

Chapter - I

Introduction

The present work seeks to explore and elucidate the relationship between language, speech and communication. Hence, we will be concerned with the major concepts involved here, namely, language, speech and communication as well as the relationship between them. We shall be concerned both with what is language and what is speech together with focusing on the nature of their relationship to communication. Our contention is that these three concepts are intimately related such that the discussion of one is not possible without a discussion of the other two. There is a lot of interpenetration among the three. They may be described as a ‘trinity’, a ‘three-some’. As is obvious, by language we would mean natural, human language; by speech the utterances made by speakers of a language and by communication the linguistic exchanges between speakers and hearers in speech situations.

The relation is worth studying because of a variety of reasons. One of these is that through language, we can articulate our experiences of the objects around us. It is, again, through language that we can delimit their boundaries. That is, language enables us to be selective. Instead of being swept away by the deluge of experiences of things all around us, by means of language, we can pick out and register some of the experiences from the whole. Over and above this, it is through language we share our experiences with others. Language enables us to create a sort of ‘public space’, which belongs neither to the speaker, nor to the hearer, nor to both severally, but belongs to them together.¹

Language may be defined as an abstract system of symbols – words, phrases, idioms etc. and the modes of their combination provided by the grammar

of the language, designed to yield meaningful sentences. Though the symbols are finite in number, with the help of these and the rules of their combination, an infinite number of new sentences, never encountered before, can be generated.

The preoccupation with language by philosophers from antiquity to the contemporary times has resulted in works in philosophy of language which are considered as at the top of our achievements in philosophy. The relation between language and communication is also important for exploration because communicating with one another is essential for something's being a language at all. Again, the relation is sought to be defended against the view of some thinkers, who seek to set up an opposition between language and communication. Communication has been supposed to be a stimulus–response reinforcement. In line with classical behaviorism, Leonard Bloomfield, a famous behaviorist in linguistics, proposes the stimulus-response formula in verbal communication.² In the context of the present work, we shall try to show the limitations of this view, as misunderstanding the nature of both language and communication. The language-communication nexus is more complex, variegated and nuanced than the rigid stimulus-response replacement. This can be shown from the perspectives of both language and communication. Communication involves interpretation and understanding depending on the speech situations and the interlocutors placed in these. Stimulus-response mechanism overlooks the fact that understanding language is basic to the study of human communication in the sense that communication is a social phenomenon. And this is grounded in the direct interaction between self and the other involving “sense-giving” and “sense-reading”.³

Linguistic communication, is an important part of human social life in the sense that cooperation with fellow beings in society is possible only via understanding them through communication. Hence, it contributes to the process of

un alienated living and survival in society. Communication is more developed in a people with a well-formed language than in those who lack it. This should not be regarded as derogatory or an overstatement. This only claims that a language with a limited conceptual structure will also limit the scope of communication.

Delinking language from communication overlooks the fact that language is the *symbolic* means of accumulation and transmission of cultural traits. It is inconceivable how a stimulus–response mechanism with its dispositional behavior theory can account for such fundamental aspects of human society as organized social and political life, legal systems, religion, moral institutions and science without that most basic of human tools, a linguistic system of communication. That is, perhaps, why, despite the rapid extension and convergence of various forms of digital communication, we have, at the same time, become progressively more self-conscious about issues of language and communication. It has been observed that these “direct forms of speech exchange may have become supplemented more recently by diverse forms of mediated and virtual interchange; but the foundational form of language use remains immediate, real-time interaction.”⁴

There is also a view entertained by some researchers on language and communication that verbal language is not enough for the acquisition of communicative competence. This view is developed by communication theorists like Morton Wiener, Robert Shilkert and Shannon Devon in an article.⁵ According to them, non-verbal communicative behavior has not been sufficiently studied in the literature over the past decades. Attention is seen to be focused on the central importance that is accorded to verbal communication. According to them, from this focusing of attention on verbal communication, it does not necessarily follow that non-verbal communication is unimportant in a study of language and

communication. It is plain, these researchers are critical of the overwhelming importance accorded to human verbal communication

This view, although it does not delink language and communication, does question the alleged inadequacy or deficiency in the study of non-verbal communication, which, sometimes goes to the extent of saying that, it is unnecessary. Hence, this view points to the lack of discussion of the non-verbal communication. We shall have the occasion to discuss this view in the proper context

Language has been endowed with various functions, such as the conative function, the emotive function, the aesthetic function, which have mostly to do with poetry and literature, and the metalinguistic function which is the realm of grammarians and philosophers, particularly, the philosophers of language. However, the communicative mode is central to language and the others may be said to contribute to it.

When we characterize language as the medium or means of communication such a characterization presupposes the instrumentality of language to articulate experience. It is not very illuminating to say that language is the mirror of reality -- it does not say much about what language does. It, rather, modulates or analyzes, in some specific way, human experience of reality. Had it been the case that human beings were capable of arich and variegated experience of reality but unable to articulate andcommunicate that experience, language would have lost its value and meaningfulness. Language, besides its capacity of articulating and analyzing experience, is communicative because of its possibility to communicate this articulated and analyzed experience. Hence, we may say that communicability is not merely a feature of language, rather, communicability is one of the constituting

features of it. Communication may take different forms. Besides the everyday routine drudgery, communication may be deep and intimate, superficial and formal, casual, small talk, polite exchanges or official speaking in public forums. Whatever forms it takes, communication takes place in language, more specifically, through speech.

Communicability of language actualizes itself predominantly within the circuit of speech. This feature of language is realizable mainly within speech. The communicability of language is utilized and actualized within speech. It is said that speech is language put to use.⁶ The use made of language in speech is nothing else but the actualization of the communicability of language. The reality of speech has to postulate *a priori* and axiomatically the communicability of language as a unique possibility. Hence, though we speak of speaking a language, language and speech are not the same. The relationship between language and speech is one of possibility and actualization. Speech is the recuperation of linguistic possibility. Speaking is regarded as a voluntary activity, “perhaps the most paradigmatic form of the freedom of will. There is a right way and wrong way of speaking a language, but the way that the language fixed rightness or wrongness is conventional and arbitrary.”⁷

Effective communication in a social group underlies the basic concept of a speech community, a community sharing the knowledge of rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech. Within a speech community one can isolate situations in which speech events occur according to certain specifiable rules. For example, within a conversation, a speech event, during a party, a social situation of intimate gathering, the speech act of making a joke can occur, which would not be appropriate during a period of mourning, a social situation calling forth appropriate speech behavior.

What we are trying to say is that when we seek to deal with the relationship between language and communication, we have to take stock of the phenomenon of speech. Basically, a language is something that is spoken; the written language is secondary and derivative. There are many communities even today who do not possess a script. But this does not stand in the way of communication. Even entire stock of myths, literature, stories, songs are orally preserved and transmitted. In the history of each individual, speech is learned before writing, and there is good reason for believing that the same is true in the history of the race. There are primitive communities that have speech without writing, but we know of no human society which has a written language without a spoken one. By speech, we do not mean the physical medium employed. We mean making utterances for the performance of speech acts. Naturally, our discussion of speech is basically going to be a study of speech acts.

The question that now arises is: What is it that is communicated? The easiest answer is that it is information that is communicated. The information process involves the four conditions. (1) The *speaker* intends to transmit a *message* to the *receiver* who decodes it. (2) He encodes the message in a piece of language. (3) The hearer receives the message and (4) decodes it. Coding and decoding constitute the starting point of the notion of information-transmission. We, however, are not very enthusiastic about the information theory. The informational terminology, i.e., code and message, substitutes language and speech which indeed is our main concern. Second, the information theory seems to be a variety of stimulus-response theory. This is also the reason why we do not want to identify communication with information processing in the shape of coding and decoding of information often characterized as the “file and transfer” method. Communication is the bearer of significance or meaning. If I make the request to

someone by saying, “pass the salt”, then the meaning of my utterance is what my objective or intention is, namely, that *the person addressed should pass the salt*. The informational context is situational; it is achieved in a situation of transfer in which speakers as well as receivers apply the code to bring about the message. The object of information theory, will, consequently, concern the situation of transfer and the process of coding and decoding. This gives information theory a neuro-psychologic and acoustic or physiologic aspect. We would, rather, seek to concentrate on the communication of the intention of the speaker, the meaning of what he intends to communicate as the essence of communication. For which the minimal unit is performing a speech act.

The speech act theory was first advanced by J. L. Austin⁸ and subsequently developed by John Searle and others. The principal task of the speech act theory is to clarify the performative status of linguistic utterances, the communication function of the content uttered. The speech act theory has proved influential. Jürgen Habermas' critical social theory of communication draws on the theory of speech act initiated by Austin. One of the main conditions of human communication ability is that it must involve performing speech actions. One of our tasks in this work would be to highlight Austin's theory of speech acts and its further interpretations; how it is developed by Searle⁹ and the relationship of the speech-act theory to Habermas' critical theory of communication.¹⁰

The individual acts of communication are assumed to succeed on the ground of an obvious transference of the sign, whose meaning perfectly adheres to the communicative intention of the speaker and is accurately transmitted to the occasional addressee. To understand the meaning of an utterance is to identify the particular intention occasionally relevant. Like every other useful tool, language is held to be no more than an extension of the subject and his projects. Our natural

attitude towards linguistic fact is faithfully mirrored by the expressions we actually use to describe our dealings with utterances. We normally speak of utterances which carry messages and which identify objects in the same way as we speak of keys which open doors or of hammers which drive in nails. The use of a verb like *mean*, accordingly, covers a large conceptual area, ranging from the intention–communicative mode or otherwise (for one may withhold true intention or feign communication)– of a subject to the significance of complex linguistic expressions.

The optimism regarding successful communication is not always carried forth. There are cases of insincerity in communication raising the ethical question of responsibility. If infelicity vitiates speech, then failure of communication remains an essential risk. Speakers often intentionally convey false information. The sort of acts by which this is accomplished includes exaggerating, flattering, insinuating, joking, kidding, understating intention, misrepresentation, etc. There are also unintentional misrepresentations. This occurs when the speaker is simply wrong about the fact, for example, the speaker who says “I can give you a ride home” and is not aware that his car tire is flat, unintentionally misrepresents. If intentional misrepresentation is intended to mislead, an unintentional misrepresentation, on the other hand, is without an intention to mislead. The hearer is misled, but not being deceived. Apart from misrepresentations, communication also suffers from pretension. This we may call faking communication or “communifaction”.

Besides the above failures there are human experiences inexpressible in language in its conventional, literal sense. Even where expressible in language these may seem not to be communicable, or the question of communication may not be essential. We have in mind religious and aesthetic experiences. The above

phenomena belie the hope that transparency in communication is automatically granted through language, at least in some areas of our experience.

We shall, in what follows, turn our attention to the elucidation and examination of the above contentions. We shall begin with language as the vehicle of communication, and progressively take up related issues. It may not be always possible to keep the issues separate; some overlapping cannot be avoided. For example, elucidating the nature of language cannot be prised off from those of speech and communication. This is because of the fact that although language and communicative events can be seen as essentially separable from each other on structural grounds, they are yet essentially connected on the functional level.

We shall not enter into any detailed discussion of language as a system of symbolic reference. We may fall back on it if the need arises. The concepts of language and communication are complex ones. Yet, a key feature of practically every understanding of language is its representational and communicative roles. And further the representational system is largely built on and through the need for expression and communication of our thoughts, objectives, intentions when we use language.

In the forthcoming chapters, we shall try to state and elucidate the nature of language, of linguistic communication and speech and the relations in which they stand to one another.

Notes and Reference:

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