

# From synthetic to analytic. The case of some verbal periphrases in Vedic Sanskrit

Grieco Beatrice  
(Università per Stranieri di Siena)

Keywords: Vedic, periphrasis, motion verbs, continuative auxiliaries, intensive category

As Bubenik (1997) states, in the Late Vedic period “Sanskrit initiated [...] the periphrastic constructions of Middle Indic which ultimately would replace all the remaining synthetic forms” (Bubenik 1997: 54). But if some verbal periphrases have been deeply investigated in several recent works (see Jamison 1990; Stump 2012; Lowe 2017), others remain still unexplored. These periphrases have been described by Western grammarians of Sanskrit as formed by a finite verb such as *i-* ‘go’, *car-* ‘move’, *ās-* ‘sit’ and *sthā-* ‘stand’ and participle or gerund, conveying the meaning ‘to be continually x’ (x = participle or gerund).

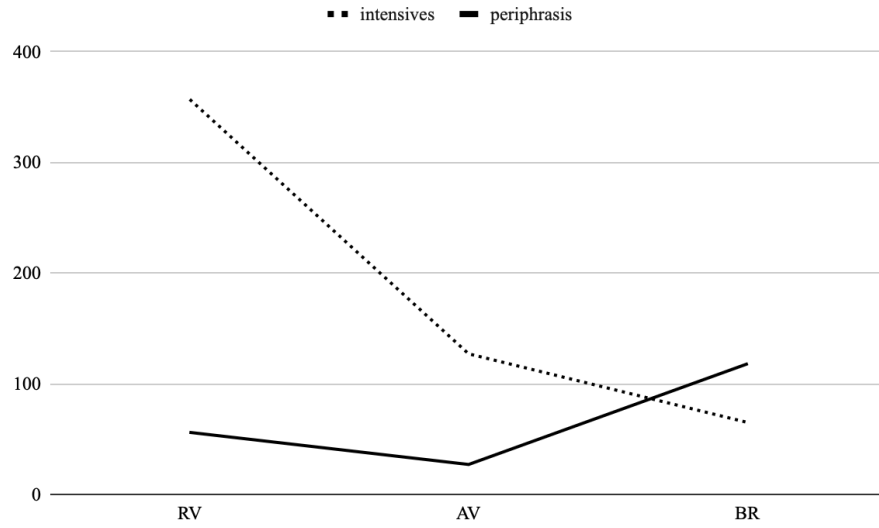
Given these premises, this paper addresses the periphrases formed by the motion verbs *i-* ‘go’ and *car-* ‘move’ plus participle, investigating their diachronic development with an in-depth account since the most ancient text, the *Ṛgveda* (2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC) to the Late Vedic period, here represented by *Brāhmaṇas* (BR) prose texts (1000–600 BC). In particular, I will show that the *Ṛgveda* (RV) does not provide clear evidence in favor of a periphrastic interpretation, but some connection with iterative meaning seems to have started to emerge already in this archaic phase: not coincidentally, most examples select iterative participles, especially the so-called *intensive participles*, formally reduplicated and with iterative *Aktionsart* (see e.g., *veviṣ-* ‘continually labor’).

- (1) *brahmacārī*                      *carati*                      *vēviṣat*                      *viṣaḥ*  
brahmacārīn.NOM.SG      go.PRS.3SG      labor.INT.PRS.PTC.NOM.SG      labor.ACC.PL  
‘The one who practices formulations **goes continually laboring** at his labors’ (RV 10.109.5ab)

In the Late Vedic period the reanalysis is completed: the finite verb has lost its motion value and functions as an iterative-continuative auxiliary. In fact, *i.* there are subjects to whom a physical movement is totally excluded; *ii.* participles semantically incompatible with a motion event reading; *iii.* the periphrasis co-occurs with contextual cues of iterativity, such as iterative adverbs.

Semantically, its meaning is not so different from that of the synthetic intensive category, suggesting a relation and possible complementary distribution. As Table 1. shows, the RV has the highest frequency of intensive forms, but these slowly disappear after *Ṛgvedic Sanskrit*. On the other hand, the periphrasis with *i-* and *car-* starts to emerge in Early Vedic but spreads just in the Late Vedic period.

Table 1. Diachronic distribution intensive forms and periphrasis



## References

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## Online resources

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GRETEL: [gretl.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretl.html](http://gretl.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretl.html)

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