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# Polysemy and cognitive linguistics. The case of *vána*[*]

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The aim of this paper is to address the problem of the polysemy of Sanskrit words using the example of the meanings of the word *vána* used in the *Ṛgveda* ("a tree, wood, forest, fire drill, vessel for Soma, water and material of the world"). I will show that the methodology of cognitive linguistics is very useful to analyse the rational background of polysemy and its conceptual consistency. The basis for my analysis is three assumptions accepted in cognitive linguistics: 1. the meaning of words reflects thinking about the designate; 2. thinking is motivated by experience and cultural beliefs; 3. the associations between semantic aspects of the word can be modelled as conceptual metonymy, conceptual metaphor and conceptual blending. On the basis of these assumptions, I will reconstruct the semantic structure of the word *vána*. It is a radial category, the centre of which is constituted by its most literal meaning, "tree", and its metonymic extensions, i.e. wood and forest. The meanings of things made of wood (i.e. fire drill and vessel) are also close to the central meaning and are metonymic extensions. The meanings of water and the material of the world are metaphoric extensions of the central meaning and more peripheral. They are based on cultural beliefs and models shared by the Ṛgvedic poets. I will also argue that the Ṛgvedic poets consciously shaped the semantics of the word *vána* by using it in contexts which forced the recipient to activate its less literal meanings. Thus they could create a general concept of the hiding place of desirable goods, such as fire, Soma, the sun, and the world.

**Keywords:** *Ṛgveda*, polysemy, conceptual metonymy, conceptual metaphor, abstract, general

## 1. Introductory remarks

In this paper, I would like to address the issue of how the Ṛgvedic poets created general concepts to express profound metaphysical ideas. The example considered will be the word *vána*, which, according to Grassmann (1872-1875), means "1. Wald, 2. Baum, Waldbaum, 3. Holz, Holzstück, 4. Wasser, Fluth". Grassmann also specifies that *vána* can

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mean fire drill and the vessel for juice of soma. Such a wide semantic range prompts us to ask how it is possible that so disparate designates can be referred to with one word.

It is impossible, it would seem, to answer this question given the scientistic and taxonomic definition of meaning, according to which the definition of meaning should refer "to elements of scientific rather than everyday knowledge". It attempts "to unambiguously identify the denotatum from a supraordinate class of denotata with the principles of logical classification" (Bartmiński 2009: 67). This definition is already accepted by Thieme (1957), who, in his review of Renou's translation of the ṚV, writes that the word has only one, strictly defined, meaning; all other meanings are seen in terms of "shadows" which transform the basic meaning in specific contexts.[1]

The scientistic and taxonomic definition of the word meaning is based on the classical theory of categorisation. According to this theory, category is defined as the set of necessary and sufficient conditions which an element should meet in order to be included as a member of a given category. It is difficult to find such a set in case of the concepts of tree and wood, fire-sticks, vessel for soma, and, finally, water, which are enumerated by Grassmann as the meanings of *vána*.

In case of such polysemic words, the cognitive definition of meaning is much more helpful. It is based on the prototypical theory of categorisation. Within the framework of this theory, categories do not reflect the world as it is, but the way people think about it. Categories are created on the basis of family resemblance[2] of their elements; some elements possess more common features, others less, and there are also cases when it is impossible to decide conclusively whether an element should be included in one category or another. The members of a category that possess the most features characteristic for it are called prototypical. Other members are usually added on the basis of resemblance to the prototype. They are also included on the basis of everyday human experience, and thus categories often reflect the whole topology of a scene which surrounds an object or the whole scenario of an activity.[3]

Similarly to categories, the meaning of a word reflects the way we think about the world. The aspects of meaning activated most frequently constitute its prototypical centre, while the aspects which are activated more rarely are on the peripheries of the word's semantic range. Thus understood, the meaning is a complex whole. Its elements are linked by associative links created in a rational way and possible to be reconstructed. Semantic reconstruction, then, should be performed on two levels: on the level of words and on the level of categories named by a word. It is the reconstruction of the polysemy of

[1] "A word is defined by its formal, grammatical features and those traits of usage that are common to all the contexts in which it appears. We must find out these features and traits by linguistic procedures of analysis that are, and must be applicable to any language which is yet fully or partly to be deciphered. […] The 'shadow' is a matter of the interpretation of the context. However essential a feature it may be in a given utterance – and doubtlessly is throughout of the ṚV – it does not change the nature of the object. The 'shadow' must be taken care of not by the translation, but by a commentary or a commenting paraphrase attached to it." (Thieme 1957: 55-56).

[2] It was Wittgenstein who first introduced this concept, his example being the game category; see Lakoff (1987: 16-17).

[3] For details see Lakoff (1987: 92 ff.).

words, which can name various elements of the category they refer to. A category can also be named by the set of synonyms. As will be shown, the reconstruction of the meaning of the word *vána* should also include both levels of investigation.

This understanding of meaning is accepted in the field of cognitive linguistics. Let me recall some basic assumption of this branch of linguistics. It investigates verbal and non-verbal signs seen as the expression of thought, and addresses the problem of how they become meaningful for us. George Lakoff developed this theory in the early 1980s.[4] Cognitive linguistics has now become a huge discipline encompassing a whole range of linguistic phenomena and human thinking, and their neural basis.

Cognitive linguistics investigates mental operations which link signs with thought. Three models of such operations are proposed here, namely, conceptual metonymy, metaphor and blending.[5] Human thought reflects itself in signs, and investigation of signs opens the way to it.

Conceptual metonymy is the way of thinking which occurs within one category. One aspect of it (called vehicle) gives access to another aspect, which is called the target domain. There is also a metonymy which links the whole category with its aspects. For example, there is a metonymy which operates within the category of container filled with a content. Metonymies are reversible, and such is the case with this metonymy. In the first case, the target domain is content, the vehicle is container. Thanks to this metonymy, we can meaningfully say *I have drunk a bottle* instead of *I have drunk the wine which was in a bottle*. In the second case, the target domain is container, the vehicle is content, and thanks to this metonymy we can be sure that we will be understood if we ask at the table *Pass me the salt, please* instead of *Pass me the salt cellar, please.*

Conceptual metaphor is a mental operation which operates between two categories. It enables thinking about one concept in terms of another. The concept in terms of which another concept is conceived is called the source domain, the concept which is conceived is called the target domain. For example, in the Indo-European languages, cognition is conceived in terms of seeing.[6] The concept of seeing is the source domain, the concept of cognition is the target domain. Similarly to conceptual metonymy, conceptual metaphor reflects itself in language, so that we can meaningfully say *I see what you mean* when we understand someone else's thought.

Finally, conceptual blending is a fusion of two or more concepts, called here mental spaces.[7] Its simplest form involves four mental spaces. Two of them, called input spaces, transfer part of their meaning to the third space, called the blend. The meaning of the blend is new in comparison to the meaning of the input spaces. A good example of a conceptual blend is the concept of an angel, which is the result of the fusion of two

[4] Lakoff & Johnson (1980).

[5] For conceptual metonymy and metaphor cf. Lakoff & Johnson (1980), Lakoff & Turner (1989). For conceptual metonymy cf. Panther & Radden (1999). For conceptual blending cf. Fauconnier & Turner (2003). For a general introduction to cognitive linguistics cf. Kövecses (2006), Geeraerts & Cuyckens (2007).

[6] Sweetser (1990).

[7] Mental spaces are defined as "very partial assemblies constructed as we think and talk for purposes of local understanding and action" (Fauconnier 2007).

input spaces: human being and bird. The input space of human being transfers the concepts of the human body and human cognitive and emotional abilities to the blend. The input space of bird transfers the concepts of wings and ability to fly. The input spaces have something in common, usually on a very general level. Those common features are called the generic space. In case of the angel it is a being which is able to perform self-movement.[8]

## 2. Reconstruction of meaning of the word *vána*

The most basic meanings of the word *vána* are "tree" and "forest". In many cases, it is difficult to state which meaning should be chosen by the recipient.[9] Let us consider the following example:

(1) *yáthā vā́to yáthā vánaṃ yáthā samudrá éjati* |
*evā́ tvā́ṃ daśamāsiya sahā́vehi jarā́yuṇā* || (5.78.8) [10]
"As the wind, as the forest, as the ocean stirs, so you in your tenth month – descend together with the afterbirth."[11]

Jamison & Brereton (2014) choose the meaning of "forest", but "tree" is also possible. This polysemy is motivated by the metonymic thinking PART FOR WHOLE/WHOLE FOR PART. The forest is conceptually treated as a whole and a tree is seen as a part of this whole. The forest can also be conceptualised as a container, then the metonymy CONTAINER FOR CONTENT/CONTENT FOR CONTAINER motivates the meaning: a tree is content of the forest. However, no matter how this metonymy is specifically interpreted, it is realised on the level of language in that one word *vána* can be used to denote both elements, i.e. tree and forest.

The next meaning of the word *vána* is "fire drill". This meaning is motivated by two conceptual metonymies. The first is WHOLE FOR PART/PART FOR WHOLE. Now, the whole is tree and its part is wood, of which the fire drill is made. The second metonymy is MATERIAL FOR PRODUCT/PRODUCT FOR MATERIAL: wood constitutes the material from which the fire drill is made. This polysemy of the word *vána* can be seen in the following example:

(2) *tápurjambho vána ā́ vā́tacodito yūthé ná sāhvā́ṁ áva vāti váṃsagaḥ* (1.58.5ab)
"With scorching fangs, spurred by the wind he gusts down upon the wood, like a victorious buffalo upon the herd."[12]

[8] The same blend exists in the Indian tradition with the fire altar built during the Agnicayana ritual, which is both a bird and a human being.

[9] All translations of the ṚV are by Jamison & Brereton (2014).

[10] Quotations from the ṚV: Holland & van Nooten (1994).

[11] The meaning of tree is clearer at ṚV 1.29.6, 7.103.21, 8.1.13, 8.35.7, 10.68.10. The meaning of forest is clearer at ṚV 7.1.19. Both meanings can be activated at ṚV 2.38.7, 6.39.5, 10.89.13, 10.23.4, 1.103.5, 10.28.8, 5.41.11.

[12] Cf. ṚV 1.67.1, 1.128.3, 2.1.1, 4.7.1, 5.1.5, 5.11.6, 8.60.15, 10.91.2. The meaning of the English wood ("forest", "piece of tree") is motivated by the same metonymies; however, the meaning "tree", basic for the meaning of vána, is not reflected there.

If the recipient interprets the meaning of *vā́ta* literally, as "wind", he will understand *vána* as tree or forest. However, he may interpret it metaphorically, as breath, then he will have to interpret the word *vána* as "fire drill". He may also interpret *vána* as "wood", which serves as the fuel of fire. It is worth noting that the ṚV attests a separate technical term for the fire drill (*aráṇī*). Fuel is also named with more technical terms (*idhmá* and *samídh*).[13] Hence, we can assume that when Ṛgvedic composers use the same word in reference to fire drill, to wood which fuels fire, and to trees and forests burnt by it, they wish to create a general meaning of the word *vána* as referring to the abode of fire.

The next meaning of *vána* is a wooden vessel into which the juice of soma was poured in order to create its final form ready to be drunk by gods and people. This meaning is also motivated by the metonymic thinking MATERIAL FOR PRODUCT/PRODUCT FOR MATERIAL. Example [3] describes the pouring of the somic juice into the wooden vessel:

(3) *agnír ná yó vána ā́ sṛjyámāno vṛ́thā pā́jāṃsi kṛṇute nadī́ṣu* (9.88.5b)
"He who, like Agni in the wood, is being set loose in the wood(en cup), he deploys his full dimensions in the rivers at will."[14]

However, I would argue that the Ṛgvedic poets wanted to create a more general concept here also. The word *sóma* means not only "the soma plant" and "the juice of soma plant", but can also mean thoughts that appear under the influence of the juice.[15] The polysemy of the word *sóma* is again motivated by metonymy. This is the metonymy CAUSE FOR EFFECT/EFFECT FOR CAUSE: the plant is cause of the juice, juice is cause of specific thinking. The coherence of the poet's thinking is strengthened by the fact that, in the ṚV, the head is conceived in terms of a vessel.[16] In the same way as in the case of fire drill and fuel, there are other words which denote specific vessels for soma.[17] It may be presumed, then, that in such contexts, the word *vána* receives the general meaning, now of the receptacle of soma, be it a vessel or a human's head. It should be noticed that in example 3 the poet also activates the general meaning of *vána* as the abode of fire, which I discussed above.

The analysis made thus far shows that the Ṛgvedic poets deliberately played with the polysemy of the word *vána*. They built the contexts in such a way that the recipient could activate more than one meaning of this word. The meanings are the result of various metonymic extensions and reflect the category of *vána*. It includes tree and everything which is connected with it, either naturally (wood, forest) or thanks to human activity (wood as fuel, fire drill, wooden vessel). The general character of the category of *vána* as the abode of fire and soma is strengthened by the fact that the Ṛgvedic poets aimed at the identification of fire and soma on the conceptual and linguistic level (attested in example 3; see also Jurewicz 2010: 149 ff.).

[13] Potdar (1953: 79-80).

[14] Cf. ṚV 2.14.9.

[15] Jurewicz (2010: 167, 172, 173, 194, 229, 239).

[16] Jurewicz (2010: 167, 172, 257, 260, 379, 400). This metaphor is reflected in cremation ritual, cf. ṚV 10.16.8, *Jaiminīya Brāhmana* 1.48.

[17] For example, *kóśa*, *kaláśa*, *camu*, *dróna*; cf. Potdar (1953).

There is one more meaning created by the Ṛgvedic poets in their descriptions of the appearance of fire and soma which is based on the polysemy of the word *vána*. Fire and soma are identified with the sun in the ṚV, as noted by Bergaigne (1878-83), Macdonell (1897) and Oldenberg (1894). Fire and soma are conceived in terms of bird in the ṚV, and the sun is conceived in the same way.[18] Let us consider the next example:

(4) *sī́dan váneṣu śakunó ná pátvā sómaḥ punānáḥ kaláśeṣu sáttā* (9.96.23cd)
"Sitting in the woods like a flying bird, Soma, being purified, has settled in the tubs."

The form *váneṣu* metonymically activates the concept of wooden vessels into which soma is poured. It is also possible that the recipient will think of the thoughts which appear under its influence. At the same time, the comparison of soma to a flying bird (*śakunó ná pátvā*) creates the image of a bird sitting on a tree. This is the source domain of the metaphor activated by the poet in order to convey the next meaning of example 4. Its target domain is the sun at its zenith situated on the top of *axis mundi* conceived in terms of a tree (see Jurewicz 2010).

The following stanza describes fire, and the poet activates the same source domain of a bird sitting on a tree:

(5) *táṃ vo víṃ ná druṣádaṃ devám ándhasa índum próthantam pravápantam arṇavám* |
*āsā́ váhniṃ ná śocíṣā virapśínam máhivrataṃ ná sarájantam ádhvanaḥ* || (10.115.3)
"Him (I invoke) for you – the god sitting on the wood like a bird in a tree, (like) the drop from the stalk in the wooden cup, snorting, shaving (the ground), undulating, the conveyor (of the oblations) with his mouth like a draft-horse, abundant with flame, like someone with a great commandment racing along the ways."

Jamison & Brereton (2014) insert the word "like" in brackets and thus lighten the identification of fire with the sun. Qualification of fire as *arṇavá* and *virapśín* activates the Ṛgvedic conceptualisation of the sun as the fiery container filled with soma. When the container reaches its zenith, soma flows down in the form of rain (Jurewicz 2010).

The aim of the play with the polysemy of the word *vána* is not only the beauty of the artistic exposition. It reveals the efforts of the Ṛgvedic poets to create a general concept which conveys philosophical meaning. As I have shown (in Jurewicz 2010), the Ṛgvedic poets saw fire and soma as the most important factors which create and sustain the cosmos, culture and man.[19] Created in ritual, fire and soma promise immortality to men. United in their solar form, they bring light and rain in the cosmos. Viewed from this perspective, the word *vána* becomes the general term for the hiding-place of the life-giving element seen as the condition of the world's creation and existence.

[18] Cf. ṚV 9.96.6, 23.

[19] Previously (Jurewicz 2010) I have discussed the structure of the cosmogony presented in the ṚV as based on the general scenario of the appearance of life-giving elements from their hiding-place. The hiding-places are conceived in terms of concepts which refer to experience (e.g. enemies of the Ṛgvedic poets, night, fire drill); they are also conceived in more abstract ways (e.g. water, *ámhas*; for the latter cf. Jurewicz 2013).

The next meaning of *vána* proposed by Grassmann is "water". In his explanation, he refers to ṚV 9.90.2:

(6) *vánā vásāno váruṇo ná síndhūn ví ratnadhā́ dayate vā́riyāṇi* (9.90.2cd).
"Clothing himself in the woods, like Varuṇa in the rivers, the conferrer of treasures distributes desirable things."

The context of the hemistich allows the recipient to understand that the expression *vánā vásāna* refers to the presence of the somic juice in wooden vessels. The phonetic resemblance between the roots *vas-* (*vaste*), "to wear" and *vas-* (*vasati*), "to dwell" strengthens this interpretation. However, the poet compares the presence of the juice in vessels to the presence of Varuṇa in rivers, which points to the conceptual closeness between vessel and water. Moreover, the expression *vánā vásāna* activates a much more frequent expression *apó vásāna* used in the descriptions of mixing soma with water:

(7) *apó vásānaḥ pári góbhir úttaraḥ sīdan váneṣu avyata* (9.107.18cd).
"Clothing himself in waters, he has wrapped himself with cows as the higher (oblation), sitting in the woods [/wooden cups]."

The expression *apó vásāna* is motivated by the conceptual metaphors. The first is conceptualisation of soma in terms of man, more specifically, of a king (SOMA IS A KING). The second metaphor triggers conceptualisation of the mixing of fluids in terms of the dressing of man (MIXING OF FLUIDS IS DRESSING SOMEONE[20]). The frequency of the expression *apó vásāna* strengthens the possibility that the recipient will think about waters on hearing the expression *vánā vásāna.*

I would argue that the possible meaning of *vána* as water is built on the conceptualisation of fire and soma as living beings and their appearance in terms of their birth from a womb.[21] In the following description of the pressing of soma, the wooden vessel is conceived in terms of a womb:

(8) *sahásradhāro asadan ní asmé mātúr upásthe vána ā́ ca sómaḥ* (9.89.1cd).[22]
"Having a thousand streams, he has taken his seat by us, in the lap of his mother, and in the wood: Soma."

The wooden vessel is filled with water with which soma is mixed. In the same way, the womb is filled with amniotic fluid. Two conceptual operations motivate this semantic extension of the word *vána*. The first is the metaphor WOODEN VESSEL IS WOMB. The second is the metonymy CONTAINER FOR CONTENT (WOMB FOR AMNIOTIC FLUID). The metaphorical conceptualisation of the wooden abode of fire in terms of water is attested in the abstract concept of Child of the Waters (*apā́m nápāt*; cf. ṚV 2.35, Jurewicz 2010: 201 ff.).

[20] Is it the same metaphor which motivates the English word *dressing* in reference to the salad sauce?

[21] Fire is referred to as the offspring of trees and waters: ṚV 1.70.3-4, 2.1.1.

[22] Cf. ṚV 9.62.8.

As has been stated above, the meaning of *vána* reflects the category of tree and everything connected with *tree*, including objects made from it. They are made by chopping or carving (*takṣ*-). In the following stanzas, the poet implies the conceptual link between *vána* and water, because he uses the verb *takṣ*- to describe transformations of water:

(9) *gaurī́r mimāya salilā́ni tákṣatī ékapadī dvipádī sā́ cátuṣpadī* |
*aṣṭā́padī návapadī babhūvúṣī sahásrākṣarā paramé víoman* || (1.164.41)
"The buffalo-cow [=Speech] has bellowed, fashioning oceans. One-footed and two-footed, she is four-footed, having become eight-footed and nine-footed: she has a thousand syllables in the highest heaven."

*tásyāḥ samudrā́ ádhi ví kṣaranti téna jīvanti pradíśaś cátasraḥ* |
*tátaḥ kṣaraty akṣáraṃ tád víśvam úpa jīvati* || (1.164.42)
"Seas flow everywhere from her: by that the four directions live, from that the syllable[23] flows, upon that does everything live."

The source domain of the metaphor created by the composer is the buffalo-cow which stamps in water. The target domain is creation of the world. Within the frame of this metaphor, Creator is conceived in terms of the buffalo-cow, and the material of the world is conceived in terms of water. However, the use of the verb *takṣ*- obviously activates the concept of tree or wood as the material of the world too. Such a metaphoric conceptualisation of the material of the world is explicitly expressed in the following stanza:

(10) *kíṃ svid vánaṃ ká u sá vṛkṣá āsa yáto dyā́vāpṛthivī́ niṣṭatakṣúḥ* |
*mánīṣiṇo mánasā pṛchátéd u tád yád adhyátiṣṭhad bhúvanāni dhārāyan* || (10.81.4)
"What was the wood? What was the tree? – out of which they fashioned heaven and earth. O you of inspired thought [=priests], in your thinking ask about that upon which he rested, giving support to living beings."[24]

It turns out then that in example 9, creation of the world is not only conceived in terms of transformation of water, but also in terms of chopping or carving of tree or wood. As mentioned in the introductory part of the paper, the conceptual operation which allows the recipient to activate several concepts is called conceptual blend. Here, the blend is activated via the expression *salilā́ni tákṣatī*. In the blend, the recipient is expected to conceive creative activity in terms of transformation of water and chopping of a tree/wood.

It is worth noting that the conceptual blending activated by the expression *salilā́ni tákṣatī* (example 9) is even more extensive, because the concept of chopping of a tree/wood is the source domain for other activities. The first of these are thinking and speaking:

(11) *sá vāṃ dhíyaṃ vājayántīm atakṣam* (1.109.1d)
"So I have fashioned for you a thought that seeks the prize."

[23] Literally: "not-flowing".

[24] Cf. ṚV 10.31.7: *kíṃ svid vánaṃ ká u sá vṛkṣá āsa yáto dyā́vāpṛthivī́ niṣṭatakṣúḥ* | *saṃtasthāné ajáre itáūtī áhāni pūrvī́r uṣáso jaranta* ||

(12) *aháṃ táṣṭeva vandhúram páry acāmi hṛdā́ matím* (10.119.5ab)
"Like an artisan a chariot-box, I bend the thought around with my heart."

Within the frames of the metaphors activated in examples 11 and 12, thinking under the influence of soma and poetic speech are conceived in terms of a chariot or its wooden part, and thinking and creation of hymns are conceived in terms of chopping. Thus, the recipient well versed in the ṚV, on hearing the expression *salilā́ni tákṣatī*, will also think of those target domains. His association is confirmed by other words used in the stanzas, namely, by the second part of the compounds ékapadī etc. (example ṚV 1.164.41) and by the word *akṣára*, which also means syllable and is thus interpreted by Jamison & Brereton (2014; example ṚV 1.164.42). It is also confirmed by the fact that, as I have already mentioned, head is conceived in terms of a vessel in the ṚV. Moreover, speech is also conceived in terms of water,[25] which makes the associative efforts of the recipient fully justified.

The next concept which is activated by the expression *salilā́ni tákṣatī* is burning, which is also conceived in terms of chopping:

(13) *ádha sma asya panayanti bhā́so vṛ́thā yát tákṣad anuyā́ti pṛthvī́m* (6.12.5)
"Then they marvel at his light when, carving (the trees) at will, he travels along the earth."[26]

If the recipient extends the conceptual blend created by example 9 to the concept of burning, he will identify the female buffalo with fire which burns not only wood but also water (as in the model of Child of the Waters, *apā́m nápāt*; see ṚV 2.35, Jurewicz 2010: 201 ff.). From the point of view of everyday experience, such an activity is impossible, but here the description refers to a reality which is absolutely free in its creative activity. The contradictory nature of this activity is expressed by the words *tátaḥ kṣarati akṣáraṃ*, which literally mean "from that what does not flow flows" (example 9, 1.164.42).

However, the recipient may find a coherence in the blend, if he understands *salilá* more specifically as the mud (in which buffaloes like to be) and activates the metaphor BURNING IS CHOPPING. Then, he may understand that the buffalo-cow dries the mud. This could activate the experience of the preparation of bricks, which in the later ritual of Agnicayana are used to build the fire altar, in terms of which the material of the future world could be conceived. However, I am not certain that this activation is already valid in the ṚV.

The meaning of the word *vána* as water is attested in ṚV 5.58.6, where the activity of the Maruts is described:

(14) *yát prā́yāsiṣṭa pṛ́ṣatībhir áśvair vīḷupavíbhir maruto ráthebhiḥ* |
*kṣódanta ā́po riṇaté vánāni ávosríyo vṛṣabháḥ krandatu dyaúḥ* || (5.58.6)

[25] Jurewicz (2010: 85 ff., 379).

[26] Cf. ṚV 1.127.3-4, 6.2.9. In ṚV 9.96.6 soma is called "axe of the trees" (*svádhitir vánānāṃ*) which again reflects a tendency to identify fire and soma. Here soma possesses an attribute of fire, namely burning, conceived in terms of chopping.

> "When you have driven forth with your dappled mares, your horses, with your chariots with their firm wheel-rims, o Maruts, the waters surge; the trees dissolve; let the ruddy bull, the Heaven, roar down."

Jamison & Brereton's translation ("the trees dissolve") is as strange in English as is the Sanskrit expression *riṇaté vánāni*, literally "the trees flow". Whatever this expression exactly means, it is rationally based on the conceptual link between *vána* and water discussed above. The Ṛgvedic category of *vána* also includes the concept of water as its periphery member, and this fact motivates such expressions.

Finally, let us analyse one more stanza which describes cosmogony with the use of the word *vána*:

(15) *váneṣu ví antárikṣaṃ tatāna vā́jam árvatsu páya usríyāsu* |
*hṛtsú krátuṃ váruṇo apsú agníṃ diví sū́ryam adadhāt sómam ádrau* || (5.85.2)
"He stretched out the midspace upon the trees, the prize of victory in the steeds, the milk in the ruddy (cows);
Varuṇa placed resolve in hearts, fire in waters, the sun in heaven, and soma on the stone."

The word *antárikṣa* (*váneṣu ví antárikṣaṃ tatāna*) is used in the ṚV to denote the space between the earth and the sky which is created in the first cosmogonic act. Its creation is then repeated every morning. According to the Ṛgvedic poets, this space is the most important life-giving factor: when there is no space, there is no life. Hence, the creation of space is creation of the world (Jurewicz 2010: 79 ff.).

The source domain of the metaphor which expresses creation of space is the making of a hole in a tree with the aid of an axe. The word *vána* refers to the place in which space appears. Its plural form is in accord with the general Ṛgvedic thinking about appearance of something in terms of its birth, where the female factor is conceived as multiple and the male offspring is one (attested in examples (3): *nadī́ṣu,* (4): *váneṣu,* (6): *vánā,* (7): *apó, váneṣu*). Moreover, the first hole in the first tree metonymically implies the whole activity of felling[27] and thus the making of space for living and cultivation. Creation of the world is conceived in terms of such expansion of space.

If we take into account that the ṚV presents a monistic vision of reality, we will see that the Ṛgvedic poets, with the aid of the simple concept of making a hole in a tree, are expressing very sophisticated metaphysics. Creation of the world is creation of space within the unmanifest reality. This implies that reality suspends its presence, we might say, in one place and for a moment, and thus creates a place for the future world. This way of understanding creation is close to the Lurian Cabala cosmogonies created more than three thousand years later than the ṚV. According to Luria, in order to create the world *ex nihilo*, God first had to create the void, in the act of *cimcum*[28] which suspended his presence. This void was then filled with the world. In the same way, the space created by Varuṇa will be filled with the Aryans who will finally create the cosmos. Here the word *vána* does not denote the material of the world, but reality in its creative

[27] The metonymy FIRST PHASE OF THE PROCESS FOR THE PROCESS.

[28] Scholem (1969 [1960]).

activity. The metaphoric conceptualisation of reality in terms of tree/wood agrees with the meaning of *vána* as the hiding-place of life-giving elements.

## 3. Conclusion

The foregoing cognitive analysis of the meaning of the word *vána* reveals the rational background of its semantic aspects, which at first glance seem to be random. Cognitive tools have allowed me to reconstruct the category of *vána*, which is tree and everything connected with it. It is worth noting that the poets create the category of *vána* consciously. They create linguistic expressions which are unusual and strange in order to trigger metonymic and metaphoric associations, often leading to conceptual blends. The human need for meaning forces the recipients to make mental efforts so that they can reconstruct the thinking reflected in the language and understand even contradictory expressions.

The cognitive approach also reveals connections between thought and language on one hand and the experience on the other. The experience is evoked by the poets, but transformed in such a way that its concepts can convey more abstract and general content. The word *vána* is not only polysemous, but also general and abstract in that it refers to the hiding-place of the life-giving elements of the cosmos, to its material, and finally to reality in its creative activity.

The meaning of the word *vána* is a radial category. The most literal and prototypical meaning is "tree" and is located in the centre of this category. The next meanings are motivated by conceptual metonymies. These are "forest" and "wood", which are also located close to the centre. The meaning "fuel" is the result of the anthropocentric categorisation of the world, which defines objects from the point of view of human needs. The wood becomes fuel when it is placed in a fire to keep it burning. The next meaning, "fire drill", is also motivated metonymically, but is located more peripherally. The meaning "wooden vessel" is again motivated metonymically, and I would locate it at a similar distance from the centre as the meaning "fire drill". The meanings "head" and "water" are motivated by metaphoric thinking and conceptual blends, and are activated only in specific contexts. I would include them within the semantic range of the word *vána* as its most peripheral meanings. They are not necessarily evoked for all recipients, but only those who are well versed in the ṚV. The meanings "the material of the world", "the hiding-place of the life-giving elements" and, finally "reality in its creative activity" are the result of a philosophical categorisation according to which fire and soma are aspects of one reality seen as the most important factor that creates and sustains the cosmos, culture and man.

The cognitive analysis allows us to see the coherence of thinking of the Ṛgvedic poets and their marvellous ability to express it. It also contributes to our knowledge of the most ancient Indo-Aryan language layers. The depth of thought and the appropriateness of terms expressing it betray a long intellectual tradition, much earlier than the ṚV. On this basis the Ṛgvedic poets were able to perform their intellectual task and further develop the skills inherited from their predecessors. In my opinion, there is no doubt that

this process was conscious, and its aim was to create abstract and general concepts and terms appropriate for presenting sophisticated philosophical theory. Without such efforts on the part of the Ṛgvedic poets, later achievements of the Indian philosophers, no matter how they differed from those presented in the ṚV, would not have been possible.

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