Discontinuity in Vedic Prose

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1. What does hyperbaton mean in Vedic prose and under which conditions does it arise?

2. Data mostly from the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa (AB), a middle Vedic text made esp. accessible by Aufrecht’s edition (1879), Keith’s translation (1920), Verpoorten’s study of AB word order (1977), etc., as well as its comparative prolixity:

   Auch ist die Form der Darstellung im Kaushitaki viel knapper gemessen als im Aitareya, das sich in einer gewissen Breite zu ergeben liebt. (Aufrecht ibid. iv) —

Upshot: relatively little pronominalization and ellipsis, nice full NPs

3. Subtype under discussion today: discontinuous Noun Phrases (dNPs) of the type Modifier ... Noun, including

   Adjective ... Noun (A...N): svargam ... lokam ‘the heavenly world’ (AB 1.7.1)
   Determiner ... Noun (D...N): teśām ... asurāṇām ‘of these Asuras’ (6.36.2)
   Quantifier ... Noun (Q...N): sarvābhyāḥ ... devatābhyāḥ ‘to all the deities’ (1.1.3),

4. Exclude dNPs that arise via relatively well-described processes:

4.1 the movement of enclitics, e.g.

   sarvāś ca devatāḥ ‘and all the deities’ (1.3.19 etc.)

   aprīyāya_enāṃ bhrātyyāya dadyāt ‘he should give it [the rejected dakṣinā] to the unbeloved rival’ (6.35.3);

4.2 and WH-elements (interrogatives, subordinators, relatives), e.g. yāvantam ... lokam ‘how much space’, where yāvantam undergoes WH-movement and lokam apparently remains in the direct object position.

   yāvantam how.much:ACC ha vai saumyena adhvareṇa ṭiṣṭvā lokaṃ space:ACC jayati he.wins

   ‘However much space he wins by performing a soma sacrifice(, he wins that much with each Upasad)’ (3.18.8)
5. We are interested in As that form an NP with the noun they modify in neutral word order. So we will also exclude As that are secondarily predicated of the noun, including

5.1 depictive As such as *avihṛtān* ‘untransposed’, which describes the state of the Pragāthas during the recitation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>avihṛtān</th>
<th>eva</th>
<th>caturtham</th>
<th>pragāthān</th>
<th>chaṃsati</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>untransposed:ACC.PL</td>
<td>PTCL fourth:ADV</td>
<td>Pragāthas:ACC</td>
<td>he.recites</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘The fourth time, he recites the Pragāthas untransposed.’ (AB 6.24.11)

5.2 and participles such as *kriyamāṇam* ‘being performed’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>yat</th>
<th>karma</th>
<th>kriyamāṇam</th>
<th>rg</th>
<th>abhipadati</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>which:ACC.SG</td>
<td>deed:ACC</td>
<td>being.performed:ACC.SG</td>
<td>verse:NOM</td>
<td>describes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘the deed that the verse describes as is it being performed’ (AB 1.4.9),

5.3 Note that this holds for English as well

I eat Kumamotos raw, but Bluffton oysters, I eat steamed,

in contrast to attributive adjectives

*I eat Kumamotos Japanese

*Bluffton oysters, I eat small.

6. This should leave us with As that modify the referent of the noun in general, e.g.

*dakṣinaṇa ... jānunā* ‘with (his) right ... knee’ (8.6.4)

*triṣamṛddham ... vajram* ‘the triperfected ... vajra’ (2.16.4)

7. Two issues that go back at least to Delbrück, whose discussion of particular examples is often reminiscent of modern literatur on pragmatics/information structure.

7.1 What motivates fronting (a type of *occasionelle Stellung*) of the adjective: topicalization or focalization?

7.1.1 Regarding the fronting of predicate nominals (1878: 27):

Der Gund für diese Stellung liegt auf der Hand. Das Subject nämlich ist bekannt, das Praedikatsnomen aber bringt etwas Neues hinzu, und tritt also nach dem allgemeinen Gesetz der occasionellen Wortstellung vor.

⇒ Focus (or more precisely, fronting of new information, which is typically focused).
7.1.2 Regarding the fronting of predicate genitives (1878: 32):

Die Worte tvāṣṭur und mónor sind aber hier nach vorn gerückt, weil sie das Stichwort der Erzählung bilden. Da begreiflicherweise zu einem solchen Erzählungsanfang häufig Gelegenheit ist, so sind diese Genitive in occasioneller Stellung häufiger anzutreffen, als in traditioneller.

⇒ Topic.

7.2 Does the fronting encode topicalization/focalization of the A alone or can it also encode topicalization/focalization of the entire NP? He very clearly states that preverb fronting emphasizes the entire preverb+verb and apparently suggests the same about A fronting in his remarks on

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{vi bhajante} & \quad \text{ha} \quad \text{vā} \quad \text{imām} \quad \text{āsurāḥ} \quad \text{prthivām} \\
& \quad \text{distribute} \quad \text{PTCL} \quad \text{PTCL} \quad \text{this:ACC} \quad \text{Asuras:NOM} \quad \text{earth:ACC}
\end{align*}
\]

‘Es verteilen ja diese Erde die Asuras’ (ŚB 1.2.5.3),


8. Both questions persist — understandably — in more recent studies that focus on syntax, e.g. Hale’s excellent 1995 treatment of the syntax of “Topicalization”

I use ‘topicalization’ without prejudice as to ultimate assessment of the pragmatic function of this position. (103 n. 20)

... the initial position is the landing site for topicalized or emphatic material. It is not a priori obvious what in detail the pragmatics of this position are, but that there is a position to the left of everything else in the clause is beyond doubt. That this position is further to the left than, e.g., the landing-site for WH-movement can be seen from examples such as ... (114)

and — regarding Preverb ... Verb discontinuity — in Lowe 2011:

There are two competing justifications for this: either the preverb itself is focused, or the preverb serves to focus or topicalize the verb with which it is associated. (§3.3.2)

9. Tentative answer to both questions: in A...N dNPs, the adjective is focused and the noun is not. I will assume that “Focus indicates the presence of alternatives that are relevant for the interpretation of linguistic expressions” (Krifka 2007 with refs). Relatively clear examples are found in answers to (implicit) questions and parallels/contrasts.

9.1 During the Upasads, the sacrificer fasts; he only drinks fasting milk (vrata). The implicit question is: how may teats of milk may he drink on which day of the Upasads?
‘In the beginning, he has recourse to four teats for fasting milk during the Upasads.’ (1.25.4)

In this case, alternatives {three teats, two teats, one teat} are explicitly mentioned:

# # trīn stanān vratam upaity upasatsu ... # # dvau stanau ... # # ekam stanam ... 

9.2 What does the King do with the ritual throne that he has just prepared? How does he do it?

dakṣiṇena_agre  jānuna_atha  savyena
right:INS_beginning:LOC  knee:INS_then  left:INS

‘He should mount that throne, first with his right knee, then with his left.’ (8.6.4) 

10. A less obvious case of Af...N is triṣamṛddham ... vajram in the following context.

The gods were afraid: “The Asuras will take this morning sacrifice from us ... .” Indra said to them, “Fear not!

triṣamṛddham  ebhyo  'ham  prātar  vajram  prahartāsmi_iti
trī-perfected:ACC  them:DAT  I:NOM morning  vajra:ACC  will.hurl_QUOT

‘I will hurl the triperfected vajra at them in the morning.’ (2.16.4)


11.1 In contrast to restrictively used triṣamṛddham above, descriptively used As do not appear in hyperbaton in the AB, e.g.

surabhi ghṛtam ‘sweet-smelling ghee’ (1.3.5 in a list with melted butter, slightly melted butter, etc.)
apriyam bhrātryam ‘unbeloved rival’ (6.32–33, multiple repetitions)
apriyāya_enām bhrātryāya dadyāt ‘he should give it to a hated rival’ (6.35.3)

Descriptively used As are not compatible with focus. In a world where all rivals are hated (and hate you), it is impossible to say
the HATEDF rival = apriyam ... bhrātryam

because there are no alternatives.
11.2 But adjectives that are especially compatible with focus do, such as ordinals, comparatives, and superlatives, which pick out members of a set (contrasting with other members)

  ordinals       *prathamaṃ ... rcā ‘with the first verse’ (4.7.6),
  superlatives   *bhūyāśtan ... paśūn ‘the most cattle’ (6.24.16),

identity adjectives (*same, other, different*), who use a logical operation relative to (and in a sense, contrasting with) an anaphoric antecedent

  identity As  *itarāḥ ... devatāḥ ‘the other/rest of the gods’ (2.16.1),

demonstratives, which pick out a referent via deixis or anaphora (often contrasting with other potential referents)

  demonstr.    *etām ... yajñām ‘that (particular) sacrifice’ (ŚB 11.1.6.16)

12. Where in the syntax? They precede non-dropped subject pronouns, *eta*-deictics, *tad* ‘thus, that way, etc.’, and one interrogative.

  trīṣamṛddham evhyo [ham prātar vajram prahrātāsmi
  asapatnāṃ vā [tābhir devā vijītāṃ vyajayanta (1.24.1)
  tāvantam eva [dviṣate lokam pariśiṣṭaṃ (5.24.10)
  itarā me [kendra devatā upaṭā bhaviṣyanti (2.16.1)


13. Is *A_F N* always realized as a dNP? No. Compare the following cases, where fronting of *A_F* would result in

13.1 continuous word order

  (caturro ’gre stanāṃ vrātam upaṭy upasatus ...) trīn stanāṃ vrātam upaṭy upasatus ... *dvau stanau *

13.2 clitic-interrupted NPs

  sarva enam pañcajanā vidur
  all:NOM him:ACC five.peoples:NOM know

  ‘all the five peoples know him’ (3.31.6)

14. Where nothing intervenes between the neutral position of the NP and the “topicalization” position, continuous NPs and clitic-interrupted NPs are ambiguous, because the same order results whether the *A* is focused and fronted (as above) or not:
apriyāya _enām__ bhrāṭṛvyāya  dadyāt
unbeloved:DAT_it:ACC__ rival:DAT__ he.should.give

‘He should give it to a hated rival’ (6.35.3).

15. The cautious result: A...N dNPs arise under the same conditions in Vedic prose as they do in Greek prose (D&S 2000: 112–113)

“Basically, an adjective can only be used in Y₁ hyperbaton if it has narrow strong focus. Consequently descriptive adjectives, emphatic or otherwise, and restrictive adjectives not in strong focus never, or hardly ever, occur in Y₁ hyperbaton in prose ...” and Latin prose (D&S 2006: 548)

“It emerges clearly from this analysis that the pragmatic values in premodifier hyperbaton are not random. In general it is difficult to find examples of the adjective that cannot be read with focus, and it is difficult to find examples of the noun that are not either tail material (anaphoric, implicit or accommodated) or at least subordinated focus.”

16. Since dNPs of this type exhibit these pragmatic characteristics cross-linguistically (cf. Fanselow and Féry Ms.), A ... N discontinuity falls squarely into the category of things that could be inherited, but are common enough that they presumably arise independently as well.

Works cited


