta is first in one place and then in another place such as Pāṭaliputra, is an action.

By the statement A is meant the inference of an action from the use of a finite verb form like *pacati* (*śabdaprayoga*) and by the statement B that from a spatial movement (*deśāntaraprāpti*). The point here, thus, is that an action has the cause-effect relation to the application of the finite verb form and to movement, which enables one to infer an action from these. It is to be noted that one must assume a cause in order to

account for the utterance of words, as well as the occurrence of such an event as Devadatta's being in one place at one time and somewhere else at another, since application of words is said to have meanings for its occasion (Bh I.114. 13-14: *arthanimittaka eva śabdah*).

Of these two types of inference, Patañjali considers the latter (B) to be preferable. For, the use of the finite verb form *pacati* may take place even when what is supposed to be its cause, an action of cooking, is not present in reality (*asatyaviśaya*), just as there may come about the perception of a stream of water which is not objectively existent; in this sense, the verbal cognition derived from such a finite verb form should be sublated (*bādhita*). One may say that a result such as reaching another place, in contrast with it, does not occur without its cause being present.

3. Given that an action is absolutely imperceptible, then one will be naturally confronted with the question of how one could grasp the causal relationship between an action and its result, which underlies the relation of a logical mark and the marked (*liṅgalīṅgisambandha*), a relation crucial to the theory of inference. Pāṇinīyas' answers to this question vary according to their views on the perceptibility of action-moments. Although they hold the common view that an action as a composite is hard to perceive, yet they may differ as to whether the constituent action-moments can be the objects of perception.

3.1. We can see from the following that Bhartṛhari recognizes that the constituent action-moments are perceptible to the eye. With the aim of exemplifying the imperceptibility of an action, he [VP III, *kriyā*, kk. 7-8] states as follows:

Just as a collection of the phonemes like *g-au-h*, which, as a whole, is not the object of perception, though each constituent phoneme [that occurs in a sequence] is perceived, and the form of which is conceived by the mind. When by the sense-organs that fall upon respective component [actions] those components are cognized wrongly as in the case of perception of the fire-wheel, the aspect [of perceptibility] that belongs to a component action is assumed to be of an action as a complex.

Bharṭṭhari here tries to show, by comparison of the cognition of an action as a composite with that of a complex of phonemes (*varṇa-s*), that an action, being a complex, can be mentally constructed of the perceived action-moments, and to illustrate, with the example of the fire-wheel, that tricking on one's sense-organs, the action-moments actually perceived create the illusion of an action being perceived. What is to be noted here is that Bharṭṭhari refers to the theory of the phonemes (*Varṇavāda*) as Mimāṃsakas advocate it, in which theory there can appear, in a kind of recollective cognition, a collection of those phonemes which have been perceived severally in due order, which is regarded as a cause of the verbal cognition [cf. ŚV, sphoṭa, kk. 109-116]. As Helārāja [VP III, kāla, k. 90] generalizes, the unification (*saṅkalanā*) of the objects which have already been perceived directly in a sequence is brought about by one single cognition; it is true that memory (*smaraṇa*) is necessarily caused by perception, but it does not necessarily follow that the objects perceived directly are not remembered at one and the same time. To apply it to this case, we may have the following statement of Kaiyaṭa [Pr. 3. 2. 123]:

Although the composite action said to be denoted by a verb like *pac* is indeed not directly perceptible because the components do not occur together, each moment is directly perceptible and *pacati* is used on the basis of mentally unifying these perceptible constituent moments.

On the theory of *saṅkalanā* according to which the previously perceived constituent elements are mentally unified later, how can one grasp the causal relationship between an action and its result? Commenting on the above-mentioned statement by Kaiyaṭa, Nāgeśa [Ud. 1. 3. 1] argues that one might grasp the causal relation with reference to what is made known (*upasthita*); there is no restriction that one should do so only with reference to what is made known through perception. Thus he concludes that when the causal relation of an action and its result has been grasped in this manner, one can infer the action from its result and employ a finite verb form like *pacati*; this, however, takes

place with yogins only, who are able to perceive a current action at each component instant.

Apart from the question of whether yogins alone are qualified for having the inference of such a kind for an action, it admits of no doubt that the theory of *saṅkalanā* makes it possible for one to grasp the causal relationship necessary for inferring an action. Although the action as a complex, without which its result is not to be realized, cannot actually be existent in terms of time and space, one might identify the mental unity with the proper cause for the outcome concerned, insofar as a certain result is observed to follow a complex of action-moments, and these mentally unified moments, which one speaks of as an action, can represent the actual action-moments in a sequence.

3.2. As has already been suggested, Nāgeśa holds that nobody can perceive the action-moments except yogins. For him, both a complex of action-moments and the action-moments are beyond perception with ordinary people. Let us then see from this standpoint how the inference for an action can be made. Nāgeśa [ud. 1.3.1] formulates the third type of inference mentioned above as follows:

[Thesis (*pratijñā*)] Contact [of an agent of going] with a succeeding point of space (*uttaradeśasaṃyoga*) is produced by a cause. [Reason (*hetu*)] Because it is a result. On condition that [an action is established as being] distinct from other likely candidates for the cause, those others being sublated, the cause in question is proved to be nothing but an action.

Here, Nāgeśa, to begin with, by resorting to *sāmānyatodṛṣṭa-anumāna* ('inference from general correlation') which is applied to the sphere where what is to be inferred is absolutely not visible, generally establishes that a result like contact should have a certain cause, and, next, specifies the cause of its result by applying *pariśeṣa* ('method of elimination').

It may be worth pointing out in passing that Nāgeśa [Ud. 4.1.3], while explaining the inference of the gender (*liṅga*) (as a cause) from the word (as its result), is fully aware that inference can have the absolutely imperceptible for its object. He remarks that what makes the

causal relationship known is not limited to perception; in some cases it can be even an authoritative statement (*śabda*), and that the knowledge of universal concomitance (*sāmānyavyāpti*) between a cause and an effect can lead to the inference of a specific cause from a specific effect.

4. For the Vaiyākaraṇas who believe in the words as their authority, what the words express is their authority (*śabdaḥ pramāṇakā vāyam/yac chabda āha tad asmākaṁ pramāṇam*). In this sense, they have to say that an action should have a collective nature since a verb like *pac* might be used at any moment in the process of its accomplishing its result. For them, thus, inferentiality of an action, whether or not its constituent action-moments might be directly perceived, is inevitable. In conclusion, any action that figures in the field of verbal communication, as Nāgeśa [Ud. 1.3.1] states, cannot but be inferred from its result just because the action-moments can never fall into the scope of the verbal communication.

- 1) In this paper, the word 'action' refers to what is denoted by a verb root (*dhātvarthakriyā*), which follows the definition of verb roots (*dhātu*) proposed by Patañjali in his *Mahābhāṣya* on P1.3.1. : *kriyāvacanā dhātuh*; 'action-moment' the most minute moment of activity (*kriyākṣaṇa*) which is no longer divisible.
- 2) Such a notion of an action may be traced back to the *Nirukta* I.1 and the *Bṛhaddevatā* I.44. It is evident that Patañjali takes it for granted that an action is of a collective nature. In interpreting '*kriyāsamabhihāra*' (a 'collection of actions') in the *Mahābhāṣya* on P3.1.22, he observes that there are two sorts of action: *sāmānyakriyā* ('common action') and *avayavakriyā* ('component action') such as *adhiśrayaṇa*, *udakāsecana*, and so on. *Sāmānyakriyā* is a single complex that is comprised of the component actions and, to the effect that the verb root *pac* ('to cook') may be used at any stage in the process of cooking, must be taken to be 'common' to all component actions in question. Concerning the sequential occurrence of the component actions, it suffices to point out that, in commenting upon the third *vārttika* on P3.2.102, Patañjali assumes that the action of moving from one place to another consists of the constituent actions of moving that occur in a sequence.

<Key words> *kriyā*, *kriyānumāna*, *saṅkalanā*.

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