Bhartrhari distinguishes between the word itself (sometimes called sphota) and the sounds that manifest it. These sounds themselves are subdivided in one passage of the Vākyapadiya into prākṛta dhvani and vaikṛta dhvani. These two expressions have puzzled modern scholarship. J. F. Staal offers the following interpretation (1969: 519 [123]): “Bhartrhari distinguishes between (1) the sphota of an expression, which denotes the expression as a single unit conveying a meaning; (2) the prākṛta-dhvani of an expression, i.e. the phonological structure assigned to the type it represents; and (3) the vaikṛta-dhvani, i.e. the phonetic realization in its particular utterance-token.” This interpretation goes back to John Brough (1951). K. Kunjumma Raja (1969: 14–15) gives a somewhat different explanation: “First, we have the actual sounds of the words uttered; this is the vaikṛta-dhvani. These sounds reveal the permanent prākṛta-dhvani which is an abstraction from the various vaikṛta-dhvani-s, or which may be considered as the linguistically normal form devoid of the personal variations which are linguistically relevant.” Elsewhere in the same book he describes the prākṛta dhvani as an “abstract sound-pattern with the time-sequence still attached to it” (p. 117), as “the phonological structure, the sound-pattern of the norm” (p. 120). Jan E. M. Houben (1990: 125 with n. 17) criticises Brough’s view to the extent that the vaikṛta-dhvani represents “the individual instance, noted in purely phonetic terms” and observes: “The prākṛta-dhvani refers to those phonetic features of the audible sound that are differential in the system of language. The vaikṛta-dhvani is not differential in the system of language.” He further points out that the verses of the Vākyapadiya only use these terms, without defining them, so that for an interpretation we have to rely on the ancient commentaries. The following interpretation, which obviously tries to do justice to the commentaries, is due to Ashok Akuljkar (1990: 132): “Sphota, though without temporal distinctions, appears to have temporal divisions of two kinds: difference in the form of short vowel or long vowel, and so on; and difference in the form of a quick (druti), medium (madhyamā), or slow (vilambita) pace of utterance, due to division in
the manifesting sound (dhvani). A part of the sound is the minimum needed for the manifestation of the linguistic units (prakṛṭa dhvani); the remainder, if any, simply keeps the manifestation in effect for a longer time (vaikṛṭa dhvani). The former is related to the distinction conveyed by 'short', and so on, the latter to the distinction conveyed by 'fast', and so on." Madhav M. Deshpande (1997: 46–47), similarly, observes: "The sphoṭa level is said to be beyond temporality, while the primary manifesting sounds (prakṛṭa-dhvani) have the feature of duration or length. The secondary manifesting sounds (vaikṛṭa-dhvani), which are further reverberations of the primary manifesting sounds, reveal the feature of tempo. Thus, in general, we get concentric circles representing different features." He then comments: "As a production model, I do not think Bhartrhari's ideas will rank very high in the evaluation of modern phoneticians. On the other hand, the diagrammatic perception of the various phonetic features as concentric circles moving out from more distinctive to less distinctive offers an interesting view of these features and deserves to be explored further."

It is of course well known that it is not without risk to interpret old Indian texts only in the light of modern notions of linguistics, especially where there is no explicit evidence to support such an interpretation. Texts have to be interpreted first of all in the light of notions familiar to their own author(s). It is not obvious that all the interpretations mentioned above fulfill this requirement. Aklujkar's interpretation does try to remain close to the texts. It is, however, strange in that it suggests two succeeding parts of sound with altogether different functions. If Bhartrhari entertained such notions about sound, where did he get them from?

Instead of – or rather before – following Houben's advice to rely on the ancient commentaries, I propose to explore a different path: to reflect upon the question what prakṛṭa and vaikṛṭa dhvani could be.

Consider the expressions prakṛṭa and vaikṛṭa. Why did Bhartrhari use these? Prakṛṭa is an adjectival derived from prakṛti; vaikṛṭa is similarly derived, or can be derived, from vikṛti. The terms prakṛti and vikṛti are particularly popular in classical Śāṁkhya, which divides its twenty-five principles (tattva) under these two headings. Śāṁkhya Kārikā 3 puts it as follows: "The root-prakṛti is no vikṛti; the seven beginning with mahād are both prakṛti and vikṛti; sixteen are [only] vikṛti (here the synonym vikāra is used); the puruṣa is neither prakṛti nor vikṛti."

In our quest for the meaning of prakṛṭa dhvani it is not necessary to enumerate all the twenty-five principles of Śāṁkhya and show their mutual relationship. It is sufficient to recall that among those principles there are five, called the tannāṭras, that are both prakṛti and vikṛti, because they give rise to five other principles (the five elements), and are themselves derived from the principle ahamkāra. The five tannāṭras carry the names of the five qualities, but are not identical with them. The Śāṁkhya distinguishes therefore a śabdasthānāṭra ('sound'), a sparśasthānāṭra ('touch'), a rūpānanāṭra ('colour'), a rasātanāṭra ('taste'), and a gandhātanāṭra ('smell'). What can be said about them?

Śāṁkhya Kārikā 38 begins with the words tannāṭraṁ aviseṣaṁ. "The ones without specific features (aviseṣa) are the tannāṭras". The Yuktidīpikā comments: "Those indeed are the ones without specific features. Which are the tannāṭras? They are śabdasthānāṭra, sparśasthānāṭra, rūpānanāṭra, rasātanāṭra, and gandhātanāṭra. Why are they [called] tannāṭras? Because specific features of the same kind are not possible [in them]. When there is no difference of kind, e.g. sound, no other specific features – such as the accents called udatta, anudatta, svṛti, or the being nasal – are found in it, and that is why it is [called] śabdasthānāṭra (approx. 'sound and nothing but that'). In the same way [there are no specific features] such as 'soft', 'hard' etc. in the tannāṭra of touch; no specific features such as 'white', 'black' etc. in the tannāṭra of colour; no specific features such as 'sweet', 'sour' etc. in the tannāṭra of taste; and no specific features such as 'fragrant' etc. in the tannāṭra of smell. For this reason only the general feature of each quality is present in the [tannāṭras], no specific feature, and this is why those 'ones without specific features' are the tannāṭras."

We are primarily interested in the śabdasthānāṭra. It is here presented as sound without the specific features that may accompany sound. It is, moreover, different from the quality sound. The quality sound, we may assume, possesses all the specific features which the śabdasthānāṭra is here stated not to possess. But the quality sound, unlike the śabdasthānāṭra, does not evolve into other principles. The fact that the śabdasthānāṭra does do so, justifies it being prakṛti, or prakṛti śābda.

To avoid confusion, let me point out that the Śāṁkhya texts, as far as I am aware, do not use the expression prakṛṭa śābda. But this would seem to be an insignificant detail. Prakṛti means "belonging to the prakṛti(s), original", and obviously the śabdasthānāṭra does belong to the prakṛti of Śāṁkhya.

But if the Śāṁkhyas accept a prakṛti śābda, one would expect that they also accept a vaikṛṭa śābda "modified sound". Here however we are confronted with a difficulty that characterises classical Śāṁkhya as it has been handed down to us. None of the usual qualities, and this includes the quality sound, figure among their twenty-five principles. Contrary to what one might expect, the tannāṭras do not give rise to the corresponding qualities, but to the five elements, in the following!
manner: the tanmātra of sound gives rise to ether, the tanmātra of touch to wind, the tanmātra of colour to fire, the tanmātra of taste to water, and the tanmātra of smell to earth. It is even stranger that these five elements are stated to be ‘specific features’ (vīṣēṣa) in the Sāmkhya Kārikā. The Yuktidīpikā seems to take a different position, for it gives a long enumeration of characteristics (dhårmaṇa) for the five elements, and concludes: “These [here enumerated characteristics] are called ‘specific features’ (vīṣēṣa).” The position of the qualities is described as follows in the Yuktidīpikā:

From the tanmātra [called] ‘sound’, which has sound as quality, ether [is born], which has [that] one quality. From the tanmātra [called] ‘touch’, which has sound and touch as qualities, wind [is born], which has [these] two qualities. From the tanmātra [called] ‘colour’, which has sound, touch and colour as qualities, fire [is born], which has [these] three qualities. From the tanmātra [called] ‘taste’, which has sound, touch, colour and taste as qualities, water [is born], which has [these] four qualities. From the tanmātra [called] ‘smell’, which has sound, touch, colour, taste and smell as qualities, earth [is born], which has [these] five qualities.

We learn from this passage that the qualities are not derived from the tanmātras, but that they somehow characterise both the tanmātras and the elements derived from them. In other words, the qualities have no place in the evolutionary scheme of Sāmkhya. They are not derived from anything at all, but they somehow pop up in the company of both the tanmātras and the elements.

The situation is even stranger than it may look at first sight. Recall that the tanmātra of smell is free from specific features such as ‘fragrant’ and the like. But now we learn that this same tanmātra has sound, touch, colour, taste and smell as qualities. It looks as if the tanmātras are here not looked upon as “pure” qualities, as was the case in the description above, but as some kind of “pure” or “pre-” elements. Indeed, the passage just cited is introduced by the remark: “From the elements (bhūtā) which have each one more [quality than the preceding one] arise the specific elements (bhūtāvīṣēṣa) which have each one more [quality than the preceding one].” Here the first word ‘element’ (bhūtā) clearly refers to the tanmātras.

The Sāmkhya of the Sāmkhya Kārikā and its commentaries is, as the above passages illustrate, a strange knot of doctrines, which it may take long to disentangle. However, there is reason to believe that Bhartrhari was acquainted with an earlier form of the system, which may have been, in at least some respects, less obscure. Some passages in his Vākyapadiya and Mahābhāṣyadīpikā indicate that he knew a form of Sāmkhya in which all material objects were looked upon as constituted of qualities. Citations in the works of other authors – among them Dharmopāla and Mallāvādin – confirm that this was at some point a doctrine of Sāmkhya. There is even reason to think that these qualities once figured among the principles (tattva), as final evolutes, and therefore as viṅkatī only. They may have been the vīṣēṣa before this term came to be reserved for the five elements. If we assume that at one point in the history of Sāmkhya tanmātras were thought to give rise to the corresponding qualities, as seems likely in view of the way the tanmātras are still described in the much later Yuktidīpikā, we may have found our vaikṛta sādha. In that case the prākṛta sādha is the sādhatanmātra, free from adventitious features such as accent, nasalization and the like. The vaikṛta sādha is then the quality itself, along with such adventitious features. And the vaikṛta sādha would then be looked upon as being derived from, or having evolved out of, the prākṛta sādha.

This to some extent hypothetical reconstruction of an earlier phase of the Sāmkhya system of thought may perhaps help us in coming to terms with Bhartrhari’s prākṛta and vaikṛta dīvanī. No importance should be attached, I believe, to Bhartrhari’s use of dīvanī in the place of sādha: he often uses sādha as a synonym of sphota, so that this term may have been already used in a different sense. This terminological choice may further be explained by the fact that Bhartrhari uses the expression prākṛta sādha elsewhere in order to refer to something altogether different, viz. the/a Prakrit language. It should also not be forgotten that Bhartrhari often uses ideas which he borrows from other systems for his own purposes. His distinction between prākṛta and vaikṛta dīvanī, supposing that he really borrowed these ideas from Sāmkhya, does not imply that he accepted their other principles and their entire scheme of evolution. With this in mind let us consider the relevant passages of his Vākyapadiya and its commentaries.

The terms are used in verses 76–79 of the first Kānda: They declare that the difference of condition (vṛti) of the sphota, which has no difference of duration and which follows the duration of the dīvanī, is due to the difference in accidental features of the grasping. Because there is – [the sphota] being eternal – a difference in nature in the case of short, long, protracted [vowels] and other [sounds], it is figuratively stated that the duration of the prākṛta dīvanī belongs to the sādha.

The prākṛta dīvanī is accepted as being the cause of grasping the sādha. The vaikṛta [dīvanī] becomes the cause of difference of its state.

But after the manifestation of the sādha the vaikṛta dīvanī bring about a difference of condition; the essence of the sphota is not differentiated by them.

This translation is kept rather literal in an attempt not to impose too much of an interpretation. It should further be kept in mind that verse
78 may not really belong to the Vakypadaya: it disturbs the transition from 77 to 79 (so Rau), and the Vrtti ascribes it to a/the Samgrahakara. It seems however clear that all these verses use the word sabda as a synonym of sphota. The sphota is eternal. One sphota can have a different nature from another one (e.g., u is different from i), but the features (such as length) that allow us to distinguish between them do not really belong to them; they belong to the prakrta dhvani. Once the prakrta dhvani has manifested “its” sphota, the vaikrta dhvani may bring about further differentiations, which do not however affect the nature of the sphota. Note that nothing in these verses states that the vaikrta dhvani itself is subsequent to the prakrta dhvani, as are its effects.

Recall now what the Yuktidipika had to say about the sabdatannatra:14 “When there is no difference of kind, e.g. sound, no other specific features – such as the accents called udatta, anudatta, svarita, or the being nasal – are found in it, and that is why it is [called] sabdatannatra.” Moreover, “specific features of the same kind are not possible [in them]”.15 In other words, the sabdatannatra may be different for different sounds, but it does not contain features that do not differentiate sounds. This, of course, agrees in all details with Bhartrhari’s prakrta dhvani.

The Vrtti adds some observations to the above verses of the Vakypadaya:16 Dhvani here is of two kinds: prakrta and vaikrta. Prakrta [dhvani] is that without which the non-manifested form of the sphota is not distinguished. Vaikrta [dhvani] on the other hand is that by which the manifested form of the sphota is perceived, again and again without interruption, for an extended period of time.

And again,17 Just as a light, immediately after coming into being, is the cause of grasping a jar etc., but when established (avasthitamno) becomes the cause of the continuation of grasping, in the same way the dhvani that continues once the sabda has been manifested brings about a continuation of the notion that has the sabda as object by adding strength to the manifestation of the object. Therefore, though associated with the vaikrta dhvani the difference of which is clearly perceived, the essence of the sphota, because no identity is superimposed, does not lead to any usage of difference in duration in the science [of grammar] as do the features ‘short’ etc.

In these passages from the Vrtti one does get the impression that vaikrta dhvani extends in time beyond prakrta dhvani, that the vaikrta dhvani still resounds when the prakrta dhvani has disappeared. The first passage, to be sure, is not explicit about this. The second passage, on the other hand, speaks of “the dhvani that continues once the sabda has been manifested”: Of course, this passage does not state that the prakrta dhvani disappears once the sphota has been manifested. Indeed, in this line it uses the mere word dhvani, leaving us guessing what exactly is meant.

If we assume – and I repeat that the passage leaves room for doubt – that the vaikrta dhvani comes after the prakrta dhvani, we are confronted with a difficulty in the Vrtti on Vkp 76 (75 in Iyer’s edition). This verse, translated above, appears to speak of the vaikrta dhvani (without mentioning this expression) because it deals with the vrttibhedo (difference of condition) of the sphota, exactly the same expression used in verse 79 to indicate what the vaikrta dhvani brings about. The Vrtti on verse 76 (75) contains the following line:18 “The conditions of the sphota in which we imagine differences – viz. [the features] ‘quick’, ‘medium’, and ‘slow’, each faster than the following one by one third” – are reported to be connected with that grasping that has the sphota as object, and which is an accidental feature of variable duration.” If this means that the vaikrta dhvani brings about the features ‘quick’, ‘medium’, and ‘slow’, we are forced to believe that we are informed about the speed in which a phoneme is uttered by sound that follows the sound that makes us know whether the phoneme concerned is short, long or protracted. This sounds odd, and we would expect the prakrta dhvani and the vaikrta dhvani to act simultaneously.

What would be the Sankhya position in this regard? Do the tannatraas come into being before the evolutes that derive from them? In one important sense, yes. In the evolution out of original nature (muleprakriti, pradhana) each next evolute comes into being after the preceding one. But can the same be said about an individual utterance? Does it first produce the sabdatannatra, and only subsequently its evolute, the quality sound?

It is difficult to find a satisfactory answer to this question. However, one thing seems clear. Both the tannatraas and their derivatives are objects of the senses. This we learn from Sankhya Krikaka 34a, which states:20 “Of the [tenfold external organ] the five sense organs have the viisadas and the aiviisadas as objects.” The aiviisadas, it may be recalled, are the tannatraas. The viisadas are the five elements in the classical system, but we have seen that in the system known to Bhartrhari they may have been the five qualities. The important thing is that the tannatraas are perceivable. Each perception, according to the Sankhya system presumably known to Bhartrhari, must have primarily consisted of two constituents: “pure” qualities (the tannatraas) and “ordinary” qualities (warts and all). I am not aware of any statement in Sankhya literature to the extent that the tannatraas have some kind of priority in perception,
but cannot exclude that some such position was adhered to by at least some Sāmkhya. However this may be, it is possible or even likely that the Sāmkhya scheme of things as known to Bhartrhari did distinguish two elements in sound, one of them perhaps called prākṛta sabda, the other one vaikṛta sabda. Unlike the latter of these two, the former was free from non-differential features.

It is time to turn to the Paddhati of Vṛṣabhadeva. This commentary is clearly not aware of the possible link of the two kinds of sound with Sāmkhya. This is clear from the way it explains the terms prākṛta and vaikṛta, without reference to the Sāmkhya use of these terms. Since the passage concerned is corrupt in all mss. I will only translate the part more or less plausibly reconstructed by its editor.22

Regarding the word prākṛta: On account of the fact that dvānī and sphota are not perceived separately, the sphota concerned is thought to be the origin of that dvānī. [The dvānī is called] prākṛta because it is born in that.2 [The dvānī] that comes after that and is perceived different from that is called vaikṛta, because it is like a modification of the sphota. Or the striking of the organs [of sound] is the origin of the collection of sounds (dvānī). What comes first into being from that, is prākṛta, what comes next is vaikṛta.23

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To conclude. For a correct understanding of Bhartrhari’s prākṛta and vaikṛta dvānī, his intellectual context must first be taken into consideration. Comparison with theories of modern linguistics is delicate, and should not be made until Bhartrhari’s own intellectual background has been properly explored.

It seems likely that the notions of prākṛta and vaikṛta forms of sound come from Sāmkhya, where these notions appear to have been current until the revision of that philosophy during which the qualities as final evolutes were replaced by the five elements. This hypothesis explains both Bhartrhari’s terminology and the ideas it covers: both Sāmkhya and Bhartrhari distinguish between two perceptible forms of sound, the one “pure”, the other “impure”. Questions remain as to their temporal relationship: does the vaikṛta dvānī come into being after the prākṛta dvānī? Neither Bhartrhari’s text nor our limited knowledge about the Sāmkhya known to him allows us to reach a clear and certain answer to this question.

The revision of Sāmkhya referred to above did away with both prākṛta and vaikṛta dvānī. Not surprisingly, the commentator Vṛṣabhadeva no longer understood Bhartrhari’s short and enigmatic passage, and gave it a different interpretation.
REFERENCES


