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# **Bhasha**

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# Bhasha

## Journal of South Asian Linguistics, Philology and Grammatical Traditions

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## **Section 1**

Vyākaraṇa and Its Many Espouses:  
Linguistics, Philology, Philosophy = Proceedings  
of a Thematic Panel from the 11th CBC Conference  
(Rome, December 10-11, 2021)

Part 1





# A Brief Introduction

Artemij Keidan

Sapienza Università di Roma, Italia

## **1 Some Words on the Coffee Break Project**

*The Coffee Break Project* was founded in 2010 by a group of young scholars (PhD students and postdoc researchers) from the Oriental Faculty of the Sapienza University of Rome. The name of the project reflects the initial intuition on which the project is grounded. Indeed, it often happens that the coffee breaks become the most interesting, informative, and stimulating part of an average academic meeting or conference, in comparison to presentations proper. The monotony of reading and the pompousness of speakers' language often end up causing the audience to lose attention and interest, almost fall asleep. The discussion is discouraged, while the questions tend to become just formal and unchallenging side notes. Or, at least, this is what conferences in humanities often attest. On the other hand, one often takes part in the most challenging and fascinating debates while sipping a cup of coffee during the breaks. The same paper may sound thought-provoking and insightful during such informal discussions while being boring and uninspiring during the actual presentation.

*The Coffee Break Conferences* (CBC) are therefore based on the idea of capturing exactly this informal yet scientifically productive and intellectually stimulating atmosphere and transferring it to the conference itself. Such a decision entails a series of additional rules and constraints for the participants. Thus, the speakers are expected to present their research informally and off the cuff, while reading from a printed version is highly discouraged. A second requirement is that the authors prepare longer abstracts of their papers, which are made available to all the participants days before the conference

starts.<sup>1</sup> This way, all those who are interested have the time to prepare a fruitful discussion and meaningful questions on each paper, rather than making pointless formalistic remarks during the question time.

Our aim has always been that of focusing on methodology and comparisons, rather than on singular highly specialised topics. We promote a comparative approach that combines various fields of study, methodologies of different disciplines, and the concepts and vocabulary of different traditions of scholarship with the aim of giving participants the opportunity to critically discuss their work in an interdisciplinary setting.

The scholars who founded the project generally have a background in the studies of Asia, and especially of India, although from highly varied disciplinary approaches: from philology to philosophy and literature, from linguistics to anthropology, from sociology and economics to gender and sexuality studies. Nonetheless, CBC has and continues to welcome other geographical and linguistic areas and traditions.

Another goal of the CBC project is to give young scholars – who may sometimes experience difficulties in being admitted to major academic meetings – the opportunity to participate in a scholarly event, where they can learn the art of scientific debate and academic presentation.

We also aim at internationalising our conferences as much as possible. We have no fixed venue and often move from one hosting institution to another. So far, the venues of the CBC have been Sapienza University of Rome (six editions, one extra meeting); University of Turin (two editions); and one edition per each of the following institutions: University of Cagliari (Italy); University of Leiden (Netherlands); University of Tübingen (Germany); Wolfson College, Oxford (UK); Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna.

## 2 The 11th Edition of the CBC

The 11th edition of the CBC happened to be the first one upon the pandemics and was held in December 2021, jointly organised by Sapienza University of Rome and the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna. The decision was made for a double venue in order to include all the numerous applicants, who were starving for academic gatherings after almost two years of lockdown. The session of December 10-11 at Sapienza University of Rome was organised by Artemij Keidan, while the session of December 16-17 at the Austrian Academy of Sciences was co-organised by Marco Ferrante, Borayin Larios, and Nina Mirnig.

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<sup>1</sup> The abstracts are freely available on our internet site <https://asiaticacoffeebreak.wordpress.com>, where one can also find all the information about the CBC project, the preceding and the ongoing editions of the CBC conferences.

The general theme of this edition of the CBC has been defined by its organisers rather playfully, as one can infer from the general title, *Arranged Marriages Between Disciplines*. The ‘marriage’ metaphor revealed to be quite versatile in defining all kinds of conceptual interconnections that are established during the analysis of a certain topic from a multi-disciplinary perspective.

Traditionally, CBC conferences are divided into several thematic panels. Such was the case for the 2021 edition as well. Five panels were included, one in the first session and four in the second, with numerous participants and attendees, both personally and online. Following is the list of the panels.

- “A Humanities’ Love Triangle: Anthropology, Literature and Gender Studies”, organised by Marco Lauri and Marta Scaglioni. The focus of this panel is on the gender roles and identities in the modern Arabic-speaking world.
- “Conceptuality in Perceptual Knowledge: Philosophical and Philological Perspectives”, organised by Marco Ferrante. The focus is on the analysis of traditional Indian philosophy of mind and cognition from a modern philosophical point of view.
- “The Language of Things: Materiality as a Fruitful Lens in the Humanities”, organised by Borayin Larios and Nina Mirnig. This panel explores the manyfold interconnections of language, ritual, and material culture in the traditional South Asian society.
- “Telling Stories, Interpreting Documents: The Interaction of Literary and Historical Practices”, organised by Naresh Keerthi and Elena Mucciarelli. This panel approaches the problem of the interconnections between historical reality and literature, with a special focus on South Asia.
- “*Vyākaraṇa* and its Many Espouses: Linguistics, Philology, Philosophy”, organised by Artemij Keidan. This panel was the only one held at Sapienza University of Rome. For further details see the section that follows.

The vastness and variety of topics taken in consideration in the present edition are a perfect representation of what the CBC has always tried to be, i.e. a general container (rather than a thematic guideline) that offers a methodological frame (rather than a precise theoretical approach) for confronting, discussing, and generating new ideas.

The total number of papers presented during this edition of CBC was so high (almost doubling the average figures of past editions) and the topics so varied, that it was almost impossible to publish the proceedings of all the panels together. The decision was therefore taken to publish the proceedings of specific panels separately. What follows is the proceedings of the panel devoted to the investigation of the traditional Indian *vyākaraṇa* ‘grammatical analysis’ from a contemporary perspective.

### 3 Proceedings of the Vyākaraṇa Panel

Some words on this panel are in order. The main assumption is that between the traditional Indian language disciplines (the grammar of Sanskrit, including morphology, phonology, lexicology, but also semantics and philosophy of language) and the contemporary language sciences (ranging from linguistics to philology, textual criticism, and philosophy) there are several connections, some of which rather evident, and others more hidden. These theoretical links go back to the very beginning of the western ‘discovery’ of Sanskrit with its traditional grammar, authored by Pāṇini, the greatest Indian grammarian, dating back to circa the 5th century BCE. But even today, after the western linguistics tradition matured enough to understand certain brilliant theoretical subtleties of Pāṇini’s grammar, surprising new links and parallelisms are still being discovered.

Thus, we know not only that the discovery of Sanskrit provoked the explosion of the Indo-European studies in Europe, but that many basic notions in Morphology and Phonology, in western linguistics, have been similarly shaped with substantial support from the Indian disciplines of *vyākaraṇa* and *śikṣā*. Conversely, some theoretical achievements of Pāṇini, or his successors, have been fully understood only recently, after the western linguistics have independently developed similar notions and categories.

Thus, only during the twentieth century did scholars finally understand and started to appreciate several theoretical highlights of the Indian tradition:

- Pāṇini’s syntactic theory (constructed as the interplay of *kāraṅkas* ‘semantic roles’ and *vibhaktis* ‘morphological endings’, which has been equaled in the west only after Lucien Tesnière and Charles Fillmore formulated the notion of semantic role);
- Bhartṛhari’s theory of *sphoṭa* (which prefigures functionalist phonology);
- the overall architecture of Pāṇini’s grammar organised in a set of concurrent ordered rules (as in many contemporary generative approaches to phonology, starting from the seminal ideas of Paul Kiparsky who himself is an appreciator of Pāṇini’s grammar);
- the notion of lexical meaning as negation defended by the Buddhist philosophers of language (which closely recalls Saussure’s semiotics).

The present panel had, therefore, the purpose of challenging the two sides of this bilateral relationship - the western and the Indian - favouring a compenetrative analysis of both.

Finally, I must express my sincere gratitude to *Bhāṣā. Journal of South Asian Linguistics, Philology and Grammatical Traditions*, and personally to its editor Andrea Drocco, who kindly agreed to host the proceedings of the *vyākaraṇa* panel as a thematic section of two issues of this journal. A first group of papers occupies a section of volume 2, issue 1 (2023); a second group of papers is planned for the issue 2 of the same volume.