

**SPEECH AS AN ONGOING ACTIVITY :
[COMPARING BHARTRHARI AND WITTGENSTEIN]***

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There has been a keen contest among the philosophers of language between the view that the primary function of language is (1) that of an instrument of communication, and the view that it is (2) that of a vehicle of thought. This has a great bearing on the debates over the theory of meaning for a language and its actual use.

One detects quite many similarities in the expositions of Bhartrhari and Wittgenstein concerning language and its relation to reality. At the same time, there are significant differences in their orientations. Ancient sciences, the *śāstras*, are generally attributed with a *holistic* approach to knowledge -- understanding the real world in totality, as illustrated by Bhartrhari's *sphoṭa* theory. The contemporary science, the *viññāna*, probes knowledge in *analytic* terms as a relational system.

In the reality of everyday life what synergically transpires (or is actually grasped, i.e. an action) from a speech event matters more than what it signifies. The intrinsic stability of the concepts of natural language and their openness, their being not well-defined, and their undergoing changes along with usage just as the reality itself changes, lead us to a new meaning of the term "understanding". It is only in natural language that we can be sure of touching reality. A convergence of perspectives that other groups of people may have a different basis from our own allows the "openness" for all kinds of concepts.¹

I

"The Whole is Prior to the Parts"

The Indian school of philosophy has a rich tradition dating back more

than two thousand years capable of shedding light on the humanistic perspective of communication. Indian thought examined the relation of language to consciousness. All aspects of the world and human experience were thought of as illuminated by language.

The *sphoṭa* theory of Bhartr̥hari is based on the logic that "the whole is prior to the parts". It accounts for a continuum of cognition, resulting in an ascending hierarchy of speech levels, whether one is dealing with factual scientific language or a poem or a book : *vākya*, *mahāvākya*, *akhaṇḍamahāvākya*. The word is subsumed by the sentence, the sentence is subsumed by discourse, the discourse by the chapter (component), the chapter by the book, and so on, until all speech is identified with *Brahman*. The terms *śabdabrahma* carries the connotation of indivisible word, sentence, discourse, text, and the ultimate consciousness. In reality only an indivisible speech act, a text (sentence) as a physical whole, is meaningful.

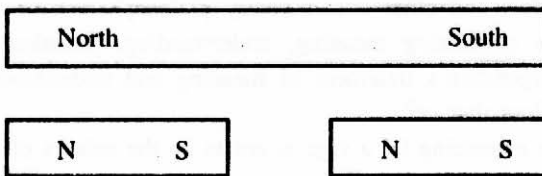
The concept of *sphoṭa*, the ultimate in language, has been interpreted by traditional grammarians as "something latent which takes form" just as a flower blooms; its literal meaning "bursting, plosion" signifies the point that verbal and non-verbal signals evoke a situation of reality just as throwing a pebble in a pond causes ripples. Maṇḍana Misra's reasoning based on the analogy of the jeweler's cognition points out that a jeweler by his continuous gaze (i.e. a series of cognitions), perceives the genuineness of the stone but with increasing clarity. Each cognition leaves its *saṃskāra*, a common memory trace; the last cognition helped by all previous *saṃskāras*, fully perceives the genuineness of the stone. An expert before beginning the examination of the stone had the image of a precious stone ingrained in his subconscious. This image is revealed by *sphoṭa* in the jeweler's mind at the end of his series of partial, as well as erroneous, perceptions.²

Bhartr̥hari identifies three speech levels: At the "outer speech" level of *vaikhari vāk* 'elaborate speech', the sounds uttered sequentially make up a sentence, a poem, or a book. The "inner speech" level of *paśyanti vāk* 'transcendental speech' marks an instantaneous perception of the reality the *sphoṭa* : "a bursting forth of illumination of insight". In this context, all intuitive flashlike understanding of meaning of any sentence (or a discourse) as a whole is described as *pratibhā*. Between the two there is *mādhyaṃ vāk*, 'mediatory

speech', the mide level of speech. Here the unitary *sphoṭa* breaks up into a sequence of thoughts, phrases and words but has not yet reached the separateness of individually uttered sounds. The integral *vāk* is gradually externalized when speaking from undifferentiated to the differentiated; when listening, this is reversed.³

Communication as a spontaneous activity is characterized by effortlessness. The Buddhist doctrine of the *maddham mārga* 'Middle Path' stresses the fact that man functions at his best in the merging of two extremes, i.e. by treading the middle path. Such moderation enables harmony between relaxation and alertness. Spontaneity transcends intellectual evaluation. The Jain theory *syādvāda* is another codification proposing multi-valued logic which stresses, complementarity, potency, potentiality, and possibility.

Greek philosophers have also drawn attention to the holistic interaction involving all the elements of Nature. According to Anaxagoras, the nature of reality is best understood as consisting of *mind (nous)* and *matter*; each part contains what is in the whole of reality, each thing having a special 'portion' of everything in it. It is akin to the breaking of a single magnet producing two magnets, and not two isolated magnetic poles⁴ :



Such a holistic approach to science enables us to work towards a slow merger of physical sciences with social sciences. For modern natural science there is no longer in the beginning the material object, but *form*, mathematical symmetry. Since mathematical structure is in the last analysis an "intellectual construct" -- the image, the "idea", we could say, in the words of Goethe's Faust: "In the beginning was the word, the logos"; in the terms of Bhartṛhari, the *Śabdabrahma*.

II

"What is Customarily Said"

Many different theories of meaning distinguished by various concepts such as sense, knowledge, reference, and truth value are debated to improve and expand our horizons of understanding verbal communication⁵ :

- What constitutes successful communication?
- What is the relation between words and concepts?
- Can the meaning be attributed to the originator, to the code transmitted, or to the recipient?
- Is meaning an *absolute* property of the utterance without reference to the originator or the recipients, or is the speech act to be viewed as a physical whole responding to the complex reality in everyday life? Patañjali claims : "Meaning is not to be produced by a word, but a word is to be produced by meaning".

Coherence in natural orders is classified on a certain *scale*. There are different ranges of magnitude within any "measurement constant". One attaches a certain *range* of meaning to words and sentences of the language. The theory of meaning is intended merely as a systematization of the understanding which a speaker manifested in his/her use of language.

Wittgenstein and other contemporary philosophers have been engaged with the issues concerning meaning, understanding, intention content, and objectivity. Wittgenstein's treatment of meaning and understanding has been summarized in four themes⁶ :

- 1) To mean something by a sign is not to be the subject of an inner state or process.
- 2) To understand a sign is not to interpret it in a particular way.
- 3) Using a sign in accordance with a rule is not founded upon reasons.
- 4) To understand a sign is to have mastery of a technique or customs of using it.

According to Wittgenstein, language and all rule - governed institutions "are founded not in our internalization of the same strongly autonomous, explanation-transcendent rules, whose requirements we then succeed, more or

less, in collectively tracking, but in primitive dispositions of agreement in judgement and action."⁷ The requirement of rules exist only within the framework of institutional activities. The very existence of any rules depends on some rules being applied, and one rule being applied only *once* would not be enough. This capacity is to be guided by *normativity*, by cooperative institutional environment within a framework of extensive institutional activity.

Wright (1989) points out to Wittgenstein's mistrust of erecting mythological picture about the content of language as "rule- following", as active in the Platonist philosophy of mathematics and in the Cartesian philosophy on inner experience (i.e. innate faculties of the speaker)⁸. Wittgenstein posits an alternative account of normativity, to explain how there can be standable middle ground between the hypothetization of "rules-as rails" imagery; "If you use a rule to give a description, you yourself do not know more than you say If you say, 'and so and so'. you yourself do not know more than 'and so and so'".⁹

There is a sufficient gap between the requirements of a rule and a subject's reaction in any particular case. Texts are guided by the notion of "free play" tempered by normativity; this phenomenon abrogates the spurious autonomy of rules. The grasp of such a rule is thus the internalization of an open-ended set of pre-ordained requirements, an informational state accessible, as Wittgenstein had his interlocutor put it, only by a kind of *guesswork*.¹⁰ In Prigoginian terms all systems, close or open, contain subsystems that are continually "fluctuating": "Free will downstairs operated only within the limits of a menu determined upstairs".¹¹

This ongoing *flexibility*, in correlating linguistic form with context, regulated according to the expediency of the communicative task, is the concern of pragmatic grammar. "All meanings are sensitive to contexts that, taken together, constitute a galaxy of contexts"; these contexts are labeled as "semantic galaxies".¹² It exhibits the connection between the theory of meaning for a language and the actual use. Language to a speech act can be characterized as an organism that drives to a purpose; it acquires a "practical cash-value" determined by relevant use.¹³ Coarse meaning (the 'blueprint') will both determine and be determined by use. Wittgenstein positively insists on *use* itself as the determinant of meaning.¹⁴ There is no fact of the matter concerning what

someone means. There could be variable "readings" of the same text.

This phenomenon explains Wittgenstein's preference for "piecemeal" description of "what is customarily said", and his rejection of the *centrality* of the notion of truth to an account of pragmatics. He regards "understanding" as a practical capacity associated with the "multiple application thesis": "To obey a rule, to make a report, to give an order, to play a game of chess are customs" (uses, institutions).¹⁵

Often different roles in a setting or different identities or cultural legacies from one generation to another transmit some prominent values of interaction -- a common way to interpret, to share experiences. That common way, that a sort of general frame-work is called the *communication ethos*.¹⁶ Sharing some same ethos does not mean that the existing differences are to be eliminated; these traits get integrated through a super-consensus; "...the things it aims at, prizes and endorses, and more or less achieves".¹⁷ One has to account for the play of cross-purpose elements in interpreting reality. In everyday life communications, such elements get adjusted through various "fuzzy" strategies such as elucidating, itemizing, etc.¹⁸ People in a community do often share concepts and translational meaning, despite differences in their beliefs about the world, and even differences in their explications of the relevant terms.¹⁹ In the pragmatic and transactive modes of usage, words live and move, a characteristic of an ongoing process.

III

A Synergic Process

Communication at the human level utilizes language as an infinitely subtle and flexible instrument to cope with a variety of relations and a diversity of facts :

"Man possesses the ability to construct languages capable of expressing every sense, without having any idea how each word has meaning or what its meaning is just as people speak without knowing how the individual sounds are producedEveryday language is a part of the human organism and is no less complicated than it."²⁰

Everyday speech in human interaction, though not-well defined, never loses immediate connection with the reality, whereas the idealized language with

precisely defined concepts is confined to a construct, a sort of 'formalized' reality. A speech act can potentially have multiple interpretations in the way that in an interaction, oral or written, the "perceived" may differ from the "measured" objective reality. Interpretation is a semiotic exercise, characterized by its "spontaneous" effortless condition (see the Table "Speech as Living Phenomena", in the Appendix).

Communications in everyday life are based on the *synergic* relationship between the twin criteria : (i) *The reciprocity of language skills* among communicators (spread over a speech spectrum comprising one or more languages, dialects, styles, etc.) (ii) *the mutuality of focus* (that is, sharing the *relevance* of the setting, commonly attributed to the attitudes, moods, or feelings of the participants.)²¹

One characteristic harmoniously blend with the other. Such a relationship accounts for the element of *indeterminacy*, a sort of tentativeness in human encounters characterized by implicitness in everyday communication events, built into the synergic process itself. Time, distance, disparities in outlook or in assumed references require a message to be an operation of "interpretative decipherment".²² Such indeterminate characteristics account for the quality of communication in face-to-face encounters and in creative writings. Ambiguity becomes a virtue in many human communication settings : *He didn't say in so many words what he meant.*

According to Husserl, indeterminacy as a progenerative medium "points ahead to possible perceptual multiplicities".²³ It is a "determined indeterminacy"; *I know what this is all about I should not want to say.*²⁴ In this context, Derrida's comments are meaningful : "The meaning of meaning of meaning ... is infinite implication, the indefinite referral of signifier to signifier.... (its force) engages to its own *economy* so that it always signifies again and differs".²⁵ Garfinkel also points out that the meaning of every utterance in a conversation bears an etcetera "the open horizon which inhabits the world," a license for permitting some indeterminacy.²⁶

In this ongoing process, the manoeuvres are always negotiatively shaped choices, working out temporary choices based on the relevance of a context. Dasgupta calls this kind of reasoning "exduction" distinct from deduction and

induction. One can afford to be "tentative" in keeping track of options, working out contradicting alternatives : doing one derivation from assumption P and Q and another from assumption not-P and not-Q.²⁷

Wittgenstein has been attributed with inventing a startling "Regress-of interpretation" Paradox : "But how can a rule show me what I have to do at *this* point? Whatever I do is, on some interpretation, in accord with the rule.... any interpretation still hangs in the air along with what it interpretes, and cannot give it any support. Interpretations by themselves do not determine meaning."²⁸

Wittgenstein discusses intuitional epistemology, pointing out the contrast between "intuition" and "decision" (*Entscheidung*); intuition *implies* and decision *repudiates* the suggestion that one can say nothing by way of justification for one's particular way of proceeding. Intuition suggests an unarticulated *ur-cognition* a form of knowledge too basic to admit of any further account. This primal (primitive) faculty can accomplish harmony between the real requirement of a rule and a subejct's impression of them. As Wittgenstein puts it: "If intuition is an inner voice (comparable to Bhartrhari's *Pratibhā*) -- how do I know *how* I am to obey it? And how do I know that. It doesn't mislead me? For if it can guide me right, it can also guide me wrong. This is what we human beings are".²⁹

In a linguistic interchange, the hearer's presumption that he/she has understood the speaker can never be definitely refuted or confirmed; he can only have evidence that he has done so, which falls short of being conclusive. So regarded, communication rests ultimately on *faith*.. trusting that one has hit on the very theory of meaning that one's interlocutor has internalized. An individual's explicational ability not only does not suffice to fix the referent of the individual word, it does not exhaust the meaning expressed by a word in the individual's ideolect.³⁰

In everyday life decisions contain an inevitable element of irrationality. The decision may be a result of deliberation, but at the same time complementary to deliberation; it excludes deliberation and decision.³¹ One will always have to act on an insufficient evidence. The decision always rests on by pushing away all arguments, understood or not, and by cutting off all as a basis for action. Without such a firm stand our own actions would lose all force. In this sense,

some real or apparent truth forms the basis of life.

The Heisenberg 'Principle of Uncertainty' in physics shows clearly that the concept of probability "potentia" in an event is to be reckoned as a kind of reality. The possibility or "tendency" for an event to take place has a kind of reality. The potentiality may involve or overlap with other potentialities. In view of this, the distinction between a *real* and an *apparent* contradiction has disappeared. Capra, explaining the parallelism between modern physics and Eastern mysticism, makes out a compelling case for believing that the trends in the development in the new physics tend to be similar to the basic tenets and insights in ancient Indian and Chinese mystical and philosophical traditions.³²

The potential energy of *relavance* shows man's ingenuity in abstracting or transcribing everyday reality through speech. Projections of different focuses through selection and shift mechanisms convey much more than is grasped at the cognitive plane; they also comouflage many details. A speech event carries a "formal" meaning within sentence(s) signifying subject, predicate, and so on; a "specificational" meaning within a context (conditioned by interactional roles, setting, channel, etc.), and an "effective" meaning within the discourse, emerging from the relavance of interaction.³³ A sentence does not "convey" meaning the way a truck conveys cargo, complete and packaged, It is more like a blue print that allows the bearer to reconstruct the meaning from his knowledge' (Winograd 1974).³⁴

In the light of this, a three-dimensional model of language isolates (1) the *cognitive* dimension, to draw a broad "blueprint" of verbal activity, (2) the *identity* dimension, for providing "specific" social details to the blueprint, and (3) the *design* dimension, to "filter" differential values over the specified details of the blueprint; it intensifies, in a way, the focus that heightens compatability in a speech act.³⁵

Expressive modulations in a creative process, a "language design" so to say, *open up* many choices to cope with any unprecedented communicative tasks : 'The selective function of meaning depends on "the states of readiness"; as in the game of chess" the movement of a black pawn may mean to the "white"

players a *threat*, to the "black" player a *relief*, and to an ignorant onlooker the *displacement* of a piece of carved wood'.³⁶

IV

Complementarity of "Intuition" and "Reason"

In the pursuit of knowledge, modern sciences generally stress isolating a phenomenon under study by controlling its variables : *ceteris paribus*, "all other things being equal". Each discipline attempts to arrive at a totality, by aggregating or multiplying a single dimension, giving a fragmented picture of the phenomenon, failing to present a total view of life. It reminds us of the parable of the "blind men and the elephant"; the blind men determined the reality from insulated examination of only one or more parts (identifying them as pillars, walls, fans, etc.), but missing the *organic* whole.³⁷

Many philosophers accept formalized domains with a sharp boundary and with a closure of some sort, and the logic of replicating each mode of accounting on a domain-by-domain-basis.³⁸ Today in interdisciplinary enquiries one notices lot of cross- fertilization on the surface, but these investigations hardly question the "established" domain boundaries.³⁹

Bharṭhari tackles the unity of language, *sphoṭa*, by relating the "universal" and "particular" characteristics of meaning at two speech levels : (1) the word "reflected" at the *paśyanti* level, in the intellect of both the speaker and the listener, (2) the word "uttered" at the *vaikhari* level -- the word in action, the word used i.e., the action accomplished; as stated earlier "what synergically transpires". Wittgenstein's *language-game* identifies the process of internalization of an open-ended set of pre-ordained requirements in speech, as a "paradox of interpretation", as conditioned by the analytic tradition of linearity. On the other hand, Bharṭhari gives central position to *madhyamā vāk*; it represents the *integral* level of speech, discussed earlier.

Verbal discourse in everyday life is an integral activity, a complex interplay between linguistic exchange and related action. It gets modulated on a scale of *intentional* and *instinctive* extremes. Bharṭhari describes this phenomenon by positing two times : 1) *Vṛtikāla* speech in a sequential time, as in *vaikharivāk*

and 2) *svakāla*: speech in own time - instantaneous time, as in *paśyanti vāk*. At the intensive end, thought processes are sequential through audio-monitored (i.e. calculated) speech. Verbalization is overt and deliberate. At the instinctive end, communication processes are largely simultaneous with extemporized speech; verbalization is spontaneous and involuntary.

The instinctive use of language is characterized by implicit regulation, depending on identity pressures, suggestion, inference and design. These elements are excessively manifested on the stage or simulated in a literary work. Conversely, the intensive use of language in a formal text is characterized by an explicit value system, maximally detached from the context in order to achieve precise, and overt manifestation. These elements are prominent in formalistic, legal and scientific discourse.

A focus on an external manifestation of word projects discourse on a "rational" plane, and a reflection over the speech act as a whole draws attention towards the unity of a discourse on an "intuitive" plane. Characterizing Wittgenstein's perspective as "rational" and Bhartrhari's as "intuitive" can be justified in the light of the analytic and holistic orientations of their enquiry. For Bhartrhari, "*Brahman* is the principle of unity which is the starting point as also the goal. And it does not lay down the specific rules, it embodies a method of understanding any language."⁴⁰

Bhartrhari's two levels of speech highlight the *complementarity* of "intuition" and "reason" in a discourse, a text. The Wittgenstein theory of language use also looks for its justification in the basis of unity; "that is what we human beings are". A discourse in a quest for the conscious, or a poem for the *Sahṛdyā*, the *Rasika*, or a speech event in everyday life communication setting are primarily understood and acted upon through the faculty of intuition. On the other hand, a text arguing scientific concepts, a narrative of an eyewitness in the court room, or instructions in an utility-oriented setting are deliberated through deductive and inductive reasoning and inference. The degree of prominence of different faculties of interlocutors (or readers) could be *relevant* to the communicative task of discourse. Shah's comments succinctly bring out the relevance of both intuition and reason in a discourse : "Intuition without reason lacks power and reason without intuition lacks direction."

APPENDIX

Speech as living phenomena

Speech process	Normative entity
<p>I. Communication device</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. an organic process, potentially diverse and heterogeneous 2. regarded as a nonautonomous device, communicating in symphony with other non-linguistics devices; its full signification can be explicated only from the imperatives of context and communicative tasks 3. interpretation dependent on the focus of communication "field" and the degree of individual's "sensitivity" toward it 4. An effortless integral activity; discourse centres around the "event" with the support of ad hoc "expression" strategies 	<p>a formalized entity, emphasizing uniformity and homogeneity ideally aiming at the targets of being an autonomous and unambiguous tool of communication</p> <p>interpretation relying heavily on explicit formulas--grammars, dictionaries, etc.; efforts for consistency made through the standardization apparatus</p> <p>an ideal-oriented representation requiring directed effort; discourse concentrates on "expression", which measures the "event"</p>
<p>II. Strategy of control</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. guided by implicit identity pressures - a sort of etiquette agreed upon ad hoc by those participating in it 	<p>characterized by explicitly defined value system - a prescriptive code with sanctions from the language elite in the community</p>

Speech process	Normative entity
6. regulated by "situation-bound" propriety in which ecosystems, constituting the social reality "here and now", claim a prominent share	conditioned by "tradition-inspired" profiles in which "time- honoured" standard practices (spelled out through the grammatical accounts, lexicons, and style sheets) dominate the scene
7. permissive toward inherited variations linked with region, class etc.	less tolerant toward such ascribed deviations; assimilatory pressures in favour of the elitist standard variety
III. Total repertoire	
8. total verbal repertoire is malleable, responsive to contextual expediencies resulting in uninhibited convergence between speech varieties with the contact pressures of pidginization, hybridization, code-switching, etc.	total verbal repertoire is demarcated for the demands of different normative systems (specified by a "distant" elite) involving stress on maintaining divergent development of a different system, and insistence on exclusiveness or "purity" of tradition
9. greater scope for functional fluidity leading to innovations and creativity of expression in negotiating the "event"	Restrictions over the scope of or spontaneity and creativity due to the pressures of exclusive conformity to different systems
10. fuzzy speech boundaries; interlocking variations responding to covert stratificational and situational differences	sharp language boundaries; compartmentalization through overt linguistic differentia

NOTES

- * A revised version of the paper presented at the seminar on Word and Sentence: Perspectives of Bhartṛhari and Wittgenstein held by Sahitya Akademy and Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla 1994.
1. "The concepts of natural language, vaguely defined as they are, seem to be more stable in the expansion of knowledge than the precise terms of scientific language, derived as an idealization from only limited groups of phenomena... hence we must be sceptical about any scepticism with regard to this natural language and its essential concepts" (Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy : The Revolution in Modern Science*, London : Allen and Unwin, 1959, pp. 171-72).
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 28. L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 198-201, see the discussion on Saul Kripke's formulation of Sceptical Paradox in : *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, B. Blackwell, Oxford, 1981.
 29. L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 213.
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