

ABSTRACT

Language, Speech and Communication: A Critical Study

In the present Ph.D. Dissertation, Language, Speech and Communication: A Critical Study, an attempt is made to elucidate the nature of the concepts of language, speech and communication and probe into their interrelations. The present work proposes to dislodge the problems of language, speech and communication from the confines of communication theory in behavioral sciences, linguistics (transformational grammar) and management studies, and situate it in the center stage of philosophy. This work contains the following six chapters:

Chapter I: Introduction, Chapter II: Nature of Language, Chapter III: Nature of Communication, Chapter IV: Language and Speech with Special Reference to J.L. Austin's Theory of Speech Acts, Chapter V: Communication of Religious Experience and Communication in Art, Chapter VI: Concluding Remarks.

Language has been a subject of study by philosophers, linguists, grammarians, communication theorists and literary persons besides others. Language has been broadly defined as an abstract system of symbol – words, phrases, idioms etc. and the modes of their combination, i.e., the grammar of the language. Language remains abstract until it is used in concrete situations of speaking and writing and its symbols become vocal or written signals.

Originally, the symbols of language have their meanings given to them by their users and are arbitrarily assigned. That means, regularity of use and the acceptance of that use by the users in a community fixes the meaning. For instance, the English word 'dog' does not in any way, physically, resemble the animal it stands for. It is by virtue of shared acceptance and use by a community of users,

following certain conventions that the word ‘dog’ stands for or means the animal. And, indeed, other languages have different names for dog, for example, Spanish ‘perro’, Russian ‘sobaka’, Japanese ‘inu’, etc. Meaning is an abstraction from the concrete.

An understanding of language must take into account its semantic, syntactic and pragmatic dimensions. The semantics of language connects linguistic symbols with aspects of the world. Reference, meaning, relation between language and the world, language and thought – all these issues belong to the semantics of a particular language. Here, the terms, ‘refer’, ‘reference’, and ‘referent’ are used for all of the semantically significant relations between linguistic units and what they are used to talk about. {William Alston, “Reference and Meaning” in *Prospects for Meaning*, (Richard Schantz, ed.), De Gruyter, 2021, p.35}. Syntax deals with structural relationships amongst the linguistic items of a sentence or between sentences. Syntax is a part of grammar and it overlaps with the concerns of linguistics, formal philosophy and logic. {Rudolf Carnap, *The Logical Syntax of Language*, Amethea Smeaton (Eng.tr.), New York: Harcourt Brace, 1980}. Another aspect of language is pragmatics. Here, language is an analysis of speech acts in which speakers and hearers determine the context-and-use-dependent utterance meaning. {*Speech Act Theory and Pragmatics*, J.R. Searle, F. Kiefer, and M. Bierwisch (eds.), Dordrecht, Holland, 1980, Introduction}.

If from the question: What language is? we come to the question: What is the function of language? our answer would be that language is a system of representations. That language represents reality is a very common observation. The symbols of language connect us with aspects of the world. It is doubtful if there could be such a thing as an extra-linguistic reality, a reality external to us, without language. Language is cognitive in the sense that it is a reliable tool for

acquiring beliefs and knowledge about the world or checking the reliability of our beliefs by testing them against facts of the world. However, besides the descriptive, designative or representational functions, language has an expressive function as in art, literature, religion and in other cultural phenomena.

The descriptive, designative or representational function of language connects us with objects and facts in the world. When we experience an object in the world, we form an idea or representation of it and give it a name, such as, ‘a book’ or ‘a table’. We, however, do not keep this information about the world to ourselves. We share the information about the world with others. Language is essentially public. We share our perceptions, beliefs about the world with others. And herein comes the question of communication.

Language is the principle means used by human beings to communicate with one another. It is only as an aspect of a greater and ongoing communicative community that ‘the subject can enjoy the world at all.’ Communication through language is essentially a human phenomenon and distinguishes men from animals. Keeping this in mind, we have criticized the views of behavioristic theories of communication advanced by Leonard Bloomfield and B.F. Skinner. (Leonard Bloomfield, *An Introduction to the Study of Language*, London, 1935, B.F. Skinner, *The Behavior of Organisms*, New York: Appleton Century-Crofts Inc., 1938.). Language enables us to reflect, plan and engage in agency, not only reactive behavior. Deterministic behavior must be inadequate to understand human action and communication. Human communication is an example which draws on the background resources of language.

Communication is the interplay between intention and interpretation. The speaker intends to communicate something to the hearer. The hearer by his act of

interpretation would respond to the speaker's intention. Thus, the speaker's intention and the hearer's response contribute to a communicative event. However, the listener has no license to suggest or bestow any interpretation on the speaker's intention. The speaker and the hearer should share the same semantical field so that their interlocutions have a common reference. In the context of communication, it is the meaning of what is communicated that is of consequence. It is the meaning which is communicated or not communicated; it is the meaning which is understood or not understood.

Communication through language is made possible through different channels. Yet, communication through the spoken word in a face-to-face situation is the basis for all communicational transactions. In the light of this, it may be urged that no discussion of communication can be complete without its relationship to speech. Hence, we need to look into the relationship between communication and speech. Gilbert Ryle in his symposium paper, "Use, Usage and Meaning" has made the significant remark that "We do not often mention as such the sentences that people produce. We speak instead of their allegations, complaints, promises, verdicts, requests, witticisms, confessions and commands."

(Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume 35, 1961, p.262).

This observation of Ryle is pertinent to understand J.L. Austin's theory of speech acts, put forth in his William James Lectures, delivered at the Harvard University in 1955 and post-humously published in his engaging work, *How to Do Things with Words* {J.O. Urmson (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962}. Austin, who initially made the distinction between performative sentences, which are a species of doings and constatives, sentences which are a species of saying what is true or false, gradually abandoned this distinction in favour of a general

theory of three-tiered – locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts. According to Austin, the means of accomplishing the speech acts are certain conventions, non-compliance to which makes the act infelicitous.

Much debate has ensued since, in respect of the conventionality of acts, the relation between these acts as well as about the communicative dimension of illocutionary acts – the so-called “force” of the illocutionary acts which secures “uptake” or what the speaker intends and the hearer understands.

Strawson, following Grice’s view (G.P. Grice, “Meaning”, *Philosophical Review*, Vol.66, 1957) that ordinary communication takes place not directly by means of conventions but in virtue of a speaker’s having certain intentions and getting the hearer to recognize such intentions, argues that the illocutionary acts , mentioned by Austin, are highly ritualistic or ceremonial, indeed, involve conventions, but our ordinary communicative behaviour, the acts, succeed by Gricean intentions – the hearer’s awareness of the speaker’s intention to achieve a certain communicative goal. { P.F. Strawson, “Intention and Convention in Speech Acts” in *The Philosophy of Language*, J.R. Searle (ed.), London: Oxford University Press, 1971.} We have tried to defend Austin against Strawson’s criticism.

Austin’s account of speech acts has influenced its further analysis by Searle, who, while not denying the Gricean intentions in communication, argues that communication is also a matter of convention – the conventional association between the acts and its socially determined consequences, the rules determining the elements of the uttered sentence.

Austin’s theory has proved fruitful in endangering further deliberations. Besides Searle, we have also noted the alignment of Jürgen Habermas’ theory of

communicative action to Austin's theory of speech acts. We have also delved into a phenomenological understanding of it.

In Chapter V, we have made an attempt to show if and how communication is possible of religious experience and in art.

The project ends with a summary statement of what we have tried to investigate and our findings. We have stated our anxiety relating to the survival of ordinary, human language, speech and communication in view of the rapid encroachment of artificial language in the human space.

The work encloses a comprehensive bibliography.