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Norbert Oettinger

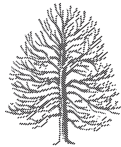
a collegis et amicis dicatum

herausgegeben von

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Information Structure and Scribal Culture in Old Indic

ROSEMARIE LÜHR

1 Task

If one analyzes how narratives were reproduced in early writing cultures, the distinction between fore- and background was an important principle of textualization. For example, the narrator can use certain tenses to give his story grounding and emphasize the illustrated events. Thus the tense serves the information structure. Because stories are usually told in the past tense, languages that possess several past tenses alongside a present tense are particularly relevant for the contribution they make to information structure.

As one of the oldest languages of our cultural circle, Old Indic makes a very suitable case study. In the oldest period, Vedic, it has the greatest number of past tenses among old Indo-European languages: it has an imperfect, an aorist, a perfect, a perfect-preterite,¹ and an injunctive, a formal category that indicates non-temporality² but which could also denote past circumstances. However, it is not the case that all the Old Indic sources use all these past tenses. Most of the past tenses can be found in the oldest literary source of Old Indic, the Rig-Veda, which dates back to 1200 BCE.³ These texts stem from the nonliterate period and were not put into writing until later. Starting in the post-Rig-Vedic period they were handed down depending on ritual or pronunciation as a diverse canon in local Brahman-schools up to the late Brāhmaṇa-period and finally united in the Rig-Veda Saṃhita.

There are innovations in late Vedic that are connected to the information-structural contribution of the tenses. However, ancient features are also preserved here. How the relationship between inherited tense use and innovation is shaped and which tenses grew dominant over time and how the information structure interacts with the choice of tense will be explained in the following. Before we go into this, we will present the

¹Thieme 1929:3; Kümmel 2000:683; García Ramón 2004.

²According to Kiparsky 2005 the Vedic injunctive is neither a mood nor a tense. It has no intrinsic modal or temporal meaning at all. Such modal or temporal interpretations as it receives come from the sentential and discourse context.

³Cf. Witzel 1997:264–5.

analytical framework, according to which we will determine the event evaluation by tenses in the tradition of Old Indic texts. After that we will focus on the use of the individual past tenses in the oldest and later Vedic.

We choose the most famous love story of old India, the story of Purūravas and Urvaśī, as an analysis text.

2 The analytical framework

We base our analysis on discourse relations, as Asher and Lascarides phrased them in *Logics of Conversation* (Asher and Lascarides 2003:459–71). They contain distinct temporal references and therefore seem to be appropriate for the analysis of different past tenses. As a result, the tense use within the “coordinating relations” and “subordinating relations” can be observed. The most important “coordinating relation” is *narration*:

(a) *Narration*:

Max came into the room.

He sat down.

He lit a cigarette.

A shared topic is typical for *narration*. The individual steps of *narration* can be linked by ‘then’. “Subordinating relations” are for example:

(b) *Background*:

Max opened the door. The room was pitch dark.

(c) *Explanation*:

Max fell. John pushed him.

Like *narration*, the discourse relation *background* also needs a shared “topic”. However, the complete temporal overlap of the two events is essential here.⁴

3 The tradition and the content of the narrations

3.1 Tradition

The oldest tradition of narration can be found in the Rig-Veda. The legend of Purūravas and Urvaśī in the Rigveda is an ākhyāna hymn, a “narrative hymn”. The uniqueness of this kind of poetry is that only the poetic verses remain in the Rig-Veda, whereas a mixture of prose and poetry was the original form of narration. It consists of the speech and response of the characters. So one only committed to memory what was necessary to remember in a certain way. Such dialogue songs are full of incomprehensible references, and the context breaks off constantly (cf. Oldenberg 1929:44–5). However, if

⁴Furthermore, *narration* and *background* differ concerning the manner of pronominal resumption (Asher and Vieu 2005).

the prose narration is preserved, the content is clear. This is exactly the case in the dialogue song Purūravas and Urvaśī (Schnaus 2008), whose related prose is found in the Śatapathabrāhmaṇa (cf. Witzel 1997:314–5). It stems from the Middle Vedic language stage. A further version of the Purūravas and Urvaśī theme can be found in the Vādhūla-Anvākhyāna (cf. Witzel 1975:75–108). According to Gotō 2000:80, this Anvākhyāna is based on an independent tradition and not the one codified as Brāhmaṇa. Another can be found in the Baudhāyana-Śrautasūtra. This dialogue song is relevant for our tense problem as it shows various uses of tense.

3.2 Content

To begin, we will give an account of the text from the Śatapathabrāhmaṇa up to where the dialogue starts in the Rig-Veda.

The Apsaras Urvaśī, a divine nymph, enters into marriage with the mortal Purūravas on one condition: she is never to see him naked. The Gandharvas, demigods whose realm the nymph belongs to, want to have her back. At night they rob two little lambs that were tied to her bed. She says, “Am I defenseless then?” Purūravas jumps up naked to reclaim the little lambs. The Gandharvas send a bolt of lightning. Urvaśī sees Purūravas naked and disappears. Purūravas wanders about searching for her. He comes across a lake, where Urvaśī and her playmates are swimming in the shape of ducks. Urvaśī reveals her identity.⁵

The Old Indic text with translation reads as follows (we will only quote the passages that contain past tenses):

- (1) ŚB II.5.1.1
urvaśī hāpsarāḥ. purūravāsam aiḍām cacame tāṃ ha vindāmānā uvāca
‘Urvaśī was an Apsara. She had fallen in love with Purūravas, the son of Iḍā. When she got him she said (“... also I do not want to see you naked...”).’
- (2) ŚB II.5.1.2
sā hāsmiṅ jyōg uvāsa āpi hāsmād garbhīny āsa tāvaj jyōg hāsminn uvāsa tāto ha gandhārvāḥ sāmūdire
‘And for a long time she lived with him and got pregnant from him, such a long time she had lived with him. Then the Gandharvas spoke with each other.’
- (3) ŚB II.5.1.2
jyōg vā iyām urvaśī manusyēsv avātsīd (thought of the Gandharvas)
‘Indeed too long has this Urvaśī lived with the humans.’⁶
- (4) ŚB II.5.1.2
tāsyai ha āvir dvyūraṇā sāyana upabaddhāsa

⁵Cf. Hoffmann 1967:200.

⁶Cf. Hoffmann 1967:156; Gotō 2000:105 n. 100.

- ‘A ewe was tied to her bed together with two little lambs.’
- (5) ŚB II.5.1.2
tāto ha gāndharvā anyataram úraṇam prá metbuh
 ‘The Gandharvas robbed one of the two little lambs.’
- (6) ŚB II.5.1.3
sā ha uvāca . . . dvitīyam prá metbuh sā ha tātha évainòvāca
 ‘The same moment she shouted: (“Somebody is stealing my child . . .”). Then they also robbed the second one and she shouted once again.’
- (7) ŚB II.5.1.4
ātha hāyām iksām cakre . . .
 ‘Then he thought to himself: (“How should there be no men . . . where I am?”).’
- (8) ŚB II.5.1.4
sā nagnā evānūtpapāta cirāṃ tán mene yad vāsah paryádhyāyata
 ‘And naked, as he was, he jumped up and after (her) because it seemed too long if he should clothe first.’
- (9) ŚB II.5.1.4
tāto ha gandharvā vidyūtam janayām cakrus tam yāthā dívā evām nagnām dadarśa
 ‘Seeing that, the Gandharvas created a bolt of lightning, and she caught sight of him naked, as clear as in broad daylight.’
- (10) ŚB II.5.1.4
tāto haivēyām tiró babhūva . . . ét tiróbhūtam
 ‘Thereupon she disappeared. (With the words) “I will come back” (he came. But behold:) She had disappeared.’⁷
- (11) ŚB II.5.1.4
sā ādhyā jalpan kurukṣetrām samāyā cacāra
 ‘Yearning for love, he wandered deliriously through Kurukṣetra.’
- (12) a. [ŚB II.5.1.4
anyatahplakṣēti bisavatī
 ‘There is a lotus lake, called Anyatahplakṣā.]
- b. ŚB II.5.1.4
tāsyai hādhyantēna vavrāja
 ‘He walked on the lakeside.’
- (13) ŚB II.5.1.4
tādāha tā apsarāsa ātāyo bhūtvā páripuplūvire

⁷Hoffmann 1967:200 (English translation by R. L.).

‘There the Apsaras were swimming around in duck shape at that moment.’

- (14) ŚB II.5.1.5
tām heyām jñātvòvāca . . .

‘When she recognized him, she said (“That is the human I lived with”).’

- (15) ŚB II.5.1.5
tā́ hocus

‘They spoke (“We want to reveal ourselves to him nevertheless!”).’

- (16) ŚB II.5.1.5
tásmāi hā́vīrāsuh

‘She revealed herself to him.’

Concerning the denotation of the past tenses, the perfect consistently appears in the quoted narrative parts. However, the aorist is used in expresses the thoughts of the Gandharvas (see example (??) above). We will focus on this usage when talking about the tense system of Vedic.

4 The use of the past tenses in Early Vedic

The function of the Vedic tenses is determined in accordance with the Old Indic grammarian Pāṇini (400 BCE). Pāṇini describes a spoken language (*bhāṣā*) in the northwest of the subcontinent at a time around 500 BCE. This language bears close resemblance to the late Vedic Indo-Aryan represented in Brāhmaṇa texts such as the *Aitareyabrāhmaṇa* (cf. Cardona 2003:106–7):

- (a) The aorist denotes the latest past, it expresses the fact that the verbal act was just executed or occurred.
- (b) The imperfect stands for the non-latest, historical past. It is the tense of narration of an historical account.⁸

⁸Cf. Delbrück 1876; 1897; Hoffmann 1967:151, 153, 155, 270; and Tichy 1997:592: “. . . im Vedischen [werden] die aktuelle und die entfernte, d. h. durch eine Zwischenphase von der Gegenwart abgesetzte Vergangenheit, jeweils durch zwei verschiedene Tempuskategorien bezeichnet” [“. . . in Vedic the latest and most distant past, i.e. a past detached from the present by an interphase, are expressed by two different tense categories”; English translation by R. L.], i.e. aorist and imperfect. Furthermore, Mumm 2002:183: “Aorist wie Perfekt drücken die retrospektive Perspektive aus. Der Aorist focussiert aber enger. Er lässt den Rückblick auf mittelbare—akkumulierte oder in grauer Vorzeit liegende—Ursachen nicht zu, und er bezeichnet auch nur einen aktuellen, keinen langanhaltenden Folgezustand. Das Perfekt, das diesen weiten Focus besitzt, kann seinerseits für den engen aoristischen Focus . . . gebraucht werden” [“Aorist as well as perfect express the retrospective perspective. However, the aorist’s focus is more limited. It does not permit the retrospect to mediate causes—accumulated or from time immemorial—, and it only denotes a current, not long-lasting follow-up condition. The perfect, which possesses this wider focus, however, can be used for the limited aorist focus”; English translation by R. L.]. But compare also Dahl 2010:5–23, 186–216, 343–72.

- (c) The perfect is used for denoting an achieved state.⁹ It states something as past, mostly with an emphasis on the contrast to the present.
- (d) The perfect-preterite is the imperfect for the present perfect (see Kümmel 2000: 82–4).

A further form that was used for denoting preterite situations, the injunctive, does not have an augment, contrary to the indicative aorist and the imperfect. According to Hoffmann 1967:163, it serves among other purposes to give a description. This version of the injunctive appears only infrequently in Middle Vedic (see Kümmel 2000:5). Therefore, we will not pursue the injunctive as a past tense form any further here. Moreover, we will not take the perfect-preterite into consideration because it is consistently used as imperfect (cf. Kümmel 2000:82; Dahl 2010:372–85). Consequently, in the following we will limit ourselves to the other past tenses, indicative imperfect, aorist, and perfect. The indicative aorist will be the centre of attention and will be reevaluated in the following.

4.1 Imperfect/Perfect

4.1.1 In dialogue song

Contrary to the quoted part of the Śatapathabrāhmaṇa, the narrative tense in the Rig-Veda is the imperfect. It appears in the “coordinating relation” *narration*.¹⁰

Thus Urvaśī tells about their time of living happily together:

- (17) RV X 95.5
pūrūravó ’nu te kētam āyayam
rājā me vīra tanvās tād āsīh

‘Purūravas, I met your will. King of my life, o hero, you were then.’

The second sentence contains the temporal adverb *tād* ‘then’. Furthermore, Urvaśī says about the birth of the mutual son:

- (18) RV X 95.7
sām asmiñ jāyamāna āsata gnā
utēm avardhan nadyāḥ svāgūrtāḥ /
mahé yāt tvā purūravo rānāyā-
-vardhayan dasyuhátýāya devāḥ

‘When he was born, the wives of the gods sat with us, and the rivers that sang their own praise raised him, because the gods raised you (too), Purūravas, for the great fight, for the killing of the Dasyu.’¹¹

⁹Cf. Kümmel 2000:65; Kiparsky 2002:1. According to Kiparsky 1998, “the most salient perfect-specific function is to introduce an existential or universal quantification over past times.”

¹⁰Cf. Dahl 2010:192–5, 208–9 for telic and atelic verbs in the imperfect and for the imperfect to denote facts and circumstances that overlap with such descriptions in the present.

¹¹According to Hoffmann 1967:202, the causal sentence shows anterior tense. It appears in the imperfect. Cf. Dahl 2010:199–213.

A remarkable sequence of perfect and imperfect in the dialogue song can be found in the following passage:

- (19) RV X 95.11
jajñiṣá itthá gopátthyāya hí
dadhátha tát purūravo ma ójaḥ /
ásāsam tvā vidúṣi sásminn ában
ná ma áśṛṇoh kím abhúg vadāsi

‘Actually you are born for the office of the guardian. You have, Purūravas, assigned this power for me. I, as the knowing woman, taught you on the same day. You did not listen to me. What useless things do you want to talk about (now)?’

Hoffmann (1967:205) interprets this passage convincingly as follows:

As a knowing woman, [Urvaśi] might, if one considers the actual course of the legend . . . have talked about the fact that the marriage between an Apsara and a mortal with the jealousy of the cunning Gandharvas in mind could not last, but would have to come to an end some day. Purūravas did not listen to this instruction, he did not take it seriously. This also explains the accusation of Urvaśi in [pāda] a [and] b, that he had changed his life only for her: he should have been expecting the end. (English translation by R. L.)

In pāda a and b, with the stative perfects *jajñiṣá* ‘you are born’ and *dadhátha* ‘you have assigned’ Urvaśi raises, according to Hoffmann, “the accusation that his whole power, that Purūravas should have actually dedicated to his ruler’s position, is only focused on her, and indeed . . . still is” (English translation by R. L.). However, the imperfects in *ásāsam tvā* ‘I taught you’ and in *ná ma áśṛṇoh* ‘you did not listen to me’ relate to the day on which they entered into the bond of marriage and Urvaśi posed the crucial condition: “I am not allowed to see you naked.”

The facts expressed in the perfect offer background information. They overlap with the narration in the imperfect. This is an instance of the discourse relation *background*. It is followed by the relation *narration* again in imperfect.¹²

Furthermore, the following perfect form is of interest in our dialogue song because it is characteristic for the further development of the perfect.

¹²But Tichy 1997:596–7: “Die entfernte Vergangenheit wird auch . . . durch das Imperfekt bezeichnet, wenn der Sprecher ein dem Hörer bekanntes Faktum mit Blick auf die aktuelle Gegenwart konstatiert” [“Distant past is also expressed by imperfect when the narrator states a familiar fact concerning the current present”; English translation by R. L.].

(20) RV X 95.4

sā vāsu dādhatī śvāsūrāya
vāya úso yādi vāsty antigryhāt /
āstam nanakṣe yāsmiñ cākān . . .

‘She, giving the father-in-law good vigor every morning, if she wants to,¹³ from the house next-door, has found a home which gives her happiness . . .’¹⁴

As Hoffmann (1967:201) explains, “[Purūravas] remembers the situation of their living happily together at that time before the separation, in fact . . . in a kind of pondering monologue“ (English translation by R. L.). Purūravas cannot understand why Urvaśī left him, because she had after all found a home.

The explanation relates to an implicit question that arises from the context: Why did you leave me? In this instance a non-explicit speech-act is justified. Therefore, this is the “subordinating relation” *explanation*. The perfect *nanakṣe* ‘she has found’ to the root *naks* ‘achieve, reach’ denotes the achieved state of the subject;¹⁵ however, it is clearly oriented towards the past. Therefore, this tense could also be understood as an expression of the past, a usage that is still marginal in Early Vedic.

In the dialogue song Purūravas and Urvaśī of the Rig-Veda, the imperfect is used as a narrative tense. It appears in the “coordinating relation” *narration*. Sequences of perfect and imperfect can also be found. The facts expressed in the perfect offer background information. They overlap with the narration in the imperfect. This means that the discourse relation *background* (perfect) and the discourse relation *narration* (imperfect) alternate. Furthermore, perfect forms appear which are characteristic for the further development of the perfect. While the perfect usually denotes the achieved state of the subject at least in one case (RV X 95.4), it points to the past. This usage is relatively rare in Early Vedic.

4.1.2 In the Śatapathabrāhmaṇa

Contrary to the Rig-Veda, the perfect in the Śatapathabrāhmaṇa version appears consistently. But the aorist is used too. In Middle Vedic, however, the perfect gradually replaced the imperfect as a past tense. The change of the perfect to the narrative tense took place in the following fashion: While the perfect denotes a past state of the agent (cf. example (??) above), in the course of language development a shift towards the implicit preceding action took place until finally a pure preterite was reached. At the same time, instead of the agent other actants could be denoted.¹⁶ This language level can be

¹³Cf. Schnaus 2008:365–6 for interpretation.

¹⁴Cf. Kümmel 2000:277.

¹⁵For a hitherto unknown function of the perfect in opaque context in the scope of a *verbum dicendi* or an attitude verb, see Dahl 2010:370–1.

¹⁶Cf. Kümmel 2000:681 and Dahl 2010:366–7; specifically, present anterior categories strongly tend to develop a perfective or simple past meaning (see Bybee, Perkins, and Pagliuca 1994:51–105; Dahl 2009 and to

found, as shown, in the passages taken from the Śatapathabrāhmaṇa (cf. example (??) above).

Whenever a mingling of perfect and imperfect took place in later Vedic texts, one assumes that the writers were not certain about the use of these tenses anymore.¹⁷ There are several explanations for the change of tense.¹⁸ However, as Witzel (1987:392) argues, there has been a linguistic development. The replacement of the imperfect by the perfect developed from the normal usage of the perfect, that is, for stating the outcome of an event or action: “this has happened/been done”, while he sums up all forms of appearance of the imperfect under the category “ahead of time”.¹⁹ But as Witzel remarks, the old function of the imperfect as narrative imperfect can still be preserved in later Vedic.

The imperfect is an exception in the text of the Śatapathabrāhmaṇa (cf. Delbrück 1888:279).

After Urvaśī advises Purūravas to go home because she is harder to obtain than the wind, she says:

- (21) ŚB II.5.1.7
na vai tvam tād akaror yād aham ābravam
‘You did not do that which I had told you.’²⁰

But this shows that the imperfect was indeed a narrative tense originally. Thus Witzel (1989:145) notes, “It was only by the time of the assembly of the materials and of the actual composition of this Brāhmaṇa (during the late Brāhmaṇa period), that the usual narrative tense became the perfect, at least in the East [of India].”

4.1.3 In the Vādhūla-Anvākhyāna

If we now have a look at the version of our story in the Vādhūla-Anvākhyāna, we can find the following. While the core of the story is told in the perfect, as in the Śatapathabrāhmaṇa, the beginning and the end are in the imperfect. The narration is integrated into a theological discussion. A theological thesis is made that concerns the

appear). But Hoffmann 1967:160: “Es gibt, soweit ich sehe, keinen Fall, in dem das Perfekt als Bezeichnung der ferneren oder aktuellen Vergangenheit aufgefasst werden musste” [“There is, as far as I know, no case in which the perfect had to be understood as denoting the distant or latest past”; English translation by R. L.]. See also Kümmel 2000:78.

¹⁷This is true for example with the Śatapathabrāhmaṇa (in the Kāṇva- and in the Mādhyandina recension) and the Jaiminīyabrāhmaṇa.

¹⁸Whitney (1891:5–34) observed that speeches relating something about the past which are inserted into a story told in the perfect usually use the imperfect. Caland (1915:20) spoke of a “hierarchical” or “mythological” imperfect, which was used in order to relate happenings in the mythical past, while those of a more recent (pseudo-)historical past were told in the perfect. But Oldenberg (1917:25–7) stressed the fact that the imperfect is used when the speaker wants to recall a personal memory.

¹⁹Witzel (1989:149–50) agrees with Caland, who found that in the Śatapathabrāhmaṇa the imperfect appears at the end of a tale told in the perfect, “in pluperfect meaning”: “this or that had happened at that time”.

²⁰Cf. Delbrück 1888:279.

Purūravas- and Urvaśī-narration. According to Gotō, the people involved in the discussion are Brahmvādins, some sort of Vedic priests. Their style is not only characterized by the use of the imperfect, but also by an archaic use of words and thus is in contrast to the colloquial language. The imperfect as a past tense seems to have been in use in the standard language when at the same time the perfect was used in colloquial language. Compare the beginning that is in the imperfect:

(22) VA § 1²¹

[ya]jñ[e]na devās suvargam lokam āyan.

‘By [complete] ritual [indeed] the gods went into the divine.’ (Imperf.)²²

(23) VA § 1

teṣām manusyānām akṣptena yajñena yajamānānām kusindhāny eva **prāvar-**
dhanta nānyāni kāni canāṅgāni

‘Of the (named) people (“descendants of Manu”), who organized the ritual for themselves with the unformed ritual, only the torsos grew, not any other parts of the body.’ (Imperf.)

There are also sentences in the perfect in this part of the ritual. They contain the particle *ha* in a temporal use that otherwise can be found in perfective sentences in Middle Vedic. In this case it is stating a fact (cf. Oldenberg 1917:25–7):

(24) VA § 1

no ha devān havjam **prāpa**.

‘[Their] sacrificial substance did not reach the gods as well.’ (*ha* + Perf.)

However, in the purely narrative § 2, which stands in the imperfect, *ha* can also be found with the imperfect:

(25) VA § 2

tan mano vācam **prāviśat**. tato manur **ajāyata**. sā vān manuṃ **prāviśat**. tata idā mānavy **ajāyata**. sa manur idāṃ **prāviśat**. tataḥ purūravā aido ’jāyata. sedā pu[rūravasam] **prāviśat**. tata urvaśy **ajāyata**. manusyā **ha** purūravasam rājānam **akurvata**. gandharvā horvaśīn dubitaram **akurvata**.

‘At that moment thought entered language. From this Manu was born. Then language entered Manu. From this Īḍā, the daughter of Manu, was born. Then Manu entered Īḍā. From this Purūravas, the son of Īḍā, was born. Then Īḍā entered Purūravas. From this Urvaśī was born. The humans made Purūravas their king; the Gandharvas made Urvaśī their daughter.’

²¹Cf. Gotō 2000 for the following.

²²See TS I 7.11.3.

This is followed by the actual story in the perfect:

(26) VA § 3

tau tathā manuṣebhyo yajñam icchantau ceratus...

‘Then both (P. and U.) wandered around, looking for a ritual for the humans. . . .’
(Perf.)

4.2 Indicative aorist

4.2.1 In dialogue song

There is consensus among scholars about the use of the indicative aorist “im aktuellen Kontext” [“in current context”; English translation by R. L.] in Vedic. Tichy (1977:599–601) also uses the term “narrative aorist” in this respect. In addition, it has a resultative or anterior function and thus also the characteristic “assertion”. See Hoffmann 1967:155, who terms this aorist specifically a “konstatierender Aorist” [“assertive aorist”; English translation by R. L.].

Let us have a look at the following passage from the dialogue song. After Purūravas finds his Urvaśī again and asks her to talk to him, she says:

(27) RV X 95,2

*kīm etā vācā kṛṇavā tāvāhām
prākramiṣam usāsām agriyéva /
pūrūravaḥ pūnar āstaṃ párehi
durāpanā vāta ivāhām asmi*

‘What am I supposed to do with this speech? I ran away like the first of dawn.
Purūravas, go back home again! I am hard to reach like the wind.’

According to Hoffmann 1967:156 the indicative aorist *prā akramiṣam* cannot mean a current event, as the separation of Purūravas and Urvaśī was long ago. However, Tichy (1997:601) assumes an extended current usage of the aorist. What is being expressed is that the denoted situation has lasted too long already.

(27) a. ‘I ran away already (as far) as the first of dawns.’

However, if we take the information structure into account here then we have a case of an explicit speech-act justification. Urvaśī justifies her rhetorical question ‘What am I supposed to do with your speech?’ with:

(27) b. ‘I cannot make anything of your speech because I have run away for so long.’

Here, the “subordinating relation” *explanation* applies again.

But the indicative aorist also occurs in “subordinating relation” in other instances. In subordinate clauses, it often serves to denote anteriority (cf. Hoffmann 1967:157). Therefore, one is confronted with the question whether the function that is commonly ascribed to the aorist in scholarship, denoting the current or latest past, is actually true for Vedic, because the denotation of anteriority is a subordinating strategy, just like the use in the discourse relation *explanation*. The usage in justifying *hi*-sentences, i.e. causal clauses (see Dahl 2010:283–6), is connected to this. If one accepted only one function of the aorist, i.e. to identify the background contrary to the denotation of the foreground action,²³ one would face many problems in explaining the functions of the Vedic aorist, i.e. the denotation of the current or latest past as well as the assertive function.²⁴

Even when the aorist occurs in direct speech, this use is compatible with the function of background denotation.²⁵ Thus the aorist can be found in direct speech when relating to the same events that were illustrated before in the narrative preterite.²⁶

4.2.2 In the Śatapathabrāhmaṇa

In the passage from the Śatapathabrāhmaṇa exactly this context is given in the use of the indicative aorist in the reproduction of thoughts;²⁷ cf. examples (??) and (??) above.

4.2.3 In the Baudhāyana-Śrautasūtra

The corresponding text passage can be found in the Baudhāyana-Śrautasūtra. In this sūtra, elements shared with the Śatapathabrāhmaṇa occur. However, in the sūtra it is an Apsara and not the Gandharvas that wants Urvaśī back. As in the Śatapathabrāhmaṇa, the aorist occurs in direct speech when making a reference to something mentioned before, i.e. Urvaśī’s long stay with the humans:

²³But see Dahl 2010:283: “As a statement of fact typically consists of highlighting information which is or should be known by the hearer, it is tempting to link this discourse function to assertive clauses containing old and given information rather than to particular morphosyntactic categories, as has been done previously in Vedic scholarship” (cf. Delbrück 1876, 1888, 1897, Thieme 1929, and Hoffmann 1967).

²⁴Cf. Hoffmann 1967:277. According to Hoffmann the old function of the indicative aorist is preserved “in der Konstatierung, also wo er allein stand” [‘in the assertion, that is, where it stood alone’; English translation by R. L.]. This function is disabled in those domains in which the aorist and imperfect appear. Tichy (1997:596–603), too, speaks of a use of the aorist “in aktuellem Kontext” [‘in current context’; English translation by R. L.] beside the resultative function.

²⁵Compare the use of the 2nd-person indicative aorist in addresses in text passages that otherwise show the 3rd-person imperfect (see Gonda 1962:80–92, Dahl 2010:286–9) or the use of the 1st-person indicative aorist in performative sentences. Here the reference time is identical with the time of the speech act (cf. Dahl 2010:297–8, 331–3).

²⁶For such a passage of Brāhmaṇa prose, see Tichy 1997:592, 599–600 and Dahl 2010:279–84.

²⁷Differently Witzel 1989:131: “In late Vedic, the aorist had retained its function, i.e., relating something that happened immediately before the present. Apparently it also relates (the effect of) a recent happening leading up to the present.”

(28) BŚ XVIII 45:397,13

atho hāsya eṣā pūrvacittir apsarā svasā babhūva. sa hekṣāṃ cakre. jyog bai me svasā manusyeṣy avātsīd

‘Now, however, this Pūrvacitti became her sister, an Apsarā. At that moment she pondered: “Very long indeed has my sister been living with the humans.”²⁸

4.2.4 In the Vādhūla-Anvākyāna

The aorist is also used for denoting background information in the Vādhūla-Anvākyāna. There are speech act justifications with the “subordinating relation” *explanation*:

(29) VA § 5

darvihoma eva yuṣmākam. pra hi yūyam yajñam adāteṭi

‘[The gods] said to them: “. . . only the Darvihoma (sacrifice of cooked rice)²⁹ belongs to you. For you gave [away] the ritual.”

The Gandharvas are instructed that they only receive a simple sacrifice because they gave away the ritual.

Furthermore, as expected, the aorist in this text can again be found in direct speech. As in other sources, issues that have been previously mentioned by the speaker are referred to. This can be seen in (??) and (??):

(30) a. VA § 6

sa ha purūravāḥ putram evetarasmin haste cakre yajñam itarasmins. tābhyān tathā vavrāja. tābhyām ubhābhyām saha grāman nābhyavājigāṃsat. so ’raṇye yajñan nidhāya putreṇa saha grāmam abhyaveyāya. tam madhye grāmasya nidhāya yajñasyārdham āvavrāja. tam anyathārūpam ivāntarhitam ājagāma.

‘Purūravas took his son into one of his hands, the ritual into the other (ha + perf.). With both he wandered in that way back here (perf.). He did not want to go down into the town with both of them (imperf.). He went, after he had put down the ritual in the wilderness, down into the town together with his son (perf.). Having put him down in the centre of the town, he wandered (back) to the site of the ritual (perf.). He encountered that which had just disappeared in a different shape (perf.).’

b. VA § 6

sa ha devānām uddudrāva. tān hovāca. devāḥ putreṇa ca yajñena ca saha grāman +āvavrājīṣan. tābhyām ubhābhyām saha grāman nābhyavājigāṃsīṣam. so ’raṇye yajñan nidhāya putreṇa saha grāmam abhyavāgān. tam ma-

²⁸Cf. Gotō 2000:105 with literature.

²⁹Cf. Gotō 2000:89–90 n. 36.

*dhye grāmasya nidhāya yajñasyārdham +āvrajiṣan. tam anyathārūpam
ivāntarhitam āgamam iti.*

‘He ran up to [the seat of] the gods (<ha + perf.>). He said to them (<ha + perf.>): “Gods! I wandered down to the town with my son as well as the ritual. I did not want to go down into the town together with both of them (<aorist>). I as such went (therefore I), after I put down the ritual in the wilderness, down into the town together with my son (<aorist>). Having put him down in the center of the town, I wandered back to the site of the ritual (<aorist>). I encountered that which had just disappeared in a different shape (<aorist>).”’

5 Further development

The further development of the different tense forms is connected to the emergence of post-Vedic Epic or Classical Sanskrit. This language form does not directly continue a Vedic dialect but rather unites different regional features. However, concerning tense, from early on in Old Indo-Aryan tendencies to reduce contrasts in the tense system can be recognized. The contrasts present in the stage of Indo-Aryan that Pāṇini describes were retained longest in the peripheral northwest and east. The central area innovated by eliminating the contrast between perfect and imperfect, leaving a contrast between a narrative perfect/imperfect and an aorist. With this elimination, whereby, e.g., both *uvāca* (3rd singular perfect active) and *abravīt* (3rd singular imperfective active) became interchangeable in the meaning ‘he said’, the three-way contrast in the preterite was reduced to two (cf. Cardona and Jain 2003:11). Perfect and imperfect forms were distributed according to metrical requirements. Thus, for example, *idaṃ vacanam abravīt* ‘...said this’ (*idaṃ vacanam* ‘this statement’), with the imperfect *abravīt*, is a common fourth pāda of anuṣṭubh verses in the Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata; *tam uvāca* ‘...said to him’, with the perfect *uvāca*, is also a frequent beginning of an anuṣṭubh in the same texts, whereas in the Mahābhārata the narrative is connected with *uvāca* (perfect) ‘...said’ in prose introductions outside the scheme of metrical regulation (cf. Cardona and Jain 2003:138, Witzel 1989:150).

But in the course of time Middle Indo-Aryan (4th century BCE–12th century CE), which in its older stage is represented by writings in inscriptional Aśokan Prākṛits and Pāli, the dialects—Ardha-Māgadhī and Māgadhī in the east, Śaurasēnī and Pāli in the west of north India, see Oberlies 2003:166 and Bubenik 2003:205—lost the distinction of the Old Indo-Aryan aorist and imperfect by syncretizing them into a single past tense, usually called preterite (cf. Mayrhofer 1951:153–9, Bubenik 2003:228). In this stage of the Middle Indo-Aryan period the only living category of the preterite is the aorist. The following aorist formations that stem from Vedic are preserved: the root aorist (Sanskrit *adāt* > Pāli *adā* ‘gave’), the thematic aorist (Sanskrit *agamat* > Pāli *agamā* ‘went’), the s-aorist (Sanskrit *asrauṣīt* > Pāli *assosi* ‘heard’), the iṣ-aorist (Sanskrit *agrabhīt* > Pāli

aggahi ‘took’), the reduplicated aorist (Sanskrit *udapaptat* > Pāli *udapatto* ‘flew up’; see von Hinüber 1994:52–61), while imperfect and perfect survived only as relict forms (for example imperfect Sanskrit *āsīt* > Aśoka, Pāli, Prākṛit *āsi* ‘was’, Sanskrit *abravīt* > *āha* ‘said, says’; see von Hinüber 2001:§ 479). Beyond these, Pāli has new formations based on the present stem: *pucci*[*m*] ‘I asked’, *ajāni* ‘he knew’, *māresi* ‘he killed’ (cf. Oberlies 2003:197–8). But the most productive classes of preterites in Pāli are the *s*- and *iṣ*-aorist regardless of whether those roots are attested as *s*- or *iṣ*-aorists in Old Indic.³⁰ As root aorists are attested mostly in the older language, and the various sigmatic aorists were preferred in the later language, the development of these forms can be used for the chronology of the early Buddhist canon written in Pāli (see Kingsbury 2002).

The Prākṛits of the middle stage of Middle Indo-Aryan and the Apabhraṃśa dialects of the late stage of Middle Indo-Aryan retain the aorist. In Ardha-Māghadhī there are relics of the *s*-aorist (*akāsi* ‘made’; compare Pāli *akāsi*), but the only productive formation continues the Old Indo-Aryan *iṣ*-aorist (cf. Bubenik 2003:228), i.e. in choosing a form with a suffix, speakers and scribes together use the most discernible formation.

But which information structure features prevailed as time went on? It was the features of the colloquial register. In narration, facts are stated by the perfect;³¹ in direct speech previously mentioned issues or shared experiences are referred to by the aorist. So both of these tenses have in common the function of providing background information. However, the (*s*- and) *iṣ*-aorist is the category for the past tense that has a special suffix. Therefore, it is not surprising that the aorist is the only surviving past tense in Middle Indic (cf. Witzel 1989:151, von Hinüber 2001:303). Statements in conversations, i.e. in an original conversation register, are the crucial basis here.³²

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³⁰The preterite is supplemented by the verbal adjective (with or without *hoti*) used as *verbum finitum* (cf. Oberlies 2001:228, 261–2).

³¹Witzel’s (1989:151) differentiation between personal and non-personal experiences in descriptions of past events is probably not decisive. Witzel refers to the conversation between Videgha and Gotama, which recapitulates their journey in the aorist. However, this is a case of the above-mentioned function of the aorist in direct speech. For subjectively and objectively recent past see Dahl 2010:190–2.

³²Cf. Gotō 2000:99. But Tichy (1997:598 n. 19) states that the narrative use of the “aktuellen Indikativ Aorist” [‘current indicative aorist’; English translation by R. L.] (see n. 20) is required by Pāli, which generalized this category as narrative preterite.

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