

Pedagogical Approach of the Pāli Grammarians with reference to the study of Pāli Verbs

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In Pāli language, the time of action is observable by investigating the verb. In other words, the verb alone tells us when the action was done or committed. In English, this is called 'tense' and there are many tenses under past, present and future. Traditional Pāli grammarians have made a successful attempt to elucidate the verb in coherence with the format of nominal cases. This, the pedagogy they used, is meticulously gone through by various scholars and they have made volumes of researches to define all the nuances of verbs. However, the need of producing a simple explanation rather agreeable with the traditional pedagogical approach is the main focus of the present article.

INTRODUCTION

The Pali verb has two voices: active and middle; three persons: first, second and third; two numbers: singular and plural; three tenses: present, past and future; four moods: indicative imperative, optative and conditional.¹ All these moods are denoted in one group, called '*Ākhyāta Vibhaktis*' in traditional Pāli grammar. Eight verbal cases are listed below.

- i) *Vattamānakāla* - Present Indicative Tense
- ii) *Bhavissanti* – future indicative
- iii) *Ajjatanī* – aorist/ past indicative
- iv) *Hīyattanī* - imperfect
- v) *Parokkhā* - perfect
- vi) *Kālātipatti* - conditional
- vii) *Pañcamī* – imperative /Benedictive (mood)
- viii) *Sattamī* – Optative/ Potential (mood)²

Hīyattanī, pañcamī, Sattamī & Vattamānā are *Sabbadhātuka* tenses.³
Ajjatanī, Parokkhā, Bhavissanti & Kālātipatti are *Asabbadhātuka* tenses.

According to the traditional Pāli grammar, Past tense is in four divisional tenses; they are

- i) *Parokkhā* (perfect),
- ii) *Hīyattanī* (imperfect),

- iii) *Ajjatanī* (aorist/past) and
- iv) *Kālātipatti* (conditional).

Every tense is again divided into two Padas or modes, namely, *Parassapada* (words for others/active) and *Attanopada*⁴ (words for oneself /middle or reflexive). For e.g. the suffixes or conjugational terminations of *Parokkhā* tense: *a, u, e, ttha, a* and *mha* represent the *Parassapada* form, while *ttha, re, ttho, vho, i* and *mhe* demonstrate the *Attanaopada* form of *Parokkhā* or Perfect tense of Pāli language.

A verb is conjugated by adding these suffixes, both modes differing from each other. The following table shows conjugation of the verbal root √*paca* (= to cook) in Vattamāna Parassapada form. It should be noted that the Pāli 1st person is the 3rd person in English; the Pāli 2nd person remains same in English and the Pāli 3rd person is 1st person in English.

i) Vattamānā -The Present Tense (Active Voice)

Bālāvatāra theorem and Exposition: “*Vattamānā paccuppanne*” - *paccupanne kāle vattamānā vibhatti hoti. [vattamānā ti anti si tha mi ma-te ante se vhe e mhe iti tyādīnaṃ vattamānakālasaññā].*⁵

Singular:	Plural:
3rd: (So) <i>pacati</i> = He cooks	(Te) <i>pacanti</i> = They cook
2nd: (Tvam) <i>pacasi</i> = You cook	(Tumhe) <i>pacatha</i> = You cook
1st: (Aham) <i>pacāmi</i> = I cook	(Mayam) <i>pacāma</i> = We cook

E.g. Singular:

1. *So bhataṃ pacati* =
He cooks rice.
2. *Tvaṃ bhataṃ pacasi* =
You (sg.) cook rice.
3. *Ahaṃ bhataṃ pacāmi* =
I cook rice.

Plural:

1. *Te bhataṃ pacanti* =
They cook rice.
2. *Tumhe bhataṃ pacatha* =
You (pl.) cook rice.
3. *Mayaṃ bhataṃ pacāma* =
We cook rice.

The verb *atthi* (to be) from root √*as* is a special verb of frequent occurrence. It is conjugated as:

Singular	Plural
3rd <i>atthi</i>	<i>santi</i>
2nd <i>asi</i>	<i>attha</i>
1st <i>asmi / amhi</i>	<i>asma / amha</i>

ii). **Bhavissanti**

Bālāvatāra theorem and Exposition: “**Anāgate bhavissanti**” [*bhavissanti ssati ssanti ssasi ssatha ssāmi ssāma-ssate ssante ssase ssavhe ssaṃ ssāmhe'ti etesaṃ bhavissanti saññā.*]

The future tense is formed by adding *-ssa* to the root / verbal base with, or in some cases without, the connecting vowel *-i-* the terminations are the same as those in the present tense.

Conjugation of √ <i>paca</i> (= to cook) in <i>Bhavissanti- Parassapada</i>		
persons (<i>purisa</i>)	singular (<i>ekavacana</i>)	plural (<i>bahuvacana</i>)
<i>Paṭhamapurisa</i> (3 rd person)	(<i>so</i> : he/she/it) <i>pacissati</i> will cook	(<i>te</i> : they) <i>pacissanti</i> will cook
<i>Majjhimapurisa</i> (2 nd person)	(<i>tvaṃ</i> : you) <i>pacissasi</i>	(<i>tumhe</i> : you) <i>pacissatha</i>
<i>Uttamapurisa</i> (1 st person)	(<i>ahaṃ</i> : I) <i>pacissāmi</i> (I shall..)	(<i>mayāṃ</i> : we) <i>pacissāma</i>

Conjugation of √ <i>paca</i> (= to cook) in <i>Bhavissanti- Attanopada</i>		
persons (<i>purisa</i>)	singular (<i>ekavacana</i>)	plural (<i>bahuvacana</i>)
<i>Paṭhamapurisa</i> (3 rd person)	(<i>so</i> : he/she/it) <i>pacissate</i>	(<i>te</i> : they) <i>pacissante</i>
<i>Majjhimapurisa</i> (2 nd person)	(<i>tvaṃ</i> : you) <i>pacissase</i>	(<i>tumhe</i> : you) <i>pacissathe</i>
<i>Uttamapurisa</i> (1 st person)	(<i>ahaṃ</i> : I) <i>pacissāmi</i> (I shall)	(<i>mayāṃ</i> : we) <i>pacissāma</i>

Attention should be paid to the following forms:

<i>gacchati</i> -	<i>gamissati</i>	= he will go
<i>āgacchati</i> -	<i>āgamissati</i>	= he will come
<i>dadāti</i> -	<i>dadissati</i> / <i>dassati</i>	= he will give
<i>tiṭṭhati</i> -	<i>ṭhassati</i>	= he will stand
<i>karoti</i> -	<i>karissati</i>	= he will do

iii) **Ajjatanī**

Bālāvatāra theorem and Exposition: **Samīpe ajjatanī** [*ajjatanī ī uṃ o ttha imhā-ā ū se vhaṃ a mhe iti etesaṃ ajjatanī saññā*]. So far, we have

noticed in the above conjugation of Pāli past tense, none is fully past; some are conditional while the others are imperfect or indefinite of the speaking action. The *Ajjatanī* or the Aorist is the full past tense. In other words, *Ajjatanī* is the complete past tense, it is definite.

Conjugation of √ <i>paca</i> (= to cook) in <i>Ajjatanī</i> – <i>Parassapada</i>		
persons (<i>purisa</i>)	singular (<i>ekavacana</i>)	plural (<i>bahuvacana</i>)
<i>Paṭhamapurisa</i> (3 rd person)	(<i>so</i> : he/she/it) <i>apaci, paci, apacī, pacī-</i> cooked	(<i>te</i> : they) <i>apacuṃ, pacuṃ</i> - cooked
<i>Majjhimapurisa</i> (2 nd person)	(<i>tvaṃ</i> : you) <i>apaco, paco-</i> cooked	(<i>tumhe</i> : you) <i>apacittha, pacittha-</i> cooked
<i>Uttamapurisa</i> (1 st person)	(<i>ahaṃ</i> : I) <i>apaciṃ, paciṃ-</i> cooked	(<i>mayāṃ</i> : we) <i>apacimha, pacimha,</i> <i>apacimhā, pacimhā-</i> cooked

Conjugation of √ <i>paca</i> (= to cook) in <i>Ajjatanī</i> – <i>Attanopada</i>		
persons (<i>purisa</i>)	singular (<i>ekavacana</i>)	plural (<i>bahuvacana</i>)
<i>Paṭhamapurisa</i> (3 rd person)	(<i>so</i> : he/she/it) <i>apacā, pacā</i>	(<i>te</i> : they) <i>apacū, pacū</i>
<i>Majjhimapurisa</i> (2 nd person)	(<i>tvaṃ</i> :you) <i>apacise, pacise</i>	(<i>tumhe</i> : you) <i>apacivhaṃ, pacivhaṃ</i>
<i>Uttamapurisa</i> (1 st person)	(<i>ahaṃ</i> : I) <i>apacaṃ, pacaṃ</i>	(<i>mayāṃ</i> : we) <i>apacimhe, pacimhe</i>

E.g. Singular:

1. *Bhūpālo dīpe cari / acari*
acarimsu -
The king wandered in the island.
2. *Samaṇo dhammaṃ desesi*
desayimsu.
The monk preached the dhamma.
3. *Tvaṃ bhaṇḍāni vikkiṇi*
You sold goods.

1. *Tvaṃ pupphāni pūjesi*
You offered the flowers.
2. *Ahaṃ pabbataṃ āruhim*
I climbed the mountain.

Plural:

1. *Bhūpālā dīpesu carimsu /*
Kings wandered in the islands.
2. *Samaṇā dhammaṃ desesuṃ /*
Monks preached the dhamma.
3. *Tumhe bhaṇḍāni vikkiṇittha*
You sold goods.

1. *Tumhe pupphāni pūjayittha*
You offered flowers.
2. *Mayāṃ pabbate āruhimha -*
We climbed mountains.

3. *Ahaṃ dīpaṃ jālesim / jālayim*
I lit the lamp.

3. *Mayaṃ dīpe jālayimha -*
We lit lamps.

v) **Hīyyatanī**⁶

Hīyyatanī is the Imperfect mode. It is defined as *hiyoppabhuti paccakkeva apaccakkeva hīyyatanī* – Things done yesterday confirmed and not confirmed. [*hīyattanī ā ū o ttha a mhā-ttha tthum se vhaṃ im mhaseti etesaṃ hīyyatanī saññā*]. According to Venerable AP Buddhadatta, this was originally used to express the definite past, and *Ajjatanī* was used to express the time recently passed but now, they have lost their individual significance, and *Ajjatanī* is extensively used to express the definite past.⁷ In *Hīyyatanī* form of conjugation, *a* is added to the verbal root and then the conjugation terminations are added to the root. Examples of both *Parassapada* and *Attanopada* modes of *Hīyyatanī* would make it easier to absorb its conjugational method.

Conjugation of √ <i>paca</i> (= to cook) in <i>Hīyyatanī – Parassapada</i>		
persons (<i>purisa</i>)	singular (<i>ekavacana</i>)	plural (<i>bahuvacana</i>)
<i>Paṭhamapurisa</i> (3 rd person)	(<i>so</i> : he/she/it) <i>apacā</i>	(<i>te</i> : they) <i>apacū</i>
<i>Majjhimapurisa</i> (2 nd person)	(<i>tvaṃ</i> : you) <i>apaco</i>	(<i>tumhe</i> : you) <i>apacattha</i>
<i>Uttamapurisa</i> (1 st person)	(<i>ahaṃ</i> : I) <i>apaca</i>	(<i>mayāṃ</i> : we) <i>apacamhā</i>

Conjugation of √ <i>paca</i> (= to cook) in <i>Hīyyatanī – Attanopada</i>		
persons (<i>purisa</i>)	singular (<i>ekavacana</i>)	plural (<i>bahuvacana</i>)
<i>Paṭhamapurisa</i> (3 rd person)	(<i>so</i> : he/she/it) <i>apacattha</i>	(<i>te</i> : they) <i>apacatthum</i>
<i>Majjhimapurisa</i> (2 nd person)	(<i>tvaṃ</i> : you) <i>apacase</i>	(<i>tumhe</i> : you) <i>apacivhaṃ</i>
<i>Uttamapurisa</i> (1 st person)	(<i>ahaṃ</i> : I) <i>apaciṃ</i>	(<i>mayāṃ</i> : we) <i>apacamhase</i>

These both forms of *Hīyyatanī* conjugation, like the *Parokkhā*, give the same meaning. E.g. *so odanaṃ apacā* and *so odanaṃ apacattha*; both sentences express one meaning, i.e. ‘he cooked rice.’ As mentioned above, *Parokkhā* has six rules for the reduplication of the first two letters of the nominal root.

vi) **Parokkhā**⁸

The definition of the *Parokkhā* is ‘*apacchakkhe parokkhātite*’ (the past that is not confirmed). [*parokkhā a u e ttha a mha-ttha re ttho vho i mhe ti etesaṃ parokkhā saññā*].

Conjugation of √ <i>paca</i> (= to cook) in <i>Parokkhā – Parassapada</i>		
persons (<i>purisa</i>)	singular (<i>eka vacana</i>)	plural (<i>bahu vacana</i>)
<i>Paṭhamapurisa</i> (3 rd person)	(<i>so</i> : he/she/it) <i>papaca</i>	(<i>te</i> : they) <i>papacu</i>
<i>Majjhimapurisa</i> (2 nd person)	(<i>tvam</i> : you) <i>papace</i>	(<i>tumhe</i> : you) <i>papacittha</i>
<i>Uttamapurisa</i> (1 st person)	(<i>ahaṃ</i> : I) <i>papaca</i>	(<i>mayam</i> : we) <i>papacimha</i>

Conjugation of √ <i>paca</i> (= to cook) in <i>Parokkhā – Attanopada</i>		
persons (<i>purisa</i>)	singular (<i>eka vacana</i>)	plural (<i>bahu vacana</i>)
<i>Paṭhamapurisa</i> (3 rd person)	(<i>so</i> : he/she/it) <i>papacittha</i>	(<i>te</i> : they) <i>papacire</i>
<i>Majjhimapurisa</i> (2 nd person)	(<i>tvam</i> : you) <i>papacittho</i>	(<i>tumhe</i> : you) <i>papacivho</i>
<i>Uttamapurisa</i> (1 st person)	(<i>ahaṃ</i> : I) <i>papaci</i>	(<i>mayam</i> : we) <i>papacimhe</i>

In both conjugations, one common special feature we can notice is the prefix ‘*pa*’ is added to the verbal root √*paca* and then the conjugation terminations are added to the root. However, this differs according to the first letters of the verbal root of the verb, e.g. if the verbal root is *bhū*, the *Parokkhā* form would be *babhūva*. It is the doubling of the first two letters – (*dvitva*).

vii) **Kālātipatti**

“*Kriyā atipanne atīte kāle kālātipatti hoti*” is the definition of the *Kālātipatti* or Conditional Past mode of Pāli past tense. [*kālātipatti ssā ssaṃsu sse ssatha ssaṃ ssmhā ssatha ssiṃsu ssase ssavhe ssaṃ ssāmhaseti etesaṃ kālātipatti saññā*].

It speaks of some past conditional actions, sometimes in expression or connected to the future. According to Venerable A.P. Buddhadatta, it is expressing future relatively to something that is past, and an action unable to be performed on account of some difficulty in the way of its

execution.⁹ Examples of the two modes in *Kālātipatti* would make it clearer to observe the special features of *Kālātipatti*.

Conjugation of √paca (= to cook) in <i>Kālātipatti – Parassapada</i>		
persons (<i>purisa</i>)	singular (<i>ekavacana</i>)	plural (<i>bahuvacana</i>)
<i>Pathamapurisa</i> (3 rd person)	(<i>so</i> : he/she/it) <i>apacissā; apacissa</i>	(<i>te</i> : they) <i>apacissamsu</i>
<i>Majjhimapurisa</i> (2 nd person)	(<i>tvaṃ</i> : you) <i>apacisse</i>	(<i>tumhe</i> : you) <i>apacissatha</i>
<i>Uttamapurisa</i> (1 st person)	(<i>ahaṃ</i> : I) <i>apacissa</i>	(<i>mayāṃ</i> : we) <i>apacissamhā</i>

<i>Pathamapurisa</i> (3 rd person)	(<i>so</i> : he/she/it) <i>apacissatha</i>	(<i>te</i> : they) <i>Apacissimsu</i>
<i>Majjhimapurisa</i> (2 nd person)	(<i>tvaṃ</i> : you) <i>apacissase</i>	(<i>tumhe</i> : you) <i>apacissavhe</i>
<i>Uttamapurisa</i> (1 st person)	(<i>ahaṃ</i> : I) <i>apacissam</i>	(<i>mayāṃ</i> : we) <i>apacissāmhase</i>

viii) ***Pañcamī***

“***āṇatyāsiṭṭhenuttakāle pañcamī paccuppanne kāle bhedamanūmasitvā pañcamī hotī***” –[*pañcamī tu antu hi tha mi ma- taṃ antaṃ ssu vho e āmase ti etesaṃ pañsamīsaññā*]. The imperative mood expresses a command, benediction, prayer or wish.¹⁰

Singular	Plural
3 rd (So) <i>pacatu</i> = Let him cook	3 rd (Te) <i>pacantu</i> = Let them cook
2 nd (Tvaṃ) <i>paca, pacāhi</i> = You cook	2 nd (Tumhe) <i>pacatha</i> = You cook
1 st (Ahaṃ) <i>pacāmi</i> = Let me cook	1 st (Mayāṃ) <i>pacāma</i> = Let us cook

It should be observed that the second person plural and first person singular and plural have the same forms as in the present tense. The prohibitive particle *mā* is also used with the imperative.

1. *So vāñijānaṃ bhattaṃ pacatu.*

Let him cook rice for the merchants.

2. *Tvaṃ rathena nagaraṃ gaccha / gacchāhi.*

You go to the city in the vehicle.

3. *Ahaṃ dhammaṃ uggaṇhāmi.*

Let me learn the dhamma.

1. *Te vāṇijānaṃ bhattaṃ
pacantu.*

Let them cook rice for the
merchants.

2. *Tumhe rathena nagaraṃ
gacchatha.*

You go to the city in the
vehicle.

3. *Mayaṃ dhammaṃ
uggaṇhāma.*

Let us learn the dhamma.

With the prohibitive particle *mā*.

1. *Mā tumhe saccaṃ parivajjetha.*

You do not avoid the truth.

2. *Mā te uyyānamhi pupphāni ocinantu.*

Let them not pick flowers in the park

ix) *Sattamī* (The Optative or the Potential Mood)

Bālāvātāra Theorem and Exposition: “*Anumati parikappatthesu sattamī*”-*anumatyatthe parikappatthe ca anuttakāle sattamī hoti. [sattamī eyya eyyuṃ eyyāsi eyyātha eyyāmi eyyāma - etha eraṃ etho eyyavho eyyaṃ eyyāmhē ti eyyādīnaṃ sattamīsaññā]*.

The optative expresses mainly probability and advice, and ideas such as those conveyed by if, might, would, etc. It is formed by adding *-eyya* to the verbal base before terminations.¹¹

Singular	Plural
3 rd (So) <i>paceyya</i> = If he would cook	3 rd (Te) <i>paceyyuṃ</i> = If they would cook
2 nd (Tvam) <i>paceyyāsi</i> = If you would cook	2 nd (Tumhe) <i>paceyyātha</i> = If you would cook
1 st (Ahaṃ) <i>paceyyāmi</i> = If I would cook	1 st (Mayaṃ) <i>paceyyāma</i> = If we would cook

Conclusion

Thus, the above methodology seems very well organized as well as profound for achieving a comprehensive knowledge of verbal conjugations as presented by traditional grammarians. The comparative remarks of certain verbs would make it easier to understand that this pedagogy of grammarians is only one of the ways of explaining Pāli conjugations, which, in turn, leads us not to be bound with the format given.

ABBREVIATIONS

KV	<i>Kaccāyana Vyākaraṇa</i>
BL	<i>Bālāvatāra Grammar</i>

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It should be noted that all the grammatical explanations of Kaccāyana Vyākaraṇa were extracted from Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyanā Tipiṭaka 4.0, 1995 published by Vipassanā Research Institute.

NOTES

- ¹ Perniyola, V. (1958) *A Grammar of the Pali language*, p. 175
- ² Buddhadatta, A.P. *The New Pāli Course II*, p. 75.
- ³ *Sabba* = all *dhātuka* = having the nature of roots, *Sabbadhātuka* = common to all roots/ occupied with all roots. KV: 431, **458**. *Hiyyattanī sattamī pañcamī vattamānā sabbadhātukaṃ*.
- ⁴ KV “*Atha sabbāsaṃ vibhattīnaṃ yāni yāni pubbakāni cha padāni, tāni tāni parassapadasaññāni honti. Taṃ yathā? Ti anti, si tha, mi ma. Parassapadamiccānena kvattho? Kattari parassapadaṃ.*” *Sabbāsaṃ vibhattīnaṃ yāni yāni parāni cha padāni. Tāni tāni attanopadasaññāni honti. Taṃ yathā? Te ante, se vhe, e mhe. Attanopadamiccānena kvattho? Attanopadāni bhāve ca kammani.*
- ⁵ KV **414**, 428. *Vattamānā paccuppanne. Paccuppanne kāle vattamānāvibhatti hoti. Pāṭaliputtaṃ gacchati, sāvattiṃ pavisati.*
- ⁶ KV *Hiyyopabhuti paccakkhe hiyyattanī. Hiyyopabhuti atīte kāle paccakkhe vā apaccakkhe vā hiyyattanī vibhatti hoti. So agamā maggaṃ, te agamū maggaṃ.*
- ⁷ The New Pāli Course II, p. 86.
- ⁸ KV **417**, 460. *Apaccakkhe parokkhāṭīte. Apaccakkhe atīte kāle parokkhāvibhatti hoti. Supīne kilamāha, evaṃ kila porāṇāhu.*
- ⁹ The New Pāli Course II p. 75.
- ¹⁰ **415**, 451. *Āṇatyā siṭṭhe’nuttakāle pañcamī. Āṇatyatthe ca āsīsatthe ca anuttakāle pañcamī vibhatti hoti. Karotu kusalaṃ, sukhaṃ te hotu.*
- ¹¹ **416**, 454. *Anumatiparikappatthesu sattamī. Anumatyatthe ca parikappatthe ca anuttakāle sattamī vibhatti hoti. Tvam gaccheyyāsi, kimahaṃ kareyyāmi.*