

# To Classify Words

## Western and Sanskrit Grammatical Approaches

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Even though the analysis of language in *units* seems to have appeared as essential for all traditions of language study, to classify words consists in an activity which is neither self-evident nor homogeneous: the classifier (whether he is an individual scholar, a school of thought, or a trend) has an epistemological aim (i.e. he has something to explain) and one must consider the regularities (hence the categories) he establishes on this basis. Epistemological aims varied greatly throughout history, from one tradition of language study to another, and even within one and the same tradition. Today, specialists of different trends in linguistics use different categories, and the criticisms they address to each other and the debates they have on this topic remain vigorous. The analysis and description of Sanskrit in the perspective of computational linguistics inevitably bring different grammatical theories and different classifications face to face. In this context, and without calling into question their legitimacy (my approach is rooted in the perspective of the history of ideas), it is perhaps not totally useless to recall, even briefly, the presuppositions that these theories present.