

Pali ekakkharas Revisited

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PALI LEXICOGRAPHY

Indian literature written in Sanskrit has a long, rich lexicographic tradition, with the composition of glossaries or lists of words (*nighaṇṭu*) that are rare, unexplained or of difficult understanding in sacred texts. The *Nirukta* composed by Yāska (ca. third century CE) is probably the most famous and the oldest witness of such works. Then, many specialized dictionaries on some groups of words or subjects have been developed. These lexicons can be synonymous, exposing lists of terms with one or more words having the same meaning (*ekārtha*, *samānārtha*), or homonymical, compiling words with one or more meanings (*anekārtha*, *nānārtha*). Among them are the *ekākṣarakośas* (“lexicons of monosyllables”) which deal with particles and monosyllabic terms that can be polysemic. Claus Vogel lists about eleven such texts (Vogel 2015: 102–104). These *ekākṣarakośas* are well known in the Sanskrit tradition as used mainly in two types of exercises: games on linguistic matters, such as riddles or learned poems, and Tantric practices where the meanings of the hidden characters are used in magic formulas and esoteric diagrams (Vogel 2015: 102).

Pali literature is far from being so prolific in this field of knowledge. The most ancient lexicographic work known is the *Abhidhānappadīpikā*,¹ a vast dictionary of synonyms composed in the twelfth century by Moggallāna Thera in Ceylon. However, it is not the only lexicon that has reached us. There are, for example, the *Dhātumañjūsā* (fourteenth

¹ The colophon is clear regarding the place and time of the *Abhidhānappadīpikā*'s composition: it has been elaborated at Pulatthipura (today Polonnaruwa in Ceylon) under the reign of Mahā Parākramabāhu. The identity of the author (Moggallāna) has been controversial, but he has to be distinguished from the Sinhalese grammarian. See the introduction of the *Abhidhānappadīpikā* edition for more details (Abh ix–xvi).

century) and *Dhātupāṭha* (composed earlier) which list verbal roots (*dhātu*)² or the *Abhidhānappadīpikā-sūci* (nineteenth century) which arranges the entries of the *Abhidhānappadīpikā* in a different way. A compendium focused on monosyllables was also composed in the sixteenth century, the *Ekakkharakosa* which we will come back to below. The list of Pali lexicons is however quite short compared to Sanskrit, even if we take into account the possibility that other texts have been lost.

Despite this fact, the organization of linguistic entities has been a preoccupation since the early days of Pali Buddhism. Just as Sanskrit lexicography draws its source in Vedic literature, so the Tipiṭaka contains in germ what will be systematized later in specialized works. It must be admitted that this interest is mainly focused on synonyms. Indeed, the enrichment of linguistic resources is primarily for the purpose of spreading the Buddha's words to the greatest number, in a complex social and cultural context, and linguistic diversity. Unlike the Brahmin attitude towards Sanskrit, the Blessed One prescribes monks to diversify and expand their vocabularies to best fit their audience. The *Araṇavibhaṅga-sutta* (M III 230) is the *locus classicus* on the subject, expressing perfectly in this well-known formula the need to adapt and vary one's own language:

janapadaniruttiṃ nābhiniveseyya, samaññaṃ nātidhāveyyā ti.

M III 234,32

One should not insist on local language, and one should not override normal usage.

Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi 1995: 1084,25f.

This injunction warns against a misrepresentation of the language that would make it an object of attachment, as well as a use of words that would not be within the understanding of the audience. Language obeys social conventions and conveys ideas and concepts whose signifiers vary according to dialects and contexts. The Buddha suggests speaking

² Rudolph O. Franke described these two works and mentioned also a third roots lexicon whose date and authorship are unknown, the *Dhāvatthadīpanī* (Franke 1902: 69–76; 1903: 317–318). It seems to focus on the material expounded in the *Saddanūti Dhātumālā*.

in a language understandable to all, the role of synonyms being then essential. Enriching the lexicon aims to a certain extent at “popularizing” the words of the Buddha. It is then one of the preferred methods in canonical literature for spreading the Dhamma (Nandawansa 2001 : 5).

In parallel, the old layers of the Pali canon organize these elements. The first case is the *Padabhājanīya* section (“explanation of individual words”), the old commentary on the *Pātimokkha* of the Vinaya-piṭaka (Norman 1983 : 166), which offers a precise analysis of rules word by word. It gives a clear explanation essentially in the form of lists of synonyms. This method is also formulated later in the *Mahāniddeśa*, which, in addition to groups of synonyms, presents etymological constructions to account for the meaning of certain terms. For instance, eleven synonyms of the word “snake” are commented on :

*sappo vuccati ahi. ken’ atthena sappo? saṃsappanto gacchati
ti sappo, bhujanto gacchati ti bhujago, urena gacchati ti urago
(...)*

Nidd I 7,28 –8,1

sappa (the creeper) means the snake. How is it the creeper? “He creeps forward”, such is the creeper (*sappo*); “He moves forward contorting”, such is the serpent (*bhuja-go*); “He advances on the chest (he crawls)”, such is the crawler (*ura-go*) (...).

Subsequent developments contained in the *Nettipakaraṇa* and *Peṭakopadesa* are an essential step towards the realization of lexicons (Law 1933 : 634; Norman 1983 : 166; Nandawansa 2001 : 8). These guides for commentators to interpret and to transmit the word of the Master both define sixteen modes of transmission (*hāra*) of the teachings. The synonyms are one of the essential vectors of this diffusion, as described in sections entitled *Vevacanaḥāra* (“mode of transmission by synonyms”) (Nett 53,1–56,24; Peṭ 96,4–23). The commentators go on with this activity of lexical enrichment. They fully understand the use and functions of synonyms and also develop the field of homonyms and other grammatical resources (particles, prefixes, etc.) (Nandawansa 2001 : 9-10).

MONOSYLLABLES (*ekakkharas*)

In this general context, monosyllables are of very minor importance. They are present from the earliest days of Pali literature but do not follow the same way and systematic forms as synonyms. As they are very rare, their polysemic potential is still of little interest. They often occur within a formula or group of words which are repeated identically in various places, as for example the syllable *sā* that has been used for “dog” many times in the Pali canon in the sentence “not where a dog was waiting” (*na yattha sā upaṭṭhito*) (D III 41,6; M I 77,34f.; etc.).

The late canonical literature expands their field of application, particularly the *Mahāniddeśa*. This commentary inserted in the Pali canon includes monosyllables in its glosses. For instance, the syllable *dhī* which means “wisdom” (*dhī vuccati paññā*) is called on to explain the meaning of *dhīra*, “the sage”. It defines it “as one who possesses wisdom” (*tāya paññāya samannāgatattā dhīrā*) (Nidd I 44,24). Commentators then integrated these monosyllables into the range of semantic tools, as being able to enrich the meaning of certain terms. These *ekakkharas* thus take part in artificial constructions of the meaning or semantic etymologies, which strive to motivate the hidden link that exists between words and the things they designate. They reveal semantic contents that are unrelated to a morphological or linguistic analysis governed by grammatical conventions (see Balbir 1991; Kahrs 1998a, 1998b; Bronkhorst 2001). Contrary to a historical approach, their intention is more to unveil the essence or deeper meaning of a notion (Kahrs 1998b: 142–143) and to create verbal associations with “(des) valeurs symboliques et figurées” (Renou and Filliozat 1947: § 110). For instance, the syllable *kaṃ* participates in the etymology of the word *kandara* (cliff) at various places:

kandaran ti kaṃ vuccati udakaṃ, tena dāritam, udakena bhinnam pabbatapadesam.

Sv I 209,25f.; Nidd I 98,8f.; etc.

The word *kaṃ* means water. A mountainous place dug by water (*kaṃ*), that is split (*dāritam*) by it, is “a cliff” (*kan-daram*).

Or the word *dukkham* (suffering) defined many times by the addition of the respective meanings of *du* and *kham*:

idha iti ayam saddo kucchite dissati, kucchitañ hi puttaṃ duputto ti vadanti. kham saddo pana tucche, tucchañ hi ākāsaṃ khañ ti vuccati. idañ ca paṭhama-saccaṃ kucchitaṃ aneka-upaddavādhi-ṭṭhānato, tucchaṃ bālañaparikappitadhuvasubhasukhattabhāvā virahitato. tasmā kucchitattā tucchattā ca dukkhañ ti vuccati.

Vism 494,27–32; Paṭis-a I 54,26–28; Vibh-a 84,2–7; etc.

Here the word *du* (“bad”) is met with in the sense of vile (*kucchita*); for they call a vile child a *du-putta* (“bad child”). The word *kham* (“-ness”), however is met with in the sense of empty (*tuccha*), for they call empty space “*kham*”. And the first truth is vile because it is the haunt of many dangers, and it is empty because it is devoid of the lastingness, beauty, pleasure, and self conceived by rash people. So it is called *dukkham* (“badness” = suffering, pain), because of vileness and emptiness.

Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli 2010: 506, § 16

Thus, the use and handling of these syllables suggest the existence or constitution of a background of references, from which commentators draw their knowledge. *Ekakkharas* are of particular interest because of their semantic potential, including the way they allow us to elucidate etymologies.

LATE PERIOD³

To the best of our knowledge, two works have organized and greatly exploited largely these monosyllables for different purposes: the *Abhidhānappadīpikā* elaborated by Moggallāna (twelfth century) and supplemented by its *ṭīkā* (fourteenth century), and the *Saddanīti* composed by Aggavaṃsa (twelfth century).

The *Abhidhānappadīpikā* evidences an interest for *ekakkharas*, but in an unorganized form. They are present among the abundance of synonyms, and it is difficult to count their exact number without a thorough study of this work. However, the number of words treated and the multiplicity of meanings associated with these syllables largely exceed the

³ We designate by “late” the post-commentarial period (fifth century), without being now able to be more precise. Only reliable and available sources could help to delineate these developments with precision.

Saddanīti (see below), as illustrated by the word *saṃ*. The *Abhidhāna-ppadīpikā* gives nineteen different meanings while the *Saddanīti* shows only four:⁴

saṃ sāmāṃ ca sayāṃ (...).

Abh 1144

saṃ is oneself and by itself (...)

ānande sañ ca diṭṭhā 'tha (...).

Abh 1151

saṃ and *diṭṭhā* are for joy (...).

*saṃ samodhānasāṅkhepasamantattasamiddhisu,
sammābhusasahāppathābhimukhatthesu saṅgate,
vidhāne pabhavē pūjāpunappunakriyādisu.*

Abh 1170

saṃ is for combination, summary, totality, and prosperity,
Correct, abundant, with, little thing, and turned towards, meeting,
Performance, origin, tribute, repeated action, etc.

Moreover, the *Abhidhānappadīpikā-tīkā* gives helpful indications regarding the use of these monosyllables and the existence of some lexicons. First, it perfectly integrates other monosyllables in some of its glosses by way of etymological constructions. There are many examples, such as the gloss of *gottam* “the clan”:

*go vuccati abhidhānaṃ buddhi ca, “te tāyati” ti gottam
gotram pi “gavaṃ saddaṃ tāyati” ti vā gottam.*

Abh-ṭ 332

go means naming and knowledge. “It preserves (*tāyati*)
them” such is the clan (*go-ttam, go-tram*).

Or “it preserves sound and knowledge (*gavaṃ*)”; it is the
clan (*go-ttam*).

In addition, some explanations reflect a certain degree of elaboration. To some extent this can be explained by the fact that some of them are Pali adaptations of passages found in Sanskrit works, such as the

⁴ See Sadd 245,4–246,3. *tatra saṃ vuccati santacitto puriso (...)* *saṃ vuccati dhanam (...)* *tathā saṃ vuccati sukhaṃ santi ca (...)*.

Viśvaprakāśa, a Sanskrit lexicon written in 1111 CE by Maheśvara. This is the case for *ko* and *kaṃ*:

*ko brahmattānīlakkesu samāne sabbanāmike, pāvake ca mayūre ca sukhasīśajalesu kaṃ ti.*⁵

Abh-ṭ 1198

ko is for Brahma, for self, wind, sun, equal, pronoun;
kaṃ is for fire, peacock, as well as happiness, head, water.

Finally, this commentary refers (in nominative or locative form) to an *ekakkharakosa* on six occasions.⁶ This term could be understood either as “lexicon of monosyllables” or as the title of a work (*Lexicon of Monosyllables*). This is unlikely since the Pali treatise having this name was composed two centuries later (the *Ekakkharakosa*) and since these monosyllables are not referenced in a Sanskrit work called *Ekākṣarakośa* (see below). In any case, these references to one or more lexicons (*kosa*) of the genre, in addition to the elements previously mentioned, suggest that textual sources focusing on monosyllables were sufficiently structured (although not yet determined) and were circulating at the turn of the first millennium.

The second work, the *Saddanīti*, occupies a central place when the analytical study of lexicon is concerned. This masterpiece offers an exhaustive description of the Pali language, not only in a grammatical way, but also philologically and hermeneutically. It is not surprising to see that it participates actively in the development of the Pali lexico-logical tradition. It contains a large number of lists of synonyms and homonyms (Nandawamsa 2011: 11), and an entire section is dedicated

⁵ It refers to *Viśvaprakāśa* 24.

*ko brahmātmānīlārkeṣu śamane sarvanāmi ca,
pāvake ca mayūre ca sukhaśīśajalesu kaṃ.*

⁶ Abh-ṭ 84. “*ā tu kodhamudāṭṭīsū*” *ti hi ekakkharakose vuttaṃ.*

Abh-ṭ 156. “*pasaddo paramatthe pī*” *ti hi ekakkharakose vuttaṃ.*

Abh-ṭ. 262. “*a pume mādhave ñeyyo, paṭisedhe tad’ abyayaṃ; ī satthe ca viruddhatthe, sadisatthe payogato*” *ti. hi ekakkharakose vuttaṃ.*

Abh-ṭ. 661. “*dā dānacchedadhātū*” *ti hi ekakkharakose, [...].*

Abh-ṭ 743. “*ā tukodhamudāṭṭīsū*” *ti hi ekakkharakoso.*

Abh-ṭ 1162–1163. “*po siyā paramatthasmim, pātu vātesu pā bhava*” *ti ekakkharakose vutto.*

to the roots or *dhātu* (the *Dhātumālā*, Sadd chapters 15 to 19). In addition, the *Saddanīti* focuses on monosyllables and organizes them in a specific section (Sadd 239,6–246,8). They are examined in alphabetical order (from *ka* to *saṃ*), in the context of noun declensions and the establishment of the genres of the words considered. Compounds constructed on this basis are supported by examples and quotations taken from various texts. Thus, the introductory stanzas of the tenth section of the *Padamālā* present a series of sixteen monosyllables that retain Aggavaṃsa's attention:

viññnūnaṃ

gambhīra-buddhi-cāratthaṃ pavakkhāmi yathābalaṃ: (...)

*ko vi sā c' eva bhā rā ca thī dhī kū bhū tath' eva kaṃ khaṃ go
mo mā ca saṃ yan taṃ kiṃ icc ādi ca ekikā ti.*

Sadd 236,1–8

I will expose the things that deepen the intelligence of wise people, according to their ability: (...)

The elements “*ko vi sā*” and “*bhā rā thī dhī kū bhū*”,

Then *kaṃ khaṃ go mo mā ca saṃ yan taṃ kiṃ*”.

For instance, the word *rā* is presented in this way:

*rā vuccati saddo. Aggaññasuttaṭīkāyaṃ hi “rā saddo tiyyati
chijjati etthā ti ratti sattānaṃ saddassa vūpasamakālo” ti
vuttaṃ — tasmā rāsaddassa saddavācakkatte rattī ti padaṃ
nidassanaṃ. (Sadd 237,1–4)*

rā means noise. For it is said in the *Aggaññasutta-ṭīkā*: the night (*ra-tti*) is the time of the cessation of noise for beings, as *rā* (means) noise, *tiyyati* (means) “it is cut” here. That is why when we express “noise” with the word *rā*, the word “night” (*ratti*) is an example.

Aggavaṃsa was mainly inspired by the exegetical literature in Pali to illustrate this set of monosyllables, but not only that. Indeed, in his entry on *mo*, he justified the grammatical passage from *mā* to *mo*, both meaning moon, stating that “the method has been understood according to the *Ekakkharakosa* [in Sanskrit], and it has to be said with the *o* letter as in ‘*mo* is Siva as well as the moon’” (*ekakkharakosato nayaṃ gahetvā*

“*mo Sivo candimā c’ evā*” *ti okārantavasena vattabbattā*) (Sadd 243, 19f.). In the *Saddanīti* edition Helmer Smith identified the source of reference (Sadd 243, n. 8), namely the *Ekākṣarakośa*, a Sanskrit lexicon composed by the grammarian Puruṣottamadeva at the same period in Orissa.⁷ This fact illustrates the penetration and adaptation of Sanskrit technical works in Pali erudite circles at that time, and illustrates similar connections between the *Abhidhānappadīpikā* and the *Amarakośa*, the *Vuttodaya* and the *Vṛttaratnākara*, or also parts of the *Subodhāṅkāra* and the *Kāvyādarśa*.⁸ The *Saddanīti* also exhibits the meticulous interest in language artifices present during this period, monosyllables then becoming objects of study in their own right. In the absence of other available sources, this grammar marks a milestone in the history of Pali lexicography dealing with the *ekakkharas*.

The presence of monosyllables was enlarged through their inclusion in works where playing with linguistic elements is at the centre, such as the enigmatic and poetic genres targeted at a learned audience. They are still used to shed light on etymological points, as for instance in the *Vidaddhamukhamaṇḍana-tīkā*, a commentary on the undated compendium of learned riddles, the *Vidaddhamukhamaṇḍana* (Balbir 2007: 346–360):

bhāti ābhātī ti bhā raṃsī. bhaṃ karotī ti bhākarō sūriyo.

Vid-ṭ ole gā, lines 4f.

It lights, illuminates (is the meaning of) *bhā* (which means) ray. It produces light, (therefore it is) *bhākarā* (which means) sun.

atthaṃ dhāretī ti dhī paññā.

Vid-ṭ ole ku, line 3

It supports a meaning, (therefore it is called) *dhī* (which means) wisdom.

⁷ See the *Ekākṣarakośa* edition of Ram Kumar Rai (2005: § 27) which mentioned *maḥ śivaś candramā* (...).

⁸ For instance, the section dealing with riddles (*paheḷikā*) is based on the classification provided by the *Kāvyādarśa*; see Subodh 33 (footnote 1).

But *ekakkharas* also become parts of more complex compositions, allowing different levels of understanding. The *Subhodhālankāra*, a treatise on poetics composed in Ceylon by Saṅgharakkhita (twelfth century), integrated these tools in its technical demonstrations. Among the multiple “embellishments of speech” or *alankāras* developed in this work, *silesa* (polysemies) and *paheḷī* (enigmas) are a fertile soil for *ekakkharas*. The first method, the *silesa*, is characterized by the principle of “simultaneity” of a significant element, here the use of polysemic terms.⁹ For instance:

sāradāmalakābhāso samānītaparikkhayo,
kumudākarasambodho pīṇeti janataṃ sudhī.

Subodh 290

(Meaning 1)

It has a pure light in autumn,
It carries the decline,
It is the awakening for lotus
groups,
It rejoices the assembly of
people,
It is the pure (i.e. the moon).

(Meaning 2)

He promises the excellent,
He has the pure light that comes
from the head,
He ended (suffering) and brought
peace,
He is the awakened source of joy
on earth,
He rejoices the assembly of
people,
He is the sage (i.e. the Buddha)

The work done on the linguistic chain permits a statement with a double meaning. Monosyllables allow manipulations of the compounds, giving different readings according to the different divisions of words. The two commentaries (the *porāṇa-°* and *abhinava-ṭīkā*) are here indispensable: *sārado* (in autumn) and *sāra-do* (he promises the excellent); *amalak'-ābhāso* (it has a pure light) and *amala-k'-ābhāso* (he has the pure light that comes from **the head**), where *ka* designates the head; *samānīta-parikkhayo* (it carries the decline) *sam'-ānīta-parikkhayo* (he ended [suffering] and brought peace); *kumud'-ākara-sambodho* (it is the

⁹ See for instance the works of Yigal Bronner on the subject (Bronner 2010, 2014).

awakening for lotus groups) and *ku-mud'-ākarasambodho* (he is the awakened source of joy on **earth**), where *ku* designates the earth; *sudhī* (it is the pure) and *su-dhī* (he is the sage), where *su* is for beautiful and *dhī* wisdom.

Certain types of enigmas (*pahelikā*) also include monosyllables in their construction.¹⁰ The *ubhayacchannā* type (“the two are hidden”) illustrates this pattern:

<i>alaṅkaronto bhuvanam sassiriko sadevakam,</i>	
<i>kasmim sañjātasamvaddho ko na ten' upalimpatī ti.</i>	
	Subodh-ṭṭ 63,6f.
(Meaning 1)	(Meaning 2)
He is resplendent,	It is resplendent,
He embellishes the world	It always embellishes the world
including the <i>devas</i> ,	and the water (<i>kaṃ</i>),
Where (<i>kasmim</i>) does one rise	It was born and grows in the
and develop (spiritually)?	water (<i>kasmim</i>),
Who is not stained thanks to	Water does not adhere to it.
him?	(answer: the lotus)
(answer: the Buddha)	

Here, the “container” and the “contained” are hidden (Sternbach 1975: 49): the enigma makes use of specific linguistic elements, here the *ekakkharas*, to play alternatively with the different meanings of the term. In this example, *ka* is the key word: it promotes first the elaboration of an interrogative statement, *ka* being the interrogative pronoun “where” (*kasmim*), and then gives the answer to this question since *ka* means also “water”, in the accusative (*kaṃ*) and locative (*kasmim*) cases.

The *Vajirasāratthasaṅgaha* composed by Ratanapañña in Lanna in 1534 CE illustrates another way to use these minimal linguistic units.¹¹ This compendium, dedicated among other things to linguistic matters,

¹⁰ See for instance Gerow 1971: 210–217 and Porcher 1979 for more details on the subject.

¹¹ The critical edition of this text is forthcoming (*Ratanapañña's Vajirasāratthasaṅgaha and Its Ṭīkā*, Bristol: The Pali Text Society.)

devotes four short chapters to different types of enigmas, probably inspired by the Pali *Vidaddhamukhamaṇḍana*. Again, *ekakkharas* participate in the process, for instance in the *antapādotṭara* chapter (“the answer is at the end”) which plays with the spatial position of questions and answers in the stanza, as well as with the different divisions of compound words. Here, the first three verses contain the questions, while the last details the respective answers:

*ko khe dhamme ca kā ko c' abbhantare yāti ko 'uṇṇataṃ,
k' oṇataṃ ko aghantaṃ ko vī dhi mānarahorahā.*

Vss 128

Who moves in the sky? Who (travels) in the Dhamma?
And who (moves) between the clouds? Who (leads) to arrogance?
Who (makes) a bow? Who (leads to suffering)?
Who (puts) an end to suffering?
The bird, wisdom, the moon, pride,
The one who has no arrogance, loneliness, the Arahant.

Three monosyllables are used by the author in his demonstration: *vī* for bird, *dhi* for wisdom, and *mā* for moon.

ko khe ākāse yāti ? – vī sakuno.
kā dhamme yāti ? – dhi pannā.
ko ca abbhantare antarikkhe yāti ? – mā cando.
ko uṇṇataṃ yāti ? – māno.
ko oṇataṃ yāti ? – māna-raho māna-rahito.
ko aghaṃ dukkhaṃ yāti ? – raho sokī.
ko aghantaṃ dukkhass' antaṃ yāti ? – arahā.

Vss-t 128

The *Vajirasāratthasaṅgha* offers another puzzling mechanism designated as *pañhasamottara* (“the answer is in the question”). Ratana-pañña proposes compositions of his own but also borrowed from other works such as the *Saddanīti* which can hardly be suspected of promoting recreational matters, underlining then an essential point: all these riddles were probably not just for the entertainment of mind, this genre having gained a singular and serious status among scholarly circles. For instance:

*uṇhakāle kam icchanti kam icchanti pipāsītā,
paccāmittā kam icchanti kam icchanti du[k]khaṭṭitā.*

Sadd 281,23f.; Vss 133

<i>(Questions)</i>	<i>(Answers)</i>
What (<i>kam</i>) do you want when it's hot?	When it's hot, we want wind (<i>kam</i>). Thirsty people want water (<i>kam</i>).
What (<i>kam</i>) do thirsty people want?	Enemies want the head (<i>kam</i>). People afflicted by suffering desire
What (<i>kam</i>) do enemies want?	happiness (<i>kam</i>).
What (<i>kam</i>) do people who suffer from suffering want?	

Here, the monosyllable *ka* is simultaneously the interrogative pronoun (“what”) and a polysemic word with several meanings that are perfectly attested in the corresponding technical literature: wind, water, head, and happiness.

Monosyllables and their potentialities were well known by learned monks in Northern Thailand during its “golden age” (15th–16th centuries). This is not surprising as Lanna was an active centre of Pali studies where scholar monks showed in their works a deep interest in the rules underlying the structure of language (Schnake 2018: 98–106). A prolific author such as Ñāṇakitti¹² made use of these *ekakkharas* and elucidated the etymology of some notions with their help. The voluminous *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha-vibhāvinī-attha-yojanā*¹³ offers examples, dissecting the meaning and morphology of the terms with the help of various linguistic tools (roots, morphology, etc.). The *Saddanīti* is here called upon several times and is clearly one of the sources of reference, as shown for instance by the gloss of *karuṇā* (“compassion”):

*kam rundhatī ti vā karuṇā yā dhammajāti, kam sukham rundhati iti
tasmā sā dhammajāti, karuṇā dutiyātappuriso. kasaddo sukhattha-
vācako. tena vuttam:*

¹² See von Hinüber 2000: 123–34 for more details concerning this Lanna scholar monk.

¹³ This title is given in *CPD* as *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha-vibhāvinīya Pañcikā nāma Atthayojanā*.

*kāye brahmani vate [sic] ca sirojalasukhesu ca*¹⁴
kasaddo vattati tīsu pumā; tīsu napuṃsako ti.

Sadd 281,15f.

*dukkhaṃ kusati*¹⁵ *ti kaṃ sukhaṃ.*

Abhid-a-mh-y 5, 11-16

“It does not take into account (its own) happiness” such is compassion (*ka-ruṇā*) born in the Dhamma, or else “it ignores (its own) happiness (*kaṃ*)” because it is born from the Dhamma. “Compassion” (*ka-ruṇā*) is a *tappurisa* compound. The word *ka* has the meaning of happiness, because it is said:

The word *ka* is used for body, Brahma,
 Wind, and head, water and happiness;
 Masculine for three, neutral gender for three.

Happiness (*kaṃ*) is “what slices the suffering”.

Surely Ñāṇakitti made use of these polysemic syllables in his other so-called *attha-yojanās*. Only a study of those available would provide confirmation.

As said earlier, the *Vajirasāratthasaṅgaha* and its *ṭīkā* display interest in *ekakkharas* in learned riddles. In addition, this compendium also offers a synthesis of monosyllables modeled on the list provided by the *Saddanīti*. The *Vajirasāratthasaṅgaha-ṭīkā* also glosses these linguistic units, but adds an element concerning the circulation of these lexicons. Indeed, in the section dealing with the word *go*, it is said:

Visuppakāsapakarāṇe pana:
gosaddo saggaraṃsīsu vajirājjunavārīsu,
disānayanacandesu pasumhi vacane bhūvī ti vuttaṃ.
 Vss-ṭ 223–225

It is also said in the work (named) *Visuppakāsa*:
 The word *go* is for heaven, ray, diamond, Ajjuna tree, water,
 Direction, eyes, moon, cattle, speech, earth.

The *Visuppakāsa* is very likely the *Viśvaprakāśa* already mentioned, whose stanza dealing with *go* is close in content to the *Vajira-*

¹⁴ Compare Smith’s ed. of Sadd: *kāye Brahmanī vāte ca sīse jalasukhesu ca*.

¹⁵ Probably derived from Sanskrit *kuṣṇati* “to cut, to fill” as indicated in *A Dictionary of Pāli* (cf. √*kuṣ*²).

sāratthasaṅgaha-ṭīkā.¹⁶ It is still difficult to determine the diffusion of this lexicon in Southeast Asia, and to know whether it had been adapted in Pali, especially since it is absent from any work of reference. However, it seems to have exerted an influence among learned circles from Lanna at this time. Indeed, there is another text that probably made use of this literary source. The *Saddabinduvinicchaya* composed by Dhammakitti Phussadeva a few decades before the Vss (end of the fifteenth century) also illustrates the word *go* in its *nāmakappa* section through a stanza very close in content to that of the *Vajirasāratthasaṅgaha-ṭīkā*, which suggests a common background.¹⁷

The compilation of monosyllables finds a culmination in a work totally dedicated to the topic, the *Ekakkharakosa*. This text also sheds light on these linguistic units and on their allegorical value during the same period.

THE EKAKKHARAKOSA

Composed in 1525 by Saddhammakitti this huge work from Taungu (Burma) requires the support of its commentary, the *Ekakkharakosa-ṭīkā* (same period), in order to be fully apprehended. Unique in the Pali literary landscape, it is a major contribution in the lexicographic field, especially since this work is still living in Burma: this “minor” grammatical text¹⁸ enjoys a certain popularity and is a part of the monastic curriculum. Composed in *anuṭṭhubha* meter, the *Ekakkharakosa* deals with all the letters of the alphabet, each of them liable to be the subject of multiple entries (e. g. *ka, ki, kiṃ, ku*). A total of 136 different monosyllables which define proper nouns, roots, prefixes and particles are listed and explained. Clearly the *Ekakkharakosa* surpasses the *Saddanīti* in this field of knowledge. To measure the significant contribution of

¹⁶ See *Viśvaprakāśa* 4cd-5ab.

*gauḥ svarge vṛṣabhe raśmau vajre candramasi smṛtaḥ
arjune netra-dīg-bāna-bhū-vāg-vāriṣu gaur matā.*

¹⁷ Sadd-v 94,17f.

*gosaddo saggaramsīsu vajirānunevādisu
dassane nayanantesu pasumhi vacane bhuvī ti.*

¹⁸ For a description of these “minor” grammatical texts, see the introductory part of Sadd-v and Ruiz-Falqués 2017: 28–29.

this text to this linguistic discipline, let us take as an example the monosyllable *vi*:

*vi tu dhāt' upasaggesu pakkhipakkhandanesu ca,
saṃsibbane vināsāyaṃ padissati payogato
vividhātisayābhāve bhūsatt' issariy' accaye,
viyoge kalahe pātubhāve bhāse ca kucchane,
durānabhimukhatthesu mohānavatṭhitīsu ca,
padhāne dakkhatākhede sahatthādo ca dissati.*

vi exists to designate a root, a prefix, bird, and springing,
Sewing together, destruction,
Multitude, abundance, absence of, being decorated, supremacy,
fault,
Separation, conflict, appearance, language, and contempt.
And it appears for far, diverted from, ignorance, unstable,
Effort, dexterity, regret, with one's own hands.

Twenty-five different meanings are here referenced, all subjected to analysis in the *Ekakkharakosa-tīkā*:

“vināyako vindo” ti ādīsu pakkhimhi. “vīnaṃ nāyako adhipati (ti) vināyako supaṇṇasaṅkhāto garuḷo. vīnaṃ sakuṇānaṃ indo sāmī” ti vindo garuḷo ti attho.

“vināyako ti vindo” ti etth' eva visaddo pakkhandane hoti. tattha hi “vināti pakkhandatī” ti vi sakuṇo ti attho.

“nibbānan” ti ettha vidhātu saṃsibbane hoti. tattha hi “vin(ā)ti saṃsibbatī” ti vānaṃ. tato “vānato nikkhantan” ti nibbānan ti attho.

Ekakkh-ṭ 512,16–21

It is for *bird* as in “the lord of birds, the king of birds”. “He is the lord (*nāyako*), the ruler of birds (*vīnaṃ*)” such is the lord of birds (*vi-nāyako*), the Garuḷa (otherwise) called the Supaṇṇa. He is the king (*indo*), the ruler of birds (*vīnaṃ*)” such is the king of birds (*v'indo*), the Garuḷa. Such is the meaning.

“Lord of birds (*vināyaka*)” means “king of birds (*vi-inda*)”. Here, the word *vi* is for *jumping*. For here *vi* means “he jumps (*vināti*) (which is equal to) *pakkhandatī*”. The meaning (of *vi*) is bird (*sakuṇo*)

In “Nibbāna” the root *vi* is for *sewing together*. Indeed, “it weaves, entwines” such is the attachment (*vānaṃ*). Therefore Nibbāna is “the eradication of attachment”. Such is the meaning.

Little information is available about this lexicon and its sources, this work having not received much attention from Western scholars.¹⁹ The *Ekakkharakosa* is mentioned in works dealing with Pali literature,²⁰ but did not arouse more curiosity,²¹ and was sometimes described with imprecision.²² The author collected a lot of information from many works he did not quote explicitly (*Saddanīti*, *Abhidhānappadīpikā*, *Kaccāyana*, etc.), the voluminous commentary increasing the number of examples by various borrowings from Pali literature (*Jātaka*, *Viddhamukhamaṇḍana*, *Pādarūpasiddhi*, *Dhammasaṅgaṇī-mūlaṭṭhā*, etc.). Saddhammakitti’s motivations to compose this text came in a troubled political context in Burma, as reported by scholars²³ and as detailed in the following extract from the *Sāsanavaṃsa*:

So the Thera Saddhammakitti wrote the *Ekakkharakosa*. Indeed, in the year 887 of the Kali era (i.e. 1525 CE) the light of the Sāsana disappeared throughout the kingdom of Tambadīpa for fear of the

¹⁹ Exception being made of Paul Grimblot who considered preparing the transliteration of the text and of its commentary (Grimblot 1862: 753).

²⁰ For example, Bode 1909: 45; Law 1933: 634; Norman 1983: 167, etc.

²¹ Rudolf O. Franke said of this text that it was “ohne Bedeutung für die Pali-Kenntnis” (“without importance for our knowledge of Pali”) (Franke 1902: 77, n. 2).

²² In the introduction to his edition Subhūti incorrectly described the *Ekakkharakosa* as “a small vocabulary of words of various meanings ending in certain final letters” (Subhūti 1865: vii), an assertion later repeated by Mabel H. Bode in her edition of the *Sāsanavaṃsa* (Sās 23, n. 3).

²³ Mabel H. Bode stated that “the *Ekakkharakosa* was written to keep alive sacred learning, then in mortal danger from the great destruction of books in the land” (Sās 23,21–24,22); or as K.R. Norman also summed up the situation: “during the difficult period of persecution in the fifteenth century, and in the belief that survival depends on correct understanding of the texts his book was intended to help with the proper understanding of Pali” (Norman 1983: 167).

families called Jaluma (who were of) wrong views.²⁴ Thus, many manuscripts were destroyed by fire. There, observing that he felt anxious and thought, “If the study of the doctrine perishes, then the doctrine by the practice will disappear; when the doctrine by the practice is gone, what will become of the doctrine by the penetration of meaning? (Therefore) he wrote this text.” This is said in the commentary.²⁵

Surely the *Sāsanavaṃsa* refers to the following passage from the *Ekakkharakosa-tīkā*:

At this moment, the master (thought) in this kingdom, the continuity of the Sāsana through the existence of the study (of texts) (*pariyatti*) will be interrupted in a short time. When the continuity of the study has been interrupted, the continuity of the practice (*paṭipatti*) will be interrupted. When the continuity of practice will be interrupted, recluses and householders who failed in (this) practice will have a bad destiny; they will disappear.²⁶

The text describes a well-known process that goes well beyond this local context: the destruction of the Sāsana by the successive disappearance (*antaradhāna*) of teachings/study (*pariyatti*), practice (*paṭipatti*), and the penetration of these teachings (*paṭivedha*) which is not explicitly mentioned here. This process, detailed in Buddhaghosa’s

²⁴ It refers to the Shan ruler Salun, remembered in Burmese history as the conqueror of the Ava Kingdom in about 1523 CE. Salun placed his son Thohanbwa on the throne, reputed for his roughness and brutality against Buddhist monks (see Phayre 1883: 87f. and 93)

²⁵ Sās 76,1–9. *Ekakkharakosam pana Saddhammakittithero akāsi. so hi kaliyuge sattāsī-adhike aṭṭhasate sampatte micchādīṭṭhikānaṃ Jalumasaññītānaṃ kulānaṃ bhayena sakale pi Tambadīparaṭṭhe sāsanobhāso milāyati. bahūni pi pothakāni aggibhayena nassessuṃ. tadā taṃ pavattiṃ passivā sace pariyattidhammo vinasseyya paṭipattidhammo pi nassissati paṭipattidhamme nassante kuto paṭivedhadhammo bhavissatī ti saṃvegaṃ apajjitvā imaṃ ganthaṃ akāsīti taṭṭhikāyaṃ vuttaṃ vuttaṃ.*

²⁶ Ekakkh-ṭ 428,12–16. *tasmīṃ ca kāle ayam ācariyo imasmīṃ raṭṭhe sambhūto pariyattisāsanavaṃso aciraṃ pacchijjeyya. pariyattivaṃse pacchinne paṭipattivaṃso pacchijjeyya, paṭipattivaṃse pacchinne pabbajitā gahaṭṭhā ca paṭipattiyaṃ virajjhivā duggatigāmino yebhuyyena bhaveyyuṃ.*

commentaries, highlights the value of the study (*pariyatti*) to the expense of the two others, an elementary condition to sustain the living of the Sāsana.²⁷ Focus on *pariyatti* aims to counteract, or rather delay from the Buddhist perspective, this destruction of the Buddhist community. The composition of the *Ekakkharakosa* intended to reverse this process, as expressed in its commentary :

Free of the fear aforementioned, sons of good family, modest and devoted, confident, left household life in order to find a way out in the Sāsana. They produced renewed efforts by memorization and learning, etc., of canonical texts, commentaries, etc., and by this work (i.e. the *Ekakkharakosa*) as a support they will have the certain knowledge. In accordance with this, they will have a perfect practice. In these circumstances, the continuity of study and practice will become prosperous and flourishing and will last without interruption for 5,000 years. In this context, the one whose spirit is guided by compassion composed this work thinking “here in the Tamba kingdom, having found pleasure in gift and discipline, in the fulfilment by the study, beings could reach liberation, the divine abodes”.²⁸

Thus, the compilation of what best embodies the value of the syllable, because of its range of meanings, is considered according to this extract as a concentrate of the Buddhist doctrine. Beyond a work of lexical synthesis, the development of this work is then placed in a soteriological perspective. It corroborates the views of Pagan’s grammarians who no longer view the study of language as a way to normalize the Pali language, that is to say the study of its structure and its forms. They offer above all an exhaustive description of the language, and promote a

²⁷ See Sv III 898,18–21 ; Ps IV 115,10–13 ; Vibh-a 431,27–30.

²⁸ Ekakkh-ṭ 428,22–30. (...) *yathāvuttabhayesu vūpasantesu, lajjipesalā saddhā-sampannā kulaputtā sāsane nissaraṇatthāya pabbajitvā imaṃ pakaraṇaṃ nissāya pāḷiy’ aṭṭhakathādīsū savanuggahadhāraṇādivasena punappunaṃ ussāhaṃ katvā yathābhūtaṃ bujjhissanti. tadanusārena ca sammāpaṭipattim paṭipajjissanti. evaṃ sati pariyattipaṭipattivaṃso ca puna pi iddho phīto samvutto hutvā yāva pañcavassasahassapariyantam avicchedaṃ avattissati. evañ ca sati idha tambaraṭṭhe sattā pariyattiparipūraṇesu dāna-silādīsū abhiratā hutvā saggamokkhalābhino bhavēyyun ti karuṇāsañcoditā-mānaso hutvā idaṃ pakaraṇaṃ akāsi.*

method to correctly interpret and transmit the Pali texts in order to sustain and keep the *pariyatti* alive (Ruiz-Falqués 2015: iii).²⁹ The *Saddanīti* which influenced many of these Pali works during these times is in that way unequivocal. It perfectly reflects this vital and conceptual orientation, as expressed in the parable concluding the text:

This has been composed by me (to support) the study, the
 practice, and the penetration (of meaning),
 This is why we have to listen to this:
 “Is the study (*pariyatti*) the basis of the Sāsana of the Master,
 Or is it the practice (*paṭipatti*)?”
 It was said “the study!”
 Indeed, it was said by the Blessed One, the Buddha,
 The kinsman of the sun, (regarding) what makes the Sāsana
 last for 5,000 years:
 “As long as the Suttanta exists, as long as the Vinaya illumi-
 nates,
 They see the sky when the sun rises,
 When the Suttanta is gone and the Vinaya is lost,
 Darkness happens in the world like the sun at bedtime,
 When the Suttanta is protected, practice is preserved,
 The sage is established in practice, he is not deprived of the
 liberation of the attachments.”³⁰

²⁹ Note that this concern for the end of the Sāsana also reached the Sukhothai and Lanna kingdoms during the 14th–16th centuries. For instance, King Lidaya evoked the different steps leading to this fatality in the Nagara Jum inscription dated 1357 CE (Griswold and Prasert 1973, 98–102), and composed the *Traibhūmikathā* (1345 CE) to delay this deadline (Cœdès 1957, 348–51). Lanna scholar monks showed a sharp interest in the structure of language in some works, surely in order to sustain the *pariyatti* (Schnake 2018, 98–105), and the importance of grammar is clearly formulated in the Padaeng Chronicles, in their task to preserve the monastic rules and the symbolic order (Schnake 2018, 93–97).

³⁰ Sadd 926,30–927,27.

*pariyattipaṭipattipaṭivedhānaṃ eva me
 atthāya racitaṃ etaṃ, tasmā sotabbam ev’ idaṃ.
 “pariyatti nu kho mūlaṃ sāsanaṃ mahesino
 udāhu paṭipattī” ti. “pariyattī” ti dīpaye.
 vuttaṃ h’etaṃ Bhagavatā buddhenādiccabandhunā
 pañca vassasahassāni sāsanaṃthitikārinā:*

Beside the linguistic contribution to Pali lexicographical knowledge, the elaboration of the *Ekakkharakosa* can surely be appreciated in this optic: preserving the sacred word of the Buddha from final destruction, and making it last.

CONCLUSION

It is still difficult to have a definitive idea regarding the history of these *ekakkharas*. Although they have had some success in the Sanskrit tradition, their developments have been more uneven in the Pali field. The origin of *ekakkharas* is the correct observation of *ekākṣaras* particularly in the Vedic language, but also in Tantric literature as mystical letters. This observation was expanded and generalized in a creative way to be used as a tool to explain words unclear to traditional commentators, surely drawing on an unidentified common fund. Little used in the early days, these monosyllables infiltrated later disciplines focused on the study of language to serve as a help for composition before being studied in a more objective way.

The range of meanings of these small linguistic units shows the richness of the resources studied by the experts of the language and testifies to the vitality of this discipline by the numerous influences and borrowings of which each lexicon is the object. From knowledge as it stands today, it seems that many textual sources circulated, but their references and methods of access still elude us. In this context, the influence of Sanskrit lexicons cannot be underrated, both in their form and content, but further investigations are needed to identify them with precision. The *Saddanīti* had a pivotal role in the organization of the *ekakkharas* and certainly prevailed as a model in its time, before the massive *Ekakkharakosa* (supplemented by its commentary) became the centrepiece in this field of knowledge. Beside the contribution it makes to lexicographic studies, one should take into account the vital and

*“yāva tiṭṭhanti suttantā vinayo yāva dīpati,
tāva dakkhanti ālokaṃ suriye abbhuṭṭhite yathā,
suttantesu asantesu sammūṭṭhe vinayamhi ca
tamo bhavissati loke suriye atthaṅgate yathā,
suttante rakkhite sante, paṭipatti hoti rakkhitā
paṭipattiyam ṭhito dhīro yogakkhemā na dhamasati”ti.*

social issue at the origin of its composition, namely the conviction that it would help avoiding the end of the Buddha's teachings by perpetuating *pariyatti*.

ABBREVIATIONS

The system of abbreviations follows the *A Critical Pāli Dictionary*.

Other texts are :

Abh-ṭ	<i>Abhidhānappadīpikā-ṭikā</i>
Ekakkh-ṭ	<i>Ekakkharakosa-ṭikā</i>
Vss	<i>Vajirasāratthasaṅgaha</i>
Vss-ṭ	<i>Vajirasāratthasaṅgaha-ṭikā</i>
Sadd-v	<i>Saddabinduvinicchaya</i>
Vid-ṭ	<i>Vidaddhamukhamaṇḍana-ṭikā</i>

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