Issues in Sanskrit agreement

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Speijer (1886) recognizes two different strategies for predicate gender agreement with mixed-gender antecedents: agreement with the nearest conjunct (which has distributive readings) vs. gender resolution (such that with all-human conjuncts, masculine is used, while neuter is used elsewhere). This account is similar to Pāṇini's ekaśeṣa account (esp. 1.2.67-69), except that Pāṇini's use of the terms napuṁsaka, puṁs, strī does not unambiguously distinguish between sex gender and grammatical gender (elsewhere in his grammar the terms refer to grammatical gender).

For the pre-classical language, a similar comprehensive account is still missing.

The purpose of this paper is to provide such an account. Stray remarks in the earlier literature (Delbrück 1888, Brugmann 1925) include the claim that nearest-conjunct agreement signals not distributiveness but totality and that gender resolution for human/animate conjuncts may be feminine. While the former claim may hold for the Rig Veda, it does not seem to be accurate for later Vedic Prose, a fact which suggests a change in linguistic markedness. The second claim only holds for passages in the Rig-Veda where the conjuncts are heaven and earth, characterized as father and mother, but both of feminine gender (note also *dyāvāpṛthivī* [fem.]). Elsewhere, gender resolution functions just as in the classical language.

I conclude by pointing out the implications of my findings for general linguistics and the challenges presented by certain exceptional types of construction in Vedic Prose, as well as Pāṇini's rule 1.2.73, which calls for feminine gender resolution in the case of herd animals.