

Paśyantī, Pratibhā, Sphoṭa and Jāti: Ontology and Epistemology in the Vākyapadīya

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Abstract Eli Franco has recently suggested to distinguish the two main periods in the history of Indian philosophy, i.e. the older ontological and the new epistemological. In the *Vākyapadīya*, however, ontology and epistemology are evidently intertwined and interrelated. In this paper ontological and epistemological features of the concepts of *paśyantī*, *pratibhā*, *sphoṭa* and *jāti* are analyzed in order to demonstrate that all these concepts, while being ontologically different, are engaged in similar epistemological processes, i.e. the cognition of a verbal utterance. Thus the identification of *sphoṭa* and *jāti* as well as of *paśyantī* and *pratibhā* met with in some passages of VP and the commentaries implies not the absolute identity of these concepts, but only their overlapping in the sphere of epistemology. Considering concepts of different origin in one epistemological perspective enables to escape controversies in interpretation and provides a kind of consistency in a bit but amorphous work of Bhartṛhari.

Keywords Bhartṛhari · Indian language philosophy · *Paśyantī* · *Sphoṭa* · *Pratibhā* · *Jāti*

Eli Franco in the introduction to the recent volume ‘Periodization and Historiography of Indian Philosophy’ proposed to divide the history of Indian philosophy into three large periods, i.e. (1) the ontological period, (2) the epistemological period and (3) the Navya Nyāya period. The transfer from the first to the second period is dated to approximately the fourth century, which is associated with the rapid development

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of Buddhist epistemology (beginning especially with Dignāga) (Franco 2013, pp. 24–26).

Franco's periodization model seems to be far-reaching, because it is based on the typological structure of philosophical systems and not on some factors 'external to philosophy', i.e. historical, religious or ethno-cultural. It may be beneficial to make use of this model while analyzing different schools of Indian philosophy. A similar conceptual model was used by Halbfass, who distinguished two periods in the history of the concept of *dravya* in the Vaiśeṣika, i.e. initial cosmological (nature-philosophical) and later functional (developed under the influence of Grammarians)¹ (Halbfass 1979). Another study of this kind was undertaken by Alexis Pinchard in the paper 'The History of *Sphoṭa*: From Ontology to Epistemology?', published in Franco's volume. Pinchard examines the evolution of the concept of *sphoṭa* from early Grammarians up to Bhartṛhari and comes to the conclusion that the concept of *sphoṭa* has never lost its ontological component (Pinchard 2013).²

The interrelation of ontology and epistemology in the *Vākyapadīya* (VP) is worth considering a further look. Bhartṛhari's lifetime is usually dated around the end of the fourth beginning of the fifth centuries CE (EIPh 1990, p. 121). His philosophical ideas derive from Brahmanic schools and at the same time one can hardly deny his methodological proximity with Buddhism and the impact he had on Dignāga. All of this allows ranking Bhartṛhari among philosophers in whose works, according to Franco's hypothesis, the evidences of the transfer from ontological to epistemological philosophizing can be traced (cf. Pinchard 2013, p. 331). Halbfass and Pinchard studied ontological and epistemological tendencies diachronically,³ i.e. focusing on the history of certain concepts. In this paper I am going to apply Franco's conceptual model for the analysis of VP synchronically, which means that I will study Bhartṛhari's philosophy, emphasizing structural interrelations between different concepts.

This task is not as easy as it may seem, because the interpretation of VP as an integral system remains problematic. Bhartṛhari never strived to find the one true solution to a question, but enumerated and justified different—often mutually exclusive—opinions, without making a final decision. Jan Houben designates this approach as *relativism* or *perspectivism* and finds similarities with Jainism, Mādhyamika and early Vedānta (Houben 1995a, 1997). In the last two decades the term '*perspectivism*' in relation to Bhartṛhari's methodology has become generally accepted.

¹ The third, i.e. the Navya Nyāya period of Franco's periodization will be neglected in this paper as irrelevant with concern to Bhartṛhari.

² Pinchard actually comes to deny the relevance of Franco's opposition with respect to Bhartṛhari. He claims that 'epistemology of grammarian-philosophers cannot work as a substitute to ontology because it is somehow ontology' (Pinchard 2013: 335). Still, this does not refute the existence of the epistemological trend in Bhartṛhari's philosophy. In a study of Indian philosophy, at least in the case of Bhartṛhari, it seems more reasonable to use the terms "*ontology*" and "*epistemology*" not as 'technical terms... in their status nascendi', i.e. as Kant did it in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (Pinchard 2013, p. 333), but more loosely as designations of certain trends in philosophy identified in the course of the analysis. Moreover, Bhartṛhari tended to discuss every problem from different angles, so that one can hardly expect him to hold a strict ontological or epistemological attitude.

³ To put it in de Saussure's terms of *synchronic* vs. *diachronic* analysis.

Still, the very concept of perspectivism needs to be clarified further. By proclaiming Bhartṛhari to be a perspectivist do we categorize his attitude as purely encyclopedic, implying that he impartially collected the views of different schools without expressing his own opinion? If this were the case, a Bhartṛhari scholar would have to content himself with attempting to clarify the origin of the attitudes enumerated in VP. Another possibility is to assume that Bhartṛhari intentionally examined different views out of their initial context, considering them as equally possible methodologies, with each providing the terms in which the problem under consideration can be solved successfully.

The difference between these two interpretations of perspectivism may seem insignificant. Still, it is only the second interpretation that explains the freedom with which Bhartṛhari dealt with the concepts, borrowed from different schools, neglecting the initial context in which these concepts were initially introduced. Again only the second interpretation allows us to assume that Bhartṛhari could have possessed his own opinion, embracing and systematizing the different views of rival schools.⁴

It is also worth to note, that Franco's opposition of ontology and epistemology is not just a means of understanding Bhartṛhari's philosophy from an external, i.e. etic, position. On the contrary, there is a similar emic opposition—the opposition of *paramārtha* and *vyavahāra* with ontology corresponding to the *pāramārthika* level and epistemology to the *vyāvahārika* one—by means of which Bhartṛhari and his commentators used to classify the views expounded in the *kārikās*.

The *pāramārthika* level is the ultimate ontological reality, unique and beyond relativization. Examining a particular philosophical problem from the perspective of *paramārtha*, Bhartṛhari tends to demonstrate, that this problem is stipulated by dualistic worldview and thus needs to be eliminated.⁵ At the same time we must not forget, that ontology has never been the main point of Bhartṛhari's interest (Bronkhorst 1991, p. 12). Though in later doxographical works his philosophy was usually characterized as linguistic non-dualism (*śabdādvaita*), most likely it was because of two reasons. Firstly, the influence of Kashmir commentators (Helārāja, Puṅyarāja), who interpreted VP in the light of Kashmir Shaivist doctrines. Secondly, the classifications of philosophical systems represented in doxographical works were based on the basic opposition of monism/pluralism, in the frames of which Bhartṛhari's distinct 'functional/epistemological' bias could not have been captured.

Paramārtha is opposed to *vyavahāra*. In grammatical context [e.g. in the *Mahābhāṣya* (Mbh 1880–1885, I, p. 2)] the term 'vyavahāra' means 'language behavior, usage'. Bhartṛhari applies it in broader sense as an activity per se, not least as a cognitive activity. For him, *vyavahāra* is an important criterion of the validity of a philosophical doctrine. In choosing the answer on certain philosophical problem he often relies on actual usage to make the final decision. On the other hand the

⁴ As Patāñjali put it, 'sarvapārsadam hīdam śāstram' (Mbh 1880 I: 400).

Cf. also, 'While grammar is accommodating, it is also conscious that it has its own point of view, different from that of the *darśanas*. Grammar is not concerned with outside reality and it does not try to arrive at logical notions regarding it' (Iyer 1992, pp. 77–78).

⁵ E.g. in the second part of the *Sambandhasamuddeśa* the concept of semantic relation as correspondence between words and objects is criticized from ontological perspective (VP III.3.52–88).

functional realm is much broader than philosophy, so that the same activity can be explained from different attitudes by means of different doctrines. VPI.75 claims,

‘An activity can be carried out relying on different doctrines. In this case that, what for some is principal, for others vice versa’.⁶

There are many different *vyāvahārika* levels that correspond to different facets of phenomenal reality. In VP a *vyāvahārika* level is related to a certain aspect of linguistic or cognitive activity, therefore identifying *vyāvahāra* with Franco’s epistemological trend in Indian philosophy seems quite plausible.⁷

Ontological and epistemological trends in VP will be studied in this paper by means of the analysis of four important concepts, viz. *paśyantī*, *pratibhā*, *sphoṭa* and *jāti*. However haphazard this choice may seem, it was made for the following reasons.

Firstly, all the concepts are intertwined with language and the sphere of epistemology.

Secondly, in Bhartṛhari’s ontology they share a common position between the world of phenomena (words and things) on the one hand and the absolute reality, concealed and speculative⁸—on the other and this intermediate position is the main challenge of Bhartṛhari’s ontology.⁹ This level is more deeply ‘rooted’ in the Reality, comparing to the world of phenomena; it can not be perceived directly and at the same time it presents a stage in the unfolding of the non-dual Absolute into phenomena. It is not surprising, that this level is referred to in VP by different terms and concepts.

Thirdly, all of these concepts (except *paśyantī*, most probably introduced by Bhartṛhari or his immediate predecessors) were used in the past by different schools. Thus an analysis of these terms may allow us to check whether their understanding has undergone some changes over the course of the time and whether Bhartṛhari’s interpretation was more ‘epistemological’, than that of his forerunners.¹⁰

⁶ *bhinnadarśanam āsrītya vyāvahāro 'nugamyate | tatra yan mukhyam ekeṣāṃ tatrānyeṣāṃ viparyayah ||* Enumeration of the verses according to Rau’s critical edition (Rau 1977).

⁷ Strictly speaking, a study of linguistic activity is not the same as epistemology. On the other hand, for Bhartṛhari language (*śabda*) is obviously *pramāṇa*, though mainly not (not only) in the sense of *āptopadeśah*, but as an intrinsic part of every cognitive act:

na so 'sti pratyayo loke yaḥ śabdānugamād ṛte | anuviddham iva jñānam sarvaṃ śabdena bhāsate || 1.131 ||

Thus, linguistic discourse in VP is inseparable from epistemological and vice versa.

⁸ I will not discuss here the question of whether the Absolute can be cognized directly by means of yogic perception.

⁹ The existence of the Absolute is the key-point of monistic ontology, whereas the phenomenal world needs to be either justified or refuted. In this case, postulating ontologically intermediate realms—more real than the world of phenomena, but simultaneously untrue, compared to the Absolute – makes the philosophical system more complicated.

¹⁰ *Paśyantī*, *pratibhā*, *sphoṭa* and *jāti* are not the only concepts in VP to meet these criteria, the more so, as Bhartṛhari used different terms on similar occasions no less frequently than used a single term in different meanings. The most evident example is *śabda*, a term applied in VP with a variety of meanings, including the one very close to *sphoṭa* (cf. Houben 1995b, p. 35). Still these four concepts cover the main aspects of the problem of understanding of verbal utterance, allowing me to focus on them, while sometimes only mentioning close or synonymous terms/concepts.

Moreover, the mentioned-above (1.2) interpretation of perspectivism as an enumeration of possible methodological attitudes leads to the question of whether these four concepts mutually correspond to each other. It is not only the proximity of their ontological status, on which the possibility of such correlation is based, but also their direct identifications, met with in VP and the commentaries. In VP I.96 *sphoṭa* is identified with *jāti*, whereas the subcommentary *Paddhati* on VP I.14 proclaims *pratibhā* and *paśyantī* to be the same. In the following part of the paper I will analyze the concepts one by one, stressing their epistemological dimension. However close their ontological status may be, each concept obviously has been introduced in a specific context, so it is only in the epistemological sphere, that we may discover where they overlap.

2.1. Paśyantī

VP I.1 proclaims the beginningless and imperishable *Brahman*, the source of the Universe, to be of verbal nature (*śabdatattva*). Elaborating probably this statement, in VP I.159 Bhartṛhari distinguished three levels of speech that unfold from Absolute to actual sonic speech. It was only in this *kārikā*, that the term '*paśyantī*' was used in VP. The lower level *vaikharī* is actual speech manifested in sounds in the course of verbal communication. The intermediate level of *madhyamā* might be a kind of mental speech, like speaking to oneself. The *madhyamā* speech is less diversified than *vaikharī*, which consists of individual sounds (phonemes). *Paśyantī* is the highest level of speech, devoid of the differentiation into signified (*vācya*) and signifier (*vācaka*). In VP I.159 however Bhartṛhari just enumerated three levels without returning to them in other parts of his work. All the information about it is derived from commentaries.¹¹

The three-part ontological structure was further elaborated by the Pratyabhijñā school of Kashmir Shaivism, adding the fourth highest level of speech, i.e. *Parā Vāc*. Somānanda argued against identifying *paśyantī* with *Brahman*, because of the duality of the former. The very name of *paśyantī* implies that it 'sees' something, i. e. has an object, which is impossible in the case of non-dual Absolute. (Torella 2002, p. XIX) It is *Parā*, the highest level of speech, that is identical with Śiva and thus devoid of subject-object duality. (Ksemaraja 1982, p. 79)

The concept of three (four) levels of speech is primarily of ontological character, but it is also not devoid of epistemological aspect. Thus the concept is multidimensional, aggregating different modes of description:

- (1) *ontological*, according to which language principle is the source of the Universe;
- (2) *psychological*, explaining the actual language behavior;
- (3) *empirical*, by which actual speech appears as succession of articulated sounds.

¹¹ Though the attribution of verses I.160-170, marked as doubtful in Rau's critical edition, remains problematic.

Some scholars relying probably on the commentaries claim that Bhartṛhari identified *paśyantī* with *Śabda-Brahman* (Raja 1964, p. 147), but there is no evidence of this in the *kārikās*. Bhartṛhari used the term *paśyantī* only once and was evidently unwilling to formulate a consistent ontological system, making it very plausible, that he understood *paśyantī* last but not least as epistemological concept, explaining the indivisibility of the signifier and signified aspects of the word that precedes an act of communication.¹²

2.2. Pratibhā

Pratibhā is a momentary flash of understanding, intuitive awareness, in poetry—inspiration. The term was employed by different schools of philosophy, particularly in Yoga, where *pratibhā* is claimed to lead to omniscience (YS 3.33).¹³ Bhartṛhari mentions *pratibhā* especially referring to the problem of sentence-meaning (*vākyārtha*). In the second *Kāṇḍa* he argues for the sentence to be the primary meaning-bearer against the doctrine of sentence-meaning consisting of single word-meanings. *Vākyārtha* is grasped in an instant flash (*pratibhā*) and only after this the meanings of individual words are revealed by means of logical analysis.

For Bhartṛhari *pratibhā* is not only a cognitive act, but also the meaning of the sentence per se (VP II.143). This seeming ambivalence in the interpretation of the term indicates, that sentence-meaning is not a single entity like *padārtha* of the Vaiṣeṣikas, but an element of a cognitive process described only in its context and non-existent separately. In the same way, as Tola and Dragonetti fairly noted, in *kārikā* II.147 that proclaims *pratibhā* to be a *pramāṇa* the latter ‘can be taken in the sense of “a means of knowledge”, i.e. a mental act, that presents to us the right path to follow’ (Tola and Dragonetti 1990, p. 97). In other words, *pratibhā* is not an additional *pramāṇa*, but a flash of understanding that happens to the cognizer, when a *pramāṇa* is applied successfully, be it *pratyakṣa*, *anumāna* or *śabda*.

Thus, *pratibhā* is primarily an epistemological concept. In his subcommentary on VP I.14 Vṛṣabhadeva identifies *pratibhā* with *paśyantī* (Vākyapadīya 1966, p. 48). We have no direct evidence to credit this statement to Bhartṛhari, especially considering that *paśyantī* most probably was not the central concept of Bhartṛhari’s philosophy. Still in the light of the *perspectivistic* approach it seems to be quite plausible that *paśyantī* and *pratibhā* are two facets of one entity. *Paśyantī* describes the inner level of the indivisibility of word and meaning from an ontological point of view with reference to *Śabda-Brahman*, whereas *pratibhā* is the same act of

¹² It seems reasonable to underline here a major difference between Bhartṛhari’s and Kashmir Shaivist ontologies. The initial point of Shaivist ontology is Absolute Subject (*Śiva*). Everything else, including language, is explained as manifestation of the Subject. This makes it reasonable to introduce *Parā*, an additional intermediate level between Absolute and *paśyantī*, that is more abstracted than the latter and devoid of epistemological functions. On the contrary, Bhartṛhari’s ontology does not imply the existence of subject, in this regard being close to Buddhism (Bronkhorst 1995, pp. 102–104). It is centered on language, understood as process. Therefore there is no need for Bhartṛhari to consider language as an accident of the Subject and hence no reason to introduce *Parā* as a distinct concept.

¹³ On *pratibhā* in different philosophical systems see Kaviraj (1924).

understanding an utterance, described from an epistemological point of view (from the point of view of the cognizer).

2.3. Sphoṭa

Sphoṭa is one of the most important and at the same time problematic concepts of Indian philosophy of language. The first textual reference to it is found in the *Mahābhāṣya*, where it is defined as unchangeable word essence manifested in audible sounds that are secondary to it.¹⁴ The actual manifestations of a word in sounds may differ, but the *sphoṭa* remains unchangeable, like drum strokes of different force can spread in the distance of twenty, thirty or forty paces, but their essence remains the same (Mbh 1880–1885, I, p. 181).

Bharṭṛhari, in contrast to Patāñjali, did not oppose *sphoṭa* to audible sounds (*dhvani*), in VP I.99 he insisted, that there is no difference between them.¹⁵ In VP I.76 he claimed, however, that *sphoṭa* differs from sounds as it has no temporal sequence, and this is due to the limitations of dualism, that *sphoṭa-word* is apprehended as possessing temporal extension.¹⁶ In general *sphoṭa* can be characterized as an integral indivisible unity of sound and meaning, revealed instantaneously to a participant of a verbal communication (cf. Matilal 1990, p. 85). According to Bharṭṛhari *sphoṭa* is possessed not only by individual word, but also by single phoneme as well as by integral utterance, the latter being described in more detail in the second *Kāṇḍa*.

From ontological point of view the concept of *sphoṭa* allows to justify the doctrine of the Absolute word as the source of the Universe. Psychologically it explains the apprehension of integral meaning from distinct sounds uttered. Thus we can conclude that epistemologically *sphoṭa* is close to *pratibhā*, whereas ontologically to *paśyantī*. The detailed discussion of possible correlation between the concepts (including *jāti*) is presented in the final part of the paper.

2.4. Jāti

In philosophical context *jāti* means genus or universal. The problem of universal vs. individual meaning of the word was one of the central in Indian language philosophy, which can be traced already in the *Mahābhāṣya*, where the almost

¹⁴ *evam tarhi sphoṭaḥ śabda dhvaniḥ śabdaguṇaḥ* (Mbh 1880–1885, I, p. 181).

¹⁵ *na bhedo dhvaniśabdayoḥ*

According to Bronkhorst, the non-difference between *sphoṭa* and *dhvani* is stated ‘in the context of *sphoṭa* conceived as a universal, for universals and individuals represent the same thing, be it from its real and its unreal side’ (Bronkhorst 1991, p. 18). Still, it is also possible to interpret this *kārikā* in epistemological context, in the sense that in the course of a verbal communication *sphoṭa* and sounds are never conceived to be different. The last interpretation conforms with VP I.100 where the relation between *sphoṭa* and sounds is compared with the correspondence (*yogyatā*) of the sense organs and their objects.

¹⁶ *sphoṭasyābhinnakālasya dhvanikālānupātinaḥ | grahaṇopādhibhedena vṛttibhedah pracakṣate || 1.76 ||*

synonymous term ‘*ākṛti*’ is used (Mbh 1880–1885, I, p. 1, 6; II, pp. 98–99). The other synonym for ‘*jāti*’ is ‘*sāmānya*’ used inter alia by Vaiśeṣikas as a special *padārtha* (‘category’ or more precisely, as Halbfass (Halbfass 1979, p. 538) rendered to it, ‘constituent of reality’¹⁷).¹⁸

In VP universals are discussed in the *Jāṭisamuddeśa*. In VP III.1.92 universal is defined:

Universal is defined with such synonyms as similarity (consisting in) non-difference of appearance and also as essential forces (*śakti*).¹⁹

Helārāja notes, that the existence of universals is proclaimed in order to explain the cognition of similarity of different objects. Defining universal as *śakti* Bhartṛhari underlined its ontological status. This refutes a possible objection that similarity between objects can be explained with the fact that they consist of identical elements and have identical appearance, in which case the concept of universal would be superfluous (Vākyapadīya 1963, p. 93)²⁰

In VP *śaktis* are understood as powers by means of which Absolute (*Brahman*) unfolds itself in phenomena. Designating universal as *śakti* Bhartṛhari indicates that it is more substantial than individual objects which consist of parts and are subject to change or destruction. Universal understood as similarity is static. Treating universal as *śakti*, Bhartṛhari proceeds to dynamic level of description that combines two planes of reality—phenomenal and absolute.²¹ It is only by means of universals understood as *śaktis* that ordinary activity can be explained (VP III.1.95). Cognition of similarity between objects is not to be explained by the fact, that they possess similar parts, because these parts are not absolutely identical. Moreover the act of realizing similarity is instantaneous and does not imply a painstaking comparison of parts and qualities. On the other hand, from monistic point of view the essence of all things is single and inexpressible, and in this case ‘activity would be impossible’ (VP III.1.95).²² Thus, the concept of *śakti* serves a kind of ‘bridge’ between the common pluralist viewpoint and absolute ontology.

In the *Jāṭisamuddeśa* universal is proclaimed to be the signified of all words (VP III.1.2). According to VP I.96, *sphoṭa* is remembered to be universal.²³ To

¹⁷ Though later on Halbfass referred to *padārtha* as category (Halbfass 1992, pp. 76–78).

¹⁸ On universal in different philosophical schools see Dravid (1972).

¹⁹ *abhedarūpaṃ sādṛśyam ātmabhūtaś ca śaktayaḥ | jātiparyāyavācītvam evam apy upavarṇyate ||*

²⁰ *iyam atra śāṅkā. anvayavijñānonnīyamānasadbhāvā jātir ity udghoṣyate. sā ca vyaktibhyo vyatirekēṇāmānaṃ no darśayati. tad eta eva vyaktayaḥ sādṛśyād ekākārapratyayaprasavahetavaḥ prakṛtyaivaikapratyayamarśajananaśāmarthyād vā santu kim apareṇa sāmānyena kṛtyam.*

tad etad abhyupagacchati. abhedarūpaṃ avyatiriktaṃ vyaktīnāṃ yat sādṛśyam ekapratyayamarśajanakaṃ vā vyatiriktaṃ eva śaktīlakṣaṇaṃ śāmarthyam tad apī jātir iti vyapadiśyate eva. anvitākārajñājanakaṃ hi vyaktīnāṃ kiñcana rūpaṃ sāmānyam iti sarvapārśado nyāyah. tatas ca sādṛśyam śaktir ity apī nāmāntareṇocyatāṃ na kācid anupapattiḥ.

²¹ Thus, through the concept of *śakti* the universal becomes more substantial and at the same time more dynamic. This obviously correlates with Bhartṛhari’s inclination to understand the Universe as a process (*prakriyā jagato*—VP I.1).

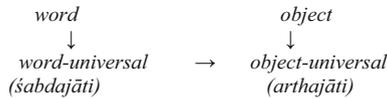
²² *vyavahāro na kalpate.*

²³ *anekavyaktyabhivyaṅgyā jātiḥ sphoṭa iti smṛtā | kaiścit vyaktaya evāśya dhvanitvena prakalpitāḥ || I.96 ||*

understand this statement let us turn to VP III.1.6, where the relation between words and universals is explained in detail.

Every word first of all expresses its own universal. And then it becomes identified (*adhyāropakalpanā*) with universals of objects (*arthajātirupeṣu*).²⁴

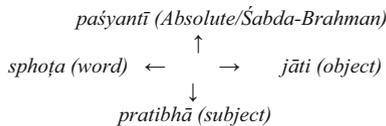
This *kārikā* refutes the obvious common view of direct relation between an audible word and its object. It can be summarized by the following diagram:



Object-universal is postulated in order to explain, how different objects (cows of different size and colour) are cognized as identical (cows per se). Similarly the concept of word-universal explains how a word uttered by different people with different volume, speed and accent is recognized as one and the same. Linguistic aspect of the same problem, i.e. concerning the identity of different words, was solved by means of *sphoṭa*. Thus it is very plausible that the universal of the word is *sphoṭa*, i.e. the unity of audible form and the meaning manifested instantaneously in the course of communication, irrespective of all possible differences in actual articulation (see “Sphoṭa” section) (cf. Bronkhorst 1991, pp. 12–17).

The concepts of *jāti* and *sphoṭa* derive from the same epistemological situation dealt with in different aspects. In the case of *sphoṭa* the starting point for investigation is the word (*śabda*), whereas in the case of *jāti* it is the object of the word (*artha*). *Jāti* is postulated in order to solve the problem of how different objects (things) are perceived as identical. *Sphoṭa* is referred to in a more narrow sense, i.e. for solving the problem of the word understanding in the context of Grammarian language ontology. Therefore these concepts are not completely synonymous, but only in some epistemological context.

3. Thus the four terms analyzed can be grouped into two pairs: *paśyantī/pratibhā* and *jāti/sphoṭa*. However, as all four of them derive from a similar epistemological context, interconnection between the members of both pairs can be supposed. *Sphoṭa* is manifested to the speaker/hearer in an instantaneous flash (*pratibhā*), when their consciousness is in *paśyantī* state (Cf. Matilal 1990, p. 105). Apprehending the *sphoṭa* of a word or an utterance, one simultaneously understands the meaning of this language unit, i.e. the universal. This can be summarized by the following diagram:



²⁴ *svajātiḥ prathamam śabdaiḥ sarvair evābhidhīyate | tato 'rthajātirupeṣu tadadhyāropakalpanā || III.1.6 ||*

Paśyantī and *pratibhā* are opposed as they refer to the same cognitive act from different stand points, i.e. Absolute and subject. The same is true for *sphoṭa* and *jāti* opposed as their standpoints are word and object (signifier and signified) respectively. Each concept derives from a special philosophical perspective, which implies, they are by no means identical. Still, all of them correlate to the single epistemological situation, i.e. the act of understanding of a verbal utterance, the explaining of which was probably the main intention of Bhartṛhari's discourse.²⁵

Application of conceptual opposition of ontology/epistemology provides us with a clue to some complexities of Bhartṛhari's philosophy. It was Bhartṛhari's inclination to interpret originally ontological concepts in an epistemological context that made him change the initial meaning of the terms he inherited from preceding traditions and use them in a way that puzzled both traditional commentators and modern scholars. Considering concepts of different origin in one epistemological perspective enables to escape controversies in interpretation and provides a kind of consistency in a bit but amorphous work of Bhartṛhari.

Thus Franco's claim of the general transfer from ontology to epistemology in India in the middle of the first millennium is well supported by VP. Still, the question remains open of whether Bhartṛhari was really aware of this transfer and of the novelty of his way of doing with the problems inherited from previous thinkers. Halbfass in the mentioned above paper on two aspects of *dravya* noted, that 'Prāśastapāda never thematizes this twofold aspect of his problem, nor does he develop any theory of semantic levels. He simply tries to explain and justify the old cosmological heritage of his school in a context and on a level of thought and argumentation which is no longer cosmological in its orientation' (Halbfass 1979, p. 542). Bhartṛhari on the contrary seems to be aware that mutually exclusive views can be equally true, each of them stipulated by certain presupposition. This evidently correlates with his understanding of language as a dynamic process or activity represented on all strata of reality. But this question probably deserves a separate discussion.

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²⁵ Thus it is not surprising, that in the list of sentence definitions (VP II.1–2) *jāti* (*jātiṣaṅghātavartini*) and *sphoṭa* (*eko' navayavaḥ śabdaḥ*) are distinguished as two different approaches. Most probably these definitions initially belonged to different schools. But as Puṅyarāja points out, both of them can be reduced to the concept of *sphoṭa*, characterizing it from different angles (Ivanov 2012, p. 153).

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