

# Pāṇini, Variation, and Orthoepic Diaskeuasis

Paul Kiparsky  
Stanford University

Is Pāṇini’s grammar prescriptive or descriptive, or perhaps both at the same time? The answer determines, among many other things, how we should render *vā* and *vibhāṣā* in his optional rules. If the grammar is prescriptive, these terms can mean “preferably” and “marginally”. If it is purely descriptive, then only “frequently” and “rarely” are appropriate translations. In *Pāṇini as a Variationist* (henceforth *PV*) I suggested that both translations are equally valid, on the grounds that the Aṣṭādhyāyī is at the same time a faithful record of the usage of a community of *śiṣṭas*, and part of a project to canonize that usage as correct, meant to be binding on all users of the language. Devasthali (1983), however, objected that the idea of “better” or “worse” usage is “foreign to the ancient Sanskrit grammatical works and grammarians”, because they do not deal with incorrect *apaśabdās*, only with *sādhuśabdās* — the correct words of the divine language. Recently Scharfe (2009: 46) has given an interesting twist to Devasthali’s point that makes it even sharper. He notes that Pāṇini’s disfavored (*vibhāṣā*) options include some attested Vedic usages, which are necessarily *sādhu* in virtue of the very fact that they occur in the sacred texts. He concludes that *vā* and *vibhāṣā* are better interpreted just in a statistical sense: “it is therefore preferable to speak of more commonly or rarely used forms without passing a value judgment on them”.

The argument is cogent only as long as we concede its presupposition. I would like to challenge it. The ideology of the eternal immutable Vedas is itself not fixed. It must be relativized to a particular period, which began some time *after* the various redactions of the Vedic texts were consolidated and normalized. This process certainly did not happen overnight, nor could it have been a one-man job. It was the result of systematic editorial efforts by many generations of scholars. These scholars’ editorial activity — the *orthoepic diaskeuasis* to which Bronkhorst (1981) devoted an illuminating study — would necessarily have involved making judgments of relative grammatical acceptability. They were the only available principled grounds for choosing among variant readings in a text. The modern historicist perspective on restoring original texts did not exist in the tradition. Sanskrit scholars did not even think of Vedic as a precursor of the classical language, so *a fortiori* they would not have dreamed of differentiating between older and more recent forms of the Vedic language.<sup>1</sup> They surely had the notion of a corrupt vs. authentic reading in a Vedic text, but lacking philological methods they must have selected among variants on the basis of their synchronic judgments of relative grammaticality. This meant exercising precisely the kinds of preferences and dispreferences that P marks with *vā* and *vibhāṣā*. Later, as Scharfe and Devasthali rightly note, these became unthinkable, and the grammatical intuitions on which they are based were in any case no longer available, which is why the original purport of *vā* and *vibhāṣā* was erased from the tradition.

---

<sup>1</sup>In Bronkhorst’s words (1982), “it is not correct to ascribe an awareness of linguistic development to the ancient Indian grammarians.”

There are good reasons to believe that the development of Sanskrit grammar culminating in the Aṣṭādhyāyī took place during the period in which this editorial activity was in progress, and that there was interaction and even overlap between the two scholarly communities. This can be concluded from the similarities between the grammarians’ phonological rules and those of the Prātiśākhya, from the fact that some of the grammarians that Pāṇini cites (such as Śākalya), and some grammarians that followed him (such as Kātyāyana) also played a role in fixing the Vedic canon. If the Prātiśākhya use a different descriptive technique, it is because they serve a different purpose, not because they are remnants of some pre-scientific empiricist stage of the grammatical tradition. They are a concurrent but not wholly independent strand of development. It follows from these considerations that Pāṇini himself must have been familiar with the idea of relatively preferred and relatively dispreferred expressions, both in secular usage and in the Vedic domain. This much already implies that the notion of “better” or “worse” usage *cannot* have been entirely “foreign to the ancient Sanskrit grammatical works and grammarians”. As Bronkhorst (1982) notes, against that background the translations ‘preferably’ and ‘marginally’ are most natural.

In fact, these considerations go further than just allaying the doubts that Devasthali and Scharfe have expressed. The period of editorial activity into which the construction of the Aṣṭādhyāyī falls provides a context for, and indeed *explains*, the extraordinary attention it gives to grammatical options, and its concern for adjudicating between them, not only in ordinary language, but even in the Vedic rules of the grammar.

When I read Caland’s preface to his edition of the Kāṇva recension of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (1926), referred to henceforth as C, with its listing of the many differences between the Kāṇva (K) and Mādhyam̐dina (M) recensions, I was immediately reminded of the points of usage addressed by Pāṇini’s optional rules. It is as though the editorial decisions that divided these recensions come from the same milieu as the Aṣṭādhyāyī. A closer look at the material shows that K tends to agree more with Pāṇini’s usage than M does. A preliminary collation of this material with Pāṇini’s grammar leads to three specific mutually supporting conclusions. (1) When one of the recensions has a downright un-Pāṇinian expression, it is usually M, with K having the Pāṇinian one. (2) When one version uses an option that Pāṇini characterizes as Vedic by restricting his rule to *chandasi* or *mantra*, it is nearly always M, with K using the one sanctioned by Pāṇini for general usage. (3) When one of the recensions agrees with Pāṇini’s dispreferred (*vibhāṣā*) option, it is usually M, with K having the preferred (*vā*) option. It is not a matter of relative antiquity of the recensions: as Caland (p. 85) notes, the older variant is sometimes found in K, sometimes in M. The language of K is just closer overall to that of Pāṇini. How should this finding be interpreted? It is well established that Pāṇini himself did not know of the White Yajurveda tradition. And Pāṇini’s grammar was in any case not mechanically imposed on K, for there are many cases where *both* recensions diverge from the Aṣṭādhyāyī. At least one possible conclusion we are left with is that the K recension was compiled in an area whose dialect shared significant features with that of Pāṇini, by editors who were familiar with the grammatical tradition, but worked independently of Pāṇini’s grammar.

Another small clue to the special connection between the K recension and the grammatical tradition is K’s use of nominal inflection of 3.Sg. present forms in Abl. *rasayateḥ*, *vakteḥ*, where M instead has *vacas*, *rasa* (at BĀU 4.3.23 ff.). The hypostasizing of 3.Sg. verbs as nouns probably originates as a technical device of grammarians and ritualists (as in Pāṇinian rules like 6.1.108 *nityaṃ karoteḥ*). This usage was presumably put into the K text by the scholars who edited it.

A relation between the K recension and the grammarians would have several interesting implications. If Pāṇini’s preferences tend to agree with a particular textual tradition, then they were not just idiosyncratic, they were shared by a community of other speakers. The fact that they are

not consistently imposed on the text suggests that the editorial decisions were based on linguistic intuitions and not on the implementation of grammatical rules. These things both point to a period when Sanskrit still exhibited the kind of dialectal and idiolectal variation that is the natural state of any spoken colloquial language. Moreover, the correlation between the tendency to observe the obligatory rules and the tendency to prefer the *vā* variants provides a measure of independent support for proposal of *PV* that *vā* and *vibhāṣā* in Pāṇini's optional rules express respectively a preference and a dispreference for the variant they introduce.

Here are some representative cases illustrating these observations, with no claim to completeness. First, cases showing how K tends to conform to Pāṇini's obligatory rules where M violates them.

(1) Differences with respect to Pāṇini's obligatory rules

- a. K neuter *u*-stems in *-uni* (*vāstuni*, *keśaśmaśruni*), M *-au* (*vāstau*, *keśaśmaśrau*, C 38). K follows the obligatory rule 7.1.73 *iko 'ci vibkaktu*.
- b. K Acc. *śriyam*, M *śrīm* (C 38). K follows P 6.4.77 *aci śnudhātubhruvām yvor iyaṇuvaṇau*, pre-empting 6.1.107 *ami pūrvaḥ*.
- c. Fem. *-ā* vs. *-ī* (C 39-40): K *-ā* in *trayastrimśe*, M *trayastrimśyau* (Fem.Dual) 'thirty-third' (*-ā* by 4.1.4), K *parimūrṇā*, M *parimūrṇī* 'decrepit (cow)' (P requires *-ā*, 4.1.54 is inapplicable because the word has initial accent, 7.1.4.14 *pārimūrṇā*), K *parivrṭtā*, M *parivrṭtī* (4.1.54 inapplicable because it is not a *bahuvrīhi*), K *catuṣpadī* according to 4.1.8 and 6.4.130, vs. M *catuṣpadā* (but *pañcapadā* in both). Unclear is K *baddhavatsī* M *baddhavatsā* 'a cow whose calf is tied up' (*-ī* by 4.1.20?).
- d. K *dakṣinasyām*, *uttarasyām*, M *dakṣināyām*, *uttarāyām* (C 42). K follows P 7.3.114.
- e. K *nilayām cakre*, M *nililye* (C 44). P 3.1.36 requires the periphrastic perfect, as in K.
- f. K *grasta*, M *grasita* (C 46). K follows 7.2.15 *yasya vibhāṣā* (since 7.2.56 *udito vā* gives *grasitvā*).
- g. K *parigrāha*, M *parigraha* (C 50). K follows P 3.3.47 *param yajñe* (the suffix *GHañ* requires *vrddhi*).
- h. K *viṣphuliṅga*, M *viṣphuliṅga*. P 8.3.111 *sāt padādhyoḥ* requires *-s-* here, as in K.
- i. K *dakṣiṇe*, M *dakṣiṇāḥ*. K follows P 1.1.34, which requires *-e* (*PV* 83-84).
- j. K *vipalyeti*, M *viparyeti*. K extends the *-l-* beyond Pā 8.2.19.
- k. K *ulūkhamusalena*, M *ulūkhamusalābhyām* (C ). P 2.4.6 *jātir aprāṇiḥ* requires the singular.
- l. With respect to the change of *n* to *ṇ* after *r* in compounds and after preverbs (C 36), K tends to follow Pāṇini. K *vrīhiyavānām* is Pāṇinian, M *vrīhiyavāṇām* is not, conversely K *rathavāhaṇa* is Pāṇinian (8.4.8), K *rathavāhana* is not. K *pariniviṣṭa* is correct as opposed to M *pariniviṣṭa* (P 8.4.17 allows *ni-* to undergo this process only after certain roots, *viś* not among them). K *pramiṇāti* is regular (P 8.4.14), vs. M *pramināti*. Also regular are *paryāṇayanti*, *parihanāni* (P 8.4.22), *pariṇivapet* (P 8.4.17), *prahinoti* (P 8.4.15). Exception: K *pranāśayati*, vs. regular M *praṇāśayati*.
- m. K *vavāma*, M *uvāma* 'vomited'. Pāṇini allows only *vavāma* (this root not is not among those listed in 6.1.15-16 as undergoing *samprasāraṇa*).

- n. K *upariṣadya* M *uparisadya* (C 37). A complicated case: the suffix *LyaP* shows that *upari* is treated as an *upasarga*, in which case Pāṇini 8.3.66 forces *-ṣ-*. On the other hand, the treatment of *upari* as an *upasarga* is itself un-Pāṇinian.
- o. With respect to voice, K's usage is more Pāṇinian, judging from the BĀU examples collated by Fürst: K 3.1.8 *atinedante* 3.2.13 *cakrāte*, 4.3.1 *ūdāte*, 4.4.2 *rasayate*, 4.4.15 *jugupsate*, 5.4.18 *kurute*, vs. M *atinedanti*, *cakratuḥ*, *samūdatuḥ*, *rasayati*, *vijugupsate*, *karoti*. These roots are either intrinsically middle (*anudāttaṇitaḥ*) or middle voice is required by 1.3.14 or 1.3.72. Conversely K 4.5.1 *upakariṣyan*, 5.12.1 *viśanti*, vs. M *upakariṣyamāṇaḥ*, *viśante* (*udāttet*).
- p. In the other direction, M's gerundive form *avanegyam* is correct (P 7.3.52), as opposed to M's *avanejyam* (C 37).

Where Pāṇini restricts a rule to apply only *chandasi*, K often shows the general form where M has the *chandasi* form. This raises the question what *chandas* 'metrical text, hymn' means as a technical term in grammar. Thieme (1935: 67 ff.) proposes a specialized meaning "Saṃhitā text", i.e. Ṛgveda, Atharvaveda, Sāmaveda, and Yajurveda, as distinct from *yajuṣ*, *brāhmaṇa*, etc., and a generalized meaning "sacred literature". In Pāṇini's rules 6.1.209-210 *chandas* is contrasted with *mantra*. The avoidance of *chandas* forms in K suggests that *chandas* in Pāṇini was meant (or was understood) in the narrower sense as "Saṃhitā text".

## (2) Differences with respect to Vedic rules

- a. K has Nom *dyāvāprthivyaḥ* (I.4.1.26 etc.), M has contracted *dyāvāprthivī*. Similarly, K has *trayyaḥ*, *aryaḥ*, *tāvatyāḥ*, *janvaḥ*, M has *trayīḥ*, *arīḥ*, *tāvatiḥ*, *janūḥ*. For Pāṇini, K's forms are obligatory outside of *chandasi*, where M's contracted forms are preferred by 6.1.106 *vā cchandasi*
- b. K uses the oblique stem *śiras-* "head", M has *śīrṣan-* (C 38), which Pāṇini 6.1.60 *śīrṣaś chandasi* restricts to *chandas*.
- c. Loc.Sg. usually K *-i*, M *-ḥ*, e.g. *ātmani*, *ātman* (C 38). P 7.1.39 restricts the *-ḥ* (*luk*) ending to *chandas*.
- d. K paraphrases M's Vedic *-tavai* infinitives with other, synonymous constructions (c 47). P 3.4.9 restricts *-tavai* to *chandas*.
- e. K replaces perfects of desideratives and intensives by periphrastic forms (C 48), as prescribed by P 3.3.35 *amantre*, which excludes *brāhmaṇas*:<sup>2</sup> K *apacikramiṣāṃ cakāra*, M *apācīkramiṣat* 'wanted to run away'.
- f. K *dugdhe*, *duhate*, *śere*, *saṃvidrate*, M *duhe*, *duhe*, *śerate*, *saṃvidre* (C 43). P 7.1.41 restricts the M forms to *chandas*.
- g. K *āplutya*, M *āplūya*. P 6.4.58 restricts the M form to *chandas*.
- h. K *akṣyau*, M *akṣiṇī*. P 7.1.77 restricts the M form to *chandas*.
- i. An exception: K several times uses *-tos* infinitives with *purā* and *ā*, where M has a regular noun, e.g. K *purā vaptōḥ*, *aitasmād hotōḥ*, M *purā vapanāt*, *aitasya homāt*. P 3.4.16 allows the *-tos* infinitives only in *chandas* (and in a few roots, including *hu* but not *vap*).

<sup>2</sup>According to Thieme (1935: 67 ff.) *mantra* is a cover term for *ṛc* 'Vedic stanza' and *yajuṣ* 'sacrificial formula in prose'.

In view of the K's tendency to modify the text in a generally Pāṇinian direction, it is interesting to check out how it handles the facts covered by Pāṇini's *optional* rules. If *vā* means “preferably” and *vibhāṣā* means “preferably not” (*na vā*, 1.1.44), i.e. “marginally”, then K ought to seek out those options which Pāṇini introduces with *vā* and avoid the *vibhāṣā* options, as well as those tagged with *vā* plus *na* continued by *anuvṛtti*. This is indeed what we find.

### (3) Differences with respect to optional rules

- a. In *-ti*-stems K has Dat.Sg. *avaruddhaye*, *guptaye*, *āgataye* vs. M *avaruddhyai*, *guptyai*, *āgatyai*, also Gen.Sg. *anumateḥ*, *dhenoh* vs. M *anumatyāḥ*, *dhenvai* (C 37). Pāṇini favors K's *ghi* inflection over M's *nadī* inflection: 1.4.7 *śeṣo ghy asakhi* vs. 1.4.6 *ṅiti hrasvaś ca [5 vā] [4 na] [3 nadī]* (PV 48 ff.)
- b. In *-ī*-stems K has Dat.Sg. *śriye* against M *śriyai* (C 37). The same preference applies.
- c. K nearly always has *prāk* for M's *prācīna* (C 50). P 5.4.8 introduces *-īna* as a disfavored (*vibhāṣā*) option (PV 22).
- d. K has gerundive *-ya* over M's *-tava* in the compound *-udyam*, M *vaditavyam* ‘to be said’ (C 48). By P 3.1.94 *vāsarūpo 'striyām*, *KyaP* from 3.1.106 *vadaḥ supi kyap ca* is to be preferred to *tavya* by 3.1.96 *tavyattavuānīyaraḥ* (PV 27 ff.). K *kāryam* M *kartavyam* ‘to be done’, K *prāśyam* M *prāśitavyam* ‘to be eaten’; K's usage preferred by 3.1.124 *ṛhalor ṅyat*. A reverse case in K *hartavyam* M *kāryam*.
- e. K *girati*, M *gilati* (C 37). M's usage is marginal by 8.2.21 *aci vibhāṣā* (PV 169).
- f. K *āyatayāmani*, M *āyatayāmi*. Deletion of the vowel in the Loc.Sg. of *-an* stems is marginal by P 6.4.134 *vibhāṣā niśyoh*.
- g. K *adarśam*, M *adrākṣam*. P 3.1.57 *irito vā* makes K's *aṅ* the preferred option after roots marked with diacritic *IR*.
- h. K *adya gopāyati*, M *adya gopāyīṣyati*. For the proximate future, Pāṇini 3.3.6 prefers the present tense as in K.
- i. K (5.6.7.4) Pl. *ajāvayaḥ* ‘goats and sheep’, M. (4.5.5.4) Sg. *ajāvikasya*. M's singular is marginal by 2.4.12 *vibhāṣā vṛkṣamṛgatṛṇadhānyavyaṅjanapaśuśakunyaśvavaḍava-pūrvāparādharttarāṅam*.
- j. The opposite in K *sādhu*, M *sādhvī*: *-ī* is preferred by P 4.1.44 *voto guṇavacanāt* (PV 111).

In some cases, K ‘hypermodernizes’ the text, imposing a normal classical Sanskrit form even more advanced than the one allowed in the Aṣṭādhyāyī.

### (4) Hypermodern forms

- a. K *āvām*, M *āvam* (C 42). 7.2.88 only requires the long vowel in the *bhāṣā* ‘colloquial language’.
- b. In K *ṛksāman*, M *ṛksāma* K uses the regular form. Although M's irregular alternant is provided for in the *nipātana* rule 5.4.77, K ignores it. Cf. K *āyatayāman*, M *āyatayāma*, where K uses the regular form.
- c. K once replaces the weak stem *dat-* ‘tooth’ by *danta* (C 39), which is standard in classical usage, though *dat-* is listed in the *nipātana* rule 6.1.63.

How did this affinity between Pāṇini and the Kāṇva recension of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa arise? Pāṇini does not register the peculiarities of either recension, in the way that he carefully records noteworthy forms from the Kaṭha and Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitās in his *nipātana* rules (Schroeder 1895). Noting this lacuna, Thieme (1935) reaffirmed Goldstücker's (1861) conclusion that Pāṇini did not know the White Yajurveda tradition.

It looks as though the Kāṇva and Mādhyam̐dina recensions are modernizations of an earlier Yajurveda which has not survived, but which was closer to the extant version of the Black Yajurveda, particularly the Kaṭha and Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitās. Perhaps Pāṇini knew this lost text; it would be one candidate for the source of the untraced *mantra* and *chandas* forms cited in Pāṇini's *nipātana* rules. The Kāṇva recension in particular has been revised in the direction of a form of early Classical Sanskrit rather close to that described in the Aṣṭādhyāyī, apparently with ambitions to be the standard version, claimed to be *purāṇaprokta* (Vt. on 4.3.105),<sup>3</sup> and reputedly spread through every part of India (*sarvadeśeṣu viśtr̥tā*, according to the Caraṇavyūha, Schroeder p. XXIV). It must be one of the later products of the intense linguistic activity which led to the fixation of the Vedic śākhās with their attendant padapāṭhas, prātiśākhyas, and other editorial apparatus. As such it gives us another small glimpse into the grammarians' workshop, and helps us understand why variation was such a central issue for them.

Linguistics Department  
Stanford University  
kiparsky@stanford.edu

## References

- Bronkhorst, Johannes. 1981. The Orthoepic Diaskeuasis of the Ṛgveda and the Date of Pāṇini. *Indo-Iranian Journal* 23: 83-95.
- Bronkhorst, Johannes. 1982. The Variationist Pāṇini and Vedic: a Review Article. *Indo-Iranian Journal* 24: 273-282.
- Caland, Dr. W. 1926. *The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa in the Kāṇvīya Recension*. Punjab Sanskrit Series, No. 10. Lahore: Punjab Sanskrit Book Depot. Reprinted with revisions by Raghu Vīra, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983.
- Fürst, Alfons. 1915. *Der Sprachgebrauch der älteren Upaniṣads*. Inaugural-Dissertation, Tübingen. Göttingen.
- Kiparsky, Paul. 1979. *Pāṇini as a Variationist*. Poona and Cambridge, MA: University of Poona Press and MIT Press.
- Scharfe, Hartmut. 2009. *A New Perspective on Pāṇini*. Indological Taurinensia XXIII. Torino.
- von Schroeder, L. 1895. Das Kāṭhaka. *ZDMG* 145-171.
- Thieme, Paul. 1935. *Pāṇini and the Veda*. Allahabad: Globe Press.

---

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Kielhorn's preface to Vol. II of the Mahābhāṣya, reprinted in Vol. III<sup>3</sup>, p. 16.