

# Choosing What Should Be Left Unsaid: Is It an Outcome of Grammatical Issues or Rather Evidence of Cultural Transformations?

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## *Abstract*

In Vedic Sanskrit, both the duals of the terms *pitr̥* and *mātṛ* possess the distinctive trait of conveying the sense of 'parents' (Macdonell 1916, §193). However, the feminine option is excluded from Pāṇini's teachings, which only give an account of the other one (see the *ekaśeṣa* section A 1. 2. 64-73). Besides, this feminine elliptic dual has been replaced by a masculine one in the tradition of a sacred text (RV 10. 140. 2; TS 4. 2. 7. 3). The present work aims at focusing on the analysis of Vedic verses that selected the dual of the term *mātṛ*; the fact that such a formation gains a stable place in the presence of recurring themes is a crucial piece of evidence of its ancient belonging to a shared cultural background.

*Keywords:* Vedic Sanskrit, Pāṇini's *ekaśeṣa*, *dvandva*, cultural transition.

## 1. *A Technical Premise\**

There is no perfect matching between language and thought, just as there is no perfect coincidence between word-forms and their *denotata* as well. As for Sanskrit, the lack of such a one-to-one relation was noticed even in the earliest extant treatise

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of grammar, the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, and then in the relevant commentaries<sup>1</sup>. This is not surprising: Vedic poetry makes repeated use of elliptic depictions of gods whose strict association was a kind of *cliché* for poets and worshippers of that age. One of the most known examples regards the divine pair Mitra and Varuṇa, often referred to with the Vedic Sanskrit du. *mitrā* and, at least in RV 5. 62. 3b, with the du. *varuṇā* (Wackernagel 1877, 151)<sup>2</sup>; even within a simple frame of reflection on the language, the meaning of these duals happens to be “equivalent” to a copulative compound or to a coordinative syntactic string which overtly expresses both the names of the given gods, and thus: *mitrā* = *mitrāvāruṇā*<sup>3</sup> = *mītrās ca vāruṇās ca*. The fact is common in the Indo-European languages<sup>4</sup>.

As Macdonell 1916 suggests, such a device is often employed in order to denote strictly linked male and female individuals of the same class: in fact, this is a core point of Pāṇini's *ekaśeṣā*<sup>5</sup>. A set of ten *sūtras* in the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* deals with the present problem; this sequence of *sūtra* depends on the first one: *sarūpāṇām ekaśeṣa ekavibhaktau* (A 1. 2. 64); it describes the procedure that allows the usage of a single item as a remainder (*ekaśeṣa*) in the place of several items having the same form (*sarūpāṇām*), and the application of a single nominal ending

1. As for the correspondence principle, see Bronkhorst 1996 and Candotti–Pontillo 2013, fn. 72. The idea behind this conception lies in the philosophical problem of the relation between the linguistic items of a true statement with the corresponding ones in the phenomenal world. In a grammatical sense it consists of the one-to-one relation between word-forms and denoted objects (see M 1. 233 l.16 vt.1; l. 20 vt.2 *ad* A 1. 2. 64).

2. Elizarenkova 1995, 293, while talking about the evocative power of theonyms, states that the usage of the vocative with the imperative produces that «emotional style» which permeates the hymns.

3. As for the double accent of *mitrāvāruṇā*, Macdonell (1910, 156) notices that «In the commonest and earliest type of the old *Dvandvas* each member is dual in form and has a separate accent». He considered this type as originating from two grammatical practices frequent in the Vedas: (a) the juxtaposition of two coordinate words without *ca*, (b) the use of the elliptic dual. In fact, as Macdonell emphasises, the dual *dvandvas* alternate with these usages, *e.g.* «*mātārā-pitārā* ‘mother and father’ [appears] beside *mātārā* or *pitārā* and *pitre mātṛé* and other cases, the VS (IX. 19) having pleonastically even *pitārā-mātārā ca* meaning ‘father and mother’». However, some doubt arises in considering these word-forms as *dvandvas*, since the accent plays a non-secondary role in the perception of univerbation, as the ancient grammatical reflection suggests (see A 6.1.158). More on this subject (in the *padapāṭha* perspective) in Deshpande 2002.

4. Also consider *e.g.* Gr. du. *Αἴαντε* ‘Ajax and Teucer’ or common nouns, Gr. du. *τόξα* ‘bow and arrows’; further details of the general phenomenon in Page 1959 and Schwyzler 1988.

5. Joshi–Roodbergen 1992 discussed many problems raised by the *ekaśeṣa*-technique. As for the elliptic duals, they consider the peculiarities of such linguistic devices as unconnected with the grammar.



(*ekavibhaktau*) to it, *e.g.* *aśvaś ca aśvaś ca* > *aśvau*; *e.g.* *aśvaś ca aśvaś ca aśvaś ca* > *aśvāḥ*. The nature of this rule has been the object of much reflection: while Patañjali and modern interpreters (see *e.g.* Cardona 1997, 260) reject the possibility of reading it as a substitution rule, there are several arguments that seem to suggest the contrary with repercussions on the entire section; the topic is also dealt with in Borghero–Pontillo 2020.

If we examine the issue in greater depth, we find that A 1. 2. 67 *pumān striyā* aims at the retention of the masculine form (*pumān*) when it combines with a feminine one (*striyā*), given that the input condition is represented by items having an equal form. The syntactic structure of this *sūtra* – and that of the following ones – involves a nominative and an instrumental case which self-evidently overlaps with the scheme introduced in the *overture* of the treatment of compounds, A 2. 1. 4 [*sup* 2] *saha supā*: an inflected *pada* (*sUP*) with another inflected *pada*<sup>6</sup>. However, the section of the *ekaśeṣa* hints at a non-fully uttered combination of words, whose entire realisation subsists only in the mind of the speaker and in the coherent mirroring offered by the semantic and grammatical analysis. As Deshpande 1989, 121 remarks «Pāṇini is not concerned about words in a sentence which someone may drop. He is concerned about words which one does not drop»: indeed, he concentrates on teaching the single remainder by representing it with the *sUP* inflected in the nominative case<sup>7</sup>. After A 1. 2. 67, Pāṇini points out special cases by extending the general statement (*i.e.* the retention of the masculine form when it combines with a feminine one) to items which do not have an equal form and, nonetheless, stand as regular masculine and feminine counterparts<sup>8</sup>.

6. In Pāṇini's description, the next step is represented by the zero-replacement of the nominal endings according to A 2. 4. 71.

7. Consider that «all the rules devoted to the formation of compounds have to teach two inflected words [...] namely the so-called *upasarjana*, expressed in the nominative case in each single provision and the non-*upasarjana*, expressed in the instrumental case [...] The metalinguistic device which allows the *upasarjana* constituent to be recognised in the relevant rules, is explained in A 1. 2. 43 «*prathamānirdiṣṭam samāsa upasarjanam*», What is stated in the nominative in [the *vidhi* teaching to form] a compound is called *upasarjana*» (Mocci–Pontillo 2019, 5).

8. A 1. 2. 68 *bhrātṛputrau svasṛduhitṛbhyām* teaches the retention of *bhrātṛ* 'brother' when it combines with *svasṛ* 'sister' and the retention of *putra* 'son' when it combines with *duhitṛ* 'daughter': the Sanskrit dual forms *bhrātarau* and *putrau* can denote, respectively, 'a brother and a sister', 'a son and a daughter'. With rule A 1. 2. 69 *napuṃsakam anapuṃsakenaikavac cāsyānyatarasyām*, the only stem retained (out of the equal stems marked by different genders) is the neuter one, *e.g.* *śuklaṃ ca śuklaś ca śuklā ca* = *śuklāni / śuklam*. According to A 1. 2. 71 *śvaśuraḥ śvaśrvā* the du. m. *śvasurau* 'parents in law' also stands for its feminine counterpart *śvaśrvā* 'mother in law'. As hinted above, the input forms mentioned in A 1. 2. 68; 70; 71 are not *sārūpa*, *i.e.* they do not have equal form and they can be intended as a parenthetical note to A 1. 2. 67 *pumān striyā*.

To reach the heart of the present paper, let us concentrate on A 1. 2. 70 *pītā mātṛā*, which teaches that when the term *pītṛ* ‘father’ combines with the term *mātṛ* ‘mother’ only the former one remains; consequently, the dual inflection of this word thus represents exactly the same coordinative relationship as the corresponding *dvandva* or syntactic string, whose meaning is ‘mother and father’. This linguistic phenomenon will be investigated as far as the *Rgveda* and the Pāṇinian tradition are concerned; then, a related Vedic Sanskrit *varia lectio* will be treated.

## 2. Vedic Heritage

In the elliptic procedure, while the chosen word is utterly expressed, the other one remains in the back of one’s mind, floating in an (un)conscious way between speaker and listener between the poets and their audience: what is unsaid virtually accompanies what is being said aloud and, together, they ensure the success of the communicative event.

The architecture of this phenomenon is based on a play of *praesentia* and *absentia*; however, there is a mandatory condition for such an elliptic game to work: every player must be involved in a context made up of shared information. Indeed, when faced with *mama pītaraū*, no one will ever think about both parents due to a purely intuitive instinct, but a common cultural background shared by reciter and listener will prevent any failure in communication<sup>10</sup>.

Let us focus on the above-mentioned rule A 1. 2. 70 *pītā mātṛā*: Pāṇini teaches that a neuter optionality<sup>11</sup> governs the output for the input combination ‘*pītṛ* and *mātṛ*’. In other words, to convey the sense ‘father and mother’, one can choose a copulative compound or an *ekasheṣa*, whose surface realisation consists in the nominative dual form of the constituent inflected in the metalinguistic nominative case in the relevant rule (*pītā*), *i.e.* Skt. *pītaraū*, Ved. *pītārā*. Although not mentioned in the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, the dual of *matṛ* is also used in the *Samhitās* to express the sense of ‘mother and father’ according to Macdonell 1916, 1 §93. As

9. As for relevant special compounds, see below §3.

10. For example, the *Rgveda* must have only contained a limited amount of sometimes intentionally unclear passages, almost riddle hymns. Of course, poetry cannot be compared with ordinary speech; the former makes free use of stylistic devices and poetic license, while in the latter such freedom would be neither functional (nor productive) at all. As such, the mutual permeability of the linguistic material is not always expected.

11. *I.e.* neither “preferable” nor “marginal” according to Kiparsky’s 1979 reconstruction of Pāṇini’s optionality; *anyatarasyām* is continued by *anuvṛtti* from A 1. 2. 69.

already observed by Edgerton (1910, 116), this specific usage presents some analogies with Gothic pl. *berusjos* «Sg. \**berusi* [...] *mother*, actually ‘she who has borne’» (Lehmann 1986 s.v.): he wondered whether it could be considered as possibly «a reminiscence of a matriarchal system» for the ancestral Indo-European culture.

### 2.1 Textual Evidence

Since Pāṇini documents a phonetic specificity of the Śākalya’s *padapāṭha*<sup>12</sup>, the composition of the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* has to be chronologically set after its compilation and before our version of the *Rgveda*. In fact, by applying Pāṇini’s rules of *sandhi* we obtain a different text that represents an archaic stage of the Rigvedic textual development. As a consequence, it would be deeply inconsistent to use the surviving redaction of the *Rgveda* in order to test Pāṇini’s phonetics; however, there is no reason why we should refrain from making use of its morphology and syntax<sup>13</sup>. This is the reason why the present study relies on the *Rgveda* evidence. So, in order to better understand how Pāṇini might have conceived the elliptic behaviour of the language, with special regard to the application of A 1. 2. 70, one has to examine all the occurrences of the dual form of the stem *matṛ* and to verify its actual nature by analysing the relevant context<sup>14</sup>:

a) Reference to the *arāṇis*:

*e.g.* R̥V 8. 60. 15ab

12. See Bronkhorst 1981; 2016. While Bronkhorst maintains that this *padapāṭha* was composed in a written form, Witzel 2011 believes that it was still subject to oral transmission.

13. However, consider that the Vedic Sanskrit is not Pāṇini’s main target (see *e.g.* Kulikov 2013).

14. See also the Appendix and cf. Jamison–Brereton 2014, 1145. Two occurrences (R̥V 1. 46. 2; 6. 59. 2) have been excluded from the list since their inflection is only determined by the syntax of the context. As for the interpretation of the occurrences of the du. of *matṛ*, see also Ditrich 2006, 227ff.: the author points out the general reference to Heaven and Earth in a large number of occurrences and gives a reason for the metaphorical comparison with human parents in R̥V 3. 33. 1; 3. 33. 3; 7. 2. 5; 10. 1. 7. It seems that R̥V 8. 99. 6 can also be added to this group.

*śéṣe váneṣu<sup>15</sup> mātṛóḥ sáṃ tvā mártāsa indhate /*

You (Agni) lie in power in the forests, in your parents<sup>16</sup>; mortals kindle you.

As is well-known, the *araṇís* are two pieces of different kinds of wood used to kindle the sacrificial fire. The grammatical features of *matṛ* are consistent with the denotatum of this specific word-form (since it is a feminine dual denoting a pair whose grammatical gender is feminine); nonetheless, it is self-evident that the whole ritual procedure actually hints at the ignition of the fire as a production of offspring by copulation, *i.e.* involving a male principle, the *uttarāraṇi*, ‘the upper fire-drill’, and a female one, the *adharāraṇi*, ‘the lower fire-drill’. Even if the *araṇís* actually generate the fire, the mythological birth of Agni is manifold, as Bergaigne (1963, I, 21) explained; moreover, he quoted, *e.g.*, R̥V 10. 46. 9 as a passage from which one can infer the origins of Agni. Judging from the syntax of the first part of that verse (*dyāvā [...] pṛthivī jāniṣṭām*, ‘[Agni,] whom Heaven and Earth begat’) it is possible to conclude that the fire-drills might almost systematically have been treated as a parallel pair of parents (with respect to Heaven and Earth).

b) Reference to Soma's parents:

*e.g.* R̥V 9. 9. 3ab:

*sá sūnúr mātārā śúcir / jātó jāté arocayat /*

He, the radiant, born son, caused his two parents to shine<sup>17</sup>.

15. See R̥V 10. 4. 6ab *vanargū* ‘two ones who wander in a forest’, where the term *vana* conveys the idea of the forest and of the *araṇís*, since they are both made of wood; the ‘two ones’ are both two robbers and the arms of one of the officiants who kindle the sacred fire.

16. ‘Parents’ stands as a compromise: the fact that Vedic Sanskrit allows both forms to denote the parental pair offers the slight (but powerful) variation in its perception. Perhaps, a faithful translation would be ‘the mother with the father’ and the reverse version in the opposite situation.

17. Probably the two pressing stones, which ‘shine’ due to the tawny colour of the just produced Soma. In st. 1b they are called *naptyor*: it seems quite paradoxical that the birth of Soma is caused by two members of its own progeny, and that this pair is referred to as *mātārā* in the same hymn; perhaps, during the performing of the ritual practice, the two stones are considered as being constantly renewed due to their contact with the Soma. This complex relation seems underlined by the double use of the past participle of *√jan* referring to each of them in the verse quoted above.

They are Heaven and Earth<sup>18</sup>; Agni and Soma share the fact that they were both born from a pair of ritual instruments: two pieces of wood, two pressing stones (or mortar and pestle) respectively. Their production implies the superimposition of the human physical union (apt to generate) on the whole craft process<sup>19</sup>.

c) Reference to Indra's parents:

*e.g.* R̥V 10.120.7cd:

*ā mātārā sthāpayase jīgatnū āta inoṣi kārvarā purūṇi* /<sup>20</sup>

You cause your moving parents to halt; then you advance towards many deeds.

The peculiarity of Indra's family is testified *e.g.* by R̥V 10. 54. 3, where the god is directly addressed as he who begot (*ajanayathās*) his own parents (*mātāraṃ ca pītāraṃ ca*). As Bergaigne (1963, II, 162) states, these 'parents' can be recognised in more than one pair, including, again, Heaven and Earth<sup>21</sup>.

d) Two occurrences that refer (a) to the parents of Viṣṇu (b) to the parents of the Angirases. These isolated cases seem to denote Heaven and Earth: in (b) in particular, the allusion to the Vala myth implies the cosmogonic perspective of creation of light: see also R̥V 6. 17. 5, where the Sun and the Dawn (*sūryam uṣāsam*) are allowed to shine for the first time.

e) Reference to *ródasī*:

*e.g.* R̥V 9. 85. 12cd:

18. See Geldner 1951, III, 16; Jamison–Brereton 2014, 1244.

19. De Witt Griswold (1923, 223, n. 4) points out the sexual innuendo of both practises and recalls the phonetic proximity between the verbal roots *√su* 'to press' and *√sū* 'to procreate'.

20. Indra causes the fixity of his parents, *i.e.* Heaven and Earth; he makes the union between them (and therefore his own conceiving) possible. Compare this verse with AVŚ 5. 2. 6c *ā sthāpayata mātāraṃ jīgatnūm āta invata kārvarāṇi bhūri*, 'cause ye to stand there the moving mother; from it send ye many exploits' (Whitney 1905, 224; Roth (*ibid.*, 224) interprets this as a time-dilating stratagem). This seems a later version with respect to R̥V 10.120: *e.g.*, in the AVŚ the dual of *matr* did not survive and became an accusative singular.

21. However, the reference to these two elements in R̥V 4. 22. 3d (*dyām [...] bhūma*) does not seem to represent either the parents of Indra or the divine pair at all.

*bhānūḥ śukreṇa śocīṣā vy ādyaut prārūrucad ródasī mātārā śúcīḥ /*

Brightness (*i.e.* Soma identified with the Sun in the form of a Gandharva) has flashed forth with its radiant radiance; he caused Heaven and Earth, his parents, to shine – he who is the radiant one.

According to the translation by Jamison and Brereton (2014, 1320), the feminine *ródasī* in its dual inflection denotes the ‘two world-halves’ (Heaven and Earth). This dual form possesses the denotatum of two different items: therefore, a never indicated word must represent the counterpart of the expressed one. First, it should be pointed out that *ródasī* can morphologically be analysed as a dual in the sense of ‘Heaven and Earth’ as well as a feminine singular denoting ‘Rodasī’, *i.e.* the proper name of the wife of Rudra / partner of the Maruts<sup>22</sup>. Clearly, a superimposition of two divine pairs (respectively ‘the two-world-halves / Heaven and Earth’ and ‘Rudra and Rodasī’) could have occurred. In contrast with the occurrences analysed here, in R̥V 7. 6. 6 the du. *ródasī* is qualified by the du. of the term *pitr̥* (*ródasyor* [...] *pitr̥ór*): this is the evidence of the involvement of a masculine item in the pair and makes it reasonable to infer that the du. of *mat̥r* conveys the sense of both a masculine and feminine item, and that even here it does not merely mean ‘two mothers’. An analogous conclusion can be drawn from the internal comparison of R̥V 9. 75 (which is a *Soma Pavamāna*, as its collocation suggests): whereas, still with reference to *ródasī*, verse 2 features the du. *pitr̥ór*, verse 4 involves the feminine *mātārā* and these duals allegedly refer to the same pair (*i.e.* the parents of Soma). This fact indeed validates the interpretation of the feminine dual in the elliptic sense, and, even here, it implies its being rooted (at least) in the linguistic register of ritual practice.

f) Reference to the compound *dyāvāpṛthivī*<sup>23</sup> and to *dyāvā* and *pṛthivī* in asyndeton:

22. The difference between these forms can only be grasped in accented texts, since the oxytone *rodasī* corresponds to the singular (with the meaning of ‘Rodasī’), while the proparoxytone *ródasī* coincides with the dual (with the meaning of ‘Heaven and Earth’), even though «the latter can also sometimes be used for Rodasī» (Jamison–Brereton 2014, 364–365). As regards it, see *e.g.* R̥V 6. 66. 6. Vasilkov (1989, 396–397) notes that the Maruts own the goddess Rodasī as a *sādhārānī*, «a woman in common possession». Needless to emphasise the parallel with Draupadī’s polyandrous marriage in the *Mahābhārata*.

23. More details in Ditrich 2018.

e.g. R̥V 1. 159. 3ab<sup>24</sup>:

*té sūnávaḥ svápasaḥ sudāmsaso mahī jajñur mātārā pūrvácittaye /*

These skilful, powerful sons begot the powerful parents to obtain their first thought.

While *pr̥thivī* is a feminine dual, *div* is employed both in the masculine and in the feminine gender. Indeed, as Bergaigne (1963, 236) noted, the Heaven can be seen as both a female and as a male entity: in the former case the rain is the semen, in the latter it is the maternal milk (see R̥V 10. 114. 1). Therefore, this series provides many opportunities for understanding the du. of *matr̥* as an elliptic one.

Finally, let us consider some verses that feature the use of metric formulas<sup>25</sup>: the syntactic string *ródasī mātārā súciḥ* preceded by the verb *pra-√ruc* at the end of R̥V 9. 75. 4 and R̥V 9. 85. 12 seems to have been created *metri causa*; the same happens with *yahvīrtásya mātārā* in R̥V 1. 142. 7; 5. 5. 6; 9. 102. 7; 10. 59. 8<sup>26</sup>. Also consider the slightly inverted formula *mātārā yahvīrtásya* in R̥V 6. 17. 7<sup>27</sup>.

Now, the myth provides another clue: the *R̥gveda* contains many hymns devoted to the Ṛ̥bhus; a complete analysis of their nature is offered by Bergaigne (1963, II, §2). They are considered as divine officiants of the sacrifice as well as mythic craftsmen; for the present scope, only one of their many powers needs to be considered: that is the ability to rejuvenate their parents, «c'est-à-dire le ciel et la terre» (Bergaigne 1963, II, 411)<sup>28</sup>. This special idea is commonly expressed by referring to the parental pair with the du. of *pitr̥*: *pítārā* (R̥V 1. 20. 4; 1. 110. 8; 4.

24. In this hymn the meanings of *pitur* [...] *mātur* (v.2), *pítārā* (v.2) and *mātārā* (v.3) are equivalent.

25. There are a few cases where the dual of *matr̥* agrees in gender and number with *rihāpé* (R̥V 3. 33. 1; 7. 2. 5) and with *samrihāpé* (R̥V 3. 33. 3) from *√rih* 'to lick'. This relation seems to rely on their being envisioned as mother-cows (see parallel cases with *matr̥* inflected in the plural number in R̥V 9. 100. 1; 7).

26. Night and Dawn are considered as the mothers of the *rtā* and at the same time its youngest daughters (see Witzel–Goto 2007, 705, n. 7). That is why there is an apparent contradiction in terms in R̥V 6. 17. 7 between *pratné* 'ancient' and *yahvī* 'yung' which both refer to *mātārā*. The connotation of this pair seems more temporal than spatial: on the contrary, the gender opposition of Heaven and Earth, is not so manifest. As such, the efficacy of the translation of this formula could present some limits.

27. The parallel case of *yahvīrtásya mātārāḥ* in R̥V 9. 33. 5 is characterised by the plural inflection of the term *matr̥* (and of *yahva*) instead of the dual one.

28. However, the whole procedure of rejuvenation raises doubts in many directions (see Pontillo 2019).

33. 3; 4. 34. 9; 4. 35. 5; 4. 36. 3); *pitṛbhyām* (R̥V 1. 111. 1; 4. 33. 2); *pitṛór* (R̥V 3. 5. 8). However, while in the latter case (R̥V 3. 5. 8) the parents of the R̥bhus are referred to with the masculine dual, the preceding verse features a different lexical choice by introducing the feminine *mātārā* (R̥V 3. 5. 7) with respect to the same pair. This evidence seems to corroborate the idea of the comprehensibility (and allegedly of the spreading) of the special meaning of the dual analysed here: since *mātārā* is used in a context where *pitārā* is usually involved, it is very likely that the author of R̥V 3. 5 was perfectly aware of the possibility of denoting the parental pair with both the elliptic dual *mātārā* and *pitārā*, and he used each possibility within the distance of a single verse<sup>29</sup>.

Since the present series of occurrences bear witness to the elliptic nature of the du. of the term *matṛ* and also give reasons to believe that its meaning was not at all obscure, why did Pāṇini avoid teaching it?

### 3. Back to the Core Point

The silence of the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* about this fact is quite perplexing, since its description of the language also encompasses many usages restricted to special literary and geographical contexts (Joshi–Bhate 1984, §5). For example, A 6. 3. 32 *mātarapitarau udīcām*, which teaches that the *dvandva* *mātarapitarau* without the thematic form of the first constituent, is promoted by Northern grammarians; moreover, A 6. 3. 33 *pitārāmātārā ca chandasi* means that *pitārāmātārā* (the reversed form with respect to the previous case) is found in the sacred literature, (as taught by the loc. s. *chandasi*). Both rules are good instances of Pāṇini's attempts to give an overview of the language known to him that is as complete as possible.

An interpretation of the order of the constituents of the just quoted compound is offered by Patañjali's commentary on A 2. 2. 34 *alpāctaram*, 'the *pada* which contains the fewer number of *aC* [all the vowels], is placed first (30) in a *dvandva* (32)<sup>30</sup>. This *sūtra* (along with A 2. 2. 32 and A 2. 2. 33) traditionally deals with the order of the constituents of copulative compounds; Kātyāyana proposes a detailed set of information in the relevant *vārttikas* about the mandatory features of the first *pada*, given that both could be placed first according to 2. 2. 34, *i.e.* by being endowed with the same number of vowels (see in vt. 3 ad A 2. 2.3 4

29. The philological perspective is in contrast with the philosophical belief that the Vedas are eternal and, as such, beginningless and authorless.

30. The translation is mine.



‘*samānākṣarāṇām*’). The following point seems to be culturally rather than linguistically oriented (M 1. 436 ll. 18-19 vt. 4 and M ad vt. 4 ad A 2.2. 34):

*Abhyarhitam* / *abhyarhitam pūrvam nīpatatīti vaktavyam* / *mātāpitarau*(...)/

[The constituent standing for] the greatly honoured. It has to be said that the [constituent standing for] the greatly honoured [is placed first]. [For instance:] *mātāpitarau* ‘mother and father’ [...]<sup>31</sup>.

The traditional grammatical reflection gives a non-technical explanation to this word-order; this cultural interpretation seems quite inconsistent with the masculine horizon towards which the spoken language known to Pāṇini tends (see A 1. 2. 67 *pumān striyā*)<sup>32</sup>. What is it based on?

#### 4. Literature as a Mirror: a Vedic Sanskrit Varia Lectio

Due to the transformation of a given cultural milieu, the relevant language undergoes changes of various kinds<sup>33</sup>. In the light of what has been said so far, it seems interesting to consider that RV 10. 140. 2 was later modified in the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* to replace the du. of the term *matṛ* with the more acceptable / understandable masculine dual form<sup>34</sup>:

31. The translation is the author's.

32. Cf. the inverted order in *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* 2. 225: *ācāryaś ca pitā caiva mātā bhrātā ca pūrvajāḥ / nārtenāpy avamantavyā brāhmaṇena viśeṣataḥ*, ‘Teacher, father, mother, and older brother – these should never be treated with contempt especially by a Brahmin, even though he may be deeply hurt’. But see this well-known passage: 2. 145 *upādhyāyān daśācārya ācāryāṇāṃ śataṃ pitā / sahasraṃ tu pītṛṇ mātā gauraveṇātīricyate*, ‘The teacher is ten times greater than the tutor: the father is a hundred times greater than the teacher; but the mother is a thousand times greater than the father’ (Olivelle 2005, 34). As for the maternal role and the historical background with respect to the *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* see Ditrich 2010, 151 «The maternal power was perceived as overwhelming and uncontrollable, too complex to be approached consciously. It is, therefore, omitted and suppressed in the *Law Code of Manu*. The silencing and the repression of the mother in the text enabled the construction of the patriarchal vision of a male-created and male-dominated society in the *Law Code of Manu*».

33. This scenario is quite common in history: consider e.g. the Latin word ‘minister’ which commonly denotes a high position in a government department, even though it originally indicated a mere ‘servant’ (\**minus-ter*), subordinate to the *magis-ter*.

34. Keith (1914, 319, fn. 8) notes the *varia lectio*.

RV 10. 140. 2: *putró mātārā vicárann úpāvasi prṇákṣi ródasī ubhé /*

TS 4. 2. 7. 3: *putráḥ pītārā vicárann úpāvasy ubhé prṇákṣi ródasī /*<sup>35</sup>

Spreading towards his parents, you, son, behave friendly, you unite Heaven and Earth.

Now, it is worth making a few considerations; firstly, the *Samhitās* of the Black *Yajurveda* form a closely connected group. Their material and its distribution point to an organic unity. Their agreement is often even verbal, especially in those mantras which were borrowed from the *Rgveda*. Though representing a later stage, the language of the mantra portion on the whole agrees with that of the *Rgveda* (Gonda 1975, 324)<sup>36</sup>. The origins of the *Taittirīya Samhitā* are in the Central Gangetic area which «shows a clear dependence on the western (Kuru) KS / MS traditions»<sup>37</sup>. As Witzel remarks, the Kuru state along with its «new socio-religious basis» was solid and enduring, also in exerting its influence: «The changes were carried out in the center of political power and of contemporary culture, in Kurukṣetra, which now also became the center of the newly emerging Vedic orthopraxy and “orthodoxy”». Due to chronological and areal reasons, it is likely that the TS text was reformed.

In such a framework, the specific reading treated above could represent a (small) outcome of a strategy of cultural transformation.

## 5. Conclusions

The present inquiry is just one piece in the mosaic of the changing aspects of the Vedic world, whose many implications continue to require extensive studies. No definite historical explanations are expected from this linguistic analysis, since it only pays attention to a thought-provoking inconsistency between Vedic Sanskrit and Grammatical literature and aims, where possible, to preserve the original intention which led the poet to choose the feminine dual rather than the masculine one. It is impossible to provide a univocal interpretation which sheds light on the reason why one constituent of a given pair should be left unsaid; however, the cultural role in the natural selection operated by the language is far from being

35. ‘Visiting thy parents thou aidest them; thou fillest both worlds’ (Keith 1914, 319).

36. See Witzel 1989, for a detailed analysis of the Vedic dialects.

37. Witzel 1997, 12.

undervalued. The image of markedly maternal parents (which recalls the hypothesis of a primordial matriarchal system at which Edgerton hinted) had been fixed in the literary dimension in the form of a reminiscence, which had the expressive merit of being strongly evocative. This process indeed seems close to a sublimation, an irreversible metamorphosis: why did the special use of the du. of *matṛ* become a poetic prerogative? As the paper has tried to show, this is a quite recurring presence in the *Rgveda*, and it might represent a crossroads between two different ages and social *milieux*, with the latter even removing this Vedic Sanskrit dual from the TS, a sacred text. Then, when Pāṇini composed his grammar around the 400–300 BCE, he did not formulate an *ad hoc* rule to introduce its elliptic usage: the meaning of the dual of the term *matṛ* must not have been any different from the ordinary one, *i.e.* ‘two mothers’. This fact could represent the indicator of a (more or less induced) cultural transition. It goes without saying that the choices made by the author of the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* had an enormous influence on the classical Sanskrit language (and on Indian culture by extension) which has lasted until the present age<sup>38</sup>.

38. A possible opposite situation has likely occurred with respect to the passive *janyate* and *tanyate* from *√jan* ‘to be born’ and *√tan* ‘to stretch’; as explained by Kulikov 2013, even if these forms are taught by Pāṇini, the Vedic *corpus* does not feature any occurrence of them in the place of the usual *jāyate* and *tāyate*. Nonetheless, they are attested in Classical Sanskrit (see Kiparsky 1979), legitimised in the light of many centuries of Pāṇinian tradition.

## Appendix

ARANĪS	
1. 122. 4d	<i>prá vo nápātam apāṃ kṛṇudhvam prá mātārā rāspināsyāyóḥ</i> Put forward for yourselves the Child of the Waters (Agni), forward the two parents of the noisy Āyu <sup>39</sup> .
1. 140. 3b <sup>40</sup>	<i>kṣṇaprūtau vevijé asya sakṣitā ubhā tarete abhí mātārā śísūm</i> Floating quickly through the black (the smoke), lying together, both his parents pass across each other for the sake of the child.
3. 1. 7b	<i>ásthur átra dhenávaḥ pínvamānā mahí dasmāsyā mātārā samīcī</i> The swelling cows stood here; the powerful parents of the wonderful one are united.
3. 7. 1b	<i>prá yá ārúḥ śitipṛṣṭhāsya dhāsér ā mātārā viviśuḥ sapṭá vāṇīḥ<sup>41</sup></i> From the home of the white-crested (the fire), they move forth; they pervade the parents and the seven voices.
7. 7. 3c	<i>ā mātārā viśvāvāre huvānó yāto yaviṣṭha jajñīṣé suśévaḥ</i> Being summoned to your parents who possess all treasures, o new-born, you have been generated extremely auspicious.
8. 60. 15a	See §2. 1
3. 5. 7d	<i>dīdyānaḥ śúcīr ṛṣvāḥ pāvakāḥ pūnaḥ-punar mātārā návyasī kaḥ</i> Shining, the bright, sublime, pure one (Agni identified with the R̥bhus) again and again has made his parents new <sup>42</sup> .

39. The legend of Purūravas and Urvaśī is allegorically compared to the *aranīs* already in TS 1. 3. 7; 6. 3. 2. Note in RV 1. 31. 11 the identification of Agni with the *prathamam āyura*, and its powerful epithet in st. 2 *dvimātṛ*. Within this specific hymn (st. 11) the father is identified with the sacrificer. Is it possible to consider him as the mortal counterpart of the pair, as the archetype of Purūravas?

40. In this column only the *pāda* where the dual of *matṛ* appears is specified.

41. Note the use of the du. m. *pītārā* in the following verse (1c). «Agni's "mother and father" might be Earth and Heaven – especially since his parents are probably Heaven and Earth in *pāda* c. But they could also be the two fire-churning sticks, the *arāṇś*, in which case *mātārā* might better be "the two mothers". If the *mātārā* are both Earth and Heaven and the churning sticks, then the poet may be deliberately exploiting the paradox that Agni, the ritual fire, is the child of the churning sticks, and Agni, perhaps as the sun, is the child of Heaven and Earth» (Jamison–Brereton 2014, 478). The identity of the *sapṭá vāṇīḥ* is not clear.

42. Note that this identification may imply a *double entendre* referring to Agni: Heaven and Earth, and the *arāṇś*. The involvement of the R̥bhus, on the contrary, places an obstacle with respect

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10. 79. 4b	<i>tád vām ṛtāṇ <b>rodasi</b> prā bravīmi jāyamāno <b>mātā</b> gārbho attī</i> I say this truth to you, Heaven and Earth: while being born, the embryo eats his parents.
10. 115. 1b	<i>citrā īc chīśos tārūṇasya vakṣātho ná yó <b>mātā</b> apyēti dhātave</i> Excellent is the growth of the new-born, and he does not reach his parents to suck <sup>43</sup> .
PARENTS OF SOMA	
9. 9. 3a	See §2. 1
9. 68. 4a	<i>sá <b>mātā</b> vicāran vājāyann apāḥ prā médhiraḥ svadhāyā pīnvate padām</i> Abandoning his parents <sup>44</sup> , impelling the waters, the wise one (Soma) swells his traces with his own power.
9. 70. 6a	<i>sá <b>mātā</b> ná dādṛśāna usṛīyo nānadad eti marútām iva svanáḥ</i> Manifested as to his parents, he (the new-born Soma), that ruddy bull, flows roaring again and again like the cry of the Maruts.
PARENTS OF INDRA	
4. 22. 4c	<i>ā <b>mātā</b> bhāratī śuṣmy ā gōr nṛvāt párijman nonuvanta vātāḥ</i> The thundering one brings near his parents, near on account of the milk (the rain). The winds roar like men circling everywhere.
8. 99. 6b	<i>ānu te śúṣmaṇ turáyantam īyatuh kṣoṇī śísuṇ ná <b>mātā</b></i> Heaven and Earth go after that rushing fire (Indra) like two parents [go after] their child.
10. 120. 7b	See §2. 1
PARENTS OF VIṢṆU	
1. 155. 3b	<i>tā īṇ vardhanti máhy asya paúṃsyam ní <b>mātā</b> nayati rétase bhujé</i> They ( <i>ṛcaḥ</i> ) strengthen his powerful, masculine virility; he brings his parents (Heaven and Earth) to enjoy the semen (Soma).
PARENTS OF ĀNGIRASES	
6. 32. 2a	<i>sá <b>mātā</b> sūryeṇā kavīnām ávāsayaḍ rujád ádriṇ gṛṇānāḥ</i>

to the second possibility (see above §2. 1). As such, the collocation of the verse in this section remains doubtful.

43. The interpretation of this passage is quite complex. The whole image probably refers to the fact that, once ignited, the sacred fire is not ‘fed’ by the two ones who begot him, as usually happens in nature between parents and their offspring. The ancestral idea of nourishment is represented by the maternal milk (note that the *arāṇs* are compared with cows); Agni, as the son, ‘sucks’ it by means of the offerings, e.g. *ghee*, burnt in the flames by the officiant.

44. *I.e.* moving out from the pressing stones.

	He made the parents of the poets shine with the sun; the praised one broke the stone.
REFERENCE TO RODASĪ	
3. 2. 2b	<i>sá rocayaj janúṣā ródasī ubhé sá <b>mātrór</b> abhavat putrá īḍyaḥ</i> He (Agni Vaiśvānara) caused both Heaven and Earth to shine by means of his birth; he became the son to be invoked by those parents.
6. 17. 7d	<i>ádhārayo ródasī deváputre pratné <b>mātárā</b> yahvī ṛtásya</i> You (Indra) have fixed Heaven and Earth who have sons as gods, the two ancient but youthfully exuberant parents of <i>ṛta</i> .
9. 18. 5b	<i>yá imé ródasī mahī sám <b>mātareva</b> dóhate</i> [He (Soma)] who yields milk like the two parents together, these powerful Heaven and Earth.
9. 75. 4b	<i>ádribhiḥ sutó matibhiś cánohitāḥ prarocáyan ródasī <b>mātárā</b> śúcīḥ</i> Pressed with stones, the one made favourable by intentions, causes Heaven and Earth, his parents, to shine, [he who is] the radiant one.
9. 85. 12d	See §2. 1
10. 59. 8b	<i>śám ródasī subándhave yahvī ṛtásya <b>mātárā</b></i> Heaven and Earth are luck for Subandhu, the two youthfully exuberant parents of <i>ṛta</i> .
10. 140. 2c	<i>putró <b>mātárā</b> vicárann úpāvasi pṛṇákṣī ródasī ubhé</i> Spreading towards his parents, you, son, behave friendly, you (Agni) unite Heaven and Earth.
REFERENCE TO THE COMPOUND <i>DYĀVĀPṚTHIVĪ</i> REFERENCE TO <i>DYĀVĀ</i> AND <i>PṚTHIVĪ</i> IN ASYNDETON	
1. 159. 3b	See §2. 1
10. 1. 7b	<i>ā hí dyāvāpṛthivī agna ubhé sádā putró ná <b>mātárā</b> tatántha</i> O Agni, indeed, you always extended towards both Heaven and Earth, as a son towards his parents.
10. 35. 3b	<i>dyāvā no adyā pṛthivī ánāgaso mahī tráyetām suvitāya <b>mātárā</b></i> Let Heaven and Earth, those powerful parents today protect us, who are sinless, to obtain prosperity.
10. 64. 14b	<i>tē hí dyāvāpṛthivī <b>mātárā</b> mahī devī devān jānmanā yajñīye itāḥ</i> Heaven and Earth, indeed, the powerful parents, the two deities <sup>45</sup> worthy of sacrifice, go towards the gods with their birth.
AGREEMENT WITH VERBAL FORMS < √RIH ‘TO LICK’	

45. As for the *construtio ad synesim*, see Speijer 1886, 19.

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3. 33. 1c	<i>gáveva śubhré <b>mātārā</b> rihāṇé vipāṭ chutudrī páyasā javete</i> Like licking cattle, radiant parents, the Vipās and the Śutudrī hurry on with their milk (as the first is a tributary river with respect to the second one and both together with respect to the Indus).
[...]	[...]
[3. 33. 3ab	<i>áchā síndhum mātṛtamām ayāsaṃ vipāśam urvīm subhágām aganma]</i>
3. 33. 3c	<i>vatsām iva <b>mātārā</b> saṃrihāṇé samānām yónim ānu saṃcārantī</i> I (Viśvāmitra) arrived at the very motherly river (the one who accepts all the waters?); we moved to the broad, prosperous Vipās. Like parents licking their calf, they go together in the same womb (riverbed) <sup>46</sup> .
7. 2. 5c	<i>pūrvī śíśuṃ ná <b>mātārā</b> rihāṇé sám agrúvo ná sámāneṣv añjan</i> Like parents licking the son, they anoint the many double [doors] like the virgins in the assembly.
FORMULAE ANALOGOUS TO RV 6.17. 7; 10. 59. 8.	
1. 142. 7c	<i>yahvī ṛtasya <b>mātārā</b> śīdatām barhīr ā sumāt</i> Let two youthfully exuberant parents(?) of ṛta, sit together on the ritual grass.
5. 5. 6b	<i>suprātike vayovīdhā yahvī ṛtasya <b>mātārā</b></i> The two of beautiful appearance, of improving strength, the young parents(?) of ṛta.
9. 102. 7b	<i>samīcīné abhī tmānā yahvī ṛtasya <b>mātārā</b></i> The two youthfully exuberant parents(?) of ṛta, connected with their own person.

46. The passage presents some interpretative difficulties which deserve further investigation.

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