VITAKKA / VICĀRA

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What would be vitakka/vicāra, on a **purely verbal ground** as defined in [SN 41.6](#)?

"But what are bodily fabrications? **What are verbal fabrications**? What are mental fabrications?"

"In-&-out breaths are bodily fabrications. **Directed thought & evaluation are verbal fabrications**. Perceptions & feelings are mental fabrications."

"But why are in-&-out breaths bodily fabrications? **Why are directed thought & evaluation verbal fabrications?** Why are perceptions & feelings mental fabrications?"

"In-&-out breaths are bodily; these are things tied up with the body. That's why in-&-out breaths are bodily fabrications. **Having first directed one's thoughts and made an evaluation, one then breaks out into speech . That's why directed thought & evaluation are verbal fabrications* (vitakketvā vicāretvā pacchā vācaṃ bhindati, tasmā vitakkavicārā vacīsaṅkhāro).** Perceptions & feelings are mental; these are things tied up with the mind. That's why perceptions & feelings are mental fabrications."
(Thanissaro).

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First one applies thought and sustains thought, and subsequently one breaks out into speech; that is why applied thought and sustained thought are the verbal formation. (Bodhi)

One, having first thought and pondered, then breaks out into speech. Therefore, thinking and pondering are verbal formation.(Piya Tan)

Having thought and reflected beforehand, friend Visākha, he afterwards breaks forth with a word, therefore thinking and reflection is a speech process. (Anandajoti)

What would be vitakka/vicāra, particularly at inception; namely the first in-and-out-breath, first feeling, first perception, and first attempt to "verbalize" that.
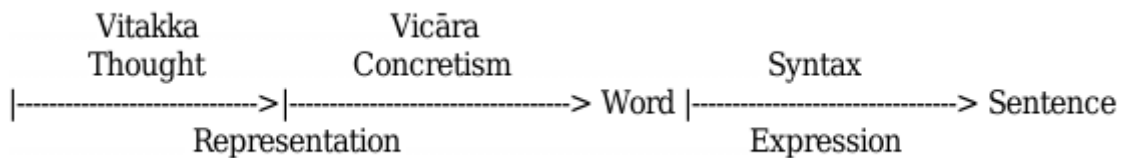And also later on, within the following pericope:

> What one feels, one perceives. What one perceives, one thinks about. What one thinks about, one objectifies.

> yaṃ vedeti taṃ sañjānāti, yaṃ sañjānāti taṃ vitakketi, yaṃ vitakketi taṃ
> papañceti
> MN 18

Vitakka and vicāra has been translated as directed thought & evaluation (Thanissaro); or thought and examination (Bodhi), or initial application and sustained application (Piya Tan), etc.

However, is there reflectivity (or sustainment) in a verbal process, from a linguist point of view? If, like Buddha, we start from the psychical structures of the feeling/perception experience, (and not from the mere semiological structures, like a structuralist would do;) where in the following diagram should we find reflectivity or sustainment in the verbal process?

A Feeling/Perception experience yields the following linguistic process:

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      Vitakka              Vicāra
      Thought            Concretism                  Syntax
|----------------------->|----------------------------> Word |-----------------------------> Sentence
            Representation                        Expression
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Vitakka/Vicāra seems only to encompass the representation process of the verbal process.

If such is the case, then the Vitakka's definition as "thought" would be correct; but "evaluation" and "examination", as the definition of Vicāra, would be far from being convincing; let alone "sustained application".

The representation process is far more involved with the concept of "concretism" than with "reflexion".

Representation should be considered as "concretism" - as a lexical more than a grammatical process (which will develop later as syntax/expression); as representing an abstract idea in concrete terms; as an attempt to embody a thought about a perceived feeling.

Vicāra as "concretism" (representation, embodiement,) seems more appropriate than "evaluation" or "examination;" or even "sustained application".
For instance, words like pek(k)hā (consideration,) seem more suitable than vicāra, when it comes to examine and evaluate.

"Concretism" (representation) would be more in line with such expressions like:

kshatryas', brahmins', householders' representations are wisdom (paññūpavicārā); woman's representation is adornment (alaṅkārūpavicārā); robbers' representation is seizing (gahanūpavicārā) in AN 6.52 (EA 37.8, MA 149).

Thanissaro's translation of Buddha's answer to the question:
"Why are directed thought & evaluation verbal fabrications?";
would become:
"Why are thought & concretism (internal/mental representation,) verbal fabrications?"

> Having first directed one's thoughts and made an evaluation, one then breaks out into speech.
> would become:
> Having thought and made a concretism, (a representation of that thought in concrete terms,) one then breaks out into a word.
> *Pubbe kho, gahapati, vitakketvā vicāretvā pacchā vācaṃ bhindati.*

That would be more consistent with the above diagram.

In MN 18,
What one feels, one perceives. What one perceives, one thinks about. What one thinks about, one objectifies.
yaṃ vedeti taṃ sañjānāti, yaṃ sañjānāti taṃ vitakketi, yaṃ vitakketi taṃ papañceti.
Papañca would be the objectification generated by the word itself.

Words are giving an instance of our thought "perceived feeling" experience; with a communicative intent, either to ourselves; or to the external world.
We express ourselves in sentences; but we represent through words. We need to represent before we express.
There is also a grammatical (formal) aspect in this representation, but the lexical (material) aspect, which comes first, suffice to have us understand how the abstract thought is represented in concrete terms. In the making of a word, the "ideogenesis" delivers a material significance, while the "morphemogenesis" delivers a formal significance that leads to the word to be used in the syntactical expression.

In other words, Vitakka/Vicāra (thought/concretism,) seems to be about embodying a thought we have, about the perception of a feeling.

The role of language is not to provide just the physical means of expressing our experience, but rather the mental means of representing it, of depecting it in expressible units of meaning, each with a sign, and of combining these into sentences. (Waldron).

> With delight the world's fettered.
>
> With thought it is represented (materialized).
>
> *Nandisaṃyojano loko,*
>
> *vitakkassa vicāraṇaṃ*
>
> Sn 5.13 - Udaya

Anatomy of an experience:

An experience of fire (fire is an upādāya; a form derived from the four great elements (mahābhūtāna rūpa) of nāmarūpa,) is twofold.

1. Fire (thought, idea,) cannot be conceived, apart from its form and heat (concretism).

2. Yet this experience of fire, is a feeling and an ensuing perception of this feeling, that trigger first the idea, the thought (vitakka) of "fire", then its concretism (vicāra). The mental materialisation of fire, passes through the representation of its form and heat; through the morphemes (words) "fireform" and "heat".

Papañcā is just about these different (infinite) forms and heat thatthe materialisation takes, through the different (infinite) experiences.

What has to be abandoned is the "mental materiality" of the fire (its form andheat); and the "thought" of it that is seed.

What you have to abandon is the word (which papañcizes* each experience,so to speak); then the concretism, and finally the thought.

Concretism = A representationof an abstract idea in concrete terms.

* each experience conveys a new concretism in each word (vāca). Wordshave a different "content" through each new experience of fire.

<u>Note 1</u>:

For one who has attainedthe first jhana, **word** has ceased.

Paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ samāpannassa vācā niruddhā hoti.

For one who has attained the second jhana, thought and examination (concretism)have ceased.

Dutiyaṃ jhānaṃ samāpannassa vitakkavicārāniruddhā honti.

https://suttacentral.net/en/sn36.11/3-5

Note 2:

[mentalprocess]:

One feels a feeling (vedanā), and perceives(cf. saññā) that feeling.

[verbal representation process]:

Notice that thoughts(vi-takka) don't have to be "right". It is just that one "makes up his mind" (mano) about his perception.Then one thinks about it (one ends up thedoubt about that perception - vi-takka); one puts concrete terms on hisabstract thought (one ends the process - vi-cāra).

Note 3:

Interesting reads on the subject:

Match the date of these articles, etc.:

http://www.fondsgustaveguillaume.ulaval ... Hirtle.pdf

with the following table:

http://www.fondsgustaveguillaume.ulaval ... er-hirtle/

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