

OVERVIEW OF SANSKRIT GRAMMAR: Part I

James Santucci
Department of Comparative Religion
California State University

I. How Words Are Formed

Sanskrit, as defined by Pāṇini, is based on three fundamental forms¹:

1. Nominal stem (*prātipadika-*)²
2. Verbal base (*dhātu-*)³
3. Affix or termination (*pratyaya-*) that are attached to (1) and (2) which in turn generate:
 - (a) additional stems
 - (b) words (*pada-*)

Nominal stems (*prātipadika-*) refer to a morpheme (or more than one morpheme) prior to its being affixed by case inflection (*vibhakti-*). Nominal stems include morphemes with:

1. *mūlabhūta-* base: a stem based solely on the root
2. *kṛdanta-* base: a *prātipadika-* with a *kṛt-* or ‘primary’

¹ The original base of a word is known as *prakṛti-*.

² When *prātipadika-* is used in this context, it refers specifically to underived or primitive stems. Thus Pāṇini’s rule (1.2.45) stating that a *prātipadika-* denotes a meaningful expression other than a *dhātu-* or *pratyaya-* is explicit when paired with 1.2.46, which states that a *prātipadika-* also denotes derived forms: *kṛt-*, *taddhita-*, and *samāsa-*.

³ Pāṇini’s predecessor, Śākatāyana, and his followers taught that all nominal bases (*prātipadika-*) were derived from verbal bases (*dhātu-*), thus accepting the etymologist (*Nairukta-*) view that all substantives can be derived from *dhātu-s*. (*Nirukta-* I. 12: *tatra nāmāny ākhyātājān īti śākatāyano nairuktasamayaś ca*)

affix attached to roots to form verbal derivatives

3. *taddhitânta-* base: a *prātipadika-* with a *taddhita-* or ‘secondary’ affix attached to a substantive [or, ‘a suffix attached to a nominal stem, finite verbal form or indeclinable]
4. *samāsa-* : ‘compound’ base; usually, two or more *prātipadika-*s, of which the *vibhakti-* is attached to the final *prātipadika-* (1.2.46)

The **base** is a non-grammatical form carrying the basic meaning. The **stem** (*aṅga-* according to 1.4.13: the term ‘*aṅga-*’ refers to a unit after which an affix is introduced.) refers to a form to which an affix is introduced. Often the base and stem are identical.

II. Parts of Speech

A. Nirukta

According to the *Nirukta* (I.12), there are four word classes: **noun** (*nāman-*), **verb** (*ākhyāta-*), **prefix** (*upasarga-*), and **particle** (*nipāta-*): *tatra nāmākhyāte co ’pasarga-nipātās ca*

B. Pāṇini

On the other hand, Pāṇini recognizes only two categories:

1. *sUB-anta-* (terminating in case endings): this category included *nāman*, *upasarga-*, and *upasarga-* words.
2. *tiÑ-anta-* (terminating in personal endings: finite forms)

(I.1.14: *sUP-tiÑ-antam padám*)