

# Three more subjecthood features in Pāṇini's tradition

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Some properties of Sanskrit syntax, such as its highly free word order, as well as the unmarked use of the passive voice and of nonfinite verbs as sentence predicates, made it less obvious for the traditionally oriented European philologists to understand whether Sanskrit possessed grammatical relations. Furthermore, Pāṇini, the author of the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* and the founder of the most influential grammatical tradition in Ancient India, does not mention anything similar to the modern notion of subject in his description of Sanskrit grammar, even though his description of the semantic structure of the simple sentence is quite accurate. Scholars have generally concluded that there is no such thing as subject in the Indian grammatical tradition at all (see Speijer 1886: 1; Cardona 1974, 244).

After the introduction of Keenan's (1976) multi-factor approach to subjecthood, the question of subject in Pāṇini and Sanskrit requires a revision. It has been observed (see Hook 1980; Deshpande 1980) that at least one of Pāṇini's rules regarding the characterization of the semantic role called *kartr* 'agent' closely resembles the present-day methodology of describing subject, since it deals with the control of the equi-NP deletion.

In my presentation I wish to introduce at least three previously unnoticed subjecthood features that can be envisaged in Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, and also to highlight that the evolution of Pāṇini's school of grammatical analysis of Sanskrit slowly drifted from a role-oriented to a subject-oriented approach. The new features are inferred from Pāṇini's tricky — yet surprisingly insightful and really anticipatory — theory explaining how role semantics and morphology interface, on which see Cardona (1974), Kiparsky (2002), Keidan (2015). Pāṇini's *kartr* 'agent' is treated by his commentators as a sort of "proto-subject", which is inferable both from their theoretical arguments and from the linguistic examples they quote. Note that the language they referred to must have been a late version of an already dead Sanskrit under a strong Middle-Indian influence (see Kulikov 2013).

The features under consideration are the following.

1) Obligatoriness. *Kartr* is "always expressed" in every sentence. As we know today, only a grammatical relation (usually, the subject), rather than a semantic role, can become obligatory.

2) Semantic indefiniteness. Unlike other semantic roles (called *kāraṅkas*), *kartr* is not bound to a narrow semantic characterization, but is rather vaguely defined as 'the independent one', which resembles the modern understanding of subject as the "privileged argument".

3) Topicality. *Kartr* controls the verbal voice selection and labile argument transformations (see Keidan 2014), with the guiding principle of the so-called *vivakṣā* 'communicative intention' (see Nooten 1983), not dissimilar from the present-day notion of topicality, which strongly characterizes subjecthood according to many scholars (see Bhat 1991).

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