

Research Article

Vincent Eltschinger*

Why did the Buddhists adopt Sanskrit?

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Abstract: Western scholarship has long wondered about the reasons that led the Buddhists, or, to be more precise, specific sectarian components of the Indian Buddhist communities (most conspicuously the [Mūla]sarvāstivādins), to abandon the Middle Indic vernaculars as their scriptural, scholarly and probably vehicular language, to turn to Sanskrit, the celebrated and elitist language of Brahmanical scriptures (first and foremost the Veda), ritual, and culture. The fact is all the more intriguing that insistent Buddhist traditions traced to the Buddha himself, apparently a champion of regional languages, a prohibition to use Sanskrit or, at least, to emulate Brahmanical linguistic behavior. The present paper presents a partly new hypothesis concerning one aspect of this important sociolinguistic phenomenon by looking into the legitimations provided by these Buddhists for studying (Sanskrit) grammar.

Keywords: Buddhism, Sanskrit, Indic grammar, Sarvāstivāda, Buddhist sociolinguistic attitudes, Hieroglossy, Proselytism, Debate

1 Introduction

The notion of a relationship between two or more languages lies at the heart of “hieroglossy” as it has been defined by the French sinologist and japanologist Jean-Noël Robert. This relationship owes its specific designation to the fact that it possesses “une dimension fondamentalement religieuse” (Robert 2012, 62), as the relationship between Chinese and Japanese in Japan, where “une hiérarchie des langues soutenue par le bouddhisme” (Robert 2012, 58) was established. More generally, “hieroglossy” refers to a

relation hiérarchisée entre deux ou plusieurs langues, dans laquelle l’une est tenue pour l’idiome primordial dans l’ordre de la représentation du monde, et l’autre, ou les autres, reçoivent de la première l’essentiel de leur sens, c’est-à-dire que la valeur des mots d’une langue sera validée par leur référence à une autre. (Robert 2012, 62)

As remarked by Jean-Noël Robert, the belief in the primordality of a specific language is fairly well attested in ancient India, where generations of Brahmins have endeavored to raise Sanskrit to the rank, not only of the language of the gods (*daivī vāk*), but also of the original language from which all others are derived. This attitude culminates in the doctrinal system of the Mīmāṃsā school of Vedic exegesis, the most uncompromising expression of Brahmanical ultra-orthodoxy. This school regards Sanskrit, the language of the Vedic revelation (*śruti*), as possessing an “originary” (*autpattika*), authorless (*apauruṣeya*) and permanent (*nitya*) relationship with its meaning. In the same way, and on this very basis, the Veda is claimed to have a direct relationship with its invisible object, the *dharma* or socio-religious/ritual duty.

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*Corresponding author: Vincent Eltschinger, Section des Sciences religieuses, École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris, E-mail: vincent.eltschinger@ephe.sorbonne.fr

It is perhaps less well-known that the scholiasts of Theravāda Buddhism and certain Jainas have conceived the languages of their holy scriptures, Pāli¹ and Ardhamāgadhī, as primordial languages,² playing in particular on the semantic potential of the distinction between Sanskrit (Skt. *saṃskṛta*, “prepared,” “purified,” “adorned,” the language of Brahmanical ritual and culture) and Prakrit (Skt. *prākṛta*, “natural,” “ordinary,” the Middle Indic vernacular languages): Whereas, for the Brahmin, Prakrit represents rude and amorphous naturalness, a degeneration in comparison with Sanskrit, Prakrit constitutes, for the devotees of these traditions, the natural and original language (the one a child left to his own devices would speak³), Sanskrit being nothing but a constructed, artificial, hence less authoritative derivative (Bronkhorst 1993, 400-401).

But what about the Buddhists (predominantly representatives of the [Mūla]sarvāstivāda monastic order/“sect”) who adopted Sanskrit as their canonical, scholarly and perhaps even vehicular language? The sources allowing us to conjecture that these circles conceived Sanskrit as the original language are extremely rare.⁴ Similarly, we are lacking information about the way in which these “sanskritizers” (John Brough) of the Buddhist scriptures envisioned the relationship between Sanskrit and other languages, canonical or not. However, we know that the Sarvāstivādins, and more specifically their Vaibhāṣika doctrinal offshoot, regarded the “holy language” (*āryā niruktiḥ*), in this case very likely Sanskrit, as possessing an intimate relationship with reality. And as suggested by Jean-Noël Robert, the alleged intimate connection of one or more languages to reality constitutes a key element in the constitution of a hieroglossic relationship. I shall dedicate the first part of the present essay to this aspect of hieroglossy, inquiring whether the belief in such a connection of the holy language (≈ Sanskrit) to reality was ever advocated to explain and perhaps justify the transition to Sanskrit in a Sarvāstivāda(-Vaibhāṣika) environment. In its second part, I shall attempt to demonstrate, *against this hypothesis*, that the rare sources at our disposal do not corroborate this scenario (although they do not invalidate it either). As far as I can see, these sources justify the recourse, if not directly to Sanskrit, at least to (Sanskrit) grammar, on the basis of the felt necessity to challenge the Brahmins’

1 The Theravādins call *māgadhī* or *māgadhābhāsā* the language of their sacred scriptures; the word *pāli* traditionally refers to the canonical scriptures themselves.

2 Buddhaghosa (5th century CE) uses the expressions *mūlabhāsā* (“original language”) and *sabhāvanirutti* (“natural language/form of expression”); see Bronkhorst 1993, 398-399, and nn. 12 and 15. On Jaina *ardhamāgadhī*, see below, n. 12, and more generally Bronkhorst 1993, 399-400.

3 I do not resist the temptation to quote the following passage by Tissadatta in the *Sammohavinodanī* (387,29-388,7, as quoted in Bronkhorst 1993, 398, n. 13): *mātā damiḷi pitā andhako / tesam jāto dārako sace mātu katham paṭhamam suṇāti damiḷabhāsam bhāsissati / sace pitu katham paṭhamam suṇāti andhakabhāsam bhāsissati / ubhinnaṃ pi pana katham asuṇanto māgadhābhāsam bhāsissati / yo pi agāmake mahārañṇe nibbato tattha añño kathento nāma natthi so pi attano dhammatāya vacanaṃ samuṭṭhāpento māgadhābhāsam eva bhāsissati / niraye tiracchānayanīyam pēttivīsaye manussaloke devaloke ti sabbattha māgadhābhāsā va ussannā / tattha sesā oṭṭakirātāndhakayonakadamīlabhāsādikā aṭṭhārasa bhāsā parivattanti / ayam ev’ ekā yathābhuccabrahmavohārīyavohārāsamaṅkhatā māgadhābhāsā va na parivattati /* “[Suppose] the mother is a Damiḷi, the father an Andhaka. Their [newly] born child, if it hears first the speech of the mother, it will speak the language of the Damiḷas. If it hears first the speech of the father, it will speak the language of the Andhakas. But if it doesn’t hear the speech of either of them, it will speak the language of the Māgadhās. Also someone who is born in a big jungle, devoid of villages, where no one else speaks, he too will by his own nature start to produce words and speak this same language of the Māgadhās. In hell, among the animals, in the realm of ghosts, in the world of men and in the world of the gods, everywhere this same language of the Māgadhās is preponderant. The remaining eighteen languages—Oṭṭa, Kirāta, Andhaka, Yonaka, Damiḷa, etc.—undergo change in these [realms]. Only this language of the Māgadhās, rightly called language of Brahma and aryan language, does not change.” Translation Bronkhorst 1993, 398-399. This is reminiscent of the story, told by Herodotus in *Histories* 2.2, of the Egyptian King Psammetichus/Psamtik (r. 664/3-610/9), whose experiment on two babies caused him to conclude that Phrygian (βερικός was the first word they uttered) was the original language. This famous experiment gives rise to fascinating pages in Rabelais’s *Tiers Livre*, Chapter 19. Note also the Jaina monk Namisādhu’s analysis of *prākṛta* as *prāk-kṛta*, “made/created before/first” (see von Hinüber 2001, 36).

4 Note Bronkhorst 1993, 408: “It seems [...] at least possible to maintain that *Vākyapadiya* 1.182cd refers to Buddhists who held that their sacred texts were composed in a language which, though appearing corrupt to orthodox Brahmins, represents in reality the origin of Sanskrit. Since we have no reason to believe that Bhartṛhari was acquainted with the Pāli tradition and with its belief that this language was identical with Māgadhī, the original language, we are led to the conclusion that he may here refer to Buddhists who believed that some kind of Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit was the original language, which formed the basis of other languages, including Sanskrit.”

monopoly on conceptually and formally well-formed language and eloquence. In other words, what these Buddhists were up to might have been self-authorization, didactic skills and superiority in debate.⁵

2 Language and Reality

Analyzing the mystical and metaphysical logic at work in ancient Japanese poetry, Jean-Noël Robert concludes that “[f]aire un poème, c’est prononcer un mantra et révéler ainsi la nature de Bouddha cachée dans le monde” (Robert 2012, 41). This observation links up poetic creativity with the Shingon esoteric tradition and its “founder” Kūkai (774-835). And

[p]armi les textes de grande valeur qui nous ont été transmis de [Kūkai], tous rédigés dans un chinois classique de grande tenue stylistique, plusieurs concernent directement un thème qui pourrait se définir comme ‘mystique du langage’. Il en est notamment un, intitulé *Du sens des phonèmes, des graphèmes et de la réalité qu’ils expriment* (*Shō-ji-jissō-gi* [聲字實相義], T. 2429), qui se situe chronologiquement à l’aube de la réflexion des Japonais sur leur langue, alors même que ce qui est traité par Kūkai ne concerne pas directement le japonais, mais la question générale de la capacité des signes phénoménaux à exprimer le réel. [...] Il ne s’agit de rien moins que de fonder l’idée d’un lien direct entre les signes linguistiques, écrits et oraux, et la substance des choses, qui n’est autre que la substance même de Bouddha ; phonèmes, graphèmes et réalité ne font qu’un. [...] L’intention de Kūkai était de démontrer la validité ontologique des ‘paroles de vérité’ [*shingon, mantra*]. (Robert 2012, 44-45)

Kūkai’s ideas are of course ultimately to be traced to the mystical-linguistic doctrines that appeared in 6th-7th century India in early Tantric circles. These were responsible for a new declension of the Great Vehicle emphasizing initiation (*dīkṣā*, *abhiṣeka*), *maṇḍalas* and mantras and claiming that salvation was possible in this very life. The earliest Buddhist Tantric texts in our possession, the *Mahāvairocanābhisambodhisūtra* (MVASū) and the *Sarvatathāgatātattvasaṅgraha* (STTS), claim for the mantras or mystical-ritual formulas an intrinsic efficacy they owe to their phonetic structure alone. The first of these two texts declares that

the character of mantras, no Buddha has ever made it, caused it to be made or approved it. – Why? – Such is the nature(/mode of being) of the *dharmas* that their *dharma*-nature subsists [for all eternity] whether *tathāgatas* appear [in the world] or not. Such is the nature(/mode of being) of the *dharmas*, i.e., the mantra-nature of the mantras.⁶

The mantras’ efficacy is therefore naturally given and thus entirely independent from the *buddhas* who reveal them or not. The same kind of “innatism” can also be found in a short passage from the STTS in which mantras are described as “naturally established” (*prakṛtisiddha*, STTS I.24, §20). As we can see, from very early on, Buddhist esoterism gave rise to reflections on the ontological status of mantras and the source of their efficacy. To be sure, there is still a big gap between these brief statements and a genuinely Tantric reflection on the “capacité des signes phénoménaux à exprimer le réel.” However, the principle of an adequation between language and reality, the very source and foundation of the mantras’ power, is clearly articulated.

Similar ideas have been sharply criticized by the philosopher Dharmakīrti (active between 550 and 650), a contemporary of the two Tantric texts discussed above. If there are good reasons to believe that he was at least doctrinally hostile to the arising Tantric ideas and practices—Buddhist as well as non-Buddhist—, his targets are Śaiva rather than Buddhist. This is testified to by his polemic against the *tulādīkṣā* (“initiation on scales,” in which the initiand is weighed in order to demonstrate that the ritual initiation he has just

⁵ Oskar von Hinüber (written communication, 10 February 2016) draws my attention to a tradition (preserved in the *Sumaṅgalavilāsini*, 273,30ff.) according to which, at the time of the former Buddha Kassapa, the Vedic ṛṣis composed their mantras in doctrinal conformity with this Buddha’s Law; it is only later that evil-minded Brahmins falsified the Veda and separated the two Laws.

⁶ MVASū P *Tha* 134b2-3 [Sanskrit fragment extracted from the *Caryāmelāpakapradīpa* alias *Sūta*, ed. Wedemeyer 2008, 388]: *mantrāṇaṃ lakṣaṇaṃ sarvabuddhair na kṛtaṃ na kāritaṃ nānumoditam | tat kasya hetoḥ | eṣā dharmāṇāṃ dharmatā yad utotpādād vā tathāgatānāṃ anutpādād vā tathāgatānāṃ sthitaivaiṣaṃ dharmāṇāṃ dharmatā yad uta mantrāṇāṃ mantradharmatā.*

undergone has eliminated the *material* vices and defilements that polluted him beforehand), his allusions to the terrific forms of the Goddess and his controversy over antinomianism (Eltschinger 2014, 120-136). As a matter of fact, Dharmakīrti ascribes these conceptions of the efficacy of mantras to the Mīmāṃsā school which, as far as I am aware, does *not* uphold them. According to him, the Mīmāṃsā regards the mantras (bits and pieces of Vedic hymns reused in ritual sequences of which they set the pace, and which they sustain) as possessing a natural and originary capacity relying on the words' natural "appetency" for their meaning. This relation is claimed to be authorless and permanent. Dharmakīrti dedicates more than a third of his first treatise (which was to become the first chapter of his *Pramāṇavārttika* [PV 1/PVSV]) to a merciless critique of Mīmāṃsaka linguistic and apologetic assumptions and a defence of the conventionality of the relationship between word and meaning—the dominant Buddhist position in linguistic theory, which comes very close to the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign. Needless to say, such a position excludes from the very outset any kind of natural efficiency of magical, mystical or ritual speech. If the mantras are efficacious, which our logician unhesitatingly admits, it is because superior beings like *buddhas* and advanced *bodhisattvas*, but also non-Buddhist deities such as Śiva and Garuḍa, identify phonetic sequences as mantras (which demonstrates, be it said in passing, their capacity to perceive supersensible things) and empower them (*adhiṣṭhā*, a word La Vallée Poussin rendered with "bénir"), making their success dependent on the observance of behavioral, moral, ritual and meditative prescriptions on the part of their users. In other words, mantras yield their mundane or supermundane results thanks to a promise (*pratijñā*) on the part of their "author" (*kartṛ*), or on the basis of covenant (*samaya*) between their author and their user—the exact contrary of the Mīmāṃsaka position.

Albeit without the philosophical sophistication of Dharmakīrti's writings, pre- and non-Tantric Buddhism is almost unanimous in its rejection of any kind of real relation between language and meaning. The Kashmir Vaibhāṣika school of Buddhist dogmatics (Willemsen et al. 1998, 116-121) is an important exception to this. Some among its representatives indeed come very close to Brahmanical ideas—or is it the other way around?—while postulating an authorless relationship for certain linguistic "factors" such as phonemes (*vyañjana*), names/words (*nāman*) and sentences (*pada*), for those at least that were uttered by the Buddha (Jaini 1959, Cox 1995, 159-171). Let us consider a first excerpt from the *Abhidharmadīpa* (ADīp, 6th century CE?):

Moreover, it is due to the operation [of these linguistic factors] that one ascertains their existence. – And what is this [operation]? – We reply: [Their] operation consists in communicating their own meaning. [And if] each of them communicates its meaning, [it is] because the relationship between a name/word and [its] meaning is authorless. Such is their action (*ḥṛtānta*).⁷

A few lines later, the same text restricts the authorless phonemes, names and sentences to those of the holy language alone, i.e., to the language in which the Buddha revealed the constituents of reality, the so-called *dharma*s—the five aggregates/constituents (*skandha*), the twelve sensory bases (*āyatana*) and the eighteen elements (*dhātu*).⁸ It claims that

the [words] expressed in the holy language with reference to the twelve sensory bases have a fixed relationship with their meaning. They only appear when a *buddha* appears, [but] on no other occasion. Indeed, the Blessed One has said: "The names, sentences and phonemes arise due to the arising of a *buddha*." Therefore, due to the fact that he manifests [words that are] fixed [in their meaning], one understands that a *buddha* is omniscient. For the authorless [words] that reveal

⁷ ADīp 109,8-10: *kiñca kriyayā ca tadastitvaṃ nirdhāryate / kā ca sety ucyate / svārthapratyayanaṃ kriyā / svam svam arthaṃ pratyāyaty apauruṣeyatvān nāmārthasambandhasyaṣa teṣāṃ ḥṛtāntaḥ /*

⁸ According to the Vaibhāṣikas, these three categories exhaust all that exists with the exception of *nirvāṇa* and two other factors (one of which is spatial extension, *ākāśa*). The five aggregates or constituents (*skandha*) are: corporeality, (affective) sensations, identifications, conditioning factors, and bare uninterpreted (sensory) cognitions. The twelve sensory bases (*āyatana*) are: five sensory organs and their respective organs accompanied by the mind and its own objects. The eighteen elements (*dhātu*) are: the same twelve plus the six bare uninterpreted (sensory) cognitions resulting from the contact between senses and their respective objects.

the [eighteen] elements, the [twelve] sensory bases and the [five] aggregates/constituents were first the objects of [the cognition of] the *buddhas*. And since he apprehends them, the Blessed One is said to be omniscient.⁹

The words referring to the ultimate constituents of reality (hence of the Buddhist Law, which is but a reflection of the latter) therefore possess a fixed relationship with their meaning, which the *buddhas* reveal in and through the holy language.

As we can see, the author of the ADīp defines the holy language on the basis of its contents and intimate relationship with reality rather than on the basis of its linguistic properties. He thus does not tell us which concrete language the holy language actually is.¹⁰ In a theological vein, one could of course regard the question as irrelevant and resort (with the Vaibhāṣikas) to the “gift of tongues” that characterizes a *buddha*,¹¹ as the *Mahāvibhāṣā* makes clear (here in Lamotte’s French translation):

C’est pour montrer qu’il peut s’exprimer clairement en toute langue que le Bouddha s’exprime différemment, afin de trancher les doutes de ceux qui le soupçonnent de ne pouvoir prêcher que dans la langue sainte [...]. Le Tathāgata peut exprimer tout ce qu’il veut en n’importe quel langage. S’il s’exprime en chinois, c’est que cette langue est la meilleure pour les habitants de la Chine ; de même, s’il s’exprime en langue [de] Balkh [...]. De plus, la parole du Bouddha est légère et aiguë, le flux en est rapide, et quoiqu’il parle toutes sortes de langues, on peut dire qu’il les parle toutes en même temps : ainsi, s’il s’exprime tour à tour en chinois, en langue de Balkh, en langue śaka, il prononce toutes ces langues sans interruption et pour ainsi dire en même temps.¹²

However, if the identity of the holy language in a Sarvāstivāda environment is not indifferent, it is because this monastic order was the first and certainly the most uncompromising in using Sanskrit as a canonical language, and this either through a large-scale translation enterprise or through a gradual adjustment to the Sanskrit norm.¹³ There are in fact several clues to identify the holy language with Sanskrit in a Sarvāstivāda

9 ADīp 113,9-19: *ya āryayā niruktyā nirucyante dvādaśāyatanaviśayās te niyatābhidheyasambandhāḥ / [...] buddhotpāda eva pravartante nānyadeti / uktaṃ hi bhagavatā – tathāgatānām utpādān nāmapadavyaṅjanakāyānām utpādo bhavatiṭy eta-smān niyatodbhāvanād buddhaḥ sarvajña ity gamyate / ye hy apauruṣeyā dhātvyāyatanaskandhādyavadyotakās te prathamam buddhaviśayā eva / tadavabodhāc ca bhagavān sarvajña ity abhidhiyate /*

10 According to the Vaibhāṣikas and Vasubandhu, the holy language is the one spoken by the gods. This is reminiscent of the Brahmanical notion of Sanskrit as a *daivi vāk*. Note AKBh 170,1-2: *sarve devā āryabhāṣābhāṣiṇaḥ /* “All the gods speak the holy language.” As noted long ago by Louis de La Vallée Poussin (*Kośa* II.165, n. 4), the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang (602-664) regards this *āryābhāṣā* as the language spoken in Central India or Madhyadeśa.

11 On the qualities peculiar to the language of the Buddha/*buddhas*, see *Hōbōgirin* s.v. *bonnon*; see also *Traité* IV, 1985-1987, and n. 1, p. 1986, as well as Lamotte 1987, 109-110, n. 52, for abundant references.

12 *Abhidharmamahāvibhāṣā*, T. 1545, 410b7-c7: 復次世尊欲顯於諸言音皆能善解故作是說。謂有生疑佛唯能作聖語說法。[...] 復次如來言音遍諸聲境隨所欲語皆能作之。謂佛若作至那國語勝在至那中華生者。[...] 復次佛語輕利速疾迴轉。雖種種語而謂一時。謂佛若作至那語已無間復作磔迦國語。乃至復作博喝羅語。以速轉故皆謂一時。 Translation Lamotte 1976, 609. The Vaibhāṣikas thus criticize conceptions generally associated with another influential Buddhist monastic order, the Mahāsāṅghikas; these conceptions foreshadow Mahāyānist ideas on the infinity and unity of the Buddha’s voice; see *Hōbōgirin* s.v. *button*, and *Abhidharmamahāvibhāṣā*, T. 1545, 410a16-17: 佛以一音演說法， 衆生隨類各得解。皆謂世尊同其語， 獨爲我說種種義。“The Buddha preaches the Law with a single sound, and [all] sentient beings understand it [each] according to his own category. All of them say that the Blessed One conforms with [i.e., speaks,] their [own] language, [thinking:] ‘It is just for me that He utters [these] various meanings.’” Cf. Lamotte 1976, 609. See also the text by Vasumitra (T. 2031) quoted in *Hōbōgirin* 215b s.v. *button*, and Lin 1949, 223-224. The Jaina *Aupapātikasūtra* (as quoted in Bronkhorst 1993, 399, n. 16) exhibits similar ideas: *bhagavaṃ mahāvīre [...] savvabhāṣāṅgamiṇīe sarassaie jōyanañihāriṇā sareṇaṃ addhamāgahāe bhāsāe bhāsai [...] sā vi ya ṇaṃ addhamāgahā bhāsā tesiṃ savvesiṃ āriyamañāriyāṇaṃ appaṇo sabhāsāe pariṇāmeṇaṃ pariṇamaī*. “With a voice that extends over a yojana, Lord Mahāvīra speaks in the Ardha-Māgadhi language, a speech which is in accordance with all languages. That Ardha-Māgadhi language changes into the own language of all those, both *āryas* and non-*āryas*.” Translation Bronkhorst 1993, 400. On the “unique sound” in the context of Jainism, see also Bronkhorst 2015.

13 See von Hinüber 1989, 360: “The formation of Buddhist Sanskrit or B[uddhist] H[ybrid] S[anskrit] is first of all conditioned by the language chosen for the canonical scriptures. This choice could be stuck to once for all, what the Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravāda seems to have done resulting in a true BHS with strong Middle Indic affiliations. Alternatively the language could be updated from time to time as in the (Mūla)Sārvāstivāda and Dharmaguptaka traditions thus paving the way for slowly removing the Middle Indic features and moving steadily towards standard Sanskrit.”

environment.¹⁴ One may think of an episode of the *Vinaya* of the Sarvāstivādin in which the four great Celestial Kings pay a visit to the Buddha. According to this *Vinaya*,

the Buddha taught [them] in the holy language the *dharma* of the four Truths: suffering, the cause [of suffering], the cessation [of suffering], and the path [leading to the cessation of suffering]. Two [of the] Celestial Kings understood [it] and obtained the path, [but] two of them did not understand. The Buddha again preached the *dharma* for [these] two Celestial Kings, [this time] in *draviḍa* language. [...] From [these] two Celestial Kings, one understood, the other not. The Buddha then spoke again, [this time] in (a?) Barbaric (*mleccha*) language [...]. The four Celestial Kings, having understood and taken [great] advantage from and delight in this instruction, bowed to the feet of the Buddha and left.¹⁵

To be sure, there is nothing in this passage to even suggest that the holy language used by the Buddha is Sanskrit, but the parallel passage in T. 212 (734b5) reads, instead of “holy language,” “language of the Madhyadeśa” (中國之語), i.e., very likely Sanskrit (Lin 1949, 223, n. 1). Furthermore, the *Vibhāṣās* that gave their name to the Vaibhāṣika school seem to have been composed directly in Sanskrit—the great (Mūla) sarvāstivādin monk poet Aśvaghōṣa (1st-2nd century CE) acting as a deluxe secretary according to tradition (Takakusu 1904, 278-279, Eltschinger 2012). Aśvaghōṣa himself, who composed in a Sanskrit free from any “prakritism” (Salomon 1983), has the Buddha of his *Śāriputraprakaraṇa* speak Sanskrit.¹⁶ It could thus very well be that, for a Sarvāstivādin(-Vaibhāṣika), the holy language was none other than, or had come to correspond to, Sanskrit. One feels justified, then, in asking whether the choice of Sanskrit obeyed doctrinal considerations of the type outlined above. On this hypothesis, the Sarvāstivādins would have chosen as their (new) canonical language the one which, they thought, had the most intimate relationship with reality.¹⁷ But before assessing this hypothesis and asking ourselves about the reasons that led the (Mūla) sarvāstivādin to adopt Sanskrit as a canonical and scholarly language, let us briefly discuss the very fact of this adoption, which is surprising in the light of what is generally believed to be the overall attitude of early Indian Buddhism with respect to Sanskrit and local languages/dialects.

3 “Primitive” Buddhism, Sanskrit, and Local Languages

The *Vinayas* of the various Buddhist monastic orders contain different recensions of a passage that has often been taken to reflect earliest Buddhism’s if not the Buddha’s own personal attitude concerning the language of the scriptures and the monks’ missionary activities. Here is the Theravāda version of the event (keeping the problematic expressions in their Pāli original):

Now at that time Yameḷu and Tekula were the names of two monks who were brothers, brahmins by birth, with lovely voices, with lovely enunciation. They approached the Lord; having approached, having greeted the Lord, they sat down at a respectful distance. As they were sitting down at a respectful distance, these monks spoke thus to the Lord: “At present, Lord, monks of various names, various clans, various social strata have gone forth from various families; these corrupt the speech of the Awakened One in [repeating it] *sakāya niruttīyā*. Now we, Lord, give the speech of the Awakened One *chandasas*.” The Awakened One, the Lord, rebuked them, saying [...]: “Monks, the speech of the Awakened One should

¹⁴ On the chronology of the adoption of Sanskrit, see Bronkhorst 2011, 122-123, referring to the most ancient items from the Schøyen collection of Kharoṣṭhī fragments in Gāndhāri and in Sanskrit, which can be dated “from about the late second or early third centuries CE” (Salomon 2006, 358, quoted in Bronkhorst 2011, 123).

¹⁵ T. 1435, 193a11-20: 佛以聖語說四諦法苦集盡道。二天王解得道，二天王不解。佛更爲二天王以馱婆羅語說法。[...] 是二天王一解一不。佛復作彌梨車語。[...] 四天王盡解，示教利喜已，禮佛足而去。 Cf. Lin 1949, 223. On this episode, see also Dutt 1947, 128ff.

¹⁶ See Lüders 1911, 30, and von Hinüber 1989, 348-349; note especially, p. 349: “Of course one might argue that these were the conventions of the Indian theatre, of which we know very little at this early date anyway, but still it is hard to imagine that Aśvaghōṣa would have opted for Sanskrit as the language of the Buddha, if that was unacceptable to his audience. At the same time Aśvaghōṣa uses Old-Ardhamāgadhī for some of his characters, which could have been an obvious choice for the language of the Buddha, if the canonical scriptures Aśvaghōṣa was used to, were recited in some kind of Buddhist Middle Indic.”

¹⁷ Note Bronkhorst 2012, 109: “Sanskrit is more than just the original language. It is also the language which is closest to reality. The words and sentences of the Sanskrit language are believed to have some kind of inherent connection with the world we live in. This belief is no doubt linked to the belief in the efficacy of mantras, which, when correctly pronounced at appropriate occasions, are supposed to have various effects, from securing the success of a particular ritual act to curing a disease.”

not be given *chandāsas*. Whoever should [so] give it, there is an offence of wrong-doing. I allow you, monks, to learn the speech of the Awakened One *sakāya niruttīyā*.¹⁸

The two contrasted expressions, i.e., *chanda(s)* and *sakā nirutti* (Skt. *svakā niruktiḥ*), have given rise to multiple interpretations in Buddhist India, in the Chinese translations of the parallel texts, and in western scholarship.¹⁹ Let me consider a first group of parallel recensions. In the *Vinaya* of the Mahīśāsakas (T. 1421), a monastic order most likely to have favored Middle Indic (as its friendly relationships with the Theravādins would seem to suggest), the passage ends with the following injunction on the part of the Buddha:

It is(/I) allow(ed) to recite [the scriptures] according to the sounds(?) of the country. One should simply not go against the intention(?) of the Buddha. [But] it is(/I do) not allow(ed) to cause the language of the Buddha to become the language of the non-Buddhist scriptures.²⁰

The Buddha seems to allow the use of local languages provided one remains true to the meaning of his teaching;²¹ at the same time, he forbids the transposition of his teaching into “the language of the non-Buddhist scriptures,” i.e., having recourse to Sanskrit, the language of the Brahmins. In the *Vinaya* of the Dharmaguptakas (T. 1428), whose scriptures were originally preserved in Gāndhāri, the monk Yongmeng (勇猛, “Brave [Śūra?],” Lévi; “Brave-courageux,” Lin) asks the Buddha to be allowed to “cultivate(/arrange/

18 *Vinaya* II.139: *tena kho pana samayena yameḷutekulā nāma bhikkhū dve bhātikā honti brāhmaṇajātikā kalyāṇavācā kalyāṇavākkaraṇā. te yena bhagavā ten’ upasaṅkamimṣu. upasaṅkamtivā bhagavantaṃ abhivādetvā ekamantaṃ nisīdimṣu ekamantaṃ nisinnā kho te bhikkhū bhagavantaṃ etad avocum. etarahi bhante bhikkhū nānānāmā nānāgottā nānājaccā nānākulā pabbajitā, te sakāya niruttīyā buddhavacanaṃ dūsentī. handa mayaṃ bhante buddhavacanaṃ chandaso āropemā ’ti. vīgarahi buddho bhagavā. [...] na bhikkhave buddhavacanaṃ chandaso āropetabbam. yo āropeyya āpatti dukkaṭassa. anujānāmi bhikkhave sakāya niruttīyā buddhavacanaṃ pariāpuṇitun ti. Translation Horner 1963, 193-194, with *sakāya niruttīyā* instead of “in [using] his own dialect” and “according to his own dialect,” and *chandāsas* instead of “in metrical form.” For alternative translations of this passage, see, e.g., Lamotte 1976, 610, and Lin 1949, 217-218. On the names of the two monks, see Brough 1980, 37-38.*

19 See Lévi 1915, 441-447, Lin 1949, 216-227, Edgerton 1953, 1b-2b, Norman 1971, 329-331, Norman 1980, 61-63, Brough 1980, Norman 1997, 59-60, Seyfort Ruegg 2000, Pollock 2006, 54-55, Levman 2008-2009, Kelly 2012, 105-106. On the earlier interpretations (Thomas, Oldenberg, Rhys Davids, Geiger, Weller and Winternitz), see Lin 1949, 225-226, and Norman 1971, 329-330. According to Norman (1971, 330), *sakāya niruttīyā* must be interpreted, in the first occurrence of the expression, as “they are spoiling the Buddha’s words [when they try to repeat them] in his own language,” to which the Buddha answers (second occurrence), “I allow you to learn the Buddha’s words in his own language [and no other].” As for *chanda(s)* (*chanda* + *so* [= Skt. *-śas*]), it would not mean “metre” or “(Vedic) Sanskrit,” but a “wish, desire,” hence “as one wishes.” The two monks’ request could thus be paraphrased as follows: “let us translate into the various vernaculars to meet the various needs of these different people who cannot cope with the language of the Buddha’s words” (Norman 1971, 331). In a later paper (1980), Norman revised his initial interpretation of *sakāya niruttīyā* and proposed the following interpretation (p. 63): “People were spoiling the Buddha’s words by reciting them with explanatory glosses [the *niruttis*, VE] replacing some of the original words. The Buddha did not think this was important enough to merit translating *chandaso*. Even though his words were being spoiled, he ordered the practice to be continued.” Brough (1980, 37) admits that *-so* is better interpreted as an equivalent of Skt. *-śas* than as an ablative or genitive ending, but it is to be understood as based, not on *chanda* (“wish”), but on the Middle Indic form *chanda* < *chandās*, i.e., “in the sense of ‘Brahmanical texts,’ the Vedas being naturally taken as pre-eminent.” According to Brough, then, *chandaso* means “in the manner of the Brahmanical religious texts.”

20 T. 1421, 174b19-20: 聽隨國音讀誦，但不得違失佛意。不聽以佛語作外書語。Cf. Lin 1949, 219, and Lévi 1915, 442. On 違失 as “go against,” see Karashima 1998, 458 (“misconducts, transgresses”); on 外書 as “non-Buddhist scriptures,” see Karashima 2001, 275 (“a non-Buddhist writing”). The exact meaning of 不聽以佛語作外書語 is not entirely clear to me. Lin translates: “Il est interdit de faire de la parole du Bouddha un langage externe”; as for Lévi, he renders: “je ne permets pas qu’on se serve des paroles du Bouddha pour en faire des expressions de livres hérétiques.” I am inclined to interpret it in the sense of a transposition from one language into another.

21 In the *Vinayamāṭṭikā* (T. 1463, 822a20-23), the Buddha says to the *bhikkṣus*: 吾佛法中不與美言爲是。但使義理不失，是吾意也。隨諸衆生應與何音而得受悟應爲說之。是故名爲隨國應作。“Dans ma religion, on ne donne pas raison au beau langage. Que le sens et le raisonnement ne soient pas déficients, c’est tout ce que je veux. Il faut prêcher selon la prononciation qui permet aux êtres de comprendre. C’est pourquoi il est dit qu’il convient de se comporter selon les pays.” Translation Lin 1949, 220.

edit) the *sūtras* of the Buddha in accordance with the fine language (texts?) of the world.”²² The Buddha’s answer is unambiguous:

You idiot(s)! Wishing to mix the *sūtras* of the Buddha with the language of the outsiders(/non-Buddhists) would amount to damaging(/ruining) them! [...] It is(/I) allow(ed) to recite and to practise(/repeat) the *sūtras* of the Buddha according to the vulgar(/vernacular) languages of the [different] countries (as these languages are?) understood(/expounded) [there].²³

The “fine language of the world” is none other than the language of the allochthonous teachers, the Brahmins. Here again, the Buddha forbids Sanskrit and recommends the adoption of regional languages. According to these two *Vinayas*, or at least their Chinese translations, *chanda(s)* is equivalent with Sanskrit, the language of the Veda. As for the *sakā nirutti*, it consists in the dialects of the prozelytized countries.

As remarked long ago by Sylvain Lévi and Lin Li-Kouang, the *Vinayas* of the Sarvāstivādins (T. 1435) and the Mūlasarvāstivādins (T. 1451), two (?) denominations known for having turned to Sanskrit from an early date, reflect a very different understanding of the episode. According to the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, the two monks, both Brahmins by birth, “had initially recited the scriptures [consisting] of the four Vedas of the outsiders(/non-Buddhists); after having entered ascetic life, they recited the *sūtras* of the Buddha with this [very same Vedic] intonation,”²⁴ a practice the Buddha was not long to proscribe: “From now on, he who recites the *sūtras* of the Buddha with the intonation of the non-Buddhist scriptures [makes himself guilty of] an offence (*duṣkṛta*).”²⁵ The *Kṣudrakavastu* of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* contains a very similar account of the event. Two monks, having “learned, in the past, the method of chanted intonation of the Brahmins, were now reciting, due to habit, with their former chanting style.”²⁶ The Buddha’s prohibition is worth being quoted in its entirety:

From now on, the monks should not recite the *dharma* of the *sūtras* by chanting and stretching out the voice(/intonation). If the monks recite the canon of the *sūtras* with the intonation of the *chandās*, they make themselves guilty of transgressing the Law. [However,] if the pronunciation of a [certain] region [or] a [certain] country requires that one stretches out the voice(/intonation), there is no offence in doing [this].²⁷

As remarked by Lin, in these two *Vinayas*, “la défense d’adapter les textes bouddhiques à la norme sanskrite est supprimée, ainsi que l’autorisation d’user des dialectes. L’interdit porte sur les intonations à la manière védique” (Lin 1949, 220-221). Lin adds that “[c]ette variante doit être due à un remaniement effectué par les Sarvāstivādin, soucieux de justifier l’emploi qu’on faisait du sanskrit dans leur école” (Lin 1949, 221, Brough 1980, 39). According to Lévi, the first who attempted to explain the divergence between the two groups of texts,

[i]l est probable que la tradition a systématiquement séparé deux éléments qui se combinaient dans la conception primitive. Chez Pāṇini, l’accentuation fait partie intégrante de la science grammaticale, au même titre que la phonétique et la morphologie ; la définition d’une forme grammaticale implique nécessairement l’indication de l’accent ; le mot *chandās*, d’autre part, a dans la langue de Pāṇini un usage précis ; il désigne la langue des textes védiques, par opposition au parler

²² T. 1428, 955a20: 以世間好言論修理佛經。 Cf. Lin 1949, 219, and Lévi 1915, 442. “in accordance with the fine language (texts?) of the world” is borrowed from Brough 1980, 39. According to Lin (1949, 219), “[d]ans ce passage, le terme ‘arranger’ (*sieou-li* [修理, *xiuli*, VE]) pourrait avoir le sens de *samskartum*, autrement dit de *sanskritisier*.” Note also Brough 1980, 39: “It is tempting to think that ‘fine language’ might render MI originals with an equivalent of *samskṛta* (or *satkṛta*, with Buddhaghosa); but in view of the uncertainty of the date of this as the noun of the language, this remains speculative. It is certain, however, that Sanskrit is intended [...]” Here again, the exact meaning of 修理 is unclear. The expression is attested in the sense of “cultivates” (Karashima 1998, 511), but might well have the sense of “to arrange” (Lévi, Lin), and even “to edit” (Brough 1980, 39, not meant as a translation, however).

²³ T. 1428, 955a21-23: 汝等癡人。此乃是毀損，以外道言論而欲雜糅佛經。[...] 聽隨國俗言音所解誦習佛經。 Cf. Lin 1949, 219, and Lévi 1915, 442.

²⁴ T. 1435, 274a19-20: 本誦外道四圍陀書。出家已是以音聲誦佛經。 Cf. Lin 1949, 220, and Lévi 1915, 443.

²⁵ T. 1435, 274a22-23: 從今以外書音聲誦佛經者突吉羅。 Cf. Lin 1949, 220, and Lévi 1915, 443.

²⁶ According to T. 1451, 232b19-20: 先學婆羅門歌詠聲法。由串習故今時讀誦作本音詞。 Cf. Lin 1949, 221, and Lévi 1915, 443.

²⁷ T. 1451, 232c9-11: 由是苾芻不應歌詠引聲而誦經法。若苾芻作闍陀聲誦經典者得越法罪。若方國言音須引聲者，作時無犯。 Cf. Lin 1949, 222, and Lévi 1915, 444-445.

courant des gens du monde ; c'est le sanscrit védique. Les Thera, les Dharmagupta, les Mahiśāsaka, qui avaient adopté des *prākṛits* comme langue canonique, n'ont retenu de la proscription portée contre le *chandās* que l'interdiction du sanscrit, tenu pour un langage d'hérétiques. Les Sarvāstivādin et les Mūla Sarvāstivādin ont, au contraire, un canon rédigé en sanscrit ; ils n'ont retenu de la proscription que l'interdiction d'utiliser les accents, en les prolongeant, comme une fioriture musicale. (Lévi 1915, 445-446)

At least in the light of the first series of parallels, the adoption of Sanskrit as a canonical and scholarly language may well have been perceived as an infringement of the Buddha's injunction. From the turn of the common era if not earlier, however, (some) (Mūla)sarvāstivādins transposed all or parts of their scriptures into Sanskrit, adjusting—if Lévi and Lin are right—the target and the scope of the old prohibition. But as remarked by Sheldon Pollock,

[w]hat exactly prompted the Buddhists to abandon their hostility to the language after half a millenium [...] and finally adopt it for scripture, philosophy, and a wide range of other textual forms, some of which they would help to invent, is a question for which no convincing arguments have yet been offered.²⁸

Among the reasons advocated, let us mention the “*précision technique du sanskrit*,” which made it an “*instrument idéal pour la pénétration des doctrines et des idées*” in a society in which Sanskrit was gaining ground (Lamotte 1976, 646). One of the explanations most frequently resorted to is the felt necessity of a *koiné* language. According to Jean Filliozat,

[p]lus les *prākṛits* évoluaient, plus ils se différenciaient et plus il devenait nécessaire de recourir, dans les échanges à l'intérieur d'un monde bouddhique de plus en plus vaste et pour un prosélytisme actif de toutes parts, à une langue de relations culturelles étendues ; or le sanscrit seul était une telle langue. Il était le meilleur instrument de compréhension mutuelle à la disposition des moines des diverses provinces qui se rencontraient aux lieux saints. (Filliozat 1954, 165)

The same author regards *sanskritization* as

le fait d'usagers de dialectes moyen-indiens provinciaux que leurs rapports mutuels poussaient à employer de préférence les formes communes à la plupart de ces dialectes et à introduire de plus en plus de formes *sanskrites*, comprises plus généralement encore. (Filliozat 1954, 165-166)

According to Gérard Fussman, the need of a vehicular language capable of replacing the “*galimatias*” of the spoken *Prākṛits* “est sans doute la raison pour laquelle les bouddhistes recoururent de plus en plus au sanscrit, qui avait l'avantage de constituer une norme et de pouvoir être interprété par la grammaire, ce qui n'était plus le cas des *prākṛits* réellement parlés” (Fussman 1982, 38-39). The *prozelytization* of the Brahmins has also been interpreted as a plausible motivation for adopting Sanskrit. According to Heinrich Lüders,

[m]an war sich in den buddhistischen Kreisen offenbar darüber klar geworden, daß man die Brahmanen, die Träger der Bildung, nicht für die Lehre des Meisters gewinnen könnte, wenn man ihnen die heiligen Schriften nicht in Sanskrit, in der Sprache der *śiṣṭa*, entgegenbrächte. (Lüders 1940, 713)²⁹

Proselytization or not, Brahmins and the brahmanization of royal courts must have been, according to Johannes Bronkhorst, one of the main reasons why the Sarvāstivādins of the Mathurā area adopted Sanskrit during the Kuṣāṇa period. This language would have facilitated their political-economic interaction with the brahmanized and hence *sanskritized* courts which they depended upon and before which they were led to argue their cases (Bronkhorst 2011, 122-142).

²⁸ Pollock 2006, 56-57. For a critique of the different hypotheses formulated so far, see Pollock 2006, 57-58. On the *sanskritization* of Pāli in particular, see Norman's detailed exposition in Norman 1997, 95-111 (“Buddhism and Sanskritisation”).

²⁹ On the notion of *śiṣṭa*, see below, p. 323.

4 Grammar and the Linguistic Science

We are thus far from a satisfactory explanation of the sanskritization that took place in important segments of the Indian Buddhist communities around the turn of the new millenium. This hypothetic explanation, provided there is one, might even be a mirage, for such a process can be expected to have involved different historical parameters and thus greatly varied according to local circumstances.³⁰ This, however, should not prevent us from inquiring into the perception the Buddhists themselves had, if not of sanskritization, at least of their own standards and norms of linguistic behavior. Based in part on an interesting remark made about fifteen years ago by Richard Salomon, I would like to focus, not on the reasons why certain Buddhists adopted Sanskrit, but on the motivations that led some (Mūla)sarvāstivādins of Yogācāra persuasion³¹ to recommend and to justify the study of (Sanskrit) *grammar*, one of the five “sciences” (*vidyā*) or “fields of knowledge/disciplines” (*vidyāsthāna*) of a *bodhisattva*’s (at least ideal) curriculum.³² In doing so, I would like to suggest that, normative as they can be, those of our sources that promote the study of (Sanskrit) grammar are not without relevance for the issue under consideration. To be sure, any research hypothesis based on those sources is doomed to address only one part of the problem and relate to one particular segment of the community, but it has the indisputable merit of relying on textual sources reflecting the opinion of the Buddhists themselves.

30 According to Oskar von Hinüber (written communication, in German, 10 February 2016, English translations mine), the fact that the question has received no satisfactory answer suggests that it has generally been posed in a wrong way. The phenomenon of (re)sanskritization indeed, far from pertaining to Buddhism alone, concerns India as a whole: “That the Buddhists provided no legitimation for their ‘linguistic turn’ might be due to the fact that it was a general development within Indian culture, and thus was simply evident to them.” Note also: “That the Buddhists turned to Sanskrit could naturally result from the linguistic evolution of Indian culture. This would raise two questions: Why did India as a whole first turn its back on Vedic as a cultural language and turn to the vernaculars, only to come back later to—now Pāṇinian—Sanskrit, as if Europe should now turn again to Latin? And second, why did one part of the Buddhists keep to Middle Indic and refrain from turning to Sanskrit? It may not be a coincidence that in the North, Gāndhārī eventually was abandoned, whereas Pāli has survived to this day in the South. In the North indeed, a very diversified Indo-Aryan ‘Umgangssprache’ opposes itself to Sanskrit, the great transregional cultural language. In contradistinction to this, in the South, Tamil has remained for both Hinduism and Buddhism an important language, very different from Sanskrit. Why should the Buddhists alone have renounced their old languages?” The attitudes of the various Buddhist monastic orders are quite diverse: The Theravādins and (very likely) the Sāṃmitīyas reject this linguistic evolution (“perhaps because the pressure of Sanskrit in the southern, Dravidian speaking regions was less strong than in the North”); in other contexts, bilingualism seems to have at least provisionally prevailed (thus it is that Nāgārjuna composed his works in Sanskrit in a Śātavāhana empire where Prakrit was still predominant); Oskar von Hinüber attracts my attention to an inscription of Rudrapuruṣadatta (see von Hinüber/Skilling 2011), whose chief physician (*agrabhiṣaj*) composed verses in elegant Sanskrit whereas in the rest of the inscription, the Buddhist order uses Middle Indic (“This inscription shows very nicely why and how lay Buddhists may have felt offended by the monks’ [perhaps] insufficient mastery of Sanskrit, which caused them to look more knowledgeable than the monks”). Whereas the Sarvāstivādins turned entirely to Sanskrit, the Mahāsāṅghika-Lokottaravādins created a new language that did not, however, result in Sanskrit (“Perhaps the conscious obstinacy in favor of a form of linguistic intermediary world was a matter of identity”).

31 Most of the materials discussed below stem from the *Yogācārabhūmi* (around 300?), a massive compilation of textual materials belonging to a milieu of “(Buddhist) Yoga practitioners” (*yogācāra*) who were active between the 1st and the 4th century CE (at least) in northern India and especially Kashmir. To this originally non-Mahāyānist milieu belong Aśvaghoṣa’s *Saundarananda* (see Yamabe 2003), but also, and above all, the *Yogācārabhūmi* of the Sarvāstivāda scholars Saṅgharakṣa (T. 607, partial Chinese translation by An Shigao between 148 and 170; T. 606, Dharmarakṣa’s translation around 284 CE, see Demiéville 1951) and Buddhaseṇa (T. 618, wrongly attributed to Dharmatrāta, Chinese translation by Buddhahadra around 413 CE; see Lin 1949, 344-346, and Demiéville 1951, 362-363). I have no proof that all the materials collected in the *Yogācārabhūmi* are also of (Mūla) sarvāstivāda provenance, but this looks like the most likely hypothesis, all the more so since the scriptural passages quoted in the *Yogācārabhūmi* generally belong to a Mūlasarvāstivāda version (Schmithausen 1970, 94-97; Skilling 2013, 773-774). The later *Yogalehrbuch* found in Qizil, which belongs to the same textual tradition, is a Mūlasarvāstivāda treatise (see Schmithausen 1970, 109 and 113, n. 257).

32 The equivalence between *śabdavidyā/śabdaśāstra* (“science/treatise on/of words,” “linguistic science”) and grammar is reflected in Sthiramati’s explanations, e.g., in SAVBh D Mi 202b6/P Mi 224a6 (*sgra’i gtsug lag byā ka ra ṅa la mkhas pa ni sgra rig pa ṅes bya’o*, “[a *bodhisattva*’s] expertise in the treatise on words, i.e., in grammar (*vyākaraṇa*), is what is called ‘science of words’ [*śabdavidyā*]”) and SAVBh D Tsi 92a4/P Tsi 109a7 (*byā ka ra ṅa’i gtsug lag la mkhas pa ni sgra ṅes pa ṅes bya’o*, “we call ‘science of words’ [a *bodhisattva*’s] expertise in the treatise on grammar [*vyākaraṇaśāstra*]”).

To begin with, let me briefly come back to an excerpt from the Mahiśāsaka *Vinaya* bearing on the adoption of dialects and its frequent corollary, the rejection of Sanskrit:

There were two Brahmins, two brothers, who had recited the *Chandaveda* books and then entered the ascetic life in the Good Law. Having heard the monks reciting the *sūtras* in a wrong way, they derided [them], saying: “The Venerables (*bhadanta*) have entered ascetic life for a long time, but they don’t know [yet] the masculine and the feminine, the singular and the plural, the present, the past and the future, long and short syllables, light and heavy syllables, and so they recite the *sūtras* of the Buddha in this way.” Upon hearing this, the monks were ashamed. The two monks went to the Buddha and reported all this to him. The Buddha said: “It is(/I) allow(ed) to recite [the scriptures] according to the sounds(?) of the country. One should simply not go against the intention(?) of the Buddha. [But] it is(/I do) not allow(ed) to cause the language of the Buddha to become the language of the non-Buddhist scriptures.”³³

Two Brahmin converts bemoan the monks for wrongly reciting the scriptures and especially for ignoring or neglecting, if not for having forgotten, gender, number and tense, i.e., *grammar* itself. This passage can be profitably compared with another excerpt from the same Mahiśāsaka *Vinaya*:

The Buddha was residing at Śrāvastī. Together with a community of five hundred monks, he went to the town of Aṭāvī. At that time, the following occurred to the minds of the [lay] householders: “The Buddha hasn’t come here for quite a long time and soon after that he is going to leave [again]. We should be in close terms with the monks and learn [from them how] to recite the stanzas of the *sūtras* (**sūtragāthā*?) and ask [them] about what we do not understand, [so that] we will have something to rely upon after the Blessed One has left.” Thus they went to the monks and spoke as follows: “O Venerables, teach us [how] to recite the stanzas of the *sūtras*!” The monks said: “The Buddha has not allowed us yet to teach laymen [how] to recite the *sūtras*. Let us therefore report [the case] to him.” The Buddha said: “I allow [you] to teach laymen [how] to recite the *sūtras*.” Then the monks, who had entered ascetic life in [the most] different countries, recited the stanzas of the *sūtras*, [but] the sounds and the sentences(/verses) were not correct. The householders then derided(/criticised) [them], saying: “How is it that [you] monks take care of yourselves day and night, but [that] you don’t know the masculine, the feminine, the neutral (黃門, **napuṃsaka*?) and [words with] two genders (根, **liṅga*?), as well as all the ways of speaking [proper] to all human languages?” Upon hearing [this], all the monks were ashamed and therefore reported [the case] to the Buddha.³⁴

Here again, the monks’ ignorance of grammar is responsible for the criticism of the Brahmin householders. Richard Salomon has rightly drawn a parallel between this passage and a *locus* of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* in which the Buddhist monks are scolded by the Brahmins for their ignorance of calendrical calculation.³⁵ Here is Salomon’s conclusion:

Given these references to the influence on the habits of Buddhist monastic communities of such characteristically brahmanical practices as ritual chanting and calendrical calculation, it seems reasonable to extrapolate that the Buddhists could also have been affected by that most quintessentially brahmanical cultural value, namely the use of the Sanskrit

³³ T. 1421, 174b14-20: 有婆羅門兄弟二人誦闍陀鞞陀書，後於正法出家。聞諸比丘誦經不正譏呵言，諸大德久出家而不知男女語一語多語現在過去未來語長短音輕重音，乃作如此誦讀佛經。比丘聞羞恥。二比丘往至佛所，具以白佛。佛言。聽隨國音讀誦，但不得違失佛意。不聽以佛語作外書語。 Cf. Lin 1949, 218-219, and Lévi 1915, 442. According to Brough (1980, 38), 闍陀鞞陀書 (*chantou pituo shu*, “*chanda-veda* books”) could be “a tautological expression here, ‘the Vedic-veda books.’”

³⁴ T. 1421, 39c9-18: 佛在舍衛城，與五百比丘僧至阿茶脾邑。時彼居士作是念。佛久乃來此，尋當復去。我等應親近諸比丘學誦經偈問所不解，世尊去後得有所怙。即到諸比丘所作是語。大德教我誦讀經偈。諸比丘言。佛未聽我等教白衣誦經，以是白佛。佛言。聽教白衣誦經。時諸比丘種種國出家，誦讀經偈，音句不正。諸居士便譏呵言。云何比丘晝夜親承，而不知男女黃門二根人語及多少語法。諸比丘聞各各羞恥。以是白佛。 Cf. Lévi 1915, 437.

³⁵ *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya, Uttaragrantha* (**Dul ba D Pa* 105a4-b2): *sañs rgyas bcom ldan 'das mñan du yod pa na dze ta'i tshal mgon med zas sbyin gyi kun dga' ra ba na bžugs pa'i tshes bram ze dañ / khyim bdag rnam dge sloñ gi gan du 'oris nas 'phags pa de riñ tshes grañs du žes dris pa dañ / de dag gis smras pa / kye mi šes so // bram ze dañ / khyim bdag gis smras pa / mu stegs can gyis kyan' tshes grañs dañ / ñi ma dañ / skar ma dañ / yud tsam yañ šes na / khyed cag rab tu byuñ na / tshes grañs tsam yañ mi šes sam / de dag lan med nas cañ mi zer bar 'dug go // de ltar gyur pa dge sloñ dag gis bcom ldan 'das la gsol pa dañ / bcom ldan 'das kyis bka' stsal pa / de lta bas na / tshes grañs bgrañ par nas rjes su gnañ ño // žes gsuñs pa [...]*. “At a time when the Buddha, the Blessed One, was staying at Śrāvastī, in the Jetavana, in the Park of Anāthapiṇḍada, when brahmins and householders came to the monks and asked them, ‘What, Noble Ones, is today’s date?’, the monks answered: ‘Sorry, we don’t know.’ But the brahmins and householders said: ‘When members of other religious groups not only know the date, but the position of the sun and the stars and the moment as well, how can you, when you have entered the religious life, not even know the date?’ The monks, having no response, sat there saying nothing. The monks then reported what had occurred to the Blessed One and the Blessed One said: ‘I order that henceforth the date is to be counted!’” Translation Schopen 1998, 173.

language. Although no explicit textual reference has, to my knowledge, been discovered so far to prove that the gradual adoption of Sanskrit by the Buddhists of northern India was motivated by such a desire to emulate the practices of the Brahman communities, we can easily imagine how gossip about the perceived inferior linguistic habits of the Buddhist monks, like the actually recorded complaints about their ignorance of calendrical reckoning, might have motivated them to progressively Sanskritize their language. Thus in this little episode we have an indirect but helpful clue as to the actual forces and motivations that produced that curious linguistic phenomenon which we now call “Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit.” (Salomon 2001, 250-251)

No more than Salomon, I am aware of any source reflecting a slavish imitation of Brahmanical linguistic and/or recitation practices on the part of the Buddhists. There are, however, a few passages mirroring the latter’s wish to challenge the Brahmins in the field of eloquence and to neutralize “gossip about [their] perceived inferior linguistic habits.”

However, it looks unlikely to me that the Buddhists turned to Sanskrit *just* in order to escape the Brahmins’ sarcasms. In my opinion, they perhaps more likely sought to *authorize* their own discourse by bringing it into agreement with the norms of (Sanskrit) grammar, ancient India’s most revered science. As is testified by an oft-quoted passage from the fiercest among anti-Buddhist Brahmanical controversialists, the Mīmāṃsaka philosopher Kumāṛila (active around 550 and 650?), well-formed speech alone—quite literally Sanskrit—can legitimately claim authority and credibility.³⁶ To speak well is to speak the truth, or at least cause others to believe so, and this appears to be the dominant concern of the texts which, in a (Mūla) sarvāstivādin and early Yogācāra environment, encourage the study of grammar. These two aspects—neutralizing the Brahmins’ irony and authorizing one’s own discourse—are clearly reflected in a passage from Sthiramati’s (6th century CE?) *Sūtrāṅkāravṛttibhāṣya* (SAVBh):

A *bodhisattva* studies the linguistic science (*śabdavidyā*) both in order to authorize himself among other experts on account of his [own] skill in the Sanskrit language (*saṃskṛtalapita*) and in order to defeat the allodox teachers (*tīrthika*) who boast of knowing the linguistic treatise(/science) (*śabdaśāstra*).³⁷

According to Sthiramati, a *bodhisattva* studies the Sanskrit language—note that the Tibetan translators have opted for a phonetic transcription of *saṃskṛta*, as if to insist on the (proper) name of a specific language rather than on the ideal characteristics of any language—to make himself trustworthy and to repel sarcasms on the part of self-appointed Brahmin experts in grammar and eloquence. Sthiramati’s allusion to Brahmins boasting of mastering the language and its grammar—the Tibetan word *rlom pa* most likely renders the Sanskrit *-mānin*, which refers to conceit as a vain pretention and can be conveniently rendered by “pseudo-” —echos the sarcasms documented by the Buddhist canonical sources discussed above.

The activity in which the monk’s or the *bodhisattva*’s linguistic skills and hence authority are most needed is predication and proselytism. This is well reflected in another excerpt from Sthiramati’s SAVBh:

Thanks to the linguistic science, [the *bodhisattva*,] when he himself teaches the [Good] Law [i.e., Buddhism], teaches it with elegant words such as “*sapratighād rūpam iti*” or “*anubhavasvabhāvatvād vedaneti*,” and, since other [people] quickly understand the meaning [of the Law] when he teaches it to them without resorting to corrupt/vernacular words (*apabhraṣṭapada*?), confidence arises [among them who think] that he is an expert.³⁸

36 TV II.164,8-15 ad Mīmāṃsāsūtra 1.3.12: *asādhuśabdabhūyiṣṭhāḥ śākyajaināgamādayaḥ / asannibandhanatvāc ca śāstratvaṃ na pratiyate // māgadhadākṣiṇātyatadapabhraṃśaprāyāsādhuśabdānibandhanā hi te / [...] tataś cāsatyaśabdeṣu kutaś teṣu arthasatyatā / dṛṣṭāpabhraṣṭarūpeṣu katham vā syād anādītā //*. “The scriptures of the Buddhists and Jains are composed in overwhelmingly incorrect (*asādhu*) language, words of the Magadha or Dakshinatyā languages or their even more dialectal forms (*tadapabhraṃśa*). And because they are therefore false compositions (*asannibandhana*), they cannot possibly be true knowledge [or, holy word, *śāstra*]. When texts are composed of words that are [grammatically] false (*asatyaśabda*), how can they possibly communicate meaning that is true (*arthasatyatā*)? And how could they possibly be eternal [as true scripture must be] if we find in them forms that are corrupted (*apabhraṣṭa*)?” Translation Pollock 2006, 55-56.

37 SAVBh D Mi 203a7-b2/P Mi 224b8-225a2: *sgra rig pa byañ chub sems dpa’ ’tshol bar byed de / bdag ñid saṃ skri ta’i skad la mkhas pa’i sgo nas bdag la mkhas pa gžan dag yid ches par bya ba dañ sgra’i gtsug lag śes par’ rlom pa’i mu stegs pa dag tshar gcad par bya [...] ba’i phyir ’tshol’ bar byed do //*. ¹D par: P pas. ²tshol em.: D rtshol, P tshol.

38 MSABh D Tsi 92b4-5/P Tsi 109b8-110a2: *sgra rig pas ni bdag ñid chos ’chad pa’i dus na yañ thogs pa dañ bcas pas kyañ gzugs śes bya ba la / myoñ ba’i bdag ñid kyi phyir tshor ba’o źes bya ba tshig bzañ pos chos ’chad par byed pa dañ tshig zur chag pa med pas gžan la chos ston na gžan dag don myur du go bar ’gyur žin de’i sgo nas ’di ni mkhas pa yin no źes yid ches par ’byuñ ste /*

The preacher's personal authority is made dependent on the fact that he uses grammatically well-formed expressions and avoids corrupt language—in other words, that he expresses himself in Sanskrit. It is to be noted that, here as elsewhere, Sthiramati hardly improves on Vasubandhu's (?) commentary on the *Mahāyānasūtrāṅkāra(bhāṣya)* (MSA[Bh]). While defining the usefulness of linguistics, Vasubandhu claims this science to allow him who studies it to “[use] well-formed expressions and [to arouse] other peoples' confidence.”³⁹ Vasubandhu himself borrowed this explanation from the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (BoBh, 250-300?), according to which “a *bodhisattva* studies the linguistic science in order to arouse confidence among those who are attached to the Sanskrit language by choosing well-formed phrases(/words, Tib. *tshig*) and syllables.”⁴⁰ Sthiramati's remarks are thus based on materials some of which cannot be much later than the Buddhists' adoption of Sanskrit. But mastery of grammar and Sanskrit is not aimed just at authorizing a *bodhisattva*'s speech in the framework of his missionary activities. It also provides him with skills in didactic and hence salvific means, granting that this is the meaning of the following passage from the BoBh: “A *bodhisattva* studies the linguistic science in order to learn how to successively expound⁴¹ one and the same object(/meaning) by means of various expressions.”⁴² One can only regret that neither the Tibetan version nor *Sāgaramegha's gloss nor the SAVBh parallel are of any use for interpreting this short description of the purpose of studying grammar.⁴³

As we have just seen, the BoBh uses the compound expression *saṃskṛtalapita*. I do not believe that *saṃskṛta-* is to be interpreted here as an adjective (“purified,” “refined,” “made ready”) characterizing *lapita* (“language”). It is much more likely to be analyzed as a substantive (or a substantivized adjective) used in apposition to *lapita* (“the language consisting in/that is Sanskrit”), as in expressions such as “the Sanskrit language,” “la langue sanskrite,” “die Sanskritsprache.” But if this expression refers to Sanskrit as a specific language, it could well constitute one of the earliest if not the earliest (roughly) datable attestation(s) of *saṃskṛta* in the sense of “Sanskrit,” a privilege traditionally granted to the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the “original poem” (*ādikāvya*).⁴⁴ In 5.28.18-19ab, Hanumān speaks as follows: “If I express myself in Sanskrit (*vācam... saṃskṛtām*), like a Brahmin, Sītā will think I am Rāvaṇa and be frightened. I must absolutely speak a human, intelligible language.”⁴⁵ And *Rāmāyaṇa* 3.10.54 tells us that, “assuming the form of a Brahmin, the merciless Ilvala spoke to the priests in Sanskrit in order to invite them to the *śrāddha* meal.”⁴⁶ If one cannot deny the existence of a narrative cycle centered on Rāma prior to Aśvaghōṣa (2nd century CE at the latest),⁴⁷ there is to my knowledge nothing to prove that the extant version(s) and especially the relevant verses predate the BoBh (250-300?).

The expression *saṃskṛtalapita* is to be connected with a second, more technical (and also more obscure) passage from the BoBh in which the two “aspects” (*ākāra*) of the linguistic science are presented.

39 MSABh 136,21-25: *suniruktābhidhānaṃ parasampratyaayaś ca* /.

40 BoBh_D 74,13-14/BoBh_W 105,17-19/BoBh_V 70,4-5: *śabdavidyāṃ bodhisattvaḥ paryeṣate saṃskṛtalapitādhimuktānām ātmani sampratyaoyotpādanārtham suniruktapadavyaṅjananirūpaṇatayā* [...] /.

41 According to SWTTF I.70b-71a s.v. *anuvyavahāra*, “immer wieder erklären, behaupten,” which is more satisfactory than BHSD 34b s.v. *anuvyavahāra*, “regular, successive (in stages), corresponding process, operation, or business.” The Tibetan version (*rjes su tha sñad gdags pa*, BoBh_T D Wi 57a4-5) is of no help, just as *Sāgaramegha's gloss (BoBhVy D Yi 126a3-4/P Ri 153b6-8).

42 BoBh_D 74,13-15/BoBh_W 105,17-20/BoBh_V 70,4-6: *śabdavidyāṃ bodhisattvaḥ paryeṣate* [...] *ekasya* [...] *arthasya nānāprakāra-niruktyanuvyavahārānupraveśārtham* /.

43 See BoBh_T D Wi 57a4-5 and BoBhVy D Yi 126a4/P Ri 153b8. SAVBh D Mi 203a7-b2/P Mi 224b7-225a2: *sgra rig pa byaṅ chub sems dpa' 'tshol bar byed de* / [...] *don gcig la nes pa'i tshig maṅ po bstan ciñ bśad pa'i chos tha sñad la mkhas par bya ba'i phyir 'tshol bar byed do* // . “A *bodhisattva* studies the linguistic science in order to be an expert in successively explaining the Law by using various expressions for one and the same object(/meaning).” This translation presupposes that *tha sñad* renders *anuvyavahāra* rather than *vyavahāra* (“conventional practice/usage”).

44 See Brough 1980, 37, Cardona 1997, 557-564 (§§838-844), and Pollock 2006, 44-45. The grammarian Patañjali (around 150 BC) seems not to be aware of the word *saṃskṛta* and to call *bhāṣā* the language he describes (in the 4th century BC, Pāṇini opposes *bhāṣā*, “the spoken language (?)”, to *chandasa*, “the holy language [of Veda]”; see Cardona 1997, 4 [§7]).

45 *Rāmāyaṇa* 5.28.18-19ab: *yadi vācam pradāsyāmi dvijātir iva saṃskṛtām / rāvaṇaṃ manyamānā māṃ sītā bhūtā bhaviṣyati // avaśyam eva vaktavyaṃ mānuṣaṃ vākyam arthavat* /.

46 *Rāmāyaṇa* 3.10.54: *dhārayan brāhmaṇaṃ rūpam ilvalaḥ saṃskṛtaṃ vadan / āmantrayati viprān sa śrāddham uddiśya nirghṛṇaḥ* //.

47 See, e.g., Hildebeitel 2006.

There we read that, “just as [the other sciences,] the linguistic treatise(/science) entails two aspects: that of teaching the distinction between the [proper] form of the verbal root and the [various] factors of action(/ means of realizing the verbal action), and that of teaching the benefits [to be derived] from the purification/ ornamentation (*saṃskāra*) of speech.”⁴⁸ If the first aspect lends itself to different analyses,⁴⁹ the second is relatively straightforward. As suggested by Cardona, *saṃskāra* can be taken to refer to “a derivational explanation for correct speech forms (*śabda*, *sādhuśabda*)” and “a purification of speech, since correct speech forms are thereby segregated from corrupt ones (*apaśabda*, *apabhraṃśa*, *asādhuśabda*).”⁵⁰ Grammar thus enables the *bodhisattva* to derive the correct forms and to keep his speech immune from any barbarism. This is important, for according to the grammatical tradition’s self-legitimation, corrupt expressions can backfire on their user. Patañjali indeed declares that

speech, [if it is] corrupt either with respect to accent or with respect to phonemes, [being thus] used in a wrong way, does not communicate its meaning; this verbal thunderbolt destroys the sacrificer himself just as [the word] “*indraśatru*” [killed Vṛtra] because of a fault in regard to accent; grammar must therefore be studied so that we do not use correct words/speech forms.⁵¹

Interestingly, Guṇaprabha refers to a Tantric (?) adaptation of Patañjali’s idea while explaining the benefits (*anuśaṃsa*) alluded to by the text examined above:

A mantra which is corrupt either with respect to accent or with respect to phonemes does not bring about the [expected] result (*nārthasiddhiḥ?*) due to this [very] corruption; [in fact,] it is the adept (*sādhaka*) himself who is destroyed by this verbal thunderbolt (*vāgvajra*).⁵²

The MSA and Vasubandhu’s commentary on it associate each of the five sciences with specific purposes. According to MSA 11.60, “the supreme saint does not reach omniscience in any way unless he applies

48 BoBh_D 68,16-17/BoBh_w 96,24-26/BoBh_Y 58,1-2: *śabdaśāstram api dvyākāram / dhātūrūpasādhanavyavasthānaparidīpanākāram vāksaṃskārānuśaṃsaparidīpanākāram ca /*

49 How to analyze the compound *dhātūrūpasādhanavyavasthāna*: “distinction between the [proper] form of the verbal root and the factors of action(/means of realization [of the verbal action]),” or “determination of the means to produce the [different] forms/the [proper] form of the verbal root”? If it does not plead in favor of the first interpretation (*dhātūrūpa-sādhana* as a *dvandva* compound; on *sādhana* in the sense of “means of realization [of the verbal action],” see Renou 1942, II.141-142), the Tibetan version does not exclude it entirely either (BoBh_T D Wi 52a7-b1: *skad kyi dbyiṅs kyi ṅo bo bsgrub pa nam par gźag pa*). The two commentaries preserved in Tibetan seem to strengthen the second interpretation. According to *Sāgaramegha, grammar enables him who studies it to know that a certain form (?) is derived from a certain root; *sādhana* is to be understood as the explanation of something yet unknown (**aprasiddha-pradarśana/-[sam]prakāśana?*), and *vyavasthāna* as the determination (**avadhāraṇa?*) of something on account of (its?) different uses (**prayoga?*) (BoBhVy D Yi 117a1-2/P Ri 142a5-7: *skad kyi dbyiṅs kyi ṅo bo žes bya ba la la sog pa la dbyiṅs 'di las 'di 'byuñ bar 'gyur ro žes nam par gźag pa'i don to // ma grags pa rab tu ston pa ni sgrub pa yin la / sbyor ba'i bye brag gis ñes par 'byed pa ni nam par gźag pa žes bya ba [...]* //). If my understanding of *Sāgaramegha is correct, the science of grammar aims first at instructing on the establishment/explanation and (?) the determination of the different forms of the verbal root. As for Guṇaprabha, who does not comment on *sādhana*, he is content to paraphrase as follows: the grammatical science enables him who studies it to determine that such is the form(/nature) of the verbal root (BoBhVṛ D 'i 173a4-5/P Yi 218a1-2: *skad kyi dbyiṅs kyi ṅo bo sgrub pa nam par gźag pa ston pa'i nam pa žes bya ba la / dbyiṅs kyi ṅo bo mam par gźag pa ni dbyiṅs kyi ṅo bo nam par gźag pa ste / dbyiṅs 'di'i ṅo bo 'di žes nam par gźag pa de' ston pa'i nam pa'o //* ¹P 'di'i: D kyi. ²D pa de: P pas).

50 Cardona 1988, 564 (§844). Note *Paddhati* 202,6-7: *yadā hi vyākaraṇaṃ śabdattatvaṃ saṃskaroti tato 'yam adhitavyākaraṇo 'pabhraṃśān pariharati sādhuṃś ca prayuñkte /*. “For if grammar purifies the essence(/nature) of language, he who has studied grammar rejects corrupt forms and uses correct ones.” Note also *Paddhati* 40,7: *na viśiṣṭotpattir atra saṃskāro 'pi tu prakṛtipratyayādibhir vibhāgānvākyānam /*. “Here, the *saṃskāra* [grammar is responsible for] does not consist in the production of a better [language/form], but rather in an explanation of the division [of language into various elements] thanks to [verbal] bases, affixes, etc.”

51 MBh II:2,11-13: *duṣṭaḥ śabdaḥ svarato varṇato vā mithyāprayukto na tam artham āha / sa vāgvajro yajamānaṃ hinasti yathendraśatruḥ svarato 'parādhāt // duṣṭān śabdān mā prayukṣmahity adhyeyaṃ vyākaraṇam /*. On this passage, see Joshi/Roodbergen 1986, 39-42.

52 BoBhVṛ D 'i 173a6/P Yi 218a3-4: *dbyaṅs sam yi ge ñams pa dañ ldan pa'i sñags kyis ni / ñams pas don mi 'grub ste¹ / ñag gi rdo rje des sgrub pa² po ñid ñams par byed do //*. ¹D ste: P te. ²D pa: P om. pa.

himself to the five fields of knowledge(/sciences). In order to defeat or to benefit others, or for the sake of his own liberating knowledge, he exerts himself to them.”⁵³ Whereas medicine and the arts-and-crafts are studied in order to benefit (*anugraha*) others, and the “internal science” in order to obtain salvation,⁵⁴ linguistic and logic are aimed at defeating (*nigraha*) others.⁵⁵ In his SAVBh, Sthiramati again alludes to the conceit characterizing the (non-Buddhist) opponents to be defeated:

A *bodhisattva* applies himself to the linguistic science (*śabdavidyā*). – Why so? – He applies himself [to it] in order to defeat the alldox teachers (*tīrthika*) who boast of knowing the treatise on logic (*hetuvidyāśāstra?*) and who boast of knowing the treatise on linguistics (*śabdavidyāśāstra?*).⁵⁶

Unfortunately, neither the MSA cycle nor the BoBh have anything else to teach concerning the (socio-) linguistic aspects of argumented speech and disputation. In particular, they do not inform us about the way in which the linguistic science, i.e., grammar, can enable a *bodhisattva* to secure victory in debate. However, the *Yogācārabhūmi* corpus contains one of the earliest extant Buddhist treatises dedicated to dialectic and eristic, the “Hetuvidyā Section.” Among the many properties ascribed to speech (*vāda*) in general, this early treatise mentions the “ornamentation of speech” (*vādālaṅkāra*), which “should be regarded as fivefold, viz. being cognizant of [both] one’s own and [one’s] opponent’s doctrinal tenets, being endowed with eloquence, being fearless, being firm and being gentle(/kind).”⁵⁷ As one could easily guess, eloquence (*vākkaraṇasampannatā*) plays a key role in one’s victory over an opponent. A little later, the treatise characterizes eloquence as the fact that

a certain [debater] expresses himself with [correct] speech (*śabda*) rather than with corrupt speech (*apaśabda*). – What is “[correct] speech”? – It must be known to have five qualities: It is not not rustic (*agrāmya*), it is eas[sil]y [understood], it is vigorous, it is coherent, and it has a good purpose. – In what sense is it not rustic? Inasmuch as it avoids the language(s) of wrong countries, wrong kingdoms and wrong nations.⁵⁸

This invitation not to resort to corrupt speech and the definition of linguistic correction in terms of social-geographical provenance are reminiscent of Patañjali’s famous delineation between correct speech and barbaric (*mleccha*) languages. Let it be recalled that, while justifying (the study of Sanskrit) grammar, Patañjali alluded to demons being defeated for having used corrupt forms. From this he concluded that

53 MSA 11.60: *vidyāsthāne pañcavidhe yogam akṛtvā sarvajñatvaṃ naiti kathañcit paramāryaḥ / ity anyeṣāṃ nigrahaṇānugrahaṇāya svājñārtham vā tatra karoty eva sa yogam //*.

54 The *adhyātmavidyā* is nothing but the word of the Buddha (*buddhavaçana*) according to the BoBh (BoBh_o 68,11 and 74,9/BoBh_w 96,17 and 105,10/BoBh_v 57,14 and 69,13), which divides itself into a “basket of the *bodhisattvas*” (*bodhisattvapīṭaka*) and a “basket of the hearers” (*śrāvakaṭīṭaka*), i.e., into compositions belonging to the “Great” and the “Lesser” vehicles (BoBh_o 68,1/BoBh_w 96,6-7/BoBh_v 57,2). To put it very briefly, let us say that the *adhyātmavidyā* consists in exegesis, dogmatics, and soteriology.

55 MSABh 70,14-18: *pañcavidhaṃ vidyāsthānam / adhyātmavidyā hetuvidyā śabdavidyā cikitsāvidyā śilpakarmasthānavidyā ca / tad yadarthaṃ bodhisattvena paryeṣitavyaṃ tad darśayati / sarvajñatvapraptyartham abhedena sarvam / bhedena punar hetuvidyāṃ śabdavidyāṃ ca paryeṣate nigrahārtham anyeṣāṃ tadanadhimuktānām / cikitsāvidyāṃ śilpakarmasthānavidyāṃ cānyeṣāṃ anugrahārtham tadarthikānām / adhyātmavidyāṃ svayam ājñārtham /*. “The fields of knowledge/disciplines amount to five: internal science, science of [logical] justifications, science of words/language, science of medicine, and science of arts and crafts. [In MSA 11.60, Maitreya] indicates why the *bodhisattva* must study [these five fields of knowledge/disciplines]: [He studies] all of them indistinctly in order to obtain omniscience; however, [taking them] separately, he studies the science of [logical] justifications and the science of words/language in order to defeat other [persons] who are not devoted to them(/it?); [he studies] the science of medicine and the science of arts-and-crafts in order to benefit other [persons] who are in need of them(/it); [finally, he studies] the internal science with a view to [obtaining] his own liberating knowledge.”

56 SAVBh D Mi 203a3/P Mi 224b2-3: *sgra rīg pa la byañ chub sems dpa’ brtson par byed do // ci’i phyir že na / mu stegs rgyu rīg pa’i gtsug lag śes par rlom pa dan sgra rīg pa’i gtsug lag śes par¹ rlom pa de dag tshar gcad par bya ba’i phyir brtson par byed do //*. ¹D par : P pas.

57 HV §4 (17*,2-4): *sa pañcavidho draṣṭavyaḥ / tadyathā svaparasamayajñatā vākkaraṇasampannatā vaiśāradyaṃ sthairyam dākṣiṇyaṃ ca /*

58 HV §4.2 (17*,13-18): *yathāpīṭikaityaḥ śabdena vaktā bhavati nāpaśabdaiḥ / śabdaḥ katamaḥ / sa pañcabhir guṇair yukto veditavyaḥ / agrāmyo bhavati laghur bhavaty ojasvī bhavati sambaddho bhavati svarthaś ca bhavati / katham agrāmyo bhavati / kudeśakurāṣṭrakujanapadabhāṣavarjanatayā /*

“a Brahmin should not speak a Barbaric language(/as a Barbarian), i.e., he should not use corrupt words; ‘Barbaric language’ is indeed equivalent with ‘corrupt speech’; therefore, one must study grammar so that we do not become Barbarians.”⁵⁹ That the *Yogācārabhūmi* does not refer explicitly to the Barbarian and his language raises no particular problem, for it mentions instead the vile countries, kingdoms and nations where corrupt speech predominates. In doing so, the *Yogācārabhūmi* again echos Patañjali, who defined the Āryāvarta—the country whose male Brahmin inhabitants serve as a behavioral and linguistic norm—as located “to the east of [the place where the Sarasvatī river] disappears, to the west of the Kālaka forest, to the south of the Himālaya, and to the north of the Vindhya [mountains].”⁶⁰ Patañjali added that

the Brahmins who inhabit this country of the Āryas [called Āryāvarta], who do not store more than one basket of corn, who are not greedy and have reached excellency in a [particular] science without any [external] motivation, these are [called] the *śiṣṭas* [i.e., morally, linguistically and eruditively learned persons].⁶¹

The Buddhist dialectician as he is depicted in the *Yogācārabhūmi* thus bears interesting affinities with the *śiṣṭa* of the Brahmanical grammatical and juridical traditions.

5 Conclusion

The texts examined above ascribe a threefold purpose to the study of (Sanskrit) grammar: authorizing a *bodhisattva*’s speech so that he does not become the target of the sarcasms of pseudo-experts; allowing him to preach the Buddhist Law in a conceptually precise and formally irreproachable language; cause him to possess the eloquence that enables him to defeat his opponents in debate. The intended sarcasms are of course those of the Brahmins; those who are appealed by a linguistically sophisticated speech are, again, the Brahmins; finally, those against whom the Buddhists are debating are the Brahmins for the most part. The Brahmins are thus involved in each of the justifications provided for the study of grammar and the use of correct forms of speech. This of course explains neither the sanskritization of Buddhist scriptures nor the composition of new works in Sanskrit, but gives us some clues as to the socio-linguistic agenda of certain segments of the Buddhist communities during the first centuries of the common era. This is perhaps not entirely surprising if we keep in mind that the (Mūla)sarvāstivādin monastic order from which these testimonies stem was apparently famous for its leading role in anti-Brahmanical polemics. In an interesting passage from the **Mahāvaitulyamahāsannipāta* (T. 397), the Buddha prophesizes that, after his *parinirvāṇa*,

there will be [...] disciples, who will receive, hold, read, recite and copy the twelve categories of the Tathāgata’s teachings. They will also read, recite, copy and speak about non-Buddhist texts, receive [the doctrine] concerning the existence of [the *dharmas*] of the three time periods [past, present and future] and of internal and external [*dharmas*]. They will refute heretics, be good at arguing, maintain that all kinds of beings are able to receive the precepts. They will be able to answer correctly all intricate questions. Therefore, they will be called the Sarvāstivādins.⁶²

In this perspective, one can easily understand that a perfect mastery of the language of the Brahmins was a prerequisite for those interested in understanding their scriptures, objecting to them and defending Buddhism or, at least, ideas and practices compatible with (Mūla)sarvāstivāda.

⁵⁹ MBh I:2,7-9: *brāhmaṇena na mlecchitavai nāpabhāṣitavai / mleccho ha vā eṣa yad apaśabdaḥ / mlecchā mā bhūmety adhyeṣaṃ vyākaraṇam* /. See also Joshi/Roodbergen 1986, 38, Joshi 1989, 268, and Tripathi 1986.

⁶⁰ MBh III:173,7-8 ad Pāṇini 6.3.109: *prāg ādarśāt pratyak kālakavanāt dakṣiṇena himavantam uttaraṇa pāriyātram* /. See also Deshpande 1994, 97.

⁶¹ MBh III:174,8-10 ad Pāṇini 6.3.109: *etasminn āryanivāse ye brāhmaṇāḥ kumbhīdhānyā alolupā aṅghyamānakāraṇāḥ kiñcid antareṇa kasyāścid vidyāyāḥ pāragās tatrābhavantaḥ śiṣṭāḥ* /. See also Deshpande 1994, 97.

⁶² T. 397, 159a17-21: 諸弟子受持如來十二部經，讀誦，書寫。而復讀誦，書，說外典，受有三世及以內外。破壞外道，善解論義，說一切性悉得受戒。凡所問難悉能答對。 Translation Karashima 2014, 138-139.

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