

# Don't stop *mā* now: A New Approach to Prohibitive Constructions in the *R̥gveda* and the *Atharvaveda*

IAN HOLLENBAUGH  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

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## 1 *mā* Introduction

- 1.1 In Vedic Sanskrit a negative command, or prohibition, is regularly expressed by *mā* plus the injunctive form of a verb (i.e., the unaugmented verbal stem with secondary endings).
- 1.2 These may be built to Present, Aorist, or (rarely) Perfect tense-aspect stems.
  - I refer to these respectively as “Pres. inj.,” “Aor. inj.,” and “Pf. inj.” throughout.
  - All textual citations are from the *R̥gveda* (*RV*), *Atharvaveda* (*AV*), and the *Khilāni* (*Kh.*).
  - Citations of *Atharvaveda* are to the Śāunaka recension (*AVŚ*) unless otherwise marked as Pāippalāda (*AVP*).
  - Translations are mine except where noted.
  - In numbered textual examples, **boldface** is used for the relevant verb form, and underlining is used to highlight nearby adverbial or contextual elements that help decide on a particular reading.
- 1.3 Hoffmann (1967) hypothesizes a semantic distribution for the three tense-aspect stems in prohibitions, with the Aor. inj. expressing one type of prohibition and the Pres. and Pf. inj. expressing another.
- 1.4 Hoffmann's (1967:44, 70, 91) primary semantic distinction is between what he terms ‘preventive’ (Aor. inj.) and ‘inhibitive’ (Pres./Pf. inj.). These are both types of interpretations or “readings” of a prohibitive verb.
  - 1.4.1 *mā* + Aor. inj. = “preventive.”
    - **Preventive:** *Don't be alarmed by what I am about to tell you.*
      - I.e., LET IT NOT BE THE CASE THAT YOU WILL BE ALARMED.
      - Presupposition: I'm afraid you *will*.
  - 1.4.2 *mā* + Pres. inj. or Pf. inj. = “inhibitive.”
    - **Inhibitive:** *Don't leave me!; Don't cry! (= Stop crying!! Don't keep crying!); etc.*
      - I.e., LET IT NOT BE THE CASE THAT YOU CONTINUE CRYING.
      - Presupposition: You currently *are*.

1.5 Aor. inj. with preventive reading:

- (1) *mā no vadhīr indara mā pārā dā mā naḥ priyā bhójanāni prá moṣīḥ āṇḍā mā no maghavañ chakra nír bhen mā naḥ pátrā bhet sahájānuṣāṇi* (RV I.104.8).

‘Don’t smite us, Indra; don’t hand us over. Don’t steal our dear delights.

Don’t split apart our “eggs,” o bounteous and powerful one; don’t split our “cups” along with their contents’ (tr. Jamison and Brereton 2014:248).

1.6 Pres. inj. ((2a)–(2b)) and (rare) Pf. inj. (2c) with inhibitive readings:

- (2) a. *śrudhī hávam indra mā riṣanyaḥ* (RV II.11.1a).

‘Hear (our) summons, Indra; stop doing damage’.

- b. *ví uchā duhitar divo mā cirāṃ tanuthā āpaḥ* (RV V.79.9ab).

‘Shine forth, Daughter of Heaven; don’t stretch out [= delay] your work any longer’ (cf. Hoffmann 1967:79).

- c. *sóma íd vaḥ sutó astu kálayo mā bibhītana ápéd eṣá dhvasmā ayati svayám ghaiṣó ápāyati* (RV VIII.66.15).

‘Let just your soma be pressed. Kalis, stop fearing: this miasma will go away; by itself it will go away’ (tr. Jamison and Brereton 2014:1155).

## 2 *mā* Problem

2.1 Hoffmann’s (1967) theory has gone essentially unchallenged since its formulation and is not uncommonly presented as *communis opinio* (e.g., Willi 2018:398, Clackson 2007:162, Willmott 2007:106).

2.2 Such a semantic contrast between Aor. and Pres. inj. in prohibitions is said to provide our “clearest” evidence in support of the supposed perfective/imperfective aspectual contrast between Aorist and Present stems in Vedic (Kiparsky 1998:46; cf. similarly Dahl 2010:23–4, 244–9, 323–5, though here the distinction is between perfective vs. *neutral* aspect).

2.3 Yet a re-examination both of Hoffmann’s (1967) treatment and of the relevant data in *RV* and *AV* reveals that the distribution he reports is only rarely borne out in the texts.

2.4 For one thing, there are many clear counterexamples in both directions:

2.4.1 On the one hand, we find Pres. (3a) and Pf. (3b) inj. in preventive sense (admitted by Hoffmann 1967:88–90):

- (3) PREVENTIVE PRES. AND PF. INJ.

- a. *mā jásvane vṛṣabha no rarīthā mā te revátaḥ sakhiyé riṣāma* (RV VI.44.11ab).

‘Give us not to exhaustion, bull. Let us not come to harm in our comradeship with you, the wealthy’ (tr. Jamison and Brereton 2014:827).

- b. *māré asmád ví mumuco* (RV III.41.8a).

‘Do not unharness at a distance from us’ (tr. Jamison and Brereton 2014:526).

2.4.2 On the other, we find Aor. inj. in inhibitive sense (admitted by Hoffmann (1967:72–3), *pace* Dahl 2010:324: “Aorist Injunctive forms invariably have a preventive meaning in prohibitive clauses”):

(4) INHIBITIVE AOR. INJ.

a. *ní vartadhvam mānu gāta* (RV X.19.1a).

‘Turn back. **Don’t keep going**’ [NB: NOT <sup>x</sup>*mā(nu) jigāta*] (tr. Jamison and Brereton 2014:1402).

b. *mā aré asmán maghavañ jiyók kaḥ* (RV VII.22.6c).

‘**Don’t spend/stop spending a long time** at a distance from us, o bounteous one’.

(Admitted as inhibitive by Hoffmann (1967:73)).

2.4.3 Examples (3a) and (5) show how prohibitions containing Pres./Pf. inj. often co-occur alongside prohibitions containing Aor. inj., without obvious difference in meaning.

(5) CO-OCCURRENCE OF PRES. INJ. AND AOR. INJ.

*mā kāsya yakṣām sādām id dhuró gā*<sub>[AOR.]</sub> *mā veśāsya praminató mā āpēḥ*  
*mā bhrātur agne anṛjor ṛṇām ver*<sub>[PRES.]</sub> *mā sākhyur dākṣaṃ ripór bhujema*<sub>[AOR.]</sub>  
 (RV IV.3.13)

‘**Don’t ever chase after**<sub>[AOR.]</sub> (us, as) the specter of a nobody, a crooked man—neither of a tricky neighbor, nor of a friend.

**Do not pursue**<sub>[PRES.]</sub> the debt of a dishonest brother (against us), Agni. **May we not pay for**<sub>[AOR.]</sub> the “skill” of a cheating partner’ (tr. Jamison and Brereton 2014:562–3).

NB: Pres. inj. *mā veḥ* is considered preventive also by Hoffmann (1967:88).

(On the optative *bhujema* see Hoffmann 1967:95–7.)

2.4.4 Examples (4a) and (5) demonstrate a further peculiarity of prohibitions in Vedic: One and the same form can be used in both inhibitive (4a) and preventive (5) sense, in this case the root Aor. inj. *mā gā* ‘don’t go/stop going!’, but elsewhere the Pres. inj. as well, as in (6).

(6) PRES. INJ. TO  $\sqrt{guh}$  ‘HIDE’ WITH BOTH READINGS

a. *āvis kṛṇuṣva rūpāni mātmanam āpa gūhathāḥ*  
*ātho sahasracakṣo tvāṃ prāti paśyāḥ kimīdīnaḥ* (AVŚ IV.20.5 ≈ AVP: VIII.6.11)

‘Make manifest (your) forms; **do not hide yourself away (any longer)**; then may you, O thousand-eyed one, look upon the *kimīdīns*’.

b. *kīm it te viṣṇo paricākṣiyam bhūt prá yád vavakṣé śipiviṣṭó asmi*  
*mā várpo asmád āpa gūha etád yád anyárūpaḥ samithé babhūtha* (RV VII.100.6)

‘Was (this speech) of yours to be disregarded, when you proclaimed of yourself: “I am Śipiviṣṭa”?’

**Do not hide away** this shape from us, when you have appeared in another form in the clash.’ (tr. Jamison and Brereton 2014:1010).

2.5 Hoffmann’s (1967) proposal, then, becomes difficult to maintain.

2.5.1 If either tense-aspect stem can have either meaning, we must conclude that tense-aspect stem selection alone is insufficient to retrieve the reading intended by the speaker and, conversely, that the readings intended by the speaker do not determine tense-aspect stem selection.

2.5.2 Thus, the semantic grounds for assuming an inhibitive/preventive distinction are shaky at best and, particularly in the often opaque passages of *RV* and *AV*, difficult or impossible to determine with certainty.

### 3 *mā* Proposals

#### 3.1 Semantic proposal

3.1.1 I propose, then, *contra* Hoffmann 1967, that

- 3.1.1.1 i. the morphological tense-aspect stem (Aor. or Pres./Pf. inj.) does not determine the semantic reading of the prohibition, nor does the preventive/inhibitive distinction arise by the selection of one tense-aspect stem or the other.
- ii. In other words, there is no *grammaticalized* contrast of preventive vs. inhibitive prohibitions in Vedic. The verbal morphology plays no role in this semantic distinction.

3.1.1.2 Instead, the preventive/inhibitive distinction arises

- i. by the LEXICAL SEMANTICS of a particular root or root–preverb collocation, or
- ii. by PRAGMATIC CONTEXT, which may optionally be made more explicit (i.e., specified lexically/semantically) by the inclusion of an adverbial element.

3.1.2 Thus, we find most roots consistently attested in prohibitions in one tense-aspect stem form or the other, with competing forms to the same root being quite rare.

3.1.2.1 Out of 98 verbal bases (i.e., roots + derived stems, such as denominatives) attested in prohibitions in *RV*, just 9 attest competing Aor. ~ Pres./Pf. pairs in the prohibitive construction ( $\approx 9\%$ ). In *AV*, the number is 10, this time out of 86 verbal bases ( $\approx 12\%$ ).

3.1.2.2 More importantly, of these few roots that attest competing Aor. ~ Pres./Pf. inj. forms in their prohibitions, virtually none show the semantic distribution predicted by Hoffmann’s (1967) account. That is, almost no roots actually attest a Pres./Pf. inj. that is always and only inhibitive and an Aor. inj. that is always and only preventive in all attested prohibitions.

i. In *RV*, there are just two roots ( $\sim 2\%$ ) that could, under scrutiny, be considered “well behaved” by Hoffmann’s (1967) account.

- Namely:  $\sqrt{car}$  ‘move’ (*s*-Aor. and *a*-Pres. attested once apiece) and  $\sqrt{bhi}$  ‘fear’ (Pf. inj. 1x, root Aor. 2x), both outside the Family Books.

ii. In *AV*, there are none.

3.1.2.3 For all other verbal bases that attest both Aor. and Pres./Pf. inj. forms in prohibitions the distribution is *not* in line with Hoffmann’s (1967) proposal.

- Either both stems are preventive (most frequent), or both are inhibitive, or one stem is attested in both readings and the other in only one.

3.1.3 LEXICAL SEMANTICS: Further, we find a given root, whether it builds an Aor. or Pres./Pf. inj., displaying remarkable consistency in its readings (preventive or inhibitive).

3.1.3.1 For instance, the root  $\sqrt{is}$  ‘be(come) master’ formally attests only root-Pres. inj. and in meaning is *exclusively* preventive (13x in *RV*, 5x in *AV*).

(7)  $\sqrt{is}$  ‘BE MASTER’, PRES. INJ. WITH PREVENTIVE READING ONLY

*mā no arātir isata devāsya mārtiyasya ca* (*RV* II.7.2ab).

‘Let hostility of god and mortal **not gain mastery** over us’ (tr. Jamison and Brereton 2014:410).

- The preventive meaning is admitted also by Hoffmann (1967:65–6), who argues unconvincingly that these forms are Aorist. More likely, it originated as a Pf., but in *RV* it is manifestly Pres. (*RV* has no augmented examples; all inj. examples are prohibitive; the rest are present or optative).

3.1.3.2 On the other hand,  $\sqrt{jiv}$  ‘live’ attests only *iṣ*-Aor. inj. forms, beginning in *AV*, all 14 of which are inhibitive in meaning.

(8)  $\sqrt{jiv}$  ‘LIVE’, AOR. INJ. WITH INHIBITIVE READING ONLY

*āhe mriyāsua*<sub>[Pres. ipv.]</sub> *mā jivīh*<sub>[Aor. inj.]</sub> *pratyág abhy ètu tvā viśám* (*AVŚV*.13.4cd (≈ *AVP* VIII.2.3c–e)).

‘Serpent, die<sub>[–DURATIVE]</sub>, **stop living/don’t keep living!**<sub>[+DURATIVE]</sub> Let your poison go back against you’.

3.1.3.3 Examples (7) and (8) demonstrate the importance of lexical semantics in determining the “aspectual” reading of a given form.

3.1.3.4 There is nothing about the form of these verbs that tells us how to interpret them, as we (and Hoffmann (1967)) are forced to interpret them in precisely the opposite way to what they ought to mean if Hoffmann’s (1967) analysis were correct.

3.1.3.5 Rather, the root lexical meaning of (e.g.)  $\sqrt{jiv}$  ‘live’ is particularly well suited to inhibitive interpretation, simply due to the fact that one must usually be alive first before being told not to live (any longer).

i. This becomes even clearer when we consider its opposite formulation, in (9):

(9) *jīva*<sub>[Pres. ipv.]</sub> *mā mrthāh*<sub>[Aor. inj.]</sub> (*AVŚ* III.31.8b (≈ *AVP* X.7.8b)).

‘Keep living<sub>[+DURATIVE]</sub>, **don’t die!**<sub>[–DURATIVE]</sub>’

- Here, the Pres. ipv. to  $\sqrt{jiv}$  ‘live’ is still to be read as durative ‘keep living’, while *mā mrthāh* must be read as preventive (the hymn is for promoting longevity, not resuscitation: cf. Hoffmann 1967:73, n.128).

3.1.3.6 Hoffmann’s (1967) analysis would predict (8) to be *coerced* into a preventive reading by its morphology (i.e., being an Aor. inj.), yet it is not, nor do we find such coercion in any other attestation of this root in prohibition.

3.1.4 Thus, LEXICAL SEMANTICS seems in many cases to govern the reading of a prohibitive verb, whatever tense-aspect stem it happens to build, irrespective of any Pres./Pf. ~ Aor. contrast.

3.1.5 PRAGMATIC CONTEXT: There are other roots whose lexical semantics are such that they are open to either preventive or inhibitive interpretations, in which case *context alone* must determine which interpretation is to be understood, as seen above for *mā gā-* ‘don’t go/stop going’ in examples (5) and (4a).

3.1.5.1 For examples with the Pres. inj., cf. *mā gūha-* ‘don’t hide/stop hiding’ in (6) above, and consider (10), in which (10a) is prohibitive and (10b) is preventive, but both are built to the Present stem of  $\sqrt{hr̥}$  ‘be angry’.

(10) PRES. INJ. TO  $\sqrt{hr̥}$  ‘BE ANGRY’, BOTH READINGS AS CONTEXTUALLY DETERMINED

a. *ó śú prá yāhi vājebhir mā hr̥ñīthā abhī asmān*  
*mahāñiva yūvajāniḥ* (RV VIII.2.19).

‘Drive forth here with prizes. **Stop being angry** at us,  
like a great man with a young wife’.

(tr. Jamison and Brereton 2014:1027, flg. Hoffmann 1967:87)

b. *mā no hr̥ñītām átithir vásur agniḥ purupraśastá eśāḥ*  
*yāḥ suhótā suadhvarāḥ* (RV VIII.103.12).

‘Let the guest **not be/[get] angry** at us, this good Agni, proclaimed by many,  
who is the good Hotar of good ceremony’ (tr. Jamison and Brereton 2014:1216).

(On *hr̥ñītām* for *hr̥ñīta* see Hoffmann 1967:94–5.)

- In (10b), the prohibition against anger comes after 11 lines of praise for Agni. There is simply no indication that he is currently angry at the praisers and every reason to suppose he is not.

3.1.5.1 Thus, CONTEXT, in addition to lexical semantics, plays an important role in determining the appropriate prohibitive reading of a given verb.

3.1.6 Once again, recourse to a tense-aspect stem contrast is not only unnecessary, it makes false predictions.

3.1.6.1 The root  $\sqrt{hā}$  ‘leave’ provides an instructive example in *AV*, where both its Pres. and Aor. inj. forms are attested in prohibitions just two verses apart, yet there does not seem to be any difference between the two in terms of Hoffmann’s (1967) preventive/inhibitive opposition.

(11)  $\sqrt{hā}$  ‘LEAVE’ IN PRES. AND AOR. INJ., SAME READING

a. *sám̐ krāmataṃ mā jahītaṃ śárīraṃ prāñāpānaú te sayújāv ihá stām*  
*śatām̐ jīva śarādo vārdhamāno ’gnis̐ te gopá adhipá vásiṣṭhaṭ*

*āyur yát te átihitaṃ parācaír apānáḥ prāñāḥ púnar á táv itām*  
*agnis̐ tād āhār nír̥ter upásthāt tād ātmáni púnar á veśayāmi te*

(AVŚ VII.53.2–3 ≈ AVP XX.11.5–6)

‘Walk together, [expiration and breath]; **don’t leave** the body; let your breath and expiration be allies here;

live on, increasing a hundred autumns; (let) Agni (be) your best over-ruling shepherd.

Your life-time that is set over at a distance—(your) expiration, breath, let them come again—

Agni has taken that from the lap of perdition; I cause that to enter again in your self’.

b. *mā imām̐ prāñó hāsīn mó apānó ’vahāya párá gāt*  
*saptarṣībhya enaṃ pári dadāmi té enaṃ svastí jaráse vahantu*

*prá viṣataṃ prāñāpānāv anaḍvāhāv iva vrajám*  
*ayám̐ jarimnáḥ śevadhír áriṣṭa ihá vardhatām*



3.1.9 These ‘derailments’ (“Entgleisungen”), he says, may be explained by the ‘punctual Aktionsart’ of  $\acute{a}va\sqrt{srj}$ ,  $\acute{u}d\sqrt{srj}$  ‘release/let out’,  $\acute{u}d\sqrt{vrh}$ , and  $vi\sqrt{vrh}$  ‘tear up/apart’, which ‘approximates the Aorist function’.

(15) PRES. INJS. WITH LEXICALLY DETERMINED PREVENTIVE READINGS

- a. *mā no agne áva srjo agháya aviṣyáve ripáve duchúnāyāi*  
*mā datváte dásate mádáte no mā rīṣate sahasāvan párá dāḥ* (RV I.189.5).

‘Do not release us, Agni, to the evil man, nor to the greedy one, the cheat, nor to misfortune.

Do not hand us over to the toothed one who bites nor to the toothless, nor to one who does harm, o strong one’ (tr. Jamison and Brereton 2014:394).

- b. *mā kākambīram úd vrho vānaspátim áśastīr ví hí níṅśaḥ*  
*mā utá súro áha evá caná grīvá ādádhate véḥ* (RV VI.48.17).

‘Don’t tear out the Kākambīra tree—pursue the taunts and make them disappear! And certainly don’t (tear off the wheel) of the sun: for thus never could you give pursuit to the one who ‘puts the necks’ (of the horses to the chariot-pole?)’ (tr. Jamison and Brereton 2014:840–1).

3.1.10 In light of all of the above observations, we may now look more broadly at all the relevant data in the two texts. In Tables 1 and 2, we can see that the actual semantic distribution, as nearly as can be determined, is wildly out of step from Hoffmann’s (1967) treatment and, therefore, from the *communis opinio* (insofar as one exists).

Table 1: SEMANTIC DISTRIBUTION OF PROHIBITIONS IN THE *ṚGVEDA* (TOKENS)

	COUNT			PERCENT OF TOTAL			PERCENT OF STEM CLASS		
	PRES. INJ.	AOR. INJ.	PF. INJ.	PRES. INJ.	AOR. INJ.	PF. INJ.	PRES. INJ.	AOR. INJ.	PF. INJ.
PREVENTIVE	48	≤ 276	6	14%	≤ 78%	2%	89%	≤ 95%	86%
INHIBITIVE	4	≥ 16	1	1%	≥ 5%	0.3%	7%	≥ 5%	14%
UNCLEAR	2	—	—	1%	—	—	4%	—	—

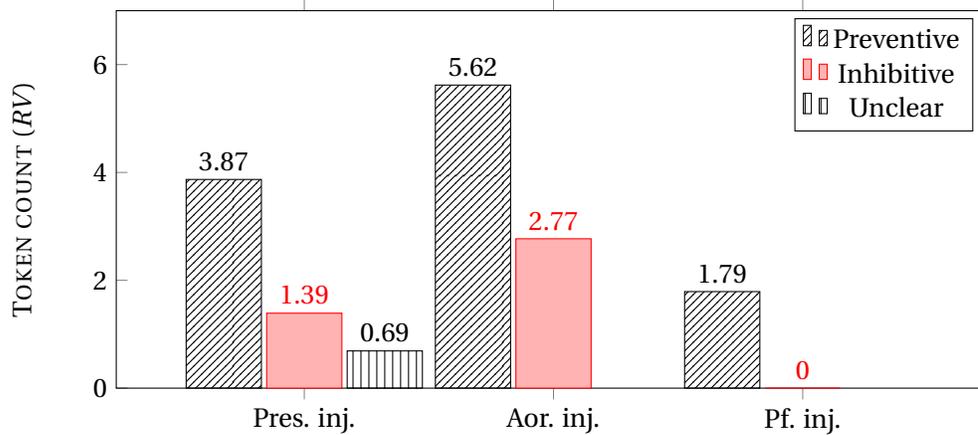
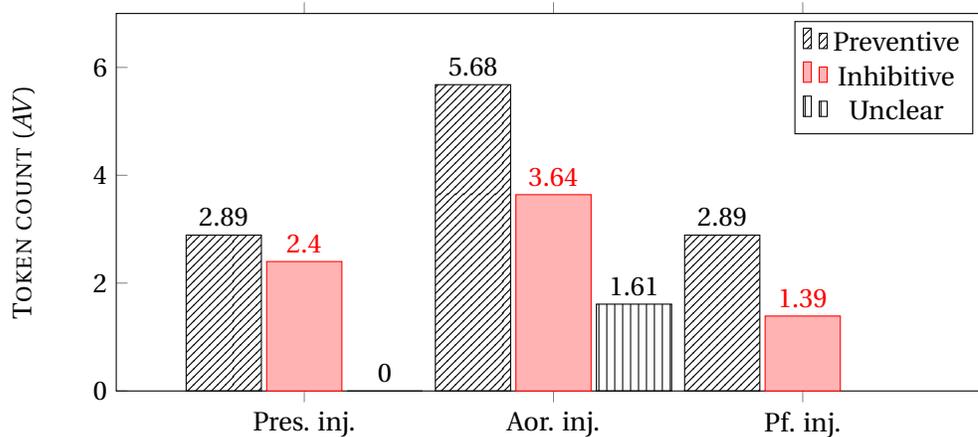


Table 2: SEMANTIC DISTRIBUTION OF PROHIBITIONS IN THE *ATHARVAVEDA* (TOKENS)

	COUNT			PERCENT OF TOTAL			PERCENT OF STEM CLASS		
	PRES. INJ.	AOR. INJ.	PF. INJ.	PRES. INJ.	AOR. INJ.	PF. INJ.	PRES. INJ.	AOR. INJ.	PF. INJ.
PREVENTIVE	18	293	18	5%	76%	5%	60%	87%	82%
INHIBITIVE	11	38	4	3%	10%	1%	37%	11%	18%
UNCLEAR	1	5	—	0.3%	1%	—	3%	1%	—



3.1.11 If the “semantic” readings along the lines of Hoffmann 1967 are not reliable for determining which inj. stem is selected in prohibitions, a *formal* distribution seems to be the likeliest alternative.

## 3.2 Formal Proposal

3.2.1 I have argued elsewhere (Hollenbaugh 2017) for a formal distribution of prohibitions in *RV*, rather than a functional one.

3.2.2 As we saw above (§3.1), this is motivated by the fact that roots that have Pres. stems but lack Aor. stems in their paradigm are, in a sense, *forced* to use their Pres. inj. in prohibitions, as it is the only stem they have available (the Pf. by-and-large being excluded from building inj. stems), as demonstrated in (16).

3.2.3 Again, both inhibitive (16a) and preventive (16b) readings are available according as permitted by the lexical meaning of the root or as arises by the local context in which the verb occurs.

(16) PRES. INJS. TO ROOTS LACK AOR. STEMS

a. *akṣāir mā dīvyah kṛṣīm ít kṛṣasva* (*RV* X.34.13a).

‘Don’t keep playing with dice; just plow your own plowland’ (tr. Jamison and Brereton 2014:1431).

b. *indra tūbhyam ín maghavann abhūma vayāṃ dātré harivo mā ví venah* (*RV* VI.44.10ab).

‘Indra, we have become ready just for you, the giver, you generous possessor of the fallow bays. Do not lose the track’ (tr. Jamison and Brereton 2014:827).

- **NB:**  $\sqrt{dīv}$  ‘play’ and  $\sqrt{ven}$  ‘long’ each only build Pres. stems. Cf. similarly (5) and (10) above.

3.2.4 Further, certain derived stems belong properly only to the Pres. system and cannot readily build Aor. stems. Such is the case with denominatives (17a), desideratives (17b), and intensives (17c). Readings attested are again both inhibitive and preventive.

(17) PRES. INJS. TO VERBAL BASES THAT BELONG ONLY TO THE PRES. SYSTEM

a. *mā́ átra pūṣan āghṛṇa irasyo váruṭrī yád rātiṣácaś ca rásan* (RV VII.40.6ab).

‘Don’t get envious now, glowing Pūṣan, when the Shielding Goddess and the Gift-Escorts will make bestowal’ (tr. Jamison and Brereton 2014:935).

b. *naitám te devá adadus túbhyaṃ nṛpate áttave  
mā́ brāhmaṇásya rájanya gám̐ jighatso anādyám* (AVŚ V.18.1 = AVP IX.17.1).

‘The gods did not give you her for you to eat, O lord of men;

**do not**, O noble, **desire to devour/seek to eat** the cow of the Brahman, that is not to be eaten’.

c. *mā́ tvā sómasya bárbrhat sutásya mádhumattamaḥ* (Kh. II.13.4).

‘Let the sweetest of pressed soma **not oppress** you **sorely/repeatedly**’

3.2.5 Crucially, nearly all roots that are capable of building a root Aor. inj. do so in prohibitions to the exclusion of any other forms, Pres. or otherwise.

- I leave aside reduplicated Aors., which are independently motivated by their causative semantics and can, in a sense, “override” the constraint proposed here that prohibitive verbs be morphologically simplex. This is supported by the fact that the reduplicated Aorist is productively built alongside other Aor. formations to the same root.

3.2.6 An example for ( $\acute{a}$ ) $\sqrt{gam}$  ‘come’ is given in (18).

(18) *á mām̐ mitrávaruṇā ihá rakṣataṃ kulāyáyad viśváyan mā́ na á gan* (RV VII.50.1ab).

‘Guard me here, Mitra and Varuṇa. **Do not let** the nesting or the swelling thing **come upon** us.’ (tr. Jamison and Brereton 2014:944).

3.2.6.1 Here we might naively expect to find examples of the Pres. or Pf. inj. (*mā́ gacha-* or *mā́ jagam-*) to mean ‘don’t come’ or (by Hoffmann’s (1967) account) ‘stop coming’, but these are unattested in favor of the root formant.

3.2.7 Another example is  $\sqrt{kr}$  ‘make’, which attests only root Aor. injs. in the prohibitions of *RV*, despite attesting injs. outside the prohibitive construction that are built to the Pres. stem (e.g., *RV* IV.24.3b *kr̥ṇvata* ‘they make’, *RV* X.49.1b *kr̥ṇavam* ‘I have made’) and the Pf. stem (e.g., *RV* IV.42.6a *cakaram̐* ‘I do’), in addition to non-prohibitive root Aor. injs. (e.g., *RV* V.29.4b *kaḥ* ‘he made’).

3.2.8 Thus, the preference for morphologically simplex stems proposed here is a property not of injunctives generally but of prohibitions in particular.

3.2.9 There are 31 roots that regularly build root Aor. stems and are attested in prohibitions in *RV*. Of these, 26 attest *exclusively* root Aor. injs. in prohibitions (84%).

3.2.9.1 I.e., all except  $\sqrt{tan}$  ‘stretch’,  $\sqrt{su}$  ‘press’,  $\sqrt{muc}$  ‘release’,  $\sqrt{bhi}$  ‘fear’, and  $\sqrt{vrj}$  ‘twist’.

3.2.10 In the Family Books, the number is 20 out of 23 (87%).

3.2.10.1 I.e., all except  $\sqrt{tan}$  ‘stretch’,  $\sqrt{su}$  ‘press’, and  $\sqrt{muc}$  ‘release’.

- This count excludes the passive Aor., since it can be built even to roots that otherwise lack a root Aor. stem. Tables 3–4 below, however, includes the passive Aorists. *RV* and *AV* each have 2 such roots.

3.2.11 Roots that lack viable root Aor. stems, on the other hand, attest either morphologically complex Aor. inj. (19a), morphologically complex Pres./Pf. inj. (19b), or both (see (20) below) in prohibitions.

(19) CHARACTERIZED AOR. OR PRES. INJ. STEMS TO ROOTS THAT LACK ROOT FORMANTS

- a. *mā vo rátho madhyamavā́lṛté bhūn mā yuṣmāvatsu āpiṣu śramiṣma* (*RV* II.29.4cd).

‘Let our chariot not come to be without you when it is travelling in the middle [...] **let us not become weary** while we have friends like you.’ (tr. Jamison and Brereton 2014:443).

- b. *mā tvā mūrā aviṣyávo mópahásvāna á dabhan mákīm brahmadviṣo vanaḥ* (*RV* VIII.45.23).

‘Let not the greedy dolts, let not the deriders deceive you.

**Do not cherish** those who hate the sacred formulation’ (tr. Jamison and Brereton 2014:1121).

3.2.12 Thus, Pres./Pf. ~ Aor. inj. stem alternations in the prohibitions of *RV* are virtually restricted to bases that do not (or cannot) build root Aor. stems.

3.2.12.1 Roots that build a morphologically complex Aor. (thematic or sibilant) and a morphologically complex Pres. (thematic or characterized) but lack a root Aor. have the highest rate of attesting competing forms in prohibitions. An example is given in (20).

(20) COMPETING FORMS TO THE SAME ROOT IN VERBS THAT LACK ROOT FORMANTS

- a. *maīnam agne ví daho mábhi śoco máśya tvácaṃ cikṣipo má śárīram yadā śrtāṃ kṛṇávo jātavedo áthem enam prá hiṇutāt pitṛbhyah* (*RV* X.16.1).

‘**Don’t burn** him **through**, Agni; don’t scorch him; don’t singe his skin, nor his body. When you will make him cooked to readiness, Jātavedas, then impel him forth to the forefathers’ (tr. Jamison and Brereton 2014:1395).

- b. *mā mām édho dáśatayaś citó dhāk prá yád vām baddhás tmáni khádati kṣām* (*RV* I.158.4cd).

‘**Let** the piled-up, ten-stick kindling **not burn** me, when he [=Agni], whom you bound by the trunk of his body, chews at the earth.’ (tr. Jamison and Brereton 2014:336).

3.2.13 There are 4–6 roots (out of 98) that seem to go against this generalization in *RV* (4–6%). In the Family Books, the number is 2–4 out of 57 (4–7%).

3.2.14 In other words, this analysis accounts for some 95% of the data as attested in *RV*.

3.2.15 I therefore posit stem selection for *RV* prohibitions based not on tense-aspect but on a formal preference for morphological simplicity of the prohibitive verb. Thus the prohibitive construction was originally built directly to the root, as seen most robustly in the Family Books of the *R̥gveda*, and only later could be formed to stems that were morphologically more complex.

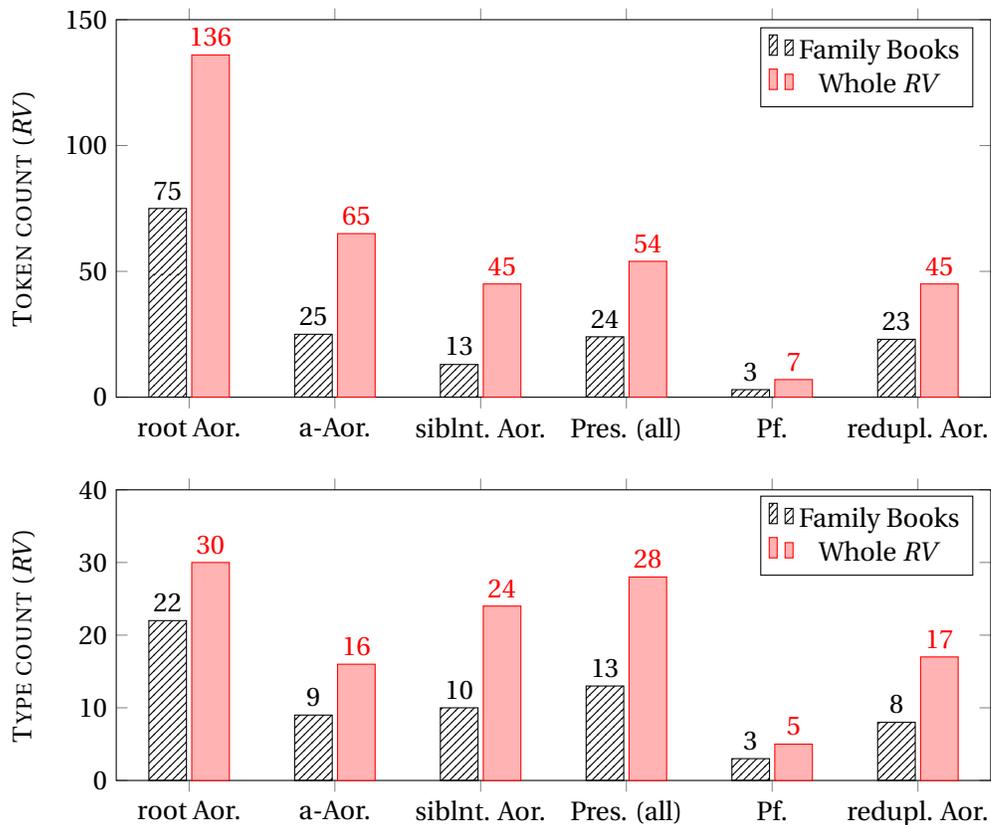
3.2.15.1 We have already seen (cf. Table 1 above) that the Aor. is overwhelmingly preferred to the Pres. in prohibitions (cf. Whitney 1879:218: “prevailingly aorist”).

3.2.15.2 This formal proposal entails additionally that the *root* Aor., in particular, is preferred among the Aor. stems, at least in the earliest language. This is borne out, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: **DISTRIBUTION OF PROHIBITIVE AORISTS IN THE *ṚGVEDA***

		COUNT			PERCENT OF TOTAL			PERCENT OF ALL AORISTS		
		ROOT AOR.	<i>a</i> -AOR.	SIBLNT. AOR.	ROOT AOR.	<i>a</i> -AOR.	SIBLNT. AOR.	ROOT AOR.	<i>a</i> -AOR.	SIBLNT. AOR.
TOKENS	<i>RV</i> II–VII	75	25	13	46%	15%	8%	55%	18%	10%
	WHOLE <i>RV</i>	136	65	45	39%	18%	13%	47%	22%	15%
TYPES	<i>RV</i> II–VII	22	9	10	34%	14%	15%	45%	18%	20%
	WHOLE <i>RV</i>	30	16	24	25%	13%	20%	34%	18%	28%

**DISTRIBUTION OF PROHIBITIVES IN THE *ṚGVEDA***

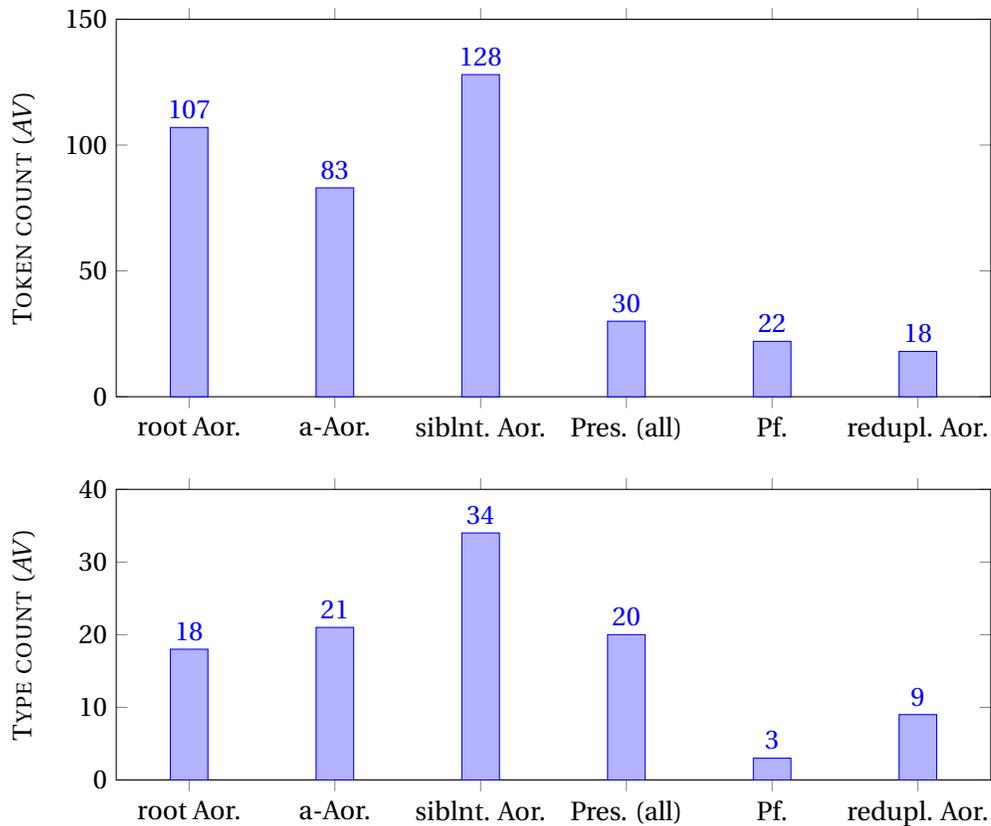


3.2.16 Thus, in *RV* the “formula” for building a prohibitive construction would have been that of (21).

(21) PROHIBITIVE IN *RV*: *mā* + ROOT + SECONDARY ENDING

Table 4: DISTRIBUTION OF PROHIBITIVE AORISTS IN THE *ATHARVAVEDA*

	COUNT			PERCENT OF TOTAL			PERCENT OF ALL AORISTS		
	ROOT AOR.	<i>a</i> -AOR.	SIBLNT. AOR.	ROOT AOR.	<i>a</i> -AOR.	SIBLNT. AOR.	ROOT AOR.	<i>a</i> -AOR.	SIBLNT. AOR.
TOKENS	107	83	128	27%	21%	34%	31%	25%	39%
TYPES	18	21	34	17%	20%	32%	22%	26%	41%

DISTRIBUTION OF PROHIBITIVES IN THE *ATHARVAVEDA*

3.2.17 In contrast to *RV*, in *AV* we find that, of the 24 roots capable of building root Aor. stems that are attested in prohibitions, only 16 actually build them (67%). This is expected, given the general trend towards thematization and conversion of old root Aorists to sibilant Aorists.

- Again, this count excludes passive Aorists (cf. §3.2.10 above), which adds 2 roots to our count (included in Table 4 above under “Root Aor. inj.”).

3.2.17.1 The sibilant Aors., unsurprisingly, become the most frequent way of marking prohibition.

3.2.17.2 The suffix *-iṣ-* is so productive by the time of *AV* that it is used to build Aor. inj. stems in prohibitions out of bases that originally could not make Aors. at all, such as desideratives (22a), Perfects (22b), and even characterized Pres. stems (22c).

- Contrast the Pres. inj. to a desiderative stem given above (*mā jighatsaḥ* ‘don’t seek to eat’ in (17b), which coexists with the *-iṣ-*-suffixed type in *AV*). Prohibitive Pfs. not extended by *-iṣ-* are restricted to *RV* (e.g., *mā ví mumucaḥ* ‘do not unharness’ in (3b) above). For plain nasal Pres. inj. in this construction, cf. above *mā hṛṇī-* ‘don’t be angry’ (10).

(22) NEW AOR. INJ. FORMS IN *AV* BUILT WITH THE *-iṣ-* SUFFIX

a. *mā vaniṃ mā vācaṃ no vīrtsīr* (*AVŚ* V.7.6a ≈ *AVP* VII.9.8a).

‘Do not seek to thwart our winning/desire nor speech’.

b. *vānaspatyā údyato mā jihīṃsīr mā taṇḍulāṃ ví śarīr devayántam* (*AVŚ* XII.3.18cd ≈ *AVP* XVII.51.8c).

‘Made of forest tree, uplifted, do not injure, do not crush to pieces the god-loving rice-grain’.

c. *sá mā vadhīt pitāraṃ vārdhamāno mā mātāraṃ prá minīj jānitrīm* (*AVŚ* VI.110.3cd, not in *AVP*).

‘Let him not, increasing, slay his father; let him not harm his mother who gave him birth’.

i. One also finds *áya-*causatives suffixed by *-iṣ-* of the type in (23a) alternating with the more expected reduplicated Aor. stems of the type in (23b).

(23) COMPETING CAUSATIVE AORS. IN *AV*: *-áya-*PRES. + *-iṣ-* VS. REDUPLICATED AOR.

a. *námas te tásmāi kṛṇ(u)mo mā vaniṃ vyathayīr máma* (*AVŚ* V.7.2cd).

b. *namas te tasmāi kṛṇ(u)mo mā vaniṃ mama vivyathah* (*AVP* XIX.34.2cd).

‘We pay homage to him of yours: Do not disturb my victory’.

ii. Such forms are at least twice as common in *AV* as they are in *RV* (6:3, including non-prohibitive occurrences): 3 examples alone are met with in *RV*, only one of which occurs in the Family Books (*RV* IV).

iii. By contrast, *RV* again contains twice as many (coincidentally also 6:3) inj. stems built directly to derived Presents or Perfects in prohibitions, without the suffix *-iṣ-*, such as *mā riṣaṇyaḥ* ‘don’t do damage’ (*RV* II.11.1a) and *mā irasyaḥ* ‘Don’t get angry/envious!’ (*RV* VII.40.6a), discussed above (cf. (2a) and (17a) respectively).

3.2.18 By *AV* (and perhaps by the later *RV*), then, the “formula” for prohibitions appears to have changed from what we saw in *RV* above (21) to that of (24).

(24) PROHIBITIVE IN *AV*: *mā* + BASE + *-(i)ṣ-* + SECONDARY ENDING

3.2.19 This is in keeping with the fact that Pāṇini (III.3.175) ends up declaring as a rule that prohibitions are formed with *mā* + the unaugmented Aorist. By this stage of the language, prohibitions made with Pres. inj. effectively don’t exist (Whitney 1879:218, 221).

## 4 *mā* Conclusion

4.1 We have seen that the Pres./Pf. ~ Aor. inj. alternations in the prohibitions of *RV* and *AV* cannot be motivated in terms of an aspectual contrast (inhibitive vs. preventive) of the kind described by Hoffmann (1967).

4.2 Any perceived contrast between preventive and inhibitive readings is to be attributed only to the lexical semantics of the verb in question and the local context in which it occurs.

- 4.3 In addition, a formal analysis seems to account better for the attested distribution, with stem selection originally based on morphological simplicity but later restricted to the Aor. stem (especially as marked with the suffix *-iṣ-*).
- 4.4 We have looked not only at what forms are actually attested, but also what forms we do *not* find attested.
- 4.5 If the inhibitive/preventive contrast in Vedic really is, as it is said to be, our “clearest” evidence (Kiparsky 1998:46) for assuming a perfective/imperfective contrast in Indo-Iranian (Willi 2018:414), then assuming the existence of such an aspectual contrast for Indo-Iranian becomes problematic, at least outside the indicative (cf. Hollenbaugh 2018).

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