

# LINGUISTIC LIGHT FROM THREE LESSER STARS

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In linguistics, as in all walks of life, there is good evidence for Gilbert's division of practitioners into the types of "happy, undeserving A" and "wretched, meritorious B". Not that all those in the limelight are undeserving; but the overshadowed have often merited as much exposure. Perhaps we can make amends by gazing at three linguists whose lights were outshone either by blinding exponents who overtook them or by the persistent luminosity of a star which had failed to fade. Our three stars were not consistently excellent or even good; but they were stars at least of the second magnitude and not of the fifth or worse. Each has had a full-length book devoted to his life and thought.

Our three scholars span at least twelve hundred years and three continents. One, from India, is often lost to view in the unending radiance of Pāṇini; one, from renaissance Spain, is commonly seen—if seen at all—as mere input to the French Jansenist school of the Port Royal; and one, a nineteenth-century American, declined from his zenith just when the Swiss Saussure was in the ascendant. Two radicals and one establishment figure; one mystic and two hard heads. The life of the first is a mystery; of the second, contemporary reception was puzzlingly adverse; of the third, *stat magni nominis umbra*. In order of appearance our characters are: Bhartṛhari, Sanctius, and Whitney.

## I *Bhartṛhari*

Insensitivity to chronology in the ancient Indian mind prevents our dating with any accuracy even the greatest South-Asian linguist, Pāṇini. Was he of the fifth-century B.C., and so after Yāska, a more seminal grammarian than is often realised; or of the seventh, and so more understandably ignorant (as he is) of many probing questions on syntax and its categories? Was it a millennium—or half as much again—that ensued before there appeared on stage a most intriguing figure in the profession, Bhartṛhari? *His* date may be of the seventh century *after* Christ; I-Tsing's visit to India, in its closing decade, found him forty years

dead (Subramania Iyer 1969:2). But the indirect evidence, via a Tibetan translation, of citation of books 2 and 3 of his major treatise by Diñ-nāga (whose own life was from 480 to 540) argues for a mid-to-late fifth century floruit for Bhartṛhari. Pāṇini's brightness continued then; but Bhartṛhari contributed to his own comparative dimness. Apart from the problem of his possible identity with the philosophic epigrammatist poet of like name (and we may recall the similar poser about the two Patañjalis, or the philosopher and the oratorical politician who may be the same Antiphon in classical Athens), there remains his penchant for mystical metaphysics in his pursuit of the cognitive base of grammar. His major interpreter, Helārāja, does not see it so; but we are certainly faced with the Supreme Word (*Parā-Vāk*) or the Dissolution of the Universe (*Pralaya*) or the Eternal Reality (*Brahman*), when we are hoping to be told about the meaning of roots or whether the verb is syntactically central or where the author stands on grammatical categories. Yet his work contains deeper forays into pre-grammar than does Pāṇini's famous essay (for all its notational ingenuity and generative skill). We may grant deep-case theory (possibly) and the invention of zero in morphology (probably) to the older scholar; but if we prize good questions above answers, and the rough Salisbury plain of manoeuvres to the parade-ground of tight drill, Bhartṛhari has much to offer.

What did he write? Very likely a commentary on Patañjali (himself a commentator on Pāṇini); maybe a monograph (still lost) on the utterance as itself a root or cause of thought (if that is what *śabdadhātusamikṣā* means); possibly (Subramania Iyer, 1969:16-36, 79, remains uncertain) a commentary on books 1 and 2 of his own big treatise. But above all towers the "Sentence-Word Grammar" (*Vākyapadiya*, = "VP" below), composed of three books (*kāṇḍas*) of which the third (*Prakīrṇa*) is so large as to be virtually a separate study. The whole is in the form of just under two thousand maxims (*kārikās*). These are in verse (in the *anuṣṭubh* metre), but in complete sentences and not in a code. All is offered less as a consultable primer than as a vision of life (*darśanam*). Four major topics weave in and out of the three books: the difference between meaning which is fixed and meaning which is deduced; the distinction between lexemes and syntactic words; the combination, in items which occur, of the fact they are caused by (or cause) thought and the fact that they are

'naturally fit' channels of that causation; and finally the relation between the understanding of meaning and spiritual merit (*dharma*). This last conjunction sounds curious; yet one might say—and I had once a headmaster who did say—that “ $2 + 2 = 5$ ” is not a mistake but a lie. Yet Bhartṛhari does not confuse correct grammar with successful communication (Subramania Iyer 1969: 56 ff.). The individual books are labelled less easily: one might propose that the first *kāṇḍa* is about the embodiment of thought in speech; the second debated just where, in linguistic terms, ideas and formal elements have their co-extension; but the longer third (the *padakāṇḍa*) faces a crisis of the author's own making—on what terms can we handle the meaning (and use) of words? The solutions are interesting; for Bhartṛhari they can lead to philosophic liberation (*mokṣa*); but it is the problem which spotlights his best-known contribution to linguistic thought.

In the simplest formulation, Bhartṛhari saw the sentence (*vākya*) as the only real unit of meaning. Hence, his third book shows that for analysis (*apoddhāra*) he is ready to speculate on, even to regulate, the theoretically non-existent: even fiction has its structure (as one's semantic theory may embrace some other possible world, such as that of Oedipus or Mr. Pickwick). On what grounds did he deny 'reality' to the intuitively satisfying relation of, say, the word *magpie* to a recognizably sized, coloured, and situationally behaved bird? Well, let it be conceded that between a convenient upper grammatical limit of construction (the sentence) and a minimal demonstrable lowest unit (the morpheme) many languages—not all—operate with at least one intermediate unit. This is like a sort of carburettor where lexical and grammatical meaning are mixed, and above and below which the structural rules are fundamentally different. It then follows that this unit, conventionally named the “word”, may be assigned four different relationships to meaning:

- 1) The word carries meaning; the sentence combines both words and meanings, serially.

(This was the view of the Bhāṭṭa section of the Mīmāṃsā school of thought. Even more extreme is the attitude of the latest theory offered by Richard Hudson (1984), wherein the word is declared to be the highest constituent, barring combinations, of grammar.)

- 2) Meaning is conveyed by words when they are co-articulated in a well-formed sequence, the sentence. (This was the notion of

the rival Prābhākara schism of the same school; moreover, it seems to be what Gottlob Frege thought, at least in 1884, when he wrote “nur in Zusammenhang eines Satzes bedeuten die Wörter etwas” (1884: 73.)

- 3) The sentence conveys the meaning; the words in it are clues to that meaning and the contribution of each is calculable. (This chimes with a remark of Willard Quine’s: “the unit of communication is the sentence and not the word...we can say that knowing words is knowing how to work out the meaning of the sentence containing them!” It is a view sometimes ascribed to Wilhelm von Humboldt (cf. Hymes and Fought, 1975:1005, who cite Bloomfield’s 1912 judgement to that effect).)

But Bhartṛhari’s position is rather:

- 4) The sentence is indivisible (*eko’navayavaḥ śabdah*, equating sentence here with utterance) and alone has real meaning. Words are a convenient fiction (*asatya*)—just as Malinowski said “isolated words are figments” (1935:11; cf. Robins 1979: 139). Now it may be that Audumbarāyaṇa conceived this idea centuries earlier, as noted by Yāska in his *Nirukta*, 1.201 (cf. Brough 1952). But Bhartṛhari makes clear the guiding analogy: words are to sentences as phonological segments are to words, or as features are to segments, namely recognizably different bits (*VP* 1.73).

The Mimāṃsā group offer five, have really only two, arguments. First, that ‘ten-ness’ exists only when ten objects are placed together—a submission which is ambivalent, after all; secondly, that the first word in a sentence gives the whole meaning and the subsequent words progressively refine it (or, sometimes, a non-initial word is the key). Well, a semantic revision in processing is a psycholinguistic possibility: one recalls K. S. Lashley’s famous sentence “rapid [Jaitiŋ] with his uninjured hand saved from loss the contents of the capsized canoe”. Or the mind may jump back and forth, as at *Antony and Cleopatra* 3.8 where Shakespeare makes Scarus say “Yon nag of Egypt...the breeze (brize) upon her, like a cow in June, hoists sails, and flies”. The final flash of understanding, if it comes, is called *pratibhā* by Bhartṛhari (*VP* 2.119,145). But for him the whole sequence is essential. He meets head-on the obvious attack: his opponents will claim that a single word can be substituted *salva collocatione*. And indeed the

substitution may be required, as when in a religious ritual it is ordered that one sacrifice "with rice or some equivalent" (and another instrumental noun may be placed for *vrihibhir* with *yajeta*). Bhartṛhari's reply is that artificial stripping and naming of parts may occur, and the practical man may use the parts for a (ritual or other) non-grammatical purpose (Subramania Iyer 1969: 188 f., 192; *VP* 2.88); but in grammar the frame does *not* remain constant if a part-change is made. Notoriously, he denies that "fetch...from the wood" (*vanāt...āṇiyatām*) has any decidable meaning until the gap is filled; and if the filler is "magpie" (*pika-*) the sentence means one activity, if it is "tree" (*vṛkṣa-*) or "bear" (*ṛkṣa-*) the sentence means entirely another, down to details of means and movements.

Now from this judgement three interesting results flow. For one thing, individual items or events are less potent in grammar than fused sequences of items or events; and that is bad news for any syntactic theory based on a single nominal and its predication or on a single verb and its valency. It is good news for those faced with languages (like the contemporary idioms of north-west India) where unmistakably verbal complexes are regular and are formed of strings of (separate) semi-lexical, semi-aspectual items (cf. *VP* 3.42 ff.; Subramania Iyer 1969: 247). Secondly, to insert even a simple negative is to replace a whole sentence. In semantico-syntactic terms *I was not in Delhi* is no closer to *I was in Delhi* than is *they had taken me to Jaipur*—or even than *what a silly question!* We are used to languages (like Finnish) which change noun-case usage between e.g. *Mary is eating the apple* and *Mary is not eating the apple*, or those (like Irish) which employ different lexical verbs as between e.g. *John is happy* and *John is not happy*. But Bhartṛhari has already gone much further. Let us return to that point presently. Lastly, ellipsis is impossible. One can perhaps fail to enunciate the whole sentence; but then a recoverable omission as in *John is cooking* (*Devadatta pacati*) comes only from the situation and our knowledge about cookery. It is not a matter of grammar. "What", asks Bhartṛhari literally, "have we grammarians to do with traipsing round the real world for such knowledge?" (*kimasmākaṁ vastugatena vicāreṇa?*—cf. Subramania Iyer 1969: 403). So *in a given sentence*, verbs are either transitive or they are not: here *pacati* is plain intransitive.

To return to 'transformed' sentences. Bhartṛhari is obviously an opponent of any truth-conditional theory of meaning which

requires a calculus of the whole from the value of the parts, the view commonly associated with Frege, and essentially the base even of 'Montague (logical) semantics'. This pleases those who have found that formula useless when handling things like *Mary did not sing until midnight*, where the interaction of the negative with *until* implicates by convention the other not apparently reconstructable meaning *but then she did*—as also with Greek conjunction *prin* plus finite verb forms or Latin *antequam* with the aorist-perfect or the future perfect (cf. Woodcock 1959: 184-86). Furthermore, if *what a silly question!* is a perfectly likely alternant to *I was not in Delhi* (in a given situation), we have a fine basis for conversational implicatures of the most pragmatic sort. So Bhartṛhari demonstrates that *don't cry* may well have the form *the tiger eats any child who cries* (*rudantaṃ vyāghro bhakṣayati*), or *it is late* may surface as *look at the sun!* (*VP* 2.312,322; cf. Brough 1953: 172). We are already in the world of Austin, of Searle, and of Grice.

Besides, Bhartṛhari recognized the triple nature of a word, once artificially isolated (as it has positively to be, in a language phonically fused by sandhi): these are the syntactic item, the phonic sequence, and the lexeme (*VP* 1.59-61). He also knew (long before Bazell 1958: 8-10) that in an inflexional language morphological meaning is hard to locate—just where in *vṛkṣāṇām* is the genitive, and where the plural? (*VP* 2.167; cf. Subramania Iyer 1969: 226). Of course, he became involved in parochial matters, like the use of the term *sphoṭa*. Of course, he said strange things, as on case and number (Subramania Iyer 1969: 251 f.), or on spiritual grace (*dharma*) being attained by correct syntax. Of course, he missed a lot: the Indian love of the passive voice and of the non-finite verb. But what he noticed catches the attention of our contemporaries more and more. That notion of ellipsis being impossible, so that between English verbs like *faint* and like *put* no middle class (like *read* or *cook*) really exists—that not only is a challenge; it also suggests that we should turn our eyes upon another linguist who might be called 'the king of ellipsis'.

## II *Sanctius*

Ellipsis as an analytical device is respectable among linguists as long as it calls itself "recoverable deletion". Otherwise, it seems a deplorable licence to 'supply' whatever a theory lacks when face to

face with some frightful problem in a sentence of a natural language. J. R. Firth said so in 1956 (published at 1968: 123): "our grammatical analysis must not require us to supply missing words understood". But Sanctius did just that, and on a grand scale. Franciscus Sanctius Brocensis—or, in vernacular form, Francisco Sánchez de las Brozas, often called 'el Brocense'—and bearing in his portrait in the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid an uncanny resemblance to Mr. Omar Sharif—lived from 1523 to 1600 (or early 1601). A graduate of Valladolid and Salamanca, he was for twenty years (1573-1593) professor of Rhetoric in the latter university, and also professor of Greek by 1576 and after 1593 professor of Latin; never, despite three attempts, professor of Grammar. His origin was partly Semitic. He was outspoken, even turbulent (Padley 1976:97); he said of one adversary *tecum fustibus agendum erat, non ratione* (*M* 3.1). In middle life he attracted the hostility of the Holy Office. Why, we do not know, except that he was waspish towards established predecessors and not always deferential to those twin pillars of canonical doctrine, Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas. But then Spain—and Philip II—were at a pinnacle of nervous ambition and burning faith. Toledo, under the Grand Inquisitor, Don Fernando Niño de Guevara, was at its most pious, proud and pitiless. The year before Sanctius' major work, *El Greco*, at the height of his powers, finished *The Burial of the Count Orgaz*; the year after it, the Armada sailed against England. The Inquisition never liked linguists; and Sanctius died under house arrest (as did the Russian linguist Evgenij Dmitrievič Polivanov in 1938). That was in or just after November 1600; and he was refused an honourable funeral at the university he had known and served for over sixty years. But between 1925 and 1983 he has had two books and two substantial surveys devoted to him.

His major work is the *Minerva*, a rationalistic treatise on grammar. A first version of 1562 was superseded by the definitive edition of 1587. The subtitle (in 1562 *seu de Latinae linguae causis et elegantia*, in 1587 *seu de causis linguae Latinae*) deliberately recalls J. C. Scaliger's 1540 grammar, in thirteen books, of that latter name. Sanctius' avowed aim, as in his primer of 1576, is to provide a compendious teaching aid for students of Latin. In this he follows the tradition of Nebrija in the closing years of the fifteenth century. But the *Minerva* is the vehicle for a generalized theory as consistent (and ecumenical) as it is iconoclastic. For a

detailed critique of his work, his debts to Plato and Petrus Ramus and Scaliger, and the debts of the Port Royal theorists (in their Latin grammar of 1644) to him, one may profitably consult Bell (1925), García (1960), Padley (1976 and 1985), and especially Breva-Claramonte (whose decade-long studies come together in his 1983 monograph). Let us look at Sanctius' own contentions, perversely beginning with the negative ones.

He did not believe in extending grammar—certainly not to include the pragmatic—a very strong version of the “autonomia della linguistica”. The sentence “every triangle has three angles jointly equal to two right-angles” is, he says, of interest to a linguist only in its morphosyntax (García 1960:47). For him, “syntaxis est finis grammaticae” (*M* 1.2). The situational or the cognitive are not, for Sanctius, “la oración y sus partes” (as he translates Aristotle's *léxeōs méréē*). He might have echoed Bhartṛhari and cried “what have we linguists to do with traipsing round geometry classrooms?” He was averse to assigning situational meaning to noun-cases; ‘agent’ and ‘patient’ were anathema to him. Even a ‘by-Agent’ is rejected: so (*M* 3.4) *dabuntur a me pecuniae* is indeed derived, but not from (*ego*) *dabo pecunias*, rather from *dabo a me pecunias*, where *a me* is independent and original and means “a mi cuenta”. He cites Tacitus' *trepidabatur nihilominus a Caesare* (*Ann.* 11.33.1), “there was just as much alarm on Caesar's side.” Noun cases have no uniform meaning (cf. Percival 1975a: 243); the verb has no moods (*M* 1.13). Verb and noun have equal status, even if person is dictated by the verb (*M* 1.12). Interestingly, between noun and adjective case and number are shared, by concord; but gender is an intrinsic property of the noun—an argument revived, as a new way to separate ‘government’ from ‘concord’, by F. R. Palmer in his Penguin *Grammar* (1984:94). And that gender only exists as a mechanism to show interdependency (*M* 1.7; cf. Breva-Claramonte 1983: 107) is an insight at once accepted by the Port Royal.

On the positive side, for Sanctius as for Jackendoff and others today, pronouns (or some pronouns) are prior to their co-referential nouns, in an existential sense. If Sanctius says *ego* the reference is clear and unmarked; if he says *Franciscus*, it is either ambiguous or marked (Breva-Claramonte 1983: 101). But the startling suggestion, fragmented among many syntactic demonstrations, is that patterns are controlled by underlying (or, anyway, invisible) items (see also Breve-Claramonte 1980: 45 ff.).



Hence, ellipsis is not a convenience for a harassed analyst. It is a “necessary tool” (Padley 1985: 275), indeed it is the prime fact of grammar. Let us list the ‘proofs’.

The theory called ‘categorial grammar’ uses an operator/operand distinction: an adjective is that which counts as a noun if and only if a noun is combined with it (or operates upon it). An adverb needs a verb to form a verb-category. The sentence (which is true or false) and the entity (which is, at least for speaker and hearer, existent or non-existent) give the basic categories. (‘s’ and ‘n’—the notation varies according to theorist, Ajdukiewicz or Bar-Hillel or Cresswell or Montague). So ‘s/s’—a category needing a sentence to form a sentence—is perhaps a subordinate clause or a sentential adverb; ‘n/n’ is an adjective, a potential noun but with a noun-shaped hole in it. Now a sentence with a noun-(or nominal-) shaped hole in it (‘s/n’) must be a verbal predicate lacking its subject; but as ‘s’ is, when fleshed out, bulkier than ‘s/n’ (i.e. *John runs* is larger than *runs*), so ‘s/n’ should be bulkier than ‘s/n/n’ (a verbal predicate lacking an object-like component). Therefore it is false to see ‘s/n’ as canonically identifiable with a bare verb like *faints* or *runs* rather than with a VP like *hits Bill* or *wants money*. The latter type is arguably basic, and the *faints* type is somehow short of a surface component. And that is what Sanctius said. For him no verb is ‘intransitive’ in the common sense. For him, Bhartṛhari (who denies the middle sort of verb, like *reads*, *cooks*) does not go far enough: there is only *one* type, the ‘transitive’. If the transitive verb happens not to have its object with it, the latter has been ellipsed; it is there underneath. Maybe (as Percival suggests, 1975a: 243) Thomas Linacre supplied the notion of ellipsis; perhaps ‘explication de texte’ is Sanctius’ province of its use (so Chomsky 1968: 15 f.; but Vivian Salmon disagrees, 1969: 178); certainly the idea has been re-canvassed by Saksena in 1982. But Sanctius presses the concept hardest. To any verb the missing nominal can (and must) be given, even if we have to say *it iter* or *currit cursum*—using the “cognate” accusative as Latinists call it, or the “internal” accusative where the root is not identical, or (better) the “contained” accusative, to use Kenneth Quinn’s apt term. Or it could be an infinitive as in Hebrew or Greek (see Breva-Claramonte 1983: 170). Now once we have *currit (cursum)* we can derive (*cursus*) *curritur*, and the omissible noun may again vanish and provide the frequent but misnamed

“impersonal passive”. Again, if *iudico te* is really *iudico te iudicium*, while *uiuo* is *uiuo uitam* or *ardeo* is *ardeo ardorem*, then most surface sentences simply undergo a general rule by which one noun-phrase in the predicate is deleted. Sanctius invokes the switch of verbs like *utor* to having an accusative object; he moves from the optionally expressed subject in *cursus curritur* to *Deus pluit* (or rather *Deus pluit pluuium*, so that atmospheric verbs have all the nominals you could wish). In fact, what can now escape the entanglements of Sanctius’ “*doctrina supplendi*”?

The comparative ablative goes: *doctior omnibus* is for *doctior prae omnibus*; so does apposition: *Fabius dux* is really *Fabius ens dux* (*M* 4.79)—and of course we have not got the participle *ens* in classical Latin, for is it not always ellipsed? (Actually, Linacre trod this path in 1524, book 3; so did Priscian in part, *Inst* 18.1; or even Quintilian, *IO* 8.3 and 9.3—see Breva-Claramonte 1983: 168, 173.) The relative clause *qui currit* has an underlying nominal, as *qui homo currit*—an idea recurring in the very recent arguments about ‘NP gaps’ at that very point, but also confirmed in actual earlier Latin as when the *Sententia Minuciorum* of 117 B.C. declares *quem agrum eos uendere ... licet, is ager uectigal nei siet*. Cases of the noun have submerged prepositions; did Fillmore wonder, in the later 1960s, if anyone had said so before him? The genitive of value vanishes, because an ablative of price is always really there: *hoc magni (aeris pretio) aestimo!* A proper noun identifies; it cannot sort: hence *Roma est magna* must be short for *Roma est urbs magna*. We reach the brink of folly here; but the sheer consistency of Sanctius’ devotion to a reduction grammar (not unlike recent work of Zellig Harris—cf. especially Breva-Claramonte (1983: 168)—is worth an admiring look. He even uses expectancy—the obverse of recoverability—when he says (*M* 1.13) that by using a Latin imperfect or pluperfect “*suspensum habes auditoris animum, donec uerbum aliud adiungas, quo sensus absoluatur*”. His reasons may seem strained; but that is an acute observation on tense usage, just as his expected objects suddenly bloom—as he claims—in things like Horace’s *non expalluit hausitus* (*Epi* 1.3.10) or, more doubtfully, Propertius’ *lacrimas depluit* (2.20.8, although only ms. N reads *lacrimas* and only Scaliger conjectures *depluit*). But this is dizzying stuff even from a hard arguer; and perhaps we should pass to a much more sober figure.

### III *Whitney*

Little or nothing is obscure about the third star's life. William Dwight Whitney was born into the Massachusetts branch of that family in Northampton in 1827; he lived to 1894, although disabled by a rather severe heart condition from 1886 onwards. His father was a banker, and he himself served some years as a clerk; but then he developed a latent taste for natural science, especially botany and zoology: one piece of booty is a case of birds donated by him to the Peabody Museum in New Haven. He even joined ecological expeditions, in 1849 to Lake Superior and in 1873 to darkest Colorado. But once his brother Josiah, a distinguished geologist, had in 1847 given him a copy of the second edition of Bopp's Sanskrit grammar (a work which had a marginal part in prompting another scholar's major claim to fame, Verner's law), William's path of life was clear. He spent the years 1850-1853 in Europe, largely on Vedic studies. From 1853 he was professor at Yale; first of both Asian and western languages, and then (when Yale redesigned his duties and secured his remuneration in order to fight off a take-over bid by Harvard in 1869) he became a specialist in Sanskrit grammar, Vedic lore, and related linguistic studies. He lectured at the Smithsonian in 1864 on the principles of linguistic science (and published the talks three years later); he helped to promote the American Oriental Society and in 1869 to found the American Philological Association. In 1875 he produced his book on *The life and growth of language*, which (to cite just one reaction) Filipp Fjodorovič Fortunatov, then doyen of the linguists in Moscow, made recommended reading for all his students, largely because of its adroit linking of language and human society. Whitney's portrait in later years exudes benevolence; he had much to be benevolent about. He was eulogized in New England; in Europe, one neogrammarian (Leskien) called him "stimulating", another (Brugmann) wrote of him as of "ein Wegweiser, dessen Zuverlässigkeit ausser Frage stand" (Jankowsky, 1972:169 fn. 101, gives the reference and date, 1897). His own Sanskrit grammar of 1879, many times re-issued (most recently in the twelfth edition of 1972 from Harvard University Press), has never been surpassed for overall coverage, clarity of exposition, or soundness of judgement on obscure issues. So why are we weighing his worth now? Why are we wondering if, in linguistic conversations, his is a name to 'drop'—or a name to drop?

Roman Jakobson in 1971 gave an optimistic assessment of world opinion on Whitney's first declaration (1864, 1867) of the principles of linguistic science; but actually the world has shown a notable reserve on this score. Whitney is known as a player in the neogrammarian drama and is still an acknowledged master Sanskritist; beyond that, silence. Perhaps it is because he was pretty rough with his own rivals (see Lehmann 1966:420). This was reasonable, one may allow, when he caught Max Müller winning popular acclaim in England for essays which showed scant regard for precision in fact or theory, but rather what Whitney termed "a gush of genial assertion" (1874: 63). Yet that feud simmered for a quarter of a century; and in one boiling moment Whitney remarked that his adversary was "disingenuous" and "dishonest", was guilty of "scurrility" and "insolence", and was ready to "advertise his inability to meet me in any fair and manly way" (Silverstein 1971:110 f.). In fact, Whitney was a great polemicist, and his ire fell most notably (and, for his reputation, most unwisely) on the Hindu grammarians, as he called them.

Allen's little book (1953) on phonetics as described in ancient India cites Whitney's comments nine times, and only once is the American sympathetic to the Indian scholars (1953:49)—and trustworthy. For the rest, he is wrong (35, 50, 56) or misleading (85) or just scornful, and to Germans as well as Indians (3). Bhartṛhari is quite ignored. As to Pāṇini, for Whitney he is "highly artful" and shows a "perverse and wasted ingenuity" (1884:280); indeed, Pāṇini and his school are said to have invented an artificial language out of their own imagination (1884, 1893)—a judgement which Rocher (1975:6f.) mildly calls an "overstatement" and Staal (1972:140) regards as a sheer "mis-interpretation" of what Pāṇini was about. Hence Whitney's benevolence has seemed complacency to many, if not arrogance. One accepts that the list of roots (*dhātupatha*) supplied by Pāṇini is composed of about nine hundred which are extant and about eleven hundred which do not turn up in our texts, and that his rules sometimes generate forms which never surface (cf. Whitney 1893: 192 for a good example); but the predictive strength of the grammar is simply excessive. Whitney failed (cf. 1893: 171) to see the 'deep' nature of Pāṇini's case-theory (the *kāraka* theory), and the novel use of zero in derivations. Of the six accepted classes of compound noun or adjective Whitney approves of four and

rejects two; yet the types *twostep* (*dvigu*), and *upstream, overhead* (*avyayibhāva*), are as clearcut in Sanskrit as in English. More revealing is Whitney's inability to see why the ten present-stem classes into which Sanskrit verbs are divided are ordered as they are (1884:297). It is true that thematics are numbered 1, 4, 6 and 10 and athematics 2, 3, 5, 7, 8 and 9; and also that classes 5 and 8 belong together in origin. But it goes too far to say (as he does) that they might as well have been drawn out of a hat. Five years earlier Saussure, in his famous *Mémoire* of December 1878, had used the embryo laryngeal theory to link the nasal infix classes 5, 7, 8 and 9—and the surface appearance can justify that ordering. Besides, class 10 is reasonably placed last, as of doubtful independence, being largely causative; so Whitney himself judges (1879:607, 775). Add the fairly obvious circumstances that (1) classes 1-4 are of stems whose accent is, or starts, on the root and classes 5-10 of stems whose accent is, or starts, on the stem-making affix, and (2) within those subdivisions stems with affixes come after stems without, and—after Whitney's thunders have died away—the only fault in a highly systematic native arrangement is that classes 5 and 6 are the wrong way round. Yet Whitney is correct to observe that Pāṇini's rules replaced natural language creativity, that a grammarian's statement is without authority until tested against the data (a very Firthian maxim), and that Pāṇini forgot to legislate for some known and used forms (1893:181). It is not so much that here not many of Whitney's arrows hit the target, but rather that many arrows did not hit the target.

Very well; behind the complacency and the absence of appreciation of the worth of the ideas of others, what was there? Any real contribution to language study? At least he declares that “the grammar and the laws of interpretation must be so construed as to yield good and acceptable forms” (1884:280)—which is awfully like Chomsky's phraseology in his Pisa lectures, you know. And both scholars like to bring in mathematics. It is refreshing—and was so to the more rigorous diachronists of the closing years of last century, after Humboldt's idealistic slant and Schleicher's frighteningly creative Indo-Europeanism, and after Bhartṛhari's invented and Sanctius' Latin examples—to hear a call for analysis of real texts with workable rules. Whitney valued the social dimension of language and its history. He saw, in that connexion, “that the English of no two individuals among us is precisely the

same", but that changes in it are the work of the community (and that they follow the working-out of tendencies—a sort of 'drift'—and not intentional movements but if anything rather a lessening of attention to exact forms). So Whitney is with Labov rather than Lightfoot on language change; and he saw a 'pernicious error' in the equating of language with thought.

If we put it all positively, we get quite a tally of novelties. The concept of analogy—in its modern sense, even when the term "false analogy" was employed—came to (e.g.) Leskien from Whitney (1867: 389). Saussure's "arbitrariness of the linguistic sign" is arguably Whitney's before him (and Davies 1975: 632 fn. 42—quoting Coseriu—and Koerner 1975: 799 have argued just so). The remark about many 'Englishes' foreshadows the distinguishing of *parole* from *langue* (which latter Whitney called "the average rather than the sum"). Godel 1966 is relevant on these matters. Whitney has been seen as a precursor of Boas and Sapir in language typology (Davies 1975: 655). The concept of variation not by exceptions but by uneven diffusion, so fashionable today, is there in Whitney's last paper (1894). So, you see, he did contribute a great deal.

Curiously, it was Saussure, the star whose growing radiance eclipsed Whitney, who gives us the best cue to assessing the American. At Whitney's death the neogrammarians of Germany were as keen to laud his memory as the patriotic academics of New England; had he not outfought the neoDarwinists and their pseudo-naturalist creed? Saussure had, as a teenager, been one of the Leipzig circle of Indo-European historical realists; and fittingly he was requested to despatch to Philadelphia a eulogy of the departed scholar. He never sent it. Two decades later, after his own death, among Saussure's papers was discovered a seventy-page, scrappy, much-corrected draft (cf. Koerner 1975: 796; also the introduction to Silverstein 1971). He believed Whitney to be not a comparative philologist so much as 'one who deduced a higher, general, view therefrom'. But in the end he could not stomach the American's complacent certainty that factual evidence will itself infallibly lead to the light, or that even data are themselves other than mostly opaque, or that free speculative play of mind (which Saussure himself undoubtedly had, as had Bhartṛhari and Sanctius) does not deserve support and sympathy. He finally said that he had discovered, by attempting to praise Whitney, that he himself was not in tune with any such firm

attitude, "pas plus avec la doctrine raisonnable de Whitney qu'avec les doctrines déraisonnables qu'il a victorieusement (combattues)". So rigour may become rigidity, if one is not careful; and what a scholar misses may be more noticed than the things he sees and hands on to posterity. A sad thought.

Perhaps it would have been better to devote this third vignette to another inadequately honoured linguist: perhaps (going back in time) Johan Nicolai Madvig, a classical editor whose grasp of linguistics is astonishingly modern and, like Whitney's, anti-naturalist. Or one might have tried to assess a more recent scholar (say that rather bewildering figure Gustave Guillaume). But Whitney's is a star that did shine, quite blindingly; and his glory and occlusion alike are worth our pondering.

For *envoi*, therefore, let us be content with a couplet, in the triṣṭubh metre, which may serve as a warning to us all and an epitaph for our three heroes:

anantapāram kila śabdaśāstram  
svalpaṁ tathāyurbahavaśca vighnaḥ.

Boundless indeed is the science of language;  
but life is short, and obstacles are rife.

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