

• Chapter - 1

Introduction

The objective of the present study is to examine the end concept of autonomy of language. Whether language is autonomous or not is, in fact, a serious debate in the domain of philosophy of language. The chief function of the language is to communicate our thoughts and this communication is made possible either in terms of logical language or in terms of ordinary language. Here, we may recall what Berkeley had said in this direction. He cautioned us regarding "the nature and above of language" in the domain of communication. There are diverse "ends of language" besides communicating of ideas.¹ In terms of communication, language may be either logical or ordinary. This is again a matter of deep concern among the linguistic philosophers. In fact, the debate between ordinary and logical language addresses the issue 'whether thought is expressed by language or not'.

Linguistic philosophers over the years thought of language from different perspectives. Languages are not just sets of symbols. They also contain a grammar or a system of rules, used to manipulate the symbols. Human languages are defined through the use of syntactic and semantic rules, to define the structure and meaning respectively. Some would like to say that

¹ Berkeley, George (1710) *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge in British Empirical Philosophers* ed. A.J. Ayer, Carion, New York, 1927. p.174

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language is something independent of grammar. On the other hand, some other philosophers believe that language is totally based on grammar. When a set of symbols is used for expression or communication, it is primitive and relatively inexpressive, because there is no clear or regular relationship between the symbols. Whatever grammar or language may be, one thing is clear that the chief function of language is to be used for communication. That means communication between the hearer and the speaker, between the hearer and the society or more specifically in Wittgenstein's sense 'within the form of life' is all about language. Attempt to define 'language' one has to bridge between word and meaning in a system of language. Western linguistic philosophers have proposed the concept of autonomy of Language; similar trend is also observable amongst the Indian thinkers as well. They hold that language is known through itself. But what do we mean by 'autonomy'? The term 'autonomy' is understood from different philosophical angles. Let us take the case of Kant. In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant employed the concept 'autonomy' to define personhood.² That is, an autonomous person acts morally only for the sake of doing "good", independently of other incentives. He proposed that agreement with moral law creates the essence of human dignity. In the, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant described the concept 'Thing-in -itself' which is independent and cause of all other things. It is known by itself or it is autonomous. Kant proposed that autonomy is demonstrated by a person who decides on a course of action out of respect for moral duty. On the other hand, Wittgenstein speaks that

² Kant, Immanuel., *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, edited by Mery Gregor, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 31-32

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language is autonomous for its unique and independent nature. Wittgenstein in the *Blue book*, *Brown book* and in *Zettle* highlights this point that language is autonomous. He says, 'cooking is defined by its end, whereas, speaking is not'. Therefore, the use of language is in a certain sense autonomous, as cooking and washing are not.³

To define the concept, autonomy of language, we have to define the components of language and have to try to examine the features for which language is said to be autonomous. Pāṇini (traditionally 520–460 BC, but estimates range from the 7th to 5th centuries B.C.) ,Bhartṛhari (6th century A.D.), Wittgenstein (1889-1951) and Chomsky (7thDecember 1928-) maintain that all languages have certain common features (components) e.g. *syntax* (syntactic or grammatical structure), *semantics* (meaning), *phonology* (structure & systematic patterning of sounds) and *morphology*. Bhartṛhari and Pāṇini, both of them seem to have conceived that grammar or grammatical structure (syntax) is the basis for being acquainted with the languages. According to them, semantics and phonology depend on syntax. In this thesis, we shall discuss the nature and components of language.

Both Bhartṛhari and Chomsky hold that semantic (meaning) depends on syntax or syntactical structure of the word. Chomsky asserts that syntax or grammar can be studied as *autonomous and independent of meaning*. Here, he would conceive a different type of grammar which is internal, mentally presented and biologically or genetically given i.e. universal in the nature.

³ Wittgenstein, Ludwig, (1970), *Zettle*, edited by G.E.M. Anscombe & G.H. Von Wright , University of California Press, p. 320.

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It is known to us, that Pāṇinī's *Aṣṭādhyāyī* (henceforth *Ad*) (meaning "eight chapters") is not philosophical in nature. However, this does not mean that it totally lacks the philosophical importance. Pāṇinī's *Ad* is a source of quite a number of linguistics theories. Pāṇinī did not write any theoretical treatise on language, though his *Ad* uses and presupposes linguistic theories. In a sense Pāṇinī is an authority for the description of language and philosophy of Grammar. Pāṇinian *sūtras* reveal a strong and full-fledged system of linguistic concepts. Hence, all the linguistic philosophers and grammarians like Patañjali, Kātyāyana and Bhartṛhari et al. drew upon Pāṇinian *sūtras* and quoted them as a proof of various kinds of linguistic theories and philosophical concepts. Eminent linguist L. Bloomfield in his book, *Language*, described the *Ad* as "the greatest monument of human intelligence".

The *Ad* consists of 3,959 *sūtras* or rules, distributed among eight chapters, each subdivided into four sections or *padas* (*padāni*). The description of language in the *Ad* is complete in itself. It is at once a work on descriptive linguistics, generative linguistics, and together with the work of his immediate predecessors (*Nirukta*, *Nighanṭu*, *pratiśākyas*,) stands at the beginning of the history of linguistics itself. Pāṇinī's comprehensive and scientific theory of grammar is conventionally taken to mark the end of the period of Vedic Sanskrit, and the beginning of classical Sanskrit. Pāṇinī's *Ad* or Grammar is based on the sound of spoken Sanskrit.⁴ It means a set of rules by which the language can be analysed. According to

⁴ George Cardona, (1976), *Pāṇini: A Survey of Research*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, p. 142.

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him, language is an integral part of total human behaviour, it influences and is being influenced by other norms of behaviour. Pāṇini's total concern is the analysis of structural conditions of language. He defines Sanskrit both in its structure and use. This language has a network of inter-relationships between its formal units at various levels. The formal structure of a language is to be understood thoroughly in all its aspects and it does involve reference to the environmental objects. It is significant that with regard to the spoken variety of language, the speaker, the hearer and the phenomenal world appear to be the relevant environmental factors. Pāṇini's analysis, therefore, is based as much on its use as on its structure. The *Ad* stands for its unique character for analysing the two languages i.e. classical and Vedic together.

It seems that for Pāṇini, the meaning of word (*pada*) depends on the grammatical rules or meta-rules (*paribhāṣā*) for their autonomous existence. Pāṇini was aware of the existence of a *meta-language* besides the regular language (Sanskrit) when he has used the expression '*upadeśa*' i.e. the instructions, which are valid for his technical language only.

Bhartrhari, on the other hand, held a *Śabda-advaita* position, identifying *Śabda* as indivisible, and a unifying cognition which is ultimately identical with Brahman. His method of "language" is totally different from others. He presents the entire range of human understanding by analysing the structural conditions of language. His job is not only confined to the analysis of the structural conditions of language but also to find out a boundary of what we can do and cannot do with language. He may be regarded as one of the most original philosophers of language in ancient India. He is recognised primarily, as a

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grammarian, but his works have great philosophical importance, especially with regard to the connections among grammar, logic, semantics, and ontology. His thought may be described as part of *Śabdadvaita* (word monism) school of thought. He supports the view that language at an ultimate level is ontologically non-different from the Supreme Reality, i.e. Brahman. In *Vākyapadīya* (henceforth *VP*)⁵, he treats the concept *śabda*, as the ultimate concern for his philosophical investigation and at the same time, like other classical philosophical systems, he also considered *śabda* as a *pramāna*. In his philosophy, *śabda* has been recognised as a word, or a sentence, or the language as a whole. In the first two chapters of the *VP*, he discusses the nature of creation, the relationship of Brahman, world, language, the individual soul (*jīva*), and the manifestation and comprehension of the meanings of words and sentences. His concept of *Śabda-brahman* might be understood as similar to the Greek concept i.e. *Logos*. For Bhartṛhari, language is primarily communicative in nature. It is not only an act itself, but also the source of all activities in the world.⁶ He holds that there are two kinds of 'word-entities' (i.e. two elements) in functional level, both of which may be called *Śabda*: one is *sphoṭa*, which is the cause (production) of words or articulated speech (the speech-sound/*dhvani*). Articulated speech is used to express the

⁵ A treatise of three *kāṇḍas*. The grammarians have accepted that *Vākyapadīya* declares that the sentence and the sentence meaning alone are real, and that the *padas* and the *padārthas* have a place only in grammatical analysis. In other words, Prābhakara suggests that *Vākyapadīya* -a study of *vākya* and *pada*-should logically conclude "*padāny eva vākyaṃ*" instead of "*vākyaṃ eva, na padāni*."

⁶ Bhartṛhari, (1977), *The Vākyapadīya of Bhartṛhari*, Kānda II, tr. K.A. Subramania Iyer, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, II. 399-400. For language as the source of all human activities, see I. 127.

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meaning.⁷ The concept of '*sphoṭa*', for Bhartṛhari, is autonomous in the sense that it is neither articulated nor guided by any grammatical rule. For him, *sphoṭa* is the reflection of the 'word', which lies originally in one's mind and is spoken by the speaker and received by the listener, through the medium of *nāda/dhvani*⁸.

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), in the earlier development of his philosophy, as seen in the *Tractatus-Logico-Philosophicus* (henceforth *TLP*), he considered that a language is a picture of the world but, later, in the *Philosophical Investigations* (henceforth *PI*), the earlier view was discarded and came to argue that language, as a complex process, could not be defined. Wittgenstein accepts the word "language" not as the name of a single phenomenon, but it is the name of the class of an indefinite number of language-games. In the *TLP*, Wittgenstein is concerned with a logically perfect language, a language in which it would be easy to see the logical relations between different statements. He has not proposed or developed any theory of language. His basic aim was to describe our linguistic activities or to describe the uses of language. Actually, he deals with the problems of philosophy. It is true that philosophy has no language of its own and philosophical problems cannot be said to be rooted in philosophy itself. To

⁷ VP.I.44

*dvāv upādānaśabdeṣu śabdau śabdavido viduḥ
Eko nimittaṁ śabdānām aparo'rthe prayujyate.*

⁸ VP. I.47

*vitarkitaḥ purā buddhyā kvacidarthe nibeśitaḥ
karaṇebhyo vivṛtvena dhvaninā so'nugṛhyate*

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him, ordinary language has not been designed for solving empirical problems. He maintains that the apparent philosophical problems are due to our misunderstanding and wrong description of language. Here, by language, Wittgenstein means the ordinary language. To speak "invention of a language" makes no sense to him. According to him, language is what it does and can do. To describe what it does is the best technique for so-called philosophers to follow. It has no dimensions actually, it is flat indeed. Wittgenstein says "Man possesses the ability to construct languages capable of expressing every sense, without having any idea how each word has meaning or what its meaning is just- as people speak without knowing how the individual sounds are produced. Everyday language is a part of the human organism and is no less complicated than it."⁹ To him, in human interaction, everyday language, which is not well-defined, never loses immediate connection with the reality, whereas the ideal language with precisely defined concepts is confined to a construct, a sort of 'formalised' reality. He accepts that language disguises thought.¹⁰ He maintains that languages are constituted by propositions... "The totality of propositions is language"¹¹. To him, propositions can be meaningful or meaningless¹² In *PI*, he has emphasised on the use of language or the rules of a particular language game. To him, Language game and the games are surely rule-governed activities. He defines that particular game has the particular rules. In this way,

⁹ Wittgenstein, L (1961): *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, D.F. Pears and B. McGuinness (trans.), London: Routledge, 4.002.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 4.002.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 4.001.

¹² *Ibid.* 4.003.

he has tried to define the uniqueness of a particular language-game, which is justified in a particular form of life. He holds that the use of language is self-governed in the way that the rules are autonomously real in the language-game.

Generally, it is assumed that language functions for expression of our thought and for that reason we can assume that the relation between language and thought is a unique phenomenon in human life. That is why, Noam Chomsky, once said that *language is the mirror of human mind or brain*. He maintains that the human mind is preprogrammed to learn language. He has accepted that our brains have some sort of a "language device" that allows us to understand language naturally. This language mechanism contains an understanding of *Universal Grammar* (henceforth UG), hypothetical basic grammar rules that apply to all languages. According to him, our capacity to express language is not simply a reflection of our general cognitive capacity to reason. Rather, there is a special purpose of cognitive mechanism responsible for this capacity (Chomsky 1965, 1975). He makes an important *hypothesis* that UG is a characterisation of innate principle of language faculty.¹³ He then postulates some detailed structure of UG. Language-acquisition device uses primary linguistic data as the empirical basis for language learning to meet explanatory adequacy that is defined in UG, and to select one of the potential grammars, which is permitted by UG. Chomsky's UG is *biologically determined principle*¹⁴. Chomsky seems to use 'physically' and 'biologically' interchangeable concept. In this aspect, Chomsky's UG that are biologically realised and physically encoded in brain,

¹³ Chomsky, Noam. (1986), *Knowledge of language*. New York, Praeger. p.40

¹⁴ Ibid. Chomsky, 1986, p.24.

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is different from Descartes's innate idea. A person's innate ability to learn language, attached with environmental influences, allows him to easily learn the grammar of that particular language. The language, which we learnt at first, is called one's native language or mother tongue; both of these terms are figurative in the sense that the knowledge of a particular language is not inherited but can be learnt. According to Chomsky, all human beings are genetically endowed with the ability to learn and use language in general. He argued for a highly cognitive account of linguistic competence. He thinks that human language use is rule-governed in a very strong way. Linguistic behaviour is controlled by rules clearly represented in the mind of the speaker, rules of which the speaker is cognizant, but not consciously aware. With the help of the knowledge of these rules, the speaker can be acquainted with the knowledge that which strings of words are sentences and what sentences mean. We have innate knowledge of UG. We born with pre-programmed of information about the kinds of rules. Though these rules are pre-programmed, we need to learn them, to learn a language or to invent a new language. Now if a speaker understands English in virtue of knowing rules for its employment these rules cannot be in English. These rules help us to learn any language, for instance Japanese, Bengali etc. It is impossible to understand Japanese, without the help of Japanese dictionary also. Chomsky claimed that linguistics is a branch of cognitive psychology, that linguistic claims are claims about (a significant subcomponent of) our capacity to produce and understand our native language.

Chomsky's innate principle includes syntax, phonology, morphology, and semantics. By 'semantics' he means the study

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of the relation between language and the world — in particular, the study of truth and reference.¹⁵ At the same time, he also generalises his idea of UG, especially the process of parameter determination in acquiring a particular natural language for a subject. In the book *Syntactic Structure* (hence forth *SS*), Chomsky wants to free the grammatical (or syntactical) concepts from the dependence of vague semantic notions, to define them in specific formal terms. According to him, syntax is of primary importance in the construction of a grammar, and grammar can be studied as "autonomous and independent of meaning".¹⁶

Like Pāṇini, Noam Chomsky too, has focused on to finding out the rules of language. As a person from the modern era, however, he took a more scientific, mathematical approach. His work provides his theory of generative grammar, a set of rules for breaking down sentences into smaller parts. His concept of generative grammar is the factor which helps to differentiate his views from the theory of structuralism. He believes that this grammar must "render explicit the implicit knowledge of the speaker."¹⁷ His model of this grammar begins with an axiom and a set of well-defined rules to generate the desired word sequences. In accordance with generative grammar, sentences can be broken down into nouns, noun phrases, verbs, verb phrases and determiners. Different types of sentences e.g. long, complicated and simple sentences can be reduced to smaller parts by following this grammar. It is true that there are certain types of sentences that generative grammar cannot handle. For instance, by following the generative grammar one can not put

¹⁵ Ibid. Chomsky, 1986, p.44.

¹⁶ Chomsky, N. (1957), *Syntactic Structure*, The Hague: Mouton.p.17

¹⁷ Chomsky (1977), *Essays on Form and Interpretation*, North Holland, New York, p.103

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those sentence parts together to form a wh-(who, what, where, when, why) question, or a sentence in the passive voice, or a negative statement. For the inadequacy of generative grammar, Chomsky developed the idea of transformational grammar to cover these sorts of sentences. The rules of transformational grammar show how these sorts of sentences can be transformed into the type of sentence that the system of generative grammar applies to. For instance, the phrase "What are you looking for?" would be changed to "You are looking for it". Additionally, Chomsky has pointed out how rapidly children learn language, as compared to how quickly they pick up other abilities. The presence of a language acquisition device (LAD) could explain this speed. Chomsky would not accept such a type of behavioural approach to language. He asserted that parents do not teach their children how to speak grammatically correct language.

Bhartṛhari has also used the notion of a beginningless trace which is inherent in consciousness. He discusses the trace of speech in relation to previous births. This residual trace of speech has no beginning and it exists in every one's mind as a seed. It is not possible to count it as the result of the effort of any person. Movements of the articulatory organs by children are not due to the instructions by others but are known through intuition (*pratibhā*).

