

CHAPTER 2:

Philosophers' Views in Favour of the Possibility of Private Language

The issue of private language has been a fascinating debate among the philosophers. There have been many philosophers who would consider that there is a possibility of privacy in our linguistic dispositions or behaviours. Quite often we fail to describe something in a language, be it a beautiful place or a pain. Especially in the case of pain it is very much possible that we are unable to properly articulate the nature of it to another person. John Locke in his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* emphasises on the relation between word and its signifying object as correspondence. One persuasive theory about language has it that words map to ideas, concepts or representations in each person's mind. On this version, the concepts in my head are diverse from the concepts in another one's head. But my concepts can be counterpart to a word in our common language, and then I can speak the word. Another person matches the word to a concept in his mind. So our concepts consequentially form a private language which we convert into our common language and so share. This account is found, for example in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and more recently in Jerry Fodor's Language of thought theory. There are innumerable

interpretations of private language argument and these have invoked a great debate. It has pertinent impact in two fields of philosophical study, the first is philosophy of mind or philosophical psychology as it is often called, the second is philosophy of language.

Wittgenstein was primarily concerned with the first of the two themes, his concern with the second theme i.e. philosophy of mind came as an outcome of his reflections on his philosophy of language when the larger picture arrived before his investigation. O.R. Jones points out, "His concern with philosophy of mind is a part of his wider concern with the philosophy of language. It was as a result of his reflection on language that he came to question a well-established and widely held view about such things as sensations, feelings, and thoughts."⁷

The implication of private language problem has surely wider significance in terms of its impact on post *Investigations* philosophical analysis. The amount of debate it has generated is simply unmatched. Even if there has been a domination of Wittgenstein's views on this topic, one cannot deny that he has opened a new interest in *Cartesian* dualism. Chomsky for example, was inspired by Descartes' doctrine of innate capacity to formulate the ideas and apply them into language. Fodor was

⁷ O.R. Jones (ed.), *The Private Language Argument* (Macmillan: St Martin's Press, 1971), p. 13.

further motivated by Chomsky to propagate the language of thought where *Mentalese* could produce the required foundation to create linguistic ability. All these can be taken in the light of the famous private language problem as it has aroused a greater curiosity among philosophers regarding the application or implications of the famous passages of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. Twentieth century philosophy has witnessed the wider allusion of PLA, still the problem persists and continues to baffle a scholar. This chapter is about the arguments that are in favour of the possibility of private language. The following sections will take up the discussion further about the study.

Descartes' view:

The history of the private language problem could be found in Descartes. Although if we trace the origin nowhere we would find the *Cartesian* argument stating explicitly about the term 'private language'. But his *cogito* poses with a specific problem which the philosophers cannot deny either. By establishing the existence of oneself as a thinking being, Descartes wants to prove that mind is a substance which is independent of language and the world. He establishes the fact that the thinking substance exists by itself, it requires nothing else in order to exist. Therefore, mind is regarded as an autonomous being which not only

thinks about the world but is also aware that it has representations of the world.⁸ That makes the origin of the private language problem. According to the *Cartesian* view, the present thinking, feeling, willing, perceiving, remembering and imaginings of a person are intrinsically phosphorescent. Since the inner life of a person is a stream of consciousness, it would be absurd to suggest that the mind would be unaware. In the *Cartesian* perspective, the mind is supposed to be the store-house of ideas that represent things in the world. Descartes gives primacy to the mental representations as he believes that the self is the metaphysical reality par excellence,⁹ and therefore, it must have an autonomous existence as the agent of the mental activities like thinking, perceiving etc. The hallmark of the *Cartesian* mind is the self-validating character of the mental representations.

Descartes employs a remarkable approach to ensure that mind is more easily known than body. In his *Meditation II* Descartes raises a fundamental problem that sets the tone of modern philosophy. There he argues for a doubt that is not merely scepticism but a search for a

⁸David Weissman(ed.), *Discourse on the Method and Meditations on First Philosophy: René Descartes* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 66.

⁹ R. C. Pradhan, "Descartes and Wittgenstein: Two Philosophical Models of Mind", *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, Special Number: Rene Descartes, Vol. No. XXIII Nos. 1-2 (Jan - Apr. 1996), p.122.

certainty. He is famous forever since he began doubting for the certainty, although it has created a wide range of debate and discussions mostly criticizing his process. But we cannot ignore the fact that his “cogito ergo sum” has enormous importance in the history of philosophy.

Descartes begins to doubt in everything that he perceives in the external world that he cannot resolve them. He thinks that there must be a deceiver or other, very powerful and cunning, like a demon, whoever employs his ingenuity in deceiving him.¹⁰ Every act he does, every object he sees, he supposes to be false. Nothing has ever existed which his fallacious memory represents to him. He even considers that he possesses no senses, his body, figure, extension, movement and place are nothing but fictions of his mind which is created by a demon. Only one aspect he feels belongs to him is thought. Thought is an attribute which cannot be separated from him; “I am, I exist, that is certain”, Descartes affirms. He inspects that what is a thing which thinks, that which doubts, understands, conceives, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, imagines and feels. These are all mental acts which confirm that I have a mind that stores these. That I doubt of all that deceive me, indicates the fact of the existence of myself as a minded-being that has the ability of thinking.

¹⁰ David Weissman(ed.), *Discourse on the Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*; René Descartes, *Ibid.*

Even if I see light, hear noise, feel heat while I am dreaming, it cannot be denied that it is my feeling which is no other than thinking.¹¹ Therefore, my existence as a thinking being proves that what goes inside me is a picture that depicts my mind is more easily known than body. Because even body is not known by the senses or by the faculty of imagination; it is known by the understanding only and it follows that there is nothing easier for than to know my own mind, according to Descartes. What is evident here is that Descartes assumes of a being that introspects to know him existing as an autonomous person.

Descartes' writings on language are comparatively little than his thoughts on the aspects of mind. His comments on the significance of language somehow parallel the critical remarks he made about the senses and circumstances which can mislead the sensory information. His philosophy of language states that ordinary language shares the ambiguities and misleading character of sensory information. Even though language is necessary for communication, it is no substitute of clear and distinct ideas of which it is only an external, corporeal and inadequate expression.¹² Therefore, it is the thoughts or ideas that could

¹¹ David Weissman(ed.), *Discourse on the Method and Meditations on First Philosophy; René Descartes*, p. 67.

¹² Desmond M. Clarke, *Descartes's Theory of Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), p.158.

be regarded as the only reliable guide of knowledge. Descartes always stresses that language is the secondary or dependent phenomenon that adds nothing to what is already provided by thought. Hans Aarsleff argued in this respect that “Descartes was determined to conduct his thinking in a silent and wordless world that would allow undisturbed reliance on intuition”. Descartes was seeking for the truth which is provided by intuition. Intuition, here understood as a direct inspection by the mind of its own ideas—provides a reliable access to the seeds of truth that are naturally implanted in the human mind and can be further developed by pure reasoning.¹³ Human beings would be able to reflect on the content of their own minds and this wordless process and to avoid the accumulated misrepresentations of traditional learning that cling to the well-worn words of language. Descartes lays importance on the innateness and word free discourse of the mind to attain the true knowledge. Human language lacks clarity and distinctness of the senses. Therefore, Descartes went on to find a unique path to scientific knowledge. Descartes wrote very little about language and that gives one the opportunity to interpret his relatively infrequent comments on the subject in the light of his more comprehensive view of his epistemology,

¹³ Hans Aarsleff, “Descartes and Augustine on Genesis, Language, and the Angels”, in M. Dascal and E. Yakira (eds.), *Leibniz and Adam*. (Tel Aviv: University Publishing Projects, 1993), pp.169-95.

theory of ideas, and his significant scientific work for understanding his theory of knowledge.

When Descartes says that he clearly and distinctly conceives himself as merely a thinking thing, following two propositions may be considered relevant:

- I can clearly distinctly conceive myself as a pure understanding, while excluding any corporeal attributes;
- I can clearly and distinctly conceive myself as having all the conscious experiences I do, in exclusion of any corporeal attributes.¹⁴

We can see that Descartes has a clear and distinct conception of himself in so far as he is 'only a thinking thing, not extended,' that presents two probabilities before us, that the concept of himself as a thinking thing must not comprise any notion of extension, and that in conceiving himself as a thinking thing he clearly and distinctly conceives of himself as a complete being.¹⁵ There lies the root of *Cartesian* privacy that is associated with his epistemological argument. It assumes that just as one can have public acquaintance with a public object, so also one can have a

¹⁴ Margaret Dauler Wilson, *Descartes: The Arguments of the Philosophers* (London: Routledge, 1978), p. 200.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

private acquaintance with a private object such as toothache. Everything that is associated with toothache is assumed to be private and whatever is manifested publicly is contingent.¹⁶ The pain counted as toothache is regarded private by Descartes. The Cartesian view holds that all sensations, feelings and other psychological states are private in the sense that toothache is a private object. When Descartes talks about toothache as a private object, we assume it as a mental property that has an owner. This owner is the 'I' of the *Meditations*, the first person as defined by Descartes. With the help of the first person he transits from darkness and vain philosophy into the new light of modern, anti-Aristotelian, philosophy and science.¹⁷

Descartes finally tries to establish that mind is really distinct from body in his *Meditation VI*, and thereby gives rise to his Epistemological Argument. His method of 'doubt' does not extend to his own existence. The summary of his *Second Meditation* is that human mind is more easily known than the body. As far as he is concerned he is only a thinking thing, thought pertains to his nature and cannot be separated. He says:

¹⁶ O. R. Jones (ed.), *The Private Language Argument*, p. 15.

¹⁷ Margaret Dauler Wilson, *Descartes: The Arguments of the Philosophers*, p. 5.

But what then am I? A thing which thinks. What is a thing which thinks? It is a thing which doubts, understands, [conceives], affirms, denies, wills, refuses, which also imagines and feels.¹⁸

The reasoning concerning the indubitability of his own existence brings Descartes to the conclusion that he alone is a *true and truly existing thing*.¹⁹ Descartes is always in the search for certainty, the self-evident truth. Right through his *Meditations* he tries to prove that mind and body are really distinct if it is possible for them to exist in separation, here actual *distinctness* does not entail actual *separateness*.²⁰ Descartes conceives that nothing can be perceived more distinctly or evidently by me than my mind. There is nothing in my mind that I am not aware of, I can know my mind more distinctly than any material. Mind is perceived crystal clear, as it has no hidden constitution, nothing chemical or otherwise.

In the sense that mind is epistemically transparent, immediately known to itself, *Cartesian* privacy captures the frame. Descartes' most fundamental belief is the belief in the self-transparency of mind.²¹ When we say something, we mean something; our ideas are ideas of something. These meaning and aboutness, or intentionality are known directly and

¹⁸ David Weissman (ed.), *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First philosophy; René Descartes*, p. 66.

¹⁹ Margaret Dauler Wilson, *Descartes: The Arguments of the Philosophers*, p. 187.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

²¹ John F. Post, "Epistemology", in *Discourse on the Method and Meditations on First Philosophy: René Descartes*, David Weissman [ed.], (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 236.

this feature of mind is regarded essential by Descartes. Because when we use language, we have an apriori understanding of meaning and our capacity for reason also necessarily involves language. Descartes exempts our understanding of the meanings from the scope of general doubt as we have internal awareness of what we mean. Here we are not in a chance of being deceived by an evil demon or a malign god, we can clearly perceive and conceive of the meaning. Every idea is an idea of something, even if the object of the idea does not exist. I cannot be mistaken about the object of the idea. It correlates with the intentionality thesis of Husserl which states that consciousness is always of something, it always intends something irrespective of the thing existing or not.

Descartes thinks that the 'I' of *cogito* is not any kind of body. "The first-person character of Descartes's argument means that each person must administer it to himself in the first person", observes G. E. M. Anscombe.²² "I" or "the mind" implies naming something such that the knowledge of its existence in all the various modes which is a knowledge of itself. Here the "I" does not sound like proper name referring the person himself, rather we have to understand self-consciousness by the use of "I". Descartes prefers to say that mind is better known than the

²² G.E.M. Anscombe, "The First Person", in *Mind and Language: Wolfson College Lectures 1974*, Samuel Guttenplan [ed.], (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 45.

body since my certainty as an existing person is proved by being conscious of me as a thinking being. He thinks that even body is not known by the senses or by the faculty of imagination, but by the understanding only (Meditation II). This method led Descartes to formulate his *cogito ergo sum* theory which is a source of attack in Wittgenstein's famous private language argument. The reason that it comes into the content is because of its introspective nature of looking into the first person account of a conscious human being.

Descartes's theory of *cogito* has a huge impact in the field of philosophy, psychology and other parts of the social sciences and it continues to do so even though his theory is hardly accepted in modern times. The chief reason could be in the division of two different observations of a person in terms of the mechanisms in his mind and in his body. Professor Gilbert Ryle formulates it in this way:

The workings of one mind are not witnessable by other observers; its career is private. Only I can take direct cognisance of the states and processes of my own mind. A person therefore lives through two collateral histories, one consisting of what happens in and to his body, the other consisting of what happens in and to his mind. The first is public, the second private. The events in the first history are events in the physical world, those in the second are events in the mental world.²³

²³ Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Penguin Books, 1990; first published by Hutchinson in 1949), p. 13.

Descartes thinks that most of our thoughts originate in sensation or imagination, and the imagination ought to form a true idea of the thing so that the intellect can turn to other conditions that are not expressed by the word. He uses the term 'true idea' to suggest that abstraction is both necessary and possibly misleading and the words often camouflage the extent to which they are based on a familiar but unacknowledged abstraction.²⁴ Descartes believes that normally we associate all our words to concepts and store them both in memory together. But he gives primacy to concepts as words may often be confused in gaining knowledge but the concepts cannot be mistaken. Descartes calls for a thinking that is not linguistically dependent because our language may confuse us with the familiarity of words in which the concepts are expressed. Descartes gives so much importance to thought that he uses it in different ways, sometimes as an action, sometimes as a faculty and even sometimes as the thing of which it is a faculty.²⁵ There are many different kinds of thinking and when we identify those thinking, those come under one particular enterprise or mental activity pertaining to thought. The mental privacy comes into the content when Descartes claims that we are always aware of the workings of our mind not necessarily being aware of faculties or powers of which we become

²⁴ Desmond M. Clarke, *Descartes's Theory of Mind*, p.161.

²⁵ Desmond M. Clarke, *Descartes's Theory of Mind*, p. 185.

conscious when using them. His process is an introspective one, because it demands the transparency to my consciousness as to accept them as descriptions of my perception when I reflect on my own experience of thinking.²⁶ My understanding is an act of my mind whenever I come into contact with a thing; it is also an evidence of the conclusion that I am thinking of something. I must be aware of the experience of thinking. This is the way in which Descartes's view resembles the question of privacy that we are concerned with.

Cartesian view holds that sensations and feelings are only contingently related to the manifest behaviour of the person. An animal is defined in terms of a certain characteristic which it possesses and without which we would not name a particular animal as we know them. For example, a certain kind of animal which we call 'rat' would not mean to us what it does now if it did not have incisor teeth. But the behavior which we normally relate with toothache is not comparable to the rat's incisor teeth. According to the *Cartesian* view, a toothache is a toothache irrespective of the divergence in suffering at different times. A rat's incisor teeth are public features as we can see it or even X-ray it. It is a rule to have incisor teeth for a rat if it is to be recognised and called as a rat. This could be called a criterion as to specify a rat as a public object.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 188.

On the other hand, the *Cartesian* position holds that the same cannot be said about the toothache. There is no public feature associated with a toothache, as all public symptoms of toothache are purely contingent. Everything that is related with toothache, or causes a pain is understood to be private to the individual who has it. Toothache can be expressed as a private mental object too. All sensations, feelings and other psychological states are private according to the *Cartesian* view.²⁷

Anthony Kenny thinks that Descartes created a new philosophy of mind by making epistemology the centre of philosophical inquiry. His thought on the relationship between mental and physical lays the foundation of a new breed of knowledge, where his dictum is that mind is better known than body. His theory has played an influential role among philosophers even outside the *Cartesian* tradition. Descartes feels that pain is in its most stringent sense, a spiritual realisation. Impressions, sense-data have been known as mental entities by *Cartesian* standards.²⁸ The internal is more certain than the external, the mental realm is more authentic than the physical and the private is prior than public. For Descartes, as Anthony Kenny observes, *thought* is an umbrella term which includes everything that we are immediately conscious of. However, Descartes

²⁷ O.R. Jones (ed.), *The Private Language Argument*, p. 15.

²⁸ Anthony Kenny, "Cartesian Privacy", in *Wittgenstein: The Philosophical Investigations*, G. Pitcher [ed.], (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), p. 353.

excludes the consequences of thought, such as voluntary movements, which depend upon thoughts but are not themselves thoughts.

Descartes believes that sensation is a thought capable of founding the certainty of one's own existence. He gives mind the primary focus to be aware of its sensation because only mind has the ability to sense or experience itself and sensation is a thought in this regard. The *Cartesian* doctrine can be seen as the basement of the private language problem. Descartes has laid importance on the understanding of our thoughts which generate from our mind. A person always has the ability to reflect on his own ideas, perceptions of events; he introspects to his own inner sense. This reflective methodology is a private enterprise according to him. If I have toothache, the *Cartesian* would say that all public manifestations of toothache are purely contingent in the sense that they need never be accompanied by any public feature as we normally correlate with toothache.

Ryle has detected an error in Descartes' theory of relation between mind and body. He thinks that there are serious theoretical difficulties if we accept 'inner' and 'outer' as two separate entities. Since the actual relation between private history and public history remains baffling, it is very difficult to establish that mind influences bodily behaviour. When a

person reflects on his own individual nature it is not like involving within oneself as a purely private entity. Because the individual always has a social reality, otherwise he could not locate himself as an individual.

Cartesian theory of mind leaves space for psychoanalysis. *Cartesian* dualism separates mind from its context, it has distinct existence from the body, and therefore we are able to distinguish the activities and symptoms pertinent to mind from the symptoms which are related to our circumstances or bodies.²⁹ Mind relates to the body associated with it directly and indirectly to the body of others. Mind's relation to any other material object including its own body, as far as Descartes is concerned, is rather problematic. He brings in the concept of God with the belief that he would not sabotage in mind's control of its body.³⁰ We shall not go into detail of that account. But we can notice from his *Meditations*, as Weissman assumes, "Cartesian self-identity is formed from the inside out, never from empathic intrusions that are incorporated as part of oneself."³¹

²⁹ David Weissman, "Psychoanalysis", in *Discourse on the Method and Meditations on First Philosophy: René Descartes*, David Weissman, [ed.], (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 330.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

Descartes and Lacan somehow have similar viewpoints about communication. Descartes finds perceiving essences between each thinker as a condition for communication who considers the same radiant ideas. Very similar to Descartes, Lacan makes the point that the psychoanalyst helps the patient to trace his singular *parole* in the background of a universal *langue*.³² Ultimately Descartes' *cogito* is located at the heart of a philosophical assumption of private language where self-reference is made as a feasible option for an individual to look at his own sensation. Here privacy is seen as a self-locating affair and thereby breeding a problem in the philosophy of mind.

Ayer's view:

Professor A.J. Ayer has been one of the proponents of the possibility of private language. Though he was not a radical supporter of private language, he did not eschew to propagate that there could be a language of the person who invents it, and that language could also be communicated like a public language. He has a different approach with regard to the Wittgensteinian one that treats words as tools rather than treating words as pictures. Although Wittgenstein's approach of treating words as pictures could be found in the *Tractatus*, Ayer finds a shift of

³² Cf. David Weissman, *Ibid.*, p. 336.

metaphor in later Wittgenstein. Instead of taking care of words as tools that are governed and become meaningful in terms of use, Ayer questions the fruitfulness of the identification of meaning with use. Ayer observes that Wittgenstein's treatment of language discards G.E. Moore's view of meaning which states that a philosopher's command of language is just a necessary means to investigate the objective properties of concepts, *ala* a mathematician who is not concerned with the numerals but the numbers they represented.³³ In Wittgenstein's view, linguistic signs are not themselves meaningful, we cannot ascribe meaning only by looking upon them, and they are to be meaningful only by the way they are used in the form of life. Wittgenstein thought that people make difficulties for themselves by failing to understand how their language worked. They raised problems where there was no issue, and thought philosophical problems are with such dilemmas; they relapsed into talking such nonsense from which they could not go out.³⁴ Wittgenstein wanted to take them out from the bewilderment by exposing the linguistic confusions and false impressions from which it cropped up.

Ayer, on the other hand, takes another road to the use of language and its meaning. He believes that there is a possibility of a private language even

³³ A.J. Ayer, *The Concept of a Person and Other Essays* (London: Macmillan & Co Ltd, New York: St Martin's Press, 1963), p. 5.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

though one might believe that a private language is not alive. In Ayer's point of view, there is no reason in believing that a private language, in principle, should not become alive. He says that a private language is contingent in the sense that only a single individual or a group of few speakers are able to understand it. A person can keep a diary, use certain codes which no one else is meant to understand. A private code is not a private language, but as Ayer says, it is rather a "private method of transcribing some given language".³⁵ Just like this private code is, in principle, should be broken, so can a private language, in theory, could be widely understood. Ayer says:

Such private languages are in general derived from public languages, and even if there are any which are not so derived, they will still be translated into public languages.³⁶

It is a language which is potentially understood by enough people and making it possible to be communicated. But philosophers have taken private language in a somewhat different sense. Usually they think that private language is something that refers to a person's immediate private experiences. Professor Ayer in his essay "Can there be a private language?" speaks about the possibility of a private language. He thinks that the problem has a prototype in Carnap's concept of protocol

³⁵ A.J. Ayer, "Can There Be A Private Language?", *Aristotelian Society Proceedings*, Supplementary Volume 28, p. 69. Reprinted in *The Private Language Argument*, John V. Canfield [ed.], (Garland Publishing Inc.: New York & London, 1986).

³⁶ *Ibid.*

language. The protocol language was to consist of bare sensation remarks e.g. 'blue now, 'cold now' etc. and they refer to the sense experiences of the concerned individual only. Ayer quotes a passage from Carnap's *The Unity of Science* (p. 80):

In general every statement in any person's protocol language would have sense for that person alone... Even when the same words and sentences occur in various protocol languages, their sense would be different, they could not even be compared. Every protocol language could therefore be applied only solipsistically: there would be no intersubjective protocol language.

Carnap went on to reject this thesis by following that this solipsistic mechanism can be avoided by common understanding at the level of basic sensation -utterances. There is no way of believing that every individual would talk about his own private experiences within his own little world of experiences, which is entirely private to him. But Ayer takes a different stance in the private language problem. Ayer examines the argument given by Wittgenstein about the ostensive definition or gesturing towards an object. Pointing to an object is generally done in making someone trace the object or it is made for successful communication. The object to which I point is one that can be observed by other persons.³⁷ This is one thing to point to an object that is publicly observable, quite another in gesturing a private sensation to another person. How can I give an ostensive definition of the word which I like to

³⁷ A.J. Ayer, "Can There Be A Private Language?", p. 69.

stand for a particular sensation? I cannot define it in words which are publicly understood. No matter how much gesture I make to get their attention to my private sensation, which they cannot *ex hypothesi* observe, I fail to assume that this sensation has “natural expression”.³⁸

Ayer gives the example of Robinson Crusoe who is left alone in an island as an infant and still to learn to speak. Ayer argues that even though we accept that language is a social phenomenon, the development of language cannot be done by a solitary individual, it is possible for a person like Crusoe to make up a language for himself. Here is what Ayer says about this example:

- Imagine a Robinson Crusoe left alone on his island while still an infant, having not yet learned to speak. Let him, like Romulus and Remus, be nurtured by a wolf, or some other animal, until he can fend for himself; and so let him grow to manhood. He will certainly be able to recognize many things upon the island, in the sense that he adapts his behaviour to them. Is it inconceivable that he should also name them? There may be psychological grounds for doubting whether such a solitary being would in fact invent a language. The development of language, it may be argued, is a social phenomenon. But surely it is not self-contradictory to suppose that someone, uninstructed in the use of any existing language, makes up a language for himself. After all, some human being must have been the first to use a symbol.³⁹

Crusoe communicates only with himself with the principal distinction he keeps in mind between ‘external’ objects and ‘inner’ experiences, that his

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 70.

experiences are transient whereas the external objects are not. But he will be able to use it for himself, only thing is that he will not be able to teach it to anyone. Ayer believes that the ability to teach to someone cannot be a qualification for understanding as one can teach only what one already understands.

Ayer has criticised Wittgenstein for not taking memory as a serious criterion of correctness. In Ayer's point of view, memory need not be confined with a single present to a single past sensation. It could be an activity of a group where one memory could be checked by another. Wittgenstein rejects this option by giving the example of several copies of morning paper to assure himself about the truth of his belief. But Ayer affirms that unless the person concerned does not trust his eyesight, as well as his memory, he will continue to make mistake. At least he needs to consult with other people and cross-check his memory and his current sensation.⁴⁰ Another vital point Ayer makes in favour of private language by saying that there is no object given as public or private; this distinction comes into function only then when a sense is attached in different person's experience of objects in similar ways, "but no sense is attached to saying that they similarly inspect one another's thoughts and

⁴⁰ A.J. Ayer, *Wittgenstein* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985), p. 76.

feelings and sensations.”⁴¹ In these ways Professor Ayer defends the possibility of private language which is rather unusual but he has differed from Wittgenstein in many respects. He has tried to prove that even if someone uses an idiosyncratic language, it has a meaning to the person himself for which he does not need any criterion of correctness. By giving the example of Robinson Crusoe, Ayer also demonstrates the fact that the knowledge that one acquires has its base in his own experiences.

PLA in the contemporary times: Chomsky and Fodor

Noam Chomsky is one of the most influential thinkers of our time. His theory of linguistics has been motivated from Descartes and he has also done extensive research work on seventeenth-to-mid-nineteenth-century philosophers and linguists. He has developed a rationalist conception of language that bolsters the power of mind. Chomsky thinks that Descartes identified the basic issues and data that initiated a revolution in the philosophy of mind.⁴² Chomsky has incorporated biological and computational structures into the study of mind that would have pleased the rationalists, but was surely beyond their anticipation. The biggest

⁴¹ A.J. Ayer, *The Central Questions of Philosophy* (London: Penguin Books, 1991; first published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson in 1973), p. 97.

⁴² James McGilvray, *Chomsky: Language, Mind, and Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1999), p. 2.

success of Chomsky lies in his intellectual acumen in emerging the significance of the philosophy of mind. On the other, he explains the use of 'I-language', an internal property of an individual. Chomsky has given an 'internalist' interpretation of the human language faculty. He broadly defends, with all his imaginative linguistic analyses, that knowledge of human language is individualistic, internal to the human mind.⁴³ According to him, human language is a 'biological object'.⁴⁴

Chomsky thinks that language is a mirror of human mind. Whatever we physicalise into language is nothing but a reflection of the thought in human mind. He has given a naturalistic view of language. In his view, expressions of a natural language are at times 'unparseable', and even if they are parsed and interpreted, they may be utterly incomprehensible.⁴⁵ Chomsky draws inspiration from Descartes in so far as he wanted to construct a unified view of the world. Descartes argued that certain aspects of the world go beyond the limitation of mechanism and many a time mind prepares the ground for the language to interact with the world. There is a deep structure of language which has mind at its foundation and it also gets the creativity from mind. The performance and computational aspects of language are generated internally in a

⁴³ Neil Smith (Foreword), in Noam Chomsky, *New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. vii.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Noam Chomsky, *New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind*, p. 108.

person. What we observe in the utterances is surface structure of language, but the innate structure we cannot see, we see only the natural properties of the object outside. Chomsky has given a beautiful allegory of vision of cave through a tunnel in this respect. Here he says:

If I look through a tunnel in a mountain and see a lighted cave within, I do not see the mountain; only if I see its exterior surface (say, from inside the cave, looking through the tunnel at a mirror outside that reflects the surface).⁴⁶

Chomsky differs from Putnam with regard to the cultural aspect of language. While he agrees with Putnam that in terms of power, monuments, flags and other institutional aspects language has cultural reality, but this does not contribute in understanding the acquisition, understanding, use of language, the constitution and change in language, how it is related to mental faculties and human action etc. The internalist view of language gives 'content' or 'representation' of something, it may be related to visual perception, mapping of ideas, interface with other systems, and all kinds of individuation that take place; these cannot be accomplished in a 'shared public language' according to Chomsky.

Jerry Fodor is one philosopher who is the proponent of the possibility of private language. Chomsky has given a theory of the internalist view of language where language acquisition and creativity of language are

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 126.

generated from the mental faculty; it is a cognitive process that is governed by mind. Fodor, inspired by this account goes further to say that there is a language of thought. In his account, learning the first language requires the learning of the meaning of the predicate that language accounts for. There is an internal representation of language that determines the extension of a predicate, for that they have to fall under certain rules.⁴⁷ The conceptual structure provided to language comes from the mind. Language learning is a matter of testing and confirming hypotheses, the learner must hypothesise and confirm the generalisations which determine the extensions of the predicate. Fodor, in this regard, makes three assumptions which are as follows:

- (1) That learning a first language is a matter of hypothesis formation and confirmation; (2) that learning a first language involves at least learning the semantic properties of its predicates; (3) that S learns the semantic properties of P only if S learns some generalization which determine the extension of P (i.e. the set of things that P is true of).⁴⁸

Fodor gives an example in support of his thesis. If it is true that 'chair' means 'portable seat for one', then plausibly it may be the case that no one has mastered 'is a chair' unless he has learned that it falls under the truth rule "'y is a chair' is true iff x is a portable seat for one".⁴⁹ Someone might well know about 'is a chair' and even then he might still not be

⁴⁷ Jerry Fodor, *The Language of Thought* (USA: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, Inc. 1975), p. 64.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

able to tell about a given object. Fodor arrives at the conclusion that one cannot learn a language unless one already has a language. If he does not know about the representation he cannot formulate it in expressions. According to Fodor, his LOT (language of thought) hypothesis does not confront with Wittgenstein's private language argument. Fodor thinks that Wittgenstein characterises private language in two ways: either as something whose terms refers to something that is unique to the speaker's experience of things or as a language for application where there exist no public criteria. The way Fodor characterises an internal representation conforms to the second test if not the first one. In his language of thought the applicability of terms is not determined by public conventions, although it is not necessary that they are applied only in private events. The language of thought, in Fodor's terms, is "presumably innate". There is an obligation to make sense of it in a coherent way, but he points out that there is no obligation to show how it could be taught or learned. Secondly, the evidence of its being used coherently must be empirical but not neurological. He believes that it might be the best offered account of the overall coherence of the organism's mental life.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 70.

Fodor's view can be a platform of *holism* which is exhibited both by language and thought. It is an approach that is taken by the inner saying theory.⁵¹ Thoughts may be of many types conceptually and they may be connected with one another. Although the way Fodor's language of thought supports private language can be scrutinised, one cannot deny that it has a profound implication in the psycholinguistics study. It opens the provision to the instances where creature's suffering of pain can be non-linguistic, even perception may be allowed to be a non-linguistic affair.⁵² There might be instances when my experiences are not always expressed in linguistic terms, e.g. Georges Rey says that he often seems to have experiences which are entirely non-sentential – they are musical, 'imagistic', colourful, 'somatic'.⁵³ This confirms that there is always a mental process and many times they are not physicalised into language. The propositional attitudes can fall into this category. We can say that the followers of private language would classify the language of thought in many ways like privileged access to one's own thoughts, propositional attitudes, qualitative experiences etc. But to what amount these arguments succeed in establishing the possibility of private language is remained to be seen.

⁵¹ Colin McGinn, *The Character of Mind: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 88.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁵³ Georges Rey, "Sensations in a language of thought", *Philosophical Issues*, Vol. 1. *Consciousness*, 1991.