

“Which what did I do?” Sanskrit relative clauses and the left periphery.

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The “landing site” for Relative Pronouns (RPs) in the left periphery—or “initial string”—of Sanskrit clauses has been debated for some time. Historically, there has been some disagreement, with authors such as Hale (1987) suggesting that Sanskrit RPs move via *wh*-movement to what he calls COMP, the second possible position in a clause after TOPIC. Hock (1989) has argued against this, however, suggesting instead that RPs move to a TOPIC position which is not strictly differentiated from COMP. The diagnosis for each of these authors’ arguments has been the position of Wackernagel clitics and other elements that appear in the “initial string” of Sanskrit sentences. For example, in the following:

1. *ví yó bháribhṛad ósadhīṣu jibvām* (RV 2.4.4; Hale, 1987: 16)
“**who** flicked his tongue around among the plants...”

Hale argues that *yó* lies in the COMP position, TOPIC being filled by the local particle *ví*. Hock, however, dissolves the distinction and argues that *yó*—together with all other ‘stressed pronominals’—occupy TOPIC.

In this working paper, I review their data, and add to it my own systematic research on correlatives in the Rig Veda. I contextualise these empirical observations within the Minimalist syntactic framework, and specifically Kayne’s (1994) hypothesis—also employed in Bianchi (2000) for Latin & Greek—that relative clauses are derived via a D^0 head that takes a CP as its complement (the “raising analysis” of relative clauses). Moreover, following the approach of Davison (2009),¹ I incorporate Rizzi (1997) and Cinque’s (1999) detailed interpretation of the Left Periphery, and propose a new solution to the “landing site” question surrounding Sanskrit RPs. I argue that:

- (a) Sanskrit RPs *yaḥ*, *yā*, *yad* are not *wh*-elements, and they do not occupy the same position as *wh*-moved *kaḥ*, *kā*, *kim*, which occupy Foc(us)P(hrased).
- (b) The same process is responsible for the fronting RPs and correlative pronouns (*saḥ*, *sā*, *tad*): namely, Top(ic)P(hrased). More specifically, they tend to occupy the (lower) TopP in Rizzi’s full enumeration, with exceptions to this extremely rare.²

I further venture some explanation as to why we might see this mirroring effect in correlative clauses, whereby both RP and correlative pronouns occupy TopP. This has implications not only for Sanskrit syntax, but also for our reconstruction of the relative clause and beyond in Proto-Indo-European.

Bibliography

¹ In strong opposition, however, to her suggestion that RPs occupy Rizzi’s ForceP.

² This aligns with Hock’s argument that all ‘stressed pronouns’ occupy the same slot in the initial string.

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