

Hemacandra and the Linguistic Tradition

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IT MAY be useful to understand the linguistic judgement of Hemacandra, the medieval grammarian of Prākṛit, even though one may not agree with his mixing up of data and source material or one may charge him with undue leaning on and indiscriminate borrowing from earlier Prākṛit grammarians. When a medieval grammarian describes a number of languages and dialects in one treatise, one is curious about the underlying ideas of linguistic relationship during that period; probably the provenience of ideas of linguistic relationship may be the whole period rather than one author, but even then, the author's understanding and application of notions of language relationship may provide a useful framework to assess the medieval grammarians of Prākṛit. This short note is an attempt in that direction.

Hemacandra (*Siddha-Hema* VIII. IV onwards; especially VIII. IV 260 onwards) has dealt with the varieties of Prākṛit as dialects and has described the major dialect in details. His major dialect is (Māhārāṣṭrī) Prākṛit; Śaurasenī is described as a dialect variation from the major dialect. The three other dialects Māgadhī, Paisāci and Apabhraṃśa are described as variants within the Śaurasenī—as the members of the Śaurasenī group. (Hc. ends his description of these dialects by the statement *śeṣam Śaurasenīvat*.) Though no chronological sequence is intended, it is reasonable to separate Māhārāṣṭrī from the

rest, esp. Śaurasenī, Māgadhi and Paisācī : the total loss of some classes of intervocalic stops in Mahārāṣṭrī on the one hand, and retention or voicing of intervocalic stops in the rest. Hc. groups Apabhraṃśa also under Śaurasenī, because he notices some common phonological features (intervocalic -t- > -d-) between the two. Hc. further includes Ardhamāgadhi as a subgroup under Māgadhi and Cūlikāpaisācī as a subgroup under Paisācī, as variants which are separated only by one or two features. This grouping and subgrouping of languages and dialects (though the data were literary) indicates that the sorting of general features and special features, germane to comparative work in linguistics was not neglected by the author of *Siddha-Hema*. Prākṛit grammarians' classification may, therefore, have some basis in this understanding; even if one may explain it, following the later (14th century) eastern grammarians, Rāmaśarmā and Mārkaṇḍeya, that whatever is used on stage is *bhāṣā* or *vibhāṣā*, the rest is Apabhraṃśa¹, the subgroupings of Hc. and grouping of Apabhraṃśa in the Śaurasenī subgroup indicate a judgement of linguistic relationship.

If Hemacandra has won laurels from R. PISCHEL, he has also been severely criticised by Luigia Nitti-Dolci²; but we are less concerned here with his selection of data; Hemacandra could also be interpreted as a witness to the understanding of linguistic relationship in medieval India.

Another evidence of his familiarity with the comparativists' tools is his compilation of words of doubtful (native, non-Sanskritic)

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1 LUIGIA NITTI-DOLCI, '*Les Grammairiens Prakrits*', Adrien-Maison-neuve, Paris, 1938. Rāmaśarman II. 3. 31 :

śakāṛakauḍra-Dravidādi-vāco
'pabhraṃśatām yady api saṃśrayanti
syān nāṭakāḍau yadi saṃprayogo
naitāsv apabhraṃśatayā tattheṣṭiḥ

and her comment (on pp. 122) :

"Nous voyons ici comment le classement des langues se faisait chez les grammairiens prākṛits : d'après l'usage littéraire et non pas d'après la nature de la langue. Un dialecte, quel qu'il soit, employé sur la scène était une *bhāṣā* ou une *vibhāṣā*, selon le degré de respectabilité des personnages auxquels il était attribué. Un dialecte employé dans la littérature non théâtrale était un Apabhraṃśa."

- 2 Nitti-Dolci, *ibid.*, Chapter 5.

origin, his *Desī-sadda-saṃgaho*, or *Rayanāvali* (also known as *Desīnāma-mālā*) which supplies a lexical residue, containing items which could not fit in with the Sanskrit-Prākṛit correspondences set up by him. We know that this is how a comparativist proceeds; he collects the cognates which display regular correspondences, and separates the rest of the lexicon, which could be taken care of either by analogy or borrowing. It would be, of course, not useful to find fault with Hemacandra's etymologies; we have much more analysed data and refined tools, but we can profitably appreciate his familiarity with the notions of 'regular and irregular' in comparative historical linguistics.

