

Contextualism in the Study of Indian Intellectual Cultures

Jonardon Ganeri

Published online: 20 June 2008
© Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2008

Abstract When J. L. Austin introduced two “shining new tools to crack the crib of reality”—the theory of performative utterances and the doctrine of infelicities—he could not have imagined that he was also about to inaugurate a shining new industry in the philosophy of the social sciences. But with its evident concern for the features to which “all acts are heir which have the general character of ritual or ceremonial,” Austin’s theory soon became indispensable in the analysis of ritual, linguistic and every kind of social action. While Indianists such as Frits Staal, Bimal Matilal and David Seyfort Ruegg have made good use of the work of Austin and his “ordinary language” school, it is Quentin Skinner who has attempted to turn Austin’s insights into a general “theory and method” for the study of intellectual cultures. The question I want to address in this paper has to do with the applicability of Skinnerian techniques to the study of literary and intellectual Sanskrit culture in premodern India. If not all of Skinner’s methods transfer to the new context, identification of the points at which they breakdown helps to clarify the distinctive contours of Indian intellectual history, and suggests appropriate methodological innovation.

Keywords Quentin Skinner · Contextualism · Śāstra · Intertextual Speech-act · Definition · B. K. Matilal · Prolepsis

I

When J. L. Austin introduced two “shining new tools to crack the crib of reality”¹—the theory of performative utterances and the doctrine of infelicities—he

¹ Austin 1979.

J. Ganeri (✉)
Philosophy Department, Arts B Building, University of Sussex,
Falmer, Brighton BN1 9QN, UK
e-mail: J.Ganeri@sussex.ac.uk

could not have imagined that he was also about to inaugurate a shining new industry in the philosophy of the social sciences. But with its evident concern for the features to which “all acts are heir which have the general character of ritual or ceremonial,”² Austin’s theory soon became indispensable in the analysis of ritual, linguistic and every kind of social action (e.g. Tambiah 1979). While Indianists such as Frits Staal, Bimal Matilal and David Seyfort Ruegg have made good use of the work of Austin and his “ordinary language” school, it is Quentin Skinner who has attempted to turn Austin’s insights into a general “theory and method” for the study of intellectual cultures.³ The question I want to address in this paper has to do with the applicability of Skinnerian techniques to the study of literary and intellectual Sanskrit culture in premodern India. If not all of Skinner’s methods transfer to the new context, identification of the points at which they breakdown helps to clarify the distinctive contours of Indian intellectual history, and suggests appropriate methodological innovation.

II

According to Austin, we do more with words than merely describe or misdescribe facts: in producing utterances, we also perform illocutionary acts with perlocutionary effects. When I say, “I will see you in the cafe at six,” my utterance is a performance of the illocutionary act of making a promise, and its perlocutionary effect, perhaps, is that you go to the cafe at that time. To produce an utterance is therefore also, as Skinner puts it, to make an “intervention.”⁴ The cardinal assumptions of Skinner’s historical method are, first, that it is possible to recover the illocutionary force of past linguistic acts (as also of linguistic acts in “alien” societies and cultures), and second that the illocutionary force of a past linguistic act is good evidence in figuring out what sort of thing the author of that act was up to, the nature of his or her “intervention.” What was Cervantes up to when he wrote *Don Quixote*—was he representing the forlorn quest of an outmoded knight, satirizing the ideal of chivalry itself, or something else? Skinner says that we cannot hope to understand *Don Quixote*, let alone Cervantes, without addressing ourselves to this question, and that we cannot address ourselves to the question, a question about the intended illocutionary force of the novel, unless we can situate the act of writing it in a context, a context that will include information about Cervantes’ life, as well as the general social circumstances and political environment, not to mention the literary culture into which *Don Quixote* is inserted (2002; pp. 122–123). No amount of reading “over and over” the text alone, Skinner says, will get us its illocutionary force.⁵ The fundamental object of analysis for Skinner, therefore, is what

² Austin (1965, pp. 18–19).

³ Staal (1990); Matilal (1986, pp. 88–89, cf. 1999, pp. 52–54); Ruegg (1985). Skinner’s articles on method in intellectual history are collected in Skinner (2002). All references will be to this edition.

⁴ Skinner (2002, p. 115). Concentrating exclusively on the theory of performatives, Skinner pays virtually no attention to its indispensable twin, the doctrine of infelicities. This omission has unfortunate consequences for Skinner’s approach.

⁵ Skinner (2002, p. 143). This is Skinner’s contextualist criticism of textualism: the recovery of context is *essential* to understanding the text.

I will call the “text in context”: a particular document or pronouncement situated in a biographical, social, political and literary context rich enough to enable an inference to be drawn about the nature of the illocutionary intervention the document embodies. The recovery of such contexts permits Skinner to study the relationship between social and rhetorical change, and he has examined in particular the way terms that are both descriptive and evaluative are used to foster transformations in social perceptions (ibid; pp. 158–174).

There is a first, rather banal but nevertheless unavoidable reason why the intellectual historian of premodern India will have difficulty making use of a Skinnerian framework. When it comes to India, it’s all text and no context. Consider the way Skinner begins his short book on Machiavelli (Skinner 2000). After a photograph of the building in which Machiavelli is known to have worked from 1498 to 1512, Skinner goes on to cite from the diary which Machiavelli’s father kept between 1474 and 1487, giving information about Machiavelli’s childhood and the books that were in the household; he refers to information from Paolo Giovio’s *Maxims* about Machiavelli’s early university education; he chronicles Machiavelli’s first ambassadorial commission, to France in July 1500, and his second to Imola on 3 October 1502; and so on. It is clear that when Skinner comes to ask after the illocutionary force of a passage in Machiavelli’s *Il Principe*, he has a rich context on which to ground his conclusion that the work is intended as an attack on the humanist morality of earlier advice-books to princes. Nothing of the sort is conceivable with respect to much intellectual literature in classical Sanskrit. We think we know that Jayanta wrote his *Nyāyamañjarī* while imprisoned, but there are doubts about the relevant passage where he seems to claim this. We think we know that Śrīharṣa was from Kashmir, but it could have been Bengal.⁶ We thought we knew that the author of the *Bhāṣāpariccheda* is Viśvanatha, but perhaps it is after all Kṛṣṇadaśa (Bhattacharya 1952; pp. 117–119). In short, we can scarcely be sure of even the most rudimentary facts about authorship, geography and circumstance of composition of the texts. There is simply no prospect that the level of detail Skinner presumes to be required⁷ in order to make reliable inferences about illocutionary “intervention” will be available to the Indian intellectual historian.⁸

III

There is, however, another side to the coin. Extreme poverty of information about “physical” context is twinned with a superabundance of textual materials, which provides an immensely rich “literary” context. Moreover, there is good evidence for the conjecture that the principal context in which the Indian writers sought to make an “intervention” was a literary/intellectual rather than a physical/socio-political

⁶ On the question of Śrīharṣa’s Bengali roots, see Majumdar (1971, pp. 358–361, 395–398).

⁷ Compare: “It may indeed be impossible to recover anything more than a small fraction of the things that Plato, say, was doing in *The Republic*. My point is only that the extent to which we can hope to understand *The Republic* depends in part on the extent to which we can recover them.” (Skinner 2002, p. 107).

⁸ The Sanskrit Knowledge Systems on the Eve of Colonialism project proposal already refers to this fact; see <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pollock/sks>.

context. First, an important self-conception was that of affiliation to a śāstra or tantra, a disciplinary intellectual system. Such disciplines were held to possess an extraordinary degree of diachronic stability, conceived of more as organised structures⁹ than as living organisms, albeit structures the full contours and proportions of which had not yet been fully charted. Second, intellectual innovation had more the depiction as rediscovery than invention, new discoveries about “lost” grammatical rules explaining linguistic change much as new discoveries about “lost Vedas” were held to explain moral and social change.¹⁰ Third, individual linguistic “interventions” (for example, Jayanta’s composition of the *Nyāyamañjarī*) were shorn by their authors of almost all significant autobiographical, social or political context, a fact which suggests that such details would be a distraction from the intended illocutionary act. Indeed, if conspicuous silences are as much a part of the “total speech act” as actual utterances, then conclusions from this singular omission are justified even on Skinnerian grounds.

I suggest, then, that Skinner’s methodology can be adapted to fit the specifics of Indian intellectual history if we study the interventions of individual authors in terms of their illocutionary force within what I will call “intertextual” contexts. The first step will be to identify specifically “intertextual” kinds of illocutionary act. One area of study here is the subdivision of the genre of commentary. Some commentaries are elucidations of difficult points, some are completions of gaps in the main text, others consist in extraction of the deep meaning, still others are superimpositions of a newer framework onto an older text, and so forth.¹¹ I think we can reasonably say, for example, that as linguistic acts, Vardhamāna’s commentaries on such pre-Gaṅgeśa works as the *Līlāvātī* and the *Kiraṇāvalī* were superimpositions of the structures of Gaṅgeśa’s *Tattvacintāmaṇi* onto the older texts, with the intention of demonstrating that the new system was fully consistent with the older tradition and so could claim to be an authentic restatement of it. But, to repeat Skinner’s caution, this is not something one could discover by going “over and over” Vardhamāna’s work, because “this is not a fact contained in the text.” It is an intertextual intervention, which can be appreciated only by considering the place of Vardhamāna’s commentary in a literary and hermeneutical context.

⁹ “A tantra (‘system’) is a specification with respect to an assembly of matters connected with one another; this is a śāstra” (tantram itaretarābhisambaddhasyārthasamūhasyopadeśaḥ śāstram); Vātsyāyana, *Nyāyabhāṣya* p. 27, line 15 (under *Nyāyasūtra* 1.1.26) (page and line reference is to Thakur 1997a). Compare Uddyotakara: “A śāstra is structured assembly of words denoting the sources of knowledge, and so on” (śāstram puṇaḥ pramāṇādivācakapadasamūho vyuhaviśiṣṭaḥ), *Nyāyavārtika* p. 1, line 11 (Thakur 1997b).

¹⁰ See Deshpande (1985) and Kahrs (1998, p. 187). See also the discussion by Śabara and Kumārila under *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra* 1.3.1–2.

¹¹ Abul Fazl, in the *Ain-i-Akbari* (1597 AD), reports the classification of Sanskrit literary-philosophical genres as understood by writers in his day, distinguishing twelve forms—(1) *sūtra* “a short technical sentence”, (2) *bhāṣya* “commentary on a somewhat difficult *sūtra*”, (3) *vārtika* “a critical annotation on the two”, (4) *ītkā* “commentary (properly of the original or of another commentary) on no.3”, (5) *nibandha* “an explanation of technical rules”, (6) *vṛtti* “a brief elucidation of some complicated subjects in the first mentioned”, (7) *nirukta* “etymological interpretation of a word”, ... (8) *prakaraṇa* “a section treating of one or two topics”, (9) *āhnikā* “a short task sufficing for a diurnal lesson”, (10) *pariśiṣṭa* “a supplement to a technical work”, (11) *paddhati* “a manual of the texts relating to each of the six sciences in prescribed order”, (12) *saṃgraha* “an epitome of the sciences” (Jarrett 1894, pp. 149–150).

A second area in which to discover intertextual speech-acts is in the nature and function of definitions. The search for extensionally adequate definitions occupied a position of canonical stature in Nyāya intellectual practice, but we may well ask what the provision of a new definition signified as a linguistic act. First of all, definitions are offered only of contested concepts—it is precisely because the concept of *pratyakṣa* (“perception/sensation”) was contested that Buddhists and Naiyāyikas alike sought new definitions of the term. The provision of a definition, therefore, is an act of attempted consolidation.¹²

Indeed, definitional acts can satisfy more straightforwardly Skinnerian requirements. Referring to Gaṅgeśa’s statement that the whole *jagat* (world) is steeped in suffering, and “philosophy” (*ānvīkṣikī*) provides the road to release, Matilal says that the view that *jagat* refers to all sufferers, including women and *śūdras*, is

...clearly ascribable to Raghunātha ... [A]ccording to Raghunātha’s cryptic statement, Gaṅgeśa was saying that “philosophy” or *ānvīkṣikī* is open to all, not restrictive to the male members of the three varṇas. Unfortunately, such informal social critique often goes unnoticed by us today ... It would be stupid to neglect the strong undercurrent of criticism of religious and social practices by the classical thinkers.¹³

Whatever we are to make of this particular example, the point is that definitions can also be acts of social criticism. Skinner himself formulates a “strong” version of the thesis:

It now seems to me, in short, that all attempts to legislate about the ‘correct’ use of normative terms must be regarded as equally ideological in character. Whenever such terms are employed, their application will always reflect a wish to impose a particular moral vision on the workings of the social world.¹⁴

That seems to me to overstate the case, and risks turning a moderate contextualism into an extreme form of social constructivism.

IV

I turn now to a third sort of case, where a text can be read as an act of intrasystemic intervention. When an Indian author situates himself as a writer within a *śāstra*, he locates himself in a scholarly practice that has both a history and a future. If, looking back into the past, our author observes that great works had received commentarial attention, he may well assume, by an elementary induction, that his own work, if it is of any merit, will be commented on by future writers in the tradition. That is to say, when the intellectual “context” is a Sanskrit knowledge system, an entity conceived of by its

¹² Matilal hints at such a possibility, stating that “*lakṣaṇa* or ‘definition’ is also used ambiguously to denote an act that the philosophers perform when they utter a definition-sentence. Arguably, *lakṣaṇa* in this sense may belong to the class of ‘illocutionary acts.’ ... In fact, some sort of a speech-act analysis of the act of definition, i.e. *lakṣaṇa*, may be fruitful” (1985, p. 176).

¹³ Matilal (2002, p. 367).

¹⁴ Skinner (2002, p. 182).

participants as possessing enormous longevity, the possibility arises for proleptic speech interventions intentionally directed towards future audiences. One possibility is the deliberate use of what we might call “open texture”: knowing that my future commentator will be contending with hostile critics whose arguments I cannot anticipate, and knowing too that a commentator is (generally) a sympathetic interpreter, I insert a degree of plasticity into the text. In other words, it is my actual intention in writing the text that it be creatively interpreted by future commentators in response to critical circumstances whose existence but not exact nature I can anticipate. The idea of an intentionally proleptic illocutionary act is overlooked by Skinner, who concentrates instead on decrying the “mythology of prolepsis”:

When considering what significance some particular text may be said to have for us, it is rather easy in the first place to describe the work and its alleged relevance in such a way that no place is left for the analysis of what its author may have intended or meant. The characteristic result of this confusion is a type of discussion that might be labelled the mythology of prolepsis, the type of mythology we are prone to generate when we are more interested in the retrospective significance of a given episode than in its meaning for the agent at the time. ... The characteristic, in short, of the mythology of prolepsis is the conflation of the asymmetry between the significance an observer may justifiably claim to find in a given historical episode and the meaning of that episode itself.¹⁵

What Skinner overlooks is that the “meaning of the episode itself” is potentially proleptic, that an agent might be engaged in an activity of self-consciously addressing a future audience whose socio-political and intellectual context is understood to be unknown.

Skinner is similarly dismissive of the historian’s use of the notion of “anticipation.” He criticises the “mythology of doctrine,” a presumption that there is some given set of doctrines held to be constitutive of a field, which then tempts the historian into trying to find out what each classical author had to say or failed to say about them (ibid; p. 59). But again, in the case of India, the “mythology of doctrine” is a part of the intellectual reality that we are trying to study. How else can we explain the fact that a host of later writers, spanning two millennia and widely different socio-political contexts, should regard the sūtras not as historical documents but as current statements of philosophical knowledge? One good way to make sense of this absence of the archaic, of the idea of something becoming obsolete simply because it is old, is precisely by appeal to an idea of “anticipation”; specifically that they took the developed doctrine and argument of the śāstra in question to have been already anticipated in its earliest writings. The illocutionary force of the textual interventions of later authors is made sense of by ascribing this belief to them.

John Newman’s suggestion that healthy traditions tend to “anticipate” themselves might provide a useful further extension of the idea:

Since, when an idea is living, that is, influential and effective, it is sure to develop according to its own nature, and the tendencies, which are carried out

¹⁵ Skinner (2002, p. 73).

on the long run, may under favourable circumstances show themselves early as well as late, and since logic is the same in all ages, instances of a development which is to come, though vague and isolated, may occur from the very first, though a lapse of time be necessary to bring them to perfection ... and it is in no wise strange that here and there definite specimens of advanced teaching should very early occur, which in the historical course are not found till a late day.¹⁶

If the genuine development of a tradition consists, as Newman claims, in the “perfection” of its underlying idea and its principles, and if the possibility of such a perfection has existed from the first, then we might well expect to find, albeit in an inchoate and undeveloped form, anticipations of such later developments in the earlier strata of the tradition.

For an example of both prolepsis and anticipation, consider *Vaiśeṣika-sūtra* 3.2.15 on the oneness of self:

Self is one because there is no distinction in the production of pleasure, pain and cognition (sukhaduḥkhañānaniṣpattyaviśeṣād aikātmyam).

Vaiśeṣika-sūtra 3.2.16, however, asserts that selves are many (*nānā vyavasthātaḥ*), and this indeed is the standard Vaiśeṣika doctrine. 3.2.15 therefore raises an obvious problem for later Vaiśeṣikas. Some take the sūtra to be the statement of a *pūrvapakṣa*, others that it refers to the divine or universal soul. The post-Diñnāga philosopher Vyomaśiva, however, is unique: he finds in the sūtra an anticipation and refutation of Vijñānavāda punctualism:

The *śākyas* think that the many cognitions (*vijñāna*) that exist in a single body constitute [each of them] a ‘self’. In order to deny such an assertion, [it is said that] for each body there is one [self] not many (tathā hy ekasmin śārire ’neka ṁ vijñānam ātmeti śākyā manyante/ tatpratīṣedhārthaṁ pratīśarīram eko nānekah).¹⁷

Now clearly the sūtra was not composed with the Vijñānavāda Buddhists consciously in mind; the claim is rather that the early Vaiśeṣika articulates an underlying ‘idea’ that already contains resources sufficient to respond to the Buddhist challenge. *Vaiśeṣika-sūtra* 3.2.15 and 3.2.16 together give the text an “open texture,” and offer Vyomaśiva an important resource in a new intellectual climate.

V

We have seen that Skinner’s conception of “context” is both too rich and too poor to do justice to the Indian knowledge systems. Too rich, because the level of microscopic detail he describes is simply not one to which we have access; too poor, because our objects of study are whole śāstras or tantras, and they create broader contexts of intellectual intervention than Skinner considers. Skinner’s appeal to

¹⁶ Newman (1845, pp. 195–196).

¹⁷ Vyomaśivācārya (1983, vol. 1, p. 155, lines 9–11).

context is, I think, overly narrow in still another sense. His appeal is primarily evidential: context provides the historian with the best evidence for the kinds of illocutionary acts being performed. Philosophers of language, however, have given greater weight to another use of context, its role in reference-fixing. Indexical terms are terms whose reference varies according to determinate aspects of the context of use. The temporal indexical “tomorrow,” for instance, refers to the day after the day in which it is uttered. Philosophers have also begun to take notice of the phenomenon of “hidden indexicality,” in which the reference of terms that do not have the surface grammar of an indexical nevertheless display sensitivity to contextual parameters. The buried indexicality of such terms remains hidden if the range of contexts of use is restricted within a single value of the relevant parameter. To take a simple example, consider the term “the moon.” This is a hidden indexical, the relevant contextual parameter being the planet upon which the speaker is situated. Only with the possibility (actual or imaginary) that this parameter might vary does the buried indexicality of the expression become apparent or salient.

This phenomenon ought to be of interest to the historian of intellectual cultures, because it might well turn out to be the case that important terms (and the concepts they express) are indexicals of broad features of cultural context. If this is correct, then the study of “other” intellectual cultures assumes an importance unacknowledged by Skinner. Skinner himself, I should stress, is unusually sensitive to the importance of studying diversity. His reason for attaching value to this domain of study is, first and foremost, that “seeing things their way” encourages us to be less parochial in our “inherited beliefs.” Skinner’s position is that the historical study of other cultures helps us to reassess the value we attach to our own, to become less provincial, more tolerant, enlarged in our horizons. That is to say, it helps with the evaluative stance we assume towards “our own way.”

My argument is that the study of other cultures is relevant for another, perhaps more fundamental, reason: it helps us understand the content of “our own way” too. Our most basic normative expressions, the terms in which we express our deep values and standards of appraisal, turn out not to be proper names but cultural indexicals, and to understand the meaning of such indexical terms is to know how they map from cultural context to reference, rather than simply knowing their reference alone. Consider what Bernard Williams says about the virtue of sincerity. Sincerity has been held to be a value in many epochs and many cultures, but the way it gets to be valued varies according to circumstance. Although there is a basic shape to the notion of sincerity—saying only what one believes to be true—the “reference” of the concept will vary with context. Thus, for Rousseau and the European Enlightenment, sincerity meant authenticity, revealing the secrets of one’s heart, while in the *Mahābhārata*, sincerity took thirteen forms, including impartiality, self-control, toleration and non-violence (12.156.3–26). Williams says,

Everywhere, trustworthiness and its more particular applications such as that which concerns us, sincerity, have a broadly similar content—we know what we are talking about—and everywhere, it has to be related, psychologically, socially, and ethically, to some wider range of values. What those values are, however, varies from time to time and culture to culture, and the various

versions cannot be discovered by general reflection... Sincerity has a history, and it is the deposit of this history that we encounter in thinking about the virtues of truth in our own life. This is why at a certain point philosophy needs to make way for history, or, as I prefer to say, to involve itself in it.¹⁸

Networks of local value make sense of sincere speaking as a practice worth engaging in.

To clarify this point, I need to go further into the semantics of indexicals. According to the best known account of indexicality, that of David Kaplan, there are two ingredients in the meaning of an indexical, which he calls “content” and “character” (Kaplan 1989). The “content” of an indexical is the object it refers to on any given occasion of its use (or, more generally, the contribution made to the truth-value of the statement in which the indexical occurs). The “character” of an indexical is a function from aspect of context to contents; for example, the character of “I” is the function expressible as “Any utterance of the word “I” refers to the person who utters it.” Sincerity, we can therefore say, is a cultural indexical, its “content” varying according to the local systems of commendation that make sense of it as something of value, while its “character” (saying what you believe to be true) remains constant.¹⁹

VI

There is a further lesson to be drawn from these points about indexicality. The account implies that there are in fact two contexts to take into consideration whenever an indexical expression is used. Recall my earlier example of “tomorrow”, and consider an utterance “Tomorrow, it will be sunny.” The character of the indexical “tomorrow” tells us that it refers to the day after the day on which the utterance is made, and the truth or falsity of the utterance depends on whether on that day, it is sunny or not. So we must distinguish between the context of utterance and the context of evaluation, and notice that the context of evaluation might be, but does not have to be, identical to the context of utterance. To put it loosely, some indexical utterances “refer out” of their own contexts of use; they make assertions evaluable only with respect to some other context.

Such acts of “referring out” of one context and into another carry types of illocutionary force unique to themselves, and it is a drawback of Skinner’s presentation that, because he does not distinguish between evidential and reference-fixing appeals to context, he does not discuss these sorts of performative utterance. Skinner assumes, to put it crudely, that agents in other cultures and times must be talking about their own time and culture; “seeing things their way” is seeing how they talk about their times.²⁰ This seems to me to omit from the discussion an important class of illocutionary act, which we might call “indexical illocution.”

¹⁸ William (2003, pp. 92–93)

¹⁹ In this way, we avoid the pitfall of cultural relativism. For similar remarks with respect to the parameterisation of objectivity, see Sen (1993).

²⁰ “[T]he aim is to return the specific texts we study to the precise cultural contexts in which they were originally formed” (2002: 125).

Proleptic illocutionary acts are really just a special case of indexical illocution, the case in which the indexical points to the future (like “tomorrow”). Another important special case concerns those indexical illocutionary acts whose index is some broad feature of culture. Consider here the studies of Indian intellectual culture produced by B. K. Matilal; for the sake of argument, let us take his classic work *Perception*. The context of utterance of this study is clearly the contemporary community of Anglo-Saxon analytical philosophy. This is evident from a number of facts: the study is written in English, it uses the jargon of that culture, it makes constant references to the leading participants of analytical philosophy, and is even dedicated to two of them, it is published by Oxford University Press, and so on. The context of evaluation, equally clearly, is the intellectual culture of classical India, for it is that culture with respect to which the truth or falsity of specific utterances are to be evaluated. I do not see why we should not try to analyse the illocutionary force of the publication of *Perception*, just as Skinner does the publication of Machiavelli’s *Il Principe*; but if we do so, it is clear that the performance essentially involves two contexts, not one, and that this is so whether we take it to be an act of including one within the other, juxtaposing the two, bridging a gulf, dissolving a barrier, or whatever. It is a “binary context” illocutionary act.

I believe, furthermore and finally, that Matilal’s willingness to participate in illocutionary acts of this kind reveals his deep immersion within the Indian intellectual traditions. That sounds paradoxical: how can writing in the style of Anglophone analytical philosophy be an expression of immersion in Indian philosophical culture? The answer is that Matilal was simply responding to an obvious historical fact, the brute fact of colonialism. The immense rupture that colonialism represents left Indian intellectuals inhabiting an Anglophone intellectual culture, being taught in English-style university systems, writing in English, publishing monographs and articles rather than bhāṣyas and kroḍhapatras. How, then, to construct a bridge that could span the rupture? How is a “post-colonial” Indian intellectual to “get in touch” with pre-colonial Indian intellectual culture? But this, after all, presents no great new problem. By the fifteenth or sixteenth century, post-Vedic Mīmāṃsakas were struggling to make sense of a ritual world-view that had long since lost social vitality, while a post-Dinnāga author like Uddyotakara has to find a way to “reappropriate” the sūtras of Nyāya in a new intellectual culture inaugurated by his Buddhism.²¹ Jumping back across the rupture, while continuing to be indelibly marked by it, reconceptualising the pre-rupture past in the categories of a post-rupture present—these are among the most characteristic hallmarks of Indian intellectual practice. For this reason, one can say that a work like Matilal’s *Perception* expresses far more profound continuities with the underlying principles of the Indian tradition than the visible discontinuities would suggest. Skinner’s “evidential” appeal to context obscures the jumping across contexts, proleptic and

²¹ “In order to abolish the errors of the false reasoners [scil. Buddhists], I will prepare a description of that śāstra which the best of sages, Akṣapāda, articulated for the peace of the world” (yad akṣapādaḥ pravaro munīnām śamāya śāstraṃ jagato jagāda/kutārkikājñānanivṛttihetuḥ kariṣyate tasya mayā nibandhaḥ //); *Nyāyavārttika*, p. 1, lines 3–4. Uddyotakara’s frequent use of a rhetoric of refutation is designed to disguise a large scale assimilation of Buddhist ways of thinking and talking; this, indeed, is another example of intertextual intervention.

appropriative, which the study of India's intellectual history brings into visibility. Not that the value of trying to "see things their way" was unappreciated in India—indeed, the ability to understand and accurately paraphrase the view of an opponent was regarded as an essential skill in debate performances (Solomon 1976; p. 348). But there was also a recognition of the value of trying to "see our things our way," as intellectuals like Uddyotakara and Matilal equally illustrate, where, in both cases, "our thing" is already considerably other than "our way." I conclude with a comment of the great J. L. Mehta, made in reference to contemporary reading of the Ṛgveda: "Though we are separated from the Ṛgveda by a vast abyss of time, during which our cultural spiritual world has altered several times over, and though we are now estranged from the language of the Veda by the emergence and long dominance of classical Sanskrit, we can take comfort and encouragement from the fact that such alienation is also an enabling condition for a re-appropriation of what was once said in the remote past, that the passage of time leads not just to a forgetting but can also mean a conservation, a keeping in reserve, in which time functions as a filter through which the message may reach us in a novel, perhaps in a more purified sense" (Mehta 1990; pp. 277–8). This is, I have argued, a deeply Indian hermeneutical stance, one which the judicious use of Skinner's methods can help us better to understand.

Acknowledgements The paper is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. 0135069. I would like to thank Sheldon Pollock, Jan Houben, Francis Zimmerman, Sudipta Kaviraj and the other participants of a conference in Paris, June 28–30 2004 for helpful comments on an earlier draft.

References

- Austin, J. L. (1965). *How to do things with words*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Austin, J. L. (1979). Performative utterances. In J. O. Urmson & G. J. Warnock (Eds.), *Philosophical Papers* (pp. 233–252, 3rd ed.) Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bhattacharya, D. C. (1952). *Vāṅgālīr sārvasvat avadān: Baṅge Navya-nyāya carcā*. Calcutta: Sahitya Pariṣat.
- Deshpande, M. (1985). Historical change and the theology of eternal Sanskrit. *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung auf dem Gebeite der indogermanischen Sprachen*, 99, 22–149.
- Jarrett, C. h. S. (trans.) (1894). *The Ain-i-Akbari by Abu'l Fazl 'Allami*. (Vol. III). Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press.
- Kahrs, E. (1998). *Indian semantic analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kaplan, D. (1989). Demonstratives: An essay on the semantics, logic, metaphysics and epistemology of demonstratives and other indexicals. In J. Almog, J. Perry, & H. Wettstein (Eds.), *Themes from Kaplan*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Majumdar, R. C. (1971). *History of ancient Bengal*. Calcutta: G. Bharadwaj & Co.
- Matilal, B. K. (1985). *Logic, language and reality*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Matilal, B. K. (1986). *Perception: An essay on classical Indian theories of knowledge*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Matilal, B. K. (1999). *The character of logic in India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Matilal, B. K. (2002). *Mind, language and world*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Mehta, J. L. (1990). The Ṛgveda: Text and interpretation. In *Philosophy and Religion: Essays in Interpretation*. Delhi: ICPR.
- Newman, J. H. (1845). *An essay on the development of Christian doctrine*. Reprinted London: Longmans Green, 1890.

- Ruegg, D. S. (1985). Purport, implicature and presupposition: Sanskrit *abhiprāya* and Tibetan *dgoñs pa / dgoñs gži* as hermeneutical concepts. *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 13, 309–325.
- Sen, A. (1993). Positional objectivity. *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 22, 126–145. Reprinted in *Rationality and Freedom*. (Harvard: Belknap Press, 2002), pp. 463–483.
- Skinner, Q. (2000). *Machiavelli: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Skinner, Q. (2002). *Visions of politics, Volume 1: Regarding method*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Solomon, E. A. (1976). *Indian dialectics: Methods of philosophical discussion* (Vol. 1). Ahmedabad: B. J. Institute of Learning and Research.
- Staal, F. (1990). *Rules without meaning: Ritual, mantra and the human sciences*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Tambiah, S. J. (1979). A performative approach to ritual. *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 45, 113–169. Reprinted in his *Culture, thought and action* (pp. 123–66).
- Thakur, A. (Ed.) (1997a). *Gautamīyanyāyadarśana with Bhāṣya of Vātsyāyana*. New Delhi: ICPR.
- Thakur, A. (Ed.) (1997b). *Nyāyabhāṣyavārtika of Bhāradvāja Uddyotakara*. New Delhi: ICPR.
- Vyomaśivācārya. (1983). *Vyomavatī*. Gaurinath Sastri (Ed.) Varanasi: Sampurnanand Sanskrit Vishvavidyalaya.
- Williams, B. (2002). *Truth & truthfulness*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.