



# From Saṃskṛta to Prākṛta: A Theoretical Inquiry Into Hemacandra's Model of Linguistic Transformation

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**Abstract:** In this paper, an attempt has been undertaken for a theoretical inquiry into the differentiation between Saṃskṛta and Prākṛta as conceptualized by Ācārya Hemacandra, the eminent 12th-century Jaina scholar. In his seminal work “Siddhahemaśabdānuśāsana”, Hemacandra establishes a linguistic framework that portrays Prākṛta not as a corrupted form of Saṃskṛta ; however, as a refined language derived systematically through well-defined grammatical processes. The study highlights his use of mechanisms such as lopa (elision), āgama (insertion), sthāna (substitution), and vikāra (modification) to derive Prākṛta forms from Saṃskṛta roots. Rather than viewing Prākṛta as colloquial or degraded form of language, Hemacandra treats it as a structurally governed and grammatically autonomous language as observed in the common usage of the immediate communities of human beings. This paper analyses the linguistic and philosophical underpinnings of Hemacandra's model, particularly in light of Jaina epistemology and linguistic ethics. Through close textual analysis, comparative grammar, and theoretical interpretation, the paper repositions Hemacandra's contribution as both a descriptive and philosophical achievement in Indian linguistic history. The research affirms that Prākṛta, in Hemacandra's conception, is not merely a product of phonetic erosion or regional speech but a language of “intentional transformation” with textual and doctrinal legitimacy. The implications of this framework extend beyond grammar, touching upon language, philosophy, regional variation, and literary identity in premodern India. Ultimately, the study emphasizes the relevance of Hemacandra's insights in understanding the dynamics of linguistic change, derivation, and identity in Indian grammatical thought.

**Key Words:** prākṛta, saṃskṛta, hemacandra, jaina Grammar, siddhahemaśabdānuśāsana.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

The dynamic interplay between Saṃskṛta and Prākṛta has long fascinated scholars of Indian linguistics, religion, and literature. Saṃskṛta is traditionally regarded as the classical and sacred language, while Prākṛta has often been relegated to the status of a vernacular or simplified derivative. However, this binary view had been challenged by the sophisticated linguistic theories of Ācārya Hemacandra (c. 1089–1172 CE), a Jaina polymath whose work “Siddhahemaśabdānuśāsana” redefined Prākṛta grammar in both descriptive and philosophical terms. Hemacandra's unique contribution lies in his approach to Prākṛta- not as a corrupted form of Saṃskṛta ; however, as a legitimate linguistic system derived from Saṃskṛta through systematic transformations by giving a set of grammatical rules. He codified a model of derivation using specific grammatical operations such as lopa, āgama, and sthāna. This helped him in demonstrating that Prākṛta can be analyzed and constructed with as much precision as Saṃskṛta itself. This study explored Hemacandra's theoretical framework, and raising following questions : how does Hemacandra differentiate between Saṃskṛta and Prākṛta ? What philosophical or linguistic principles underlie this differentiation? And what does this tell us about medieval Indian attitudes toward language transformation and plurality?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

The modern academic understanding of Prākṛta owes much to 19th and 20th-century scholars like Richard Pischel. It was he who provided detailed grammatical surveys with and through a Saṃskṛta-centric lens. In his “A Grammar of the Prākṛit Languages”, Pischel examined phonological and morphological features of the identified and selected language (Pischel, 1965). However, he did not give full engagement with Indian grammatical theory. Jagdish Chandra Jain and N. Balbir expanded the understanding of Jaina contributions to Prākṛta literature (Balbir, 2003) (Jain, 1947). On the other hand, O. von Hinüber focused on manuscript traditions and textual history. However,



the internal logic of Prākṛta as articulated by Jaina grammarians—especially Hemacandra—has often been understudied (von Hinüber, 1996).

P. L. Vaidya's edition and partial translation of “Siddhahemaśabdānuśāsana” (1958) remains foundational (Vaidya, 1958). Yet, the philosophical and theoretical innovations of Hemacandra's model—his approach to language derivation and the recognition of Prākṛta's structural autonomy—deserves further attention. This study fills that gap by treating Hemacandra as both a grammarian and a linguistic theorist rooted in Jaina epistemology.

### 3. OBJECTIVES:

This paper explores the following objectives:

- To explore the theoretical distinction between Saṃskṛta and Prākṛta as outlined by Ācārya Hemacandra.
- To understand the grammatical tools (*lopa*, *āgama*, *sthāna*, *vikāra*) used for derivation.
- To examine how these rules reflect a structured linguistic transformation model.
- To highlight the influence of Jaina philosophical thought in Hemacandra's linguistic system.
- To contribute to the re-evaluation of Prākṛta as a systematic and autonomous language

### 4. METHODOLOGY:

This study employs a multi-pronged methodology:

- **Textual Analysis:** Detailed examination of primary passages from *Siddhahemaśabdānuśāsana*, focusing on rules governing derivation.
- **Comparative Linguistics:** Side-by-side analysis of Saṃskṛta and Prākṛta forms to trace derivational logic.
- **Doctrinal Interpretation:** Application of Jaina philosophical concepts such as *anekāntavāda* (non-absolutism) and *syādvāda* (conditional logic) to language theory.
- **Historical Contextualization:** Placement of Hemacandra's work in the broader context of 12th-century Jaina scholasticism and the Gujarati court.

### 5. RESULT:

The theoretical analysis yielded the following key findings:

1. Hemacandra does not treat Prākṛta as a corrupt or popular version of Saṃskṛta but as a regulated transformation guided by formal rules.
2. Prākṛta derivations are achieved via identifiable processes:
  - *Lopa*: e.g., Saṃskṛta “**bhavati**” becomes Prākṛta “**hoti**”.
  - *Āgama*: Insertions that ease pronunciation or conform to regional patterns.
  - *Sthāna*: Replacement of one sound with another, e.g., “*ṣ*” becoming “*s*”.

**Table 1: Examples of Saṃskṛta-to-Prākṛta Transformations**

Saṃskṛta Word	Prākṛta Form	Rule Applied	Description
bhavati	hoti	<i>lopa</i> (elision)	Initial <b>bha</b> becomes <b>ha</b> , medial <b>a</b> dropped
Asti	ṣi	<i>lopa</i> , <i>sthāna</i>	<b>a</b> elided, <b>s</b> retained
gacchati	gai/jāi	<i>vikāra</i> , <i>sthāna</i>	Root transformed; vowel modification
Putra	putta	<i>dvitva</i> (consonant doubling)	Assimilation in consonants
Kārya	kajja	<i>sthāna</i> , <i>vikāra</i>	<b>ry</b> > <b>jj</b> via substitution

3. His grammar accounts for regional varieties (*Mahārāṣṭrī*, *Śaurasenī*, *Māgadhī*), each with specific phonological behaviors.
4. Jaina philosophical values inform the grammar's tolerance for variation, prioritizing intelligibility, ethical speech, and contexts specially observed in the daily usages of the words by the common people.
5. Hemacandra's approach prefigures elements of modern generative grammar by tracing systematic transformations from a deep structure (Saṃskṛta) to surface forms (Prākṛta).

### 6. DISCUSSION:

The model of language given by Hemacandra may be interpreted as an early expression of transformational grammar. His rules are not merely descriptive by nature; however, they are algorithmic, guiding the generation of Prākṛta from



Samṣkṛta with appropriate precision. The shift from “bhavati” to “hoti”, or “asti” to “si”, is not arbitrary in itself. However, it is the result of layered grammatical operations provided by Hemacandra himself.

**Table 2: Grammatical Processes in Hemacandra’s Model**

Process	Sanskrit Term	Function	Example (Samṣkṛta → Prakṛta)
Elision	<i>lopa</i>	Removal of vowels/consonants	bhavati → hoti
Insertion	<i>āgama</i>	Adding sounds to ease pronunciation	rāma + -ena → rāmēṇa → rāmēṇaṃ
Substitution	<i>sthāna</i>	Replacing one letter/sound with another	dr̥ṣṭi → diṭṭhi
Modification	<i>vikāra</i>	Change of vowels or endings	asti → si
Doubling	<i>dvitva</i>	Gemination of consonants	putra → putta

Moreover, his system gives importance to “Anekāntavāda”. It is the Jaina principle of multiplicity of viewpoints. The linguistic variation is not seen as an error; however, as a contextually valid, based on region (“deśa”), usage (“prayoga”), and clarity (“spaṣṭatā”). This is seen in how *Mahārāṣṭrī* permits long vowels and elisions, while *Śaurasenī* maintains more conservative forms. By incorporating dialectal and ethical dimensions into grammar, Hemacandra surpasses earlier grammarians who confined themselves to elite language. His framework promotes a view of language as both fluid and systematic—where identity, usage, and ethics are inseparable from form.

**Table 3: Dialectal Features in Hemacandra’s Prakṛta System**

Feature Type	Mahārāṣṭrī	Śaurasenī	Māgadhi
Vowel Treatment	Long vowels preserved	Vowel shortening common	Vowel nasalization
Consonant Shift	bh → v or h	ṣ → s	r/l interchange
Elision	Aggressive	Moderate	Frequent word-final loss
Example	bhavati → hoti	dr̥ṣṭi → diṭṭhi	asti → assi

## 7. CONCLUSION:

Ācārya Hemacandra’s grammar of Prakṛta, far from being a list of altered forms, constitutes a deep linguistic theory. It affirms Prakṛta’s status as a grammatical language derived from Samṣkṛta through consistent operations. More significantly, it offers a culturally rooted understanding of language, informed by Jaina values of multiplicity, restraint, and clarity.

**Table 4: Philosophical Values Reflected in Linguistic Structure**

Jaina Principle	Linguistic Reflection	Grammatical Manifestation
<i>Anekāntavāda</i>	Acceptance of multiple dialects and forms	Regional variants treated as valid
<i>Syādvāda</i>	Conditional validity of expressions	Emphasis on context-driven derivation
<i>Ahiṃsā</i>	Linguistic restraint and clarity	Avoidance of harsh or ambiguous forms
<i>Naya</i> (partial view)	Respect for partial truths in derivation	Permits non-rigid transformations
<i>Dharma</i> (ethics)	Structured, intentional use of speech	Grammatical rules reflect ethical clarity

The paper concludes that Hemacandra’s “*Siddhahemaśabdānuśāsana*” should be studied not only as a Jaina grammatical treatise; however, as a landmark in Indian linguistic thought, offering principles relevant even to modern linguistics.

## 8. LIMITATIONS:

- The study was limited to Hemacandra’s grammar and does not deeply compare it with contemporaneous or earlier grammarians (e.g., Pāṇini, Vararuci).
- It excludes later Prakṛta developments like Apabhraṃśa or influence on modern Indo-Aryan languages.
- The interpretive reading of Jaina philosophy in grammar needs deeper interdisciplinary collaboration.



## 9. RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. There must be future studies should compare Hemacandra's model with Pāṇini's "Aṣṭādhyāyī" to highlight Indian models of language derivation.
2. There must be a digital grammar project based on Hemacandra's rules can aid language learners and researchers.
3. An observational study integrating Prākṛta studies into mainstream linguistics curricula can counter long-standing biases favoring Saṃskṛta.
4. One must conduct and study Hemacandra's linguistic ethics offer models for culturally sensitive language teaching.
5. Further research must be conducted on how Jaina metaphysics shaped grammatical theory can enrich the history of ideas.

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