

CHAPTER - V

An Internalist Approach of language use

One of the prime aspect of this chapter is to examine in what sense Chomsky criticises the views of externalist philosophers, especially Putnam, and defence of naturalism in the investigation of language. In interpreting language, Chomsky equally explicates his arguments against Quine, Dummett, Davidson, Wittgenstein etc., who have believed somehow or other the classical semantics or representational approach of language. Putnam elsewhere claims that certain human abilities may not be theoretically explicable in isolation apart from a full model of *human functional organism*, which may well be unintelligible to human when stated in detail. For him we are not theoretically going to have a detailed explanatory model for the natural kind *human being*, not because of mere complexity, but because we are partially opaque to ourselves. This is mainly for the fact that we are not having the ability to understand one another as we understand hydrogen atoms. This is what Putnam calls 'constitutive fact'⁽¹⁾. about human beings. Putnam thus inclines to favour naturalistic inquiry which is very much external in nature. It is scientific in nature in which we seek intelligible explanatory theories and look forward to eventual integration with the so-called natural sciences. It is focussed on the character of work and reasonable goals in abstraction from actual achievement. However, Putnam seems to have believed that many questions including those of greatest human significance do not fall within naturalistic inquiry which for him are nonetheless useful to some extent.

Putnam has criticised Chomskyan line of sophisticated mentalism and thereby adds some complementary observations on theoretical inquiry that would not help to explain language speaking. He, however, inclines to say that the brain science might discover that when we think the word *cat*, a configuration C is formed in the brain. He holds that if it is supposed to be

1. Putnam, Hilary : *Meaning and the moral Sciences*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978, P. 26.

the case, then it would really be fascinating as a contribution of psychology and the brain sciences. But at the same time, he goes on to say that as far as its relevance to a discussion of the meaning of cat is concerned, there is no relevance of it.⁽²⁾

At least two things will come up from Putnam's apprehension of naturalistic inquiry. First, *language speaking* and human abilities do not currently fall within naturalistic inquiry. Secondly, nothing could be learned about meaning from the study and configurations and processes of the brain. Let us focus on each of them in turn by following Chomsky. According to Chomsky the concept of human being is part of our common sense understanding, with properties of individuation, psychic persistence, and so on. The same can be said in the case of language speaking. Barring improbable accident such concepts will not fall within explanatory theories of the naturalistic variety as advocated by the externalists. For Chomsky this is not because of cultural limitations, but because of their nature. Such accounts, Chomsky opines, even cannot be integrated into the natural sciences. So there underlies no reason to hold that there is a natural kind human being which can be discovered in naturalistic inquiry. There may, of course, be scientific studies of some aspects of what people *do*, but they will not use the common sense notions *language speaking* with their special role in human life and thought in formulating their explanatory principles.

Chomsky further goes on to say that even the notions of **desk**, **book** or **house** are not appropriate for naturalistic inquiry. For him in order to describe something as a desk rather than a chair, one has to depend on its designer's intentions and the way we and others intend to use it, among other factors. As books are concrete objects, we therefore refer to them as such: the book weights five pounds. The term house is used to refer to concrete objects, but from the standpoint of special human interests and goals and with curious properties. A house can be destroyed and rebuilt, like a city, under certain circumstances. Arguably, it is hard to realise, Chomsky echoes, how these could be fit concepts for theoretical study of things, events and processes in the natural world.

02. Putnam, Hilary : ' *Meaning Holism* '. In E Hahn and P.A. Schilpp, eds., *The Philosophy of W.V. Quine* , La Salle, Open Court, 1986a, Pp. 405-26.

The same can be claimed in the case of matter, motion, energy, work, etc. Even the most elementary notions, such as nameable things involve such intricate notions as human agency. What we take as objects, how we refer to them and describe them, and the array of properties with which we invest them on their place in a matrix of human actions, interests, and intent in respects that lie far outside the potential range of naturalistic inquiry. Linguistic terms also indicate position in belief systems though in ways inappropriate to the ends of naturalistic inquiry. So Chomsky goes on to say that the concepts of natural language and commonsense generally are not even candidates for naturalistic theories.

According to Putnam there we have some concepts which are not appropriate for naturalistic inquiry. In this context he calls upon Brentano's thesis that "intentionality won't be reduced and won't go away". Putnam inclines to say that there underlies no scientifically describable property that all cases of any particular intentional phenomenon have in common.⁽³⁾ What he intends to say is that intentional phenomena relate to people and accordingly they are viewed from the standpoint of human interests and unreflective thought. Accordingly, they will not fall within naturalistic theory. But from this it does not follow that naturalism is bound to be otiose. Chomsky, however, rules out the view of Putnam. He holds that there are certain components of the mind what he calls, *science forming faculty* enter into naturalistic, much as the language faculty that enters into the acquisition and use of language. The products of the science forming faculty are fragments of theoretical understanding. Other faculties of the mind yield the concepts of common sense understanding which enter into natural language semantics and belief systems. These simply grow in the mind in the same way that the embryo grows into a person.

According to Chomsky the divergence from natural language is twofold the constructed terms abstracted from the intricate properties of natural language expressions. They are assigned semantic properties that may well not hold for natural language, such as reference what Strawson once called "the

3. Putnam, Hilary : *Meaning Holism* . In E Hahn and P.A. Schilpp, eds., *The Philosophy of W.V. Quine* , La Salle, Open Court, 1986a, P - 413.

myth of the logically proper name,”⁽⁴⁾ in natural language; and related myths conserving indexicals and pronouns. Chomsky further contends that even the strengthened version of Putnam’s first thesis does not entitle us to move on to the second to conclude that naturalistic theories of the brain are of no relevance to understanding what people do. Let us consider Putnam’s case in this regard. The discovery that thinking of cats evokes C. Arguably, such a discovery might have some relevance to inquire into what Peter means when he uses the term *Cat*, hence to a discussion of the meaning of *Cat*. There has been a debate in which Putnam has taken part about the referential properties of *cat* if *cats* were found to be robots controlled from Mars. Further suppose that after Peter comes to believe this, his brain does or does not, form C when he refers to *cats*. That might be relevant to the debate. Realistically, Chomsky opines that in recent studies of electrical activity of the brain show distinctive responses to non-deviant and deviant expressions and to violations of : word meaning expectancies, phrase structure rates, locality conditions on movement etc. Such results might be relevant to the study of the use of language, in particular, to the study of meaning.

According to Chomsky patterns of electrical activity of the brains correlate with the five categories of structure noted : non-deviance and four types of deviance. For him the study of these categories is the study of the brain, its states and properties, just as study of algorithms involved in seeing a straight line is a study of the brain. Parallel to any complex systems the brain can be studied at various levels : such as, atoms, cells, cell-assemblies, neural networks, computational representation (C-R) systems etc. The event related potential (in short ERP) study relates two such levels, namely, electrical activity of the brain and C-R Systems. For Chomsky the study of each level is naturalistic both in the character of the work and in that integration with the core natural sciences is a prospect that can be reasonably entertained. In the context of Putnam’s discussion, discoveries about the brain at these levels of inquiry are on a par with a discovery about the configuration C, when Peter thinks of *cats*. In the case of language, the C-R theories have much stronger empirical support

4. Strawson, P.: *Introduction to logical Theory*, London, Methuen, 1952, P. 216.

than anything available at other levels. They fall within the natural sciences to an extent, but inquiry into *language speaking* at other levels does not. In fact the current significance of the ERP studies lies primarily in their co-relations with the much richer and better grounded C-R theories. Likewise the discovery that C correlates with use of *cat* would, as an isolated fact, be more of a discovery about C than about the meaning of *cat*.

According to Chomsky the best-grounded naturalistic theories of language and its use are C-R theories. It may well be that the relevant elements and principles of brain structure have yet to be discovered. May be C-R theories will give rise to guidelines for the search for such mechanisms. The common slogan that ‘the mental is the neurophysiological at a higher level’ - where C-R theories are placed within the mental has matters backwards. However, neurophysiological may turn out to be “the mental at a lower level. This makes sense to say that neurophysiology might prove to have some bearing on the *mental phenomena* dealt within C-R theories. For the present, C-R approaches provide the best grounded and richest naturalistic account of basic aspects of language use. Within C-R theories, says Chomsky, there underlies a fundamental concept that bears resemblance to the commonsense notion *language*, namely, the generative procedure that forms structural descriptions, each of which has a complex of phonetic, semantic and structural properties. Chomsky calls this procedure I-language. Chomsky has chosen the concept of I-language in order to indicate that the conception of language is *eternal, individual and intentional*. According to Chomsky, the linguistic expression of a given I-language to be the structural descriptions generated by it. Accordingly, a linguistic expression is a complex of phonetic, semantic and other properties. For Chomsky to have an I-language is something like having a *way to speak and understand*, which is one traditional picture of what a language is. In this regard I-language is on a par with what Chomsky calls *grammatical competence* and accordingly distinct from conceptual organization and *pragmatic competence*.

The function of I-Language (grammatical competence)

One of the important function of I-language is that it specifies the form and meaning of lexical elements such as desk work and fall, insofar as these are determined by the language faculty itself. It also accounts for properties of mere complex expressions. For example the sentence: *John rudely departed*, may mean either that he departed in a rude manner or that it was rude of him to depart and that in each case he departed. A deeper inquiry into I-language will seek to account of the fact that Peter has the I-language L_p, while John has the I-language L_j. The basic explanations must lie in the properties of the language faculty of the brain. To a good approximation, the genetically-determined initial state of the language faculty is the same for Peter, John and other human. It permits only a restricted variety of I-languages to develop under the triggering and shaping effect of experience. Understandably, it is not implausible to speculate that the initial state determines the computational system of language uniquely along with a highly structured range of lexical possibilities and some options among *grammatical elements* that lack substantive content.

According to Chomsky I-language is supposed to be a property of the brain a relatively stable element of transitory states of the language faculty. Each linguistic expression generated by the I-language includes instructions for performance systems in which the I-language is embedded. It is only by virtue of its integration into such performance system that this brain state qualifies as a language. Chomsky claims that other organism might, in principle, have the same I-language as Peter, but embedded in performance systems that use it for locomotion. In the study of human language, we are studying the language faculty of the brain which is supposed to be a full I-language and is integrated into performance systems that play a role in articulation, interpretation, expression of beliefs and desires, referring, telling stories and so on. Thus a generated expression includes two interface levels, such as articulatory perceptual which provides information and instructions and the

other for the conceptual intentional systems. One interface is assumed to be phonetic representation and the other is, though controversial, called *logical form*.

However, it is to be pointed out here that the properties of these system are matters of empirical fact. One should not be misguided by unintended connotations of such terms as *logical form* and *representation* drawn from technical usage in different kinds of inquiry. Likewise, although there we have the notion of *deep grammar* and *surface grammar* of philosophical analysis, the concepts do not clearly match. As far as I-language is concerned, surface grammar is the interface with articulatory perceptual system. Everything else is deep. According to Chomsky, the surface grammar of philosophical analysis has no particular status in the empirical study of language. For him surface grammar is just like a phenomenal judgement mediated by schooling, traditional authorities and conventions, cultural artifacts and so on. The complex of I-language and performance systems enters into human action. It is an appropriate subject matter for naturalistic theories which might carry no far towards understanding of how and why people do what they do.

However, it would be misleading to claim that some part of the brain sees a tree or figures out square roots. Although it is usually to be the case that people in an ambiguous range of standard circumstances pronounce words, refer to cats speak their thought, understand what others say, play chess or whatever, their brains do not. However study of brains might well provide insight into what people are actually doing in such cases. An algorithm constructed in a C-R theory might provide a correct account of what is happening in the brain when Peter sees a straight line, but the algorithm would not be carrying out these actions. It may be the case, says Chomsky that people at time carry out action by virtue of the fact that their brains implement the algorithm, the same people would not be carrying out the action, if they were mechanically implementing the instructions in the manner of machine. It may be the case the I see a straight line by virtue of the fact that my brain implements a certain

algorithm, but if I carry out the instructions mechanically, then in such a situation neither I nor I-plus algorithm-plus-external memory sees a straight line.

According to Chomsky, it would be a mistake to move at once to vacuous *study of everything* via performance system. Here he cites Donald Davidson's discussion of Peter as an *interpreter* trying to figure out what Tom has in mind when he speaks. According to Davidson in such a case Peter may use any information, background, assumption, guesswork, or whatever, constructing a *passing theory* for the occasion. It appears that an interpreter in such situation carries to full models of human functional organism. Davidson thereby concludes that there is no use for the *concept of language*. Serving as a *portable interpreting machine set to grind out the meaning of an arbitrary utterance*. Thus we are led to abandon not only the ordinary notion of a language, but we have erased the boundary between knowing a language and knowing our way around in the world generally. Davidson further goes on to say that since "there are no rules for arriving at passing theories, we must give up the idea of a clearly defined shared structure which language users acquire and then apply to cases."⁽⁵⁾ For Davidson there is no such thing as a language. This view is also reflected in a recent study of Davidson with his formal approval.⁽⁶⁾ According to Chomsky, although the passing theories of Davidson initially appears to be noteworthy, but the conclusion do not follow from it. For him if our goal is to understand what humans are and what they do, then, surely, we have to try to isolate coherent systems that are amenable to naturalistic inquiry and that interact to yield some aspects of the full complexity. If we work on this line, Chomsky echoes, we are thereby led to the conjecture that there is a generative procedure that *grinds out* linguistic expressions with their interface properties and performance system that access these instructions and are used for interpreting and expressing one's thoughts. If this is to be the case, then what about 'the idea of a clearly defined shared structure which language users acquire and then apply to cases'? Do we also postulate such *shared structure* in addition to I-language and performance system? If we recall upon Fregean interpretation

05. Davidson, Donald : *A nice derangement of epitaphs*. In E. Lepore, ed., *Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1986. P.446.

06. Ramberg, Bjorn : *Donald Davidson's philosophy of language* , Oxford, Blackwell, 1989.P.115.

then we can say that public language or public meanings are required to explain the possibility of communication or of 'a common treasure of thoughts'.⁽⁷⁾ Accordingly, if Peter and Mary do not have a *shared language*, with *shared meanings* and *shared reference*, then how can Peter understand what Mary says? One very recent study holds that linguists can adopt an I-language perspective only 'at the cost of denying that the basic function of natural languages is to mediate communication between its speakers', including the so-called 'incremental learning.'⁽⁸⁾

According to Chomsky any approach to the study of language or meaning based on *shared structure* is wrong. It has been claimed by many semantics that language and language use regularly introduce other kinds of shared structure, such as, communities with their languages, common languages across a broader culture etc. Such practices are also witnessed in ordinary casual discourses as well. Accordingly, one can say that Peter and Tom speak the same language, but John speaks a different one. Similarly, we can say that Calcutta is near to Siliguri, but not near to Delhi. Or, we can say on the basis of shared structure that Ram and Shyam are alike, but neither of them looks like Arka. Equally, we might reject all these assertions what has been said. There is no right or wrong choice in abstraction from interests that may vary in every imaginable way. There are also no natural categories, no idealizations. In these respects speaking the same language is on a par with being near or looking like. Max Weinreich says that a shared structure language is just like a dialect, of course metaphorically, with an army and a navy, but dialects are also non-linguistic notions, which can be set up one way or another, depending on particular interests and concerns. For him any approach to the study of language that relies on shared structure is highly suspect.

Many philosophers, particularly later Wittgenstein holds that language is rule following. Now, *following a rule* is analysed or understood in terms of communities. For example, Johnny follows a rule if he conforms to the practice or norms of the community. Now, if the community is homogeneous then perhaps

07. Chomsky, Noam : *Lectures on Government and Binding*, Dordrecht, Forisa, 1981a, P-188.

08. Chomsky, Noam : *Language and Problems of knowledge : The Managua Lectures*, Cambridge M.A. MIT, Press.P-52.

there would be no problem, but if the community is heterogeneous, then several problems arise. Typically, we attribute, says Chomsky, in the case of notable lack of conformity to prescriptive practice. Thus we might say that Johnny at the age of three is following his own rule when he says *brang* instead of *brought* or that his father Peter is following the *wrong rule* | uses *disinterested* to mean *uninterested*. But only a linguist would say that Johnny and Peter are observing condition of the Binding theory,⁽⁹⁾ as does the community generally. The most serious objection to the notion is that common language makes as much sense as the notion | *near by city* without further specification of interests and thereby learning the analyses vacuous.⁽¹⁰⁾

Chomsky further goes on to say that in language use social factors often have a natural individualist-internalist interpretation. If John is improving his German language, he thereby makes himself a wide range of people. We gain no insight into what he is doing by supposing that there is a fixed entity that he is approaching. If Ram complains of arthritis in his ankle and thigh, and is told by a doctor that he is wrong about both, but in different ways, he may choose to modify his usage to that of the doctor's. Likewise, ordinary talk of whether a person has mastered a concept requires no notion of common language. To say that Ram has not mastered the concept arthritis is simply to say that his usage is not exactly that of people we rely on to cure as a normal situation. If Ram being a neighbour, tells me about his arthritis, my initial apprehension is that he is, to some extent, identical to me in his usage. May be I will introduce modifications to interpret his as circumstances require; reference to a presumed *public language* | with an *actual content* for arthritis shades no further light on what is happening between us, even if some clear sense can be given to the tacitly assumed notions. The understood difference in referential properties may be a consequence of a condition holding of the lexicon generally. Lack of indication of a semantic relation is taken to indicate that it does not hold. It is important to point out here that in **Representation** and | **Reality**, Putnam argues against the assumption that the lexical entry includes specific reference to expert judgement. For Putnam the argument is based on tacit assumption about common

9. Chomsky, Noam : *Lectures on Government and Binding*, *op. cit.*, P.188.

10. Chomsky, Noam : *Language and Problems of Knowledge* : *op. cit.*, P.52.

public language and translation. Chomsky in response to Putnam inclines to say that we might accept the conclusion of what Putnam has said in considering reliance on expert judgement to be a general property of a wide range of lexical entries, relating to the ways they enter into belief systems. But what kind of information is within the lexicon as distinct from belief systems? For Chomsky changes in usage, may in fact be marginal changes of I-language, or changes in belief systems, here as construed as C-R system of the mind which enrich the perspectives and standpoints for thought, interpretation, language use and other actions. For Chomsky work in lexical semantics provides a basis for empirical resolution in some cases keeping to the individualist - internalist framework.

Chomsky further inclines to say that a kind of public or interpersonal character to thought and meaning results from uniformity of initial endowment which incorporates only I-language that are alike in significant respects. In this context one can adopt some version of the Fregean doctrine that ‘it cannot well be denied that mankind possesses a common treasure of thoughts which is transmitted from generation to generation.’⁽¹¹⁾ But the problem is that as the character of thought and meaning varies as interest and circumstances vary, we do not have a clear way to establish further categories, even ideally. Therefore Chomsky opines that a plea to a common origin of language about natural selection appears to be otiose. Furthermore, it is also to be assumed that a large part of semantic structure appears to derive from our inner nature, determined by the initial state of our language faculty and therefore unlearned and universal for I-languages. The same is also true of phonetic and other properties. Chomsky therefore concludes that I-language including internalist semantics seems much like other parts of the biological world.

According to Chomsky unlike the externally determined properties of linguistic expression, the internally determined properties of linguistic expressions can be quite far reaching even in very simple cases. Consider the word *house*. In the expression John is painting the house brown, a certain collection of structural, phonetic and semantic properties are there. We may

11. Frege, Gattlob : *Uber Sinn and Bedung* . Reprinted in part as “ on sense and nomination ” in Earnest Nage and Richard Brandt, eds. *Meaning and knowledge : Systematic Reading in Epistemology*. Harcourt, New York, 1965 Pp, 69-78.

claim that it is the same expression for Peter and Tom only in the sense in which we might say that their visual systems are the same. One structural property of the expression is that it consists of six words. Other structural properties differentiate it from *John is painting the house brown*. A phonetic property is that the last two words, *house* and *brown*, share the same vowel. They are in the formal relation of assonance, while *house* and *mouse* are in the formal relation of rhyme. A semantic property is that one of the two final words can be used to refer to certain kinds of things, and the other expresses a property of these. To take a more interesting property, if John is painting the house brown, then he is applying paint to its exterior surface, nor its interior. A relation of entailment holds between the corresponding linguistic expressions. Speaking formally, relations of entailment have much the same status as rhyme; they are formal relations among expressions which can be characterised in terms of their linguistic features. Certain relations happen to be interesting one because of the ways I - language are embedded in performance systems. Moreover, some properties of the expression are universal, others language - particular. It is a universal phonetic property that the vowel of *house* is shorter than the vowel of *brown*. On the other hand, it is a particular property that the vowel in many I-language is front rather than mid. The fact that *brown house* has a brown exterior, not interior, appears to be a language universal, holding of *container* words of a broad category, including ones we might invent: *box*, *aeroplane* etc. To paint a spherical cube brown is to give it a brown exterior. The fact that *house* is distinguished from *home* is a particular feature of the I-language. In English I return to my home after work, in Hebrew, I return to the house. The exterior surface can also be distinguished in other ways within I-language semantics. If I see that house, I see its exterior surface. If I am inside an aeroplane, I see it only if I look out the window and see that surface of the wing. But the *house* is not just its exterior surface, a geometrical entity. If Peter and Mary are equidistant from the surface--Peter inside and Mary outside, Peter is not near the house, but Mary might be, depending on the current conditions for nearness. The house can have chairs inside it or outside it, consistent with its being regarded as a surface. So the house has its both exterior surface as well as

interior. The home-house difference has numerous consequences. I can go home but not go house. I can live in a brown house, but not a brown home, In many languages, the counterpart of home is adverbial as partially in English too. According to Chomsky the internal conditions on meaning are rich, complex, and unsuspected. For him even the most elaborate dictionaries do not dream of such subtleties.

The same can also be the case in I-language. London is not a fiction, but considering it as London, a particular type of linguistic expression must be required. We must allow that under certain circumstances it could be completely destroyed and rebuilt somewhere else, years or even millennium later. But it still being London, the same city as it was before destruction. We can regard London in term of its population. Even referring to London, we can be talking about a location or area, people who sometimes live there, the air above it, buildings, installations etc. in various combinations. Such terms as London are used to talk about the actual world, but there neither are nor are believed to be things-in-the world with the properties of the intricate modes of reference that a city name encapsulates. However for purposes of naturalistic inquiry, we construct a picture of the world that is dissociated from these *commonsense* perspectives. If we intermingle such different ways of thinking about the world, we may find ourselves attributing to people strange and even contradictory beliefs about objects that are to be regarded somehow apart from the means provided by the I-language and the I-belief systems that add further texture to interpretation. The situation will seem even more puzzling if we entertain the obscure idea that certain terms have a relation to things fixed in a common public language; which perhaps even exists independently of any particular speakers, who have a partial and partially erroneous, grasp of the language. These public language term, says Chomsky, belonging to common language refer to such objects as London taken as a thing divorced from the properties provided by the name city in a particular I-language. Chomsky further contends that problems will appear to deeper further if we abstract from the background of individual or shared beliefs that underlie normal language use. All such moves

as discussed above actually go beyond the bounds of a naturalistic approach as propounded by the externalist semantics.

According to Chomsky, Wittgenstein and Turing do not adopt the standard of externalist account. For Wittgenstein the questions are just silly. The tools are used as they are; and if the usage changes, the language has changed. For him the language is nothing more than the way we use the tools. Turing speaks of the language of *general educated opinion* changing as interests and concerns change. In Chomskyan voice it can be said that there will be a shift from the *l*-languages that Wittgenstein describes to new ones, in which the old word *think* will be eliminated in favour of a new word that applies to machines as well as people. Chomsky's main contention is that whatever the outcome or objective may have the externalist semantics, it fails to cope up in all varying situations. But this is not to be the case in internalist perspective. The internalist perspective appears to be adequate not only to the intuitions of Wittgenstein and Turing, but to an account of what is transpiring. Chomsky then claims that the naturalist inquiry will always fall short of intentionality at least in these terms. "Intentionality won't be reduced and won't go away". The study of C-R systems, including internalist semantics, appears to be the most promising form of naturalistic inquiry with a reasonably successful research programme.

