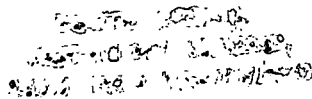


**MEANINGFULNESS AND MEANINGLESSNESS :
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DISTINCTION**

Thesis Submitted For The
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By
Jyotsna Saha

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
University of North Bengal
DARJEELING, WEST BENGAL
INDIA

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Jyotsna Saha.
(Jyotana Saha)

Words move, music moves
Only in time; but that which is only living
Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
Moves perpetually in its stillness.
Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts,
Not that only, but the co-existence,
Or say that the end precedes the beginning,
And the end and the beginning were always there
Before the beginning and after the end.
And all is always now. Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
Will not stay still.

T.S. Eliot - Burnt Norton V

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

In our everyday empirical arguments or in the controversies about scientific issues some disputed sentences or expressions may be claimed as true or false. In contrast, some disputed sentences — sentences in philosophical argument, in particular, are often claimed as neither true nor false, but meaningless. For example, "Saturday is in bed", "God exists", "Mind and body exists" and so on. The concern with meaningfulness as a philosophical phenomenon was stimulated by the logical positivists' verifiability criterion of meaningfulness and the consequent rejection of all metaphysical claims as cognitively meaningless. Ryle in discarding the official doctrine also used this concept. Logicians also make a distinction between meaningfulness and meaningfulness. They divide all the possible combinations of the basic material into two major classes (i) meaningful or permitted expressions called "Well-formed formula" or in short "wff" such as " $p > (q > p)$ " and (ii) meaningless or illegitimate combinations such as " $p \equiv VPV$ ". There is also a corresponding distinction in ordinary language between sentences constructed according to the rules and conventions of language such as "The water is boiling" (meaningful) and the random combination of words like "is over very cats between" which is meaningless. Random and arbitrary combination of words is not the only

cause of generation of meaningless expressions. Meaningless expression also generated from some linguistic illusion. The linguistic illusion comes generally from the creativity of language. Judgement about meaningfulness and meaninglessness sometimes depend on some theory about linguistic and non-linguistic truths. For example, according to Frege and Russell the sentence "Scott exists" is senseless or meaningless because according to them existence is a predicate of a concept or of a class, if it is applied to an individual, meaningless expressions would result. Quine, however, identifies a singular existential sentence with a analytical truth. Hence the singular existential sentence like "Scott exists" is a perfectly meaningful sentence to Quine. From this it appears that the concept of meaningfulness or meaninglessness may be a theory oriented concept. But is it not something strange that a sentence's being meaningful or meaningless does not depend on the nature of language, but on the theory about logic, world, human mind etc? Whether this view that meaningfulness or meaninglessness of an expression depends on particular theory about logic, world etc. is true or to what extent it is true constitute the most fundamental topic of the thesis. For answer to these questions will determine the very significance of the distinction between meaningful and meaningless expression. This issue will be discussed in Chapter I.

The major areas where the problem of meaninglessness or nonsense is most apparent is philosophy and poetry. One may wonder why is it that in philosophy and in poetry particular there is a problem of meaninglessness while in science the problem is relatively unknown. It may be said that scientific language is stereotyped and technical. Scientists are mainly interested to discover facts and they try to describe these facts in most precise and clear way. They require minimal linguistic apparatus to describe their results or hypothesis. It is not their business to say something in a better way or in a new way. It is the business of the philosophers and of the poets to say something not only in a clear way but in most elegant and comprehensive ways. Here there is a problem about content and style and the manner of saying is intrinsic to what is said. And the problem of meaninglessness comes in those fields where the manner or ways of saying is most important. This point will be discussed in Chapter II.

Looking into the natural criterion of distinguishing meaningless expressions from the meaningful ones can throw some light on the nature of the distinction between meaningfulness and meaninglessness. If we can find any natural criterion of distinguishing meaningless sentences from the meaningful ones then the concept of meaningfulness and meaninglessness would not be merely the theory oriented

concepts. Many attempts have been made to give a general adequate criterion of determining whether a sentence is meaningful or not. This will be discussed in Chapter III.

Whatever may be the cause of generation of meaningless sentences the distinction between meaningful and meaningless has found its way in language. Whether the concept of meaninglessness has found its way legitimately in language depends upon whether this concept is inherent in the very nature of language. So it is necessary to look into the general nature of language, inquire about its essential characteristics. Unless we inquire whether language has some essential features and point out them, if any, we cannot decide whether the judgement about meaninglessness is externally influenced or is theory oriented. It seems to me that the problem of meaningfulness and meaninglessness so far pointed out to a great extent has something to do with the compositional nature of language. I shall deal with this point in Chapter IV.

Language is a system consisting of different linguistic categories such as names, predicates, connectives etc. and their relation to each other. The ultimate motto of the compositional semantics is to represent a view about the best way to describe the functioning of individual words.

Given the proper functioning of these individual words and their right combination, sentences come to have the meaning that we require. So finding the right description of what items in the different categories do and the formulation of their right combination is an important task, for it makes the meaning possible. How meaning is possible has an important bearing on how meaningless expressions are generated. This will be discussed in Chapter V.

Now what an expression means and what a person has said by using expressions, is mostly a socially fixed matter. "To imagine a language means" according to Wittgenstein "to imagine a form of life".¹ Meaning of a sentence mostly depends on specific culture, and is subject to different laws, principles, conventions partially unique to it and partially is a reflection of general properties of mind. What an expression means often does not accord with a speaker's own understanding. We have also a different picture. Recent development along this line begins with an analysis of 'speaker's meaning' advanced by H.P. Grice. His theory may be called communication-intention theory of meaning. Grice says that we use the word 'meaning' to label what a speaker intends

1 Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, Translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1976, Section 19.

or is trying to do with his words. Expressions being meaningful is primarily a matter of intention. Grice's account can be interpreted to imply that meaninglessness of a sentence depends fully on the hearer because the speaker never produce a meaningless sentence deliberately or intentionally. This issue will be discussed in Chapter VI.

I have mentioned that human language is highly compositional in nature. This compositional feature of language distinguishes human language from animal language which in other respects shows signs of apparent intelligence. Another way of distinguishing human language from animal language is that man applies language with the intention to perform this or that illocutionary act while the sounds of the animal are merely stimulus-response phenomena. Besides these, animal never mistake in their communication. They can only show some deficiency or slip due to their unfitness of speech organ. 'Mistake', 'Wrong', 'incorrect', 'irrelevant', 'absurd', 'meaningless' all these concepts are inherent or implicit in human language, whether they are deliberate or due to confusion. For human language is creative and highly flexible in nature. And this creativity and flexibility is explicitly present in natural language and almost absent in artificial or formal language. From

this it may follow that the concept of meaninglessness is more relevant in the case of natural language than that of the artificial or formal language. These issues will be discussed in Chapter VII.

Some philosophers like N.V. Banerjee says that the concept of meaninglessness is not something new. This concept can be reduced into other concepts such as falsity and so on. So there is an issue about the reducibility of meaninglessness. This will be discussed in Chapter VIII.

CHAPTER-I
MEANINGFULNESS AND WORLD VIEW

Chapter I

MEANINGFULNESS AND WORLD VIEW

In this Chapter I like to deal with the question how some theoretical considerations like one's view of the world, logic, his belief, plays a vital role in determining the meaningfulness of a sentence or an expression. Holiday says :

Language serves for the expression of content : It has a representational or, as I would prefer to call it, an ideational function ... the speaker or writer embodies in language his experience of the phenomena of the real world; and this includes his experience of the internal world of his own consciousness : his reactions, cognitions, perceptions, and also his linguistic acts of speaking and understanding.¹

Let us see how each of these factors like one's view of the world, his belief about the human mind, theory of logic etc. have important bearings on meaningfulness. In dealing with this question we can take help from different examples of expressions whose meaningfulness is obviously the subject matter of controversy among philosophers and linguists.

¹ M.A.K. Halliday, "Linguistic Function and Literary Style" in Literary Style : A symposium, edited by S. Chatman, Oxford University Press, New York and London, 1971, p. 332.

"Mind and body exists" is one of such controversial expression. According to Ryle the above conjunction makes an absurd expression and can be used only in making jokes. We can construct conjunctive expressions only with the terms which belongs to the same category or type or with the same kind of expressions. Mind and body according to Ryle, are so different in nature that they can not be in the same category and therefore it is improper to say that both mind and body exists in the same sense. It is perfectly proper to say that body exists (in the literal sense of the term 'existence'). And it is also perfectly proper to say that mind exists (in the metaphorical sense of the term 'existence'). But to conjoin the two is to make a category-mistake.

But the followers of the official doctrine give an opposite opinion. According to them the proposition "Mind and body exist" is not absurd. It is alright that mind and body are different but as far as their existence is concerned they belong to the same category. The subject can have physical existence or it can have mental existence. The view of the supporters of official doctrine and of Ryle can be represented by the figure (1) and (2) respectively.

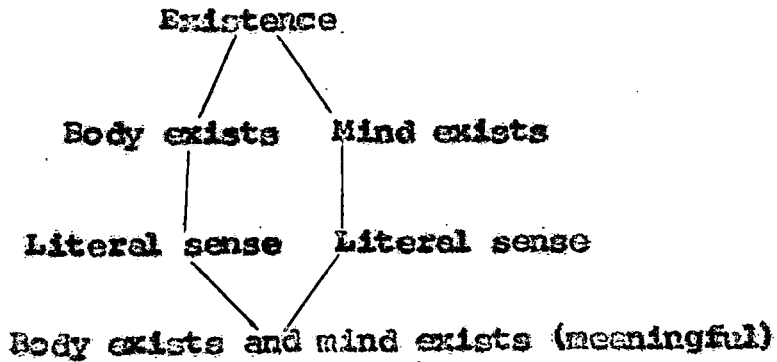


Figure : 1

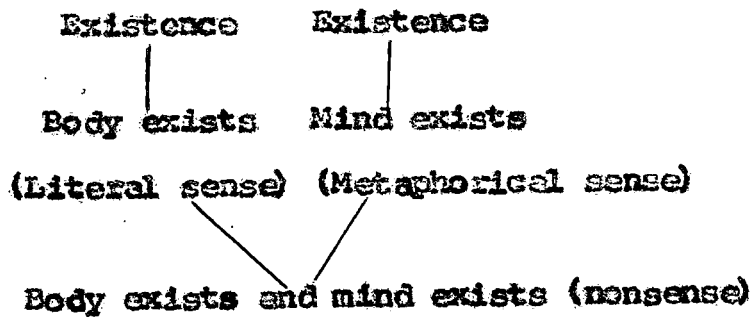


Figure : 2

Thus here we may say that different interpretations of 'existence' create strong opposition between Ryle and the followers of official doctrine in respect of the meaningfulness of the sentence "Mind and body exists".

Let us consider another controversial expression "Scott exists". According to both Frege and Russell the sentence "Scott exists" is senseless or it can be called

simply meaningless. The reason Frege gives in favour of his argument is that existence is a property of a concept. Since existence is a property of a concept it can not be significantly applied to an object, whether we affirm or deny it does not matter. Thus according to Frege general existential sentences of the form "Cow exist", "Tree exist", "Men exist" and so on are meaningful, but singular existential sentence of the form "Scott exists", "Socrates exists" is meaningless because here existence is applied to the objects.¹ He also maintains that the sentence "Scott exists" can be meaningful only in the case where "Scott exists" means there is something corresponding to the word "Scott" or the word 'Scott' is not empty.²

Russell also tries to establish by several arguments the point that sentences of the form "a exists" are meaningless where "a" is a proper name. And his argument rests solely on his theory of types, predicates and proper names. He says :

The words "a exists" are meaningless. It is only of descriptions - definite or indefinite that existence can be significantly asserted; for if "a" is a name, it must name something : what does not name anything is not a name.³

1 Frege, G., Translations from the Philosophical writings of Gottlob Frege, edited by Peter Geach and Max Black; Third Edition, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1980, p.51.

2 Frege, G. Posthumous Writings, translated by Peter Long and Roger White, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1979, p.60.

3 B. Russell, Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1956, pp.178-179.

And his view about the predicate is that if something is a predicate then it is possible at least to conceive of a situation where the predicate does not apply to a object. But in the case of "a exists", where "a" is a proper name, it is not possible to conceive of a situation where "a exists" is false. Because the meaning of a logically proper name is its denotatum which cannot be without its existence. "The notion of "existence" have several forms ... but the fundamental form is that which is derived immediately from the notion of "sometimes true".¹

Another argument of Russell in favour of the view that "a exists" or "Scott exists" is meaningless is as follows :

When you take any propositional function and assert of it that it is possible, that it is sometimes true, that gives you the fundamental meaning of existence ... when you say "Unicorns exist", you are not saying anything that would apply to any unicorns there might happen to be, because as a matter of fact there are not any, and therefore if what you say had any application to the actual individuals, it could not possibly be significant unless it were true ... and the same applies to when you say "Men exist". If you say that "Men exist", and "Socrates is a man",

1 Ibid., p. 164.

therefore 'Socrates exists', that is exactly the same sort of fallacy as it would be if you said 'Men are numerous', 'Socrates is a man', therefore 'Socrates is numerous', because existence is a predicate of a propositional function, or derivatively of a class.¹

But in Quine's Mathematical Logic we can find an opposite view. According to him singular existential proposition such as "Scott exists" is perfectly meaningful and is true. He says :

To say that something does not exist, or that there is something which is not, is clearly a contradiction in terms; hence '(x) (x exists)' must be true.²

Not only certain theoretical consideration but also some common belief may lead to the controversy whether an expression is meaningful or meaningless. The problem of meaninglessness arises in connection with religious language - especially if religious language is claimed as cognitive. Believers of the traditional Christianity and Judaism believe the factual character of the theological statements such as "God loves mankind", "God is good", "God is infinite" and so on. According to them theological statements are not only

1 B. Russell, in Logic and Knowledge, edited by Robert Charles Marsh, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1956, pp.232-233.

2 W.V.O. Quine, Mathematical Logic, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1965, p.150.

cognitive but true also. In addition to scientific realities and facts, there are religious realities and facts also.

But their thesis about religious statement has been challenged by other philosophers and philosophical schools at different times. They attempted to show that religious statements are entirely meaningless by several arguments.

According to logical positivists like Ayer a sentence can be said to have literal significance (meaning) if and only if the proposition it expresses is either analytic or empirically verifiable (verifiable in principle at least) by human experience. Experience is relevant to the truth or falsity of a statement. So in determining the truth or falsity of a statement if experience is no way relevant then that sentence must be literally meaningless. And this is what happens to theological statements, according to the positivist. In determining the meaningfulness of an expression 'experience' is a crucial factor. The problem arises about the nature of experience or more clearly what is to be counted as experience. Is religious experience an experience or is it merely a kind of feeling? When one says 'I see the world to be a gift of God' what does one experience? Or is it that he merely feels something? And when the believers of the traditional Christianity and Judaism claim that in addition to scientific

realities and facts there are religious or psychological facts, what kind of facts they refer to. Is the division of facts into different categories like psychological or religious facts and ordinary facts tenable ?

Let us see that the answer to the question whether religious language is literally meaningful or meaningless depends wholly upon the kind of answer we give to the above question.

According to some philosophers the meaning of an expression or word(s) varies in different context. The word 'experience' used in the context of religion has a meaning different from its usage in the context of science. The method of religion has an experimental character but it is different in nature from that of science. Scientific method is observational in character and observation essentially depend on sense-experience. But the experience of the Supreme Reality is non-sensible. For we can not even think of the conditions under which it can be said that we have a sensible experience of the Supreme Reality. And this non-sensible experience can be understood in the context of religious language only. The positivists contention that religious language is meaningless because they are not verifiable by experience is not tenable according to those philosophers because positivists make no distinction between different

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kinds of experience and they view as if experience means sense = experience and nothing else.

Many philosophers regard religious experience as a proof of the existence of God. They maintain that it is possible for men to be immediately acquainted with God as in the case of sense-content. In opposing to their view positivists maintain that they do not deny that religious assertion may be true. Religious assertions may be true only if the man who asserts that he is seeing God is merely asserting that he is experiencing a peculiar kind of sense-content, he is experiencing a religious emotion or feeling. The autonomists¹ also take the view like that of the positivists. They maintain that " 'God exists' means 'God is love'" and also maintain that " 'God exists' is reducible to what is love without loss of meaning".² But the thesis of the reductionism is not at all accepted by the religious believers because it reduces ontological category into a psychological one. Ordinarily the man who says that he is experiencing God or seeing God is not saying that he is experiencing a religious emotion or feeling, but also that there exists a

1 Autonomists maintain that One's believe that God exists and an ordinary object exists is not of the same kind. In the case of God exists 'the belief that means belief in'.

2 Sengupta, — Logic of Religious Language, Prajna, Calcutta, 1978, p.44.

transcendental God who is the object of his emotion or feeling. For example, one who loves God also claims that love experience must have a perfect and infinite loved object. If there is no such object then love experience would not be possible. If 'God exists' means 'one feels in a certain way' then this ontic character of the religious believe will vanish.

From the above discussion does it follow that in addition to scientific objective realities religious objective realities need be attributed to religious assertions? The problem it seems, actually lies in the use of the term 'objective reality'. Those who believe that religious experiences must have some 'objective reality' have extended the meaning of the word 'objective' in such a way that ultimately they fail to give it any meaning at all. And that is why the statements about religious experience, or more simply, the religious statements seems to many people to be meaningless or nonsense.

Let us consider another controversial issue of whether the assertion made by the philosopher like "No empirical statements are certain", "There are no material things" are absurd or meaningless. According to Moore and Malcolm these statements are absurd or senseless. They have

used the paradigm case argument to prove their absurdity. Paradigm case argument goes from the actual use of words in our ordinary language to answer to the philosophical problems. It refuses to conduct philosophical discussion in a different way, with different rules from those of ordinary discussions. Argument from paradigm case states that words mean what a given language, its rules, customs and conventions say they mean. Philosophical theses which often go against the paradigm cases are surely absurd or senseless. The defender of the paradigm case argument try to prove the absurdity of the philosophical theses like "No empirical statements are certain", "There are no material things", in this way, "No empirical statements are certain" is absurd according to Moore, because we at least know for certain that there are several chairs in this room, and it would be absurd to suggest that we do not know it, but only believe it. Philosophical thesis that "There are no material things" is also absurd because the existence of two hands at least prove that there are at least two material things that exist. The essence of Moore's technique of refutation lies in the fact that these statements go against the ordinary use of language. In reply to these Moore's argument it may be said that when philosophers say that we never know for certain any material thing statements he is not stating any empirical fact. What

they deny is that the form of the speech such as "I know for certain that P" is proper where p is a material thing statement. This is an improper form of speech because this is not the type of statement which can fulfil the criterion of certainty. The criterion of certainty states that it is wrong to say that anything is certain if there is the slightest possibility that it will not happen. A priori statement can only fulfil this criterion of certainty. The phrase "know for certain", according to Ayer is properly applied only to a priori statements and not to empirical statements. Similarly, when a philosopher says that "There are no material things" he does not deny that 'material thing' plays no part in ordinary language. Denying material things he is not denying anything which the ordinary man believes. What they want to say is that man does not really see a material thing like cat, what he sees only some sense-data of a cat.

So it seems that the problem of absurdity or meaninglessness sometimes arise from the controversial issue of what should be the nature of philosophical language - the language philosophers used for their discussion. Philosophical theses seem absurd to those who believe that ordinary language should be the philosophers medium of discussion, while it seems perfectly meaningful to those who believe that

philosophers' statements are not to be interpreted in the same way as it is done by ordinary men.

Thus after discussing the various examples of expressions whose meaningfulness is obviously a matter of controversy among philosophers it seems that the concept of meaningfulness and meaninglessness cannot be used uniformly or univocally. Sometimes we cannot say instantly whether an expression is meaningless or meaningful. The concept of meaningfulness and meaninglessness are chequered concepts and are related to a plethora of items. Meaningfulness and meaninglessness may be determined against the background of linguistic and non-linguistic facts.

In this chapter I have randomly used the term "absurd" as synonymous for "meaningless". One may object that the term "absurd" cannot be used as a synonymous term for "meaningless" for some kind of arbitrariness is involved with the term "meaningless", while with the term "absurd" this type of arbitrariness is not involved. I am also agree that "absurd" cannot be always used as a synonymous term for "meaningless". But they may be used interchangeably in those cases where the meaningless expressions are not constructed through arbitrary or random combination of words.

but out of linguistic and non-linguistic illusion. The instances of meaningless expressions (although controversial) that I have taken for consideration in this Chapter are not at all arbitrary. So, I think, there is nothing wrong in using the word "absurd" and "meaningless" interchangeably.

CHAPTER-II
LANGUAGE PHILOSOPHY AND POETRY

Chapter II

LANGUAGE, PHILOSOPHY AND POETRY

Now let us begin from some typical areas where the problem of meaninglessness is apparent, namely philosophy and poetry. One may wonder why is it that in philosophy and in poetry particularly there is a problem of meaninglessness while in science the problem is relatively unknown. It may be said that scientific language is stereotyped and technical. Scientists only try to discover the laws of fact and describe them in most precise way. And in doing so language indeed very much matter to science. Otherwise it would not be possible for scientist to carry on such activities as making hypothesis, recording, classifying, systematizing, generalizing and so on. But the problem lies in the fact that the manner in which language matter to science is not the same as it matter to philosophy and poetry. Scientists require minimal varieties of linguistic expression to describe their result. Here there is only the recording of certain information about the fact more precisely e.g.

$$F = \frac{Gm_1 M_2}{R^2}$$

(Given that F = Force between the two bodies of M, G = Gravitation, M_1 = mass, M_2 = another quantity of mass).

Scientists always try to restrict their words to their symbolic use to 'take all the colour out of them'.

They are very much busy with giving informations about the world or objective facts, not with the manner of making explicit these informations nicely or elegantly. Here style of saying does not matter so much. And where style of saying does not matter so much the question of ordering or arranging language differently from that of ordinary language does not arise. So the question of violation of semantical and syntactical rules are relatively unknown and so the concept of meaninglessness also is relatively unknown because the concept of meaninglessness is highly related with the violation of syntactic and semantic regularities. Many scientific sentences, however, often can appear bizzare to common man at first sight. For example, scientific expression like "Nothing is really solid" may seem bizzare to common man because in common usage things like tables, chairs, trees are spoken of as "solid". "Nothing is really solid" is a misleading assertion unless scientists specify how they are using the word "Solid".

In scientific writing the words are of no intrinsic importance, references made by the words are all important. Because the chief concern of scientists is to give information about the fact and their interrelations. In contrast to scientific language the language of poetry and philosophy do not consist only of referential or symbolic usage but of

something much more. It is the business of poet and philosopher to look at the world from infinite dimensions. They try to acquire concrete knowledge of the 'reality' by personalized experience. And in doing so 'reality' stands in a relative manner. The poet and the philosopher portray them in their own way. His experience of the world is modified by the structure of his language. The function of language in this respect is not to clothe or robe the thought i.e. the medium by means of which we inter-communicate information about the existing reality. On the contrary language of poetry and philosophy create reality in its own image. Both the philosopher and the poet are not the passive spectator of the existing world - they are also involved in thinking of diverse possibilities of reality. And this is the common ground between the philosopher and the poet. Both engage in transcending acts which extend the limits of ordinary experience or sensory experience. To the extent a scientist say something which is akin to common sense understanding. He may be accused of saying something nonsense like "space is actually matter". The root of the philosopher and the poet in doing philosophy and writing poetry is a kind of discontent or dissatisfaction about the existent things. Poet and philosopher always try to enrich the concept from their intuition. They interweave things or events with new meanings, a

potency which is entirely intuitive. They are very much sensitive about the power of words. And this is clearly reflected in their use of metaphor - extended use of words. It helps them to get hold of new ideas. And this metaphorical use of language is the supreme ornament of style.

They are rattling breakfast
plates in basement kitchens,
And along the trampled edges
of the street
I am aware of the damp souls
of house-maids
Sprouting despondently at area
gates.

(T.S.Eliot, Morning at the Window, 1917)

Here the transference of the qualities of some sort of deprived plant growth to the housemaids souls represents an attempt to describe their social status.

Language, Coleridge claimed, is the 'amoury of the human mind', an instrument of the imagination. Language is an instrument by means of which we reach beyond the immediate world perceived by the eye. One of the chief functions of poetry is to evoke emotions or feelings.

She lived unknown and few
could know
When Lucy ceased to be;
But she is in her grave, and O !
The difference to me !

(William Wordsworth - Lucy)

Here the simple words are used to evoke the most powerful emotion.

Style also plays an important role in the poetic language. At a conference on 'Style in language' held in the United States in 1958 it was suggested that the style of a person is as his fingerprints.¹ Schopenhauer described style as the 'phylogonomy of the mind'. And in this stylistic effect vagueness of meaning or words is an important source. Many thinkers announce that vagueness is in fact one of the basic principles of the symbolic aesthetic. Wittgenstein in his Philosophical Investigations also gives a similar view. He says

But is a blurred concept a concept
at all ? - Is an indistinct photograph
a picture of a person at all ? Is it
even always an advantage to replace an
indistinct picture by a sharp one ?
Isn't the indistinct one often exactly
what we need?²

1 Roger Brown, in Style in Language, ed. by T.A. Sebeok, Cambridge Mass., reprint 1968, p. 378.

2 L. Wittgenstein, PI, Basil Blackwell, 1976, Sect. 71.

In the poetry of E.E.Cummings we find phrases like "a man wearing a round jeer for a hat", "children building this rainman out of snow" and so on. And although the above phrases violate some semantical rules we can understand them and this semantic violation creates the imagery desired. For novelty the writer use any word that serves him, even the word may be ambiguous or new. The context of the utterance helps us to understand what the speaker tries to say. Sentences which are anomalous in this way, that is, by the employment of ambiguous, and new or uninterpretable words are known as "nonsense". But this semantic violation is permitted for poetic effect. Shefali Moitra says,

... Sentences in scientific language bring down the possibility of meaning variance almost to nil. This is made possible by the fact that the universe of discourse is predetermined and that it does not have to be determined by the context of use.¹

The language of poetry possesses reality and value in its own right and not only as an instrument or vehicle of communication. Ultimately we are fascinated or enchanted by the use of language, by the form of language. And the language

1 Shefali Moitra, "Literal Meaning and the Role of Context" in Logical Form, Predication and Ontology edited by Pranab Kumar Sen, Macmillan India Ltd., Delhi, 1982, p.183.

itself has become marvelous creation in the poetry.

"A rose-red song with sky-blue tune, a little scent laughter".¹ Here there is a grammatical contiguity between the word 'red' and 'song', 'blue' and 'tune' but there is no semantic consistency between them.

Here it can be said that some poetry leads us to a world, or creates a world which can not be expressed by a customary language - the poet breaks or at least ruffles the boundaries of customary language or preestablished linguistic system consciously. Paul Valiry says "... ambiguity gives poetry its delicate charm".² Even for some poet nonsense is more poetical than sense.

The problem of meaninglessness also finds its way in philosophy. And it finds its way in philosophy because of the vagueness involved in the very definition of philosophy and the nature of philosophical thinking. In the case of philosophy to ask the general question like "what is philosophy?" "What is the meaning of the word 'Philosophy'?" would leave unanswered since there is no one reportive definition of philosophy. Different person or group of

1 Sukanta Chowdhury, The Select Nonsense of Sukumar Roy, Oxford University Press, Calcutta, 1987, p.56.

2 Francis Scarfe, Art of Paul Valery, Heinemann, 1954, p.56.

persons use the word 'philosophy' to stand for very different things or activities. So to ask the question about philosophy it would be better to ask in this manner : what do you mean by the word 'Philosophy'? Elmer Sprague says,

The question "what is philosophy?" is like the question "what is furniture?" both "philosophy" and "furniture" are words that can be applied to many things ... to answer the question "what is furniture?" One must detail the different ways in which the word "furniture" may be used. Similarly, an answer to the question "what is philosophy?" requires a detailing of what the word may mean.¹

Now I shall focus my attention on the issue that every philosopher or group of philosophers makes a particular system - a system of belief and what can meaningfully be said is also determined by that particular system. When two systems made by the philosopher or group of philosophers contradict with each other the problem of meaninglessness creep in. And this can be explicate properly by presenting the instances of various kinds of conflicting views about the same subject matter in philosophy.

¹ Sprague Elmer, What is Philosophy : A Short Introduction, New York, Oxford University Press, 1961, pp. 3-4.

Philosophy in contrast with natural science announced the ultimate nature of the world or the nature of the world as a whole on the basis of logic (while the natural scientists' description of the world is subject to empirical observation). And the philosopher can conceive the infinite number of logically possible world. As a result there we can find the idealists world, the world of materialists and so many. Idealist philosophers believe that above and beyond the perceiving world there is a world of extraordinary state of affairs. And it is the task of the philosopher to search out such extraordinary state of affairs lies concealed (the world of ideas, the world as God's mind). And the logic they give in favour of their argument is that the world of sense does not provide them satisfactory objects of knowledge because of its ever changing nature. Only the ideas can provide them an alternative satisfactory model. Behind the changing phenomenon there lies the unchanged and unchanging substance which provides permanent and eternal objects of knowledge.

In contrary to the idealists logic about the existence of the world of Ideas materialists give their logic in favour of the world of sense or the perceiving world. According to them the statements made by the idealist for

proving the existence of something that lies beyond the perceiving world would not make sense. They are simply meaningless expression. For a statement to be meaningful to an empiricist the thing talked about must in some way be the sort of thing that can be experienced. Thus the statement made by the idealist such as "God has a perceiving mind", "The world of Ideas are the ideal forms of sensible objects" are regarded by the empiricists as meaningless.

In poetry and in philosophy language has a peculiar importance. Philosopher and poet have no alternative but to do this through language itself. By the nature of their art they must be concerned with language (if philosophy can be regarded as a kind of art). The root for both of them is a kind of dissatisfaction - dissatisfaction about the ordinary or everyday use of language or it may be about the ordinary concept of reality. Doing philosophy and writing poetry is an attempt to unfreeze habits of normal thinking, to redeem them by less rigid and restricted one. The nature of philosophical and poetical language is such that "the very manner of saying is intrinsic to what is said".¹ The philosopher and the poet is the generator of a new

1 Margaret Chatterjee, The Language of Philosophy, Allied Publishers Private Ltd., Calcutta 1981, p.134.

language game - the possessor of highly linguistic imagination. Philosophical writing express insights - the way in which the world is conceived and the manner in which they are expressed is an integral part of it. The ways of saying or style determine what someone wants to say. In expressing his subtle experience, his insights or vision, philosopher sometimes goes beyond the boundaries of everyday language. Though they use the ordinary words they use them in a very deeper sense. This kind of activity of the philosopher involves linguistic imagination and for which no rules can be given. In doing so they even sometimes terminate into vagueness or unclarity. Following Wittgenstein we may say occasionally the "blurred edges" can do the job very well. Waismann also says this :

A philosopher, instead of preaching the righteousness or ordinary speech, should learn to be on his guard against the pitfalls ever present in its forms ... just as a good swimmer must be able to swim up stream, so the philosopher should master the unspeakably difficult art of thinking up speech, against the current of cliches.¹

1 Friedrich Waismann, "How I see philosophy" in Logical Positivism edited by A.J. Ayer. The Free Press, New York, 1959, pp.262-63.

The question naturally arises : Does everyday use of language - the language we use in ordinary conversation, not a proper way of using language ? It is all right. But from this it does not imply that one cannot use language differently. A man who possesses limitless fund of imagination or possesses subtle insight can bring a new sense from the apparent nonsense. Even a paradoxical sentence like "Matter does not exist" is made by the philosopher. And this comes from his extraordinary kind of experience. Philosophical arguments enable us to see things in a new way though they do not conform logical rules. Waismann says,

The essential difference between philosophy and logic is that logic constrains us while philosophy leaves us free : in a philosophic discussion we are led, step by step, to change our angle of vision, e.g. to pass from one way of putting a question to another, and this with our spontaneous argument - a thing profoundly different from deducing theorems from a given set of premises ... The essence of philosophy lies in its freedom.¹

And the root of the concept of meaninglessness lies herein i.e. in freedom - freedom to think and expressing it.

1 Ibid., p. 364.

Every philosopher thinks in his own way, in his own ontological background or framework. Outside his conceptual framework certain expressions - expressions of different philosophical background seems to him not false but meaningless. Thus the concept of meaninglessness have their origin in the nature of philosophy itself.

It also finds its way in poetical language as I have mentioned earlier. Poetry involves a kind of immediate and witting embodiment of insights in verbal form. In expressing their insights, their imaginary world, they transcends the limits of existing language and establish a spirit of nonsense. Sukumar Roy named this special vein of nonsense the rass or spirit of whimsy. In his Rhymes without Reason (Abol-Tabol) we find nonsensical expressions like :

A pochard and porcupine, defying the
grammarians, Combined to form a
porcechard, unmindful of their variance.

And this literary nonsense creates an apparent gravity which is absent in popular rhyme. A poem is a world of its own. Unlike the prose it does not accept the conventional vehicle of language. In poetry the mind is active, having to make its own system. In poetical diction the words can no longer be given their proper meaning and the ordinary

symbolic process is foiled. Elizabeth Sewell says :

It is necessary to postulate at once two syntaxes, that of prose which we have known from your youth up, and that of poetry about which anyone who writes poetry will have glimmerings, but which is not taught in the schools.¹

¹ Elizabeth Sewell, The Structure of Poetry, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., London, 1951, pp. 100-101.

CHAPTER-III
CRITERIA OF MEANINGFULNESS & MEANINGLESSNESS

Chapter III

CRITERIA OF MEANINGFULNESS AND MEANINGLESSNESS

Present day thinkers are far too ready to dismiss a philosophical statement as meaningless. But they are unable to come to a single point about what criterion do we follow for distinguishing meaningful sentences from the meaningless ones. Philosophers from different conceptual background has given different conditions under which a sentence may be said to be meaningful or meaningless, philosophers of the empiricist tradition give empiricist criteria of meaningfulness. According to empiricism all non-analytic knowledge is based on experience. Empiricist criteria of meaningfulness is mainly formulated for opposing metaphysicism or for discarding metaphysical expressions as meaningless. Hume, an extreme traditional empiricist, claims that 'substance', 'essence', 'causal power' all are insignificant [meaningless, not 'senseless'] because we do not experience what they ostensibly signify, we do not know 'from what impressions these ideas are derived'. Let us move from Hume's thesis to the theses of logical positivists. There are many versions of logical positivists criteria of meaningfulness. All these versions deal only with 'cognitive' meaning of a sentence as opposed to 'poetic' or 'emotive' meaning. When logical positivists claim that metaphysical statements are meaningless what they mean is that they are cognitively

meaningless although they can have poetic or emotive meaning.

One of the earliest formulation of the empiricist criterion of meaningfulness is complete verifiability (possibility of verification). Hempel formulated this criterion in the following manner :

A sentence has empirical meaning if and only if it is not analytic and follows logically from some finite and logically consistent class of observation sentences.¹

This complete verifiability criterion has a serious defect. If the formulation of complete verifiability is taken as a criterion of meaningfulness then all sentences of the universal form including the scientific discoveries would turn out to be as meaningless, because they are not verifiable even in principle by finite set of observational data. This criterion is so strong that it rules out certain sentences as meaningless which are in fact generally accepted as meaningful.

For this reason logical positivists employ the

1 Karl G. Hempel, "The Empiricist criterion of Meaning", in Logical Positivism, edited by A.J. Ayer, The Free Press, New York, 1959, p.111.

criterion of complete falsifiability instead of complete verifiability. The new criterion is like this :

A sentence has empirical meaning if and only if its denial is not analytic and follows logically from some finite logically consistent class of observation sentences.¹

The main defect of this criterion is that it rules out purely existential sentences like "There exists at least one unicorn". Further there are sentences containing mixed quantifiers which could not be falsified conclusively.

For these above reasons the requirement of complete verifiability and complete falsifiability were abandoned. Positivists soon come to modify the criterion so that it requires merely that all meaningful empirical sentence would be capable of being confirmed or disconfirmed to certain degree instead of complete verifiability or falsifiability. This can be called "confirmability criterion of meaningfulness". Then new problem arises regarding when a sentence is confirmable or disconfirmable. Ayer devised a criterion of confirmability which states that a statement is confirmable and hence meaningful if it is possible to derive from the statement in question and its subsidiary hypotheses an observation statement not derivable from the subsidiary hypotheses alone.

1 Ibid., p.113.

This criterion of confirmability is so liberal that it rules out no sentence as meaningless. It allows empirical import to any sentence whatsoever. Thus if S is the sentence "The God is good" it can choose as a subsidiary hypothesis the sentence "If the God is good then this leaf is green" to deduce the observation sentence. "This leaf is green" - a deduction which does not follow from the first sentence alone. To meet this objection Ayer has proposed a modified version of the confirmability criterion. Under this new formulation the subsidiary hypotheses were required to be either analytic or independently testable.

This new criterion, however, allows empirical significance to any conjunction, S.N where S is a sentence which is either analytic or independently testable and N is a sentence like "The absolute is perfect" or "The God is good" and so on.

From the above discussion it can be said that all attempts to state an adequate empiricist criterion of meaningfulness have failed, some of them are too liberal while some others are too restrictive. Verification argument only states, as Ayer says,

That metaphysical statements do not fall into the same category as the laws of logic, or as

scientific hypothesis, or as historical narratives, or judgement of perception or any other commonsense descriptions of the "natural" world. Surely it does not follow that they are neither true nor false, still less that they are nonsensical.¹

Metaphysicians too never claim that metaphysical statements belong to the same category as scientific statements or logical laws. Metaphysicians are conscious about the status of the metaphysical expressions - which category they belong. So by stating that metaphysical expressions belong to different category from that of scientific statements it says nothing new.

Another criterion which is closely related with verification criterion of distinguishing meaningful sentences from the meaningless ones is the truth-condition criterion. And its close relation with verification criterion can be manifested from the remark of M. Schlick.

... it is simply impossible to give the meaning of any statement except by describing the fact which must exist if the statement is to be true... The statement of the conditions under which a proposition is true is the same as the statement

1 A.J. Ayer, Editor's Introduction to Logical Positivism, Free Press, New York, 1959, pp. 15-16.

of its meaning ... And these 'conditions' ... must finally be discovered in the given ... verifiable certainly means nothing but "capable of being exhibited in the given. The meaning of every proposition is finally to be determined by the given, and by nothing else.¹

Here the main problem is whether meaningfulness can be determined by truth-conditions only or whether the possibility of giving truth-conditions of an expression affirms about its meaningfulness. This problem arises because meaning and truth go together so often that to some philosophers the fundamental questions about meaning seem to be the same as the fundamental questions about truth.

In dealing with the above problem I presupposed the distinction between analytic and synthetic propositions and deals only with the truth-conditions of synthetic statement. A Statement is analytic when it is true by virtue of its meanings or by syntax independently of a fact. I think that to give truth-conditions of a sentence is to indicate the fact and for this the concept of truth-conditions is not relevant in determining the meaningfulness of analytic statements. Analytical statement is often termed as tautology or vacuous.

1 M. Schlick, "Positivism and Realism" in Logical Positivism, ed. by A. J. Ayer, The Free Press, New York, 1959, pp. 36-37.

The identification of sentence meaning with truth-condition is not a latter-day aberration. It could be traced to Wittgenstein's Tractatus. In Tractatus logical constants are defined by the method of truth-table. And to give truth-table of a sentence containing logical constant is to give the conditions under which those sentences are true or false. In the case of molecular propositions there is an explicit identification of sense with its truth-conditions.

It is the central task of semantics to give the semantic interpretation i.e. the meaning of every sentence in the language. It is very easy to decide whether a sentence is grammatically or syntactically meaningful or not. The main job of syntax is to characterise sentencehood and we are very much confident about this characterisation because there are explicit grammatical or syntactical rules for fulfilling this task. This is true not only of an analytical sentence but also of synthetic sentence. But there is no such explicit semantical rules for determining whether a sentence is semantically meaningful or not. To determine whether a sentence is semantically meaningful or not is not such an easy task. We have to say what particular meaning it has. According to Donald Davidson "... to give truth conditions is a way of giving the meaning of a sentence".¹

1 Donald Davidson "Truth and Meaning" in The Philosophy of Language, edited by A.P.Martinich, Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, 1985, p.76.

A theory of meaning for a natural language is claimed to be a theory of truth. Davidson says,

... a semantic theory of a natural language cannot be considered adequate unless it provides an account of the concept of truth for that language along the general lines proposed by Tarski for formalized languages... By a theory of truth I mean a set of axioms that entail, for every sentence in the language, a statement of the conditions under which it is true.¹

And this condition is conventionally expressed in this way "Grass is green" is true if and only if grass is green. By giving truth-conditions in this manner the meaning of all sentences will be automatically determined.

Critique of the truth conditional semantics may claim that many sentences of natural language vary in truth value depending on the time of utterance of the sentence and identification of the speaker. And this crucial fact is absent in the case of truth conditional theory. But the defender of the truth conditional theory tries to accommodate this phenomenon in their theory. They said that truth value

1. Donald Davidson, "Semantics for Natural Languages" in On Noam Chomsky's Critical Essays, edited by Gilbert Harman, Anchor Books, Anchor Press/Doubleday, New York, 1974, pp. 242-243.

is either the property of a particular utterance or the speech act or truth is a relation between a sentence, a speaker, and a time.

But one obvious difficulty about this theory of meaning is that of the existence of the counterfactual statements. Let us take a well known example of Dummett : "A city will never be built here". Truth condition theorist of course may give the truth condition of the above statement in the following manner:

"A city will never be built here" is true if
and only if, a city will never be built here.

But the truth-conditions given by the truth-theorist is such that it could not even in principle be recognized as obtaining by any speaker of any time. Though it is impossible even in principle to recognize that the truth-conditions of the sentence "A city will never be built here" is obtaining, the competent English speakers do indeed understand the sentence, know the meaning of the sentence. So giving truth conditions is a way of giving the meaning of sentences is not an adequate account.

Secondly, truth-conditional theory says nothing new about the condition under which an individual sentence can

be said to be true and therefore have a meaning. It merely repeats the sentence type.

Moreover, there are sentences that do not seem to have any truth values at all, for example, imperatives, interrogatives, exclamatory sentences and so on. But they are the proper sentences of natural language. A theory of meaning for a natural language must successfully cope with the meaning of these sentences.

Some philosophers claim that expressions like "The child was naked but wore a red dress", "He saw a colourless green dream last night", "The square is a four sided figure but not four sided" are meaningless because they are self-contradictory. Some, but not all, philosophers have held that self-contradictory expressions are meaningless. Whether self-contradictory expressions are meaningless or not is a matter of controversy. There are so many dissenting views about whether contradictions are meaningless. Langford holds that self-contradictory sentences are meaningless. The reason he gives in support of his view is that we cannot find any unitary meaning of self-contradictory expressions or sentences, though we get the meaning of the separate words or sentences. He also states that a sentence is meaningful by virtue of the 'accompaniment of the sentence' i.e., something

which a sentence stands for. But in the case of self-contradictory expression no accompaniment can be found.¹

In defending the view that self-contradictory sentences are meaningless Edward Erwin has given the following argument :

... "Some bachelors are married" and "virtue is square" both kinds of statements are unintelligible in that we cannot understand what it would be like for them to be true. I conclude, then, that it is not objectionable that contradictions turn out to be meaningless, if we interpret "meaningless" as meaning "a priori false".²

It follows from the cited argument that if the interpretation of "meaningless" as meaning "a priori false" can be proved incorrect or if some other interpretation can be given to the term "meaningless" such as "meaningless" means "neither true nor false" then contradiction cannot be regarded as meaningless. Because contradiction is a priori false. Thus whether contradiction is meaningless or not would wholly depend on the interpretation of "meaningless" if we accept Erwin's view. It seems that he

1 C. I. Lewis and C. H. Langford, Symbolic Logic, Dover Publications, New York, 1932, pp. 475-77.

2 Edward Erwin, The Concept of Meaninglessness, John Hopkins, C1970, pp. 138-39.

is bound to give the view that contradiction is meaningless because he defines "meaningless" as meaning "a priori false" and contradictions are a priori false as the negation of contradiction is a priori true.

C. I. Lewis, however, gives an opposite view. He states that self-contradictory sentences have meanings which are inconceivable.¹ It does not draw a blank. There is some reaction to such a sentence. Even he states that self-contradictory expressions have connotation, it definitely implies some properties. The expression "round square" implies the property of roundness and squareness. And it is for the existence of the two mutually exclusive properties at the same time and space the meaning of a self-contradictory sentence can not think consistently. It is inconceivable. Inconceivability here means 'logical inconceivability'.

A. C. Ewing offers an argument in favour of the view that contradictions are meaningful. He says,

...the statement : Quadratic equations attend race meetings, is self contradictory... even self-contradictory sentences are not meaningless, I think that : Quadratic equations attend race meetings, is a statement which

1 C. I. Lewis and C. H. Langford, Symbolic Logic, Dover Publications, New York, 1932, p. 68.

we understand perfectly well and that it is only because we can understand it so well that we see it to be obviously false.¹

Ewing says that "Quadratic equations attend race meetings" is self-contradictory because according to him type-crossings are self-contradictory. He does not make any distinction between the sentence "Quadratic equations attend race meetings" and the sentence "An equilateral triangle is not equilateral". "If any self-contradictory statements are meaningful I do not see where to draw the line",² says Ewing. But whether the sentence "Quadratic equations attend race meetings" would be regarded as self-contradictory is a controversial issue. Let us consider this issue a little.

We can divide a priori truths into those (1) which are true by virtue of their logical form, for example, "A bachelor is a bachelor" and (2) those which are reducible by substitution of synonyms to statements of the first kind, for example, "A bachelor is an unmarried male". If we restrict the term "contradiction" only to the negation of statements of the above two kinds then type crossing in general and the sentence "Quadratic equations attend race

1 A.C.Ewing, Non-Linguistic Philosophy, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1968, pp.31-32.

2 Ibid., p.32.

meetings" in particular would not be regarded as self-contradictory. Only "A bachelor is not a bachelor" and "A bachelor is not an unmarried man" would be contradictions.

P.F.Strawson has denied that type crossings are self-contradictory. He argues,

Some have been tempted to assimilate violations of type restrictions to self-contradictions. But this seems a mistake. The reason why 'loud smells' makes no sense is not that smells, like murmurs, are necessarily soft. Referring to something as a smell prescribes as senseless the question whether it is loud or not loud.¹

Now if we restrict the usage of the term "contradiction" only to the above two kinds then many sentences such as "Colourless green ideas sleep furiously", "Round square is a geometrical figure", "The table is round and square", "He is dead and alive" which seems contradictory would no way be regarded as contradictory. It can be said that though they look like contradictory sentences, actually they are 'indeterminable' sentences. I propose to use the term 'indeterminable' following Katz though in a slightly

1 P.F. Strawson, Introduction to Logical Theory, Methuen, London, 1952, p.227.

different way. He says that those sentences are indeterminate which involve incompatible subjects but not incompatible predicates. Sentences which involve incompatible predicates are contradictory because incompatible predications made of the same unproblematic subject.¹ I like to use the term 'indeterminable' to cover the cases which involve both incompatible subjects and predicates. They are not contradictory because contradiction is the case where incompatibility lies between the subject and the predicate or between the two sentences (in the case of conjunction) but not between the subject and the predicate themselves. Moreover, by negating the contradictory sentences we get the analytic sentences but by negating the indeterminables we cannot get the analytic sentences. So indeterminables are not self-contradictory.

Let us return to our original problem - whether self-contradictory sentences are meaningless. It seems to me that self-contradictory sentences are meaningful. Contradiction is a logical relation between two given expressions. A contradiction simply means what the subject expression designates or asserts while predicate

1 J.J. Katz, The Philosophy of Language, Harper & Row, New York, 1966, pp.215-217.

expression denies that or what an expression asserts another expression of the same conjunction denies that. The thing designated by the contradictory expression belongs to a set which cannot have a member or that it belongs to a null set. Besides this, analyticity and contradiction are inversely related to each other with respect to negation. Negation of a analytic sentence can never be a meaningless sentence. Analytic sentences perfectly meaningful so are the negation of analytic sentence.

Many philosophers find some obvious relation between the metaphor and the concept of meaningfulness. One of the views of metaphor is that metaphorical expressions are meaningless. The violation of category restrictions is the distinctive feature of categorical expressions. In other words metaphorical expressions necessarily commits a category mistake. And committing the category mistake is the sign of a sentence's being meaningless or nonsensical. Another reason for supporting the view that metaphorical expressions are meaningless may be the acceptance of the verificationist criterion of meaningfulness. According to the verificationist a sentence cannot be meaningful unless it is verifiable. The metaphorical sentence 'The spring as it comes bursts up in bonfires green' (D.H.Lawrence) is not the kind of sentence that is verifiable as it does not report

facts or describe things in a conventional or in a straight jacket. So this metaphorical sentence, according to verificationist, is meaningless. I have already discussed about the verificationist criterion of meaningfulness and shown that it is not the adequate criterion of determining the meaningfulness of a sentence.

Let us examine the first reason given by some philosophers in favour of the view that metaphorical expressions are meaningless as they violate type or category restrictions. The view that metaphorical expressions violate category restrictions and hence are meaningless is primarily based on the view that metaphors should be read literally. But it is not without controversy. One of the contrasting view in this regard is that metaphors should not be read literally. Paraphrasing of metaphor is always inadequate, it cannot express the exact sense of the metaphorical expression or the subtle feelings expressed by it. Something is lost in paraphrasing. That the metaphorical expressions does not mean exactly what the paraphrase means. If in speaking metaphorically, it seems as if, he is speaking literally the very use of metaphor will be redundant. Moreover, to some philosophers in the case of metaphorical expressions there is a break between speaker's meaning and the sentence meaning (conventional meaning). What the sentence literally

means is not here identical with what the speaker means by the sentence though it is dependent on the sentence meaning in some way. Here speaker's intention plays a vital part. Even a speaker can give the literally nonsensical sentences like 'A rose-red song with sky-blue tune, a little scent of laughter' (Sukumar Roy) a metaphorical use. We can mention the remark of Edward Erwin in this respect.

In general, what a speaker means is what he intends to say; but what his words mean may not be what he means, and hence, may not mean what we intend to say. We sometimes fail to say what we mean - we intend to say one thing but actually say another. It is what we actually say, however, and not (necessarily) what we intend to say, that is either meaningless or meaningful.¹

Now if the above view of Erwin is correct then the question of whether metaphorical expressions are meaningless or not is completely irrelevant. Because metaphor is related with the speaker's intention and not with the sentence itself.

But the question arises : how we can understand

1 Edward Erwin, The Concept of Meaninglessness, The John Hopkins Press, Baltimore and London, C 1970, p.123.

the speaker's intention if it is not expressed by the sentence itself? Or in other words what the principles that would enable speaker to formulate and hearer to understand metaphorical utterances? In replying to this above question Searle states,

Because in metaphorical utterances what the speaker means differs from what he says (in one sense of "say"), in general we shall need two sentences for our examples of metaphor - first the sentence uttered metaphorically, and second, a sentence that expresses literally what the speaker means when he utters the first sentence and means it metaphorically¹

i.e., the relevant paraphrases will indicate or at least hint what the speaker intends to say by his metaphorical sentences. Let us take one of the famous metaphor and see what problems arise about its meaning. The poet Burns wrote :

My love is like a red red rose
That's newly sprung in June.

Apparently it seems meaningless because 'My love' which refers either to a young woman or the poet's own emotion

1 J.R. Searle, "Metaphor" in The Philosophy of Language edited by A.P. Martinich, Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford 1985, p.419.

is not the kind of thing that can be 'red rose'. Pure literal interpretation of this sentence obviously makes it a meaningless sentence. But by using the part of the expression like 'a red red rose' the author suggests something of the vitality, the freshness, the vividness of colour and beauty of his love and using the expression "That's newly sprung in June" he suggests the intensity and vigour of his love. In metaphorical expression the suggestive meaning plays a vital role. And it is generally expressed (though not by an adequate way) by translating or paraphrasing the metaphorical sentence itself in a systematic way, finding some kind of similarity between the metaphorical usage of the expression and its literal usage.

But the original question, the question of meaningfulness, arises regarding the expression which is a translation of a metaphorical expression. Surely it must be translatable into something that we already know to be meaningful. So a criterion of meaningfulness is already presupposed.

I shall now discuss another argument, "type" or "category" mistake argument which many philosophers think can be employed for distinguishing meaningless expressions from the meaningful ones. The word "category" was first

used as a technical term by Aristotle. According to Aristotle every 'uncombined expression' must fall one of the ten categories or classes : substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, posture, time, state, action and passion. Two expressions belong to two different categories means that they have literally nothing in common. In recent philosophy the notions of 'category' and 'category mistake' has been introduced mainly by Gilbert Ryle. At the beginning of The Concept of Mind he gives various examples in explaining what he means by "category mistake". Since the concept of category-mistake is famous by Ryle, let us consider whether Ryle's concept of category-mistake is adequate for distinguishing meaningless sentences from the meaningful ones.

Ryle says :

When a sentence is (not true or false but) nonsensical or absurd although its vocabulary is conventional and its grammatical construction is regular, we say that it is absurd because at least one ingredient expression in it is not of the right type to be coupled with or to be coupled in that way with the other ingredient expression or expressions in it. Such sentences, we may say commit type-trespasses or break type-rules.¹

1 Gilbert Ryle, Collected Papers, Vol. II, Hutchinson, London, 1971, p.174.

That is, it commits a category-mistake. But how do we determine that two terms or expressions belong to or does not belong to different categories? In reply to this question Ryle says the following :

Two proposition factors are of different categories or types if there are sentence frames such that when the expressions for these factors are imported as alternative complements to the same gap sign the resultant sentences are significant in one case and absurd in the other.¹

With the help of some examples this point can be made clear
" _____ won the world-cup trophy of 1992" is a sentence frame, the dash is the gap sign. If we put in the blank an expression like "India", "Pakistan", "England" and the words of this categories the result will be a significant sentence though the sentence may be false. But if we put in the blank an expression like "virtue" the resulting sequence will be absurd or nonsensical. From this it follows that "virtue" belongs to different category from "Pakistan", "India", "England" and so on.

The category-mistake argument is used primarily to

1 Gilbert Ryle, "Categories" in Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Vol. XXXVIII, 1937-38, p.203.

state that a sentence is meaningless and it is also used to prove that a term is ambiguous. To discuss about the category-mistake argument philosophers usually begin by stating that if the two terms X and Y belong to two different logical categories then a third term, Z, can not be predicated of both X and Y. If we do so two conclusions will follow (1) that predicating some third term, say Z, to both X and Y would make the sentence meaningless or nonsense and (2) that the term Z is ambiguous. These two conclusions follow from the presupposition that terms of different types or categories cannot share the common predicates in the same sense.

One objection against category-mistake argument is that it does not state separately that if "x is z" is a significant sentence then "y is z" is nonsense, or that z is an ambiguous predicate. It only states that either "y is z" is nonsense or z is ambiguous. So we have to supply an additional criterion to get the conclusion that a sentence is nonsense from the disjunction that either "y is z" is nonsense or z is ambiguous. So the category-mistake argument is not self-sufficient for determining whether a sentence is meaningless or not.

Moreover, if category-mistake results in meaninglessness that does not mean that it is the only cause of

meaninglessness. "Pirots carulize elatically" is meaningless, but no category-mistake is apparently involved here or no category-mistake can be detected in this sentence.

From the above discussion about the general principle or criteria of distinguishing meaningless expressions from the meaningful ones it may be said that our aim of discovering one general criterion of meaninglessness have failed. But that does not mean that we should abandon all these criteria of meaninglessness. Expressions may be meaningless for different reasons and in determining their meaninglessness different criteria may be used. The concept of meaninglessness can be compared with the concept of 'game' as it is used by Wittgenstein in Philosophical Investigations. Wittgenstein says that there are different kinds of game, card-games, board-games, ball-games, Olympic games and so on. There is nothing common to all of them but only similarities.¹ Similarly there is no one single element that is common to all instances of meaningless expressions although there may be some similarities. So our hankering after a general criterion of meaningless is not reasonable.

1 Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1976, Sect. 66.

CHAPTER-IV

THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE AND MEANINGLESSNESS

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THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE AND MEANINGLESSNESS

Whatever may be the source for generation of meaningless expressions the distinction between meaningful and meaningless expression finds its way in philosophy. Whether the concept of meaninglessness find its way legitimately in philosophy depends upon whether meaningful-meaningless distinction is inherent in the nature of language. And to inquire into the fact whether this distinction is inherent in the nature of language we have to look into the general nature of language, inquire into its essential characteristics. Question arises in what sense the distinction between meaningfulness and meaninglessness is inherent in language. Unless we can settle whether language has some essential features and point out them, we cannot decide whether the judgement about meaningfulness or meaninglessness is externally imposed and is theory oriented, or whether it is inherent in the very nature of language. Let us discuss the general nature or characteristic features of language, features which apply to all languages, written or spoken and only those features which seem to be relevant for the problem in hand, the features which are responsible for deviation and novelty of

expressions, in spite of inherent fixity and rigidity of language.

(1) Language is primarily a system of phonetic symbol. Any sound that human larynx can produce has a conventionally significant phonetic element. The speech apparatus which is used in the articulation of language is same for all known communities. Human being has the capacity to produce distinctive sounds which everyone can recognize and reproduce. Although higher animals like chimpanzee have a suitable vocal apparatus they can produce only limited number of sound pattern. Language is not however a continuous flow of phonetic sequences. We divide patterning of phonetic sequences into symbolically significant entities such as words, phrases and so on. And these words are built up arbitrarily, there is no definite procedure of framing the word unit from the phonetics. The word is the meaningful and unanalyzable unit of language.

(2) Language consists not only of a collection of parts, words, phrases and so on but a set of rules for ordering those parts to generate sentences of a language or more properly to generate the meaningful sentences of language.

The grammatical rules of the language categorize words into different parts of speech and combine them systematically and produce indefinitely many sentences of endlessly varied forms and contents. This formal procedures are employed by the speaker of any language. May be that the grammar of one language is more simple than others but it would be meaningless if one says that one language is more grammatical than others. All grammars are equal - equal in the sense of being capable of producing infinite number of sentences from the fixed vocabulary. The following quotation I think would not be mismatched here :

... the grammar of a language is simply an orderly description of the way people in a given society talk of the sounds that people utter in various situations, and of the acts which accompany or follow the sounds.¹

Every language is adequate - adequate for expressing thoughts, feelings and making communication possible. A language contains two classes of words form classes and function words or more properly words which refer and words which

1. Bertrand Block and George L. Trager, Outline of Linguistic Analysis, Naverly Press, Baltimore, Md. 1942, p.6.

order other words. The form class consists of the words which can be defined by other words or substituted by other words or phrases in a sentence. For instance, the word 'father' can be defined by the properties of male parent of someone. But there are words like 'to', 'the' which cannot be defined or substituted in this way because they have no synonymous words. They have no synonymous words because they have no properties. But these type of words play an important role in language, they have highly explicit use in language. They can be defined only by the function they perform in language. Fries has called them function words.

(3) Another design feature of language is that it has a creative or productive aspect. Max Black terms this feature as 'synthetic resources' of language. This feature of language makes a language an open system. Chomsky also lays great stress on the creativity or 'open-endedness' of human language. The openness of language permits native speaker to construct and understand from a limited number of vocabulary infinitely many intelligible complex utterances that they have never been heard before - language users have the power to synthesize new linguistic compounds. The capacity of the language users to produce an infinite variety of new

sentences is of course rule-governed. We have to follow the grammatical rules for producing a new sentence that we never heard before. Generation and understanding the new expression is a 'rule-governed creation'. Creativity does not merely mean of course the production of the utterances that never occurred in the previous experience. It may mean the style and use of the utterances in a new context or situation. Without this feature of language human language would be very much like animal communication medium. (I am not mentioning animal language because whether animal communication system fulfils the criteria of language is a debatable issue).

(4) Although language is a symbolic system based on pure and arbitrary convention it is highly flexible in nature. It may change according to the changing needs of its users. Language may be creative also in this sense that the users are free (at least at a certain degree) to invent new words or old words with new meaning(s). Users are free to use metaphors and irony of different types for their purpose. This is because with too little given material we have to perform too many jobs perfectly. Thus to express the enormity of the blenish of murder which was perpetrated by Macbeth, Shakespeare writes "All the perfumes of Arabia cannot sweeten this little hand". It may be the case that this enormity of

the crime of Macbeth could not be properly expressed in the stereotyped language.

(5) Language is by its very nature and essence, metaphorical. It is very difficult to express abstract and complex thoughts and ideas without metaphor. Metaphor has a kind of artistic or decorative success. Artistic ingenuity and originality is manifested in the creation of metaphors. It breaks the literal convention and discover a new world within the known world. Man thinks so diversely that sometimes he is unable to express his subtle thinking literally. J.L. Austin says the metaphorical use of language as 'parasitic' uses of language. Metaphor has not only artistic or decorative use, our ordinary language is also full of metaphors. The phrase 'high status' which we use in our ordinary language is a metaphorical expression. Similar is the case with 'hand of a clock'.

(6) Language makes man free from the immediate present. Language permits us to say something that have never happened and indeed that might never happen. It makes imagination possible. Language not only describe the reality passively, it rather creates the reality by its practices and imagination. Language performs the double task - the task of reporting the fact and also as the expression of feeling.

imagination and emotion. The creation of new meanings and therefore the new knowledge is the property of human language.

(7) Language is a social institution established for the purpose of communication, communication between different individuals or social groups. Every institution must have some common rules and conventions. Every member of the institution must conform to these rules and conventions for their common interest. So if communication is to take place, the participants must share the common conventions, agreed ways of behaving to cooperate with each other. Otherwise the very concept of communication would make no sense at all.

(8) Language is highly compositional in nature. The principle of compositionality states that the meaning of a complex expression is determined by the meanings of its component parts and the way of their combination. For example, the meaning of the sentence "The beauty of her face is like the beauty of moon" depends on the meaning of the component parts which are 'the', 'beauty', 'of', 'her', 'face', 'is' and the 'like', which belongs to different linguistic classes like noun, verb, adjective, adverb, article and so on. Language also possesses some specific rules for combining different words which belong to different linguistic classes into a sentence. According to many linguists and philosophers

sentence is the only bearer of meaning.

This compositional nature of language is sometimes compared with the numerical system of mathematics. We learn only few basic numerals and compose infinite number out of these basic numerals. For example, learning the numbers 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7 we can construct the infinite number of numerical unit like 23467, 32467, 43267, 24367, 63427, 72436 and so on by their infinite possible combination. But the difference between the two systems in regard to their compositionality lies in the fact that every combination of numeral makes a meaningful numerical unit but every combination of words or phrases would not make a meaningful unit of language i.e. the sentence. This is because mathematics is independent of reality. It is full of abstractions. While the language is highly related with reality. So we cannot accept any combination of symbol. Certain manner of combination of words are permissible while the others are not. There are so many restrictions on language, may be it logical, epistemological, metaphysical or conventional restrictions. It seems to me that the problem of meaningfulness and meaninglessness has something to do with this compositional nature of language. Compositional pattern sometimes goes wrong. It goes wrong in several ways, some of them may be drastic than others. Plainly the rules of grammar can

determine which combination of words are legitimate or makes sense and which combination of words are nonsensical or senseless, i.e. the combination of words are being excluded from the language and withdrawn from circulation.¹ Language is filled with the questions of acceptability - acceptability of the sequences of the words or phrases. Sometimes we are misled by the grammatical confusion and make wrong combination of words due to the wrong grammatical analogy. And "philosophical problems arise" says Wittgenstein "when language goes on holiday".² Wittgenstein gives various instances which are the result of such grammatical confusions.

(1) Time flows

(2) I feel the depth of water is n feet

(3) Thinking takes place in our mind

(4) I can not have his toothache.

These sentences are the result of wrong grammatical analogy, some of them may be called as nonsensical and the others result from looking them out of context. We know "River flows" is a perfectly grammatical sentence. This leads us to make up sentences like "Time flows". And think that this sentence also makes sense literally. Sometimes we superimpose the form of one sentence to make another sentence with different content.

1 Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1976, Sect 500.

2 Ibid, Section 38.

May be that the sentence "Time flows" has some metaphorical use but literally it makes no sense at all.

The sentence "I feel that the depth of water is n feet" combines well-known words but in a deviant way. We know what 'I feel' means and we also know what 'the depth of water is n feet' means but we don't understand them in combination without any specific explanation. The grammar of the sentence has to be explained to make sense. One can explain this expression in this way as it is illustrated by Wittgenstein, "when I have a certain feeling of tension in my hands, the words 'three feet' spring up in my hand".¹ And the meaning of the sentence "I feel the depth of the water is n feet" is just the explanation one gives to it and nothing more.

Thus it follows that meaningless expressions are not always artificially produced for specific purposes - the purpose of giving an example of meaningless expression or making a joke. The possibility of expressions being meaningless is sometimes inherent in the very nature of language. Meaningless expressions sometimes generate due to the vagueness involved in the natural language, from the inherent flexibility of language.

1 Ludwig Wittgenstein, The Blue and Brown Book, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1978, p.11.

CHAPTER-V
THE POSSIBILITY OF MEANING AND MEANINGLESSNESS

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THE POSSIBILITY OF MEANING AND MEANINGLESSNESS

Language is a system consisting of different linguistic categories such as names, predicates, connectives, quantifiers and their relation to each other. Simon Blackburn says :

The goal of systematic, compositional semantics is to form a view about how best to describe the functioning of individual terms in sentences and how to describe how given this functioning of their parts, sentences come to have the meanings they do ... a compositional semantics would form the "core" of a philosophy of language.¹

How meaning is possible is an important problem of philosophy of language and this problem is closely related with the problem of meaningfulness and meaninglessness. For how meaning is possible has an important bearing on how meaningless expressions are generated.

Let us see how meaning is possible or how one can understand a new sentence. Competent or native speakers of

1 Simon Blackburn, Spreading the word, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984, pp.9-10.

any language are not restricted to use only previously known sentences. Language is not the aggregate of all words or all sentences which have in fact been already uttered. With the help of finite number of vocabulary and the rules of their combination we generate infinite number of new sentences we never heard before. Our understanding of the words and the syntax enables us to understand the meaning of new sentences. So we have to understand first what the words do and secondly, the set of rules for ordering those words. Finding out what the words do is to make a distinction between various categories or types of expression, for example, subjects, predicates, connectives, quantifiers and so on and to describe the function of expressions of those categories.

There are of course some philosopher who says that only sentences can have meaning. The word meaning should be determined only in the context of a sentence. It seems that though the exact meaning of a word or more properly the exact sense of a word, is determined in the context of a particular sentence or utterance of a particular sentence, at least a vague or an inexact sense of a word can be grasped without looking for it in a sentence. Moreover, a sentence necessarily has a certain structure. 'Structure' implies that what is structured has some definite parts which must

have some definite functions. Let us discuss what the different parts of the sentence e.g. subjects, predicates do or what linguistic functions are performed by the different linguistic categories like subject expression, predicate expression and so on.

We commonly use expressions of some kind to identify or refer to some individual, a group of individuals, certain place, certain process and so on. Strawson calls this way of using expressions the 'uniquely referring use'.¹ The expressions generally used for referring or identifying the objects are the proper names like 'Washington', 'Mary', 'Silvia'; pronouns like 'he', 'she', 'you', 'they', 'it', 'I' and the like; singular terms like 'the morning star', 'the first Mughal Emperor', 'The man who first land in the moon'; the demonstrative pronouns like 'this', 'that', 'these', 'those'. The view that expressions of the above types have only referring use is not without controversy. According to Frege some descriptive elements, that is, the sense of a name, is also the part of its meaning. In addition to reference, names must have sense also. Otherwise any two names of the same referent would have the same meaning.

(1) "The Morning star is the Evening Star" would mean

(2) The Morning star is the morning in so far as their

1 P.F.Strawson, Logico-Linguistic Papers, Methuen & Co.Ltd., London, 1971, p.1.

reference is concerned, but according to Frege, (1) and (2) cannot have the same meaning. It would not be irrelevant here to mention that Frege does not make any difference between the proper name and the definite descriptions. I do not want to enter into the deep issue whether the view that names have sense is correct or incorrect. The linguistic categories like names, predicates etc. have certain logic of their own and what is that logic is certainly controversial. It can be said simply that though in uttering some kind of referring expressions some ascriptions of property (some characteristic or particular aspect of the person we are talking about) are necessarily involved with the reference, they are not the primary concern of using a referring expression. Or more properly the characteristic(s) of the person is not the subject-matter of discussion in that particular context. If so, then in addition to that (those) characteristic(s) something more would not be said in the predicate expressions. We can illustrate clearly this point with the help of an example. Take the sentence "The present prime minister of India is a good speaker". The subject expression 'The present Prime Minister of India' is solely used to identify the person who is the present Prime Minister of India. Although some aspects or characteristics like 'He or she is a leader', 'He or she has been elected by secret ballot', 'He or she is the higher authority of India' are implicit in the meaning of the subject

expressions. But these aspects or characteristics are not the prime concern in uttering the above sentence. The expression is solely used to focus that the person identified by the expression 'The present Prime Minister of India' is a good speaker. Only in case of some controversy about the identification of the referent we may take into consideration those features.

Predicate expression generally classify or characterise the object identified by the subject expression, subject expression may be a proper name, a demonstrative pronoun or a singular term. Predicate expressions are what yield truth or falsity of a statement. Strawson says :

The statement or predication as a whole is true just in the case in which the predicate term does in fact apply to (is in fact 'true of') the object which the subject term (identifyingly) refers to. The statement or predication as a whole is false just in the case where the negation of the predicate term applies to that object, i.e., the case where the predicate term can be truthfully denied of that object.¹

Thus a predicate expression can be said to be attached with or fails to be attached with the subject expression. The truth

1 P.F.Strawson, Logico-Linguistic papers, Methuen & Co.Ltd., London, 1971, p.88.

and falsity of a statement completely depends upon this.

The above function of the subject expression and that of the predicate expression i.e., referring and characterizing respectively imply the asymmetrical relation between the subject and the predicate expression. Subject expression can never be true of whereas the predicate can be. Another asymmetrical relation between subject expression and predicate expression can be found in respect of negation. It is a linguistic convention that we negate the predicate expression but not the subject expression. The logic behind this is that by negating the predicate expression we can get an expression of the same type with contrary relation. But by negating the subject we get nothing. Strawson calls this 'the thesis of the asymmetry of subjects and predicates regarding negation'.¹

Looked at from the syntactic point of view a simple sentence is composed of two immediate constituents. One immediate constituent is the nominal (NP) and the other is the verbal (VP). The distinction between nominals and verbals is intrinsically related with the semantic category of subject and predicate. The function of referring and predicating corresponds to the distinction between the

1 Ibid., p.96.

nominal (NP) and the verbal (VP). Nominal and the verbal have their internal syntactic structure also. To say something meaningfully or for an expression to be meaningful the appropriate semantic or syntactic categories and their linear structure must follow. This is only necessary condition but not sufficient condition of meaningfulness. Broad grammatical arrangement does not assure of meaningfulness. If grammatical pattern could be sufficiently elaborated then perhaps meaningfulness would be equal to grammaticality. Otherwise meaningless expression would result.

It is the case that the meaningfulness of an expression is not only dependent on the broad categories of subjects (NP) and predicates (VP) and their functions but also on their way of combination or on their way of being arranged. The syntactic structure of a sentence can be fully understood by specifying the ultimate constituents of the sentence, that is, the words of which the sentence composed and their linear order. Modern linguists like Chomsky explains the linear order of a sentence by a method known as phrase structure or constituent structure. The method of phrase structure is analogous to the method of 'bracketing', a crucial concept of symbolic logic and Mathematics. The importance of this phrase structure grammar

lies in the fact that it removes the structural ambiguity involved in the sentence with the help of bracketing.

Chomsky's formulation of the phrase structure grammar is like this :

- (1) Sentence \rightarrow NP + VP
- (2) NP \rightarrow T + N
- (3) VP \rightarrow Verb + NP
- (4) T \rightarrow the
- (5) N \rightarrow [man, ball etc.]
- (6) Verb \rightarrow [hit, took, took, look etc.]

Thus the sentence "The man hit the ball" which is a meaningful sentence consists of first two constituents NP (the man) and VP (hit the ball). The NP further consists of T (the) and N (man); VP also consists of two further constituents V(hit) and NP (the ball).

In more formal and general way it can be said that a sentence is to be called meaningful if it is derived according to the phrase structure rules. The phrase structure rules determine the possible or permissible ordering of the given vocabulary to form a meaningful sentence. The question arises, whether these phrase structure rules has the capability of producing all the meaningful or well-formed sentences of English ? Although Chomsky was aware of the fact that there are languages which can not be adequately described

within the phrase structure grammar he was not aware whether there are certain sentences of English that cannot be generated by a phrase structure grammar. In syntactic structures Chomsky says

... A weaker, but perfectly sufficient demonstration of inadequacy would be to show that the theory can apply only clumsily; that is, to show that any grammar that can be constructed in terms of this theory will be extremely complex, ad hoc, and 'unrevealing'.¹

Moreover, there are some cases where at least two analyses would result for a single unambiguous construction. Within the phrase structure grammar two analyses can be given to the unambiguous sentence "The dog is barking".

- (1) NP (The dog) + Aux. VP (is - ing) + VP(bark) and
- (11) NP (the dog) + Copula (is) + Adjective (barking)

But the second analysis is clearly counterintuitive.

Because of the limitations of phrase structure grammar Chomsky discovers a new level of linguistic structure, transformational grammar. A transformational grammar contains in addition to transformational rules the phrase structure

1 Noam Chomsky, Syntactic structures, The Hague, Mouton 1967, p.34.

rules. Transformational rules transforms one phrase markers into another by adding or deleting some elements or by some placement of the same elements. In the phrase structure grammar two unrelated phrase structure rules are required for the active and the passive form of the same sentence. For example, 'I did the work' and 'The work was done by me' will be analysed respectively in this way.

(I) ((N) NP + (V + T + N) VP)

(II) ((T+N) NP + (V + V) + N) VP)

But in the transformational analysis instead of generating two unrelated phrase structures like ((N)NP + (V+T+N) VP) and ((T+N)NP + (V+V) + N) VP) we can say that the sentence "The work was done by me" can be analysed on the basis of the principle of transforming an active sentence into the passive. This can be done by means of an optional rule which is like this :

$$NP_1 + Aux. + V + VP_2 \longrightarrow NP_2 + Aux. + be + en + V + by + NP_1$$

This transformational model of generative grammar focuses attention on the issue how different types of sentences are related with each other or in other words how different types of simple sentences derive from the same underlying string but from different optional transformations. "Did he murdered John ?", "Didn't he murdered John ?", "John was

not murdered by him", "Wasn't John murdered by him?", "Wasn't he murdered John?" all these sentences derive by applying different transformational rule to the simple, active declarative sentence "He murdered John". Chomsky calls these last type of sentences as 'kernal sentence'.

Semantic and syntactic rules make the proper arrangement of words - words which belong to different categories. Some words are the name of a particular thing, person, and place while some others are the name of some process and so on.

Now the question may rise what makes it true that a particular word is the name of a particular thing, process, place etc. etc. ? In most simple way it can be said that it is our convention which determines whether a particular word is the name of a particular thing, process, place and so on. To use the word 'convention' in a general sense raises difficulty. The word 'convention' has a subtler sense for us, than the ordinary sense like 'some people or a group of people gather and agreeing to take various words to refer to various things and characteristics'. Language may not be conventional in the ordinary sense of the term. Because any kind of agreement presupposes the already existing language and it goes to infinite regress. For this difficulty

we will use the word 'convention' in a special sense - the sense of 'accepted use'. David Lewis takes the word 'convention' in the sense of 'regularity'. We follow this 'regularity' or accepted use because of our personal interest. It makes possible to communicate our ideas, our personal needs, to share our feelings and emotions. We have habits of taking one another in definite ways. Simon Blackburn says the following in this context :

Asserting that a regularity is conventional means showing that we need to co-ordinate on some feature out of choice of equally serviceable ones, and that the reason we adhere to one is at least in part, that we expect others to do the same.¹

There exists no natural relation between certain sounds or words and the things signified by the words. Words are arbitrarily and conventionally instituted by our society. The significant remarks of Locke, I think, would not be irrelevant here to mention.

Man though he has great variety of thoughts and such from which others as well as himself might receive profit and delight, yet they are all within his own breast, invisible and hidden from others, nor can of themselves be made appear. The comfort and advantage of society

1 Simon Blackburn, Spreading the word, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984, p.122.

not being to be had without communication of thought ... For this purpose, nothing was so fit, either for plenty or quickness, as those articulate sounds ... Thus we may conceive of how words came to be made use of by men as the sign of their ideas; not by any natural connexion that is between particular articulate sounds and certain ideas, for then there would be but one language amongst all men, but by a voluntary imposition whereby such a word is made arbitrarily the mark of such an idea.¹

So it may be said from the above discussion that to produce a meaningful expression of a language is to follow a complex mechanism - a mechanism which is at least partly settled by the social convention. The rules of semantics and syntax of our language is the guiding principle of the manner we should use our language. These rules mark not only meaningless and arbitrary restrictions on the pattern of combination of terms but make the communication possible. The rules of the language is not so rigid like the rules of the chess or board games. The complex mechanism of our language demands certain degrees of freedom on the part of the user of language. And there are every possibility that the user of language may misuse his freedom and as a result

1 John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Vol. II, Book III, Chapter II, para. 1, 11, 12.

meaningless expressions result. User of the language can misuse his freedom only unknowingly because no one want to produce meaningless expression deliberately except some cases where they are artificially produced to make a contrast with meaningless expressions like "Saturday is in bed", "Socrates is a prime number" and so on.

CHAPTER-VI
MEANINGFULNESS, CULTURE
AND INTENTION

Chapter VI

MEANINGFULNESS, CULTURE AND INTENTION

Human language has a creative aspect. The creation of new sentences and therefore the creation of new meanings of the sentences is a property of all languages. This creative aspect of human language makes the fundamental distinction between human language and animal language or more properly between animal communication system and human communication system. Human being possesses a distinctive ability to express new thoughts and ideas and also has a distinctive ability to understand entirely different and unique expressions within the "instituted language." I use the term "instituted language" following Chomsky in his book Language and Mind. "Instituted language" is defined by Chomsky as "a language that is a cultural product subject to laws and principles partially unique to it and partially reflections of general properties of mind".¹ If language is subject to different laws and principles unique to specific culture then there can not be any such concept like meaningfulness and meaninglessness independent of any specific language. What is meaningful to one language may be meaningless to any other and vice versa.

1 Noam Chomsky, Language and Mind, Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968, p.6.

Let us discuss this important issue. The content of every culture is expressible in its language. Language difference is an important symbol of cultural difference. Linguistic materials, both form and content, are used to symbolize the actual meaning, the experience of the specific culture or society. Even language may be called as heuristic. The forms of language may predetermine our modes of observation and interpretation. The real difference between languages is not merely a difference of sounds or signs but the difference of "World-perspective" or World view, that is expressed by the sounds and signs of a language. But it does not follow that there is a simple overt correspondence between language and culture. The correspondence lies moreover on a very deep level. The establishment of this correspondence requires a long observational process because linguistic changes are not as rapid as the cultural changes.

Languages differ widely in respect of their vocabularies and the vocabulary is a very acute index of the culture of the people. Every language contains terms that crystallise in themselves the thought of a people, a culture, a civilization. If one's mother language is English he has the same word, the word 'snow' for falling snow, snow in the hill, packed snow or what ever may be. But to an Eskimo

this general or all inclusive word 'snow' is almost unthinkable or meaningless. He uses different words for different kinds of snow which are sensuously different from each other. A language called Aztec is even more poorer in this respect, using the same word 'sten' for cold, ice and snow. Sometimes the vocabulary differences and therefore the meaning differences exists between different languages because of some cultural and economic need. Thus the Arabs have a large vocabulary of terms referring to camels as the Eskimos have a large vocabulary of terms referring to snow because they have an economic necessity to camels and snow respectively. Vocabulary of a language reflects the physical as well as the social environment of a society. Some societies have two different words for 'aunt'. One word denotes the mother's sister and the other denotes the father's sister. Naturally in such cultures there would be different behaviours expected in relating to these two 'aunts'.

There is little doubt about the fact that language consists of a large body of grammatical rules. Every language, may be it Japanese, Chinese, English or most 'primitive' language like Hopi, has its particular grammatical structure. Languages have grammars which act as a guide to the norms of conventional and social correctness. Languages differ not only in how they construct their sentences but also in how

they cut down nature into different types and categories and put them in sentences. Thus Whorf says :

... it is not possible to define 'event, thing, object, relationship' and so on from nature but that to define them always involves a circuitous return to the grammatical categories of the definer's language.¹

There are wide variety of concepts and the principles of their classification among languages which are illustrated in different linguistic forms. For instance, in the Indo-European languages noun classification made generally on the basis of gender but for many other languages this principle do not function at all, although other methods are there for attaining the same end. It is very surprising that not only the things in the world has been categorised differently in different languages, the very important metaphysical concept like 'time' also varies sometimes with the languages. The major linguistic differences occur in the temporal forms of verbs. English system of tenses divides time into three distinct sections, past, present and future. In contrast Hopi verbs have no tenses. Whorf says :

... the Hopi language is seen to contain no words, grammatical forms, constructions or expressions that refer directly to what we call

1 Benjamin Lee Whorf, Language, Thought and Reality edited by John B. Carroll, The M.I.T. Press, Cambridge 1971, p.215.

"time", or to past, present, or future...
At the same time, the Hopi language is capable of accounting for and describing correctly, in a pragmatic or operational sense, all observable phenomena of the universe... The Hopi metaphysics imposes upon the universe two grand cosmic forms, which as a first approximation in terminology we may call Manifestee or Manifesting (or unmanifest) or, again objective or subjective.¹

Thus what we call future is for the Hopi in the realm of the manifesting and what is past is for the Hopi in the realm of the manifested. Now the question arises : Is this merely a terminological difference or conceals the fundamental conceptual differences between the two languages ? These are not merely a terminological difference because the words Hopi employ for temporal information belong to a different group from that the words like 'future' belong. Our concept of time is a public, measurable and objective process and time for us is a never ending process. But in Hopi language time is a purely mental concept. The Hopi words for temporal information are used for talking about the mind, about hoping, what can be hoped for. The grammatical structure of Hopi language does not permit the objectification of time. If one tries to do so in Hopi language then meaningless expression

1 Benjamin Lee Whorf, Language, Thought and Reality edited by John B. Carroll, The M.I.T. Press, Cambridge 1971, pp.57-59.

would result because the logic of the specific language contribute the understanding of the meaning of the expression.

Some philosophers like Grice mentions of course that it is impossible to give an adequate account of the concept of meaning without reference to speaker's audience directed intentions of a certain kind. According to Grice the particular meaning of an expression is no doubt largely a matter of rule and convention of that language and may have cultural fervour. We have to follow the rules and conventions of classifying objects into different categories, grammatical rules for constructing an expression and so on but the rules and conventions can be only understood by reference to the concept of communication intention, that is he tries to establish that meaningfulness is primarily a matter of intention. This view if correct, has important bearing on the significance of the distinction between meaningfulness and meaninglessness. Role of intention may lead to obliterate the distinction or at least blunt the sharpness of this distinction between meaningfulness and meaninglessness. Moreover, if meaningfulness is primarily a matter of intention then the concept of meaningfulness would no way be a relative concept - relative with a specific culture or language. It would be a universal concept, for the men of any culture want to communicate

something or intends to communicate something by using the language. Now let us consider whether meaningfulness is primarily a matter of intention or not. According to the communication intention theory of linguistic meaning (non-natural meaning) the primary use of language is to make communication and what we want to communicate cannot be grasped in complete isolation from what is intended to be communicated. It is true that one of the most important function of using language is communication. And in communication intention plays a vital role. But since intention is a mental process we cannot know others intention directly. I can know my intention directly but to know the others intention or others to know my intentions we must have a objective means, a communicating process. Formal semanticist gives stress to this process — the process of making explicit the complex intention, while the communication - intentionist gives stress only to what is to be communicated, not how it is to be communicated. Both the formal semanticists and the communication - intentionists take the one sided diet. Grice's account fails to bring home the truth that saying something or communicating is a process which involves rules, conventions and other paraphernalia. What we say is closely related with what we mean. Wittgenstein says "... a significant sentence is one which one can not merely say, but also think."¹ He also

¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1976, Section 511.

says that language involves an elaborate system of rules - rules of meaning, grammatical and syntactical rules and these rules must be objective. If meaningfulness is only a matter of intention then what is the significance of producing certain rules for producing certain sound pattern or marks for communication? If meaning is primarily a matter of intention and not closely related with the outward process of making this intention explicit then meaning would be a matter of subjective affair. And then having a meaning would be comparable to having a pain, or some other mental state.

Moreover there is nothing like intention in itself.

Intention and the process of expressing this intention are inseparable. This is true even for the speaker himself, where he is soliloquizing. Intention is a kind of thought process. And as thinking is essentially linguistic in nature (it does not mean that thinking requires a fully developed language like us) there may be no intention without language. Gricians, I think, would agree with this. What they disagree, if I am not wrong, is the fact that linguistic structure of intention and the linguistic structure of what we say may not always be the same. According to them, when somebody utters the sentence "The forest is full of ferocious animal" to someone, the real intention of the utter of the

sentence might not be simply to describe the present state of the forest but to warn the hearer not to go to forest and the actual meaning of the sentence lies in the intention of the speaker in uttering of the sentence. In this type of cases where we say one thing and mean another thing, I think, two other factors may involve, either his intention of not making explicit the intention of uttering the sentence or his presupposition that the content of the utterance would make his intention clear. Instead of uttering the sentence "The forest is full of ferocious animal, so you will not go to the forest" we can just say "The forest is full of ferocious animal" in a communicative situation and think the rest will be supplied by the situation or the context. So context is also a determining factor of meaning. We can not neglect this factor. Now what will be the meaning of the sentence in the case (1), where a higher order intention i.e. the intention of not making explicit the intention of uttering the sentence, is involved? Is the meaning of this sentence is determined by the syntactical and semantical rules of the language or by the intention which he does not want to communicate? Communication - intention theorists are silent about this.

To give an account of meaning neither the structural features of language nor the speaker's intention or

psychological states can ultimately be ignored. The concept of communication requires something which will be communicated and at the same time media of communication which is to ascertain acceptable or as stable or objective. Otherwise communication would not be possible. We have to give the same importance both to what we want to communicate and the media we use for this purpose. No priority would be given to one over the other. They are complementary and are not contrasting. Gricean theory contends that communication relies on the speaker's expectation that the hearer can recognize his intention through his utterance. But says nothing about the structure of language though he is concerned with linguistic meaning and relegate the question of linguistic structure to secondary status. If the real meaning of a sentence is primarily a matter of intention - intention of the speaker and if what I am saying is not the same as what I am intending then it is impossible for my hearer to grasp the real meaning of the sentence that I am uttering. If intention is the most dominant factor in meaning then meaningfulness would be an affair of the speaker and meaninglessness would be an affair of ^{the} hearer because the speaker intends to say something but the hearer does not understand it. Sincere speaker really wants to say something, he always says something meaningful. No one deliberately say something meaningless - even if it is possible for a speaker to produce

a meaningless expression (arbitrary collection of words, for example) deliberately. And if a speaker produces a meaningless expression intentionally then that expression serves certain purpose - the purpose of giving an example of meaningless expression and so on. That expression can not be vacuous.

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CHAPTER-VII
HUMAN LANGUAGE & MEANINGLESSNESS

Chapter VII

HUMAN LANGUAGE AND MEANINGLESSNESS

The compositional feature of language distinguishes human language from animal language which in other respect shows signs of apparent intelligence. Communication signals of animals are usually highly stereotyped.

Halliday and Slater says,

In Many cases one of the most important pieces of information that they transmit is the species of the signaller. This is crucial, for example, when an animal is advertising for a mate. Such signals have to conform to precise rules absolutely common throughout the species. Any individual that diverges from these rules will be best rejected by members of the opposite sex as possibly belonging to another species with which hybridisation would be disadvantageous.¹

When animals communicate with each other information of various different sorts passes between them a signal may indicate details of the species, age, sex of the signaller. The signal may transmit information about

¹ T.R.Halliday and P.J.B. Slater, Animal Behaviour, Vol.2, Blackwell Scientific publications, 1983, p.2.

the outside world, as the bees communicate information concerning the location of nectarbearing flowers to other members of the hive. They communicate by their specific dance. The dance indicates the direction, distance and the nature of the food. Bees have two specific dances, the round dance and the waggle dance. The round dance is used generally when the food is less than 50 metres from the hive. For food sources at greater distances the waggle dance is performed. The essence of animal communication is that one animal influences another in some way. But can the bee dance be made in the absence of these state of affairs? Or can it refer to a potential state of affairs? No animal language, not only the bee dance, can be made in the absence of state of affairs or it can not refer to a potential state of affairs. S.K.Langer remarks,

Of all born creatures, man is the only one that cannot live by bread alone. He lives ... always between fact and fiction. For he sees not only actualities but meanings... By the agency of symbols - marks, words, mental images, and icon of all sorts - he can hold his ideas for contemplation long after their original causes have passed away... By associating symbols in his mind he combines things and events that were never together in the real world.¹

1 Susanne K.Langer, "From 'The Lord of Creation'", in Logic and Rhetoric, edited by James William Johnson, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1968, pp.286-87.

There is no evidence that animals are able to project their language into nonimmediate situations, which is a characteristic of all human speech, be they oral or written, gestural or symbolic. This makes us question whether the animal communicative process meets the criteria of language. According to S.K.Langer, those who maintain that animal possesses language, makes a mistake - mistake in making no difference between signs and symbols. All intelligent animals use signs, not symbols. And "the essence of language is symbolic, not signfic"¹ says Langer. The difference between a sign and a symbol is that a sign always refers to existing reality but a symbol may be divorced from the reality altogether. Or in other words we can represent a reality only symbolically. As a result we find the complex symbolic structure of poetry, literature which is only the product of human mind and is altogether absent in animal communicative process.

Another feature which makes us doubtful whether animal communicative process meets the criteria of language is that animal never commit mistakes in their communication. They can only show some deficiency or slip due to their unfitness of speech organ. As the supposed signal of subhuman species are highly stereotyped and has a distinctive mark, their process of communication are never wrong. Each of the signals produced by any animal seems to be the

1 Ibid., p.294.

response to a definite and distinct set of stimuli given in the environment outside him. Their behaviour is mostly determined by the environment. So there is no freedom in their communicative system. As there is no freedom of expression there is no scope of being wrong or make a mistake in their communication. They cannot use unlearned expressions. But language is a spontaneous process. It should not be externally guided. The freedom of expression which we enjoy in a given language entails the freedom of being wrong or incorrect in our usage of it, may be it is grammatically, semantically or contingently wrong.

Concepts like 'mistake', 'wrong', 'incorrect', 'irrelevant', 'absurd', 'meaningless' are inherent or implicit in human language, whether they are deliberate, pathological, or due to some confusion. For human language is creative in nature. And this 'creative aspect of language use', the distinctively human ability to express new thoughts and to understand completely new expressions which he never heard before is the striking property of human language. It may be said that this ability, the ability to express new thoughts and to understand completely new expressions, cannot be detected in an animal which in other respects shows signs of apparent intelligence exceeding those of a human, even though such an organism or machine might be as fully endowed as a human with the physiological organs

necessary to produce speech. Systems of animal communication are mostly closed. They send only a finite number of messages with definite meaning. Although the intensity of the body movements of bees are subject to infinite variation it can not be said creative. By 'creativity' we mean ability to construct new combinations of discrete units and not the continuous variation of a definite signalling system. And this creative process is explicitly found in human language, specially in natural language, language which is used in ordinary discourse, in friendly dialogue, in gossiping and so on. Naturally the question arises : Is this creative aspect of language absent in artificial or formal languages ? What is the distinction between natural or formal language ? Is there no rules or conventions in natural language ? All these questions have important bearings upon the problem of the distinction between meaningfulness and meaninglessness. I shall discuss these issues later.

Democritus, Epicurus, Rousseau were the creators of the biological theories of the origin of language. According to them social fact of speech has its general biological cause. Democritus first expounded the thesis that human speech originates in certain sounds of a merely emotional character and are not a specific property of man. We find this emotional behaviour in animal world also. But the structure of human language makes a radical problem in

accepting the thesis that human speech originates in certain sounds of a merely emotional nature. The structure of human language reveals the difference between emotional and propositional language. Mr. and Mrs. Yerks suggests,

Although evidence of use of the voice and of definite word - like sounds to symbolize feelings, and possibly also ideas, becomes increasingly abundant from lemur to ape, no one of the infra-human primates exhibits a systematization of vocal symbols which may approximately be described as speech.¹

On the other hand there is no evidence that man even in the lowest stages of his culture possessed merely emotional language or the language of gestures. The language of the primitive culture was agrammatical as the modern languages of civilized culture.

From the above discussion it may be said that animal communicate but they can not be said to have a language. Language and communication are not identical. The word 'communication' has a number of different meanings. Communication can be taken to mean the sharing of anything. Animal communication can be defined as the transmission of a signal from one animal to another such that the sender

1 R.M.Yerks and A.W.Yerks, The Great Apes, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1929, p. 569.

benefits generally from the response of the recipient. Communication is one of the possible uses of language. Language can be used for soliquizing also which is completely absent in animal world.

I have mentioned that human language is creative in nature and that this creative use is explicitly present in natural language and almost absent in formal language. Why this is so can be made explicit by making a distinction between artificial language and natural language. Artificial language is variously called formal language, logical language, ideal language and so on.

According to some linguists and logicians formal languages are the ideal or proper manifestation of the language. Paul Ziff says,

Characteristically a formal language is constituted by a precisely specifiable set of expressions and various perfect rules for their manipulation, combination and interpretation. In consequence, in contrast with any natural language, a formal logic and formal languages in general appear to have the undeniable virtues of precision and clarity.¹

1 Paul Ziff, "Natural and Formal Languages", in Language and Philosophy, edited by S. Hook, New York University Press, 1969, p. 223.

In contrast, natural language is full of ambiguities. The ambiguity of natural language, it can be said is its merit. And these ambiguities are generally resolved by nonlinguistic means. The context of the utterance may resolve the ambiguity involved in the utterance. In most contexts someone who knows English will have no trouble resolving the ambiguity involved in the utterances. "Now I can see what you are talking about" which is ambiguous between

- (i) "Now I understand what you were talking about"
- (ii) "Now I have caught sight of what you were talking about."

Sometimes a sentence may be ambiguous because of its grammatical structure. For example, "Flying planes can be dangerous" is ambiguous between

- (i) "Flying planes are sometimes dangerous"
- (ii) "It can be dangerous to fly a plane".

We can disambiguate these ambiguous sentences by attending to the immediate linguistic context of utterance. Formal languages ignore the realities of the context. It is true that vagueness or ambiguity are sometimes disadvantageous in the situation where clarity and precision are the guiding interests. But in many situations clarity and precision is not enough. We require vague, ambiguous and suggestive

language in order to cope with the diverse complex intention.

A great difference between a formal language and a natural language can be traced in the respect of vocabularies of each language and their word-senses.

Paul Ziff says,

A vocabulary may be thought of as constituted by a finite explicit store of words together with a set (possibly null) of morphologically productive devices. Consider a formal language, the words of which are 'x', 'x'', 'x''', ... , thus an infinite number of words. The vocabulary of this language is then constituted by an explicit store of one word, 'x', and a recursive device for the further production of infinitely many words.¹

The vocabulary of the natural languages, in contrast, whether it be English, Bengali or German, are not specifiable in this manner. Every natural language is the production of infinite combination of infinite explicit and implicit vocabularies. Moreover, the words of the natural languages have different senses. Polysemy (several senses of a single word) is an essential feature of any natural language. "That dog is

1 Paul Ziff, Ibid., p.230.

devoted to his master", "This painting is the work of a master hand", "She is a master of arts", "Master Arindam is a good actor" in the above four expressions the word "master" is used in four different senses. In the first expression it is used in the sense of male owner of a dog. "Master" is used in the second sentence in the sense of superior or skilful artist, in the third sentence it is used in the holder of the second University degree and in the fourth sentence "master" is used as a title used for boys too young to be called Mr. The expressions of a formal language are generally required to be monosemous because its ultimate aim is the precision, clarity and consistency. The semantic rules of the formal language specify what meaning or denotation is to be attached to certain elements of the vocabulary. So there is no scope of expression's being vague, ambiguous or imprecise. And there is only the limited scope of expressions being erroneous or meaningless in formal languages where the speaker or writer is ignorant about the rules of formal languages or where his memory fails. Let us take an example. There are distinctive rules for the proof of this argument :

1. (x) (Hx \supset \sim Px)
2. (x) (Gx \supset Hx) / \therefore (Gx \supset \sim Px)
3. (Hy \supset \sim Py) 1, UI
4. (Gy \supset Hy) 2, UI

5. $(Gy \supset \sim Py)$ 4, 3, Hypothetical syllogism.
 6. $(x) (Gx \supset \sim Px)$ UG Q.E.D.

If someone writes the conclusion of the argument as $(x) (Gx \supset \sim Px)$ due to ignorance or memory failure then the conclusion will be absurd or meaningless. But this meaningless expression may generate from some slip or it may produce to make a contrast between meaningful and meaningless expression. But this is not the result of some linguistic error or illusion. In natural language also there are cases of meaningless expression which are produced artificially, for example, "Socrates is a prime number", "Saturday drinks soda water" and so on. But we are not very much interested about such cases of meaningless expressions. We are very much interested about such meaningless expressions which are the result of some linguistic illusion or error. And this illusion arises from the richness of natural language. Natural languages, are by nature fluid and open to unforeseen possibilities of vagueness. Even in complex semantic situations, where more than one meaning is connected with the same word, the ambiguity which results is often used for stylistic purposes. So there is enormous possibility of expressions being erroneous or meaningless. The hearer or reader may be ignorant about the different sense of the same word, he may have a poor linguistic imagination. As a result the expressions resulting from creativity may seem to him nothing but nonsense

or meaningless. The expression "She runs along with the shore of night" may seem non_sense to someone who does not know what the phrase "shore of night" may suggest to mean.

There are, of course, some philosophers and linguists who do not maintain that there are two distinct kinds of language. Donald Davidson says :

It would be misleading, however to conclude that there are two kinds of language, natural and artificial. The contrast is better drawn in terms of guiding interests. We can ask for a description of the structure of a natural language the answer must be an empirical theory, open to test and subject to error, and doomed to be some extent incomplete and schematic. Or we can ask about the formal properties of the structures we thus abstract. The difference is like that between applied and pure geometry.¹

Frege has an opposite view. Frege was sceptical about the application of formal language procedure to natural language. One reason for such scepticism may be that the fundamental logical connectives of formal language are not enough similar in meaning to their natural language counterparts. Moreover, formalisation implies confining oneself to stating facts or making assertions. Ideal languages are capable of

1 Donald Davidson, "Semantics for natural languages" in On Noam Chomsky : Critical Essays, edited by Gilbert Harman Anchor books, Anchor Press, New York, 1974, p.247.

expressing anything which is cognitively meaningful. Some attempts have been made recently, of course, for constructing the formal logic of imperatives and question to which I do not want to enter.

From the above discussion it may be said that the concept of meaninglessness is totally absent in animal communication system because the signals they used to communicate with each other for specific purposes are highly stereotyped. It can be regarded only as a stimulus - response process. The concept of meaninglessness is most apparent in human language where linguistic creativity is somehow involved. This linguistic creativity, however, does not exist equally to natural and artificial form of human language. The scope of creativity is very limited in artificial language while the natural language possesses this creativity in high degree. Naturally the possibility of an expression's being meaningless is in high degree in natural language than it is in artificial or logical language.

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CHAPTER-VIII
REDUCIBILITY OF MEANINGLESSNESS

Chapter VIII

REDUCIBILITY OF MEANINGLESSNESS

From the discussions of the previous chapters it seems that the distinction between meaningful and meaningless is quite interesting and important. The distinction between 'meaningful and meaningless' is as genuine as the distinction between 'good and bad', 'truth and falsity', 'valid and invalid'. Philosophy of language may be pivoted on the distinction between meaningfulness and meaninglessness as the logic and ethics is based on the basic distinction between 'validity and invalidity', 'good and bad' respectively. 'Meaningful' and 'meaningless' are, as if, additional words in the vocabulary of appraisal. It may not be always possible to state what is the exact meaning of an expression but it is quite possible to state whether an expression is meaningful or not. If human communication is to be something significant then with regard to any linguistic expression we have to say at least whether it is meaningful or meaningless. The purpose of using language is to communicate. And the very attempt of communication would fail if someone use the expression which is meaningless.

But the important and interesting point is that

some renowned philosophers do not give so importance to the concept of meaninglessness. According to some philosophers the concept of meaninglessness is not something new. It can be reduced into other concepts such as falsity and so on. The possibility of reducing the concept of meaninglessness to other concept(s) might render the triviality of the distinction between meaningfulness and meaninglessness. Let us see whether meaninglessness can be reduced into other concept(s) or not.

Linguist Adrienne Lehrer says,

... An adequate linguistic description should be able to show explicitly what is wrong with sentences like "I saw a splendid odor", "cats can dogs", and "All spinsters are married to handsome men". Perhaps no definite line can be drawn between false and meaningless sentences. "The Rocks think profound thoughts" can be analyzed either as factually false or as linguistically absurd.¹

But his view is not satisfactory. Because (1) he did not make any distinction between sentence and statement. Sentence may not be either true or false. Statement can only be said to be either true or false. Sentences are

1 Adrienne Lehrer, "Meaning in linguistics" in Theory of Meaning edited by Adrienne and Keith Lehrer, Prentice Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1970, p.9.

used to make statements. (2) A linguistically absurd sentence can not be used to make a false proposition. A false proposition can be made only by a meaningful sentence. Being meaningful, it seems, is the prerequisite condition of sentence's to be a proposition or statement. John Hospers says,

... A false proposition asserts a possible states of affairs to be actual when it is not (for example, "It rains everyday all over the world") a meaningless sentence expresses no proposition whatever, for there is no state of affairs whose actuality is being asserted.¹

N.V. Banerjee also comes to the conclusion that the concept of meaninglessness is not a new concept. It can be understood in terms of contradiction or falsity. In proving that the concept of meaninglessness can be reduced into the concept of falsity he takes help from the English dictionary where the word "meaningless" is synonymous with the word "absurd". The word "absurd" however has its several synonymous words like "incongruous", "inconsistent" and so on. He says the following :

'incongruity' or 'inconsistency' must be either factual or logical. So meaninglessness

1 John Hospers, Introduction to Philosophical Analysis, Prentice Hall, Inc., 1967, p.67.

should mean either factual or logical. So meaninglessness should mean either factual or logical inconsistency. In the former sense it is obviously indistinguishable from and in fact the same as falsity; and in the latter it is but another name for invalidity.¹

But the words 'false' and 'inconsistent' are not the same level of appraisal. Strawson nicely made this point clear. He says :

... A slightly more difficult distinction is that between the criticism we offer when we declare a man's remarks to be untrue and the criticism we offer when we declare them to be inconsistent. In the first case we criticize his remarks on the ground that they fail to square with the facts; in the second case we criticize them on the ground that they fail to square with one another. The charge of untruth refers beyond the words and sentences the man uses to that in the world about which he talks. But the charge of inconsistency does not in this way refer to anything outside the statements that the man makes.²

Moreover in uttering the phrase 'factual inconsistency' it

1 N.V. Banerjee, Language, Meaning and Persons, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1963, p.91.

2 P.F. Strawson, Introduction to Logical Theory, University Paperbacks, Methun : London, 1952, p.1.

seems, he commits a mistake. Facts are as they are. We never apply the appraisal 'consistency', 'inconsistency', 'validity', 'invalidity' to facts. We apply these appraisal only to the relation between the statements that we make.

Some philosopher made a famous trichotomy of 'either true or false or meaningless', as applied to statements or propositions. Passmore also do the same in his Philosophical Reasoning. He says :

Philosophical arguments ... frequently issue in the conclusion that a disputed proposition is neither true nor false; rather, in what turns out to be somewhat special sense of the word it is meaningless.¹

N.V. Banerjee also implicitly accepted this trichotomy of 'either true or false or meaningless' by reducing the concept of meaninglessness into the concept of falsity. Because one concept is reducible into other (S) implies that they are the same level concepts. But this trichotomy is a bogus one and vanishes the distinction between sentence and statement. The sentence "All cricket^ors are very strong" is not meaningless. It is a perfectly significant sentence. But it does not make sense to ask of this sentence, whether it is true or false. It is about statements only

1 John Passmore, Philosophical Reasoning, Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., London, 1961, p.81.

that the question of truth or falsity can arise. Words like 'meaningful', 'meaningless', 'grammatical', 'ungrammatical' belong to the first order vocabulary, while 'true', 'false' belong to the second order vocabulary. A meaningful sentence can only make a true or false statement. A meaningless sentence donot make any statement at all.

Those who says that the concept of meaninglessness is not a new concept and is reducible into the concept of falsity, it seems, are also influenced by the apparent similarity between the meaningless sentence and the self-contradictory statement. In both cases the general purpose of using language that is the intention to communicate something has been failed. Contradictions are, however, meaningful which I have discussed in Chapter III. Contradiction means cancellation. In contradiction predicate expression cancels or denies what is affirmed by the subject expression. The man who makes a contradictory statement makes a false statement, only a logically false or a priori false statement in distinction from ordinary false statement.

Another attempt of characterizing meaningless sentences as false (a priori false) has been made by Theodore Drange. The following sentences such as :

- (1) The theory of relativity is blue.
- (2) The number 5 weighs more than the number 6.

- (3) Socrates is a prime number.
- (4) Quadruplicity drinks procastination.
- (5) Smells are loud.
- (6) I have eaten a loud clap.
- (7) Moral perfection is a prime number.
- (8) Chemistry is a greater ordinal than the
concept of truth.

are all meaningless, according to Theodore Drange, because they involve a crossing of types or type boundaries. They are meaningless or unintelligible when they are taken literally. He also says that sentences such as (1) - (8) need to be given some special interpretation in order to be understood. Some interpretation can be given to them which would render them not only meaningful but true also. For example, the sentence (2) could be uttered in a printing shop by a type setter. Sentences (3) could have reference to a numbered list of philosophers' name. But they are all meaningless if they are interpreted in an ordinary and straightforward way. In replying to the question what makes an expression type crossing, Theodore Drange gives two views. In Type Crossing he says in one place that the sentences (1) - (8) involve crossing of types and therefore meaningless in so far as their usual interpretations are concerned. They seem to be saying one type of thing something that has application only to another type of thing.

He also says in another place in the same book :

What makes a sentence a type crossing is the interpretation given to it, which is not necessarily its *prima facie* meaning. For example, consider the sentence :

(9) That mechanism has two springs in it. Sentence (9) would normally be taken to be a perfectly meaningful sentence of English. But suppose the word 'spring' which appears in it, were understood to mean 'The first season of the year'. Then (9) would be a type crossing, being equivalent to "that mechanism has two first seasons in it".¹

That is some unusual interpretation of a given sentence may make the sentence in question as type crossing. Thus there are two ways of sentences being type crossing and therefore meaningless, according to Theodore Drange, (1) an usual way of interpretation would make some sentences type crossing and (2) an unusual interpretation of some sentences would make them type crossing. But he clearly states "... let the term 'type crossing' be understood ... as referring to sentences which are like (1) - (8) in the specified way".¹ The unusual interpretation of sentences would make most of the meaningful sentences that we use in our daily life as type crossing and hence meaningless. There is no reason to take seriously his second interpretation of type crossings.

1 Theodore Drange, Type Crossings : An Interpretation of Meaningless Sentences. The Hague, Mouton, 1966, p.13.

2 Ibid., p.13.

Let us discuss whether type crossings, exemplified in sentences (1) - (8), can be characterized as false (a priori false) as it is demanded by Theodore Drange. He claims that type crossings can be characterized as false. And this follows, he says, from the principle that negations of type crossings are true (a priori true) and therefore meaningful. He has given some proofs in favour of his view. One example of such proofs is the following :

- (1) The theory of relativity is a theory.
- (2) Theories are abstract entities.
- (3) No abstract entities are concrete entities.
- (4) Only concrete entities are colored.
- (5) Only colored entities are blue.
- (6) Therefore, the theory of relativity is not blue.

He says that the conclusion is a priori true and hence meaningful as it is logically follows from the premises each of which is a true statement. And therefore the type crossings themselves can be legitimately characterized as a priori false.

But the theory that negation of type crossings are a priori true and therefore type crossings themselves may be legitimately characterized as a priori false seems unacceptable because the theory of relativity is such a kind of thing about which no empirical predicate like blue, green, red,

heavy, light and so on can be applied or denied to be applied. "The theory of relativity is not blue" also is a meaningless sentence, it cannot be a meaningful sentence because a significant sentence only can be significantly contradicted or negated. Arthur Pap also says that the negation of a meaningless sentence is meaningless. And if a sentence is meaningless then the question whether the statements made by these sentences are true or false do not arise. Pap opposed the view that the negation of type crossings are true (a priori) in this following way :

In ordinary parlance, a rejection of a statement of the form "X is blue" as false is equivalent to the assertion that X has some colour other than blue; similarly, were one to reject "X weighs more than Y" as false, one would implicitly assert that either X and Y have the same weight or Y weighs more than X, and so on.¹

So there is no question of describing or characterizing type crossings as (a priori) true. They are simply meaningless as the type crossings themselves are. Only contradictory statements are said to be false a priori. As contradictions

1 Arthur Pap, "Types and Meaninglessness",
Mind Vol. 69, 1960, p. 41.

are the negation of analytic statements which are true a priori. Moreover, Theodore Drange attempts to prove that the negations of type crossings are meaningful by way of their being true. But the sentences being meaningful is the prerequisite condition of its being true but not vice versa.

The concept of meaninglessness is not reducible into the concept of falsity is also evident from the poetic uses of language. In poetry there occurs many expressions which are semantically incorrect and therefore meaningless. In poetry we find many instances of such semantic violations forming strange but interesting aesthetic images. Take Dylan Thomas's phrase "a grief ago" as an example. "Ago" is a word ordinarily used with words specified by some temporal feature: "a week ago", "an hour ago", "a month ago", "a century ago" but not "a table ago", "a dream ago" or "a mother ago". When Thomas used the word "grief" with "ago" he was adding probably a durational time feature to the word for poetic effect. But poetry can never be said to be false. Though it can be meaningless or nonsense. So the concept of falsity and the meaninglessness is not the same concept.

There are other sentences which sound like English sentences but make no sense at all because they include some words which have no meaning, they are "uninterpretable". One can only interpret them if one impose some meaning for each

meaningless or nonsense word. Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky" is probably the most famous poem in which most of the content words have no meaning - they do not exist in any of the English lexicon of the world. Yet all the sentences sound as if they are the perfect English sentences .

He took his vorpal sword in hand,
Long time the manxome foe he sought.
So rested he by the Tumtum tree,
And stood a while in thought.

Or take some lines from Sukumar Roy's The Blighty Cow.

A very strange bird is the Blighty cow
You can see him at Haru's office now.
He has dreamy eyes in a very long face,
His sleek black curls are neatly in place.

We do not know what the word 'vorpal' and 'the Blighty cow' means. We can say that the sentence in which the words like 'vorpal' and 'the Blighty cow' occurs are meaningless but never say that they are false.

From the above discussions it may be said that the concept of meaninglessness and the concept of falsity are two different concepts. So there may not arise any question of reducing meaninglessness into falsity or characterizing meaningless as false. Attempt of characterizing meaningless as false may not be successful.

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

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We become desirous of studying language carefully because we face certain linguistic impasses which are often alleged to be due to 'misuse of language'. Meaningless sentences also sometimes generate from this misuse of language. Misuse may be of different sorts. Category-mistake, ungrammaticality, using bad metaphor all are the results of this misuse of language. There are some expressions, however artificial, about whose meaninglessness we can all agree. For example,

1. The theory of relativity is blue
2. Number 5 weighs more than number 6
3. Socrates is a prime number
4. Fragrance is as high as sky scraper
5. Saturday is in bed
6. Theory is but not.

The above sentences, at least some of them, can be interpreted to be meaningful of course if the rules and conventions of English language change or if different interpretations are given to these sentences in different situations. But in the existing rules and conventions of English language and in the normal interpretation they are meaningless. Whether a sentence is meaningful or meaningless is to be judged only with respect to the existing rules and

conventions governing the usage^{of} language. So it is logically possible that a new usage could be found for a meaningless sentence → a new usage which would satisfy the criterion of meaningfulness. The sentence "The theory of relativity is blue" could be interpreted as meaningful in the following manner. Suppose in a scientific institution all the data on the scientific theories have been kept in a coloured file. The data on the relativity theory is kept in a blue file. One day a scientific officer comes to the institution and asks for the file on relativity theory. One may help him to locate the correct file by saying "The theory of relativity is blue". "Saturday is in bed" can be a meaningful sentence if someone named his child "Saturday". In certain societies of India, children are named after the day of their birth.

There are some sentences, although they are perfectly grammatical, controversies are there among philosophers as to whether they are meaningless or meaningful. Philosophers possessing different beliefs and world views would interpret these sentences differently. Take some examples :

1. The Absolute is perfect
2. God exists
3. Mind and body exists.
4. Time has a beginning.
5. Socrates exists
6. Everything is complex.

Although these sentences are grammatically correct they are not universally accepted as instances of meaningful sentences. This is because a language user may look at the world differently. The possibility of sincere use of language is predetermined by some definite world outlook. Again it is not correct to think that each individual possesses one and only one world-view or system of beliefs. The world-view of a language user sometimes becomes a determining factor as to whether a sentence is meaningful or not. Descartes belief that world of bodies is essentially distinct from the mind, because one can doubt the existence of the external world including his body but not to his mind, led him to the view that there exist both physical substance and mental substance. But to Ryle "World of bodies and minds exist" makes no sense. Minds and bodies are so distinct in nature that they can not be together said to exist.

In our everyday speech the use of the term "meaningless" is not altogether absent. In everyday speech we say sometimes that "Life is meaningless". Here we use the term "meaningless" to mean "without importance", "purpose" or "value". But we are not concerned here with these uses of "meaninglessness". We are concerned rather with the meaninglessness of a sentence. And it is the typical business of the philosopher and of the poet to concern themselves with the

meaningless expressions. In scientific writing the application of the concept of meaninglessness is almost absent. In scientific writing there are no doubt words and sentences, but these words are of no intrinsic importance, reference made by the words are all important. Scientists always try to restrict their words to purely symbolic use because of their clarity and precision. In poetry and in philosophy the medium is all important. The problem of meaninglessness arises there whenever 'ways of saying' or 'medium of saying' is taken to be identical with 'what is said'.

Immediately the dispute arises about what is and what is not meaningless. Is there any general criterion for distinguishing what is meaningless from what is meaningful? Many attempts have been made to formulate an adequate general criterion to settle the dispute about what is and what is not meaningless. Different theories of meaning may be adapted for this purpose. According to the truth conditional theorist the capability of giving truth condition of a sentence is the guarantee of its meaningfulness. So if one is incapable of giving truth condition of a sentence that would determine that the sentence is meaningless. While to the verificationist unverifiability in principle is the criterion of a sentence's being meaningless. The category-mistake argument states that a sentence is meaningless if it breaks the type or category restrictions. Some philosophers, however, find some

interesting connection between metaphor and meaninglessness because metaphorical use is based on the concept of category-mistake argument. But unfortunately the general criteria of meaninglessness are all inadequate.

Is then the concept of meaninglessness a useless concept? Should we not cease using the concept of meaninglessness? It can be said in this context that not only in philosophy but also in our everyday use of language we do use a variety of concepts for which no general criterion can be enumerated. When one remarks that "life is a dream" is a beautiful expression" he may not have any general criterion of using the concept 'beautiful'. That does not mean that we abandon the concept 'beautiful'. The same may be true in the case of meaninglessness. Moreover most of the basic concepts of philosophy like 'knowledge', 'truth', 'falsity', 'validity', 'invalidity' lack any general criterion of their application. There is a controversy as to what is knowledge, when a statement is true or false, valid or invalid. Now if due to the lack of a general criterion for these concepts they have to be abandoned from the philosophical discourse then doubt may creep in whether anything remains as philosophical concepts or not. Lack of any general criterion or test is no way a sufficient reason to stop using the concept(s) in question. Moreover it may be said that none of the criteria

given by the philosopher for distinguishing meaningless sentence from the meaningful ones is separately sufficient for understanding the meaninglessness of all sentences. There is no single criterion which would cover all cases of meaningless expressions. There are only separate errors such as using sentences outside a given context, mixing up categories, contradicting one self, using untranslatable metaphor, expression which lack truth-condition, not verifiable or confirmable by experience and so on. We can group all these sentences together and call them all 'meaningless'. We can show that a sentence is meaningless by using whatever argument is required by the case in hand, instead of using one general argument.

Whatever may be the reasons for generation of meaningless sentences the possibility of generation of meaningless sentences are inherent in the general nature or characteristic features of language. They are not just artificially formulated by the philosopher. This follows from the simple fact that human language is creative. Language is highly compositional in nature. We learn only limited number of words and by their different combination we compose infinite number of sentences not even heard before. We possess the skill to generate new sentences and to interpret what these new sentences mean. This may call the elasticity or flexibility of our understanding. Our understanding of the words and the

syntactical rules of their combination help us to identify the meaning of new sentences. In composing the sentence we enjoy certain degrees of freedom, high degree of freedom in some discourse. And where there is freedom there is also the possibility of misuse of this freedom. As a result absurd or meaningless sentences generate. Sentence is made up with words and every words has its definite logic, logic of its application in the sentences. Understanding the proper function of the words and their proper application (in forming a sentence) enables us to construct a meaningful sentence.

Some philosophers like Grice of course tries to establish that meaning is primarily a matter of intention what the speaker wants to say by uttering the sentence is most important in determining the meaningfulness of a sentence. According to this communication-intention theorist language is no doubt a matter of rules and conventions but the rules and conventions should be understood only in reference to the concept of communication-intention — the intention which the speaker wants to communicate to his hearer. One objection against this view is that one cannot know the beliefs and intentions of another in advance of understanding his language. It is true that when someone says something he always attempts to communicate something to his hearer, he utters the sentence with some intention but in determining the meaningfulness of a sentence not only the intention of the speaker but the

linguistic medium of making clear this intention should be equally emphasized.

One way to express the difference between the sounds that animal make in different situation and the sentences man uses is that man applies language with the intention to perform this or that speech act (the performance of illocutionary acts) while the sounds of the animal may be regarded only as stimulus-response process. Parrot may be capable of uttering sentences by listening them repeatedly but in uttering the sentence parrots actually says nothing. Parrot utters the sentences habitually and blankly, they do not perform any speech act like making a promise, ask a question, issue commands and so on. Moreover we live in the world of words. We talk even to ourselves (soliloquizing). No other animal ever do this. What distinguishes man from any other animals is the possession of an unique language. Besides these, animal never mistake in their communication. They can only show some deficiency or slip due to their unfitness of speech organ. But 'mistake', 'wrong', 'incorrect', 'absurd', 'meaningless', all these are relevant concepts of human language. For human language is highly complex and compositional in nature.

From the above discussion it seems that the concept of meaninglessness is an important concept of philosophy of language. 'Meaningless' is as genuine a term as 'good', 'bad',

'truth', 'falsity', and so on. 'Meaningless' is an additional word in the vocabulary of appraisal.

Some philosophers of course do not want to give a great importance to the concept of meaninglessness because according to them the concept of meaninglessness can be reduced into other concepts such as falsity and so on. But those who maintain that the concept of meaninglessness can be reduced into falsity of some kind and so on, commit a great mistake — the mistake of making no difference between sentences and propositions or statements. Propositions or statements must be distinguished from the sentences. Sentences are used to express the proposition as in the same way as numerals are used to express numbers. The bearer of truth-values is proposition which is expressed by the meaningful sentence. Meaningless sentence does not express any proposition. It makes no sense to ask the question whether this or that sentence is true or false. So 'meaninglessness' and 'falsity' does not belong to the same level of appraisal and may not be reduced one into another.

If the above analysis of the concept of meaningfulness and meaningless^{ness} are correct, then we can draw some interesting conclusions about them.

(1) One among many things that a philosopher finds very interesting about language is that we say something or communicate something by using it. We cannot have a proper understanding of the nature of our language and of the nature of communication if we are ignorant about what makes some linguistic expressions meaningful as distinguished from other which are meaningless. Significance of language is the most fundamental issue of philosophy of language. The question of significance does not arise about things like mountain, river, sea and so on, but only about language which is a man made phenomenon. A river or mountain may have significance in some other sense not in the sense in which a linguistic expression can have a significance. A mountain or river may have significance from the geographical point of view, for example, a mountain or a river may separate two states one from the other. Here 'Significance' means having some 'geographical value'. A proper account of the function of signification in a language is possible where the signified, the signifier and the linguistic medium or sign system formed a structural unity.

(2) The concept of meaningfulness and meaninglessness is related with our ways of understanding the world. We have classified the discrete elements of the world into

different categories for convenience of our understanding. This classification is of different orders and levels depending on different degrees of sophistication in understanding one wants to attain. And it has become a convention to take the world in a particular way. Classification is the ability to discover likeness between the seemingly unlike objects. There are certain principles of classification which we have to follow when we classify something. Members of the same category must have some common characteristics, although in some other respects they can have some dissimilarities. Classification is the means we use to make sense out of the unorganized world. We classify entities into two kinds such as physical or material entities and abstract entities. We also make classification among the properties of things such as physical or material properties and abstract or mental properties. So the sentence like "virtue is square" and the "shape of happiness is round" seems quite odd and meaningless to our common understanding, to our present conceptual framework. But if the principles or mechanism of division or classification change what seems meaningful now may appear as meaningless, while what seems as meaningless now may appear as meaningful in the changed mechanism. So there is no such concept as meaningful or meaningless independent of our ways of understanding the world or independent of the conventions of our language. Meaningfulness and meaninglessness is very much related with

mechanism of understanding the universe of discourse.

(3) A sentence is the production of three basic components. These are the phonological component, syntactic component and the semantic component. Presence of only one of the components in a sentence, however, does not give any guarantee that the sentence is meaningful. These three elements should have to be present simultaneously for a sentence's being a meaningful unit of language. Phonological, syntactic and semantic components are internally related to each other and form an integrated whole.

Although language is primarily a system of phonetic symbols every sequence of phonetic symbols are not permissible. Language is phonemic in character. Phonemes are built up arbitrarily. We have selected some arrangements of phonetic symbol as the unanalyzable unit of language or as the meaningful symbols of reference while reject some other. The significant structure of language also depends on the sequence of the phonetic symbols. Syntactic component organizes such sound units into proper sentential or formal structures. Semantical component, however, operate upon them to determine their meaning. Semantic component gives the formal structure an interpretation.

A sentence may be literally meaningless also due to these three factors - due to the improper application of these

components. One may deny to use only the conventionally fixed lexical items as a meaningful symbol of reference. If he arranged the phonetic symbols in this order like 'dgo' instead of 'dog' then this would be merely an empty sound and would signify nothing and the sentence in which this improper phonems would present also be meaningless. A sentence may be meaningless syntactically. Syntactic rules is concerned solely with the relationships between the signs. "Theory is but" is an instance of such syntactically meaningless sentence. It violates the rules of generating the formal structure of a sentence. A sentence may also be semantically anomalous or meaningless. A semantic rule is simply a conventional association between some element of language and some element of the world. The sentence "The sound of a sitar is green" is semantically anomalous and hence meaningless because the sound is not the kind of entity that can have a colour like green.

(4) We may divide meaningless or nonsense expressions into different types. In doing so we may proceed from some uncontroversial cases of meaningless expressions to some controversial ones.

(i) Nonsense as gibberish where we can find neither familiar syntax nor familiar vocabulary

(a) Grillang baxpfemslaw

(b) Abracadabra.

(ii) Vocabulary nonsense - expression which contains enough familiar words and familiar syntax or grammar but contains some unfamiliar or untranslatable vocabulary (untranslatable into familiar vocabulary).

(a) The pabble who has no toes. (Edward Lear)

(b) He took his vorpal sword in hand. (Lewis Carroll)

(iii) Nonsense as random arrangement of familiar words.

They are ungrammatical or syntactically incorrect and hence semantically meaningless also. They may be properly called as 'nonsense string of words' instead of 'nonsense sentence' because they may not be regarded as a sentence in the strict sense.

(a) Cat mat between is are

(b) Theory is but.

(iv) Meaningless sentences which are well-formed but involved a category mistake or crossing of types.

(a) Theory of relativity is blue

(b) Smells are loud

(v) Sentences which are meaningless due to contradiction.

(a) He is married but bachelor

(b) Triangles are three sided figure and not threesided figure.

(vi) Sentences which seems meaningless which respect to some specific conceptual framework or background.

(a) Mind and body exists

(b) No material things exist.

Philosophers are not very much interested in the type^{of} nonsense exemplified in (i) - (iii). Nonsense of the type (iv) - (vi) fascinate the philosopher very much.

There are controversies among philosophers as to what should be the decisive factor in determining whether a sentence involves a category mistake or not, whether contradictions are meaningless or not. There is also disagreement among philosophers as to whether sentences like "mind and body exists", "No material things exist" are meaningless or not. This has been discussed throughout the thesis.

(5) Meaningless sentence should be distinguished from the meaningless use of a sentence. Use of a normal sentence may appear deviant or meaningless because it is inappropriate or has no relevance to a particular context. For example, to say "Best of luck" when someone is going to sleep. It is the meaningless sentence and not its nonsensical use which stems from breaking the linguistic rules governing the construction of well-formed sentences. A linguistically

perfect sentence can be used meaninglessly when it has no relevance to the context. So the distinction between meaningfulness and meaninglessness can be a distinction between the uses of the sentence.

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