

# Philosophy of Grammar in Ancient India: Reinterpreting the Gārgya Controversy in *Nirukta* 1.12–1.14

Paolo VISIGALLI\*

World History Department, Shanghai Normal University, Shanghai, China

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## ABSTRACT

This paper offers a systematic reinterpretation of the Gārgya controversy, a remarkable episode in the history of early India's reflections on language. Recorded in Yāska's *Nirukta*, this controversy centers on the issue whether all or only certain nouns are 'born from' (i.e., derived from) verbs. While Śākaṭāyana and the etymologists, including Yāska, believe that all nouns are derivable, Gārgya and the grammarians maintain that only morphologically regular nouns are derivable. This paper examines the arguments developed in this controversy and argues that Yāska's belief that all nouns are derivable is not only a linguistic axiom but also reflects non-linguistic concerns pertaining to the *raison d'être* assigned to the discipline of etymology and to the belief that the Veda transcends history.

## KEYWORDS

etymology, Gārgya, grammar, *Nirukta*, Śākaṭāyana, Yāska

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Yāska's *Nirukta* (ca 6th–3rd century BCE) is the foundation text of the Sanskrit linguistic and hermeneutic discipline of etymology or semantic derivation (*nirvacana*). The first two chapters of the *Nirukta* record several fascinating and sophisticated discussions on language which rank among the earliest systematic linguistic reflections in human history. One such discussion is what

\* Corresponding author. E-mail: pvisigalli83@gmail.com

I call the Gārgya controversy. Recorded in *Nirukta* 1.12–1.14, this controversy centers on the issue of whether all or only certain ‘nouns’ (*namāni*) are ‘born from verbs’ (*ākhyātajāni*). Two parties are confronted. The grammarian Śākaṭāyana and the ‘convention of the etymologists’ (*nairuk-tasamaya*) maintain that all nouns are born from verbs. The etymologist Gārgya and ‘some’ (*eke*) ‘grammarians’ (*vaiyākaraṇa*) affirm that only certain nouns are thus born. The former view is shared by Yāska. I will refer to these two parties as Yāska and Gārgya, respectively. Gārgya raises seven objections which are met by Yāska’s counter-objections.

Yāska’s view that all nouns are born from verbs is typically regarded as the fundamental theoretical assumption that underpins his etymological enterprise. Accordingly, mention of this view is found in most works dealing with the *Nirukta* and, more generally, with Indian language sciences.<sup>1</sup> Comparatively little scholarly attention, however, has been given to the Gārgya controversy.<sup>2</sup>

In providing a systematic reinterpretation of the controversy, this essay pursues two main aims. First, it tries to elucidate the sophisticated yet sometimes elusive arguments advanced by Gārgya and Yāska. Second, it argues that, unlike what is commonly assumed, Yāska’s view that all nouns are born from verbs is not merely a theoretical axiom pertaining to the technical issue of linguistic derivation; but it coordinates with two other vital tenets that undergird Yāska’s linguistic and hermeneutic project: the *raison d’être* he assigns to his discipline of etymology and his belief that the Veda is eternal. It is proposed that attaining a proper estimate of Yāska’s view requires understanding how this is rooted in concerns that are not purely linguistic in nature.

This essay comprises two main parts. The first one examines the arguments of the controversy (3); the second one reassesses Yāska’s view (4). The final Appendix provides an annotated translation.

Before we begin, it is opportune to take a closer look at the proposition at the center of the controversy.

## 2. NĀMĀNI ĀKHYĀTA-JĀNI

Each of the three terms making up this proposition (*nāman*, *ākhyāta*, and *-ja*) is potentially problematic and has been interpreted variously.

The term *nāman* refers to one of the four word-classes outlined by Yāska earlier in *Nirukta* chapter one. The other three word-classes are verbs (*ākhyāta*), preverbs (*upasarga*), and particles (*nipāta*).<sup>3</sup> The term *nāman* refers to what in Western grammatical terminology would be called

<sup>1</sup> Consider for example the following works devoted to Indian linguistics: Scharfe 1977: 121; Kunjunni Raja 1990: 108; Cardona 1994: 32; Houben 1997: 73, and Scharf 2013: 229.

<sup>2</sup> Two notable exceptions are Strauß (1927: 114) and, more recently, Cardona (2013: 55–59). Max Müller (1859: 164–169) too discusses the controversy at length; as we will see shortly, however, his analysis is problematic. Sarup (1984 [1921]: 68–71) is partly influenced by Max Müller. Cf. also Bronkhorst’s (2019: 74–76) recent paraphrasing translation of the controversy.

<sup>3</sup> This quadripartite classificatory model is also attested in other early Sanskrit texts; see Cardona 2019: 3, n. 7. Louis Renou (1957: 38) notes that the literal meanings of the terms designating the four word-classes are: *nāman* ‘name’; *ākhyāta* ‘predicate’ (like Greek *rhēma pñux*); *upasarga* ‘additive’; and *nipāta* ‘that which falls by chance’.



nouns, both proper names and common nouns, adjectives, and participles (see Cardona 2019: 3–5). It is sometimes translated as ‘nominal’.<sup>4</sup> In this essay, however, I use the simpler translation ‘noun’.

In Yāska’s fourfold classification, the term *ākhyāta* refers to ‘finite verbal forms’. Yet this sense does not seem to fit in with the current context. The problem is this: if, as is generally assumed, the proposition under scrutiny means that nouns are derived from *ākhyātas*, then the latter term cannot mean finite verbal form. For, strictly speaking, nouns are not derived from finite verbs but from verbal roots.<sup>5</sup> This seeming discrepancy does not, however, pose an insurmountable problem. That *ākhyāta* may here refer loosely to verbal roots seems to be consistent with Yāska’s usage.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, the term *ja-* is a derivative of the root *jan* (‘be born’); it literally means ‘born from’.

Three different interpretations of this proposition are found in scholarship. First, what I call the historical interpretation takes ‘born from’ to refer to the diachronic origin of nouns (*nāman*) from primordial verbal roots (*ākhyāta*). In this interpretation, Yāska’s view coincides with that held by many early Indo-European scholars according to which all nouns in the Indo-European languages are ultimately derived from primordial monosyllabic roots.<sup>7</sup> This interpretation, which was popular in the nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century scholarship, has been shown to be untenable. It projects modern linguistics’ concerns onto Yāska and thus anachronistically distorts his ideas. As a corrective to this interpretation, it has been noted that Yāska’s language

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Cardona 1994: 32; 2019: 2. However, Cardona (2013: 51–55) uses alternatively both ‘nominal term’ and ‘noun’ as translations; Bronkhorst (2019: 74): ‘nominal words’; Strauß (1927: 114): ‘Nomina’.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Deokar 2008: 247 and Pinault 2009: 1313. Interestingly, in a verse cited in Patañjali’s *Mahābhāṣya* that refers to this *Nirukta* proposition the term *ākhyātaja* is replaced with the unambiguous *dhātuja*; see *Mahābhāṣya* (on *Aṣṭhādhyāyī* 3.3.1) ed. 1965 (vol. II, 138.14–17).

<sup>6</sup> Yāska does not differentiate sharply between the terms *ākhyāta* and *dhātu* (cf. Liebhich 1919: 22, §25). The term *dhātu* (‘verbal root’) sometimes refers to what should strictly speaking be called *ākhyāta* (‘finite verbal form’), and the other way around. The term *dhātu* refers to verbal roots in *Nirukta* 2.1–2.2, but elsewhere in *Nirukta* 2 (e.g., 2.28) and 3 (e.g., 3.9) (as well as *Nirukta* 1.20) it refers to the finite verbal forms listed in the first section of the *Nighaṇṭu* (cf. Cardona 2019: 5, n. 12). Similarly, the term *ākhyāta* refers to both finite verbal forms (*Nirukta* 6.28; 7.1) and verbal roots (*Nirukta* 7.14, where Śākapūni is cited as saying that the noun *agni* is ‘born from’ [*jāyate*] [*jāyate* *iti* Śākapūnir *itād aktād dagdhād vā nītāt*]). It is worth noticing that the specific sense of verbal root assigned to *dhātu* in *Nirukta* 2.1–2.2 may reflect the grammarians’ usage, given that this passage describes certain analytical procedures that are accepted by the grammarians; see Durga (*NirD* 2.1 [157.14–15/124.18–19]; *NirD* 2.2 [162.11–12/128.26–27]). (In citing Durga’s commentary on the *Nirukta*, I refer to page and line in the editions by Bhadkamkar 1985 [1919] and by Rajavade 1921.) Moreover, Yāska’s use of the term *ākhyātaja*, rather than *dhātuja*, is consistent with his analyses: he derives nouns from nominalized forms of existing third person singular verbs, not from verbal roots; to give one example among several hundred possible ones, he derives *grīvā* ‘neck’ from *grhñāteḥ* ‘swallowing’, the ablative/genitive singular of a nominalized third person singular *grhñāti* (< *√grh*) ‘s/he swallows’ (*Nirukta* 2.28); cf. Liebhich 1919: 25, §31 and Renou 1957: 121, n. 596; cf. also Scharf’s (2012: 209–210) interpretation which partly differs from mine.

<sup>7</sup> The historical interpretation can be traced back to Max Müller’s (1859: 164–169) influential discussion of the Gārgya controversy. For the idea that the primacy of verbs over nouns was an axiom of Indo-European linguistics, see Stankiewicz 1974: 176 and Morpurgo Davies 1998: 106. The view that the original Indo-European was a language of roots was accepted, among others, by both Max Müller (1862: 273–274, 358) and his archenemy Whitney (1867: 256). Aufrecht (1859: vi–viii), Benfey (1869: 69), Geiger (1869: 18–21), and Belvakar (1915: 8–9), for example, praise Yāska and note that his view is congruent with that held by modern linguists. Conversely, building on Sayce (1880: 4–5), Chakravarti (1933: 239–240) criticizes Yāska and the Indian etymologists for their ‘pernicious doctrine’ and its ‘unwholesome effect’ which led people to falsely believe in the existence of an original language of roots.



analysis shows no sign to operate with a diachronic frame of reference (which, of course, lies at the very heart of modern historical linguistics).<sup>8</sup>

Second, what I call the derivational interpretation takes ‘born from’ to mean ‘derived from’. Unlike the historical interpretation, it states that Yāska’s derivation does not involve a diachronic dimension but operates synchronically.<sup>9</sup>

Third, what I call the semantic interpretation is briefly outlined by *Nirukta* specialist Eivind Kahrs (1998: 35). He translates the proposition *nāmāny ākhyātājāni* as ‘nouns arise because of [the actions denoted by] verbs’.<sup>10</sup> This translation reflects Kahrs’ interpretation of Yāska’s etymologies in general. He argues that Yāska’s etymologies mainly provide semantic, as opposed to derivational, information. Their purpose is to elucidate the semantic content of a word, by explaining how an object is assigned a certain name in relation to a certain name-giving action. Information pertaining to the derivation of the word under analysis is secondary.

Kahrs is right to emphasize the centrality that semantic considerations play in Yāska’s etymologies. He is also right to stress the extent to which Yāska’s analyses bear on the relation between objects and their names. As we will see, for example, some of the arguments in the Gārgya controversy pertain to naming. However, it has been suggested that Kahrs’ interpretation is one-sided. By overemphasizing Yāska’s concern with semantics, it de-emphasizes the considerable role played by derivation in his etymologies.<sup>11</sup>

To conclude, despite some terminological unclarity and alternative interpretations, it seems safe to say that the proposition [*sarvāṇi*] *nāmāny ākhyātājāni* is best understood as meaning ‘[all] nouns are derived from verb(al roots)’. Saying that all nouns are derivable entails that they all are explainable etymologically. We will explore the implications of this claim below. Gārgya does not, however, agree with it and raises several clever objections.

### 3. THE ARGUMENTS

[1] Several textual and terminological problems pertaining to the first argument are discussed in the Appendix. What is clear is this: Gārgya maintains that only nouns that have a regular accent (*svara*) and regular grammatical formation (*saṃskāra*) can be derived from verbs, whereas Yāska claims that all nouns are thus derivable.

For example, Gārgya believes that the term *kāraka* ‘doer’ or *hāraka* ‘grasper’ (given by Durga in his commentary on this passage; see NirD 1.12 [100.9/69.10]) are derivable. For they are derived respectively from the verbal roots *kṛ* (‘do’) and *hr̥* (‘grasp’) through regular processes of morpho-phonological derivation. Conversely, terms like *aśva* (‘horse’) or *puruṣa* (‘person’) are not derivable, because they are irregular.

<sup>8</sup> Bronkhorst (1981: 2) is the first scholar to have systematically challenged the historical interpretation of Yāska’s etymologies. (One of the reviewers informs me that a similar argument had already been advanced by Kahrs [1980: 262 f.].) See also Kunjunni Raja (1977 [1963]: 10). Bronkhorst’s view is often referred to in posterior scholarship; see, e.g., Kahrs 1983: 232/1984: 140/1998: 24, and Apple 2009: 162; Apple 2019: 172. Kahrs (2005) provides a stimulating description of how the *Nirukta* was received among nineteenth-century Western scholars.

<sup>9</sup> A particular clear endorsement of this interpretation is Scharf 2012: 207–209.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Sarup (1984 [1920–27]: 68–71), who discusses the controversy in a section titled ‘Semantics. How names are given’ and states that in ‘*Nirukta* (see 12–14), Yāska discusses the question, how names are given’.

<sup>11</sup> See Bronkhorst 2001: 171–176, Houben 2001: 131–132, Scharf 2001 and, in particular, Scharf 2012.



It seems that Gārgya and Yāska agree that for a noun to be derivable this must display a modification (*vikāra*) indicative (*prādeśika*) of the associated root. Yet they disagree on what counts as such a modification. They both agree that regular terms like *kāraka* and *hāraka* are derivable, but they disagree on irregular terms like *aśva* and *puruṣa*. Gārgya would likely say that no modification indicative of the associated root is identifiable in the latter. Yāska would probably say that a root can in fact be identified. (Indeed, as discussed below, both terms are derived later in the controversy from the roots  $\sqrt{as}$  ‘traverse [a path]’ and  $\sqrt{śi}$  ‘dwell’, respectively.)

The second [2] and the third [3] arguments form a pair. Not only are Gārgya’s two objections logically interconnected, but also Yāska’s reply to the second objection is said to apply to the third objection also.

To fully understand these two arguments, it is helpful to introduce two terms: ‘naming noun’ and ‘descriptive noun.’<sup>12</sup> A naming noun names a specific object (or a specific category of objects). For example, *aśva* (‘horse’) names the object horse. A descriptive noun describes a general object as performing a certain action. For example, *kāraka* (‘doer’) describes any object that performs the action of doing. A naming noun is the fixed name of a specific object, whereas a descriptive noun is a shifting label that designates a general object in association with certain actions. To give a fabricated example, ‘man’ is a naming noun. When he performs the actions of doing or drinking, however, a man can be designated with the descriptive noun ‘doer’ or ‘drinker’.

The distinction between naming and descriptive nouns underlies the second and third argument and bears on the issue of derivation. According to Gārgya, only descriptive nouns are derivable. For Gārgya, then, *kāraka* (‘doer’) is derivable, whereas *aśva* (‘horse’) is not. Conversely, Yāska maintains that a noun does not need to be descriptive to be derivable, but all nouns are derivable, regardless whether they are descriptive or naming nouns.

This distinction between naming and descriptive nouns is not formulated explicitly in the *Nirukta*.<sup>13</sup> A similar distinction that combines the two issues of the semantic property and the derivability of a term is however attested elsewhere. According to Theodor Aufrecht (1859: v), such a distinction accounts for the difference between Pāṇini’s grammar (*Aṣṭādhyāyī*) and the *Uṇādisūtras*, a sort of appendix to the former. Aufrecht notes that the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* derives words that denote a general referent (i.e., descriptive nouns), whereas the *Uṇādisūtras* teach the derivation of words that denote a specific referent (i.e., naming nouns). Aufrecht gives the terms *kāraka* (‘doer’) and *kāru* (‘artisan’) as examples. While both nouns are derived from  $\sqrt{kr}$  (‘do’), the derivation of the former is given in the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, whereas the derivation of the latter is recorded in the *Uṇādisūtras*. The reason is that *kāraka* applies to a general referent, any agent that performs the action of doing, whereas *kāru* refers to artisan specifically.

A similar distinction informs a later model for classing nouns in accordance with their status in terms of derivation (see Kunjunni Raja 1977 [1963]: 59–63). In its basic form, this model recognizes three types of nouns: (1) *yaugika* ‘derivational or etymological’, i.e., nouns whose

<sup>12</sup> I borrow and adapt these terms from Harmut Scharfe’s (1977: 122) brief yet insightful remarks on the Gārgya’s controversy.

<sup>13</sup> For a partly similar yet by no means identical distinction, see *Nirukta* 7.13, where Yāska differentiates between ‘conventional’ (*saṃvijnānabhūta*) and ‘merely descriptive’ nouns (*vyañjanamātra*). Yāska illustrates this distinction with the following examples: ‘Give rice to the hungry Brahmin (*brāhmaṇāya bubhuksitāya*) ... give a drink to the thirsty Brahmin (*pipāsate*).’ ‘Brahmin’ would be a conventional noun, whereas ‘hungry’ or ‘thirsty’ would be ‘merely descriptive’ nouns. Note that, unlike the distinction between naming and descriptive nouns, this distinction does not bear on the derivation of the terms involved.



meaning is wholly consistent with their grammatical or etymological derivation; e.g., *kāraka* ('doer'); (2) *rūḍha* 'conventional', i.e., nouns the meaning of which cannot be obtained by means of grammatical derivation but is established through convention; e.g., *go* 'cow'; and (3) *yogarūḍha* 'derivational-conventional', i.e., nouns the meaning of which is consistent with their grammatical derivation, yet convention restricts their application to a specific referent; e.g., *pañka-ja* 'mud-born': despite its etymologically clear derivation, this noun denotes lotus only, not any other thing that may be born (*ja* < *√jan*) from mud (*pañka*), such as other plants or insects.<sup>14</sup>

It is probably no mere accident that some of the noun examples cited by Aufrecht and Kunjunni Raja (*kāraka*, *go*) also occur in the controversy (or Durga's commentary thereon). It is also noteworthy that, as I show below, Yāska's reply to Gārgya's objection is reminiscent of the *yogarūḍha* ('derivational-conventional') class distinction.

After this necessary clarification, we can turn to the arguments.

[2] Gārgya argues that if one accepted Yāska's view that all nouns were derivable, then all objects performing the same action would receive the same name. For example, the term *aśva* would refer to any object that traverses a path.

Gārgya's objection stems from his belief that only descriptive nouns are derivable. His reasoning is this: if one accepted Yāska's view that *aśva* was derived from *√as* 'traverse [a path]', then *aśva* would be a descriptive noun meaning '[path-]traverser'; as such, this noun would apply to any object that traverses a path, not only to a horse. To give an example of my own making, a man that traverses a path, too, would be named *aśva*. This is not the case, however, for *aśva* denotes horse only. This proves that Yāska's view that all nouns are derivable is wrong.

Yāska's reply is as follows: some objects performing the same actions receive the same name, others do not. He mentions four noun examples: *takṣan* ('carpenter'), *parivrājaka* ('wanderer'), *jīvana* ('sugar-cane'), and *bhūmija* ('[a kind of] tree').

Consider the terms *takṣan* and *parivrājaka*. These nouns are clearly derived from the roots *takṣ* 'fashion [wood]' and *vraj* 'wander'. It is also clear, however, that not all agents that happen to fashion or to wander around are named *takṣan* or *parivrājaka*, but only carpenters and wanderers (i.e., the itinerant religious mendicants).

With his reply, Yāska uncouples the issue of the derivability of a noun from that of its semantics. While Gārgya believes that only descriptive nouns are derivable, the noun examples (*takṣan* etc.) given by Yāska show that a noun can be a naming noun and yet be derivable. We can apply this reasoning to the term *aśva* cited in [1], for example. Deriving *aśva* from *√as* 'traverse [a path]' does not necessarily entail that *aśva* is a descriptive noun which denotes any object performing the action of traversing a path.

In sum, Yāska's point is closely reminiscent of the *yogarūḍha* ('derivative-conventional') noun class noted above. The noun examples he mentions (*takṣan*, *parivrājaka*, *jīvana*, and *bhūmija*) belong to this class: their meaning is attained through an etymological derivation, yet their usage is conventionally limited to one specific referent. Note also that Yāska's last noun example *bhūmija* ('[a kind of] tree') is virtually identical with one of the standard examples given to illustrate the *yogarūḍha* class, the aforementioned *pañka-ja* ('lotus').

<sup>14</sup> In substantial agreement with the interpretation proposed here, Geldner (1897: 267) argues that while Gārgya considers only *yaugika* 'etymological' nouns to be derivable, Yāska maintains that *rūḍha* 'conventional' nouns are also derivable.



[3] Gārgya argues that if one accepted Yāska's view that all nouns were derivable, then, one object would receive as many names as the actions with which it is associated. For example, a pole, which is named *sthūṇā*, should also be named 'hollow-lier' (*dara-śayā*), because it lies in a hollow in the ground, or '[beam-]fastener' (*saṃjanī*), because beams are fastened to it.

Like in [2], Gārgya's objection is based on the presupposition that only descriptive nouns are derivable. Such nouns designate an object in terms of the action with which it is associated. Gārgya's objection seems also to presuppose that Yāska derives the noun *sthūṇā* from the root *sthā* ('stand'), because a pole performs the action of standing upright.<sup>15</sup> Gārgya argues that if this was the case, namely, if *sthūṇā* (which is the name of the object pole) were derived from *sthā* ('stand'), then a pole may just as well be named in relation to the other actions it performs. Thus, a pole would also be named 'hollow-lier' (*dara-śayā*) because it lies in a hollow in the ground, or '[beam-]fastener' (*saṃjanī*), because beams are fastened to it. That this is not so—that is, the object pole is only named *sthūṇā*, not *dara-śayā* or *saṃjanī*—shows that Yāska's view is untenable.

As we saw, Yāska does not reply to this objection directly, but says that his reply to [2] applies to [3] also. Yāska's reasoning may perhaps be spelt out as follows: just as many objects may perform the action of fashioning wood ( $\sqrt{takṣ}$ ) but only carpenters (*takṣan*) are named on account of that, so one object (a pole, *sthūṇā*) may perform many actions (standing [ $\sqrt{sthā}$ ], lying in a hollow, beam-fastening, etc.) but receives its name from only one of them ( $\sqrt{sthā}$ ).

[4] Gārgya argues that if one accepted Yāska's view that all nouns were derivable, then, all the nouns that Gārgya regards as underivable, but are derived by the etymologists, should display the regular grammatical structure that is postulated in such derivations. That this is not the case shows that Yāska's view is untenable. In other words, etymologists derive the morphologically irregular noun A by postulating its corresponding morphologically regular counterpart \*A<sup>16</sup>. Gārgya argues that, if A were indeed derivable, it would display the morphologically regular structure \*A in the first place.

Take for example the terms *aśva* ('horse') and *puruṣa* ('person'). Gārgya maintains that both terms are underivable, whereas the etymologists derive them from  $\sqrt{as}$  'traverse [a path]' and from *puri*, the locative of *pur* 'citadel', plus *śaya* ('dweller' <  $\sqrt{śi}$  'dwell'). These etymological derivations explain *aśva* as '[path-]traverser' and *puruṣa* as 'dweller-in-the-citadel'. But if *aśva* and *puruṣa* were indeed derivable, then, why do not they display the morphologically regular structures that are postulated in their respective etymological derivations? Instead of the irregular *aśva*, therefore, we should expect the regular \**aṣṭr* '[path-]traverser', formed with the root *aś* plus the regular agentive affix *ṭr*. And instead of the irregular *puruṣa*, we should expect the regular \**puriśaya* ('dweller-in-the-citadel'), formed with *puri*, the regular locative of *pur* 'citadel' (versus the irregular *puru-*) and *śaya* ('dweller'), the regular derivative of  $\sqrt{śi}$  ('dwell') (versus the irregular *-śa*).

In his reply, Yāska turns the tables on Gārgya. He notes that Gārgya posits the existence of rare primary affixes (*kṛt*, i.e., affixes that are attached directly to the root) to derive certain nouns. For example, Gārgya derives *damūnās* ('domestic [an epithet of Agni]') and *āṇnāra* ('one who wanders about') from  $\sqrt{dam}$  ('tame') and  $\sqrt{at}$  ('wander about'), by positing the existence of the two rare affixes *ūnas* and *nāra*. Yāska's point seems this: positing the existence of rare affixes such as these

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Uṇādisūtra* (III.15) which derives *sthūṇā* from *sthā* plus affix *nā* (Aufrecht 1859: 69).

<sup>16</sup> The asterisk indicates that the word is not attested in ordinary Sanskrit but is engineered for the purpose of derivation.



is tantamount to admitting that the nouns thus formed are morphologically irregular and yet derivable. In other words, postulating the existence of *ad hoc* affixes to derive irregular nouns, as Gārgya does, implicitly acknowledges that also irregular nouns can be derived.

[5] Gārgya faults the etymologists for performing their analyses (*abhivīcārayanti* ‘speculate’) on expressions (*abhivyāhare*) that have already ‘come about’ (*niṣpanne*). Gārgya’s point seems this: etymologies have no real explanatory power, for they are *post-factum* explanations. Etymologies purport to elucidate the relation between the denoting name, the denoted object, and the name-giving action from which the name is derived. Yet this relation is given *a priori* and as such lies beyond the purview of the etymologists’ explanations.

Gārgya cites as an example the etymologists’ derivation of the noun *pṛthivī* (‘earth’) from  $\sqrt{pṛth}$  ‘spread wide’. Gārgya argues that this derivation entails two impossibilities: first, while it requires an agent that performed the action of spreading, it is unclear who this agent may have been; and second, while the action of spreading requires a support to be performed, no such support was available, given that the earth, the basis of all possible supports, had not yet been created then.

Yāska replies that ‘an inquiry into the connection’ (*yogapariṣṭi*; between terms and the associated name-giving action [?]) necessarily presupposes that the expressions under analysis have already ‘come about’. In other words, Yāska acknowledges that the relation between the denoting name, the denoted object, and the associated name-giving action is necessarily prior to the etymological analysis aimed at elucidating it. However, this fact does not necessarily disqualify the etymologists’ analysis but rather provides the very possibility for it to take place.

With respect to the etymology of *pṛthivī*, Yāska notes that the earth is perceivably (*darśanena*) ‘wide-spread’ (*pṛthuḥ*), even if it was not spread wide by anyone. Gārgya’s objections are therefore beside the point, for it is undeniable that the earth is perceived by everyone as wide-spread. Denying this readily perceivable property of the earth would be tantamount to denying a statement based on direct perception, the most reliable of all sources of knowledge.

[6] Gārgya argues that the etymologist Śākaṭāyana engages in wild etymologizing: he breaks the term up for analysis into two halves each of which is assigned a distinct derivation. Gārgya illustrates this point with Śākaṭāyana’s convoluted etymology of the term *satyam*. He divides it into two halves, *sat* and *yam*, and derives the former half from  $\sqrt{as}$  ‘be’ and the latter from the causative form of  $\sqrt{i}$  ‘go’.

Yāska replies that Gārgya’s criticism is addressed to one single person, Śākaṭāyana, and not to the discipline of etymology. If Śākaṭāyana performs far-fetched etymologies, then he is the only one to blame.

[7] Gārgya argues that etymological analyses are built upon a logical impossibility: they assume that a prior-existing object (*sattva*) receives its name from a posterior-existing action (*bhāva*). To explain, etymologists analyze name A denoting object B in relation to name-giving action C. For action C to take place, however, object B which performs that action must necessarily already exist. But this entails that the name denoting the object exists prior to the name-giving action performed by that object. But how could an object be named in relation to an action which it has not yet performed? Consider *aśva*. A horse is named *aśva* ‘[path-]traverser’ in relation to the name-giving action of  $\sqrt{as}$  ‘traverse [a path]’. Yet a just-born horse is named *aśva* even before it can perform the action of traversing a path.



Yāska counters by noticing that certain prior-existing objects are named after posterior-existing actions, while others are not. Take for example *bilvāda* ('eater of *bilva* fruit') and *lambacūḍaka* ('one whose lock is long'). An object (a bird? person?) is named *bilvāda* even before it has ever eaten such fruits. Similarly, a person is called *lambacūḍaka* even before he has undergone a tonsure that leaves only one long tuft of hair.

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Two points emerging from the above analysis call for comment: the types of arguments deployed in the controversy and both contenders' appeal to linguistic usage as probative evidence.

Before commenting on these points, it is worth asking whether Yāska reported the controversy accurately. In this respect, Harmut Scharfe (1977: 121) strikes a cautionary note, remarking that 'it is by no means certain or even likely' that Yāska 'literally reproduced' the arguments by Gārgya's and Śākaṭāyana's parties. Given that the Gārgya controversy is recorded only in the *Nirukta*, the lack of an alternative account does not allow us to decide on this issue. Still, as I tried to show above, both parties' arguments, if examined closely, turn out to be self-consistent and sophisticated. It therefore seems reasonable to assume that Yāska described the arguments fairly, or at least, did not overly distort them. True, Yāska's way to introduce the two opposing parties may not perhaps be entirely innocent: the view held by Yāska is said to be shared by Śākaṭāyana and 'the convention of the etymologists' (*niruktasamaya*), whereas the opposing view is ascribed to Gārgya and only 'certain' (*eke*) grammarians. Nonetheless, as will be noted in the conclusion, some of Gārgya's arguments, though ably defused by Yāska's replies, seem indeed to hit on structural issues concerning etymology. Conceivably, had Yāska wanted to bag an easy victory, he would have presented Gārgya's arguments so to make them innocuous. In short, while we have no way to tell for sure, it seems best to give Yāska the benefit of the doubt and take his description of the arguments as reliable.

Different types of arguments are developed in the controversy. First, some of Gārgya's objections specifically address Yāska's view at the centre of the controversy, namely, the view that all nouns are derived from verbs (see [2] and [3], where Yāska's view is restated at the beginning of the objections; see also [4], where Yāska's view is added by Durga in his commentary thereon; NirD 1.13 [104.1/73.12]). Others attack general tenets that underlie etymology (this is most clearly the case for [5] and [7]).

Second, Gārgya challenges Yāska's view that all nominals are derivable by developing arguments that bear on both linguistics ([1], [4], and [6]) and philosophy ([2], [3], [5], and [7]). This distinction is borne out by differences in terminology. While the first type of arguments mentions technical linguistic terms (such as *svara* 'accent', *samskāra* 'grammatical formation', and *vikāra* 'modification'), the latter employs terms that are not used in a technical-linguistic sense (such as *karman* 'action', *sattva* 'thing/object', *bhāva* 'action', and *nāmadheyapratilambha* 'obtaining a name').

The philosophical arguments are noteworthy. They are among the earliest philosophical reflections pertaining to language analysis, what we may call philosophy of grammar. Prominent French Sanskritist Louis Renou (1957: 35–36) called them 'the first reflections on "general lin-



guistics” in India, and noted that they constitute the fountainhead of what would later develop into the linguistic-philosophical speculations of the grammarians and Mīmāṃsakas.<sup>17</sup>

Noticeably, both Gārgya and Yāska appeal to linguistic usage as probative evidence. References to linguistic usage are implicit in Gārgya’s second and third objections. Their underlying logic can be represented as follows: if A, then B; but since B is contradicted by linguistic usage, then A is untenable. A stands for Yāska’s view that all nouns are derived from verbs, and B is what Gārgya regards as the consequences that necessarily follow from adopting this view, consequences that are contradicted by linguistic usage.

Gārgya argues that accepting Yāska’s view entails that [2] all objects that perform the same action would receive the same name: for example, the word *aśva* ‘[path-]traverses’ would designate any agent that traverses a path; and [3] one object would receive as many names as the actions with which it is associated: for example, a pole (*sthūṇā*) would also be named ‘hollow-lier’, because it lies in the ground, or ‘[beam-]fastener’ because beams are fastened to it. Both consequences are contradicted by linguistic usage: *aśva* designates horse only, not any agent that traverses a path; and a pole is named *sthūṇā* only, not ‘hollow-lier’ or ‘[beam-]fastener’.

Yāska’s reply to [2] appeals to a closer review of linguistic usage: ‘we observe’ (*paśyāmaḥ* < *√dṛś*), Yāska says, that while some objects performing the same actions receive their name from that action, others do not. For example, while not every agent that fashions wood (*√takṣ*) is named carpenter (*takṣan*), all carpenters are so named in relation to that action.

Yāska uses analogous observation-based arguments also in his replies in [5] and [7]. While Gārgya claims that deriving the term *prthivī* from *√prth* ‘spread wide’ entails logically intractable problems, Yāska replies that the fact that earth is wide-spread is directly observable (*darśaṇena* < *√dṛś*). Similarly, while Gārgya claims that etymologists’ analyses presuppose a logical impossibility, namely, that a prior-existing object receives its name from a posterior-existing action, Yāska replies that ‘we observe’ (*paśyāmaḥ*) that this is indeed sometimes the case, e.g., a person is called *lambacūḍaka* (‘one whose lock is long’) even before he has undergone tonsure.

Yāska’s matter-of-fact, evidence-oriented stance has been noted and praised by several modern scholars. It is however problematic, as it has been sometimes suggested or implied, to take Yāska’s stance to agree with modern linguists’ evidence-based analysis of the facts of language.<sup>18</sup> While, as noted, some of Yāska’s replies presuppose an attentive scrutiny of the linguistic facts, we should not hastily over-domesticize his stance and mistakenly assume that Yāska’s concerns

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Scharfe 1977: 119–121, where, contrasting the formal-grammatical attitude underlying Pāṇini’s *Aṣṭādhyāyī* with Yāska’s keen interest in philosophy, he notes that in the *Nirukta* philosophical terms and concepts are introduced into grammar. See also Kunjunnī Raja’s (1990: 107–110) discussion of the philosophical elements in the *Nirukta*. Cf. also Strauß’s (1927: 118) remark that the controversy is ‘of great interest with respect to the philosophy of language’ (‘von hohem sprachphilosophischen Interesse’).

<sup>18</sup> Rudolph Roth, the first modern editor of the *Nirukta*, cursorily suggests (1852: [Erläuterungen] 10, n. 4) that Yāska’s view as expressed in [2] is congruent with modern etymologists’ emphasis on ‘Sprachgebrauch’ or language use. Roth refers to Franz Bopp (1833: 783 and note) who remarks that linguistic usage is instrumental in fixing a specific sense of an etymological formation that could yield various senses. For example, while the etymological sense of the term *an-eka* is ‘not-one’, its specific current sense ‘many’ was established through linguistic usage. (Cf. the *yogarūḍha* ‘derivational-conventional’ word-class noted above.) More explicitly, Friedrich Max Müller (1859: 166, n. 2; 168), commenting on [2] and [3], praises Yāska’s (and Durga’s) evidence-based reflections as being in fundamental agreement with his own view concerning the historical development of ancient languages.



necessarily overlap with those of modern scholars. Indeed, I would argue that a proper estimate of Yāska's view that all nouns are derived from verbs can only be attained if we consider this proposition in relation to other relevant ideas developed in the *Nirukta*.

#### 4. REASSESSING YĀSKA'S VIEW

The issue at the center of the Gārgya controversy—whether all or only certain nouns are derivable from verbs—is typically framed in scholarship as pertaining to the technical domain of linguistic derivation. In other words, the controversy is supposed to bear on a purely linguistic issue. This interpretation is not incorrect. Noticeably, it is reinforced by the way in which the controversy is introduced as being a debate between two opposing schools of language analysis, the etymologists (plus the grammarian Śākaṭāyana) versus the grammarians (plus the etymologist Gārgya). Nonetheless, an interpretation that considers the issue at stake only in terms of linguistics fails to capture the deep non-linguistic concerns that likely led Yāska to develop his view and unwaveringly implement it in his etymological practice.

The proposition that all nouns are derivable must be understood in coordination with two other key concerns that shape Yāska's etymological project: first, the *raison d'être* he assigns to his discipline of etymology; and second, his Mīmāṃsā-like belief that the Veda is eternal.

In *Nirukta* chapter one, Yāska discusses several goals that his discipline of etymology serves to achieve. The main goal is to elucidate the meaning of the Veda: without etymology there is no understanding of the meaning of Vedic words and formulae (*Nirukta*: 1.15: ...*idam antareṇa mantreṣv arthapratyayo na vidyate*). This goal must be considered in relation to what is evidenced by many of Yāska's most abstruse analyses: many Vedic words had become obsolete by Yāska's time. Instead of admitting a gap in the transmission of the Veda, Yāska pursues the exact opposite approach. He argues that etymological analysis elucidates the meaning of all words, with no exception. There is a clear link between Yāska's view on derivation as expressed in the proposition under scrutiny and the goal he assigns to etymology. Claiming that all words are derived from verbs is tantamount to saying that all words can be explained etymologically. Yāska's view on derivation is entailed by his claim concerning the goal of his discipline. In other words, the very *raison d'être* Yāska assigns to etymology requires him to accept the view that all nouns are derivable and, therefore, explainable. Acknowledging that certain nouns are not derivable would compel Yāska to admit that the interpretation of certain Vedic words lies outside the purview of his discipline and, consequently, that their meaning is beyond recovery.

Further, Yāska appears to entertain a Mīmāṃsā-like belief that the Veda is eternal. This belief is displayed most clearly in how Yāska explains away proper names recorded in the Veda. Acknowledging that proper names are mentioned in the Veda would necessarily tie the latter to a certain time and place. By explaining the proper names etymologically, Yāska dissolves possible historical references and concomitantly reinforces the belief that the Veda is eternal.

Consider for example Yāska's interpretation of the terms *pūru* and *dasyu* mentioned in Rīgveda I.59.6 (*Nirukta* 7.23). Modern Vedicists take both terms to refer to human groups. The Pūrus are one of the five major Ārya tribes mentioned in the Rīgveda; the Dasyus are a group of people lying outside the cultural and political Ārya community and are regularly described as enemies of the Āryas (Jamison and Brereton 2014: 54–56). Yāska explains both terms etymologically as common nouns. The name *pūru* refers not to a specific human group but to men in general as 'those



to be filled with [rain water]’ (*pūrayitavyāḥ*), that is, people who desire rain. Likewise, *dasyu* signifies ‘[one] in whom liquids decays’ (*upadasyanty asmin rasā*) or ‘[one] who destroys [ritual] actions’ (*upadāsayati karmāṇi*). By interpreting the noun etymologically, Yāska argues that *dasyu* is not a proper name but a common noun that functions as an epithet designating rain-clouds.

Names of gods, too, are typically explained etymologically. Yāska counters the interpretation of Vedic formulas advanced by a competing school of Vedic interpretation, the ‘historians’ (*aitihāsika*). While the latter explain the proper names mentioned in Vedic formulae as referring to mythical or historical characters, Yāska often explains them etymologically as referring to natural phenomena.

To cite a famous example (*Nirukta* 2.16), the historians state that the term *vr̥tra* mentioned in the Veda is a proper name designating the demon *Vṛtra* who was defeated by the god Indra in battle. Yāska argues that *vr̥tra* should instead be understood as conveying its etymological meaning of ‘enveloper’ (< *√vr̥* ‘envelop’). Understood in this way, *vr̥tra* is not a proper name but a common noun that functions as an epithet designating rain-clouds. Yāska then argues that the references to the battle between Indra and *Vṛtra* found in the Vedas should likewise be understood metaphorically (*upamārthena*): they describe the natural phenomenon of rain, which is caused when lightning (= *indra*) strikes a rain cloud (= *vr̥tra*).

The anti-mythological, naturalistic interpretation proposed in this passage presupposes that the name of the well-known Vedic deity *indra* too should be understood etymologically. It is not a proper name but an epithet designating lightning. While we are not explicitly told, the etymology that explains *indra* as ‘one that burst the nourishment [i.e., rain-water]’ (*irām dṛṇāti*) would seem to fit the passage well (*Nirukta* 10.8).<sup>19</sup>

To conclude, Yāska’s view that all nouns are derivable is not only a theoretical linguistic axiom. But it coordinates with—or, perhaps, it is entailed by—Yāska’s key non-linguistic concerns. On the one hand, this view allows him to live up to his stated claim that etymology explains all (Vedic) words, with no exception. On the other, it enables him to develop a hermeneutics of the Veda that safeguards its putative eternity.

## CONCLUSION

This essay has tried to make progress on our understanding of the Gārgya controversy in two main respects.

First, I have tried to elucidate as clearly as I could the arguments advanced in the controversy. In doing so, several new interpretations have been proposed. Most noticeably, it has been argued that to fully understand [2] and [3] requires gaining clarity on the distinction between what I call naming nouns and descriptive nouns, a distinction that underlies Gārgya’s objections and Yāska’s replies. In general, the interpretations proposed in this essay emphasize the sophisticated and self-consistent nature of the arguments and thus enhance our appreciation of ancient thinkers’

<sup>19</sup> Yāska’s etymological interpretation of the divine name *indra* is not an isolated case. In fact, Yāska’s remarkable theology is based on an etymological interpretation of all the divine names listed in the *daivatākāṇḍa* ‘section on the divine [names]’, the third section of the *Nighaṇṭu*, the word-list that is commented in the *Nirukta*. On Yāska’s theology, see Visigalli and Kawamura 2021: 257–258.



mode of reasoning and debating. Attention has also been paid to the types of arguments employed and to how the contenders claim to use linguistic usage as probative evidence.

Second, it has been argued that Yāska's view that all nouns are derivable should not be understood restrictively in merely linguistic terms, but it coordinates with two of Yāska's main tenets. On the one hand, it relates to Yāska's stated claim that the *raison d'être* of his discipline of etymology consists in explaining the meaning of all Vedic words. Committing to the view that all nouns are derivable entails that the domain of application of Yāska's etymology knows no boundaries: etymology enables the interpreter to retrieve the meanings of all Vedic words, with no exception.

On the other, this view coordinates with Yāska's hermeneutics of the Veda. Yāska invariably explains the Vedic words as conveying their etymological, as opposed to their conventional, meaning. Doing so enables Yāska to articulate an etymology-driven allegorical interpretation which explains away the proper names mentioned in the Veda as common nouns and thereby reinforces the belief that the Veda transcends history.

The assumptions underlying Yāska's view are therefore rooted in concerns that are not purely linguistic in nature. This recognition does not detract from the linguistic acumen displayed in the controversy's arguments, but invites us to consider ancient Indian linguistic ideas within the broader intellectual landscape in which they arose.

Finally, it is interesting to note that Yāska's commitment to explaining all words etymologically leads us to partly reassess the validity of Gārgya's criticism expressed in [2] and [3]. As it will be recalled, Gārgya claims that accepting Yāska's view that all nouns are derivable would entail that all objects performing the same action would receive the same name, and that one object would receive as many names as the actions it performs. To use the terminology I introduced above, Gārgya argues that Yāska's view entails considering all nouns to be descriptive nouns; no naming noun would be left. In other words, nouns would not denote objects but actions. They are not fixed labels that apply to specific name-bearer objects, but shifting labels that apply to general objects in accordance with the actions they happen to perform. Upon reflection, this view concerning the nature and function of nouns is indeed reflected in Yāska's etymological hermeneutics. By invariably explaining nouns as conveying their etymological meaning, as opposed to their conventional one, Yāska's hermeneutic curtails the referential power of words. Words are primarily explained not in relation to the referent or object they denote, but in relation to the action from which they are derived. In this respect, then, Gārgya's criticism hits Yāska's project harder than Yāska's glib reply would let us see at first.

## APPENDIX I: ANNOTATED TRANSLATION OF THE GĀRGYA CONTROVERSY

This appendix contains an annotated translation of the controversy. In it I have tried to describe, and when I felt confident enough to adjudicate, several textual and interpretive issues. It is hoped that even if not all the interpretations proposed here may be shared by all readers I have successfully managed to lay out the pertinent issues in a balanced manner.



[Ø]

|                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>tatra nāmāny ākhyātājānīti śākaṭāyano nairuktasamayaś ca   na sarvāṇīti gārgyo vaiyākaraṇānām caīke</i> | Of these [i.e., the four word-classes], Śākaṭāyana says that nouns are born from verbs; this is also the convention of the etymologists. Gārgya and certain grammarians say that not all [nouns are born from verbs]. |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

[1]

|                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Gārgya                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <i>tad yatra svarasaṃskārau samarthau prādeśikena vikāreṇa</i> [variant reading, <i>guṇena</i> ] <sup>19</sup> <i>anvītau syātām saṃvijñātāni tāni yathā gaur aśvaḥ puruṣo hastīti</i> | So, where [i.e., in which nouns ( <i>nāman</i> )] accent and grammatical structure are congruent, they both would be linked to an indicative modification. [Conversely,] those [nouns whose accent and grammatical structure are not congruent] are conventional ( <i>saṃvijñāta</i> ), such as <i>go</i> ('cow'), <i>aśva</i> ('horse'), <i>puruṣa</i> ('man'), and <i>hastin</i> ('elephant'). <sup>20</sup> |
| Yāska                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <i>yathô hi nu vā etat</i> <sup>21</sup> <i>tad yatra svarasaṃskārau samarthau prādeśikena vikāreṇa anvītau syātām sarvaṃ prādeśikam ity evaṃ saty anupālabha eṣa bhavati</i>          | Now, with respect to 'where accent and grammatical structure are congruent, they both would be linked to an indicative modification,'—[we reply that] all [nouns conform to] an indicative [modification]. This being so, this [objection] does not obtain.                                                                                                                                                    |

[1] bristles with interpretive issues. Three major issues are discussed below.

(1) The meaning of several terms is insufficiently clear.<sup>23</sup> The term *prādeśika*, a derivative of *pradeśa*, is particularly opaque. Scharfe's (1977: 121–122) proposal that *prādeśika* and *pradeśa* refer to grammatical derivation (cf. NirD 1.12 [102.7/71.6]) seems to have gained a certain traction among contemporary scholars.<sup>24</sup> I translate *prādeśika* literally as 'indicative of'. That which is indicated is, I think, the name-giving action from which a given noun is derived.

<sup>20</sup> The reading *vikāreṇa* might be preferable. [1] and [6] appear to form a complementary pair. The former describes the situation in which regular nouns are the objects of analysis, i.e., nouns in which accent and grammatical structure are 'linked' (*anvīta*) to a 'modification indicative [of the underlying verbal root]' (*prādeśika vikāra*). The latter describes a situation in which irregular nouns are the object of analysis, i.e., nouns in which the meaning is 'not linked' (*ananvīta*) and 'the modification is not indicative [of an underlying root]' (*aprādeśika vikāra*). While in [1] both the reading *vikāra* and *guṇa* are attested, only the reading *vikāra* is attested in [6].

<sup>21</sup> These four words are mentioned in *Nirukta* 1.1 as examples of word-items belonging to the *nāman* word-class. Note also that *go* is the first word listed in the *Nighaṇṭu*. As Goldstücker (1861: 171, n. 208) points out, the word *hastin* seems to be at odds with the others. For *hastin* is regularly formed by means of the secondary affix (*taddhita*) -in. One would rather expect *hasta* ('hand'), whose derivation is unclear. (*Nirukta* 1.7 derives *hasta* from  $\sqrt{han}$  'strike'; *Unādisūtra* III.86 derives it from  $\sqrt{has}$  'laugh'.) It is possible that *hasta* may have been the original word, which was later replaced by *hastin* ('elephant') to better fit semantically the other cited words.

<sup>22</sup> Skandasvāmin (NirS 1.14 [87.12]) reads *yathā-u hi nu ā etaṃ*.

<sup>23</sup> For a detailed discussion of these terms, which pays special attention to native commentators' interpretation, see Cardona 2013: 76–78, n. 15.

<sup>24</sup> See Bronkhorst 1981: 11, n. 5; Kahrs 1998: 36, n. 52; Pinault 2009: 1669; and Bronkhorst 2019: 75.



(2) The passage is syntactically difficult. Durga (NirD 1.12 [101.1-102.6/69.22–71.5]) records two different interpretations. The first interpretation construes the term *saṃvijñātāni*<sup>25</sup> with the left-part of the sentence. In this interpretation, Durga explains, Gārgya identifies three types of words: (i) those wherein the action is visible (*pratyakṣakriyāni*, e.g., *kāraka* ‘doer’)—these are named *saṃvijñātāni*; (ii) those wherein the action can be assumed (*prakalpyakriyāni*, e.g., *go* ‘cow’, *aśva* ‘horse’, etc.); and (iii) those wherein no action is found (*avidyamānakriyāni*, e.g., *dittha*, *ḍavitttha*, and *aravinda*). While the first two types of words are derivable, the last one is not. Note that the assertion that Gārgya regards nouns such as *go* etc. to be derivable is demonstrably wrong. For, as we saw, Gārgya cites *aśva* ([2] and [4]) and *puruṣa* ([4]) as examples of underivable nouns.

The second interpretation construes *saṃvijñātāni* with the right-part of the sentence and takes it to refer to nouns such as *go* (‘cow’) etc. In this interpretation, Gārgya maintains that only regular nouns (e.g., *kāraka*) are derivable, whereas *saṃvijñāta* nouns like *go* etc. are not.

Another problem is that the syntactic relation between *svarasaṃskārau samarthau* and *prādeśikena vikāreṇa anvītau syātām* is unclear. While most interpreters supply ‘and’ (accordingly, the above passage should be translated as follows: ‘accent and grammatical structure are congruent and would be linked to an indicative modification’), I tentatively take the second phrase to convey a resultative sense: that is, being linked to a modification indicative of the underlying verbal action results from having a regular accent and grammatical formation.

(3) It is unclear what the phrase *sarvaṃ prādeśikam* is in Yāska’s reply. Two interpretations are available. First, this phrase is Yāska’s reply to Gārgya’s objection, which is quoted immediately before. This interpretation yields an acceptable sense: while Gārgya argues that only nouns that present regular accent and grammatical structure display a modification indicative of the underlying root, Yāska replies that such an indicative modification is found in all nouns.<sup>26</sup> This interpretation is followed in the translation above.

There is one problem with this interpretation, however. It is unclear why there is no quotative particle *iti* before *sarvaṃ prādeśikam* to mark the preceding portion as a quotation of Gārgya’s objection. The participle *iti* occurs in Yāska’s all other replies, which all follow the same pattern: Yāska first cites Gārgya’s objection, which is marked by *iti*; then he counters it.

The second interpretation takes the phrase *sarvaṃ prādeśikam* as part of Gārgya’s objection, not as part of Yāska’s reply. This phrase must then be taken as being either Yāska’s own gloss of Gārgya’s objection, or Gārgya’s own words. With respect to the latter option, comparison with Yāska’s other replies indicates that Yāska never glosses Gārgya’s objections. With respect to the former, proposing that the phrase in question is Gārgya’s own words assumes that *sarvaṃ prādeśikam* originally featured in Gārgya’s objection also but it was excised there during the process of textual transmission. This view was proposed by Gune (1916: 173–174) and unconvincingly criticized by Sarup (1984 [1920–27 Exegetical and critical notes]: 213–214).

The problem with Gune’s proposal is that it does not explain what is Yāska’s point in repeating Gārgya’s words. Yāska would merely restate Gārgya’s view that only those words are derivable which present a regular accent and grammatical formation and display a modification of the underlying root. An interesting proposal has been made by Rajavade (1940: 263). He suggests that

<sup>25</sup> Durga (NirD 1.12 [102.12/71.13]) says that the variant reading *saṃvijñāni* is also attested.

<sup>26</sup> This interpretation is adopted by Roth (1852: [Erläuterungen] 10) and Strauß (1927: 115); see also Durga (NirD 1.14 [109.10/78.10]).



while Yāska repeats verbatim Gārgya's words, he assigns to *sarvaṃ prādeśikam* a different meaning. While Gārgya employs this phrase to mean that regular nouns are fully (*sarvaṃ*) derivable, Yāska reinterprets it to mean that all nouns (*sarvaṃ*), not only regular ones, are derivable.

[2]

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
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| <p>Gārgya</p> <p><i>atha cet sarvāṇy ākhyātajāni nāmāni syur yaḥ kaśca tat karma kuryāt sarvaṃ tat sattvaṃ tathācakṣīran   yaḥ kaścādhvānam aśnu-vītāśvaḥ sa vacanīyaḥ syāt   yat kiṃcit tṛṇdyāt tṛṇaṃ tat  </i></p> | <p>Then, if all nouns were born from verbs, anyone who would perform that act, they (i.e., people) would call all objects (<i>sattva</i>) thus [i.e., all objects performing the same act would receive the same name]. [For example,] anyone that would traverse (<i>√as</i>) a path would be called <i>aśva</i> ('horse').<sup>26</sup> Anything that prickles (<i>tṛṇdyāt</i>), [would be called] <i>tṛṇa</i> ('grass')</p> |
| <p>Yāska</p> <p><i>yathô etad yaḥ kaśca tat karma kuryāt sarvaṃ tat sattvaṃ tathācakṣīran iti paśyāmaḥ samānakarmaṇām nāmadheyapratilambham ekeṣām naikeṣām yathā takṣā parivrājako jīvano bhūmija iti  </i></p>     | <p>As to that 'if all nouns were born from verbs, anyone who would perform that act, they would call all objects thus,—[we reply that] we see that some [objects] obtain their names [on account of performing] the same actions, some do not. For example, <i>takṣan</i> ('carpenter'), <i>parivrājaka</i> ('wanderer'), <i>jīvana</i> ('sugar-cane juice'), and <i>bhūmija</i> ('[a kind of] tree').<sup>27</sup></p>        |

[3]

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
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| <p>Gārgya</p> <p><i>athāpi cet sarvāṇy ākhyātajāni nāmāni syur yāvadbhir bhāvaiḥ samprayujyeta tāvadbhyo nāmadheyapratilambhaḥ syāt   tatraivaṃ sthūṇā daraśayā vā saṃjanī<sup>28</sup> ca syāt    12   </i></p> | <p>Then, further, if all nouns were born from verbs, [an object] would obtain a name from so many actions (<i>bhāva</i>) as those with which it is associated [i.e., an object would receive as many names as the actions it performs]. That being so, thus, a beam (<i>sthūṇā</i>) would be [called] <i>dara-śayā</i> ('hole-resting') [because it rests in a hole in the ground], or <i>saṃjanī</i> ('[beam-]fastener') [because the beams (<i>vaṃśa</i>) are fastened to it].</p> |
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<sup>27</sup> Different interpretations of *adhvānam aśnuvīta* are possible. For example, 'one who pervades/attains the path', or perhaps, 'one who reaches [the end of] the path'. They do not, however, affect the general interpretation of the passage.

<sup>28</sup> Different explanations of the terms *jīvana* and *bhūmija* are given by the Indian commentators. Durga (NirD 1.14 [110.15/80.4–5]) says that *jīvana* means sugar-cane juice or a kind of plant, and *bhūmija* means charcoal (or Mars) or tree. Skandasvāmin (NirS 1.14 [89.1–2]) says that *jīvana* means 'burning charcoal' (*sāgnir aṅgārah*), and *bhūmija* means a specific planet (i.e., Mars).

<sup>29</sup> Both Roth's (1852: 36 [line 1]) and Sarup's (1984 [1920–27]: 36 [line 15]) editions read *sañjanī*. They seem to follow Durga (NirD 1.12 [103.12/72.17]). However, Skandasvāmin (NirS 1.12 [85.1–3]) solves the sandhi differently (*vāsañjanī* > *vā āsañjanī*) and says that the reading *āsañjanī* is wrong, for the nasal in the root *sañj* should be deleted, and no *saj* root from which *āsañjanī* may be derived is attested. He adopts the reading *āsacanī*, which is followed by Nilakaṇṭha (1.57 [p. 151]).



|                                  |                                                                                                                                   |
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| Yāska                            |                                                                                                                                   |
| <i>etenaivottaraḥ pratyuktaḥ</i> | With this same [reply, i.e., Yāska's reply to (2)], the following [objection, i.e., Gārgya's objection in (3)] is [also] refuted. |

[4]

|                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
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| Gārgya                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <i>athāpi ya eṣāṃ nyāyavān kārmanāmikaḥ saṃskāro yathā cāpi pratītārthāni syus tathāināny ācakṣīran   puruṣaṃ puriśaya ity ācakṣīran   aṣṭety aśvam   tardanam iti tṛṇam</i> | Then, further, [if all nouns were born from verbs, then] <sup>29</sup> the grammatical structure ( <i>saṃskāra</i> ) of these [nouns mentioned below should be] regular and [expressive of the relationship between] action and noun ( <i>kārmanāmika</i> ); also, they [i.e., the speakers] should call [these nouns] so that they [i.e., nouns] would [directly signify] their intended meanings/objects. [For example] they [speakers] would call <i>puruṣa</i> ('man') <i>puriśaya</i> ('dweller-in-the-citadel'); [they would call] <i>aśva</i> ('horse') <i>aṣṭr</i> ('[path-]traverser'); [they would call] <i>tṛṇa</i> ('grass') <i>tardana</i> ('that which prickles'). |
| Yāska                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <i>yathō etad yathā cāpi pratītārthāni syus tathāināny ācakṣīraṇṇ iti santy alpaprayerogāḥ kṛto 'py aikapadikā yathā vratatir damūnā jātya āṇṇāro jāgarūko darvihomīti</i>   | As to that 'further, they [speakers] should call [these nouns] so that they [nouns] would [directly signify] their intended meanings/objects',—[we reply that] there are [nouns formed with] primary derivational affixes ( <i>kṛt</i> ) which have limited use, even occurring [only] in single words ( <i>aikapadika</i> ), like <i>vratati</i> ('vine'), <i>damūnas</i> ('domestic' [epithet of Agni]), <i>jātya</i> ('one who has matted hair'), <i>āṇṇāra</i> ('a roamer'), <i>jāgarūka</i> ('wakeful'), and <i>darvihomin</i> ('one who offers with a ladle').                                                                                                             |

In the interpretation detailed in the body of the text, Yāska assumes that the nouns he cites in his reply are considered derivable by Gārgya. The following considerations seem to lend support to this interpretation. Note that derivations of most of these nouns are found in the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* and in the *Uṇādisūtra*.<sup>31</sup> Derivations of two nouns (*vratati*, *damūnas*) are found in both the

<sup>30</sup> Durga (NirD 1.13 [104.1/73.12]) supplies this mention of Yāska's thesis (which is mentioned explicitly in Gārgya's objections in [2] and [3]). He does not supply it in his comments on Gārgya's other objections.

<sup>31</sup> The term *jāgaruka* is derived from *jāgr* plus *kṛt* affix *ūka* in *Aṣṭādhyāyī* 3.2.165–166; *damūnas* has a close match in *Uṇādisūtra* IV.234 (*damer unasih*), where *damunas* is derived from *dam* plus affix *unas*; *darvihomin* is mentioned in *Uṇādisūtra* III.84 (*ulmukadarvihominaḥ*), where *darvin* and *homin* are derived with the affixes *vin* and *mini*, respectively; *vratati* is mentioned in Ujjvaladatta's commentary on *Uṇādisūtra* IV.59 (*amer atih*), a *sūtra* which posits the *kṛt* affix *ati*—this suggests that *vratati* is analyzed as *vrat* + *ati*; *jātya* and *āṇṇāra* are presumably derived from *jaṭ* 'get matted' plus affix *ya*, and from *aṭ* 'roam about' plus affix *nāra*. Cf. Cardona (2013: 81 n. 24–25) who helpfully describes Durga's and Skandasvāmin's explanations.



*Uṇādisūtra* and the *Nirukta*. Yet, the derivations given in these two texts differ considerably.<sup>32</sup> Hannes Sköld (1928) studied the derivation of some 400 words that are common to both the *Nirukta* and *Uṇādisūtra* and concluded that these two texts belong to two distinct traditions (31). It is conceivable that Gārgya's accepted derivations of these words, derivations which Yāska must have had in mind, resembled, and perhaps were the antecedents of, the derivations attested in the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* and in the *Uṇādisūtra*.

The two terms *kṛt* and *aikapadika* call for a few comments. The technical term *kṛt* designates primary affixes, i.e., those that are attached directly to the root. While this term is used in the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, Yāska generally employs the term *nāmakaraṇa* ('noun-maker') to refer to primary affixes (e.g., *Nirukta* 1.17; 2.2). Yāska employs *kṛt* only once more in the *Nirukta*, in the context of discussing certain analytical procedures that are accepted by the grammarians (*Nirukta* 2.2; see reference to Durga's commentary thereon cited in note 6 above). It is conceivable that in both its occurrences in the *Nirukta* *kṛt* is employed by Yāska to reflect the grammarians' terminology.

Different interpretations of the term *aikapadika* (as well as of the related term *ekapada*) have been proposed.<sup>33</sup> In my view, Yāska criticizes Gārgya and the grammarians for positing *kṛt* affixes that have limited use (*alpaprayeroga*), i.e., are found in only a few words, or are found in one single word only (*aikapadika*). The *kṛt* affixes *-ūnas* (in *damūnas*) and *-nāra* (in *aṇnāra*) are a case in point, for they seem to be found only in these two nouns (cf. Mehendale 1978 [1968]: 26–27).

[5]

| Gārgya                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
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| <i>athāpi niṣpanne 'bhivyāhāre 'bhivicārayanti  <br/>prathanāt pṛthivī āhuḥ   ka enām aprathīsyat  <br/>kimādhāraś cēti  </i> | Then, further, [etymologists] perform their analyses ( <i>abhivicārayanti</i> ) on utterances ( <i>abhivyāhara</i> ) which have already come about. <sup>33</sup> They [etymologists] say that <i>pṛthivī</i> ('earth') is from <i>prathana</i> ('spreading'); [but] who would have spread it out? And what was he based on [when the agent performed the action of spreading]? |

<sup>32</sup> The two nouns are *damūnas* (listed in *Nighaṇṭu* 4.1.5 and explained in *Nir* 4.4) and *vratati* (*Nir* 6.28). The *Uṇādisūtra* analyzes them as formed with primary affixes (*kṛt*): *damunas* (< √*dam*) + *unas*; *vratati* (< √*vrat*) + *ati*). The *Nirukta* analyzes them as compound words: *damūnas* (< √*dam* 'tame') + *manas* ('mind'); *vratati* (< √*vṛ* 'cover') + √*tan* ('stretch'); the latter etymological explanation is not fully clear, however.

<sup>33</sup> See Roth 1852: [Erläuterungen] 10; Mehendale 1978 [1968]: 22–30; Bronkhorst 1984: 2, 5; Kahrs 1998: 38, n. 57; and Cardona 2013: 58.

<sup>34</sup> Grammatically, the locative *niṣpanne 'bhivyāhāre* can be taken as a locative absolute or as a locative meaning 'concerning, with respect to'. Both ways of parsing yield roughly the same sense.



|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
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| <p>Yāska</p> <p><i>yathô etan niṣpanne 'bhivyāhāre 'bhivicārayantīti bhavati hi niṣpanne 'bhivyāhāre yogapariṣṭiḥ   prathanāt prthivīy āhuḥ   ka enām aprathatyīṣyat kimadhāraś cēti   atha vai darśanena prthuh   aprathitā ced apy anyaiḥ   athāpy evaṃ sarva eva dṛṣṭapravādā upālabhyante  </i></p> | <p>As to that '[etymologists] perform their analyses on utterances which have already come about', —[we reply that] [any] enquiry into the connection (<i>yogapariṣṭi</i>)<sup>34</sup> concerns expressions that have already come about. [As to] 'they [etymologists] say that <i>prthivī</i> ('earth') is from <i>prathana</i> ('spreading'); [but] who would have spread it out? And what was he based on?',—[we reply that] but clearly [the earth] is perceived to be spread wide (<i>prthu</i>), even if it was not spread out by others. Further, all perception-based utterances (<i>dṛṣṭapravādāḥ</i>)<sup>35</sup> would likewise be liable to [this kind of] objection.</p> |
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[6]

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| <p>Gārgya</p> <p><i>athānanvite 'rthe 'prādeśike vikāre padebhyah pade-tarārdhānt samcaskāra śākaṭāyanaḥ   eteḥ kāritaṃ ca yakārādiṃ cāntakaraṇam asteḥ śuddhaṃ ca sakārādiṃ ca  </i></p> | <p>Then, when the meaning [of the noun under analysis] is not linked [to regular accent and grammatical structure (?)], the modification is not indicative [of an underlying root], Śākaṭāyana put together the halves [of the word up for analysis] from [distinct] words.</p> <p>[Śākaṭāyana put together] the final part (<i>anta-karaṇa</i>) [of the word <i>satyam</i>, that is,] 'y' etc. [i.e., <i>-yam</i>] and is the causative [form] of <i>eti</i> (i.e., √i 'go') [with the first part of the word <i>satyam</i>, that is,] 's' etc. [i.e., <i>sat-</i>] and is the pure [form] of <i>asti</i> (i.e., √as 'be').</p> |
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<sup>35</sup> The term *yoga* in *yogapariṣṭi* can be understood in at least two ways: as a technical term meaning etymological derivation (so, e.g., Rajavade [1940: 265]); or as a non-technical term meaning connection. But connection between what? Conceivably, a connection between the meaning of the noun to be explained and the associated verbal action expressed by the verbal root. Cardona (2013: 58) glosses *yogapariṣṭi* as 'an investigation concerning connections of the meanings of terms with actions'.

<sup>36</sup> Skandasvāmin (NirS 1.14 [90.11–12]) reads *dṛṣṭipravādāḥ*, whereas Durga and the editions of the *Nirukta* that I consulted read *dṛṣṭapravādāḥ*. However, the difference in terms of meaning is negligible since Skandasvāmin explains *dṛṣṭi* as referring to the object which is being perceived, that is, as having a meaning that is virtually identical with *dṛṣṭa*. See Cardona's (2013: 82–84, n. 26) detailed comments on the interpretations by Durga and Skandasvāmin.



|                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
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| Yāska                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <p><i>yathô etat padebhyah padetarārdhānt saṃcaskārēti<br/>yo 'nanvite 'rthe saṃcaskāra sa tena garhyah   saīṣā<br/>puruṣagarhā na śāstragarhā [iti]</i></p> | <p>As to that 'he [Śākaṭāyana] put together the halves of one word [i.e., <i>satyam</i>] from [distinct] words', —[we reply that] it is the one who put together, when the meaning is not linked, that should be blamed for this. The blame is with the person, not with the discipline.</p> |

Śākaṭāyana's analysis of the word *satyam* is complex.<sup>37</sup> He divides *satyam* into two parts: a final part (*antakaraṇa*) *-yam* and an initial part *sat-*. Note that Gārgya first details Śākaṭāyana's analysis of the word's final part, *-yam*. This unexpected reversal of order is probably consistent with Śākaṭāyana's overall interpretation of *satyam*, which he explains as a compound governed by its second member (*-yam*). Śākaṭāyana analyzes both the final and the initial part in two steps. First, he mentions the two parts' respective sounds: *y* etc. (*yakārādīm*), i.e., *y* + *a* + *m*; and *s* etc. (*sakārādīm*), i.e., *s* + *a* + *t*. Second, he says that the final part *-yam* is the causative form (*kāritam*) of *√i* 'go', whereas the initial part *sat-* is the pure form (*śuddham*) of *√as* 'be'.<sup>38</sup> Interpreted in this way, *satya* means 'that which causes someone to go to (or understand) what there is/the existent' (cf. Durga [107.1-2/76.1-2]).<sup>39</sup>

[7]

|                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Gārgya                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <p><i>athāpi sattvapūrvo bhāva ity āhuḥ   aparasmād<br/>bhāvāt pūrvasya pradeśo nōpadyate iti  </i></p> | <p>Then, further, they say that action (<i>bhāva</i>) has object (<i>sattva</i>) as its prior. [Therefore] it does not hold that from posterior action (<i>bhāva</i>) there is indication (<i>pradeśa</i>) of the prior [i.e., the object].</p> |

<sup>37</sup> I assume that Śākaṭāyana analyzes the nominative (or accusative) *satyam*, rather than the stem form *satya*, for two reasons. First, given that Śākaṭāyana's analysis of the word's initial (*asteḥ śuddham ca sakārādīm ca*) and final part (*eteḥ kāritam ca yakārādīm ca*) are closely matched, *satyam* would seem preferable, for it can be analyzed into two parts each consisting of three sounds (*sat-* + *-yam*). Second, and perhaps more compellingly, etymologies attested in Vedic literature take *satyam*, not *satya*, as their object of analysis. See the evidence in Deeg 1995: 353 [AĀ 2.1.5], and 386–387 [BU 2.3.1; KU 1.6; CU 8.3.4]).

<sup>38</sup> Different interpretations of *śuddham* have been proposed. Durga (NirD 1.13 [106.15/75.22]) takes it to mean non-causative, thus contrasting with the causative form of *√i*. Roth (1852: [Erläuterungen] 10) thinks it means an abbreviate form of *√as* without the initial *a* sound ('verkürzte Form ohne a') [e.g., *santi* 'they are']. Strauß (1927: 117) thinks that it means a form of *√as* 'be' without the nasal sound found in forms such as *sant-*. Cf. also *śuddha* in Renou 1942: [part 3] 509 and Abhyankar 1986 [1977]: 393.

<sup>39</sup> See Cardona 2019: 56 and Bronkhorst 2019: 75 for two alternative explanations of Śākaṭāyana's analysis of *satyam*.



|                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
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| <p>Yāska</p> <p><i>yathô etad aparasmād bhāvāt pūrvasya pradeśo nōpapadyate iti paśyāmaḥ pūrvotpannānām sat-tvānām aparasmād bhāvān nāmadheyapratilambham ekeṣām naīkeṣām yathā bilvādo lambacūḍaka iti  </i></p> | <p>As to that ‘it does not hold that from posterior action there is indication of the prior,’—[we reply that] we see (<i>paśyāmaḥ</i>) that some objects, which arise prior, receive their names from posterior action; some [others] do not. For example, <i>bilvāda</i> (‘eater of the <i>bilva</i> fruit’) and <i>lambacūḍaka</i> (‘one whose lock is long’).<sup>39</sup></p> |
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<sup>40</sup> The term *bilvāda* may refer to a bird; cf. Rajavade (1940: 266). My interpretation of *lambacūḍaka* follows Cardona (2013: 84, n. 27): ‘A person who has his head shaved, leaving only a tuft at the point of the tonsure, is so called if this tuft hangs down.’



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