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Introduction

The first versions of the contributions collected in this volume were presented and discussed on the occasion of the Workshop “Diversity in the Vedic Lexicon and its role in reconstructing the most ancient Indo-Aryan language layers” within the framework of the 33rd South Asian Languages Analysis Roundtable (SALA 33) hosted by the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (15-17 May 2017). The topic proposed here is in line with a trend of research that has characterized the last three decades and focuses on the multiplicity of cultural matrices at the basis of the complex repertoire of Vedic texts.

The alleged homogeneity of Vedic culture and language has been explicitly questioned by a number of scholars, to quote only some recent milestones: Witzel (1987; 1997), Bronkhorst (1993; 1998; 2007), Pinault (2006), Parpola (2015). Albeit from different perspectives, they all identified at least two different cultural matrices in the ancient Indo-Aryan sources. The reconstruction of different waves of Indo-Aryan immigrants (Hoernle 1880; Grierson 1903; 1927; Parpola 1983; 2012; 2015) offers a plausible explanation of such perceived plurality, but it is far from being the only possible scenario. Reflections on the role of substrate/adstrate (e.g. by Lubotsky 2001; Thapar 2013) or on the diachronic and diatopic dynamics of linguistic and cultural changes (e.g. by Witzel 1989; 2011; Hock 2012), or, again, on the role played by prestige in a diglottic/polyglottic context (Houben 2012; 2018) also offer pertinent interpretative patterns.

Moreover, the relevant studies have been clearly disentangled from a purely Indo-European approach: the recent contributions to the history of the ancient Indian Sprachbund (Hock 1986) and the current research on the so-called South Asian linguistic area (e.g. Masica 2005 [1976]; Scharfe 2006) are no longer exclusively aimed at decoding the several steps in the assumed process of systematic divergence from a common ancestor, but also aim to recognize a process complementary to this, namely the tendency for languages gradually to converge with other languages in the area.

Within this succinctly sketched framework, the present project is specifically focused on the lexical analysis of Vedic sources. Such a methodological approach is somewhat marginal in the present scientific debate,¹ not only because it lies in an area of intersection between linguistics and philology, but also due to vestiges of a prejudice that sees lexical data as inherently unreliable in a strictly genealogical perspective. Still, if it is true that

¹ Even within the huge collection of material discussed by Witzel, to the best of our knowledge we have only a few examples of lexical analysis (see Witzel 1989: § 5.3, § 7.4).

“words travel fast”, it is undeniable that the roads along which they travel may give us crucial clues to interpreting the intricacies of (Vedic) language data. Together with the constant quest for fresh, new documents, a new approach to the already available data, in our opinion, might also lead to interesting results and increase our understanding of the central phenomena of Vedic language development.

A lexical approach is, moreover, justified by the specific modality of transmission and preservation of the Vedic sources and in particular by the process of canonisation to which they owe their actual form. The various steps of this century-long undertaking have still to be fully appreciated (see e.g. Witzel 1996; 1997; Proferes 2003). Nevertheless, one or more phases of intentional lexical and textual sifting must be postulated on the basis of the different recensions, as an effect of unitary drives and identitarian demands: against such a background some lexical facts become highly significant.

The contributions collected here confirm the variety of possible strategies and perspectives in this research area. An essential dimension of such a multidirectional investigation is to focus on the literary features of the most ancient Vedic texts (Jurewicz; Köhler). In such an approach, linguistic complexity is interpreted through the depth and expressiveness of the meanings analysed in terms of lexical and morphological polyvalence (above all, in nominal compounds) and, in a cognitive framework, in terms of creative use of metaphors, metonymies and blendings. The intriguing domain of onomatopoeic words and their non-linear semantization is also investigated by Rossi, in a case where the overlapping of substrate and adstrate contributes to understanding the nuances of semantic density. Köhler further highlights the potential and the limits of the literary approach, where poetry simultaneously enhances and blurs the purely lexical dimension, and thereby renders the identification of specific matrices or layers extremely sophisticated. Another element of this linguistic complexity is underlined by De Joseph’s analysis of the Paippalāda version of the *sūryāsūkta*, where the “floating mass of mantra materials” is analysed in a contrastive way, in a justified attempt to make sense of both the presence and absence of specific textual fragments.

Another pattern of inquiry chosen by contributors is that of focusing on various degrees of specialized lexicon which offer hints not only about specific types of content, but also about specific literary genres and clear-cut diastatic and diaphasic contexts. At the same time, they may also be of help in reappraising the role of some well-known labels such as the Śākḥā affiliation. The lexical research concerning the particle *ha* combined with several verbal forms presented by Amano – a further stage in the author’s work carried on over many years – shows how quantitative data can reveal unsuspected historical relations between the various Vedic recensions. This allows us to go beyond mere textual affiliation, and consequently to single out the traits of lexical innovation by means of scientific analytical processes. Pinault investigates the Dānastuti language with its wealth of hapax legomena in order to understand its relationship with both the use of neologisms and with the contemporary colloquial and vernacular layers of Vedic. In the analysis of the semantic constellation of a specific verb, i.e. *prati-grah-*, Candotti and Pontillo’s method consists in postulating meaning classes on the basis of the role played

by the actants of the relevant action, to capture the idiosyncrasies of the recorded forms of usage and their social and religious boundaries.

In conclusion, we see all of the pioneering, fine-tuned or consolidated paths of research trodden here as auspicious signs for the undertaking of further Vedic lexical challenges. In this spirit, we would like to thank all of the authors for the cooperation, generosity and patience they have shown in their engagement with this project.

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