

## Bhikkhu Bodhi on Bahubbīhi Compounds (extract from Reading the Buddha’s Discourses in Pāli)

*Bahubbīhi*, the relative or attributive compound

The bahubbīhi is not a different kind of compound but a compound of any of the preceding types used as an adjective to describe a noun external to itself. Because these compounds necessarily refer to something outside themselves, they are said to be “exocentric.”<sup>1</sup> The noun so described may be present only implicitly, understood from the context, in which case the bahubbīhi does service for the absent noun. A bahubbīhi must end in a noun; it is declined like the noun it qualifies and must agree with it in gender, number, and case. This means that a feminine noun at the end of a bahubbīhi, used to describe a masculine noun, will become masculine in gender, and vice versa. A neuter noun will take on the gender of the noun it describes, as when a monk with a well-developed mind is described as *subhāvitacitto*.

Some examples in English might shed light on the bahubbīhi compound. When we speak of a laptop computer, the word “laptop” does not refer to the top of the lap but to a computer compact enough to fit on one’s lap. “Laptop” is then an adjective describing the computer. If we drop the word “computer,” the context will still make it clear that the word “laptop” refers to the machine, not to the top of my lap. If we call a girl a “redhead,” we are using this word to designate the girl by the color of her hair, not to refer to the girl as a head that is red.

A good example of bahubbīhis derived from kammadhāraya compounds can be seen in the description of beings caught in saṃsāra (at **I,11**) as *avijjānīvaraṇā taṇhāsaṃyojanā*, “having ignorance as a hindrance [and] craving as a fetter.” On their own the two compounds, *avijjānīvaraṇa* and *taṇhāsaṃyojana*, are kammadhārayas, “the hindrance that is ignorance” and “the fetter that is craving,” but in this sentence they function as adjectives describing *sattā*, beings.

A bahubbīhi based on a tappurisa is seen in the expression *āmisacakkhu maccho*, “a fish with an eye for bait” (at **III,11**). The compound *āmisacakkhu* on its own is a dative tappurisa, “an eye for bait,” but here it serves as an adjective describing the fish. Once the fish falls for the bait, it is described as *maccho gilitabaliso*, “a fish that has swallowed the hook,” where *gilitabaliso* is a bahubbīhi composed of a past participle and a noun. Similarly, when it is said of the Buddha (at **III,12.4**) that he is *svimuttacitto*, “well liberated in mind,” the entire compound is a bahubbīhi, with the neuter noun *citta* at the end of the compound becoming a masculine in agreement with *bhagavā*.

Bahubbīhis can be constructed from an adverb and a noun, creating a kammadhāraya compound employed as an adjective to describe an external subject. An example (at **II,13.2**) is seen when someone wishes: *Evamrūpo siyaṃ anāgatamaddhānaṃ ... evaṃviññāṇo siyaṃ anāgatamaddhānaṃ*, “May I be of such form in the future ... may I be of such consciousness in the future.” Each of the nouns designating the aggregates is here transformed into the

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<sup>1</sup> So Collins 135.

masculine singular nominative to agree with the implicit subject, the first person pronoun *ahaṃ*.

A bahubbīhi can be created from a compound of a pronoun and a noun. This is commonly done with the demonstrative pronoun *taṃ* (which may take the form *tad* before a vowel). Thus it is said of a certain tree: *so ... mahārukkho tadāhāro tadupādāno ciraṃ dīghamaddhānaṃ tiṭṭheyya*; “that great tree, with that [sap] as nutriment, with that [sap] as sustenance, would stand for a very long time” (IV,9.1). Here *tadāhāro* and *tadupādāno* are bahubbīhis derived from kammadhārayas: the sap itself is the nutriment and sustenance.

Interrogative bahubbīhi compounds can be formed with interrogative pronouns, as seen in the following inquiry, where the interrogative compounds function as adjectives in agreement with *dukkhaṃ*: *idaṃ nu kho dukkhaṃ kiṃnidānaṃ kiṃsamudayaṃ kiṃjātikaṃ kiṃpabhavaṃ*; “Now this suffering: what is its cause, what is its origin, what is its genesis, what is its source?” (IV,8.1). Another example occurs when a visitor asks the Buddha: *Bhavaṃ pana gotamo kimānisaṃso viharati*, “But for what benefit does Master Gotama live?” Here the interrogative *kimānisaṃso* describes *bhavaṃ gotamo*.

Bahubbīhis are also found when the prefix *sa-*, “with, accompanied by,” is added to a noun used to qualify another noun. An example is the description of the “ocean of the eye” (at III,10) as *saūmiṃ sāvaṭṭaṃ sagāhaṃ sarakkhasaṃ*, “with waves, with whirlpools, with sharks, with demons,” where each of the words beginning with *sa-* is a bahubbīhi, agreeing with *cakkhusamuddaṃ*, a masculine accusative. Similarly, negating a noun with the prefix *vīta-*, “devoid of,” turns it into a bahubbīhi, as when the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta section on contemplation of mind speaks of *cittaṃ*, the mind, as *vītarāgaṃ, vītadosaṃ, vītamohaṃ*, “devoid of lust, devoid of hatred, devoid of delusion.”

Compounds of nouns can be turned into bahubbīhis by the addition of certain suffixes, particularly *-ka*, *-ika*, *-iya*, and *-in*. Thoughts about the four noble truths are said to be *ādibrahmacariyakā*, “pertinent to the fundamentals of the spiritual life.” Here the suffix *-kā* enables the compound to function as an adjective describing *vitakkā*. The path itself is described as *aṭṭhaṅgiko*, a bahubbīhi composed of the numeral *aṭṭha*, “eight,” and *aṅga*, “factor,” given an adjectival function in relation to the noun *maggo* by the masculine suffix *-iko*.

Bahubbīhi compounds can be built upon combinations of other compounds. For example, it is said of the cultivation of the path factors (at V,iii.5): *bhikkhu sammāsamādhiṃ bhāveti rāgavinayapariyosānaṃ dosavinayapariyosānaṃ mohavinayapariyosānaṃ*, “a monk develops right concentration, which has as its culmination the removal of lust, which has as its culmination the removal of hatred, which has as its culmination the removal of delusion.” Each of the three bahubbīhis describing right concentration—for instance, *rāgavinayapariyosānaṃ*—contains an internal genitive tappurisa (*rāgavinaya*) joined into a kammadhāraya (which equates *pariyosāna* with *rāgavinaya*), yet the complex compound describes an exocentric subject, *sammāsamādhi*, and is thus a bahubbīhi. Another example is seen when the Buddha describes himself (at V,ii.5.1) with a four-term bahubbīhi as *vijjāvimuttiṭṭhānisaṃso*, “one who has the fruit and benefit of clear knowledge and liberation.” This complex compound contains two subordinate dvanda compounds joined in a genitive tappurisa relationship, but as a whole it functions as an adjective qualifying *tathāgato* and is thus a bahubbīhi.