

Evidentiality in Late Vedic?

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The semantics of the past tenses in the Middle and Late Vedic prose texts represents a largely unexplored area of research. In particular, it remains unclear to what extent the distribution of the Imperfect and Perfect in these texts corresponds to the definitions given by Pāṇini, who characterizes the former as *bhūte anadyatane* ‘in the past not pertaining to today’ and the latter as *bhūte paro’kṣe* ‘in the past, beyond the range of sight’. Pāṇini’s definition of the Perfect has often been taken as an indication that it was used to express that the statement was based on indirect evidence and that, consequently, evidentiality represented a grammatically relevant semantic dimension in the language of his time. However, so far no empirical evidence in favor of this assumption has been brought to light and this hypothesis remains to be substantiated.

In this paper I argue that the use of the Imperfect and Perfect in the Late Vedic prose texts speak in favor of the assumption that evidentiality distinctions were grammatically relevant at this stage. Drawing on recent typological studies by Alexandra Aikhenwald and others (cf. Aikhenwald 2004, Aikhenwald and Dixon 2003) I show that the Late Vedic Perfect in many respects behaves like an indirect evidential. For one thing, it is mainly found in narrative discourse, being more or less excluded from direct speech. Moreover, first person forms of the Perfect are extremely rare in this period. From a diachronic perspective, it is likely that the evidential use of the Perfect originates from its resultative reading which is prominent in earlier stages of Vedic. Moreover, there is some evidence that the Perfect was compatible with an inferential-like reading in earlier stages of Vedic as well, so that its development into an evidential category may be understood in terms of conventionalization of pragmatic implicature.

References:

- Aikhenvald, Alexandra. 2004. *Evidentiality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Aikhenvald, Alexandra and Richard M. W Dixon (Eds.). 2003. *Studies in Evidentiality*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.