

Rule selection in the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* or Is Pāṇini's grammar mechanistic?

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Cardona (1970; 1997: 401–427) discusses general principles that determine precedence in the application of rules in Pāṇini's grammar. Primary among these principles is that an exception (*apavāda*) takes precedence over a general rule (*utsarga*) that operates in the same domain. An exception whose domain of application is wholly included within the domain of application of a general rule would have no scope at all if it did not take precedence; hence there would have been no reason to formulate it. The very fact that the wholly included exception has been stated demonstrates that Pāṇini operated with the principle that exceptions take precedence over their related general rules. The situation is more complicated, however, where the domains of operation of two rules overlap, yet neither is wholly included within the other so that each rule finds scope in the domain exclusive to it. The problem is in determining which rule takes precedence in the shared domain. Cardona asserts (1997: 406) that “the rule concerning the narrower part of the overlapping domain blocks the other by what I call partial limited blocking.” Kiparsky (1991) rejects limited blocking and denies that it is a principle accepted by Patañjali. In each of the four examples Cardona (1997: 406–409) provides, a cursory distribution of rule conditions into domains appears to justify the application of the undesired rule equally as much as the desired one. In such cases, Patañjali appeals instead to 1.4.2 as the grounds for resolving conflict. He (I 46.14) interprets the term *para* in 1.4.2 *vipratīṣedhe paraṁ kāryam* to mean *desired* (*iṣṭa*) rather than *subsequent* and asserts (I 46.15) that in cases of conflict the desired rule applies. Such a principle departs from a mechanistic procedure for determining the application of rules and relies rather on knowledge of the desired outcome of the generative grammar to determine rule ordering. Such a departure would be a shortcoming in the grammar. The current paper demonstrates, however, that careful attention to the statement of the rules in question does justify domain inclusion within an overlapping domain and bears out the concept of limited blocking.