

## Another Perturbation in Rigvedic Word Order: Penultimate *ná*

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### I. Non-appearance in final position

A. Both *ná* ‘like’ and *ná* ‘not’ (with former a development of the latter) seemed barred from final position in verse line or clause.

B. Since *ná* ‘like’ is usually postpositive, it therefore appears to have “flipped”

\*X *ná* # → *ná* X #

### II. Structure of the standard RVic simile

A. Simile is the preeminent poetic figure in Vedic (and later Skt.); in RV marked by *ná* or *iva*.

B. History -- nothing like it in Old Iranian; “Homeric” simile structurally distinct

But Hittite postposition *iwar* (cognate with *iva*?) possibly comparable – however structurally distinct:

*iwar* -- postposition governing the genitive

*iva* (/ná)– also postpositive, but case of the simile matches case of what it’s compared to.

C. *iva* 1023x in RV (Lubotsky)

*ná* 2103x in RV (Lubotsky, unsorted); approx. 1300 simile-marking (Jamison 1982: “Case Disharmony in R̥gvedic Similes,” IJ 24: 251–71)

D. Distribution of simile-marking *ná* and *iva* entirely parallel

One-word similes: X *iva* / *ná*

I.8.7 # *samudrá iva pínvate*

It swells like the sea.

I.30.3 # *samudró ná vyáco dadhe*

He acquires an expanse like the sea.

Two-word similes: usually X *iva* / *ná* X'

same case (coreferential Xs)

I.43.5 ... *śukrá iva sūryah* #

like the blazing sun

VI.4.3 ... *sūryo ná śukráh* #

like the blazing sun

different cases

VIII.6.35 # samudrám *iva* sindhavah

(The hymns increased Indra,) like rivers the sea.

VI.36.3 # samudrám *ná* sindhavah ...

(The songs enter Indra,) like rivers the sea.

Two-word similes: X X' *iva* / *ná*

V.56.5 # gávām sárgam *iva* ...

like a gush of cows

IV.52.5 # gávām sárgā *ná* ...

like gushes of cows

[cf. IV.51.8 # gávām *ná* sárgāh ...

with standard internal position of the particle]

Two-word similes -- discontinuous: X *iva* / *ná* ... X'

I.116.15 (*caritraṃ hí*) vér *ivāchedi* parnáṃ [= *iva-āchedi*]

(Because her foot) was cut off like the wing of a bird.

V.51.7 # nimnám *ná* yanti sindhavah ...

(The soma drinks) go like rivers to the deep.

**III.** Can simile marker preceded the target? Yes – e.g., Bergaigne 1886; no! Oldenberg 1907

A. Yes, under very restricted conditions: only *ná* when it would be final – **me** (/ Geldner)

B. *ná* and *iva* diverge: *iva* regularly appears in **final position** (approx. 100x).

One-word similes: X *iva* #

I.130.5 ... ráthāñ *iva* #

(You release the rivers to flow/run) like chariots.

I.92.4 ... nrtūr *iva* #

(She strews ornaments on herself) like a dancing girl.

Two-word similes: X X' *iva* # -- even when *iva* could be penultimate!

VIII.26.13 # ádhiyastrā vadhūr *iva* #

Like a bride in her wedding dress

X.89.7 ... svádhitiṛ váneva [= vánā-iva] #

(He smote Vṛtra) like an axe the trees.

C. But *ná* instead takes position *before* the simile if it would be final – approx. 25 exx.

IX.97.57 #*padé rebhanti kaváyo ná gr̥dhrāh* #

On the track (of soma) the poets squawk like birds of prey. (Cf. I.118.4.)

X.89.7 # *rurója púro áradan ná síndhūn* #

He shattered the fortresses; he dug (them) out like rivers.

IX.14.5 [=107.26] # *gāh kṛṇvānó ná nirnījam* #

(Soma) making the cows [=milk] like a garment.

**IV. *ná* (both usages) barred from final position** – of 2103 occurrences of *ná* only 7 potential counter-examples:

A. Two (X.49.10, 105.3): Lubotsky’s pāda division is wrong; one (X.111.7): too obscure to interpret, plus v. late hymn. So this leaves four.

B. Two real exx., with extenuating circumstances

*ná* ‘like’

VII.68.8 # *yāv aghnyām ápinvatam apó.ná, staryām cid* ...

You two who swelled the fertile cow like waters—also the barren cow ...

→ Simile internal to the constituent being compared: *aghnyām ... staryām cid*

*ná* ‘not’

IV.13.5 [=14.5] *ánāyato ánibaddhaḥ kathāyām, nyānñ uttānó 'va padyate ná*

Not held firm, not tied down -- how does this one [=sun] not fall down, head over heels?

→ Chiasmic figure #*án ... án ... ná* # Plus negative Q.

C. Two examples of “misplaced” *ná* signalling disordered thought

X.95.3 *avīre krátau ví davidyutan ná*

Purūravas raving – passage much disputed; see online comm.

X.129.7 *yádi vā dadhé yádi vā ná* [X X]

if it was produced or if not ...

→ Metrical, syntactic, and word-positional disturbances signal radical doubt about creation

## V. Why?

A. I tried – and repeatedly failed – to start with *ná* in final position and flip it. I could not motivate it – hence the change schematized in I.B above is actually false

*\*X ná # → ná X #*

B. Instead, inspired by Brent’s paper of nearly 50 years ago -- “On the Metrics and Origin of Rig-Vedic *ná* ‘like, as’,” IJ 20 [1978]: 171–93 – I now think that the anomalous prefinal position of *ná* ‘like’ is a **syntactic archaism**: penultimate *ná* resisted flipping to final position:

*ná X # ↔ \*X ná #.*

C. Two questionns:

1. If this is the original position of *ná* ‘like’, then why does it show up postpositive in similes elsewhere?
2. What accounts for this supposedly original position?

D. Answer to #1 is easy: after *ná* was re-interpreted as a simile marker, it mimicked the behavior of *iva*, which, as a genuine enclitic, naturally slots itself into 2nd position – this happened with similes in other parts of the verse line, but not in penultimate position. (See multiple exx. in II above, with simile opening the verse line.)

E. Answer to #2 – provided by Brent, tracking the relative positions of *ná* ‘not’ and *ná* ‘like’ by metrical slots: usually position in the line is sufficient to disambiguate the two functions.

*But* the two overlap in syllable 5 of dimeter and syllable 9 in trimeter meter – translated into word-positional terms: *directly before the last word of the pāda.*

... *ná* WORD #  
 “not”  
 “like”

Brent suggests that this position is the locus of the re-analysis of ‘not’ to ‘like’ – starting from coordinate negative constructions like

VI.24.7 *ná yám jaranti śarádo ná māsāḥ*

Whom neither the years nor the months age. → “likewise (not) the months ...

It makes sense that the overlap slot is the place to look for the reinterpretation of function.

It also makes sense that, even when *ná* ‘like’ had hived off from *ná* ‘not’ and started taking post-positive position in similes in imitation of *iva*, it would maintain its penultimate position in the verse line where the functional reinterpretation first happened.