

# Relevance of Bhartrihari's *Vakyapadiya* in the Digital Age

Pooja Tripathi, Ph.D.  
tripathi.pooja94@gmail.com

[**Note:** A preliminary version of this article was presented as a paper at the International Seminar on Two Decades of the Sadharanikaran Model of Communication, organized by the Department of Languages and Mass Communication, Kathmandu University School of Arts (KUSOA), on 26 May, 2024.]

## Abstract

In the digital age, where media are diverse and constantly evolving, Bhartrihari's ancient text, the *Vakyapadiya*, remains profoundly relevant. This paper highlights how Bhartrihari's insights into language and meaning can be applied to modern digital communication, which often involves emojis, slang, and varying contexts. The study emphasizes the importance of Bhartrihari's concept of Apabhramsa, which helps in interpreting new language by relating it to familiar terms. Additionally, the paper explores how the *Vakyapadiya*'s ideas about words representing both general concepts and specific instances are crucial for understanding the wide range of digital content. Bhartrihari's notion that a single word can have multiple meanings is also examined for its role in accurate digital interpretation. Through this exploration, the research demonstrates how Bhartrihari's principles can offer valuable insights into effective communication and inclusivity in today's interconnected digital world.

**Keywords:** digital era, ekaśabdadarśana, language and meaning, universals and individuals, *Vakyapadiya*

## Introduction

Bhartrihari's *Vakyapadiya* is a significant work in philosophy and linguistics that provides timeless insights into language and communication.<sup>1</sup> Written over a thousand years ago, it addresses the complexities of understanding and cognition, making its wisdom applicable even in today's digital age. This research paper aims to explore how Bhartrihari's ancient ideas about language can be valuable in our modern digital world. It focuses on key concepts such as understanding context, the idea of Apabhramsa (linking words to familiar concepts), and the recognition that words can have multiple meanings, all of which are essential for effective digital communication. To achieve this, the paper employs three main methods: textual analysis to delve deeply into Bhartrihari's concepts, comparative analysis to relate these ideas to contemporary online communication, and case studies that illustrate how these ancient principles can be applied in today's digital tools and content. Ultimately, the paper seeks to demonstrate that the wisdom of the past can guide us through the complexities of current digital interactions. Here, some points from Bhartrihari's *Vakyapadiya* have been presented, demonstrating their relevance in today's context.

### Understanding Linguistic Diversity: Insights from *Vakyapadiya*

अस्वगोण्यादयः शब्दाः साधवो विषयान्तरे निमित्तभेदात् सर्वत्र साधुत्वं च व्यवस्थितम्॥ ॥१४९॥

ते साधुष्वनुमानेन प्रत्ययोत्पत्तिहेतवः। तादात्म्यमुपगम्येव शब्दार्थस्य प्रकाशकाः॥ ॥१५०॥

न शिष्टैरनुगम्यन्ते पर्याया इव साधवः। ते यतः स्मृतिशास्त्रेण तस्मात्साक्षादवाचकाः॥ ॥१५१॥

अम्बाम्बेति यथा बालः शिक्षमाणः प्रभाषते। अव्यक्तं तद्विदां तेन व्यक्ते भवति निश्चयः॥ ॥१५२॥

---

1 The contemporary relevance of *Vakyapadiya* has been further substantiated with the construction and development of the Sadharanikaran Model of Communication (Adhikary, 2009, 2010, 2014). Adhikary has incorporated insights from *Vakyapadiya* in order to explain the process of attaining Moksha-in-life through the process of spiritual communication (Adhikary, 2010).

एवं साधौ प्रयोक्तव्ये योऽपभ्रंशः प्रयुज्यते। तेन साधुव्यवहितः कश्चिदर्थोऽभिधीयते॥ ॥१५३॥  
परम्पर्यादपभ्रंशा विगुणेष्वभिधातृषु। प्रसिद्धिमागता येषु तेषां साधुरवाचकः॥ ॥१५४॥  
दैवी वाग्यतिकीर्णयमशक्तैरभिधातृभिः। अनित्यदर्शिनां त्वस्मिन् वादे बुद्धिविपर्ययः॥ ॥१५५॥  
उभयेषामप्यच्छेदादन्यशब्दविवक्षया। योऽन्यः प्रयुज्यते शब्दो न सोऽर्थस्याभिधायकः॥ ॥१५६॥  
asvagoṇyādayaḥ śabdāḥ sādhave viṣayāntare, nimittabhedāt  
sarvatra sādhutvaṃ ca vyavasthitam. ||149||  
te sādhuṣvanumānena pratyayotpattihetavaḥ,  
tādātmyamupagamyeva śabdārthasya prakāśakāḥ. ||150||  
na śiṣṭairanugamyante paryāyā iva sādhave, te yataḥ smṛtiśāstreṇa  
tasmātsākṣādavācakāḥ. ||151||  
ambāmbeti yathā bālaḥ śikṣamāṇaḥ prabhāṣate, avyaktaṃ tadvidāṃ  
tena vyakte bhavati niścayaḥ. ||152||  
evaṃ sādhuḥ prayoktavye yo'pabhraṃśaḥ prayujyate, tena  
sādhuvyavahataḥ kaścīdartha'bhidhīyate. ||153||  
pāramparyādapabhraṃśā viguṇeṣvabhidhātṛṣu, prasiddhimāgatā  
yeṣu teṣāṃ sādhuravācakaḥ. ||154||  
daivī vāgvyatikīrṇeyamaśaktairabhidhātṛbhiḥ, anityadarśināṃ  
tvasmin vāde buddhiviparyayaḥ. ||155||  
ubhayeṣāmapyavicchedādanyaśabdavivakṣayā, yo'nyaḥ prayujyate  
śabdo na so'rthasyābhidhāyakaḥ. ||156||

These shlokas explore how words convey different meanings depending on their usage, context, and linguistic background. They discuss how the righteousness or unrighteousness of words can vary, with terms like “asva” and “gavi” being perceived as pure in some contexts (e.g., “poor” or “milking vessel”) but impure in others (e.g., “horse” or “cow”). The righteousness of a word is thus context dependent. The shlokas also delve into Apabhramsa, where meanings are inferred through associations with pure words, akin to interpreting gestures in a secret conversation. Despite apparent differences, Apabhramsa retains its meaning through these connections. Furthermore, the shlokas explain why Apabhramsa

words are not directly synonymous with pure words, noting that their organization differs, which means they do not convey meaning in the same way or serve as direct synonyms (Jha, 2002, pp. 545–562).

Bhartrihari suggests that Apabhramsa words, arising from communities without Sanskrit knowledge, convey meaning effectively through established usage. He compares this to the gradual distortion of divine speech, where both pure Sanskrit and distorted forms are equally valid in communication. Despite differences in grammatical purity, both saintly and unsaintly words possess unique powers and significance in conveying meaning.

In today's digital age, written communication is widespread across platforms like emails, messages, and social media posts. Words can carry different meanings based on their context, including the use of emojis and slang like "lit." Therefore, choosing words carefully is essential to avoid misunderstandings online. As people encounter various languages and dialects on the internet, understanding languages like Apabhramsa—known for their reliance on connections between words—can help grasp meanings even with limited proficiency. Recognizing similarities between languages, such as Spanish and English, also aids in understanding messages.

Accurate translation requires acknowledging the distinct treatment of Apabhramsa words compared to pure words, preventing confusion in translation tools. Understanding language acquisition in children and the preservation of native languages is vital. Language apps that focus on dominant languages might hinder the learning of mother tongues, risking the loss of cultural identity. Supporting native languages promotes inclusivity, allowing people to communicate comfortably in their own languages.

As languages, including dialects like Apabhramsa, evolve, it's important to understand these changes for effective communication. Acknowledging linguistic diversity enriches digital communication and contributes to cultural preservation. Integrating

these insights into language processing technologies can enhance translation accuracy and foster inclusivity online.

### **Unravelling the Universal and Individual: Insights from *Vakyapadiya***

सर्वशक्त्यात्मभूतत्वमेकस्यैवेति निर्णयः । भावानामात्मभेदस्य कल्पना स्यादनार्थिका ॥२२॥

तस्माद् द्रव्यादयः सर्वाः शक्तयो भिन्नलक्षणाः । संसृष्टाः पुरुषार्थस्य साधिका न तु केवलाः ॥२३॥

यथैव चोद्देश्यादीनामात्मभूता समग्रता । तथा सम्बन्धिसम्बन्धसंसर्गोऽपि प्रतीयते ॥२४॥

sarvaśaktyātmabhūtātvmekasyaiveti nirṇayaḥ,  
bhāvānāmātmabhedasya kalpanā syādanarthikā. ||22||

tasmād dravyādayaḥ sarvāḥ śaktayo bhinnalakṣaṇāḥ,  
saṁsṛṣṭāḥ puruṣārthasya sādḥikā na tu kevalāḥ. ||23||

yathaiva cendriyādīnāmātmabhūtā samagrataḥ, tathā  
sambandhisambandhasaṁsarge'pi pratīyate. ||24||

Bhartrihari's Advaita view asserts that Brahman, the One, is the foundation of all existence, with all distinctions—such as universals and particulars—being mere manifestations of Brahman's powers. This contrasts with earlier discussions where terms like “ākāśa” (space) denoted universal concepts. Bhartrihari emphasizes that even distinctions in perception, where senses, mind, and object converge, are not separate from Brahman. This perspective upholds monism, asserting the unity of all things without diminishing the singular reality of Brahman, where all perceived divisions are ultimately interconnected within the One (Dissanayake, 1993, pp. 9-15). Bhartrihari explains how the eternal universal aspect influences everything:

न तदुत्पद्यते किञ्चिद्यस्य जातिर्न विद्यते । आत्माभिव्यक्तये जातिः कारणानां प्रयोजिका ॥२५॥

na tadutpadyate kiñcidasya jātirna vidyate, ātmābhivyaktaye  
jātiḥ kāraṇānām prayojikā. ||25||

Nothing comes into existence without its universal aspect already existing within it. The universal aspect initiates the causes necessary for the particular thing to manifest itself (Iyer, 1971, p. 22).

kāraṇeṣu padaṁ kṛtvā nityānityeṣu jātayaḥ,

कारणेषु पदं कृत्वा नित्यानित्येषु जातयः । क्वचित्कार्येष्वभिव्यक्तिमुपयान्ति पुनः पुनः ॥२६॥  
kvacitkāryeṣvabhivyaktimupayānti punaḥ punaḥ. ||26||

Universals, once they are established among both eternal and non-eternal causes, repeatedly appear in various outcomes (Iyer, 1971, p. 22-23).

Bhartrihari explains that universals, akin to general concepts, prompt the creation of specific individuals. Referred to as “prayojikā” or “nimittakarana,” they are intrinsic to an object’s material and manifest when the individual form emerges. Universals are believed to preexist within the material, becoming visible upon the creation of the individual. Thus, they aid in the creation process, remaining eternal as they exist prior to the individual’s appearance.

निर्वर्त्यमानं यत्कर्म जातिस्तत्रापि साधनम् । स्वाश्रयस्याभिनिष्पत्तौ सा क्रियाणां प्रयोजिका ॥२७॥

nirvarttyamānaṁ yatkarma jātistatrāpi sādhanam,  
svāśrayasyābhiṇiṣpattau sā kriyāṇāṁ prayojikā. ||27||

The universal is also responsible for creating newly formed objects. It encourages actions to happen so that the foundation for these objects can be established (Iyer, 1971, p. 23).

In a sentence like “sa Katam Karoti” (he makes a mat), the word “mat” refers to the object of the action, which is making. It functions as an accessory to the act of creating. However, a key question arises: how can something that doesn’t physically exist yet be considered an accessory to the action?

The answer lies in the concept that even though the physical mat isn’t yet present, its essence or universal aspect exists within its causes. This universal aspect is the inherent idea or essence of the mat that drives its production. Before the mat is physically made, this essence, or “sadhana,” serves as the accessory to the action. Once the physical mat is created, it becomes the “effect” or “karya.”

Importantly, the universal and individual aspects of the mat are not entirely separate entities like a cow and a horse. Instead, they are intertwined, representing different facets of the same thing.

The universal aspect is referred to as “prayojikā” or the accessory because it represents the initial idea that motivates the creation of the mat. This concept functions as the spark that initiates the action of making the mat.

विधौ वा प्रतिषेधे वा ब्राह्मणत्वादिसाधनम् । व्यक्त्याश्रिताश्रिता जातेः संख्याजातिर्विशेषिका ॥२८॥

vidhau vā pratiṣedhe vā brāhmaṇatvādisāadhanam,  
vyaktyāśritāśritā jāteḥ saṃkhyājātirviśeṣikā. ||28||

In commands or prohibitions, something general like “brāhmaṇahood” serves as an additional factor. This general aspect is specified by the individual it pertains to (Iyer, 1971, p. 23-24).

In the *Vedas*, actions, commands, or prohibitions often refer to something general, like a universal concept. When these instructions are followed, it’s this general concept that becomes the means or accessory, known as “sadhana.” Additionally, the general concept is further specified by the individual it pertains to, indicated by the suffix expressing the number.

Since the general concept is always associated with the individual, it’s questioned whether the word only expresses the general concept.

यथा जलादिभिर्व्यक्तं मुखमेवाभिधीयते । तथा द्रव्यैरभिव्यक्ता जातिरेवाभिधीयते ॥२९॥

yathā jalādibhirvyaktaṃ mukhamevābhidhīyate, tathā  
dravyairabhivyaktā jātirevābhidhīyate. ||29||

Similar to how a face seen in a reflection on water is still recognized as a face, regardless of its connection to the water, a word represents only the universal concept revealed by individual instances (Dissanayake, 1993, pp. 13-15).

We always encounter the universal concept together with the individual object it represents. However, when we use a word, it typically conveys only the universal aspect through its power of expression (abhidha). For instance, when we say “mukha” (face), we refer to the face itself, not the mirror reflecting it. Similarly, a word conventionally signifies the pure universal idea, not the individual

object embodying it.

In contrast, when we perceive something directly, we perceive both the universal and the individual simultaneously. However, when we use language, we adhere to conventional norms, and words convey meaning based on these conventions.

Bhartrihari now discusses how, if words don't convey individuals through their expressive power, then how can we distinguish between different universals?

यथेन्द्रियगतो भेद इन्द्रियग्रहणादुते । इन्द्रियार्थेष्वदृष्टोऽपि ज्ञानभेदाय कल्पते ॥३०॥

yathendriyagato bheda indriyagrahaṇādṛte,  
indriyārtheṣvadrṣṭo'pi jñānabhedāya kalpate. ||30||

Just as the distinction between different sense organs, even if not directly perceived, still results in the recognition of differences in the knowledge obtained from each sense regarding their respective objects (Dissanayake, 1993, pp. 13-15).

तथात्मरूपग्रहणात् केषाञ्चिद् व्यक्तयो विना । सामान्यज्ञानभेदानामुपयान्ति निमित्तताम् ॥३१॥

tathātmārūpagrahaṇāt keṣāñcid vyaktayo vinā,  
sāmānyajñānabhedānāmupayānti nimittatām. ||31||

Similarly, certain individuals, even if not directly perceived, can still cause variations in the understanding of universals (Dissanayake, 1993, pp. 10-15).

The idea presented here is that although words don't explicitly convey individual objects, those objects still influence our understanding of the universals conveyed by the words. This is similar to how our senses, even though not directly perceived, help us differentiate between different sensory perceptions. Now, there are three views regarding how words convey meaning:

1. Conveying the universal only: This view suggests that words convey only the universal aspect of things. For example, when we use the word “dog,” it conveys the universal concept of a dog, rather than any specific individual dog.
2. Conveying the individual qualified by the universal: This



perspective proposes that words convey the individual object but in association with its universal characteristics. So, when we say “dog,” it conveys not just the concept of a dog in general but also a particular dog, defined by its universal attributes.

3. Conveying the individual: This view argues that words directly convey individual objects without necessarily emphasizing their universal characteristics. So, when we say “dog,” it refers to a specific, identifiable dog without emphasizing the broader concept of dogs in general.

Bhartrihari explores diverse views on language’s role in conveying meaning, underscoring linguistic complexity. He suggests that the distinction between universals and individuals arises from the belief in a singular ultimate reality, implying that worldly diversity stems from varied expressions of this reality.

सत्यासत्यौ तु यौ भागौ प्रतिभावं व्यवस्थितौ । सत्यं यत् तत्र सा जातिरसत्या व्यक्तव्यः स्मृताः ॥३१॥

satyāsatyau tu yau bhāgau pratibhāvaṃ vyavasthitau, satyaṃ yat tatra sā jātirasatyā vyaktavyaḥ smṛtāḥ. ||32||

Within every object, there are components that are considered real and others that are deemed unreal. The real aspect pertains to the universal aspect, while the unreal aspect pertains to the individual aspect (Iyer, 1971, p. 25).

सम्बन्धिभेदात् सतैव भिद्यमाना गवादिषु । जातिरित्युच्यते तस्यां सर्वे शब्दा व्यवस्थिताः ॥३३॥

sambandhibhedāt sattaiva bhidyamānā gavādiṣu, jātiritiucyate tasyāṃ sarve śabdā vyavasthitāḥ. ||33||

Being, when differentiated based on the object it resides in, is termed as the universal. All words originate from this universal aspect of Being (Iyer, 1971, p. 25-26).

These shlokas explore the concept of universals and individuals within objects, rooted in the philosophical idea of monism. Universals, representing enduring essences, and individuals, referring to transient characteristics, are both aspects of Being present in all objects.

In the analogy of gold ornaments like *rucaka*, *svastika*, and *kundala*, the specific shape of each ornament is impermanent, differing from one another. However, the underlying substance of gold remains constant across all these variations. This enduring essence of gold is what qualifies as real or *satya*. However, even this reality is relative when compared to a more pervasive element like fire (*tejas*).

The ultimate reality, Brahman, is omnipresent and manifests in all things as their universals, such as ‘cowness’ in a cow or ‘horseness’ in a horse. These universals represent aspects of the great Being expressed through the characteristics of individual objects.

In essence, all words ultimately denote this supreme reality, and it is through their association with limiting factors that they appear as specific qualities like ‘gotva’ (cow-ness) or ‘aśvatva’ (horse-ness).

In the digital era, recognizing the difference between the universal and the individual helps us navigate and interpret the vast information available online. Let’s break this down with an example: When you search for “Golden Retrievers,” you’re looking for general information about the breed’s characteristics, traits, and history—universal aspects rather than details about a specific dog.

Now, imagine you come across a social media post about someone’s Golden Retriever named Max. Here, you’re encountering the individual aspect—a specific dog with unique qualities and experiences. Understanding this distinction is crucial for effective communication in various digital contexts. For instance:

**Search engines:** When using search engines, we typically seek universal information on broad topics. Recognizing this helps refine our searches for relevant, generalized information.

**Social media:** On platforms like social media, we encounter individual stories and experiences. Understanding these as specific instances within broader concepts allows us to appreciate diverse

content while recognizing underlying patterns.

Online communication: Whether writing emails, messaging, or posting online, being mindful of conveying universal concepts or individual experiences enhances clarity and understanding.

By applying this understanding of the universal and individual in digital contexts, we can engage more effectively with information online, leading to clearer communication and deeper comprehension.

### **Shabda in *Vakyapadiya*: Insights into Creation, Behaviour, and Knowledge**

शब्दस्य परिणामोऽयमित्याम्नायविदो विदुः । छन्दोभ्य एव प्रथममेतद् विश्वं व्यवर्तत ॥१२०॥  
इतिकर्तव्यता लोके सर्वा शब्दव्यपाश्रया । यां पूर्वोहितसंस्कारो बालोऽपि प्रतिपद्यते ॥१२१॥  
आद्यः करणविन्यासः प्राणस्योर्ध्वं समीरणम् । स्थानानामभिघातश्च न विना शब्दभावनाम् ॥१२२॥  
न सोऽस्ति प्रत्ययो लोके यः शब्दानुगमादुते । अनुविद्धमिव ज्ञानं सर्वं शब्देन भासते ॥१२३॥

śabdasya pariṇāmo'yamityāmnāyavidō viduḥ, chandobhya  
eva prathamametad viśvaṁ vyavartata. ||120||  
itikartavyatā loke sarvā śabdavyapāśrayā, yām  
pūrvāhitasamśkāro bālo'pi pratipadyate. ||121||  
ādyah karaṇavinyāsaḥ prāṇasyordhvaṁ samīraṇam,  
sthānānāmabhighātaśca na vinā śabdabhāvanām. ||122||  
na so'sti pratyayo loke yaḥ śabdānugamādrte, anuviddhamiva  
jñānaṁ sarvaṁ śabdena bhāsatē. ||123||

These shlokas delve into the profound impact of words on life, encompassing creation, behavior, language development, and knowledge.

1. Creation through sound (shabda): The Vedas suggest that the universe originated from the divine sound “Shabda,” underscoring the fundamental role of sound in creation and existence.
2. Behavior and understanding: Words shape our behavior and perception. Children learn through verbal interactions, absorbing rituals and duties, indicating that words are powerful tools that influence how we understand and interact

with the world.

3. Language development: Language development in children is influenced by innate knowledge from past experiences. They instinctively learn to articulate words, demonstrating a deep connection to language from previous lives.
4. Connection between words and knowledge: Words are intimately linked with knowledge, shaping our understanding of objects and the world. All forms of knowledge—whether through perception, inference, or instruction—are intertwined with words.

These shlokas emphasize the inseparable bond between words and how we perceive and interact with the world (Varma, 1970, pp. 117-120).

In the digital age, the Vedic idea that the universe was created through sound is highly relevant, especially considering how sound is integral to technology and communication.

1. Sound in digital technology: Digital devices convert sound waves into signals for music, videos, and communication, making sound essential for digital experiences.
2. Digital communication: In emails, texts, and social media, words shape interactions and influence how others perceive and respond to us.
3. SEO and digital marketing: The language used in digital marketing affects consumer behavior, while search engines use words to provide relevant results.
4. Language learning: Children engage with language through technology, and their innate understanding of language influences their learning on digital platforms.
5. Words and knowledge: Much of our knowledge is communicated through words online, highlighting the importance of understanding language to navigate digital information and express ideas effectively.

## **Exploring the Principle of “Ekaśabdadarśana” in *Vakyapadiya***

यथा सास्नादिमान् पिण्डो गोशब्देनाभिधीयते । तथा स एव गोशब्दो वाहीकेऽपि व्यवस्थितः ॥२५२॥

yathā sāsnādimān piṇḍo gośabdenābhidhīyate, tathā sa eva gośabdo vāhīke’pi vyavasthitaḥ. ||252||

Just like how the word ‘cow’ refers to an animal with certain physical features like a dewlap, it also refers to a vāhika (vehicle) similarly (Pillai, 1971, p. 95).

सर्वशक्तेस्तु तस्यैव शब्दस्यानेकधर्मणः । प्रसिद्धिभेदाद् गौणत्वं मुख्यत्वं चोपवर्ण्यते ॥२५३॥

sarvaśaktestu tasyaiva śabdasyānekadharmanah, prasiddhibhedād gaṇatvaṁ mukhyatvaṁ copavarṇyate. ||253||

The importance of a word, whether it’s considered primary or secondary due to its ability to represent multiple meanings, is determined by how often it’s used. In simpler terms, the more frequently a word is used to refer to different things, the more significant it becomes in conveying those meanings (Pillai, 1971, p. 95).

The concept being discussed here is called “ekaśabdadarśana,” which means the view that when a single word refers to different things, it remains the same word. Let’s break down this explanation further.

When we use a word like “cow,” it generally refers to a specific animal with certain physical traits, such as having a dewlap. This is the words “abhidha” power, meaning its ability to convey a direct and specific meaning. However, according to ekaśabdadarśana, the word “cow” maintains its identity even when used in a different context, such as metaphorically referring to a vehicle (vahika). Though the word now refers to a different object, it still carries its inherent meaning and identity. The continuity and consistency of the word remain intact, showcasing the adaptability of language and the ability of words to convey meaning beyond their literal interpretations.

The principle of ekaśabdadarśana suggests that a single word can denote multiple meanings based on context. For instance,

the word “gauḥ” (cow) primarily refers to the animal we commonly recognize—a cow with four legs, a tail, and horns. This primary meaning is ingrained through frequent use and cultural understanding. Yet, the same word can also carry secondary meanings. For example, “gauḥ” might be used to refer to a vehicle (vahika) in a metaphorical sense, or to describe specific individual cows in a herd.

Ekasabdadarśana also explores how “gauḥ” can denote different meanings depending on the context. It can represent the universal concept of a cow, an individual cow within a herd, or even metaphorically describe something like a vehicle if it shares certain attributes with a cow, such as endurance or appetite.

The key idea is that the word retains its identity across these various uses. Whether it’s conveying a primary or secondary meaning, the word adapts to its context while still maintaining its essential nature. This flexibility highlights the richness of language, where a single word can carry multiple interpretations based on usage and context, reflecting both its literal and metaphorical capacities.

In the digital era, the concept of “ekasabdadarśana,” which means that a single word can have multiple meanings depending on its usage, is highly relevant. Let me explain this with an example. Think about how we use words like “cloud” or “mouse” in the digital world. Normally, “cloud” refers to a collection of water vapor in the sky, and “mouse” refers to a small rodent. However, in the digital context, “cloud” can also refer to online storage services, and “mouse” can refer to a computer accessory.

Despite these different meanings, the words “cloud” and “mouse” retain their identity and integrity. When we talk about saving files to the cloud or clicking with a mouse, we’re still using the same words, even though they now refer to different things.

This shows the versatility of language in the digital age. Words can adapt and take on new meanings to fit the context in

which they're used. Just like "cow" can refer to both an animal and a vehicle, words in the digital world can have multiple interpretations depending on how they're used.

Understanding this concept is important for effective communication and comprehension in the digital era. It helps us navigate the complexities of language in online interactions, whether it's reading articles, sending emails, or using social media.

So, in the digital age, the principle of "ekaśabdadarśana" reminds us of the flexibility of language and how words can evolve to convey new meanings in different contexts, enhancing our ability to communicate and understand in the digital world:

संसर्गो विप्रयोगश्च साहचर्यं विरोधिता । अर्थः प्रकरणं लिङ्गं शब्दस्यान्यस्य सन्निधिः ॥३१५॥  
सामर्थ्यमौचिति देशः कालो व्यक्तिः स्वरादयः । शब्दार्थस्यानवच्छेदे विशेषस्मृतिहेतवः ॥३१६॥  
saṁsargo viprayogaśca sāhacaryaṁ virodhitā, arthaḥ  
prakaraṇaṁ liṅgaṁ śabdasyānyasya sannidhiḥ. ||315||  
sāmarthyamaucitī deśaḥ kālo vyaktiḥ svarādayaḥ,  
śabdārthasyānavacchede viśeṣasmṛtihetavaḥ. ||316||

### **Analyzing Word Meaning and Relevance across Eras**

The Vrtti and Punyaraja explain that the ability or capacity of a word helps us understand its meaning when it's not clear. They say that the factors listed earlier only reveal this capacity. Some believe that it's the ability alone that determines the meaning, as different interpretations depend on this ability (Sarmā, 1980, pp. 382-383). They provide examples to illustrate this:

1. Connection (Samsarga): When we say "sakiśora dhenur aniyatām," the connection between "dhenuḥ" and "kiśora" suggests that a mare (female horse) is meant, not a cow
2. Separation (Viprayoga): In "akisora dhenur aniyatām," "dhenu" without "kisora" implies a mare because only a mare can be without a foal
3. Association (Sahacarya): "Ramalakṣmaṇau" means Rama associated with Lakshmana, indicating Rama as the son of

Dasaratha.

4. Opposition (Virodha): “Rāmārjunau” suggests Parasurama due to his well-known opposition to Arjuna
5. Meaning (Artha) and Context (Prakarana): Illustrated in the previous verse
6. Indication (Linga): In “akṭaḥ sarkarāḥ,” indications elsewhere suggest that butter is used for mixing
7. Presence of another word: “Rāmārjunau” indicates meaning through the presence of another word.
8. Suitability (Samarthya): “Abhir upaya kanya deya” suggests giving the girl in marriage to a suitable, good-looking person
9. Propriety (Auciti), Place (Desa), Time (Kāla): Explained earlier.
10. Accent (Suara): In the Vedas, the meaning of a word is often determined by its accent.

These factors help clarify a word’s meaning by examining its connections to other words, context, relationships, contrasts, significance, appropriateness, placement, timeframe, gender, and pronunciation. Each aspect contributes to a deeper understanding of the word’s meaning and usage in various contexts.

In the digital era, understanding the capacity of words to convey meaning is crucial, just like it was in ancient times. Let’s break down how these factors are relevant today:

1. Connection (Samsarga): When we’re searching online for “fast cars,” the word “fast” connects with “cars” to suggest vehicles that are speedy, not necessarily vehicles moving quickly on their own.
2. Separation (Viprayoga): If we’re looking for “phones without cameras,” the absence of “cameras” indicates that we want phones lacking this feature, which is only possible with certain types of phones.
3. Association (Sahacarya): When we search for “Apple



iPhones,” the association with “Apple” directs us to iPhones made by the company Apple Inc., not iPhones from other manufacturers.

4. Opposition (Virodha): If we search for “Mac vs PC,” the opposition between “Mac” and “PC” directs us to articles or comparisons about the differences between Mac computers and PCs running Windows.
5. Meaning (Artha) and Context (Prakarana): Understanding the context of a word’s usage, like in product descriptions or reviews, helps us grasp its intended meaning in a specific situation.
6. Indication (Linga): For instance, if we search for “best laptops for gaming,” indications in reviews or specifications guide us to laptops with powerful graphics cards and processors suited for gaming.
7. Presence of another word: If we search for “Tesla Model S vs Model 3,” the presence of “vs” indicates that we’re comparing the two models, not looking for information about each model separately.
8. Suitability (Samarthya): When we search for “best smartphones for photography,” the suitability of certain smartphones for photography becomes evident based on their camera specifications and features.
9. Propriety (Auciti), Place (Desa), Time (Kāla): Adapting to the appropriate language, location-specific terms, and timing of searches ensures relevant results tailored to our needs
10. Accent (Suara): While less relevant in digital text, nuances in language, such as tone or emphasis in reviews or articles, can still influence our understanding of a product or topic.

Understanding how these factors shape the meaning of words helps us navigate the vast amount of information available online and find what we’re looking for more efficiently.

## Conclusion

In a world where digital interactions dominate, Bhartrihari's *Vakyapadiya* offers a beacon of linguistic understanding and harmony. The text reveals the profound influence of words on creation, behavior, language development, and knowledge acquisition. As we navigate the digital landscape, *Vakyapadiya*'s principles help us decipher language's complexities, fostering inclusivity and understanding. By embracing linguistic diversity and the universality of words, we can bridge digital divides, creating connections across cyberspace. Honoring the wisdom of *Vakyapadiya* paves the way for a more enlightened and interconnected digital age.

[Dr. Pooja Tripathi is an Independent Researcher.]

## References

- Abhyankar, V. K., & Limaye, V. P. (Eds.). (1965). *Vākyapadīya of Bhartrhari* (Vol. 2). University of Poona.
- Adhikary, N. M. (2009). An introduction to sadharanikaran model of communication. *Bodhi: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 3(1), 69–91.
- Adhikary, N. M. (2010). Sancharyoga: Approaching communication as a vidya in Hindu orthodoxy. *China Media Research*, 6(3), 76-84.
- Adhikary, N. M. (2014). *Theory and practice of communication - Bharata Muni*. Makhanlal Chaturvedi National University of Journalism and Communication.
- Avasthi, S. S. (Ed.). (2013). *Vākyapadīya of Śrī Bhartrhari along with his own vṛtti (First: Brahmakanda)*. Chowkhamba Vidyabhawan.
- Dissanayake, W. (1993). *Communication theory: The Asian perspective*. AMIC (The Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre).
- Dwivedi, K. (2002). *Arthvigyan aur vyakarandarshan*. Hindustani

- Iyer, K. A. S. (1977). *The Vākyapadīya of Bhartrhari Kāṇḍa II: English translation with exegetical notes*. Motilal Banarsidass.
- Jha, P. V. (2002). *Vākyapadīya Brahmakāṇḍa of Bhartrhari*. Mandakini Sanskrit Vidvat Parishad.
- Pillai, K. R. (1971). *The Vākyapadīya: Critical text of cantos I and II* [with English translation, summary of ideas, and notes]. Sundarlal Jain, for Motilal Banarsidass.
- Sarmā, P. R. (1980). *Sarasvatībhavana-granthamālā* [Vol. 91], *Vākyapadīyam* [Part II] (Vākyakāṇḍam) by Bhartrhari with the commentary of Punyarāja & Ambākartri. Director, Research Institute, Sampurnanand Sanskrit Vishvavidyalaya.
- Varma, D. S. (1970, July). *Vākyapadīyam (Brahmakāṇḍa) of Śrī Bhartrhari: The great linguist & grammarian with trilingual commentary*. Munshiram Manoharlal Oriental Publishers.
- Vākyapadīya Brahmakāṇḍa of Bhartrhari Pratyekārthprakāśika* commentary by MM Dravyeśa Jha Ananda in Sanskrit & Surya Maya in Hindi commentaries by Pt. Vedanand Jha. (2002). Mandakini Sanskrit Vidvat Parishad.