

The Buddhist Philosophy of Language in India: An Overview

Viktoria Lysenko

Abstract The attitude of Indian Buddhist thinkers towards language has varied in the course of history, depending on how they understood its nature, purpose, and efficiency particularly in the light of the key goal of the Buddhist practice: to achieve awakening (*bodhi*). Since the awakening is considered a direct, non-conceptual and non-verbal access to the highest reality *per se*, language is attributed to a lower empirical reality the ordinary human beings live in. This explains the fundamentally nominalist position of the Buddhist thinkers regarding language. Unlike some other Indian thinkers who believed in the intimate relation between words, things, and universals, in Buddhism language is understood as the articulation and conceptual construction of empirical reality on the basis of linguistic conventions. The paper will examine some stages of the Buddhist philosophy of language as it was taught by the Buddha, through the theories concerning the nature of language and the problems of semantics in the Indian schools of Buddhism such as Abhidharma, Madhyamaka, and Yogācāra.

V. Lysenko (✉)

Department of Oriental Philosophies,
Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of Sciences,
Moscow, Russian Federation
e-mail: vglyssenko@yandex.ru

Keywords Language · Buddhism · The Buddha · Nominalism · Sound · Phonocentrism · Atomistic style of thinking · Word · Meaning · Conceptualization · Universals · Particulars · Correspondence principle · Linguistic convention · Emptiness · Interconnectedness

INTRODUCTION

What is “philosophy of language”? By this expression, I understand a set of ideas about the nature and role of language, the relationship between language and reality, language and thought, the semantic theory and its rationale.

The Buddhist philosophy of language remains within the framework of Indian tradition. The main feature of the latter is an emphasis on the oral transmission of the sacred texts (Vedas) as the only legitimate way to preserve their religious functioning and value. Jacques Derrida coined the term “phonocentrism” and Sheldon Pollock applied it to Indian philosophy. This meant to highlight the physical and physiological aspects of speech and its acoustic characteristics (rhythm, tone, vibration, etc.) as well as its performative functions in ritual to the detriment of its sense.

Owing to phonocentrism the first “science of language”—phonetics (*śikṣā*)—developed in Ancient India around the sixth century BCE. The aim was to achieve the ideal of the accurate sound reproduction in the recitation of the sacred Vedic texts, and the first phoneticians developed their technical support consisted in dividing speech flow into its basic constituents (*varṇas*). So appeared the first lists of sound units according to their articulatory characteristics. The first scientific grammar compiled by the Indian linguist *Pāṇini* (c. IV BCE), also relied on the oral tradition.

What was the role of phonocentrism in the history of Buddhism? We know for certain that Buddhist texts have been transmitted orally over the centuries and then took on a written shape around the beginning of the Common Era.¹ The peculiarity of the Buddhist oral tradition can be better understood in comparing the Brahmanical and Buddhist *sūtras*, the most authoritative texts in the both traditions. The Brahmanical *sūtras* are known for their brevity and elliptic character; they were designed for mechanical memorisation without understanding their meaning. In the Buddhist *sūtras*, brevity did not play any role, and the grasp of their meaning was crucial, hence their verbosity and vastness. The same formulations

are reproduced many times and in different ways with variation of synonyms, all these devices were necessary for a better assimilation of the meaning of the texts. In this way Buddhist phonocentrism was, rather, closely associated with the “meaning-centrism”, so to say. As we will see later, the linguistic problems of speech, its production, and understanding were always elucidated with regard to oral communication and never to the written texts. There was another phonocentric line of development linked with the Indian recitation practices. In its Tantric form, Buddhism was closely associated with the all-Indian sound mysticism with its primary interest for the vocal codes of the ultimate reality (*mantras*, *dharani*, etc.).

In general, linguistic activity is understood in Buddhism as an articulation and a conceptual construction of human experience on the basis of linguistic conventions. Ordinary people while designating things they deal with in their everyday life, mistakenly believe that their, in fact, constructed, image of the world is flawless and real. When the Buddha decided to convey his teaching—the Dharma—to others and used words for this purpose, whether he, too, took the wrong direction? Such a question prompted Buddhist thinkers to launch countless theoretical debates on the linguistic strategy of expressing the ultimate reality as well as on the status of the “word of the Buddha” (the *Buddha-vacana*) and its soteriological role.

Although the Buddha in his conversations reported by the *sūtras* consistently stressed the relative, conventional nature of language and its inadequacy for conveying the knowledge of the ultimate reality (“the Awakened One does not go the ways of speech”—*Sutta-nipāta* 1076), he saw in language as such and in linguistic behaviour, in particular, an important tool for self-formation and self-transformation of man as well as an indispensable condition of social communication. In the *Sutta-nipāta* (657)² the Buddha compares language with an axe: a person is born with an axe in her mouth which can be used both for good and evil; a fool who uses words inaccurately is somehow chopping himself and others. The right speech (Skt. *Samyak-Vāc*) makes part of the Eightfold Path. The control of verbal behaviour excludes perjury, offensive words, and idle talk. In the *Majjhimanikāya* (II 58) the Buddha stresses the need to be aware of whether or not one’s speech is true, supportive, respectful, and pleasant for the others. If it is untrue and can bring about harm to someone, it is better to abstain from it. If it is true but unpleasant to another person, we must still make it but only in the suitable situation. The main task of appropriate verbal behavior is bring benefit for other people.

In this paper, I will primarily dwell on some linguistic ideas of the Buddhist philosophy of language in India putting aside its religious and soteriological functions, and the ways of the Buddhist philosophy of language outside India.

PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE IN EARLY BUDDHISM

There is no any clear evidence that the founder of Buddhism criticised the Brahmanical idea of the eternal and infallible language (Sanskrit). But when the Buddha emphasises the conditional and conventional character of the connection between words and meanings as well as the instrumentality of language in the transmission of knowledge and experience one may think that this kind of reasoning is directed against the Brahmanical view of sacred language of the Vedas as mirroring the nature of reality or, better, creating this reality. According to the Brahmanical grammarians, words and meanings are permanently connected by their very nature.

In the *Nirutti-pathā-sutta* (Pathways of Language) (*Samyuttanikāya* III. 71) the Buddha distinguishes three aspects of linguistic practice:

- (1) “pathway of language” (*nirutti-pathā*—etymology),
- (2) “pathway of synonymy” (*adhivacana-pathā*),
- (3) “pathway of description” (*paññāti-pathā*).³

Although the Buddha encourages his disciples not to cling to linguistic conventions, he at the same time warns from neglecting them and urges to follow conventional rules of grammar. One extreme is to assume that language reflects reality, and the opposite extreme is to believe that language plays no role at all in expressing reality. The position of the Buddha seems to be that language makes sense (*attha*) when it can lead to a practical goal, in everyday life or in spiritual search for truth. Language can be productive and serve for a concrete purpose, but lie is always harmful.⁴

Discarding the idea of the permanent “Self” (*Ātman*), as well as the opposite idea of the destruction of the “Self” after death, the Buddha continues to use the words “I” (*aham*), “you” (*tvam*), “self” (*atta*), but, as he says, with neither keeping hold of them allowing them to lead him astray (*Dīghanikāya* I. 202). It means that such designations as “I”, “me”, “mine” etc. are nothing more than the communication devices helpful at the empirical level which do not refer to any real thing, like

Ātman (*Self*). The Buddha proposed to replace “subject-object” self-centred language to the language of impersonal *dharmas* (phenomena or events that constitute the stream of individual existence), their interdependent origination—*pratītyasamutpāda* [*paṭiccasamuppāda* in Pali]. So such questions as “Of whom (S) is old age and dying (P)?” which presupposed the subject-object relationship, the Buddha defines as “unsound” (*akalya*). Formulated “correctly” they sound as follows: “A condition of what (P') is P?” And a “correctly” formulated answer is “P is a condition of P'”.

These ideas laid the foundation of the Buddhist nominalism later defended by the Buddhist philosophers in their disputes with the Brahmanical schools of the Vaiśeṣika, Nyāya, and Mīmāṃsā—all of them advocated the reality of universals as referents of words.

THE ABHIDHARMA PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

In the Abhidharma, the questions concerning language are interpreted in terms of theories of *dharmas*—the ultimate units of experience (phenomena) allocated, identified, and classified as a result of the Buddhist meditation known as Sati or Smṛti (mindfulness). The Abhidharmikas of the different schools made their own lists of *dharmas*, which included from 75 to 100 or more items. Language is never considered as a separate dharma or a category of *dharmas*. It is reduced to the three varieties of *dharmas*: the collection of names (*nāma-kāya*), the collection of sentences (*pada-kāya*), and the collection of single articulated sounds (*ryanjana-kāya*).

We find an interesting dispute between the Abhidharmika schools of Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika concerning the ontological status of speech units in the *Abhidharma-kośa-bhāṣya* (“Commentary on the Treasury of Abhidharma”) of the Buddhist philosopher Vasubandhu (c. V CE) (Sect. 2, kār. 47) as well as in the *Abhidharma-dīpa* (“The light of the Abhidharma”) by the unknown author and the comments on it. Let us look into it now.⁵

47a–b. Nāmakāya, etc., are collections of saṃjñās, vākyas, and akṣaras

1. *Nāman*, “name” or “word” is understood as “that which causes ideas to arise”, for example, the words “warmth”, “sound”, “odour”, etc.

2. *Pada* or “phrase” is understood as *vākya*, a discourse, a phrase allowing the development necessary for a complete sentence, for example, the stanza, “Impermanent are the *samskāras*. ..” and the rest. Or rather, one should understand *pada* as that which causes one to comprehend the different modalities of activity, quality, and time which concern a certain person: for example, he cooks, he reads, he goes; it is black, yellow, or red; he cooks, he will cook, or he cooked.
3. *Vyanjana* is understood as *akṣara* or phoneme (*varṇa*), vowels and consonants, for example, *a*, *ā*, [*i*, *ī*,] etc.
 - But are not the *akṣaras* the names of the letters?
 - One does not make or one does not pronounce phonemes with a view to designating, or of giving an idea of the letters; but one makes or one writes the letters with a view to giving an idea of the phonemes, so that, when one does not understand them, one still has an idea of them through writing. Consequently, the phonemes are not the names of letters.
4. *Kāya* or “body” means “collection”⁶;

The division of speech into articulated sounds (phonemes, *varṇas*) words and sentences is well known in Indian linguistic tradition. Let us stress the fact that the *Abhidhārmikas*, especially the *Sautrāntikas*, as we will see later, preserve the phonocentric values even in referring to the written form of the speech units (*lipyavayavāḥ*): letters are subordinated to phonemes and not vice versa. Another important point is that the *Abhidhārmikas* develop the atomistic approach to the flow of speech in the two ways: through the allocation of the structural “speech atoms”, or “phonemes”—single articulated sounds, as well as through the purely acoustic “quantification” of sound into the “sound atoms” (*śabda-paramāṇu*). This is also in tune with the general Indian tendency to develop what I called elsewhere “the atomistic way of thinking”.⁷

The ontological reality of linguistic phenomena, their adherence to one or another group of *dharmas* is a matter of debate among the *Abhidhārmikas*. The *Sautrāntikas* recognise as real only single articulated speech-sounds and they put them under somatic/material/physical phenomena (*rūpa-skandha*), for the *Vaiśāṅkikas* all the speech units are neither material (*rūpa*), nor conscious (*citta*, *caitta*). The *Vaiśāṅkikas* classify them as the “conditioned phenomena” (*samskrta dharmas*) and further as the *citta-viprayukta*, i.e. phenomena dissociated from consciousness. For them, all three sets of linguistic phenomena are real

(*dravyasat*) which means that they can exist in the past, present, and future. The Sautrāntikas, on the contrary, acknowledge the last two (words and sentences) as purely nominal (*prajñāptisat*) and not real (*adravyasat*).

The Sautrāntikas argue that “words, sentences, and sounds are voice/speech (*vāc*) by their intrinsic nature because, finally, these are nothing but sound (*śabda*)”. This is why speech belongs to material, somatic *rūpa*-category and not to the conditioned phenomena dissociated from consciousness (*citta-viprayukta*). Thus, in the Sautrāntika, a non-semantic phonocentric approach seems to prevail over the semantic one supported by the Vaibhāṣika. The latter explains that the knowledge of objects is obtained not through sounds, but through words made up of sounds expressive of meaning: “a cry does not cause one to attain to or comprehend an object. But a word (*nāman*) which is the function of a vocal sound, illuminates, causes one to attain to or signifies the object”⁸).

The Sautrāntika does not contest that “voice” is not merely vocal sound, but a vocal sound that causes one to attain to an object, that is, a vocal sound with regard to which persons who are speaking are in agreement as to what a certain thing signifies. It is thus that the Ancients have invested the sound “go” with the power to signify nine things: “The sages have established the sound ‘go’ in nine things, that is, cardinal region, cattle, land, a beam of light, a word, a diamond, an eye, a haven, and water”.

The philosopher for whom “it is the word (*nāman*) which illumines the object” should admit that the sound “go” has been endowed by convention with these different meanings. Then if a given object is signified to the hearer by a certain word, it is indeed vocal sound and nothing else, that signifies it. What advantage is there in supposing the existence of an entity you call “word?”⁹

Here, the Sautrāntika exposes the Buddhist conception of *sammuti*—convention or agreement among people about the meaning of words, also shared by the Vaibhāṣikas. Without this convention a collection of sounds would remain only sounds. Ancient sages established the meanings of sounds which have been transmitted from parents to children over ages. The Sautrāntika gives the example of what we now can call “polysemy”—the capacity to combine sounds and refer to different objects. On his opinion, this reasoning cannot prove the function of the word as the “meaning-bearer”. He proposes two possible alternatives: the word is either produced by a sound or revealed by it. The both are absurd: if the sound produces a word, then, since the word is a sequence

of the sounds, any sounds would produce words; if the sound reveals a word then all of them would reveal words. But sounds cannot reveal word because there is no such moment when they are present together, “mixed in a single moment”. They are pronounced one by one in a definite sequence (for example, *r-ū-p-a*). In addition, such dharma as word cannot occur in parts.¹⁰

Being involved in this discussion, Vasubandhu is perfectly aware of the all-Indian linguistic- and philosophical debates on how speech is to be understood. The speech perception cannot be based exclusively on the pronunciation of the articulated sounds (phonemes) since they never coexist at the same moment in order to create the whole. When the first sound “*g*” of the word “cow” (Skt. *gauḥ*, “go” in the Buddhist example) is uttered, the other sounds which constitute this word (*a-u- h*) are not yet uttered. When “*a*” is uttered, “*g*” has disappeared, “*u*” and “*h*” are still not uttered. Some Brahmanical grammarians argue that articulated sounds are associated with the meaning-bearer called *spṛṣṭa* (“bursting”, “spurt”). The Mīmāṃsakas, having rejected *spṛṣṭa*, refer to the eternal phonemes which produce the mental impressions in the mind of hearer owing to which she understands the meanings of the words.

The Vaibhāṣikas believe that the understanding of words results from the act of hearing of the last sound. It is likely that they knew the position of the Mīmāṃsaka philosopher Śābara (he dates to the early centuries CE) for whom if we hear, for example, the word “cow” (*g-a-u-h*) each of its constituting articulated sounds is perceived separately. These sounds leave their imprints (*saṃskāra*) in our memory, but only the perception of the last sound, which reactivates other imprints, produces the comprehension of the word as a whole.¹¹

It seems to me that in this Buddhist discussion, the Sautrāntika deliberately simplifies the meaning of this argument for polemical purposes reducing it merely to the assertion that the only thing that matters is the perception of the last sound. Presented in such a way, the argument is easily reducible to an absurd assumption that “someone who hears the last sound only can perceive the object [of the whole word]”.¹²

The Vaibhāṣika, however, proposes another decision: let us suppose that the word appears with its meaning (*artha-sabaja*), like the dharma of birth (*jāti*—that dharma is also listed under *citta-viprayukta* category), etc. In this case, argues Sautrāntika, “no present word would designate the past or future thing”, and “unconditioned things would not have any name, since they do not arise”, like *nirvāṇa* (*asaṃskṛta-dharma*). The

Vaibhāṣika in his turn refers to the Buddha's words: "A stanza (*gāthā*) depends on words, and a poem depends on stanzas". However, the Sautrāntika claims that word-dharma and sentence-dharma are superfluous. "Word"—is nothing but the speech sounds based on the agreement between people to designate certain objects, "*gāthā*" a special arrangement of words. To admit the independent existence of words and sentences is like to state that a chain of ants is different from the ants themselves. Only articulated sounds are the real phonemes, their combination has no substantial existence (*dravyasat*).¹³

We can see that the Sautrāntikas have consistently implemented the reductionist atomistic and phonocentric approach whereas the position of the Vaibhāṣikas imply some elements of the holistic and semantic attitude since it does not attempt to reduce propositions to words, and words—to atoms of sound. They believe words and sentences as real (*dravyasat*) as the individual sounds from which they are constituted.

PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE IN MAHĀYĀNA

In the Mahāyāna *sūtras*, such as *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, *Vajracchedika-Prajñāparamitā Sūtra* and others, language is relegated to the sphere of illusion and mental defilement while the Buddha's true message is understood as a "noble silence", which gives access to the emptiness (*śūnyatā*). All that the Buddha did teach resorting to language required rethinking. The authors of these and some other Mahāyāna *sūtras* understood the Buddha's word as skilful means (*upāya-kausālya*) to help living beings on the level of empirical reality (*vyavahārika-sat*).

In the Madhyamaka school, the idea of emptiness of all dharmas comes to the fore. If the Abhidhārmikas divide the *dharmas* into the real (*dravyasat*) and nominal (*prajñāptisat*), for Nāgārjuna (c. 150 – c. 250 CE), the founder of Madhyamaka, all *dharmas* are nominal. Why? The real thing is only a thing that has its own nature (*svabhāva*) and does not depend on anything else. Since all the *dharmas* are interdependent they cannot be real. This ineluctably transforms perception and thinking about reality into the process of a bare mental projection. Language deprived of its cognitive function does not concern the extralinguistic reality: words are instrumental only in conveying information (*prajñāpti*) about the objects and actions. For Nāgārjuna language is the source and the product of *saṃsāra* (the cycle of rebirth), empirical existence: it barely discovers the reality but rather conceals it (*samvṛitti*). The Mahāyāna philosopher does

not acknowledge any demarcation between language and thought identifying linguistic practice (*vyavahāra*) and conceptualisation (*vikalpa*) with the process called “*prapañca*”: the proliferation of linguistic concepts. The words are constantly projecting onto reality, distinctions having the inner tendency to grow in number (words produce other words).

However, the key to the genuine understanding of the role and place of language in the Mahāyāna system is the idea of two levels of reality or truth: the ultimate (*paramārthika*) and the relative or conventional (*vyavahārika*) ones associated, from the one hand, with enlightenment and *nirvāṇa* and with ordinary practice and existence in the wheel of rebirth (*samsāra*), from the other hand.

Nāgārjuna believes that language, although it does not represent anything properly, can, nevertheless, be efficient in our everyday experience as long as we refrain from judgments about the ontological status of objects we deal with and do not conjure up opinions (*dr̥ṣṭi*) thereon. The concept of emptiness does not deny the efficiency of language in our empirical world. Language fulfils its communicative function, precisely because the words themselves are empty and thus can be filled with content depending on the specific situation of communication.

*Without a foundation in the conventional truth,
The significance of the ultimate cannot be taught.
Without understanding the significance of the ultimate,
Liberation is not achieved. (“Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā” XXIV.10)*

According to Shlomo Biderman, “the only thing that makes language possible is its striving for the impossible”.¹⁴

PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE IN YOGĀCĀRA

Realists from the Brahmanical schools believe that there is a correspondence between words and things (correspondence principle), so, words express the things designated.¹⁵ The Madhyamaka thinkers consider both spheres “empty” and therefore identical. From the point of view of the great Yogācāra thinker Asaṅga (c. V CE), the Madhyamaka philosophy of emptiness is only the tool to eliminate false theories, and not the doctrine of the ultimate reality as such. For him, to deny everything that is conceived through language and conceptual thinking is the extreme of the same kind as the recognition of the immortal *Ātman* (Self) or its

destruction. To avoid these two extremes is the chief task of the Middle Way philosophy.

A completely new level of discussion about language appeared in the works of the Buddhist philosophers Dignāga (c. V-VI CE) Dharmakīrti (c. VII CE), and their followers. Dignāga as well as Nāgārjuna understands mental construction as a purely linguistic enterprise. In his *Pramāṇa-samuccaya* Dignāga defines conceptualisation (*kalpanā*) as “Association with name, genus, etc.”¹⁶ Dharmakīrti in his turn introduces some new ideas: “Mental construction (*kalpanā*) is an assertive cognition with regard to representation which can be connected with verbal expression”.¹⁷ Thus, mental construction is only *capable* (*yogyā*) to be associated with a word, however not necessarily. He gives an example of the deaf persons and babies: the deaf person cannot speak but they are capable of cognitive activity. At the sight of his mother’s breast a baby begins to rejoice, so in his mind pleasure is associated with the appearance of the mother’s breast, and this association is already a mental construction.

The Buddhist post-Dignāga philosophers, while criticising the identification of language and reality, put forward the following argument: we perceive things, rather than their names. The perception of a dark blue means the attainment of the object, whereas the perception of a dark blue in the form of the words “dark blue” (*nilam iti vijanati*) is an imposition of the verbal and mental constructions (“this is a dark blue colour”) upon the object (dark blue colour). Words are not contained in the objects and do not contain any objects in themselves. Otherwise, there would be no difference between a person who knows some word and an ignorant person. Word does not convey the sensation of an object and does not have the property of being self-evident since its connection to objects is purely artificial. If our immediate experiences were expressible in words then only by uttering the word “fire” we would feel the heat, just as we feel it in the vicinity of a real fire. So the comprehension of the word “fire” would eliminate the cold which is absurd.

From the perspective of the Dignāga-Dharmakīrti school, the ultimate reality (*paramārthasat*) defies and overpasses any verbal expression. Language is merely a system of signs, governed by the rules on which the language users agree. Since language has a symbolic nature and is entirely conditional, we can learn about the meanings of words only indirectly,—never through the object itself, but through logical inference. Word is an inferential mark associated with the concept

referred to it by the relation of concomitance (*vyāpti*: if the speaker uses the word “fire”, we can conclude that he or she has in mind the meaning of fire). Consequently, knowledge through words is error-prone and thus much less accurate, adequate, and valuable than direct perception without mental constructions (*nirvikalpaka-pratyakṣa*). Reality revealed in our direct experience is called *svalakṣaṇa*, or characterised only by itself. It is always unique and specific, unlike language which has to deal only with the universal characteristics shared by many things (*samānya-lakṣaṇa*).

The Buddhist reference theory is exactly the opposite to that of the Brahmanical philosophers—realists (Vaiśeṣika, Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā) with their commitment to correspondence principle. The word “cow” refers to cow. However, if the word “cow” refers to one individual cow, it cannot be applied to other cows. The dispute between those who believed that word refers to individual thing (*vyakti*) and those who argue that it refers to the class of things (*jāti*) dates back to the time of the first Indian Grammarians Vyāḍi and Vājapyāyana, mentioned by Pāṇini, and continues until Patanjali, so to the second century BC.

Realists solve this problem by postulating the existence of universals (*samānya*, *jāti*, *ākṛtī*) as words’ referents in addition to the existence of individual objects. In this case, the universal “cowness”, they believe, is present in each particular cow at a certain time and place. For the Buddhists, this model is problematic because it justifies the concept of the unchanging “Self”: one can say that “Self-ness” is always present in all the moments of the individual series (*santāna*) forming the basis of his or her self-identity. To avoid this undesirable outcome the Buddhists deny the real existence of universals, from their point of view only the moments (*kṣaṇika*) constituting naked particularities (*svalakṣaṇa*) can really exist. Thus, an individual in his youth and in old age (for example, a man named Devadatta)—are different moments, pertaining to the same individual *dharma*-series.

The Buddhist theory of reference tries to explain the conceptualisation without assuming the existence of universals. What does the word “cow” refer to? The Buddhists believe that it refers not to the universal “cowness” present in each particular individual, but to the common feature (*samānya-lakṣaṇa*) shared by all the cows and this is what distinguishes them from all other individuals belonging to another universal class. So word having no direct access to reality denotes its object only indirectly, through the exclusion of other objects, like, for example, the

word “cow” which actually means anything that is not “not a cow”, anything which is “not a horse”, etc. As we see signification here proceeds through the double negation. This theory called *anya-apoha*, or “negation of the other” was proposed by Dignāga and developed by his followers.¹⁸

Dignāga’s and Dharmakīrti’s theory of language influenced the school of the Svatantrika-Madhyamaka which also states that language deals only with the mental constructions rather than with real things. Concerning the school of the Prasaṅgika-Madhyamaka, its main representative Candrakīrti argues that language is empty inasmuch as external objects. The language and the world of objects are the same and therefore co-referentially express each other. The empirical reality is based on the nominal basis which is symbolic and conventional by nature.

The Buddhist philosophy later spread in such countries as Sri Lanka, China, Japan, and Tibet which developed, among other subjects, their own reflections on language.

NOTES

1. The details of the discussion thereon see: Wynne A. 2004. The Oral Transmission of the Early Buddhist Literature. *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*. Volume 27(1), pp. 97–128.
2. Cited from: 3. Mahāvagga.10. Kokālikasuttaṃ 657. See: http://www.palikanon.com/pali/khuddaka/sn/sn_iii10_683.htm.
3. The Connected Discourses of the Buddha. A New Translation of the Samyutta Nikāya. 2000. Translated from the Pāli by Bhikkhu Bodhi. VOL. I. Wisdom Publications. Boston, p. 905.
4. This three-folded model is built on the basic Buddhist schematization: one extreme—belief in the permanent “Self” (*Ātman*), or “eternalism”; another extreme—belief in the destruction of “Self” (*Ātman*) after death, or the concept of “annihilationism”, and the Middle way which overcomes these both extremes and lays the ground for self-cultivation known as the Eightfold Path.
5. Abhidharmakosabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu, transl. by Leo M. Pruden, Asian Humanities Press, Berkeley 1990. Vol. 1. Reprinted with permission of Jain Publishing Company.
6. Ibid., p. 250.
7. On the atomistic style of thinking in India see: Lysenko V. 1994. “Atomistic Mode of Thinking” as Exemplified by the Vaiśeṣika Philosophy of Number. *Asiatische Studien*, XLVIII, 2, pp. 781–806. Lysenko V. 2010.

- Between Materialism and Immaterialism: Atomism in India and Greece. Partha Ghose (ed.) *Materialism and Immaterialism in India and the West*. Ed. PHISPC 12(5) Delhi: Centre for Studies in Civilizations, pp. 253–268.
8. Pruden, Leo M. (trans.) 1994. *Abhidharmakoshabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu*. Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, Vol. 1, p. 251.
 9. Ibid., p. 251.
 10. Ibid., pp. 251–252.
 11. Biardeau M. 1964. *Théorie de la connaissance et philosophie de la parole dans le brahmanisme classique*. (École Pratique des Hautes Études - Sorbonne. Sixième section: Sciences Économique et Sociale. Le Monde d'Outre Mer, Passé et Présent. Première Série) Paris: La Haye: Mouton & Co., pp. 178–180.
 12. Pruden, Leo M. (trans.) 1994. *Abhidharmakoshabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu*.
 13. Ibid., p. 253.
 14. Biderman Sh. 2008. *Crossing Horizons: World, Self, and Language in Indian and Western Thought*. Columbia University Press, p. 233.
 15. For more detailed account of the correspondence principle see: Bronkhorst J. 1996. The Correspondance Principle and Its Impact On Indian Philosophy. *Studies in The History of Indian Thought* 8, pp. 1–19.
 16. Sanskrit text reconstructed by Ernst Shteinkellner: http://ikga.ocaw.ac.at/Mat/dignaga_PS_1.pdf.
 17. Nyāya-bīndu 1.5: abhilāpa-saṃsarga-yogya-pratibhāsa-pratītiḥ kalpanā. Shastri, Dwarika Das. 1985. *The Nyāyabindu of Acharya Dharmakīrti with the Commentaries by Arya Vinitadeva & Dharmottara*. Bauddha Bharati.
 18. For detailed discussion see: Lawrence J. McCrea, Parimal G. Patil. 2010. *Buddhist Philosophy of Language in India: Jñānaśrīmitra on Exclusion*. Columbia: Columbia University Press.
- Siderits, Mark, Tom J. F. Tillemans, Arindam Chakrabarti (eds.) 2011. *Apoha: Buddhist Nominalism and Human Cognition*. Columbia: Columbia University Press.

REFERENCES

- Abhidharmakoshabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu*. 1990. Transl. by Leo M. Pruden, Asian Humanities Press, Berkeley. Vol. 1.
- Biardeau M. 1964. *Théorie de la connaissance et philosophie de la parole dans le brahmanisme classique*. (École Pratique des Hautes Études - Sorbonne. Sixième section: Sciences Économique et Sociale. Le Monde d'Outre Mer, Passé et Présent. Première Série) Paris: La Haye: Mouton & Co., pp. 178–180.
- Biderman Sh. 2008. *Crossing Horizons: World, Self, and Language in Indian and Western Thought*. Columbia University Press, p. 233.

- Bronkhorst J. (1996) The Correspondence Principle And Its Impact On Indian Philosophy. *Studies in The History of Indian Thought*. Vol. 8, pp. 1–19.
- Lawrence J. McCrea, Parimal G. Patil. 2010. *Buddhist Philosophy of Language in India: Jñānaśrīmitra on Exclusion*. Columbia: Columbia University Press.
- Lysenko Viktoria. 1994. “Atomistic Mode of Thinking” as exemplified by the Vaiśeṣika Philosophy of Number. *Asiatische Studien*, XLVIII, 2, pp. 781–806.
- Lysenko Viktoria. 2010. Between Materialism and Immaterialism: Atomism in India and Greece. In Partha Ghose (ed.) *Materialism and Immaterialism in India and the West*. PHISPC 12(5). Delhi: Centre for Studies in Civilizations, pp. 253–268.
- Pāli Cannon. 3. Mahāvagga.10. Kokālikasuttaṃ 657. Retrieved from: http://www.palikanon.com/pali/khuddaka/sn/sn_iii10_683.htm.
- Shastri, Dwarika Das (ed.). 1985. *The Nyāyabindu of Acharya Dharmakīrti with the Commentaries by Arya Vinitadeva & Dharmottara*. Bauddha Bharati.
- Siderits M., Tillemans Tom J. F., Chakrabarti A. (eds.). 2011. *Apoha: Buddhist Nominalism and Human Cognition*. Columbia: Columbia University Press.
- Steinkellner Ernst: http://ikga.oeaw.ac.at/Mat/dignaga_PS_1.pdf.
- The Connected Discourses of the Buddha. A New Translation of the Samyutta Nikāya*. 2000. Transl. from the Pāli by Bhikkhu Bodhi. Vol. I. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Wynne A. 2004. The Oral Transmission of the Early Buddhist Literature. *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*. Vol. 27(1), pp. 97–128.

Reading

- Ruegg D. S. *Contributions a l’histoire de la philosophie linguistique indienne*.
- Boccard P. 1959. *Buddhist Logic and Epistemology: Studies in the Buddhist Analysis of Inference and Language*.
- Matilal B. R., Evans J. G. D. (eds.). 1982. Dordrecht: Reidel Publishing Company.
- Hayes R. 1988. *Dignāga on the Interpretation of Signs*. Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Matilal B. K. 1990. *The Word and the World: India’s Contribution to the Study of Language*, Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Siderits M. 1991. *Indian Philosophy of Language. Studies in Selected Issues. Studies in Linguistic and Philosophy* 46. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Cabezón J. I. 1998. *Buddhism and Language: A Study of Indo-Tibetan Scholasticism*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- David J. Kalupahana. 1999. *The Buddha’s philosophy of language*. Colombo: Sarvodaya Vishva Lekha Printers.
- Tillemans T. 1999. *Scripture, Logic, Language: Essays on Dharmakīrti and his Tibetan Successors*. Wisdom Publications.

Buddhism and Linguistics

Theory and Philosophy

Herat, M. (Ed.)

2018, XVII, 191 p. 7 illus., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-67412-4