

Translations by Lesson

There are a number of ways to translate the readings in each lesson. Each reading below is followed by (1) a literal translation by the author, roughly following the Sanskrit word order (unless changes are necessary for English) and employing the vocabulary found in the text, then (2) a published translation that illustrates other possible choices, (3) comments about the translations.

Cover

ज्ञानाग्निः सर्वकर्माणि भस्मसात् कुरुते ।

jñānagniḥ sarvakarmāṇi bhasmasāt kurute. *Bhagavadgītā* 4.37

1. The fire that is knowledge makes all actions into ashes.
2. The fire of knowledge turns all actions into ashes (Maitra 2018, 64).

Comments: The text on the book's cover is from the *Bhagavadgītā* 4.37, which reads, in its entirety, "Arjuna, just as fire makes wood into ashes, likewise, the fire that is knowledge makes all actions in to ashes," *yathaidhāmsi samiddho 'gnir bhasmasāt kurute 'rjuna, jñānāgniḥ sarvakarmāṇi bhasmasāt kurute tathā*. The excerpted portion omits the "just as...likewise" (*yathā...tathā*). When translating compounds, the preposition "of" can be used to render determinative compounds, like "glass of milk" or "king of England," but also descriptive compounds, like "statue of clay." Here, since it seems fire is being identified with knowledge (the commentator Śāṅkara makes this explicit in his remarks), one could make that relationship explicit with "that is." Maitra renders the verb \sqrt{kr} with the English "turns...into," since that is the kind of "making" or "doing" that is occurring.

Lesson 2

योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः ।

yogaś cittavṛttinirodhaḥ. *Yogasūtra* 1.2

1. Yoga is the cessation of mental activity.
2. Yoga is the stilling of the changing states of the mind (Bryant 2015, 10).

Comments: Notice that Bryant has chosen to unpack the technical term *vṛtti* into a phrase: "changing states." Elsewhere in his translation, he also uses "thought" for *citta*, especially when he's distinguishing the different psychological functions this term includes, one of which is *manas*, and is commonly translated as "mind." Also, note that while "mental activity" as activity that belongs to what is mental, by translating using the preposition "of," Bryant shows that the compound is a dependent determinative compound, not a descriptive compound (activity that *is* mental). He also makes explicit that the activity or states (*vṛtti-*) is plural, which commentators also make clear, as we see in Lesson 12.

Lesson 3

धूमप्रत्यक्षदर्शनात् अग्नौ अनुमानं भवति ।

dhūmapratyakṣadarśanāt agnāv anumānaṃ bhavati. *Nyāyabhāṣya* 2.1.32

1. From the experience of perceiving smoke, an inference about fire occurs.
2. [Only one who previously apprehended fire and smoke as related to each other] can infer fire from the perception of smoke (Gangopadhyaya 1982, 96–6).

Comments: This is an excerpt of a longer sentence in Vātsyāyana’s commentary on the *Nyāyasūtra*, which explains why perception and inference are different ways of knowing: *sambaddhāv agnidhūmau pratyakṣato dr̥ṣṭavato dhūmapratyakṣadarśanāt agnāv anumānaṃ bhavati*. Strictly speaking, the sentence says, “there is inference (*anumānaṃ bhavati*) belonging to the one who has perceived (*dr̥ṣṭavataḥ*)...” but Gangopadhyaya transforms this into an active form, “one who previously apprehended...can infer,” even though the verb usually translated as “infer,” (*anu + √mā*), doesn’t occur in this passage. This is a more natural English formulation. The point of the entire sentence is that perception comes first, and it is because of this perception that inference is possible: the ablative expresses this causal relationship.

Lesson 4

अहं ब्रह्मास्मि ।

ahaṃ brahmāsmi. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.10

1. I am Brahman.
2. I am the *brahman* (Olivelle 2008, 20).

Comments: While Olivelle translates this short sentence as “I am *brahman*” in his translation of 1.4.10, in a later passage of this Upaniṣad, where the same Sanskrit phrase occurs, Olivelle translates it with the definite article, “the.” Because Sanskrit does not have definite or indefinite articles, choosing one or the other depends on context. The first translation treats *brahman* as a proper name, which doesn’t usually take an article. The second translation underscores the unique, singular nature of *brahman* and perhaps its impersonal nature, as the ground of being, by leaving it lowercase and in italics.

Lesson 5

न निष्कर्मणो भद्रम् अस्तीति वात्स्यायनः ।

na niṣkarmaṇo bhadram astīti vātsyāyanaḥ. *Kāmasūtra* 1.2.30

1. Good fortune does not come to one who is inactive, says Vātsyāyana.
2. Vatsyāyana says...Nothing good happens to a man who does nothing. (Doniger and Kakar 2002)

Comments: Doniger and Kakar have translated this sentence into a more modern, colloquial English sentence by translating *niṣkarmaṇaḥ*, “one who is inactive” as “a man who does nothing.” This retains the idea of not engaging in effortful action even if this is not the literal meaning (the person probably does *some* things!)—we speak hyperbolically this way all the time. The word *bhadra* is sometimes also rendered “auspicious” and is often found in Sanskrit names. Finally, notice that Doniger and Kakar put the attribution to Vātsyāyana at the beginning, even though it comes at the end in Sanskrit. There are several sentences before this one (omitted with ellipses) that are part of the *iti*-clause. There is no equivalent of an opening quotation mark

in Sanskrit, but in English we're used to the beginning and end of quoted material being marked.

Lesson 6

तत्त्वमसि श्वेतकेतो ।

tat tvam asi śvetaketu. *Chāndogyopaniṣad* 6.8.7

1. You are that, Śvetaketu.
2. That *you* are, Śvetaketu! (Goodall 1996, 137)
3. That's how you are, Śvetaketu. (Olivelle 2008, 153)

Comments: Goodall translates this sentence in a different word order than the other two translations, using italics and an exclamation mark to underscore the text's meaning. The passage is tricky. "That" refers to Brahman in context. But there is the question about predication: does it matter whether the speaker is saying *about Brahman* that it is Śvetaketu, or saying *about Śvetaketu* that he is Brahman? Also, by italicizing "you" and adding an exclamation mark, Goodall emphasizes the surprising and important nature of this statement. As written in manuscripts, Sanskrit doesn't have such conventions, but translators can use them to help convey meaning.

For this sentence, there is a third, different translation available. The Upaniṣads are *Vedic Sanskrit*, which predates Classical Sanskrit and differs from it in some important ways. The translation of this particular sentence is the subject of scholarly controversy that the book sidesteps for simplicity. Without taking a stand on the controversy, it's useful to know about, since it helps us see different approaches to ancient texts with complex textual backgrounds and challenging interpretations. Olivelle's translation follows the view of a Sanskritist named Joel Brereton who argues that translations of "You are that" are incorrect. This is because *tat* is neuter and in apposition with the masculine *tvam*. To mean "you are that," the sentence should read *sa tvam asi* or "You (masculine) are that (masculine)" (Brereton 1986). But that's not what it says. Brereton's view is that *tat* is used as an adverb, referring to the way something is. As Olivelle explains, the sentence "shows that Śvetaketu lives in the same manner as other creatures, that is, by means of an invisible and subtle essence" (561). In other words, Śvetaketu is not being identified with Brahman directly, but is being described as *like* Brahman.

Stephen Phillips has argued against this view because the philosophical content of CU 6.8.1 is about identification with existence (*sat*) that is *brahman*, and so he argues there is a grammatical justification for the pronoun to reach all the way back to this term. He also adds that no classical Sanskrit commentator interpreted the text as Brereton and Olivelle do, and sometimes we should prefer an ungrammatical but intelligible meaning to following grammatical rules precisely (Phillips 2007, 171–73). He translates the sentence as "Thou art That (the Self, the Brahman, the Absolute)," using now-archaic language ("Thou") that has become standard for this sentence, underscoring the equation's transcendent nature. While Vedic Sanskrit and this controversy goes well beyond the "for beginners" purview of this book, just this small sentence points at the complexities in reading, understanding, and translating the Sanskrit language.

Lesson 7

यावदुपकरोति तावन्मित्रं भवति । उपकारलक्षणं मित्रम् ।

yāvad upakaroti tāvanmitraṃ bhavati. upakāralakṣaṇaṃ mitram. *Arthaśāstra* 7.9.12

1. Insofar as one helps, to that degree one is a friend. A friend has the characteristic of helping.
2. Someone is an ally only to the extent that he provides assistance, given that providing assistance is the defining characteristic of an ally (Olivelle 2016, 302).

Comments: Notice that Olivelle reverses the order in Sanskrit of the *yāvat-tāvat* construction to render it more naturally in English. He also makes explicit the implicit connection between the first and second sentence (“given that”) and that the characteristic is not merely one among many, but a defining one. It is not always possible or desirable to translate a single Sanskrit word with a single English word. He also uses the term “ally” rather than “friend,” which suits the political context of the *Arthaśāstra*. The word *mitra* can be used for politically expedient relationships of alliance as well as to describe bosom buddies.

Lesson 8

यस्य मित्रेण सम्भाषो यस्य मित्रेण संस्थितिः ।

यस्य मित्रेण संलापस्ततो नास्तीह पुण्यवान् ॥

yasya mitreṇa sambhāṣo yasya mitreṇa saṁsthitih |

yasya mitreṇa saṁlāpastato nāstīha puṇyavān || *Hitopadeśa* 1.39

1. Of the one who has close conversation with a friend, of the one who has close contact with a friend, of the one who has close discussion with a friend, compared to this one, there is no one more auspicious in this world.
2. There is not in life a man more happy than he, who hath a friend to converse with, a friend to live with, and a friend to embrace (Nyalankar 1830, 43).

Comments: Nyalankar renders *iha* as “in life” and reverses the order of the Sanskrit to a more natural English order, which puts the subject at the beginning of the sentence. This makes the meaning easily intelligible, although one can make an argument for keeping the somewhat suspenseful structure of the focal point at the end of the string of relative pronouns. He also uses masculine terms to match the grammatical gender in the verse (“a man” and “he”), which coheres with the original context, lessons for princes. A neutral gendered reading (“one”) may be preferable for modern readers, but can sometimes lose the original sense—these choices vary among texts, translators, and target audiences.

Lesson 9

न राज्यं प्राप्तम् इत्येव वर्तितव्यम् असांप्रतम् ।

श्रियं ह्यविनयो हन्ति जरा रूपम् इवोत्तमम् ॥

na rājyaṁ prāptam ity eva vartitavyam asāṁprātam

śriyaṁ hy avinayo hanti jarā rūpam ivottamam. *Mahābhārata* 5, 33-41

1. Even with the thought, “The kingdom has been acquired,” impropriety should not be engaged in, for intemperance destroys fortune like old age destroys beauty.
2. One should never take inappropriate action, thinking, “Mine is the kingdom,” for lack of discipline kills a king’s fortune as surely as old age kills physical beauty (van Buitenen

1978, 262).

Comments: The verse lacks any verb like “thinking,” or “saying,” to construe with the quotative *iti*, so both translations insert an English phrase to make clear that *rājyaṃ prāptam* is something being thought by the person who might engage in inappropriate activity. In his translation, van Buitenen translates the past passive participle, *prāptam*, which literally means “what has been acquired” as “mine,” since the idea here is that it is the king thinking that he has acquired a kingdom, and is therefore licensed to act as he likes, regardless of what is right. Sometimes there are ways to translate the privative *a-* prefix into an English counterpart, like “*in*-appropriate,” or “*in*-temperate,” but other times a phrase is better than a single word, such as “lack of discipline.” Finally, while the words “king’s” and “physical” aren’t present in the Sanskrit as individual words, van Buitenen is making the point of the verse clear for the reader.

Lesson 10

कथं पुनरिदं गम्यते स्कन्धसन्तान एवेवमात्माभिधानं वर्तते नान्यस्मिन्नभिधेये इति । प्रत्यक्षानुमानाभावात् । ... यदि चात्मा भवेत्तथागता एव सुव्यक्तं पश्येयुः ।

kathaṃ punar idaṃ gamyate skandhasantāna evevam ātmābhidhānaṃ vartate nānyasminn abhidheye iti. pratyakṣānumānābhāvāt...yadi cātmā bhavet tathāgatā eva suvyaktaṃ paśyeyuḥ. *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 9.

1. How, then, is this understood: “The designation ‘self’ applies only to a series of aggregates, and it is not used for any other referent”? Because there is no perception or inference... And if there were a self, the Tathāgatas alone would clearly see it.
2. How do we know that the word “soul” is only a designation for a series of skandhas, and that no soul exists in and of itself? We know this because no proof establishes the existence of a soul apart from the skandas, no proof by direct perception, nor any proof from inference... We hold that only the Buddhas, Tathāgatas would see it (because it is subtle) (Poussin and Pruden 1991, 4:1313, 1338).

Comments: Vasubandhu’s text is often extremely terse, and he often uses discourse markers (words like *iti*) to identify changes of voice between his own Buddhist view and the view of opponents. In the opening to Chapter 9 of this text, he presents his position. The first translation put his view in quotation marks to set it aside. But Pruden opts to present the view using indirect discourse (“know that”). The choice is stylistic. He has also chosen to use “soul” instead of “self.” This choice may result in different connotations for readers (souls typically being immaterial substances). Pruden’s translation is also more expansive, adding phrases like “exists in and of itself” and material that is implied but not stated in Sanskrit, “We know this because no proof establishes the existence of a soul...” The phrase *pratyakṣānumānābhāvāt* does not explicitly include a term for “proof” like *pramāna*, but this is certainly the meaning: there is no perceptual or inferential evidence.

Lesson 11

को योग इत्यत आह

योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः ॥ १।२ ॥

चित्तस्यान्तःकरणस्य वक्ष्यमाणा या वृत्तयस्तासां निरोधा निर्वर्तनं योग इत्यर्थः।

ko yoga ity ata āha

yogaś cittavṛttinirodhaḥ (1.2)

cittasyāntaḥkaraṇasya vakṣyamāṇā yā vṛttayas tāsāṃ nirodho nirvarttanam yoga ity arthaḥ.
Rājamartanda on Yogasūtra 2.

1. “What is yoga?” therefore, he says:

Yoga is the cessation of the mind’s activity. (Yogasūtra 1.2)

Yoga is the “cessation,” that is, the activity-ending, of what will be discussed next, these “activities” of the “mind,” which is the internal faculty. This is the meaning.

2. But what is Concentration (*yoga*)? To this he replies:

Concentration is the hindering of the modifications of the thinking principle. (*Yogasūtra* 1.2)

That is to say, Concentration is the hindering, or preventing, of the modifications—to be described hereafter—of the Mind or internal organ (Ballantyne 1852, 2–3).

Comments: Ballantyne chooses to translate *yoga*, which most modern translators do not. He also capitalizes important nouns, which was common in nineteenth-century English. The commentary makes explicit the analysis of the compound *citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ* as a dependent determinative compound: “the cessation *of* the activities (*vṛttayah*) *of* the mind (*citasya*).” Readers might wonder what kind of ending, cessation, etc. is being described. The translation of *vṛtti* as “modifications” is very common and gets at the metaphysics underlying Yoga and its various interpretations throughout history. The choice as to whether to put the glossed words in quotation marks, to bold them, or just leave them in coordinating phrases set apart by commas varies among translators.

Lesson 12

वागर्थाविव संपृक्तौ वागर्थप्रतिपत्तये ।

जगतः पितरौ वन्दे पार्वतीपरमेश्वर ॥

vāgarthāviva saṃpṛktau vāgarthapratipattaye |

jagataḥ pitarau vande pārvatīparameśvarau || *Raghuvamśa* 1.1

वागर्थाविव शब्दार्थाविव संपृक्तौ नित्यसंबद्धावित्यर्थः । जगतो लोकस्य पितरौ । माता च पिता च पितरौ । पार्वती च परमेश्वरश्च पार्वतीपरमेश्वरौ ।

vāgarthāv iva śabdārthāv iva saṃpṛktau nityasambaddhāv ityarthāḥ. jagato lokasya pitarau. mātā ca pitā ca pitarau. pārvatī ca parameśvaraśā ca pārvatīparameśvarau.

1. To those who, like speech and meaning are interconnected,

for my goal of understanding speech and meaning,

I give praise: to the universe’s two parents, Pārvatī and Parameśvara.

“Like speech and meaning” is like words and meaning, “interconnected” means

“permanently related”—this is the meaning. “The two parents” are *of* the world, “the universe.” And “the two parents” are mother and father. And “Parvati-Parameśvara” is Pārvatī and Parameśvara.

2. For the right comprehension of words and their senses, I salute Pārvatī (the mountain’s daughter) and Parameśvara (the supreme lord), the parents of the universe, who are (perpetually) united like words and their meanings. (Kale 1957, 1)

Comments: Kālidāsa’s famous verse invokes Pārvatī and Parameśvara at the opening of the poem. His comparison of the pair with speech (*vāc*) and meaning (*artha*) suggests that they are tightly interconnected: permanently, according to Mallinātha’s commentary. In Kale’s translation, he reorders the verse in favor of English sentence order, putting the main verb in the first half (second quarter). My rather literal translation keeps the order to preserve some sense of expectation which would be found in the original, but using “to” as a way to help readers (like the case endings in Sanskrit). Kale takes Mallinātha’s idea of permanence to be important enough to put in parentheses. Since many translators are working with commentaries, it’s useful to know about them. Often they influence the translation.

As for the commentary, much of it would not make sense in English without the Sanskrit, but we can see how Mallinātha is analyzing compounds and giving word meanings. (Kale does not translate Mallinātha’s commentary, though he includes the complete Sanskrit text of the commentary.)

Lesson 13

अन्नाद्भवन्ति भूतानि पर्जन्यादन्नसंभवः ।

यज्ञाद्भवति पर्जन्यो यज्ञः कर्मसमुद्भवः ॥३॥१४॥

कर्म ब्रह्मोद्भवं विद्धि ब्रह्माक्षरसमुद्भवम् ।

तस्मात्सर्वगतं ब्रह्म नित्यं यज्ञे प्रतिष्ठितम् ॥३॥१५॥

annād bhavanti bhūtāni parjanyaḍ annasaḃbhavaḥ |

yajñāḍ bhavati parjanyaḍ yajñāḥ karmasaḃudbhavaḥ ||14

karma brahḃodbhavaḃ vidḃhi brahḃākṣarasasaḃudbhavaḃ |

tasaḃāt sarvagaḃaḃ brahḃa nityaḃ yajñe praḃiṣṭhitaḃ ||15

Bhagavadgītā 3.14–15

1. From food, beings come to be. From rain, food has its origin.
From sacrifice, rain comes to be. Sacrifice has its origin in action. (14)
Know that action has Brahman as its origin; Brahman has the imperishable as its origin.
Therefore, the everywhere present Brahman is permanently grounded in sacrifice. (15)
2. From food creatures come into being; from rain food is produced, from sacrifice comes rain, and sacrifice is born of action. (14)
Know that (ritual) action arises from Brahman (the Veda), and that Brahman arises from the Imperishable. Therefore, Brahman, the all pervading, is ever established in sacrifice. (15)
(Deutsch 1968, 49)
3. Creatures depend on food,
food comes from rain,
rain depends on sacrifice,
and sacrifice comes from action. (14)
Action comes from the spirit of prayer,
whose source is OM, sound of the imperishable;
so the pervading infinite spirit
is ever present in rites of sacrifice. (15)
(Stoler-Miller 1986, 45)

Comments: This is a deceptively difficult set of verses, not because the grammar is hard, but because the Sanskrit words have wide semantic range: they can mean a lot of things. There is a repeated verb, √bhū and its nominal forms *bhava*, with different prefixes like *sam-*, *ud-*. Should these all be translated to capture some etymological commonality? How important are the prefixes? Are they there for metric purposes or do they communicate important meanings?

In verse 14, Deutsch’s translation (2), in contrast to Stoler-Miller’s (3), preserves the parallel structure of the three ablatives in verse 14 with his repeated use of “from” (*annād*, *parjanyaḍ*, *yajñād*). However, Stoler-Miller’s alternation of “depend on” and “comes from” preserves the parallel between the forms of √bhū, the present indicative third person singular verb form, “there is” (*bhavati*) and the nominal “being” (*bhavaḥ*, *samudbhavaḥ*). Both use “creatures” for *bhūtāni*, although this word has the same root as “come into being,” *bhū*, so “beings” would work, too (which I chose in my translation). In verse 15, Stoler-Miller omits the imperative “know” (*viddhi*) addressed to Arjuna, while Deutsch includes it. The phrase “spirit of prayer” for Stoler-Miller is translating *brahmodbhāvam*, which she renders this way because of the reference to the “Brahmā syllable” (*brahmākṣara*). The word *akṣara* can mean “syllable,” like OM (ॐ), but that is an extended sense, as the term literally means im- (*a-*) perishable (*-kṣara*). This is yet another place where commentators differ: Śāṅkara and Rāmānuja are two important commentators who interpret these verses very differently, for example.

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