

GESTURE AND SPEECH IN THE ABHIDHAMMA PITAKA, THE CONCEPT OF THE HIGHER DOCTRINE

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1. Introduction

Linguists and language learners agree that language is a system of communication which consists of a set of sounds and written symbols. Man uses language as a tool for communication. Among the properties that are most characteristic of human language, sound is one. However, sign languages, which make use of the visual channel, are considered languages as well, since they have the same level of complexity and expressiveness as spoken languages. The early 20th century witnessed a new proposal in language theory. That is the Speech Act theory. Its main theme describes how man uses speech to accomplish an action. Every time a speaker makes an utterance, he aims that an action be carried out. In this way a speaker performs a speech act.

From the above definition of language and the Speech Act theory, one can determine the function of language, or how man uses language as a tool for communication in order to obtain a result according to his free will. Such knowledge is interesting and deepens our understanding of human language as a whole. The writer hopes that a study of Viññatti-rūpa, or gesture and speech, in the Abhidhamma Pitaka will offer another overview of the language system. Eventually an exploration into the two modes of communication found in the Lord Buddha's concept of the Higher Doctrine will help us to advance our knowledge and understanding of the nature of language and its function.

Where is Viññatti-rūpa from?

Vinnatti-rupa or mode of communication, is one class of 28 forms. A form is a component in the Ultimate Reality or Abhidhamma.

What is the Ultimate Reality?

Our Lord Buddha has explained that dhamma or nature can be classified into two types:

1. The Conventional Reality is something that we coin, what we assume exists but it does not. We coin a word to name it, e.g., man, table, chair.

2. The Ultimate Reality means the existing nature, the real nature that will not alter, the real thing. There are four Ultimate Realities. They are Citta or mind, Cetasika or mental coefficients, Rūpa or form, and Nirvana or the extinction of all defilements and suffering.

Citta, or mind, is dhamma-- or nature that acknowledges the sense-object. Mind is the one who knows. What mind knows is sense-objects. Citta experiences its objects. There are altogether eighty-nine types of Citta.

Cetasika (mental coefficients) is nature that goes together with Citta and leads Citta to behave as it should. There are altogether fifty-two kinds of Cetasika.

Rūpa or form is nature that breaks or falls away by cold and heat.

Nirvana is nature that is the end of defilements and suffering.

Citta, Cetasika, Rūpa and Nirvana constitute the nature that is real, that really exists. They are Ultimate Realities. The Four Ultimates can be verified and learned. They are sense-objects for wisdom which can be reached through research, reflection, realization, and practice.

In order to understand Viññatti-rūpa, we have to study two characteristics of the Ultimate Reality:

1. The Common Characteristics are the general characteristics of all components. They are impermanence, state of conflict, and not-self. The Common Characteristics are composed of three characteristics:

- a) Anicca-lakkhana, impermanence, is the state or characteristic that is not stable, that does not exist forever.
- b) Dukkha-lakkhana, illness or suffering, is the state or characteristic that cannot endure, that has to break and decompose.
- c) Anatta-lakkhana, the not-self, is the state or characteristic that is empty, that is non-self, that cannot be commanded.

The three characteristics of the Common Characteristics are called Tri-lakkhana or the Three Characteristics of Existence.

Citta, Cetasika, and Rūpa possess all three characteristics, or the common characteristics, completely, but Nirvana has only one common characteristic, that is the Anatta-lakkhana.

2. The Specific Characteristics are special features that regularly and specifically stay in nature or dhamma. They are special states of each nature, which are never alike. The specific characteristics are composed of four parts:

- a) Lakkhana, or Characteristic, means the quality, mark, or specific state for such nature.
- b) Rasa, or Function, means the function of such dhamma or nature which the functions according to its characteristic.
- c) Paccupatthana, or Manifestation, means the consequence that comes from such a function.
- d) Padatthana, or Proximate Cause, means a factor which directly causes such a characteristic. In other words, proximate cause is the cause that immediately precedes and produces an effect on such a manifestation.

Since the Specific Characteristics have four parts, they may be called Lakkhanaticcatuka or the Qualifiers, which means dhamma or nature that has four parts or characteristics.

Citta, Cetasika, and Rūpa possess all the Qualifiers or the Specific Characteristics, but Nirvana has only three: characteristic, function, and manifestation.

Nirvana has no proximate cause because it is nature that is beyond all factor-causes.

As for Conventional Reality, it has neither Common Characteristics nor Specific Characteristics because Conventional Reality does not have its own state of being. It is named or coined according to man's conventions.

Rūpa, or Form, is the nature that can break or fall away. To know which is Rūpa, one of the Four Ultimates ruled by Citta, one has to rely on the specific characteristic, i.e., the four specific parts described above.

There are altogether 28 classes of Rūpa, all of which can be divided into smaller categories. They are 7 Nipphannarupa, or the formed, and 4 Anipphanna-rūpa or the nonformed.

Nipphanna-rūpa is the form that has its own state. There are 18 of them. Nos. I-VII are called nipphanna-rūpa.

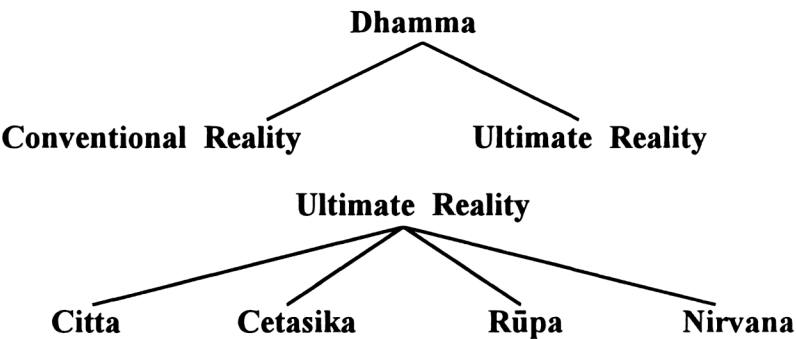


Figure 1 : Dhamma in terms of Reality

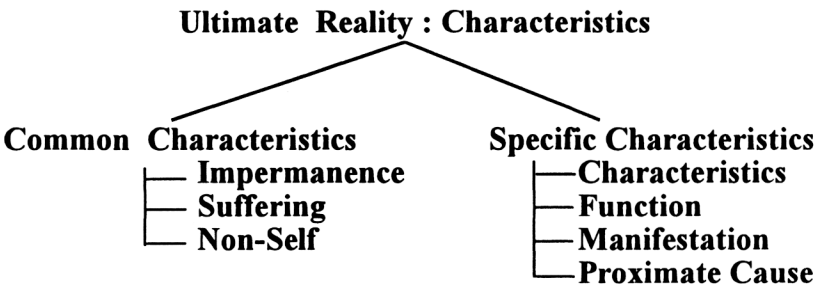


Figure 2 : Ultimate Reality in terms of Characteristics

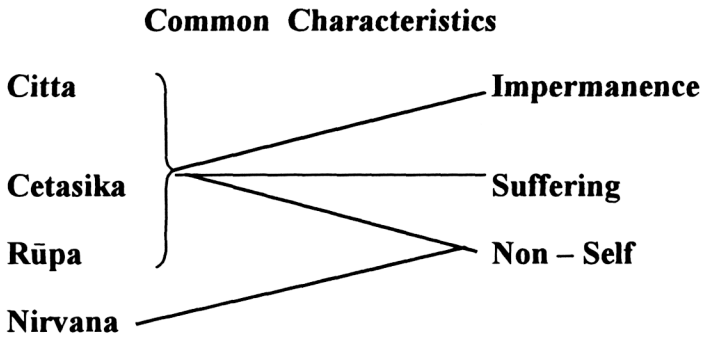


Figure 3 : Ultimate Reality in terms of Common Characteristics

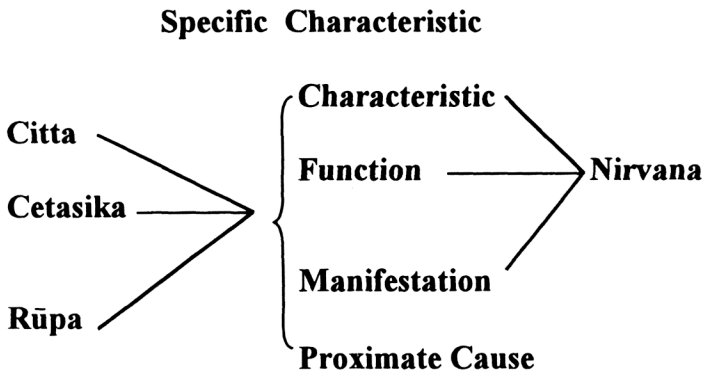


Figure 4 : Ultimate Reality in terms of Specific Characteristics

Anipphana-rūpa or the nonformed, is the form that possesses none of its own state. There are 10 anipphana-rūpa. Nos. VIII-XI are called the nonformed.

Nos. I-VII belong to nipphana-rūpa, the formed :

I The four great elements (Mahābhūta)

1. pathavī or the element of solidity
2. āpo or the fluid element
3. tejo or the heat element, including heat and cold.
4. vāyo or the element of motion or vibration

II Sensitive material qualities (Pasada-rūpa)

5. the eyes
6. the ears
7. the nose
8. the tongue
9. the body

III The material qualities of sex

10. femininity
11. masculinity

IV 12. The material quality of life (Jivita-rūpa)

V 13. The material quality of nutrition (Ahāra-rūpa)

VI The material qualities of the sense-fields (Visaya-rūpa)

14. form
15. sound
16. smell
17. taste

VII 18. The physical basis of mind (Hadaya-rūpa)

Nos. VIII – XI belong to Anipphana-rūpa, the nonformed.

VIII 19. The material quality of delimitation

IX The material quality of communication (Viññatti-rūpa)

20. kaya – viññatti or bodily intimation; gesture
21. vaci – viññatti, or verbal intimation; speech.

X The three plasticities or mutability (Vikāra-rūpa)

22. lightness
23. pliancy
24. adaptability

XI The four salient features (Lakkhana-rūpa)

25. integration
26. continuity
27. decay
28. impermanence

Viññatti-rūpa is the 9th kind of rūpa. Among the 28 kinds of rūpa, viññatti-rūpa is the only one that involves movement.

What is viññatti-rūpa?

Viññatti-rūpa is a form that conveys thoughts, feelings,

etc., so that others will get the meaning or know an intended objective. Viññatti-rūpa can move only when it is ordered to do so by Citta or mind. Movement includes bodily movement, the movement of sounds in speech, and posture. All of these acts depend on Viññatti-rūpa, which in turn is activated by Citta.

Any form that conveys the speaker's purpose is called viññatti-rūpa. People know each other's Citta or mind by relying on such rūpa or form. That is why viññatti-rūpa can be termed "modes of communication."

The performance of viññatti-rūpa is commonly called the movement of the body and the movement of sounds in speech.

There are two types of viññatti-rūpa:

1. Kaya-viññatti is that peculiar movement of a person's body whose purpose is made known to others.
2. Vaci-viññatti is that peculiar movement of a person's sounds in speech whose purpose is made known to others.

Kayaviññatti – rūpa

The movement of the body is composed of two types.

1. Bodhanakaya- viññatti is the movement of the body intended to convey the meaning to others, for example, by waving one's hands, beckoning with one's hand, etc. An example of such a movement intended to convey some kind of message is that performed by Pra Mahosot (Bhodisattiva) when he met a young woman, Amara. Instead of asking her directly if she was married, he raised a fist as an enigmatic gesture. In answer to his enigmatic gesture, she bared her hand showing that she was still single. This is what we now call sign language, which varies from culture to culture, from custom to custom.

2. Pavattanakaya-viññatti is the bodily movement that is intended to convey any meaning to others, for example, standing, walking, sitting, and running. Although we do not have any specific intention when we change our posture in this way, other people know which posture we are performing.

The kayaviññatti-rūpa has the following specific characteristics:

- a) There is a performance to convey meaning to others. This element is called a characteristic.
- b) There is an expression of meaning as function.

- c) There is the movement of the body as manifestation
- d) There is an element involving vibration based on a person's heart; this is called a proximate cause.

Note that *kaya-viññatti* is not perceived by the eyes but by the mind – or *Citta* – only. When a man raises his hand, what the other person sees is a visible object that moves or the three plasticities of a hand. Then he thinks of its meaning using *Citta* through the doorway of the mind. Finally he understands that the man might want him to do this or that.

When the three plasticities, a kind of *rūpa*, appear, e.g., a moving hand, the form is perceived not only by man but by animals as well. One example of this is when dogs, birds, and hens congregate in one place or when a man holds a stick or picks up a stone showing that he is going to hit some creature or throw a stone at it. Animals know that the man wants to hit them. As a result, they scatter in all directions.

Vaci – viññattirūpa

Vaci-viññattirūpa or movement of sounds in speech is composed of two types:

1. *Bodhanavaci-viññatti* is an utterance whose meaning is purposefully made known to others, e.g., shouting, calling out someone's name, telling a story, a conversation, etc.

2. *Pavattanavaci-viññatti* is an utterance whose meaning is not intended to be made known to others, e.g., an exclamation, a cough, a sneeze. Although the producer has no intention to convey some kind of meaning to others or does not specify any particular meaning, the hearer can differentiate between an exclamation, a cough, a sneeze, etc.

Vaci-viññattirūpa has the following characteristics:

It involves a performance intended to convey its meaning. This is called a characteristic.

- a) The element involving an expression of meaning, is called function.

- b) The actual utterance or speech is seen as manifestation.

- c) There is the earth element -- based on the heart -- as a proximate cause.

Analysis

1. Viññattirūpa or the two modes of communication, is one form of rūpa. It covers both gesture and speech, the non-verbal and the verbal.

Viññattirūpa is divided into two parts, the movement of the body and the movement of sounds in speech, each of which has two purposes. One purpose is the movement that conveys the meaning, while the other has no intention of conveying meaning to others.

In terms of its mode of communication, Viññattirūpa is an extensive and general approach to communication

2. Gesture and speech in Viññattirūpa have four specific characteristics, which describe how gesture and speech take place and how the four characteristics work together at the same time to produce bodily movement or speech. The description of the specific characteristics and how they work is quite detailed and specific.

3. Viññattirūpa is one of 28 rūpas or forms, while Rūpa is a component of the four Ultimate Realities. To understand Viññattirūpa, one has to understand the definition of the four components: Citta, Cetasika, Rūpa, and Nirvana, how they function in each rūpa and how their functions are interrelated in order to produce a rūpa, or form.

4. To understand how these four specific characteristics work together in each Viññattirūpa, one has to study in greater depth the components, the features, the functions and the interrelation of Citta, Cetasika, and Rūpa. In fact, one has to conduct further research into the four Ultimate Realities in order to understand the explanation of a proximate cause for speech; for example, there is the earth element of mind basis as a proximate cause for speech, so what is the earth element? What is the mind basis? How does the earth element of the mind-basis become a proximate cause for speech, and how does it work in relation to the other three characteristics of speech? There is a lot more to learn in order to answer these questions.

5. An interesting point regarding the specific characteristics of Viññattirūpa is the major role of Citta or mind. Notice that Citta is the nature which orders the mind-based element of motion to be activated in a person. Citta is also the one that perceives the meaning of what is conveyed to that particular person. The movement of the body reflects the

Citta of a person who performs the Viññattirūpa, i.e., what he has in his mind.

The following pictures illustrate kaya-viññattirūpa (gesture) and vaci-viññattirūpa (speech).



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Picture 1: How cruel! An Indonesian policeman jumped and angrily kicked a demonstrator near ex-president Suharto's residence in Jakarta on Tuesday. A large group of students protested and demanded that Suharto's family members and his clan be investigated for corruption.

Explanation: This is an example of kaya-viññattirūpa--body movement intended to convey meaning to others. We can tell how angry the man was from his bodily movement. The movement reflects his state of mind.



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ตายซะ-นางปรัก อ็อก ชุน หญิงเกาหลีใต้ร้องไห้และตะโกนให้ คิม แด จุง ผู้นำเกาหลีใต้จงตายเสีย ระหว่างร่วมชุมนุมกับกลุ่มแม่และภรรยาของชาวประมง ในกรุงโซล วานนี้ เรียกร้องให้รัฐบาลช่วยเจรจากับเกาหลีเหนือให้ยอมปล่อยตัวลูกและสามีของพวกเขา ซึ่งเป็นชาวประมงและเชื่อว่าถูกเกาหลีเหนือลักพาตัวไปตั้งแต่ช่วงทศวรรษ 1970-1980.

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Picture 2: Drop dead. Mrs. Park Ok Soon, a South Korean Woman cried and yelled at the South Korean leader, Kim Dae Jung, telling him to drop dead. This is a demonstration of fishermen's mothers and wives in Seoul yesterday. They demanded that the government start talks with the North Korean government to release their sons and husbands believed to be kidnapped by North Korea during 1970-1980.

Explanation: The facial expression and body movement of the woman show anger and discontent, fuelled by desire. She wants the North Korean government to free her husband and son.



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Picture 3: He is still a hero. Football fans throng around “Zico” Kiattisak Senamueng, their all-time favorite. Being disappointed, Zico has ended his contracts with the Huddersfield Football Club and flew home recently.

Question: Zico makes a gesture. What does it mean conventionally?

Application

A study of Viññattirūpa, or gesture and speech in Abhidhamma Pitaka, or Ultimate Reality, offers an alternative approach to the nature of language and its function. We learn about the four Ultimates and how they are interrelated. We

also study the Common Characteristics and the Specific Characteristics of the four Ultimates. We gain insight into the nature of the specific characteristics of Viññattirūpa and how they work.

As a language theory, Viññattirūpa is extensive, meticulous in its detail and interesting. There is a lot more to learn in order to gain insight into the two modes of communication described by the Lord Buddha. One cannot help feeling that Abhidhamma Pitaka is like a vast ocean of knowledge waiting for researchers to explore.

The application of Viññattirūpa by spiritual means is deep and delicate. To understand Viññattirūpa is to understand nature or dhamma, the internal and the external nature of oneself and those of our fellow men.

Application of Viññattirūpa.

Our case study is exemplified by picture 3: the body movement of Zico. Zico raised his fingers in a V shape to mean “victory.” This is the conventional interpretation. What is the interpretation in terms of Abhidhamma ?

Since movement comes from Citta, ordered by Citta, movement is a cause, and usually a cause leads to an effect. According to Buddhism, the body movement (a cause) that a person performs can tell the future consequence that the man will obtain. In other words, the Lord Buddha teaches us to observe and to understand not only the meaning of movement but also the consequence of the act as well.

Zico’s Citta was influenced by one Cetasika, Mana or conceit. In this context, conceit reflects an attitude that shows that one has too high an opinion of one’s abilities or importance. Mana Cetasika is the nature that appears presumptuous or being proud of oneself. Its specific characteristics are :

Pride in oneself as the main characteristics, praise association as function, strong desire as manifestation, and greed, which is an erroneous opinion as proximate cause.

The more we observe and learn of the nature of gesture and speech, the more we understand dhamma or nature. What is the use of such understanding? It can teach us a valuable lesson. Moreover, we will become faster in terms of observation and learning. Eventually we will penetrate the nature of the three Ultimates: *Citta, Cetasika, and Rūpa and how they work.*

Our understanding of the three Ultimates will finally lead to the understanding of the fourth one, Nirvana, or the extinction of all defilements and suffering. Let us take a look at the application of Viññattirūpa as explained by Reverend Sangwornsamatiwattr (1989: 614)

The wise person should examine kaya-viññattirūpa with critical reflection. He then will see that bodily movement intended to convey meaning to others is neither a creature nor a man, nor ourselves, nor other people. It is an object of seeing, an aggregate, the twelve bases, a mental object, the Noble Truth of Suffering. The rūpa moves. Body movement occurs including the entire spectrum of postures, e.g., sitting, walking. Once the body movement occurs, it commonly falls away. It is impermanence, suffering and not-self. All things are seen. Yet things cannot exist forever. All things fall away. They cannot be commanded. If you consider the Lord Buddha's teaching like this in a consistent manner, you might rid yourself of suffering once and for all.

From the Reverend's words, we may conclude that reflection on Viññattirūpa can lead to an understanding of the three Characteristics : Impermanence, Suffering and Not-Self which eventually lead to the end of all suffering, Nirvana – the supreme goal of Buddhism.

Conclusion

When we study Viññattirūpa in the Abhidhamma Pitaka, the Higher Doctrine, in terms of a linguistic approach and we observe its application by Buddhist scholars, we realize the omniscience of the Lord Buddha. We also recognize with gratitude the virtue of Lord Buddha's, especially his three main virtues.

First, the Lord Buddha's wisdom. The teaching of the Buddha on the Abhidhamma Pitaka, the Further Doctrine is a good example. Lord Buddha explained the Abhidhamma in detail to his followers and he described it in an extensive and exhaustive manner. Our study on Viññattirūpa, just one type of the 28 rūpas allows us a glimpse into the Abhidhamma.

However, it is enough to make us realize the wisdom of the Lord Buddha although we are well aware that we have a lot more to learn.

Second, the Lord Buddha's purification. The Enlightened One has no defilements and we can tell from his actions that he has none of the impurities of other sentient beings. Of the two types of devotional offering in terms of material and practice, the Lord Buddha praised practice. He appreciated the development of his followers in terms of practice. He required no material offerings from them in return for his preaching. Besides, whenever the Lord Buddha gave a sermon, he did so directly and frankly without concealing anything, i.e., the Lord Buddha was a giver in the true sense of the word.

Third, the Lord Buddha's compassion. Once he became enlightened, the Lord Buddha preached for 45 years. He expounded the Doctrine so that the Buddhist assembly could practice the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering.

As for our case study -- Viññattirūpa-- we have learned about the four specific characteristics of speech and gesture and how they work together simultaneously. We have also observed the chief role of Citta as the commander and the receiver of the action. We have accepted the law of cause-effect in the Teachings and examined the application of Viññattirūpa until we gained some insight into the language system, as expressed in the Higher Doctrine. Above all, we are grateful for the knowledge that the Lord Buddha--in all his compassion-- taught us. As Buddhists, we need to learn, accumulate and practice such knowledge from now on, and forever, until we reach the Final goal.

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