

Three more subjecthood features in Pāṇini's tradition

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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

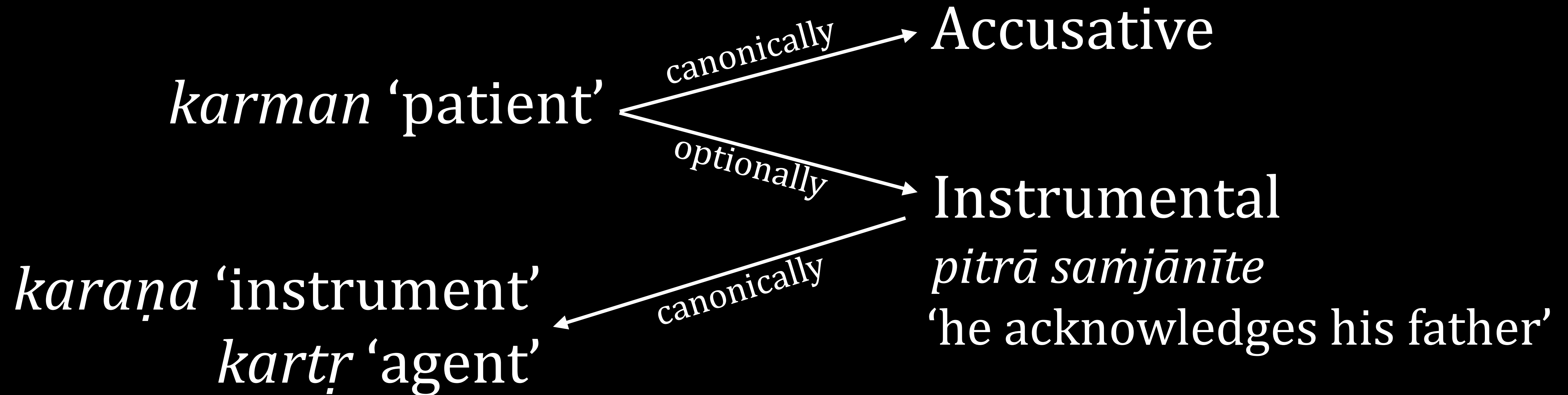
Pāṇini's syntax

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

Conclusions

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