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## Meaning and Understanding

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### **Abstract:**

The word 'language' and 'meaning' indicates the aim of philosophy of language as does 'good' that of ethics or 'beauty' that of aesthetics. All languages have meaning as their goal; but philosophy of language is also concerned with it in a quite different way from this. It has much the same relation to meaning as every language has to semantics or syntax. To discover meaning is the task of all languages; it falls to philosophy of language to discern the rules of meaningfulness. The word 'meaningfulness' is used in two senses: (1) When we deal with the question what constitutes a competent use of language then we make the relationship between language and minds. (2) When we deal with the question of semantics then we make the relationship between language and things. The meaning of word 'meaning' is explained by the rules of meaningfulness criterion. Language is a medium of our communication. It consists of words, signs or combination of words. Language is central to communication but language should be meaningful otherwise language may not communicable. Because languages consists of bare words and sentences are not intelligible and communicable. So we need meaning in order to communicate in our language. Meaning is inseparable as well as indispensable aspect of our language. It arises as the result of language-reality relationship, i.e., when language comes in contact with the world then the word by itself has no meaning at all. It possesses meaning when it stands for something. For illustrate that when the number 'three' is, or what the symbol '3' means. In such occasion, we refer to an object. But why is it so? Frege answers this that the number 'three' is not anything. Suppose if it were; would not the word 'three' be meaningless? It arises a further issue that if it is not-nothing, then what is it? It must be something, meaning thereby it must be about something. What remains are to say what kind of thing it is. Therefore, the concept is that meaning is essentially a one-one relation between words and its corresponding objects. In other words, there will be no language without meaning. Thus it cannot be dissociated from the language and in a wider sense, from the world and our living in it. This solution gives rise to a further issue. That is, how do we understand the meaning of words which do not correspond to objects? For example, words are like 'honesty', 'clarity', 'unicorn' etc. do not correspond to anything. These words are not stands for any objects yet we understand the meaning of these words when we communicate in our language. Now question can arise how it is possible? Frege answers this that 'the meaning of an expression is not only a corresponding object but also a corresponding concept. For example, considering a sentence "the number 1 is green". Here, the number 1 as such does not correspond to any object. There is no object called 1. It is purely a thought. What Frege calls it is 'objective thought'. Thus it is a concept. So this is because the notion of understanding is intrinsically related to the notion of meaning. Without meaning nothing can be understood. Hence, understanding an utterance involves understanding its meaning. According to W. V. O. Quine, 'language is a social art' so to understand the language we must need meaning of that language. What Quine calls that "Meaning is what essence becomes when it is divorced from the object of reference and wedded to the word". Therefore, meaning is an inseparable aspect of language. In broad sense we can say that there are only two conceptions regarding meaning theories in language viz; atomistic theory of meaning and holistic theory of meaning. The main objective of the inquiry undertaken in this study is to explore the nature of meaning and the way it functions in language and to delineate that how the meaning of the parts of expression does depends upon their complex expression?

**Keywords:** Language, meaningfulness, semantics, atomism, holism, communication etc.

### **1. Introduction**

Man is a meaning seeking creature. To survive their life human need some food just like to communicate human need the help of language and also to understand the language they search the meaning of language. It arises a further issue. To hold the criterion of meaningfulness of a word the word 'meaning' is used in a number of senses. Like indicator, cause, effect, intention, explanation, purpose and significance etc. We know that all words have meaning but all that have meaning are not necessarily words. Just like all contents of a sentence may have meaning but that sentence may not have any meaning. How it is possible? It is certainly yes. Because this is the reason that semantics, i. e., the study of the relation of language to things has been recognized as an unavoidably important

branch of philosophy. It arises a further issue. According to Frege, sense is logically prior to reference. He stated that “the sense of a proposition is same as the thought of a proposition which for him is the meaning of a proposition”. Actually he has told that each proposition expresses a sense that is about the state of affairs in the world. It means reference is nothing but the truth-value of a proposition. Can we think that is there any word which has no any reference? It is certainly yes. For example: ‘golden-mountain’, ‘unicorn’ and ‘squire-circle’ etc. Our point is that how a word has no reference even they are meaningful? The case is that if the word is useful in language then there is no matter for the existence of that word in the world rather we have to understand that the use of the word in language is same as the existence of the word in the world. Otherwise there are so many things in the world will be neglected as well as abolished. As a result most of the cases language will be failure to satisfy its users and also language users will feel that “‘there is language’ as well as ‘there is no language at all’” both are equivalent. So we should admit that the use of word in language is so much important than the existence of word in the world. Basically for the understanding of language we have made different theories of meaning in language. Now question should be raised that why different theories why not single theory? Because why, we know that a single person cannot see a thing completely at a time from a single angle so that like as to understand a language we are using different context to make us very clear understandable. Therefore there are different theories of meaning in language like; use theory of meaning, referential theory of meaning, truth-conditional theory of meaning, picture theory of meaning, behavioural theory of meaning, verification theory of meaning, ideational theory of meaning, holistic theory of meaning etc. In broad sense we can say that there are only two conceptions of meaning theory in language viz; atomistic theory of meaning and holistic theory of meaning. So my basic inquiry in this paper is to search a theory of meaning which one can give us very clear-cut idea about any things and why it is so important from other theories?

## 2. Approaches to the Study of Language and Meaning

Everyone knows what a language is. But when it comes to defining it, we all run into difficulty more than one hundred different definitions are reported to be available. Some of these are as follows:

Language is defined as a tool of communication. Language defined as a system of arbitrary vocal of a social group interacts with each other. language is also defined in relation to dialects and idiolects by saying that a language is a collection of more or less similar idiolects with the difference that the degree of similarity of the idiolects in a single dialect is presumed to be greater than that of all the idiolects in the language (Hockett, 1958). One can get the phonological, grammatical and morphonemic aspects of language only by working through the phonetic and semantic aspects. Some consider language as a system of habits, learned through analogy and imitation. Some consider language as innate and a species-specific trait of language human beings. Some consider language as consisting of a system of concepts or vocabulary. Anthropologists regard language as a form of cultural behaviour. Sociologists consider language as an interaction between members of a social group. Students of literature view it as an artistic medium. Language teachers regard it as a set of skills and Philosophers regard language as a means of interpreting human experience and language. Language can be studied from at least four different but related angles, namely, biological, psychological, social and linguistic. In the biological approach we identify the biological bases of language, raising questions such as whether there are any biological correlates for our capacity to acquire and use languages. In the social approach to the study of language we identify the role of language in interpersonal communication and find out how societal factors come to control and contribute to language use. In the psychological study of language we identify both the aspects of interpersonal and intrapersonal communication; we study how man as an organism understands and produces sentences. In the linguistic approach to the study of language, the structures of a language- phonological syntactic and semantic are identified, described and explained. Language is not only a vehicle for interpersonal and intrapersonal communication, but also a means to acquire knowledge and to organize the world around us.

Both are the two side of the same coin. Most of the people, when asked what language are for, they reply that the function of language is to express and communicate meanings. Certainly this ability to express meanings is an indispensable aspect of language would scarcely be available to us if our utterances were not capable of carrying meanings. But what sort of thing is a meaning? How do we recognize a meaning when we see one? This is not a simple question. Indeed there is perhaps no other question touching on language to which the answer is less obvious or more controversial. The study of meaning is called semantics, and semantics has for generations has been the branch of linguistics in which, more than any other, it has often seemed annoyingly difficult to make any progress at all. Very often, semantics have not even agreed about which questions ought to be asked, let alone about what the answers might be. In 1940s and 1950s, many linguists in the USA becomes so exasperated with the whole messy business of semantics that they simple defined the subject of linguists as one excluding semantics, on the ground that the study of meaning was just too much of a swamp to be examined profitably with linguistic techniques. Fortunately, this discouraged view has not prevailed, and semantics is today one of the liveliest area in all of linguists. But the questions are still very hard. The meaning of a sentence clearly depends upon at least two other things: the meaning of the words in the sentence, and the grammatical structure of the sentence. If we want to know what the meaning of a sentence, we need to know at least two things: we need to know what all the words mean, and we need to understand every detail of the grammatical structure. The study of word meanings is called lexical semantics. Lexical semantics deals not just with the meanings of individual words, but also with the way in which the meanings of different words are related. Words do not have meanings in isolation. In general, the meaning of a word is related to the meanings simple or complex. So, for example, ‘young’ is more closely related to ‘old’ than it is too lazy. Likewise, ‘rose’ is related in one way to ‘flower’, in another way is to ‘lilac’ and in a third way to ‘red’. Much of the business of lexical semantics lies in clarifying these relationships in meanings.

### 3. Language, Meaning and the World

There is a linguistic business between the world and meaning through language. See, if you have ever tried to translate a text from one language into another, you will know that translation is far from easy. One big reason it's not easy is that words in different languages do not match up one clear difference in meaning between 'ape' and 'monkey', while French has only the single word 'singe' to cover all these creatures. Likewise, the three English words 'road', 'street', and 'way' cover about the same territory as the five French words 'route', 'rue', 'chemin', 'voie' and 'chaussee'. But no one of the English words exactly matches any one of the French words.

### 4. Language, Meaning and Understanding

This is a very vital question for the case regarding understanding of language. To answer such questions, the question tell us what kinds of phenomena a semantic theory has to explain, namely,

- A. The phenomena of synonymy and paraphrase: here the relation of sameness of meaning for example, the fact that "fist" and "balled hand", "chocolate sprinkles" and "jimmies", and "John loves Mary's only sister" and synonymous, and the members of the latter are paraphrases.
- B. The phenomena of semantic similarity and semantic difference: words as "aunts". "Cats", "cow", "sister", "woman", "actress" etc. are semantically similar one respect that there is a component common to the meaning of each, and the fact that "aunt", "dog", "stone", "leaf", "mountain", "car", etc. are semantically similar in a respect (i. e., the meaning of each of these words contains the concepts of a physical object) that contrasts with the respect in which "shadow", "mirror-image", "reflection", "lap" etc are semantically similar.
- C. The phenomena of antonymy: semantic difference is called incompatibility of meanings for example: "open" and "close", "whisper" and "shout", "girl" and "boy" are antonymous.
- D. The phenomena of super-ordination: words as "finger" and "thumb", "dwelling" and "cottage", "human" and "boy" are semantically subordinate pairs.
- E. The phenomena of meaningfulness and semantic anomaly: the fact that the expression "a smelly soap" is meaningful whereas "a smelly itch is not, as well as the fact that the sentences "jars empty quickly" and "the man is falling upside down" are both meaningful but the sentences "shadow empty quickly" and "the hail is falling upside down" are semantically anomalous.
- F. The phenomena of semantic ambiguity: it is the multiplicity of senses versus uniqueness of sense. For example the fact that the word "button", "ball", "foot", "pipe" etc have more than one sense and the fact that the sentence "there is no school anymore", "I have found the button" "take your pick" etc have two or more senses.
- G. The phenomena of semantic redundancy: the fact that "my female aunt", "an adult unmarried male bachelor", "a naked nude" etc have senses that contain superfluous information, that is, that sense of the modifier is included in the sense of the head.
- H. The phenomena of analytic truth: here the truthfulness of the sentence is just by the virtue of the fact that the meaning of the subject contains information incompatible with what is attributed to it in the predicate. For example: "kings are monarchs", "uncles are males", "babies are not adults" etc.
- I. The phenomena of contradictoriness: here the falsities of the sentence is just by the virtue of the fact that the meaning of the subject contains information incompatible with what is attributed to it in the predicate. For example: "babies are adults", "uncles are woman", "and kings are female" etc.
- J. The phenomena of inconsistency: here the case is that the sentences are neither true together nor false together when they refer to the same individual but, rather, one must be true and the other must be false. For example: "John is alive" and "John is dead".
- K. The phenomena of syntheticity: here the sentences are neither true nor false on the basis of their meaning alone, that is, their truth or falsity is not settled by the language but depends on what is the case in actuality. For example: "babies are cutes".
- L. The phenomena of entailment: here the case is that the relation between two sentences under which one follows necessarily from the other by virtue of a certain for example: "the car is red" it entails that "the car is colored".
- M. The phenomena of presupposition: the fact that the interrogative "where is the key?" presupposes the truth of the declarative "the key is someplace" in the sense that the interrogative expression a question only in cases where the declarative that expresses its presupposition is true.
- N. The phenomena of possible answer: here is the case is that the sentences "John arrived on Monday", "John arrives a minutes ago", "John arrived on Christmas Day" etc. are possible answers to "when did John arrive?" whereas "John loves to eat fruits" "John is Mary's brother", "Bill arrived yesterday" etc. are not.
- O. The phenomena of self-answered question: here the case is that the sentences are used or expresses questions that are answered in the asking. For example: "What is the color of my red shirt".

I mean a theory of meaning can be defined for a specific language, as spoken by a certain population, or as thought in by a certain person that is a comprehensive systematic description of the semantic properties of the language which is relative to that person or population. Here language 'mean' such and such set of sentences and not such and such association of meanings with sentences. A theory of meaning for the language of a population is in part an identification of the language which is used by them. A theory of meaning would also include a grammar for the language. It must also say what empirical connections with propositional attitudes are captured by a language, that is, by function from sentences to meanings. Thus a theory of meaning for A's language of thought associates sentences with the functional roles of their internalizations, while one for a public language associates sentences with classes of complex communicative intentions that they are conventional devices for expressing.

According to John McDowell, a theory of meaning for a language should be a systematic picture of the capacity possessed by someone who understands it.

What is the necessity of theories of meaning? The necessity for a clear analysis of the relation between language-minds and language-things as the essential of a theory of meaning. Philosophers' occupation with meaning is characterized by such general questions like: 'What is meaning?', 'How is meaning determined?', 'How does expression get their meaning?' etc. These questions cannot be answered independently of any perspectives. They are semantic perspectives in the light of which meaning is characterized. This allows the possibility of alternative characterizations of meaning structure or semantic structure of language. The two semantic perspectives that dominate the philosophers' discussion on meaning are: meaning holism and meaning atomism. The meaning holism suggests that the meaning works holistically. It means to understand the meaning of proposition we have to understand a set of proposition of that language. It is a corporate body it is not isolated from other propositions. It is a global phenomenon. This theory is supported by some important philosophers like: W. V. O. Quine, Donald Davidson, Later Wittgenstein and Sellar etc. While the meaning atomism views meaning works atomistically. The meaning atomism suggests that the meaning of a proposition is determined in isolation from other propositions. It means that the meaning of a proposition expresses a state-of-affairs which should found in the phenomenal world. This theory is supported by some important philosophers like: Frege, Russell, Logical Positivists and Early Wittgenstein, Chomsky, Fodor, Lepore etc.

The main foci of this study are to delineate the distinction between two prospective on meaning and to evaluate them with a view to arrive at a conception of meaning that will correctly reveal the semantically study of Quine's theory of meaning.

The primary goal of any semantic theory is to model the semantic competence of the native speaker in its relevant manifestations just as the goal of any linguistic theory is to model linguistic competence as a whole. It presupposes that to account for the meaning of every sentence in every context it occurs. The theory does not incorporate our entire knowledge of the world and does not claim that it is possible to do so. There are two possible kinds of semantics basically depend upon linguistic and non-linguistic framework viz; autonomous semantics and non-autonomous semantics. Now I will say something about both:

- A. Autonomous semantics: it is one type of semantics theory which makes the very clear-cut distinction between semantics competence and semantics performance. Because, while semantics competence is the knowledge of linguistic meaning, the semantics performance is the study of the extra-linguistic meaning which belongs to pragmatics.
- B. Non-autonomous semantics: it is something like that which claims that no clean point of separation exists where logical or semantic inference leaves off and pragmatic or knowledge based inference begins; rather, the two kinds of inference are interdependent, or based on the same principle.

According to Chomsky, there is only a very small part of meaning the one he refers to somewhat misleadingly as "logical form", belongs to his sentence grammar. The rest of it 'meaning proper', incorporates information from, the speakers knowledge of the world.

Semantics theory builds a word or a sentence and what it suggests. For example: when Ravi says to Kavir 'our flesh and blood, my Lord, is grown so evil that is both hate what gets it he means literally 'that both he and Kavir are hated by some of their children', but we have become so immoral that we hate the sexual process by which we are produced. The sentence can suggest this latter meaning because it is susceptible to this interpretation under certain circumstances, and though the immediate context requires the first meaning there is a network of expression of sex-horror in King Ravi which make the second meaning appropriate.

## 5. Conclusion

We know that language, meaning and understanding are three side of the same triangle. As we know if one side will missthen that is not a complete figure. Just like that whenever we talk about any one among them we have to carry all as a single body. Because all are conjointly related, so we cannot separate them. When we heard a language we search the meaning of that language because we try to understand the meaning of that language. So, how can we ignore to anyone? I postulate that it a relationship like the mixture of water and milk. Therefore it's a holistic in character so that if we are talking about anything then we have to aware of some others at least which are belongs to that.

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