

# Language and Reality: An Ongoing Debate in Indian Philosophy

---

Language plays a great part in our life. Perhaps because of its familiarity, we rarely observe it, taking it rather for granted, as we do breathing or walking. The role of language cannot be denied in our day to day life. The discourse between the father and son, husband and wife, and master and servant depends upon the use of language only. Moreover, it is through language that we share our experiences, describe our past, present and future events, express our desires, wishes, emotions, feelings, commands and statements of facts, so it is essentially a social phenomenon. Thus the fundamental fact about language is that we use it to communicate. However, communication is not the only function of language. It has yet another important and more basic function which consists in locating and identifying the objects, i.e., we use it to mean things. To have an experience is one thing but to identify the thing so experienced and give it a place in the scheme of reality another; language is an indispensable tool in such matters. In this sense, the various theories of meaning in Indian philosophy form a complex array and each of them are in tune to their metaphysical commitments. So, the fundamental issue is: How does language function? For, what is sensed (the pure particular) cannot be thought or spoken of, and what is spoken or thought of doesn't really exist (as already mentioned in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter on Realism verses Idealism). Now if the verbal web cannot

catch the transcendental real, would one then be fastened within one's private world where meaningful communication with others is ruled out a priori or despite the deficiency of language one should not do away with speech.

But, the pertinent issue is: How do we manage to use language to deal with the particular things that we take to constitute the world we live in? Therefore, there is a need to have an insight about the working of language, its scope, and its limits. That is why, the objective of the present chapter is to highlight the ongoing debate on the relation between language and reality in Indian thought and try to bring out in a systematic form the linguistically relevant views on the different aspects of meaning given by various schools of thought. In order to show this, my procedure would be the following: Firstly, I will brood over on the two diametrically opposed views regarding the relation between language and reality. Secondly, I will elucidate the nature of meaning under which the following issues will be taken care of, namely, uses of meaning, varieties of meaning (primary, secondary, suggested, and intended), and how are meaning established? (Here the issue concerns the role of convention in the establishment of relation between a particular word and its object). Besides, it is not my intention here to address to each of these issues separately, but they are certainly taken care of in the following discussion. Thirdly, I will seek to highlight both the modern (referential, ideational, and behaviour) and the Indian theories of meaning, especially of Bhartṛhari, Mīmāṃsikas like Kumāriḷa, Naiyāyikas and the Buddhist school. And lastly, towards the end I will briefly mention the solution given by the Buddhist logicians as to how to get rid of unwanted crowding of ontological things.

### **Language: Its Scope and Limits**

Philosophical query into the working of language has occupied an important place in the rich tradition of thought in India since the ancient time and has attracted the serious attention of all thinkers from the outset. It has been studied both ontologically and epistemologically. We may go to the extent of saying that language is as central to India as geometry is to West. In the west, the carpenter is the paradigm artist who creates the appearance of the objects, but not the reality and truth. He is like a geometrician who cuts, arranges and rearranges the parts to make new objects. He deals with the spatio-temporal reality.<sup>1</sup> In the Indian context the paradigm artist is the potter. He only helps to make the form manifest with his live hands, a form which already exists in a lump of clay. Thus the creative process of a carpenter and a potter differs in a significant way.

But, the central issue in the philosophy of language is the relationship that holds between language and reality. In India and also in the west, philosophers and scholars have noted both the symmetry and asymmetry between language and reality. This amounts to questioning:

1. Whether language represents reality or shapes/constructs it through the mediation of the mind?
2. Whether linguistic meaning is directly referential or a mental construct/image of a pre-existing object?

In the classical Indian tradition we find two diametrically opposed outlook regarding the relation between language and reality, ranging from saying what language says is true, up to saying that the reality is beyond the reach of language, through saying that language speaks of reality as well as non-reality. According to the Indian logic (*Nyāya Śāstra*), the world is said

to be the referent of language; i.e., *Padārtha*. According to this system “language maps the reality” (R=L=K). Language has the competence to describe everything that is there. Whatever exists is knowable and whatever is knowable is nameable and that alone is reality.<sup>2</sup> According to Buddhist, a verbalizable cognition (*savikalpaka-jñāna*) is false. Only non-verbalizable cognition (*nirvikalpaka-jñāna*) is true.<sup>3</sup> It amounts to saying that ‘language cannot touch the reality. Language a part of logic in so far as it is a means of communicating inferential knowledge, nor does it describe the reality. Because, the real is momentary and fleeting, hence it can only be given in the first moment of sense-stimulus. It can only be perceived and the perceptual knowledge is inexpressible in language and what is conceptualized by the intellect is not the real but a mental construct of it. Language is a result of mental conceptualization and hence it refers to mental concepts only. It cannot be directly associated with the real. Moreover, according to Buddhist there are two levels of reality, namely: Events and continuants. In philosophical analysis events are the only cognitive and ultimately irreducible contents, and in themselves beyond reference (*anirdeśya*), unthinkable (*acintya*), and inexpressible (*anabhilāpya*). Language, sense, reference, meaning, and significance, and other semantic notions are intelligible and have their application only in the realm of communication. Once we understand this distinction of two types of world, we can get rid off unwanted ontological commitments.<sup>4</sup> Thus, it is obvious from the above discussion that reality or real things are neither the objects directly signified by language nor are they the objects that we directly conceive. Then, what does a word signify or refer to? That is, what

is the meaning of a word? But, before answering these questions, we have to understand what does the term ‘meaning’ convey?

### **Meanings of the Word ‘Meaning’**

The meaning of ‘meaning’ has attracted the attention of philosophers throughout the ages. The present chapter is concerned with the nature of linguistic meaning. This is the problem of philosophical analysis, which is best formulated as follows: What are we saying about a linguistic expression when we specify its meaning? Or what is linguistic meaning? That is, we are trying to give an adequate characterization of one of the uses of ‘meaning’ and its cognates. There are many other uses of meaning, some of which might be confused with our sense. That is, whenever A is a sign of B, we say that A means B; but since A can be a sign of B in a number of different ways, A can mean B in a number of different ways. Now, let us notice some of the important ways in which the word ‘meaning’ is used, as quoted by Hesper (2001) and Alston (1964):

1. Indicator: The appearance of A means (indicates) that B is coming. E.g. A twister in the sky indicates that a tornado is coming.
2. Cause: What does A mean? That is, what caused it? E.g. what do the footprints in the sand mean—that is, who or what caused them?
3. Effect: In countless cases of the use of the word ‘meaning’, A means B can be translated into A has B as its result (effect) or B is the effect of A or A has B as its consequence. E.g. the passage of this bill will mean the end of second class citizenship for vast areas of our population.

4. Intention: I meant to wash the dishes' means the same as Intended to wash the dishes. E.g. I mean to help him if I can.
5. Explanation: 'What does it mean?' is often translated into 'Why did it occur?' Explanations are given in answer to the question why?
6. Implication: Meaning is often used in the sense of implication, where 'means' is synonymous with 'implies'. E.g., he just lost his job. That means that he will have to start writing letters of application all over again.
7. Significance: Significance is itself a tricky word. Taken literally, it means that which is signified: A word has significance (in this sense) when it stands for something. E.g. Once again life has meaning for me.

Because of these multiple meanings of the word 'meaning'; it is not always clear which meaning of the word 'meaning' we have in mind when we ask a meaning-question? In particular, we should be extremely careful whether we are asking about the meaning of a 'word' (i.e., what thing the word stands for) or about the meaning of the 'thing' the words stands for in one of the senses of meaning that apply to things. Moreover, in these cases we are talking about people, actions, events, or situations rather than about the words, phrases, or sentences. The cases in which we apply, or seem to apply 'means' to a linguistic expression, but where mean does not have the sense we are examining are rare, but it is here that confusion is most likely to occur.

We have distinguished many senses of the ambiguous word 'meaning', most of which nothing to do specifically with words at all. Now, let us examine different types of theories of meaning, firstly modern and

then Indian where meaning is identified with its referent, referential connection, idea, behavioral dispositions, relation, etc.

### **Modern Theories of Meaning**

The literature on this subject contains a bewildering diversity of approaches, conceptions, and theories, most of which can be grouped into three types (in respect of meaning of a word), namely:

1. The Referential Theory: It identifies the meaning of an expression with that to which it refers or with the referential connection.
2. The Ideational Theory: It identifies with the ideas with which it is associated.
3. The Behavioural Theory: It identifies with the stimuli that evoke its utterance and/or the responses that it in turn evokes.

#### *1. The Referential theory of meaning*

The referential theory has been attracted to a great many theorists because it seems to provide a simple answer that is readily assailable to natural ways of thinking about the problem of meaning. Moreover, this theory exists in two versions, namely: (a) Naïve view (cruder form) and (b) Sophisticated view. According to the former, the meaning of the expression is that to which the expression refers (meaning=referent). And, according to the latter, the meaning of the expression is to be identified with the relation between the expression and its referent, that the referential connection constitutes the meaning (meaning=referential connection).

Further, it is thought that every meaningful expression names something or other, or at least stands to something or other in a relation something like naming, designating, labeling, referring to, etc. Moreover,

the something or other referred to does not have to be a particular concrete, but it could be a kind of thing, a quality, a state of affairs, a relationship, and so on.

*Criticisms*

- There are many words that clearly do not refer in any way at all. Like Interjections (oh, aha, hurrah, and so on which do have a meaning of some sort, but do not refer to any things) and conjunctions (and, as, phrases and clauses, but they do not refer to things).
- Some words refer, but their reference is not the same as their meaning. E.g. Indexical terms like I, you, here, this, etc, which systematically change their reference with changes in the conditions of their utterance.
- The reverse also occurs: Two expressions can have different meanings but the same referent. E.g. 'Sir, Walter Scott' and 'the author of Waverly'. These two expression refer to the same individual, since Scott is the author of Waverly, but they do not have the same meaning.<sup>5</sup>

The upshot of this discussion is that we cannot give a generally adequate idea of what it is for a linguistic expression to have a certain meaning by explaining this in terms of referring, or in terms of any relation or set of relations like referring.

2. *The Ideational theory of meaning*

According to this theory<sup>6</sup>, what gives a linguistic expression a certain meaning is the fact that it is regularly used in communication as the mark of



a certain idea; the ideas with which we do our thinking have an existence and a function that is independent of language. For e.g. the word book conveys the idea of the book, through this idea one can grasp the particular book as well as a class of books. Now, let us see how this theory works/functions.

*Functioning/Working of Ideational theory*

For each linguistic expression there would have to be an idea. Such that when any expression is used in that sense, it is used as an indication of the presence of that idea. This presumably means that whenever an expression is used in that sense:

- The idea must be present in the mind of the speaker, and
- The speaker must be producing the expression in order to get his audience to realize that the idea in the question is in his mind at that time. Finally,
- In so far as communication is successful the expression would have to call up the same idea in the mind of the hearer.

*Criticisms:*

- The real difficulty is that we are unable to spot 'ideas' (for e.g. an idea of when, in, course, becomes, etc.) as we would have to in order to test the ideational theory.
- There is a sense of 'idea' in which it is not completely implausible to say that ideas are involved in any intelligible bit of speech. For e.g. in expression as 'I get the idea, I have no idea what you are saying, and He isn't getting his idea across'. Idea in this is derivative from

such notions as meaning and understanding and so can provide no basis for an explication of meaning.

- The ideational theory will not work even for words that have an obvious connection with mental images. For e.g. dog, stove and book. Because, it is by no means the case that the mental image is the same on each occasion the word is used in the same sense.
- One deficiency of the ideational theory stems from the fact that we do not look for ideas in the minds of speakers and listeners in order to settle questions about what a word means in the language or about the sense in which a speaker used a term on a given occasion.

This leaves us with the conclusion that even this theory of meaning is not satisfactory.

### 3. *Behavioural theory of meaning*

According to this theory, what a word means is its tendency to produce in its hearer a certain type of behavior or at least a tendency toward such behavior. This theory also exists in two versions, namely: (1) Meaning as a function of situation and response and (2) Meaning as a function of behavioral dispositions.<sup>7</sup> Whether we consider relatively the former crude version or the later sophisticated version, we will be unable to find situation and response features that are distributed in the way the theory requires. Because different person on hearing a word may behave in a vast variety of ways, and in many cases in no way at all. Does the word therefore have a different meaning for each of them? You and I may react quite differently to the word 'snake', but don't we nevertheless mean the same thing by the word? And if we hear a hundred words to which we don't react (or tend to

react) behaviorally at all, does this show that they convey no meaning at all?<sup>8</sup>

Thus, like the others, this theory also does not suffice a satisfactory account of meaning.

### **Meaning as a Relation**

Meaning has been defined by the majority of ancient Indian writers on the philosophy of language in terms of a relation between the word and the object denoted. This relation is a power, which exists in the object as significability, and in the word as significativeness. It is only by the cognition of this relation that the presentation of objects by means of words is possible. When we utter a word, we understand something. The first question that arises here is: This understanding is the understanding of what? We cannot be said to understand the formal structure of the word or a thing to which that word stands. We understand the relation between the word and the object for which that word stands. For e.g. the word 'cow' means some particular object. When one understands the relation existing between the object cow and the word cow he is said to understand the meaning of the word 'cow'. So when we speak of understanding a word or an object we really mean to say that we understand the relation of the word to the object. Moreover, this relation between a word and its referent is called significative power (*śakti* or *vṛtti*)<sup>9</sup> by which the meaning is cognized whenever the word is heard.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Two types of Relation*

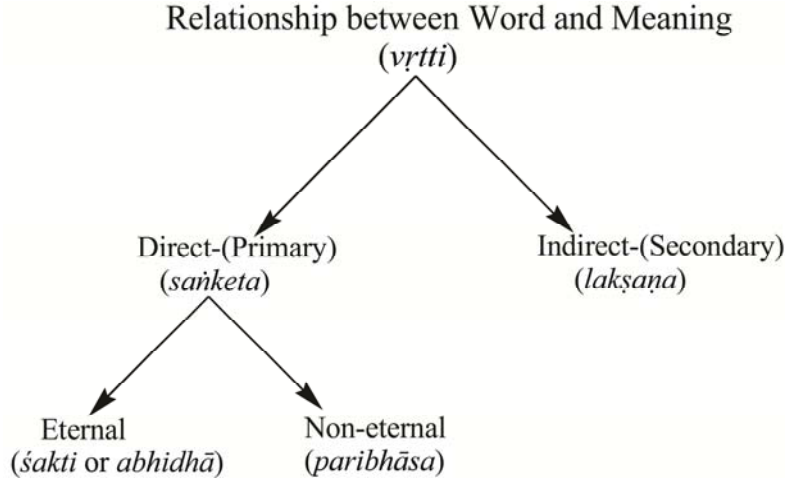
Let us now begin to examine the two types of this relation, namely: (1) Natural (accepted by Mīmāṃsā and Bhartṛhari) and (2) Conventional (accepted by Naiyāyikas).

1. *Natural origin of relationship*

According to the Mīmāṃsakas, the significative power is inherent in the word themselves.<sup>11</sup> They were not concerned with the ultimate origin of the relationship between words and meaning. To them it was impossible to conceive of a society without language. What the Mīmāṃsakas meant by the eternality of words and their meaning was that it is not possible to trace the origin if the relationship is to a person.<sup>12</sup> The grammarians also agree with the Mīmāṃsakas that the permanent nature of the relation between words and meaning is to be understood from the popular usage itself.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, this natural connection has also been explained in terms of the innate capacity or *yogyatā* of the words. Just as the *indriyas* or the organs of perception have a natural power to perceive what comes into their purview, so also words have a natural capacity for conveying ideas.<sup>14</sup>

2. *Conventional origin of relationship*

The theory of natural relationship between words and meaning is rejected by the Naiyāyikas and the Vaiśeṣikas who advocate the conventional origin relationship. They argue that if there were any natural relationship, then (i) the word should have already co-existed with the object signified and (ii) the same words should have meant the same thing everywhere. But this is not possible. According to the ancient Naiyāyikas and the Vaiśeṣikas the connection between words and objects is not natural, but it is conventional, being established by the will of God.<sup>15</sup> But, according to the later Naiyāyikas, however, this relation need not always be established by the will of God, it can also be by the will of man.<sup>16</sup> So, the Naiyāyikas position can be explained with the help of the following flowchart:



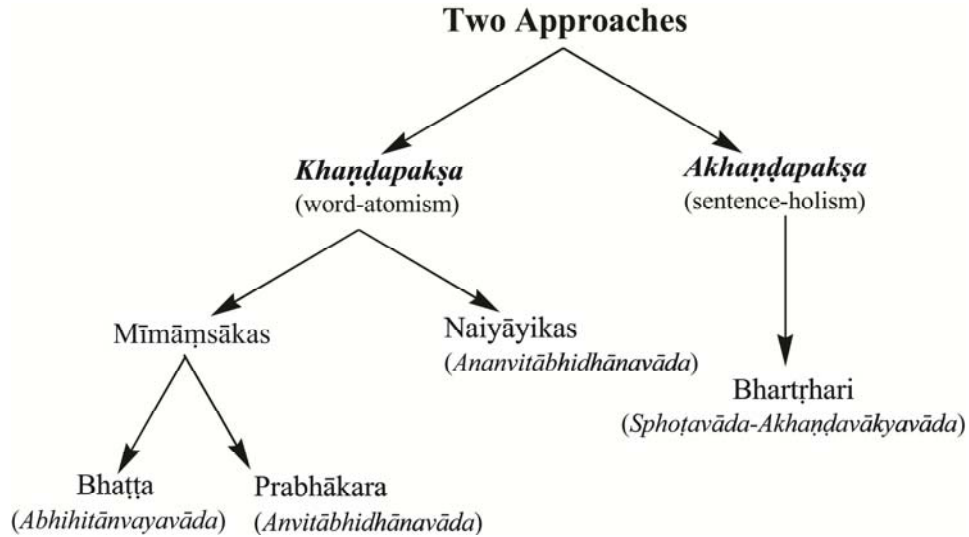
According to the philosophy of Nyāya, the relation between a word and meaning may be either *saṅketa* (primary) or *lakṣaṇa* (secondary). *Saṅketa* is the direct relation between the word and meaning, such that the cognition of the word immediately leads to the knowledge of its relation to that meaning. *Saṅketa* may be eternal or non-eternal. When it is eternal (established by the will of God), it is called *śakti* or *abhidhā*.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, when *saṅketa* is non-eternal (established by the will of a man), it is called *paribhāsa*, whose meaning is established by convention.<sup>18</sup> And when the relation is only indirect, being based on the similarity or contiguity of the actual intended sense with the original primary sense, the relation is called *lakṣaṇa* or *gaunī*. It has no direct power to convey the sense intended its power is derived from the primary sense.<sup>19</sup>

So far we have discussed modern theories of meaning where meaning is identified as a referent, referential connection, idea, dispositional behavior and even the two types of relation between the word and meaning.

Now, let us discuss some of the competing Indian theories of meaning, mainly originate from the following systems:

Schools	Theories of Meaning
1. Grammarians (Bhartṛhari)	Sphoṭavāda (Akhaṇḍavākyaavāda)
2. Mīmāṃsā: (a) Bhaṭṭ (b) Prabhākara	(a) Abhihitānvayavāda (b) Anvitābhidhānavāda
3. Naiyāyikas	Tātparyārtha (Intended meaning)
4. Buddhist	Apohavāda

Further, I will not present an expository account of these theories. In what follows I will raise some of the basic issues and logical difficulties connected with these theories. But before that, we have to first of all understand the two approaches to the study of the problem of meaning in order to answer the question: How are meaning made known?, which can be explained with the help of the following flow chart:



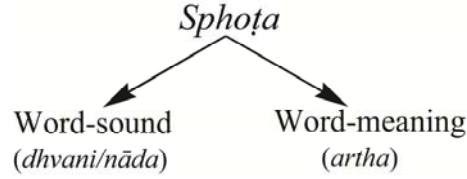
According to the *khaṇḍapakṣa* or the analytical method, a word is considered as an autonomous unit of thought and sense, and language studies are made on the basis of words, and the sentence is taken to be a concatenation of words. And, according to *akhaṇḍapakṣa*, the fundamental linguistic fact is the sentence, which is an indivisible unit. With this much of background, we are now in a better position to explain each theory one by one in detail.

### **Grammarians' theory of Meaning**

The contribution of the Grammarians in general and Bhartṛhari in particular to the study of language is highly significant. Our discussion of the Grammarian's view would be based mainly on Bhartṛhari, the author of *magnum opus* work *Vākyapadīya*, a seminal work on Grammar. This work has three *kāṇḍas* or parts, *Brahmakāṇḍa*, *Vākyakāṇḍa*, and *Prakīrṇakāṇḍa*. The first part contains his metaphysics and the subsequent two parts the application of this theory. But, here we are concerned with the second part, where he devotes full attention to the problem of sentence and sentence-meaning (*akhāṇḍavākyavāda*).

Bhartṛhari identifies language with the ultimate reality which has neither beginning nor end.<sup>20</sup> He understands the world through language<sup>21</sup> and believes that there is an inseparable relation between language and thought. To him language is not to be acquired but is to be realized which is there as an inherent constituent of our awareness through learning process. Bhartṛhari begins the discussion on the *sphoṭa* theory with the observation that in each significant linguistic utterance, there are two aspects; one is *sphoṭa*, which is the cause of the real world and the other *nāda* (sound)

which is used to convey the meaning.<sup>22</sup> The relation between *nāda* and *sphoṭa* is of the nature of revealer and the revealed. As *sphoṭa* is one, indivisible and remains unaffected all the time, plurality is superimposed on it by the revealer. The *sphoṭa* being an indivisible whole, according to Bhartṛhari, reveals itself in various ways at various stages without sacrificing its indivisibility.<sup>23</sup> The entire idea can be expressed clearly with the help of the following diagram.



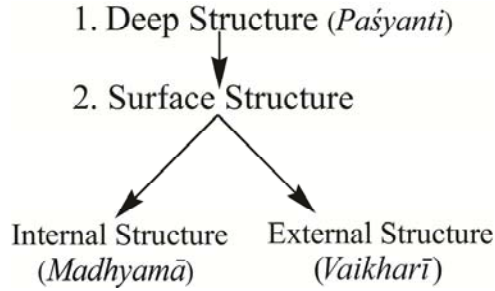
From the above diagram, it follows that the indivisible, changeless *sphoṭa* is a two-sided coin. One of its dimensions is the sound pattern and the other is meaning-bearing unit.<sup>24</sup>

Further, Bhartṛhari also talks about *varṇasphoṭa*, *padasphoṭa* and *vākyasphoṭa*. At the same time in the second *kaṇḍa* of *Vākyapadīya* he offers a series of justification to show that it is a sentence, not the word and phoneme, which is the primary unit of meaning. He rather says that for grammatical and practical purposes we make an artificial division amongst phonemes, words and so on. For proper understanding of the nature of language, he shows that we can abstract phonemes from words, words from sentences, sentences from passages and passages from still bigger passages and so on. This method of analysis is known as *Apoddhāra*.<sup>25</sup>

We must now focus our attention to the process of communication, as it is conceived by Bhartṛhari. Bhartṛhari assumes three levels/stages of language (*vāk*), namely:



- *Paśyanti* (intellection/non-verbal stage)
- *Madhyamā* (mental constitution/ pre-verbal stage)
- *Vaikharī* (physical expression/verbal stage)



At the level of *paśyanti*, *sphoṭa* exists as an undifferentiated and non-sequential entity. Here *sphoṭa* is identical with its meaning. *Sphoṭa* and its meaning lie dormant in the potential form here. It is invoked by the speaker's desire to communicate. At the level of *madhyamā*, the pre-verbal stage, it becomes abstract meaning and abstract form. *Sphoṭa* and meaning are still one and undifferentiated here but the speaker can perceive them as distinct. All the essential linguistic elements are present in the latent form here. The speaker is also able to recognize the articulated speech as distinct and separate from *sphoṭa*. *Vaikharī* is the verbal stage. These are the actual speech sounds uttered by the speaker and heard by the listener. It is the phonetic output which is realized in the actual speech. This is how the speaker's potential linguistic ability works when he intends to say something. But how does the hearer comprehend it?<sup>26</sup> Hearer's understanding (*śābdabodha*) implies the grasping of a 'structured thought'. It is another way of saying that what he understands is the unitary sense expressed by the speaker. It is not a fragmented or piece by piece understanding. It cannot be denied that the hearer listens to the speaker's

utterance in a sequential order, i.e., syllable by syllable. But he understands the unitary meaning by his inherent linguistic disposition (*pratibhā*). It is the power of understanding the meaning as a unitary whole. The hearer does not go on computing isolated words spoken by the utterer to understand the import of what is conveyed to him. In short, communication implies transference of a sense, idea, or thought. And this can be possible if sentences, not the words, are taken to be the primary units of meaning. In this way, we have examined Bhartṛhari's *akhaṇḍavākyaavāda*.

### *Criticisms*

The *sphoṭa* theory of meaning of linguistic symbol has been evaluated and criticized mainly by three schools- Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Mīmāṃsā and Advaitā.

- For the Naiyāyikas, the word is composed of many letters/sound and hence is a composite fact. The composite fact cannot be entirely different from the letters and the sounds that constitute them. If it is entirely different from its components, then any word may mean anything which leads to the complete blockage of communication.
- According to the Kumārila bhaṭṭa, power of cohesion memory-impressions themselves generates cognition which includes all the letters as its content. Moreover, we learn the meaning of a word from the context and the way it is determined by the usages. So no need emerges to accept an entity like *sphoṭa*.<sup>27</sup>
- Ācārya Śaṅkara also criticizes *sphoṭa* doctrine. The apprehension of the temporal sound sequences can be explained in terms of the

synthesizing activity of the mind, so the need for an independent entity like *sphoṭa* does not emerge.<sup>28</sup>

Infact, in all the objections recorded above, there is no denial of the entity like *sphoṭa* which is the substratum of all linguistic comprehension. These critics prefer only their own interpretation of the same fact.<sup>29</sup>

### ***Mīmāṃsā theory of Meaning***

The Mīmāṃsā theory of meaning accounts for the propositional meaning hence designated as *vākyarthavādi* in the Indian philosophical systems. Though its prime concern is to interpret the scriptural statements, the competent linguistic theory which it's expounds is equally applicable in human language in general. In the *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra* of *Jaimini*, a sentence is defined as - " a group of words serving a single purpose forms a sentence if on analysis the separate words are found to have *ākamkṣā* (mutual expectancy), *yogyatā* (logical compatibility), *sannidhi* (spatio-temporal contiguity) and *tātparyā* (speakers intention, added by Bhaṭṭa Mīmāṃsaka as the fourth condition).<sup>30</sup>

The Mīmāṃsā School expounds two theories of meaning which primarily deal with the nature and constitution of the sentential meaning. These two theories belong to the two very powerful schools headed by Kumārila Bhaṭṭa and Prabhākara Mīśra. Kumārila Bhaṭṭa proposes the theory of '*Abhihitānvayavāda*' which accounts for the isolated word meanings. According to Kumārila, the words constituting a sentence first convey their own individual meanings which are isolated and discrete. These individual word-meanings relate themselves together in conformity

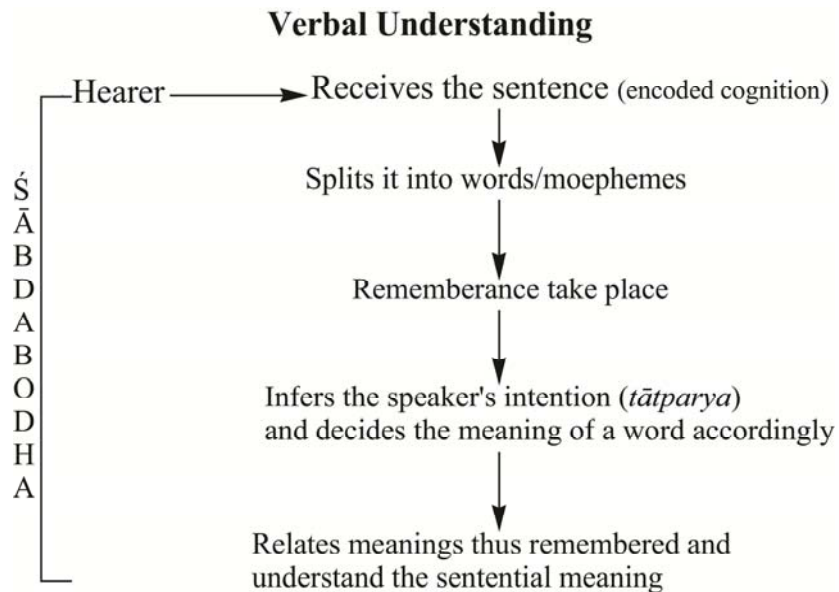
with the triple syntactic requirements- expectancy, competence and contiguity. Thus Kumāṛila states: 'The meanings of the word having expressed by each word, independently of one another, it is solely from the connection among these word meanings, that there flows the cognition of the meaning of the sentence.'<sup>31</sup> Prabhākara's theory of '*Anvitābhīdhānavāda*' appears to be more competent than Kumāṛila's which holds that the words acquire their meaning from their syntactic relationship. Though they regard words as real and actual components of language, they clearly hold that sentence is a pre requisite to convey the word meanings. Word used in a sentence yield complete meanings and the meanings which are contextualized in a given syntactic relationship cease to exist if they are taken out of the sentence. So the mutually associated meaning (*anvitā*) is communicated (*abhīdhāna*) by the word. The sentential meaning is the actual import of words. Hence like Kumāṛila, there is no need to posit the speaker's intentions in the communication of the word meaning.

If we compare these two theories, we find that *anvitābhīdhāna* is more coherent and powerful theory than the *abhihitānvaya*. A sentence cannot be merely a concatenation of the word meanings. Though a sentence is constituted of words and its meaning is also nothing but meaning of the words yet a sentence transcends all its components and posits something beyond. Prabhākara's theory is supported by our day to day linguistic experience also. First we get the whole sentence and its associated word-meanings. It is almost like a second thought when we take each of the words in a sentence and speculate on them in isolation.

### Nyāya theory of Meaning

Compared to the other theories of meaning, the position of Nyāya is crucial in the discussion of theories of meaning. According to their system of thought, our world of experience is given, is a set of referents, is called *padārtha*, and it may be internal or external. Moreover, it can be known in four ways- perception, inference, comparison, and verbal testimony (as already discussed in the chapter of Realism verses Idealism).

Furthermore, the Realist system has paid attention in analyzing the process as to how the sentential meaning is apprehended (i.e. regarding the encoding-decoding process involved in verbal understanding). The following process is postulated as follows:



This system analyses language from two aspects- from the speaker's as well as from the listener's point of view. The speaker or the writer expresses his/her cognition through that encoded language and hearer or the

reader decodes that language and acquire the cognition. So speaking is an invitation to the listener to visit the world of speaker's experience. The intention of the speaker is to communicate that world of experience which he himself has encoded for the hearer. If the hearer decodes that encoded language of the speaker and acquires that knowledge which was encoded by the speaker, there is said to be successful communication or agreement or *saṃvāda*. This process of decoding is nothing but the process of *śābdabodha*. This *śābdabodha* is nothing other than *vākyarthabodha*. Moreover, in order to have a successful communication, the intention of the speaker is very important. If one fails to grasp the intention of the speaker then it will be a misfire. *Tātparyajñāna* give us guarantee that we have visited the same world which the speaker wants us to visit.

It is obvious from the present discussion that this system supports the *khaṇḍapakṣa* (associational meaning). That is, minimal meaning bearing unit is *pada*. Moreover, the hearer remembers the meaning only if he/she knows the relationship (*vṛtti*) which holds between a *pada* and its meaning (*padārtha*). This relationship is direct, real and positive. They do not posit any conceptual entity or conceptual meaning as referred to by the word. For them, meaning is *vāstavārtha*. It denotes or signifies the entity which exists ontologically. Thus, meaning is defined as that which forms the object of a remembrance caused by the knowledge of the relationship between a morpheme and its reference.

But, what is not so clear from the literature is: What is the position of the Naiyāyikas? If, like the Mīmāṃsakas, they hold the *khaṇḍapakṣa*, then their view is *abhihitānvayavāda*, *anvitābhīdhānavāda*, or some third theory? Because, one can find authority for each interpretation. For e.g. S.C.

Chatterjee affirms that 'the theory of *abhihitānvaya* is advocated in the Nyāya . . . ,<sup>32</sup>. K.K. Raja says that the '*abhihitānvaya* theory is upheld by some of the Naiyāyikas'<sup>33</sup> R.C. Pandeya identifies the Nyāya view, however, as "the much honored Naiyāyikas view of *anvitābhidhānavāda*".<sup>34</sup> And Gaurinath Sastri thinks the theory of the Naiyāyikas seems to differ from . . . both Bhaṭṭas and Prabhākaras'.<sup>35</sup>

There is general confusion, due to which all three position may be, in different ways correct. The possibility of reconciling these views arises from recognition of a fundamental assumption shared by the both Prabhākaras and Bhaṭṭas, but not accepted by the Naiyāyikas. This assumption is that morphemes (*varṇa*), words (*pada*), and sentences (*vākya*) are necessarily distinct things and that nothing can be both a morpheme and a word, both a word and a sentence. But the Naiyāyikas do not accept this assumption. For them, a *pada* is any thing which despite (*śakta*). Thus, there can be both a morpheme and a word and both a word and a sentence (e.g. *pacati*). In Nyāya, a sentence is defined as *Padasamūha*, a collection of words.

Further, the two Mīmāṃsakas theories are primarily theories about the process by which we come to understand the meaning of a sentence (*vākyarthabodhaprākriyā*). The crucial distinction might be put this way. Prabhākaras principle understands of sentence-meaning first, word-meaning later; Kumārilas is: understanding of word-meanings first, sentence-meaning later. This is all fine, as long as one assumes that sentences and words do not overlap. Once the assumption is abandoned, however, the issue collapses or at least it must be reformulated.

On the Nyāya view of sentence-meaning, it is a combination of both *anvitābhīdhānavāda* and *abhihitānvayavāda*. The former pattern is used in accounting for our understanding of minimal sentences (*khaṇḍavākya*-those sentences expressed in *varṇas*) and the later pattern is used in accounting for our understanding of complexes of minimal sentences (*mahāvākya*). That is on the basis of part-whole analysis, we can understand the unitary meaning through *anvitābhīdhānavāda* and complex meaning (*vyākṛti-akṛti-jāti*) through *abhihitānvayavāda*.<sup>36</sup> Such a view is clearly different from the views of the Prabhākaras and Bhaṭṭa who each limits their attention to the levels above that of 'minimal sentences'. The result is that each of the three readings of Nyāya illustrated in quotes at the outset turns out to be a partial truth.<sup>37</sup>

It is obvious from the above discussion that these various theories of meaning are integral parts of their corresponding philosophical system. The differences which we have recorded in these theories are again a projection of the differences inherent in their own philosophical systems from which they have stemmed out. We are now at the end of our chapter where we have to mention the solution given by the Buddhist Logician as to how to get rid off unwanted crowding of ontological commitments.

### **Buddhist theory of Meaning**

Buddhist theory of meaning has acquired a very conspicuous position in the whole intellectual discussion of language and meaning. The theory has been in constant debate in the tradition for its unique theoretical position. The Buddhist philosopher and logician differ in a very significant way from the views and speculation we have examined so far. They refute the reality of



categories like class, universal, inherence, etc., and strongly argue for the fictional character of the whole verbal cognition. They state that a word does not refer to any real entity, whether specific or universal. Now, the question arises- If words do not signify any real object, then what is its signification? According to Buddhist, what is signified by a word is neither a subjective idea nor an objective reality, but something fictitious and unreal, which is neither here nor there. The fact of matter is that both the speaker and hearer apprehends infect and in reality a mental image, a subjective content and not any objective fact, but the speaker thinks that he present an objective fact to the hearer and the hearer too is deluded into thinking that the presented meaning is not a mental image, but an objective verity. The speaker and the hearer are both laboring under a common delusion like two ophthalmic patients who see two moons and communicate their experience to each other. Thus, the function of a word is to exclude that to which the word does not apply i.e., cow=not non-cow (*anyavyāvṛtti*). This view is known as *Apohavāda*, which denies any corresponding relation between language and ultimate reality or universal as a reality and language. It contains three stages, namely:

- Negativism - Dignāga and Dharmakīrti
- Positivism - Śāntarakṣita
- Dialectism – Ratnakīrti

Moreover, these three forms in which the Buddhist theory of Import of word is presented differ only in their emphasis concerning the positive and negative signification of words. Further, though we cannot present here the whole tradition of debate between the Buddhist's and other schools, we

can very selectively brief out/summarized the debate in the following manner. Dignāga (4<sup>th</sup> century) assimilates thoughts related to language and verbal comprehension in his tradition and provides the logical - epistemological base to it. He developed this approach and put it forward in the form of a full - fledged theory (*apoha*). The theory is taken note by Bhāmaha (5<sup>th</sup> century), one of the earliest poeticians in Indian literature, who criticized the theory of its negative content. Then comes Dharmakīrti (7<sup>th</sup> century) who developed and systematized the *apoha* theory. After him the theory came for very radical criticism- first in the hands of Uddyotakara and then of Kumāriḷa bhāṭṭa. Later Buddhist scholars, especially Śāntarakṣita gave a new orientation to the theory of *apoha*. This position was again criticized by two great Naiyāyikas: Vācaspati Miśra and Jayanta Bhāṭṭa. Ratnakīrti came after them and squarely defended the Buddhist position by refuting the objections raised by these scholars. He also established the master's original ideas as sound and valid. Then comes another Naiyāyika, Udayanā who again criticized the reinterpreted theory of *apoha*. But from Buddhists side we do not come out of their own theoretical web to initiate a debate of universal nature.

We end our discussion here because a comprehensive discussion of this theory constitutes the core subject - matter of the next chapter. Moreover, we present this proliferous debate in the same order in the next chapter. In this way, one can find that almost each philosophical system has something to articulate on language as per the basic frame work of the respective philosophical system adding thereby to the richness of the Indian philosophy of language.

### Notes and References

1. For details, see Plato (1920), p. 289.
2. *sāṅgam api padārthānām astivābhidheyatvajñāyatvānī* – *Padārthadharmāṣa-mgraha*, III.11. Quoted in S. Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (1957), p. 399.
3. As already explained in the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter on ‘The Development of the Theory of Perception in Abhidharma and Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda Tradition’.
4. According to Advaitins, there is one and only one ultimate real and that is the Brahman and Brahman is beyond the range of language.
5. For detail, see John Hospers (2001), p. 20.
6. The classic statement of the Ideational theory was given by the 17<sup>th</sup> century British philosopher, John Locke, in his ‘Essay Concerning Human Understanding’, section 1, Chapter-2, book III. ‘The use, then, of words is to be sensible marks of ideas; and the ideas they stand for are their proper and immediate signification’. For detail, see Alston (1964), p. 22.
7. Ibid., p. 26.
8. For detail, see John Hospers (2001), p. 19.
9. ‘*samketo lakṣaṇa cārtha padavṛttih*’ *Śaktivāda-I*.
10. *Siddhāntamuktāvali*, p. 265. ‘*śaktiś ca padena saha padārthasya sambandhaḥ*’
11. *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra*, I.1.5: *aytpattikas tu śabdasyārthena sambandhaḥ*.
12. For detail, see K.K. Raja (2000), p. 20.
13. *VP*, I.23: *nityāḥ śabdārthasambandhāḥ*.
14. Ibid., III. 3.29: *indriyāṅām svaviṣayeṣv anādir योगyatā yathā anādir*

*asttaiḥ śabdānāṃ sambandho योग्याता तथै।* This verse is also explained to mean that each word has a natural capacity to express its meaning; it is this natural capacity of the word that is called its denotative power.

15. See, *Nyāyasūtra*, II.1.55. 'sāmayikatvācchabdārthasampratyayasya'.

16. See, *Siddhāntamuktāvali*, p. 266.

*ādhunikasamketite tu na śaktir iti sampradāyah. navyās tu īsvarecchā na śaktiḥ kiṃ tu icchaiva, tenādhunikasamketite 'pti śaktir asty evety ahuh.*

17. For instance, the relation between the word 'jar' and the object 'jar' is a direct and eternal relation called *śakti*.

18. Bhartṛhari also refers to these two types of relationship. He says: *Sanḥeta* is of two kinds, *ājānika* or permanent, and *ādhunika* or modern; the former is the permanent primary relation, while the latter refers to the technical terms with their specialized and well-defined meanings, *VP* quoted in *Śabdaśaktiprakāśika*, loc. Cit: *ājānikaś cādhunikaḥ sanḥeto dividho mataḥ nitya ājānikas tatra yā śaktir iti gīyate kādācitkas tu ādhunikah sāstrakāradibhiḥ kṛtaḥ.*

19. Even the Buddhist accepts the causal relation between the *śabda* and the *vikalpa* or the mental construct of the image, (*kāryakaraṇabhāva*), and recognize a reciprocal relationship between the two. We will take this point again in the following pages when we will discuss the Buddhist theory of meaning.

20. *anādinidhanam brama śabdatattvam yadaḥsaram / vivartate 'rthabhāvena prakriyājagatoyataḥ // VP I.1.*

21. *na śosti pratya loka yaśśabdānugamādrte / anuviddhamiva jñānam sarvam śabdena bhāsatē // Ibid., I.123.*

22. *dvāvupādānaśabdeṣu śabdan śabdavido viduḥ /*  
*eko nimittam sabdānām aparō 'rtha prayujyate // Ibid., I.44.*
23. *nādasya kramajanmatvāt na pūrvo nāparścasah /*  
*akramaḥ kramarūpena bhedavāniva jāyatē //*  
*pratibimbam yathānuyatra sthitām toyakriyāvasāt /*  
*tātpravṛttimivānveti sa dharmāḥ sphoṭanādayoḥ // Ibid., I.48-49.*
24. It points to the fact that *śabda* and *artha* both remains inseparable in the mind prior to their outward manifestation. When it is manifested, its two aspects, the word aspect and the meaning aspect, appear to be differentiated.
25. For detail, see Tandra Patnaik (2007), p. 56.
26. For detail, see K.S. Prasad (2002), p. 81.
27. Kumārilabhaṭṭa, *Ślokaṁvārtika Sphoṭa*, V.69.
28. Śaṅkara, *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* on I.3.28.
29. For detail, see R.K. Mishra (1965), p. 33.
30. *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra*, II.1.46-47., Quoted in K.K. Raja (2000), pp. 152-154.
31. *Tantravārttika*, p. 445  
*prthagbhūtair eva padair itaretarainirapekṣaiḥ svaṣu*  
*padārtheṣūkteṣu tatsaṃsargād eva padavyāpārānapekṣo*  
*vākyāthapratyayo bhavati.* Quoted in Raja (2000), p. 204.
32. S.C. Chatterjee (1939), p. 341.
33. K.K. Raja (1963), p. 203.
34. R.C. Pandeya (1963), p. 76.
35. G. Sastri (1959), pp. 172-173.
36. *NS* and *NSBH*, II.2.68- *vyākṛtijātyastū padārthaḥ.*
37. For detail, see Karl Potter (1975), *JIP* 3, pp. 209-216.