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M. Lucia Aliffi

Annamaria Bartolotta

Castrenze Nigrelli

Perspectives on Language and Linguistics

*Essays in honour
of Lucio Melazzo*

“

Hermes

Collana di Scienze del Linguaggio

PERSPECTIVES ON LANGUAGE
AND LINGUISTICS
Essays in honour of Lucio Melazzo

M. Lucia Aliffi, Annamaria Bartolotta,
Castrenze Nigrelli (eds.)



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Skt. *śudhyati/śudhyate* ‘purify’ and the active / middle opposition in post-Vedic Sanskrit: A new function of a degrammaticalized category?*

LEONID KULIKOV**

Abstract

The Sanskrit *-ya*-presents normally inflected in the active in Vedic (activa (quasi-)tantum) start to be employed with middle inflection in the later language, as in the case of *śudhyati/-te* ‘becomes pure’ or *muhyati/-te* ‘becomes confused’. For some roots such as *śudh*, middle forms become as frequent as their active counterparts in the Dharmaśāstras (Smṛtis) and Epics. It will be demonstrated that, contrary to the widely spread opinion, such middle forms never show passive meaning and occur in the same usage as the corresponding active forms. Accordingly, such verbal forms should be translated as ‘becomes pure’, rather than *‘is purified’; ‘becomes confused’, rather than *‘is confused’. I will argue that the choice of the diathesis (active/middle) is determined by metrical reasons in many cases and depends on the position of the verbal form in the pāda.

These developments in the post-Vedic verbal system may be partly due to the fact that the active/middle opposition was lost in contemporaneous Middle Indic vernaculars, where only active endings survive.

Keywords: Sanskrit, Passive, Middle, Voice, Degrammaticalization.

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**Ghent University / Université catholique de Louvain (Louvain-la-Neuve)

1. The active/middle opposition in late Sanskrit: introductory remarks

The Old Indian (Sanskrit) voice (diathesis) opposition (active/middle), as attested, for instance, in the most ancient variety of this language, in early Vedic (late II – early I millennium BC) and manifested, morphologically, in the distinction between two series of personal endings (e.g., in the present tense, 3sg.pr.act. *-ti* / 3sg.pr.mid. *-te*; 3pl.pr.act. *-(a)nti* / 3pl.pr.mid. *-(a)nte*; etc.), is associated with a number of functional oppositions. The functions of the middle include, in particular, anticausative (cf. *vārdhati* ‘increases, makes grow’ ~ *vārdhate* ‘increases’); passive (cf. *soṭṭbhiḥ pūyate vjṣā* (RV 9.86.12) ‘[Soma] the bull is cleansed by the squeezers’); and reflexive (cf. *piś* ‘adorn’: *pipiṣe* [3sg.pf.mid.] *hīranyaiḥ* (RV 2.33.9) ‘[Rudra] has adorned himself with gold ornaments’).¹

The situation changes by the end of the Vedic period and, especially in post-Vedic (classical and Epic) Sanskrit, in particular, in the language of Dharmasūtras and Dharmaśāstras (Smṛtis). It is commonly believed (e.g. Speijer 1886: 237; Bloomfield & Edgerton 1930: 30-52; Oberlies 2003: 129-132; Patyal 2009: 209) that post-Vedic and late Sanskrit texts attest overall confusing of the active and middle inflection, so that active and middle forms virtually do not differ in use any longer and both types of endings can be employed nearly interchangeably, at least for several verbs. This degrammaticalization of the active/middle opposition, most probably, reflected (and, in fact, took place under the influence of) the changes attested in Middle Indo-Aryan languages of this époque, such as Pāli and (early) Prākṛits, where the active/middle distinction was entirely lost at the morphological level (see Kulikov 2013).

¹ Elsewhere, in a volume collected and edited by the addressee of this Festschrift (Melazzo 2012), I have demonstrated (Kulikov 2012b) that this tendency, arguably observable from the earliest periods onwards, can be qualified as degrammaticalization of the active/middle opposition in general (and of the middle voice, in particular). In other words, this morphological opposition, albeit formally still present in the paradigm, is deprived of several functions, which, ultimately, results in the decrease of its functional weight.

In this paper I will demonstrate that, even in spite of the fact that the active/middle opposition becomes heavily deteriorated by the end of the Old Indo-Aryan period, it is not entirely devoid of any functional weight.

Since it is impossible to investigate this issue for all finite forms within the scope of a short paper, I will limit my discussion to one morphological formation, presents with the suffix *-ya-* (class IV presents within the traditional Old Indian classification of present stems) of the type *pādya-te* ‘fall, move’ or *nāśya-ti* ‘perish’. This formation exhibits strict constraints on the selection of diathesis (active/middle) in Vedic, thus being one of the most relevant morphological types for a discussion of the active/middle opposition in Sanskrit.

2. *Activa (quasi-)tantum -ya-*presents and the corresponding middle forms

In this paper I focus on one particular subclass of the class IV presents. It includes those *-ya-*presents which are predominantly attested with the active inflection in the early language (thus being *activa (quasi-)tantum*), but start to be used with middle endings in late Vedic or post-Vedic Sanskrit. For some verbal roots, middle forms become nearly as frequent (or even more frequent) as their active counterparts from the end of the Vedic period onwards, that is, in the Sūtras, Dharmasāstras (Smṛtis), and, further, in the Epics and classical Sanskrit; cf., for instance, *muhya-ti/te* ‘become confused’ or *śudhya-ti/te* ‘become pure, purify’ etc. In general, the middle forms of the primarily active presents are of two main types.

2.1 Middle forms in functional opposition to their active counterparts

Middle forms may exhibit one of the functions typical of the middle: self-beneficent (autobenefactive) meaning (‘do smth. for oneself’; sometimes with additional idiomatic changes), passive, reflexive, reciprocal etc. This class includes such forms as *asya-te* ‘be thrown be driven, etc.’ (passive) (AĀ+), *saṃ-ṭṛpyante* ‘[they] rejoice together’

(sociative) (KB 12.5), *náhya-te* (with *sám*) ‘gird oneself’ (reflexive) (AV+) or *yúdhya-te* ‘fight against each other’ (reciprocal) (RV+).

2.2 Middle forms due to semantic analogy

Some secondary middle forms may have emerged under the influence of the main semantic types of the non-passive middle *-ya*-presents, such as verbs of spontaneous change of state (cf. *jīryate* ‘grows old’ AĀ and *vi-naśyate* ‘perishes’ JB, which can be considered members of the same semantic class as *kṣīyāte* ‘perishes’ and *mriyāte* ‘dies’) or transitive verbs of mental activities (cf. *dhyāyate* ‘thinks of’ KSP–KpSP ~ *mānyate* ‘thinks, believes’).

Of course, there is no clear-cut distinction between the “functional” and “analogical” types. For some *-ya*-presents both mechanisms could be operative. Thus, for instance, *páśya-te* ‘see’ can (i) render the self-beneficent meaning (‘look at smth. for oneself’); (ii) appear in the sociative usage (cf. RV 10.82.5d *yātra devāḥ samápaśyanta víśve* ‘...where all the gods observed [it] together’) (see Kulikov 2012a: 580-583); or (iii) follow the pattern of the verbs of mental activities such as *búdhya-te* ‘perceive’, without any additional meaning.

2.3 The case of *śudhya-ti/te*: semantically unmotivated middle forms?

Of special interest for the goals of the present study are such forms for which the selection of the middle inflection appears unmotivated, so that the active and middle forms are, allegedly, used interchangeably. One such example is the intransitive *-ya*-present *śudhya-ti* ‘become pure, become clean’, attested from the young mantras (Yajurveda) onwards. The earliest attestation of this formation is an active form, met with in the Vājasaneyi-Saṃhitā:

Skt. *śudhyati/śudhyate* ‘purify’ and the active/middle opposition

(1) (VS 6.15.f (≈ MS 1.2.16:26.8-9 = 3.10.1:128.13-14 ≈ TS 1.3.9.1.b))

*yát te krūrám yád ásthitaṃ, tát ta á pyāyatām ní śtyāyatām, tát te śudhyatu*²

‘Whatever wound, whatever [sore] is arisen in you, let it swell up [and] become coagulated for you, **let it become clean** for you’.

Forms with middle inflection first appear from the end of the Vedic period onwards (cf. another Vedic attestation, found in the late Ṣaḍviṃśa-Brāhmaṇa), becoming very common in the Smṛtis and Epics:³

(2) (ŚB 5.10.4 ≈ VāsDhS 3.57)

*khananād dahanād abhimarśanād gobhir ākramaṇāc ca*⁴
caturbhiḥ śudhyate bhūmih pañcamāc copalepanāt

‘By digging, burning [away the grass], sweeping [with the hand] and by cows stepping [upon it] – in [these] four [manners], and in the fifth [manner], by besmearing [with cow-dung], the earth **becomes clean**’.

Such middle forms (cf. a selection of examples in section 4 below) are translated by most Sanskritists as passives (‘is purified’, ‘est purified’, etc.). Moreover, Bloomfield & Edgerton (1930: 49) even claim that the earliest attestation of this *-ya*-present, the active imperative *śudhyatu* in the VS (cf. (1)), exemplifies a rare instance of a passive with active inflection.

However, upon closer examination, it turns out that such (secondary) middle forms made from the stem *śudhya-* are never used as passives proper. In particular, and most importantly, we do not find them attested in full passive constructions (with overtly expressed passive agents) and, altogether, they occur in precisely the same usage as the corresponding active forms.

² The Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā and the Taittirīya-Saṃhitā read *śundhatām*.

³ For Epic attestations of middle forms, see Oberlies 2003: 525.

⁴ VāsDhS reads in the first half of the fragment *khananād dahanād dharṣād* ‘gobhir ākramaṇād api’ by digging, burning [away the grass], scraping, as well as by cows stepping upon it..., while the second half is the same as in the ŚB.

3. The intransitive *-ya*-present *śudhya*^{-ti/te} and the selection of active/middle inflection

In order to substantiate this claim, I will quote below a number of metrical fragments (verses) which attest both active and middle forms of the intransitive *-ya*-present *śudhya*^{-ti/te}. Some of these occurrences are compounds with the preverb *vi-*, which does not virtually change the meaning of the verb. The relevant forms of *śudh* and their translations are in the boldface.

(3) (BaudhŚS 29.8:380.3-4)

śraddhayā śudhyate buddhiḥ 'śraddhayā **śudhyate** matiḥ
śraddhayā prāpyate brahma 'śraddhā pāpapaṇāśinī

'Through devotion the intellect **becomes pure**, through devotion the thought **becomes pure**, through devotion the Brahman is reached, devotion is destroyer of evil'.⁵

(4) (ManuSmṛ. 5.64)

ahnā caikena rātryā ca 'trirātrair eva ca tribhiḥ
avaspr̥śo viśudhyanti 'tryahād udakadāyinaḥ

'Those who have touched a corpse **become pure** after one day and night and then after three times three days (i.e. nine days); those who give libations of water [during the funeral ceremony] – after three days'.

(5) (ManuSmṛ. 5.72)

strīṇām asaṃskṛtānām tu 'tryahāc **chudhyanti** bāndhavāḥ
yathoktenaiva kalpena 'śudhyanti tu sanābhayaḥ

'And relatives of unmarried women **become pure** [after their death] within three days, but their siblings [or: blood relatives, i.e. siblings and parents]⁶ **become pure** according to the prescribed rule'.

⁵ For interpretation of this verse, see Köhler 1973: 28, where *śraddhā* is translated as 'Hingabe'.

⁶ See Olivelle 2005: 141-142 and 282-283 for an interpretation of this difficult verse.

Skt. *śudhyati/śudhyate* ‘purify’ and the active/middle opposition

(6) (ManuSmṛ. 5.101)

asapiṇḍaṃ dvijaṃ pretaṃ ' vipro nirhṛtya bandhuvat
***viśudhyati** trirātreṇa ' mātur āptāṃś ca bāndhavān*

‘A Brahmaṇa who has carried out, a deceased twice-born who is not a (near) relative, as [if he were] a (near) relative, or a near relative of his mother, **becomes pure** after three nights’.

(7) (ManuSmṛ. 5.107)

*kṣāntyā **śudhyanti** vidvāṃso ' dānenākāryakāriṇaḥ*

‘The learned ones **become pure** with patience, those who have committed an action that should not be done by paying [fine]’.

(8) (VāsDhS 3.60 = ManuSmṛ. 5.109 = ViṣṇuSmṛ. 22.92)

*adbhir gātrāṇi **śudhyanti**⁷ ' manaḥ satyena **śudhyati***
*vidyātapobhyāṃ bhūtātmā ' buddhir jñānena **śudhyati***

‘The limbs **become pure** with water, the mind **becomes pure** with truth; the spirit by science and asceticism, the intellect **becomes pure** with knowledge’.

(9) (VāsDhS 21.12)

brāhmaṇakṣatriyaviśāṃ ' striyaḥ śūdreṇa saṅgatāḥ
*aprajātā **viśudhyanti** ' prāyaścittena netarāḥ*

‘The wives of Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas, who have had sexual intercourse with a Śūdra, **become clean** with a penance, if they have not given birth [to a child]; the others [= those who have given birth to a child] do not [become clean]’.

(10) (VāsDhS 3.58)

*rajasā **śudhyate** nārī ' nadī vegena **śudhyati***
*bhasmanā **śudhyate** kāmśyaṃ ' tāmram amlena **śudhyati**⁸*

‘A woman **becomes clean** with her menstrual discharge, a river **becomes clean** with its current, brass **becomes clean** with ash, copper **becomes clean** with an acidic cleanser’.

⁷ V.II. ...*śudhyante*; *adbhiḥ śudhyanti* gātrāṇi in ManuSmṛ. 5.109; see Olivelle 2005: 579.

⁸ On variant readings, see Olivelle 2000: 645.

(11) (Parāśara-Smṛ. 6.13)

*kuraṅgaṃ vānaraṃ siṃhaṃ ' citraṃ vyāghraṃ tu ghātayan
śudhyate sa trirātreṇa ' viprāṇāṃ tarpaṇena ca*

‘The one who kills an antelope, a monkey, a lion, a leopard or a tiger becomes pure [from the sin of murder] by fasting for three days and by offering [food] to the Brahmanas’.

(12) (MBh 12.36.27)

rajasā tā viśudhyante ' bhasmanā bhājanaṃ yathā

‘They (sc. women) become clean with [their] menstrual discharge, as a vessel [becomes clean] with ash’.

At first glance, the selection of voice (active/middle) is totally at random. In other words, active and middle forms are employed in the same usage, and the middle inflection does not correlate with any specific (for instance, passive) function. All occurrences of the verb *śudhya*^{-ti/te} in examples (1-12) appear in intransitive non-passive constructions of the type ‘X_{NOM} becomes pure with/by/through Z_{INS} / Z_{ABL}’. Passive translations of such constructions (obviously, prompted by the instrumental noun), are common, even for the active forms; as I noticed above, Bloomfield & Edgerton (1930 [Ved. Var. I]: 49) even mention *śudhyatu* in (1) (VS 6.15) as one of the extremely rare examples of a -*yā*-passive with the active inflection. Below I give a representative selection of such translations:

- Bollée (1956) for (2) ŚB 5.10.4 ‘the earth is purified’ and Bühler (1882: 24) for the parallel verse VāsDhS 3.57: ‘land is purified’;
- Varenne (1960: 105, 107) for MNU 440-451 *me śudhyatām/ śudhyantām*: ‘qu’en moi soit/soient purifié(s)...’;
- Köhler (1973: 28) for (3) (BaudhŚS 29.8:380.3): ‘wird geläutert’;
- Bühler (1886: 188) for (7) (ManuSmṛ. 5.107): ‘[t]he learned are purified by a forgiving disposition’;
- Bühler (1886: 179) for (4) (ManuSmṛ. 5.64): ‘[t]hose who have touched a corpse are purified...’; after one day ‘[t]he body is cleansed by water, the internal organ is purified by truthfulness’;
- Bühler (1886: 188) for (8) (ManuSmṛ. 5.109): ‘[t]he body is cleansed by water, the internal organ is purified by truthfulness’ and Bühler

(1882: 24) for the parallel verse VāsDhS 3.60: ‘[t]he body is purified by water...’ as well as Jolly (1880: 97) for yet another parallel verse, ViṣṇuSmṛ. 22.92ab: ‘[b]odies (when defiled) are purified by water; the mind is purified (from evil thoughts) by truth’;

- Olivelle (2000: 369) for (10) (VāsDhS 3.58): ‘[a] woman is purified’;
- Olivelle (2005: 141) for (4) (ManuSmṛ. 5.64); Olivelle (2005: 142) for (5) (ManuSmṛ. 5.72) and Olivelle (2005: 144) for (7) (ManuSmṛ. 5.107): ‘are purified’;
- Olivelle (2005: 143) for (6) (ManuSmṛ. 5.101): ‘is purified’;
- Olivelle (2005: 144) for (8) (ManuSmṛ. 5.109): ‘is cleansed’.

Although, at first glance, the instrumental noun found in most of these examples can be taken as passive agent, thus licensing a passive analysis (‘X_{NOM} is purified [by Z_{INS}]’) at least for some contexts, a non-passive interpretation is more likely for a number of reasons:

- 1) *śudhya*^{-ti/te} typically refers to processes which come about spontaneously (‘become pure, clean’), rather than are brought about by somebody.
- 2) We do not find overtly expressed passive agents (i.e. noun phrases referring to the purifier) in such constructions; the instrumental noun refers to the instrument or means of purifying (water, current, truth, devotion etc.). Note that this semantic role can also be encoded by the ablative, as in (2).
- 3) Forms with middle inflection appear in the same usage as the corresponding active forms (cf., in particular, (10) (VāsDhS 3.58), where we find both *śudhyate* (twice) and *śudhyati* (twice)⁹, which cannot be employed in passive constructions.

Most likely, the middle present *śudhya*^{-te} emerges secondarily alongside the earlier active *śudhya*^{-ti} under the influence of the middle *-ya*-presents of change of state, which constitute one of the three main semantic subclasses of the middle class IV presents (see Kulikov 2012a: 705-709). Correspondingly, non-passive translations,

⁹ For variant readings, see Olivelle 2000: 645.

i.e. ‘becomes pure, becomes clean’,¹⁰ rather than *‘is purified, is cleansed’, are preferable for *śudhya*^{-ti/te}, irrespectively of the diathesis.

Yet the choice of the type of inflection (active/middle) is not at random. I will argue that the only parameter which determines the selection of the active or middle inflection of the present *śudhya*^{-ti/te} in metrical texts (in particular, in the Smṛtis and Epics) is the position of the verbal form in the pāda (= minimal metrical unit). Although the correlation between the diathesis (active/middle) and metre is by no means a novelty (noticed in passing, for instance, already by Speijer (1886: 237) and De (1940: xxxiii)), no attempt was made to formulate strict rules determining the choice of inflection in terms of metrical positions (i.e. depending on the position of a form in a pāda). In what follows, I will demonstrate that such rules can be formulated at least for some verbs or verbal formations, such as the -ya-present *śudhya*^{-ti/te}.

Let me recall the metrical scheme of the standard (and most frequent) variety (*pathyā*) of the Sanskrit śloka, which is the meter used in all examples quoted above except for (1) (◡ stands for a short syllable; – for a long syllable; and ◡ for the syllable which can be either short or long, i.e. anceps):



Fig. 1. Metrical scheme of the *pathyā* variety of śloka.

Obviously, the odd (i.e. the first and the third) pādas are made up in accordance with the same scheme, distinct from the one used for the even (i.e. for the second and the fourth) pādas. The only difference between the even and odd pādas is the length of the penult (long in odd pādas, short in even pādas).

¹⁰ Cf. e.g. Weber (1858: 336) for (2) (= ŚB 5.10.4): ‘Rein wird die Erde’.

From the point of view of the distribution of short and long syllables in the verbal form, the main difference between the 3rd person (singular and plural) active forms and their middle pendants (the most frequent forms in the text) lies in the length of the last syllable: short in active forms *-(n)ti* vs. long in middle forms *-(n)te*. This simple feature must be of crucial importance for the choice of voice (active/middle). In particular, the position often occupied by the verbal form, syllables 4th to 6th in the pāda (cf. examples (2, 3, 10)), requires a long final syllable of the verbal form (corresponding to the 6th syllable of the pāda, or antepenult). Accordingly, this position can only be occupied by the middle form *śudhyate* (at least in the case of the 3sg. form), as in (3) (... *śudhyate buddhiḥ*, ...*śudhyate matiḥ*); cf. rule (ii) in the scheme below (fig. 2). In another position commonly occupied by the verbal form, at the end of a pāda (cf. (4, 8, 9, 10, 12)), the last syllable is an anceps. In theory, one might expect that active and middle forms are equally common in this position: singular forms in *-ti/-te* in even pādas and plural forms in *-nti/-nte* in odd pādas, in accordance with the length (U/-) of the penultimate syllable: *-ya-/-yan-*. In fact, however, active forms appear much more frequently – probably because of their unmarked character for the *-ya*-present *śudhya-ti/te*, cf. (i.a-b).

The complete rule for selecting the type of inflection (active/middle) depending on the metrical position (= position in the pāda) of the verbal form is presented in tabular form in fig. 2:

Fig 2. Selection of the diathesis (active/middle) depending on the position in the pāda

¹¹ Perhaps due to the influence of other, rarer, varieties of śloka, such as, for instance, one of the subtypes of the type *vipulā*, where the odd pāda follows the pattern $\underline{\cup} \cup - - \mid \cup \cup \cup \underline{\cup}$. Cf. example (9), where the first half-śloka is composed in accordance with this scheme.

Similar explanations in terms of metrical positions may be applicable for some other irregularities in post-Vedic (in particular, Epic) Sanskrit texts, in particular, for *-ya*-passives with the abnormal active inflection in Epic Sanskrit, as noted in passing already by Speijer,¹² and, more recently, by Oberlies (2003: 240-242). This issue requires a special study, going beyond the scope of the present paper.

4. Concluding remarks

Post-Vedic Sanskrit instantiates a remarkably rare example of language development, where the rules of versification become intricately incorporated into a linguistic system. In a sense, we come here across a type of motivation opposite to the one which is more familiar and expectable, when the linguistic features of a language essentially determine the system of versification.

The case of the *-ya*-present *śudhya*^{-ti/te} ‘become pure, become clean’ (and *-ya*-passives with active inflection, which I am going to discuss elsewhere) is of particular interest, instantiating a remarkable development in the verbal system. In spite of the weakening functional weight (degrammaticalization) of the grammatical category of voice (diathesis) and the loss of most of the functions of the middle, the active/middle opposition did not become “empty” from the functional point of view and even acquired a new function for some verbal roots, at least in metrical texts. This development was probably additionally facilitated by the semantics of *śudhya*^{-ti/te}, which, by virtue of its semantics, could be easily reclassified as belonging to one of the core semantic classes of the middle *-ya*-presents, verbs of change of state, or even to *-ya*-passives. Accordingly, *śudhya*^{-ti/te} was able to freely drift between the two main (originally clearly distinct) subclasses of the class IV presents with the suffix *-ya*-, *activa* (*quasi*-)tantum and *media* (*quasi*-)tantum. Subsequently, the formal difference between the active and middle (at least in the most frequent forms, 3rd person singular and plural) became associated with metrical oppositions.

¹² “Even if the same root is employed in both voices, it is not always difference of meaning, that discriminates them; in poetry, for inst., particularly in epic poetry, another voice than the legitimate one is often admissible for metrical reasons” (Speijer 1886: 237).

Abbreviations of the titles of the texts (text sigla)

AĀ	Aitareya-Āraṇyaka
AV(Ś)	Atharvaveda (Śaunakīya recension)
BaudhŚS	Baudhāyana-Śrauta-Sūtra
JB	Jaiminīya-Brāhmaṇa
KB	Kauṣītaki-Brāhmaṇa
KpS	Kapiṣṭhala-Kaṭha-Saṃhitā
KS	Kāṭhaka(-Saṃhitā)
ManuSmṛ.	Manu-Smṛti (= Mānava-Dharma-Śāstra)
MBh.	Mahā-Bhārata
MNU	Mahā-Nārāyaṇa-Upaniṣad
MS	Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā
RV	Ṛgveda
ŚB	Śaḍviṃśa-Brāhmaṇa
Smṛ.	Smṛti
TS	Taittirīya-Saṃhitā
VāsDhS	Vāsiṣṭha-Dharma-Sūtra
ViṣṇuSmṛ.	Viṣṇu-Smṛti
VS	Vājasaneyi-Saṃhitā

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Maria Lucia Aliffi was Associate Professor at the Department of Humanities of the University of Palermo, where she taught "General Linguistics" and "Language acquisition"; Annamaria Bartolotta is Full Professor at the same Department, in which she teaches "General and Historical Linguistics", "Indo-European Linguistics", "Linguistic Typology"; Castrenze Nigrelli is Researcher at the same Department, in which he teaches "General Linguistics".



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