

# Three more subjecthood features in Pāṇini's tradition

*Artemij Keidan, Sapienza University of Rome*  
artemij.keidan@uniroma1.it

# Pāṇini and his school

- Pāṇini, around 500 BC (date uncertain)
- Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī*: most influential grammar in Ancient India
  - powerful, anticipating and refined
  - dealing with Sanskrit (mostly morphology)
  - descriptive but also prescriptive and contrastive

# Pāṇini and his school

- Dealing with the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* we must consider three languages:
  - **object** language = Sanskrit (perhaps Late Vedic)
  - **description** language = special algebraic code
  - **audience's** language = mother tongue of the grammar's users
    - ...perhaps a Middle Indo-Aryan variety

# Pāṇini and his school

- Is object language **unnatural Sanskrit**?
  - some call it **grammarians' Sanskrit**
- Did the audience speak Sanskrit?
  - only as L2 (whence the grammar is needed)
  - their mother tongue is visible **contrastively** in the grammar and in the **examples**

# Pāṇini and his school

- Commentators of the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*
  - **Kātyāyana** (III c. BC): *varttikas* ‘glosses’
  - **Patañjali** (II c. BC): *bhāṣyas* ‘explanations’
  - Kātyāyana + Patañjali form the *Mahābhāṣya*
- Later commentators to *Aṣṭādhyāyī* or *Mahābhāṣya*
  - most important: **Bhartrhari** (V c. AD)

# Subject in Sanskrit

- Sanskrit, as many ancient IE languages, had a subject with just a few features
- Common opinion on Pāṇini's grammar:
  - there is no subject here
    - ...because it had *kāraṅkas* 'semantic roles'
    - ...because subject is not very pivotal in Sanskrit

# Subject in Sanskrit

- J. S. Speijer, *Sanskrit Syntax*, 1886
  - «Vernacular grammar has no term to name the subject of the sentence or grammatical subject»
- G. Cardona, “Pāṇini’s kārakas: agency, animation, and identity”, *J. Ind. Phil.*, 1974
  - «Pāṇini’s grammar is characterized by an important absence: the notion of grammatical subject is absent»

# but

- Scholars do not always understand Pāṇini
  - no semantic roles in the West until Fillmore
- No good definition of subject was at hand
  - Speijer refers to the loose “subject” of the grammar school
  - Cardona refers to Chomsky’s “external argument”



# My suggestion

- Let's seek for Keenan's features in:
  - the grammatical rules of the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*
  - the commentators' innovations
  - the linguistic examples discussed by them
- Let's consider the **audience's** language, rather than **Sanskrit**

# Pāṇini's syntax

- Semantic roles vs. morphological forms
- Semantic roles (*kāraṅga*):
  - *apādāna* 'source'
  - *sampradāna* 'goal'
  - *adhikaraṅga* 'locus'
  - *karaṅga* 'instrument'
  - *karman* 'patient'
  - *karṭṛ* 'agent'

# Pāṇini's syntax

- *Kāraḥas* are explicitly defined in six **definitional sūtras**
  - etymology of *kāraḥa* terms plays no role
  - definitions are semantic, but more abstract and explicit

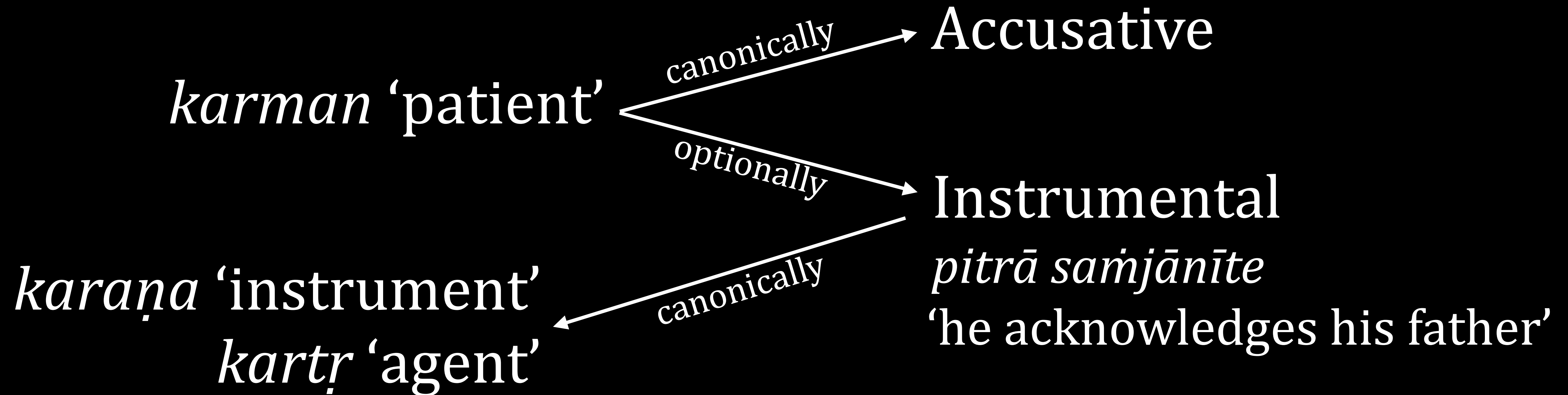
# Pāṇini's syntax

- Morphological realisations of *kāra*kas:
  - finite **verbal endings**
  - **case endings**
- The two options are mutually exclusive
  - no idea of agreement (in Pāṇini)

# Pāṇini's syntax

- Considering the case-forms expression of *kāraḥ*
  - no one-to-one relation, in both ways
  - case-forms are semantically blind
  - one canonical realisation + some optional ones

# Pāṇini's syntax



# Pāṇini's syntax

- Let's consider *kartṛ* 'agent'
  - etymologically 'the doer', but this is ignored
  - no semantic specialization: **macrorole?**
  - *svatantra* 'independent'
- Canonically expressed by the Instrumental

# Pāṇini's syntax

- Additional *sūtras* where *kāraka* roles are amended
  - amendments less elegant than the definitions
  - based on the confusion between cases and roles
- Most scholars consider them together with definitions
  - resulting categories are odd



# Excursus 1: example of a *kāraṅka* amendment

- semantic role named *karaṅa* ‘instrument’ is defined as “the most effective means”
- its canonical case-form realisation is the Instrumental
- with the verb *div* ‘to play dice’ the instrument is coded with the Accusative
- here the “most effective means” corresponds to *karman* ‘patient’
- therefore, *karman* is patient + whatever goes in Accusative

# Pāṇini's syntax

- Considering *kāraka* definitions only
  - is more consistent
  - avoids postulating mixed categories
- Good evidence that the amendments are spurious
  - let's ignore them

# Pāṇini's syntax

a. *pacaty odanaṃ Devadattaḥ*  
cook:3sg.ACT rice:ACC D.:NOM  
*KARTR̥ KARMAN {NO KĀRAKA}*  
'Devadatta is cooking rice'

b. *odanaḥ pacyate Devadattena*  
rice:NOM cook:PASS:3sg.MID D.:INSTR  
*{NO KĀRAKA} KARMAN KARTR̥*  
'Rice is being cooked by Devadatta'

# Pāṇini's syntax

- This example is inferable from the grammar
  - we can consider it “pāṇinian”
- No preference for either active or passive voice
  - both constructions are equally likely
  - *vivakṣā* ‘communicative intention’ is the guiding principle here

# Pāṇini's syntax

- a. *asinā chinatti devadattaḥ*  
axe:INSTR cut:3sg.ACT D.:NOM  
*KARANA KARTR*  
'Devadatta is cutting [stuff] with an axe'
- b. *asiś chinatti*  
axe:NOM cut:3sg.ACT  
{NO KĀRAKA} *KARTR*  
'The axe cuts [by itself]'

# Pāṇini's syntax

- This example is added by Patañjali
  - let's consider it “post-pāṇinian”
- Unmarked actancy derivation
  - derived construction is less likely
  - *vivakṣā* ‘communicative intention’ is still relevant

# Is *kartṛ* a subject?

- Modern scholars have considered *kāra*kas to be
  - equivalent to cases (Whitney)
  - equivalent to semantic roles (after Fillmore)
  - some “syntacto-semantic” categories (Cardona)

# Is *kartṛ* a subject?

- Commentators: every *kāraka* can “become *kartṛ*”
  - literally: every semantic role can become **agent**
  - better interpretation: every semantic role can be raised to the **subject** position
- Therefore, *kartṛ* is the **target** of topicality-driven transformations



# Is *kartṛ* a subject?

- Another consequence: *kartṛ* is always present
  - always expressed, either by a case-form or by a finite verb termination
- Therefore, *kartṛ* is an **obligatory** argument
  - this is another subjecthood feature

# Excursus 2: middle terminations

- Active terminations express the *kartṛ*
- Middle terminations express the *karman*
- But in non-passive verbs middle terminations express *kartṛ* instead
  - *karmavat kartṛ* ‘patient-like agent’
  - this saves the obligatoriness of *kartṛ*

# Conclusions

- *Kartṛ* has at least three subjecthood features:
  - semantically non specific (macrorole?)
  - obligatorily present in every sentence
  - target of topic-driven transformations
- Should we conclude that *kartṛ* is subject?

# Conclusions

- *Karṭṛ* **is** subject in case we consider:
  - post-pāṇinian evolution of the grammar
  - definitions without amendments
  - audience's language, rather than object language
  - example sentences, besides grammatical rules

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