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Readers’ practices with mistakes

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Do numbers matter? Mistakes occurring in commentaries for working examples in a Sanskrit astronomical treatise

Abstract – The south Indian astronomer Paramesvara (c.1360-1460) composed two individual treatises under the same title *Goladipika*, both dealing with various topics related to celestial spheres and circles and giving working examples. One version has an auto-commentary where the explanation on its working example uses symbolic words (bhutasa?khya) for representing numbers, while the other version, whose commentary by an unknown author is fragmentarily available, only uses digits for the procedures of its examples.

The commentary with numerals has many more errors, ranging from simple mis-copies to wrong replacements of numbers. At first glance, it seems obvious that writing with numerals was not a good choice compared to symbolic words. However, the fact that the commentaries show traces of being read while such mistakes were seldom corrected suggests that the correctness of the numbers themselves might not have been important for the reader. Therefore I shall examine how the commentary is structured, both verbally and visually, and look into how numerals could have played a role, even with mistakes.