LANGUAGE AS REVELATION

Introduction :

Several years ago I was working as a cognitive psychologist on a Canada Council project aimed at founding a new field of psychological research—" epistemological psychology " as we have called it.[1] The general question upon which we focused was " How does one know ? " both philosophically and psychologically. The specific question which has continued to fascinate me is " How do we know via language ? " How do both the ordinary words of everyday conversation and the special words of scriptural revelation convey their meaning, their truth to us ? In Western philosophy, psychology, and theology, I found this study very difficult to persue because of the academic alienation which exists between these three disciplines.[2] In traditional Indian thought, however, I found that there were no brick walls between disciplines and that the question as to how language conveys and reveals word meanings had a long and respected academic parentage. In my study of Indian thought, I was guided by my former teacher, Professor T. R. V. Murti back to the ancient debate between Kumārila Bhaṭṭa the Mīmāṁsaka, and Bhartṛhari, the great Grammarian. I found myself partricularly drawn to Bhartṛhari's thinking because it spanned the diverse disciplines of philosophy, psychology and theology, and because it has been debated right up to the present day.[3] In addition it seemed to relate in a very creative way both to very ancient concepts of language, such as Plato's notion of eternally existing ideas, and to some very modern notions, such as Chomsky's image of innate universal grammatical structures.

Before going further let me pause to say a brief word about the way in which two key words " language " and " revelation " are understood in Indian Hindu or Brāhmanical thought. " *Language* " is used in a rather special sense in Hindu thought. It is always conceived of in terms of speech. Inner thought is

internal speaking, and written words are literal representations of spoken speech (witness the precise phonetic nature of Sanskrit). Vāk is the faculty of speech which functions both to reveal meaning to a person and to communicate, on the basis of the meaning revealed, between persons. Vāk or speech is conceived of not only in its external form as uttered words and sentences, but also as the internal thoughts which precede and follow from such sounds. In Bhartṛhari's view vāk is seen to have a hierarchy of levels, each of which is increasingly internalized.[4] However, perhaps the most important point to note here is that the chief characteristic of language or vāk for Bhartṛhari is its inherent meaningfulness.

Revelation here refers to the function of language in its "unveiling" of reality. The basic idea here is that language or vāk is pregnant with meaning which is at first hidden, but bursts forth (*sphuṭ*) into manifestation with the help of uttered sounds. Thus all language, when correctly spoken and understood, is taken as removing the veil of human ignorance (avidyā) and revealing knowledge of reality. In modern terminology, this would be described as "general revelation" in that the whole of language is seen as pregnant with divine meaning. It is distinct from, but establishes the basis for, the more theological conceptions of "special revelation."[5] An example of special revelation in Hindu thought would be the *mahāvākyas* or great criterion sentences which are taken (by the Vedāntists particularly) as bringing out the essential meaning which is hidden in all language.[6] But to be understood, any special revelation of great scriptural sentences depends on the general capacity of language for conveying meaning, and it is precisely with this general revelation of language that Bhartṛhari's Sphoṭa theory is concerned. Let us now examine first Bhartṛhari's definition of sphoṭa, and second, the way in which this sphoṭa is said to convey word meaning, and third the levels of language which result.

I. The Definition of Sphoṭa :

Before giving a detailed definition of the sphoṭa conception, let me take a moment to sketch the metaphysical background against and out of which Bhartṛhari's thinking developed.

Metaphysical Background :

The Indian literature on the nature of language is vast. Each of the different philosophical systems has put forth its own view of language and criticized the views of others. For our present purposes let me simply indicate the positions taken in this complex debate, which covers many centuries, by a few summary sentences.[7] Indian speculations on language (vāk) began with the Veda and have continued to the present day. In the *Ṛg Veda* it is said that there are as many words as there are manifestations of Brahman.[8] The *Brāhmaṇas* and *Upaniṣads* continue to equate vāk and Brahman.[9] Murti summarizes the position well, " The Brāhmanical tradition stemming from the Veda takes language as of Divine origin (Daivī Vāk), as Spirit descending and embodying itself in phenomena, assuming various guises and disclosing its real nature to the sensitive soul ".[10] The Sāṅkhya-Yoga, Mīmāṁsā, Vedānta, the school of Grammar and Kashmir Śaivism are not only loyal to this tradition but give further systematic development to these early ' seed ' concepts, with the Grammarian Bhartṛhari producing the Sphoṭa theory.

The Sphoṭa theorists, along with the Mīmāṁsakas, hold that the revelatory power of words (*śabda*) is both divine in origin and the means by which the divine may be known. This viewpoint is opposed by the Cārvākas, the Buddhists, the Vaiśeṣikas and the Naiyāyikas who hold language to be more or less conventional in nature.[11] Just as we create names for our children or for scientific discoveries, and thereby initiate new conventions, so also the origination of all words should be understood. In this view all words are the results of convention. Arguing against this viewpoint the early Grammarians Pāṇini and Patañjali contend that words (*śabda*) and their relation with meaning are eternal, underived and impersonal.[12] Both the Mīmāṁsakas and the Grammarians adopt the view that the relation between the uttered word and its transcendent meaning is pre-established. But these two schools differ as to what aspect of speech is the primary unit that is correlated to the meaning. For the Mīmāṁsakas it is the phoneme or letter-sound (e.g. the " c " in " cow ") which is the basic given; for the Grammarians it is the totality of the word or sentence (the whole idea being conveyed) that is prior. Taken to its logical conclusion this latter view results

in an ascending hierarchy of levels of speech. Since Bhartṛhari's logic is that "the whole is prior to the parts" this means that the word is subsumed by the sentence, the sentence by the paragraph, the paragraph by the chapter and the chapter by the book, and so on until all speech is identified with Brahman. From this conclusion, Bhartṛhari also makes the following deduction : There is no cognition without the words.[13] This seems to agree with the contention of at least one modern linguist, Edward Sapir, that there is no thought without language.[14] As Professor T. R. V. Murti puts it, it is not that we have a thought and then look for a word with which to express it; or that we have a lonely word which we seek to connect with a thought. "Word and thought develop together, or rather they are the expressions of one deep spiritual impulse to know and to communicate."[15] With this background in mind, let us now take a detailed look at Bhartṛhari's notion of Sphoṭa.

The Definition of Sphoṭa :

For Bhartṛhari, the word or sentence when taken as an indivisible meaning-unit is the *sphoṭa*. The technical term sphoṭa is difficult to translate into English. Sometimes the word "symbol" is used for sphoṭa, while at other times the Greek conception of logos and the Platonic notion of the innate idea have been suggested as approximating sphoṭa. In his *Sphoṭavāda*, Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa describes sphoṭa in two ways : as that from which the meaning burts or shines forth; and as an entity which is manifested by the spoken letters or sounds.[17] The sphoṭa may thus be thought of as a kind of two-sided coin. On the one side it is manifested by the word-sound, and on the other side it simultaneously reveals the word-meaning. In a more philosophic sense, sphoṭa, may be described as the transcendent ground in which the spoken syllables and conveyed meaning find themselves united.

Perhaps an illustration may help us to grasp Bhartṛhari's notion of sphoṭa. In Western thought the whole person is sometimes referred to as having two aspects to his being, a body and a soul. Ordinarily we do not see a person as being a physical body and nothing more. So also we should not take a meaningful word to be anything more than its spoken syllables. Just as our body depends upon our inner mind and soul, so do our spoken utter-

rances depend upon the inner word or idea they manifest for their meaning. And just as the person is really a unity of his body and soul, so also our language is a unity of the spoken sounds and the inner idea or meaning. It is this unity of word-sound and word-meaning that Bhartṛhari calls the sphoṭa.

The process of speaking is described as follows : At first the whole word or idea exists in the mind of the speaker as a unity or sphoṭa. It is as it were an immediate intuition with, as yet, no subject-object distinction. But when the speaker utters it, he produces a sequence of different word-sounds so that what is really one—the sphoṭa or whole idea—appears to be many—all the words of the sentence or paragraph. From the listener's point of view the process is reversed. The listener, although at first hearing a series of uttered words, ultimately perceives the uttered sentence as a unity—the same unity or sphoṭa from which the speaker began—and it is then that the moment of communication between speaker and listener occurs.[18]

The inner idea or meaning-whole is unitary, but it may have as many different manifestations as there are speakers to utter it—each with his own peculiar way of putting it into words, his own speed of speaking, his own accent, etc. The external manifestation may have an infinite variety, but the inner meaning of the sphoṭa remains unchanged.

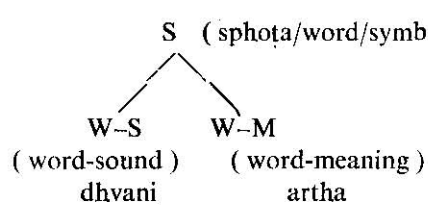
The same thing seems to hold for our experience of poetry. Let us take, for example, the word "love", which Bhartṛhari would call a sphoṭa. Although the meaning of the word love may ultimately be experienced as unitary, the verbalization and communication of that insightful knowledge may well require the employment of a variety of evocative poetic expressions—as for example, in Shakespeare's sonnet ;

Let me not to marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove;
O, No ! it is an ever-fixed mark,
That looks on tempests, and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.

Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me pro'd,
I never writ, not no man ever lov'd.[19]

In this sonnet, Shakespeare, through the use of his poetic imagination, composes a variety of expressions which when uttered manifest in the listener's mind an intuitive perception of the word-symbol "love" and its meaning. Different people may experience the manifestation of unitary word meaning differently. For some, it may come as a sudden flash of intuition, full-blown in its development. Others, however, may experience a gradual and progressive revelation through repeated exposures to the suggestive poetic phrases. In Bhartṛhari's theory, the word-sphoṭa "love" is a given, unitary and eternal in nature, but, as the history of literature, religion and marital relations evidences, a given requiring many gross nādas or imperfect empirical expressions before its meaning is fully grasped or intuitively realized in one's mind. In Indian aesthetics, the philosophical analysis of language in terms of the sphoṭa theory seems to have been assumed as a basic premise, and at the hands of scholars such as Abhinavagupta, Bhartṛhari's notion of word-sound or dhvani dveloped into the concept of *rasa* or poetic bliss[20].

Having illustrated the sphoṭa concept, let us now briefly restate its definition in a simple diagram :



A sphoṭa is like a two-sided coin. Its external aspect is the uttered sound or written word which is perceived by our sense organs but serves only to manifest the sphoṭa's inner aspect. The inner aspect is the expressive word meaning which inherently resides in all beings.[21]

Reason for Phenomenalization of the Sphoṭa :

If it is assumed with Bhartṛhari that the whole or sphoṭa is the basic unit of language, the question may then arise as to why this unity should ever come to be expressed in the diversity which is commonly called speech. In Bharthṛari's view, it is because the sphoṭa itself contains an inner energy (*kratu*) which, seeks to burst forth (sphuṭ) into expression. What appears to be unitary is thus seen to contain all the potentialities of multiplicity and complexity like the seed and the sprout or the egg and the chicken.[22] In the *Vākyapadīya*, Bhartṛhari suggests two ways in which the energy of speech (kratu) causes the phenomenalization of the sphoṭa. On the one hand, there is the pent-up potentiality for bursting forth residing in the sphoṭa itself, while on the other hand there is the desire of the speaker to communicate.[23] Unlike thinkers who conceive of language in conventional or utilitarian terms,[24] Bhartṛhari finds language to contain and reveal its own telos. In his metaphysical speculations, with which we are not primarily concerned, Bhartṛhari identifies this telos with Brahman who is beginningless and endless and whose essence is the word (śabdatattva). Bhartṛhari, in fact, takes his position to the logical extreme and concludes, in line with the Vedic Seers, that from speech (vāk) the creation of the whole world proceeds.

Sphoṭa Defined as Sentence (Vākya Sphoṭa)

In the above it has been made clear that Bhartṛhari conceives of all beings as born with śabda or speech already present within. As the child grows this inner sphoṭa, which potentially can be developed into any language, is transformed into the language of the particular speech-community into which the child was born. When the young child utters his first single word ejaculations, "mamma", "dog", "cookie", etc. it is clear that whole ideas (as yet incompletely expressed) are being verbalized : e.g. "I want mamma !", "See the dog", "Give me a cookie !", etc. Even when a word is used merely in the form of a substantive noun (e.g. "tree"), the verb "to be" is always understood so that what is indicated is really a complete thought (e.g. "It is tree").[25]

Bhartṛhari observes that man does not speak in individual words. For him the chief reality in linguistic communication is the idea or meaning-whole of the indivisible sentence. Although he sometimes speaks about letters (*varṇa*) or individual words (*pada*) as meaning-bearing units (*sphoṭa*), it is clear that for Bhartṛhari the true from of the sphoṭa is the sentence.[26] Along with this emphases comes the notion that as we listen to a group of words composing a sentence, there is at some point a flash of insight or intuition (the cartoon "light-going-on" situation) in which the whole meaning of the sentence is comprehended. Bhartṛhari technically terms this experience *pratibhā*.[27] Pratibhā, in Indian thought is described as a super-normal perception which transcends the ordinary categories of time, space and causality, and has the capacity to directly "grasp" the real nature of things. The sentence is really a psychic entity, a mental symbol which in itself is the meaning. The mental perception of this meaning-whole (sphoṭa) is a case of pratibhā. Because the whole sentence meaning is inherently present in the mind of each person, it is quite possible for the pratibhā of the sphoṭa to be grasped by the listener even before the whole sentence has been uttered. More often, however, inference and reasoning may have to be applied to the words of the sentence so that the individual's cognition is brought to the level where the intuitive grasping (pratibhā) of the meaning whole (vākya-sphoṭa) becomes possible.

II. How the Sphoṭa Reveals Meaning :

The Grammarian Sphoṭa Theory as officially expounded by Bhartṛhari attracted both opponents and supporters. The chief opposition came, at a later time, from the Mīmāṁsaka Kumārila Bhaṭṭa. Kumārila's attack focused on the way in which the Sphoṭa theory conceived of word-sounds as revealing their meanings. The side of Bhartṛhari in this debate against Kumārila was taken by the skillful philosopher Maṇḍana Miśra. Maṇḍana's work entitled *Sphoṭasiddhi*, which is based on the *Vākyapadīya*, records the confrontation that takes place on this issue of how the word conveys meaning.

In the above definition of sphoṭa we have seen how Bhartṛhari maintains that the external word-sound should not be taken

as the objective reality since it serves only to reveal the inner word-meaning which is both a unified whole and the true object. Illustrations have been offered to support Bhartṛhari's view that it is the whole idea which occasions sound and not vice versa. While illustrations from ordinary experience can indicate that the Sphoṭa theory is not implausible, they can hardly be taken as proof of the theory's logical possibility. The latter requires that the existence of the inner word, as distinct from its sounds, be demonstrated in terms of logical necessity and consistency. This is precisely the task undertaken by Maṇḍana Miśra in his *Sphoṭa-siddhi*.[28] Maṇḍana applies his logical analysis not only to the Sphoṭa theory but also to the alternative hypothesis put forth by Kumārila.[29] As Gaurinath Sastri observes, Kumārila was the most formidable critic of the Sphoṭa theory—later writers have offered no new criticisms but only repeat Kumārila's arguments.[30] Kumārila, arguing against Bhartṛhari, maintains that the word or śabda, whether it be the sentence or the individual word, is nothing more than a collection of a word-sounds or spoken letters, and it is with this collection alone that the word-meaning is associated. When such a collection is brought to the mind of the hearer by the sounds uttered by the speaker, the hearer understands the meaning from the sounds alone. No mystical entity such as sphoṭa, need be postulated at all.[31] According to Bhartṛhari, however, "the essence of the Sphoṭa doctrine is the idea that the word, mainly in the form of the sentence and secondarily in the form of the individual word and the phoneme [the articulated letter sound], is an entity over and above the sounds and not a mere collection of them and that it is this entity which is the bearer of the meaning."[32] This is the argument in its most general form. Since this argument goes on at great length, in true scholastic form, I have simply summarized the chief points as fallows :

Outline of Chief Points in the Argument :

Kumārīla (Mīmāṁsa)	*Maṇḍana (Sphoṭa)*
1. Śabda (word) refers to phoneme as uttered.	1. Śabda refers to sphoṭa or indivisible word-whole which is a felt-fact in common experience.

Kumārila (*Mīmāṁsa*)	*Maṇḍana* (*Sphoṭa*)
2. Phonemes cause the understanding of meaning when grouped together in the form of words (pada).	2. Because of their ubiquitous and eternal nature, phonemes (as defined by Mīmāṁsakas) can only exist singly and cannot possibly co-exist as pada so as to convey meaning. This inability of the phonemes to convey meanings points to the sphoṭa as revealer of meaning.
3. Various suggestions as to how the phonemes could be grouped together so as to convey meaning :	3. Difficulties vitiating each suggestion :
(*a*) *e.g. seed.* Just as a seed will produce a new effect (sprout) when helped by other factors, so also the phonemes when combined with a group of helping factors (such as being uttered by the same person in a particular sequence) will result in the conveying of meaning.	(*a*) How can being uttered by the same person in a particular sequence make the discrete phonemes c-o-w into a word when each letter vanishes completely before the subsequent one is uttered ?
(*b*) *via saṁskāras.* Phonemes leave memory traces so that the traces of the earlier phonemes together with the utterance of the last phoneme conveys the meaning.	(*b*) Saṁskāras, like their original individual phonemes, have only discrete existences vanishing completely before subsequent ones come into existence—therefore no possibility for grouping into word or conveying meaning exists.

(*c*) *via apūrva.* Phonemes leave impressions different from the ones which cause remembrance, and are like apūrva in a sacrifice, where the unified result is different in nature from the individual causes (parts of the sacrifice). When spoken by a single person in a determinate order the apūrva of the phonemes inhere in the self so that when the last phoneme is uttered the śabda is understood and its meaning conveyed.	(*c*) Analogy from the apūrva of religious merit (which is based on an inference from scripture so as to validate the moral law) to the saṁskāras of phonemes rendering them capable of conveying meaning is unjustifiable. Rather it is the case that the ordinary memory traces of the phonemes reveal the already existing inherent sphoṭa which provides awareness of the whole and determines the order of the phonemes.
4. In the above view 3 (c) only one new thing (i.e. the special apūrva-like power) need be postulated, whereas Maṇḍana postulates two or three new things—a special saṁskāra and a sphoṭa (and a special power of that sphoṭa—conveying of meaning).	4. Only new thing postulated is sphoṭa itself and even that need not be postulated since it is directly perceptible. Saṁskāra referred to is the common memory trace which has the same object as that of the uttered phoneme (i.e. the sphoṭa). The unified sphoṭa was the original cause of the phoneme and is the end-object of both it and its saṁskāra. Thus, no special or illogical power, such as apūrva is postulated.

In this logical argument, it seems clear that Kumārila's attempt to identify śabda with the uttered phoneme is effectively discredited by the reasoning of Maṇḍana, who at the same time has vindicated Bhartṛhari's Sphoṭa theory.

Having supported Bhartṛhari's theory on logical grounds, Maṇḍana now gives a detailed analysis of the process by which

the sphoṭa is cognized. If this analysis is to support the above logical argument it must show : (1) how the sphoṭa may be comprehended using only the ordinary memory traces of the phonemes, and (2) that the sphoṭa is a perceivable entity and not a mere postulation. The process by which the sphoṭa is cognized is stated by Maṇḍana in his commentary on sūtra 18 of the *Sphoṭasiddhi* as follows. Each spoken sound or letter potentially reveals the whole of the sphoṭa, which is already latent in the listener's mind. However, the first letter of the word, only dimly begins to evoke that whole meaning in our awareness. The subsequent letters are needed to produce a clear cognition of the whole word. Upon hearing of the last letter (e.g. "w") along with the memory traces of the previous letters (e.g. "c" and "o"), the complete word (e.g. "cow") stands revealed in a unitary intuition or pratibhā.[33] Maṇḍana offers the analogy of a jeweller who examines the genuineness of a precious stone. His continuous gaze is really a series of cognitions, each of which perceives the genuineness of the stone but with increasing clarity. Each cognition leaves its saṁskāra or common memory trace. The last cognition, helped by the saṁskāra of the previous ones, fully perceives the genuineness of the stone but for the saṁskāras of the intervening cognitions, there would be no difference between the last one and the first one. An important point is that the jeweller is described as "expert", meaning that before beginning the examination he already had the image of a precious stone ingrained in his subconscious, and it was this image (like the inhering sphoṭa) which was revealed to the jeweller's mind by his series of partial perceptions.

Another example offered by Maṇḍana describes how from a distance one (if one is in India) may mistake a tree for an elephant. But if one keeps on looking at it, the tree is ultimately recognized in its true form. In this situation the truth has been arrived at through a series of errors. The sense organ (in this case the eye) has been in contact with the tree throughout. The errors of perception have had the tree as their object, but the cognitions produced by the eye have had an elephant as their form. When, however, the final or true cognition takes place, it has the form of the tree itself and is one with its object. But this true cognition has been arrived at by going through the series

of erroneous perceptions that preceded it. Now this change from error to true perception cannot be explained by factors such as change in distance, since simply standing on the same spot and gazing with intense concentration often produces the described result. According to Maṇḍana, "it is the previous cognitions (having tree as the object and the form of the elephant) leaving progressively clearer residual impressions, which become the cause of the clear perception of the tree".[34] There could have been no erroneous cognition of elephant had the tree not been there as an object for the sense organ to come into contact with in the first place. The error, therefore, may be described as misapprehension or vague perception. In the context of our discussion about words, the sphoṭa is similarly said to be the object of the cognition of each of the phonemes and yet it at first appears in the form of the phoneme. But through the the additional cognitions of the subsequent phonemes, the sphoṭa is seen with increasing clarity until with the uttering of the final phoneme the form of the phonemes has become identical with that of the sphoṭa. Here the phonemes are seen in a position which at first glance seems parallel to the snake in the famous rope-snake illusion of the Advaita Vedāntins. The perception of the rope as snake is error, but it is through the negating of the erroneous snake-perception that the true rope-perception is finally realized. And were it not for the prior existence of the rope, the erroneous perception would have lacked the necessary ground for its phenomenal existence. Similarly, in this case, the phonemes are seen as dependent upon the sphoṭa for their phenomenal existence but in that phenomenal existence as being the means by which the noumenal sphoṭa may be perceived. This apparent parallelism, however, does not hold up under closer analysis. The Advaita theory provides for only true or false cognitions and allows no progressive approximation to the real, as is the case in a series of erroneous sphoṭa perceptions. Whereas the Advaitin describes his error as being transcended via a single negation (e.g. as when it is realized "this is not snake"), the Grammarian holds that his error (e.g., the vagueness of the perception of the whole in the first phoneme) is positively overcome by the increasingly clear perception of the sphoṭa which the succeeding phonemes reveal. This analysis of how error is

overcome would seem to give weight to G. Sastri's suggestion, that in some ways the doctrine of reflection (ābhāsa) of the Kashmir Trika writers may provide the closest parallel to Sphoṭa theory. In the Kashmir Trika view consciousness (*caitanya*) is the only reality, and all external manifestation is held to be a reflection on consciousness as on a mirror. Error, in this view, occurs not because the initial perception has no existence, but because its reflection of the object captures or includes only a part of its totality and adds in other material (saṁskāras) taken from the old stock of memory. This error is positively transcended as the form of the reflection is progressively purified of memory material until it perfectly reflects the object. This perfect reflection, which is true knowledge, is further described as a union of the subjective and objective aspects of consciousness—a return to the oneness which is its essential nature.[35] From this brief glance at the Kashmir ābhāsa theory it would seem to provide a helpful parallel supporting the Sphoṭa view of the way in which the manifest phonemes erroneously but positively approximate their true object, the sphoṭa itself.

Returning to Maṇḍana, his explanation of the paradox as to how the indivisible sphoṭa appears as the phonemes, and the phonemes as the parts of the partless sphoṭa is as follows. He says it is the sounds that resemble one another which are the cause of both the error and the final correct cognition of the sphoṭa. If, for the manifestation of two different word-sphoṭas, one has to make similar movements of the vocal organs, the phonemes produced by these movements appear to be parts of both of the indivisible words.[36] This is an error which is fostered by the construction of such artificial devices as alphabet letters or word syllables, usually for teaching purposes. It is precisely because of this kind of confusion, says Maṇḍana, that sentences, words, and phonemes appear to have parts whereas in reality they have none.[37] The obverse of this applies to the sphoṭa. From the phenomenal viewpoint the sphoṭa "cow", for example, may appear to possess qualities such as accent, speed, loudness, time, place, and person in its utterrance. That these are qualities of the phenomenal sounds and not the noumenal sphoṭa is what makes possible the common recognition of the word cow in spite of its diversity of utterance. From the Sphoṭa viewpoint,

it is this noumenal grounding or basis that makes possible such things as the translation of thought from one phenomenal language to another.

III. Sphoṭa in Relation to the Levels of Language :

In the above discussion it is clear that, from the Sphoṭa viewpoint, language may be seen to operate on at least two levels. On one level there is pratibhā or the intuitive flash-like understanding of the sentence-meaning as a whole. On the other level there are the uttered words of the sentence. Bhartṛhari calls the latter *vaikharī vāk* (overt or elaborated speech), while the former is aptly designated as *paśyantī vāk* (speech which through pratibhā sees or perceives reality).[38] Between these two levels, says Bhartṛhari, there is a middle or *madhyamā vāk* corresponding to the vākya sphoṭa in its mental separation into sentence-meaning and a sequence of manifesting word-sounds, none of which have yet been uttered. According to Bhartṛhari, these are the three levels of language through which vāk passes whenever one speaks. Vāk, which is at first quite internal, is gradually externalized for the purpose of communication.[39] In this way Bhartṛhari accounts for all cognition as being necessarily identified with language, since these levels of language span the complete continuum of cognition.

Let us now briefly examine each level in somewhat more detail.[40] Vaikharī is the most external and differentiated level in which vāk is commonly uttered by the speaker and heard by the hearer. It is prāṇa or breath that enables the organs of articulation and hearing to produce and perceive sounds in a temporal sequence. Prāṇa may, therefore, be taken as the instrumental cause of vaikharī vāk. The chief characteristic of vaikharī vāk is that it has a fully developed temporal sequence. At this level individual peculiarities of the speaker (e.g. accent) are present along with the linguistically relevant parts of speech. Going further inwards, as it were, madhyamā vāk is the next level and its association is chiefly with the mind or intellect (buddhi). It is the idea or series of words as conceived by the mind after hearing or before speaking out. It may be thought of as inward speech. All the parts of speech that are linguistically relevant to the sentence are present here in a latent form. At this level

a variety of manifestation is possible. The same sphoṭa or meaning is capable of being revealed by a variety of forms of madhyamā, depending on the language adopted. Although there is no full temporal sequence of the kind experienced in sploken words, word and meaning are still distinct and word order is present. Therefore, temporal sequence must also be present along with its instrumental cause prāṇa. The next and innermost stage is paśyantī vāk. Paśyantī is the direct experience of the vākya-sphoṭa—of meaning as a noumenal whole. At this level there is no distinction between the word and the meaning and there is no temporal sequence. All such phenomenal differentiations drop away with the intuition of the pure meaning in itself. Yet there is present at this level a kind of "going-out" or desire for expression. This is the pratibhā "instinct", referred to above, which in one sense may be said to motivate the phenomenalization into sentences and words of the paśyantī vision, so that communication may occur. Thus the Vedic vision or dhī of the ṛṣi, which in itself is paśyantī, becomes phenomenalized so that by its uttered word men might rise above their ignorance and be grasped in their cognition by the revelation of ultimate reality. Therefore, there is a sense in which Veda and pratibhā are identified as paśyantī vāk. Since paśyantī is, by definition, beyond the level of differentiated cognition, it is impossible to define it in word-sentences. It is at the level of direct intuition and therefore must finally be understood through experience.

For Bhartṛhari the very ontological reality of vāk throughout its various levels also amounts to a description of the path by which mokṣa (ultimate freedom from ignorance) may be attained. In *Vākyapadīya* I : 14, we read, "It (Grammar) is the door to salvation, the remedy for all the impurities of speech the purifier of all the sciences and shines in every branch of knowledge".[41] The vṛtti following makes clear that use of corrupt forms of vāk is a cause of sin, and that the correct use of vāk not only reveals all knowledge, but at the same time, results in the acquiring of special merit through which one may become united with Śabdabrahman and eventually, by repeated repetition of this union, mokṣa is finally achieved. It is at the level of paśyantī vāk or pratibhā that such union, productive of mokṣa, is depicted. Iyer describes such a practice as *śabda-*

pūrvayoga or *vāgyoga* which he defines as a kind of meditation aimed at raising consciousness to the highest level of vāk.[42] Absence of differentiation or time sequence within the vākya-sphoṭa is held to be characteristic of this meditation. Iyer finds the required discipline described in the vṛtti on *Vākapadīya* I : 123 which he translates as follows :

> Taking his stand on the essence of the Word lying beyond the activity of breath (prāṇa), resting in one's self with all sequence eliminated,
>
> After having purified speech and after having rested it on the mind, after having broken its bonds and made it bond-free, after having reached the inner Light, he, with nis knots cut, becomes united with the Supreme Light.[43]

Although Bhartṛhari is emphatic that the study of the correct use and meaning of vāk is a means of attaining mokṣa, he does not describe the different stages of that spiritual ascent. As Iyer points out, Bhartṛhari seems to do little more than to observe the levels of vāk, particularly the vaikharī, madhyamā and paśyantī, and indirectly suggest that they are somehow connected with the processes of ascent to mokṣa.[44]

IV. Concluding Summary and Suggested Relevance for the Current Language Debate :

As a result of the above analysis, the following summary is offered of the major tenents in Bhartṛhari's Sphoṭa theory.

A. The primary unit of language is the sphoṭa or meaning-whole; its physical manifestation as a series of uttered words or phonemes is secondary.

(1) An uttered word or phoneme has no independent existence apart from the meaning-whole of which it is a part, i.e. the sentence (vākya-sphoṭa).

(2) The two aspects of word-sound (dhvani) and word-meaning (artha), differentiated in the mind (buddhi) and yet integrated like two sides of the same coin, constitute the sphoṭa.

(3) The primary meaning-whole or sphoṭa phenomenalizes into parts (i.e. padas or words and phonemes) becuase there is a potentiality to burst forth into disclosure

(sphuṭ) within the sphoṭa (self-revelation is the telos of language and consciousness). To put it another way, there is an inherent desire within the individual self to communicate—speech has an instinctive basis.

B. Meaning is communicated not by the summation of phonemes/padas or their special apūrva like powers, but by the progressive revelation of the inherent vākya-sphoṭa as the phonemes/padas are uttered.

(1) Sphoṭa is an *a priori* meaning whole, which is fully perceived in the mind of the speaker before he begins to speak, and is latent in the minds of all hearers. The uttered sounds serve only to manifest to the hearer the sphoṭa which is already latent in his consciousness, and which is identical with the speaker's initial sphoṭa.

(2) The manifesting of the sphoṭa in the cognition of the hearer is a process of perception, rather than inference. This process is characterised as a series of progressively clearer perceptions, the first having the highest degree of error, the last having no error at all.

(*a*) There are levels of language characterized by different degrees of phenomenalization of the sphoṭa.

(1) At the lower levels of vaikharī and madhyamā, the sphoṭa is limited by the function of time sequence which occurs in conjunction with prāṇa, and results in ordinary verbal cognition—overt speech and mental thought.

(2) At the higher level of paśyantī, ordinary verbal cognition is transcended and the noumenal meaning of the vākya-sphoṭa bursts forth in a flash of intuition or pratibhā.

Relevance of Sphoṭa Theory for Contemporary Language Debate :

Although no attempt is made here to review the vast Western discussion of the nature of language, it is perhaps appropriate to note that a nineteenth and early twentieth century renewal of interst in language in the West was influenced by scholars such as Von Humboldt,[45] Max Mullar,[46] and Cassirer,[47] all of whom gave considerable attention to Indian language and religion in terms of recent philosophy, the Sphoṭa theory of Bhartṛhari is seen to directly challenge some contemporary Western philosophers and their analysis of language in terms of empirical factuality and linguistic game theory.[48]

Among contemporary cognitive psychologists, the finding of Werner and Kaplan that both phonemes and material objects seem to possess an inherent expressiveness, and that this expressiveness is somehow basic to word meaning[49]—this finding is suggestive of the Brāhmanical view that langugage (vāk) is inherently meaningful. In his recent book, *Biology and Knowledge*, Jean Piaget suggests that knowledge results from a process of assimilation of sensory stimuli from the lower specialized sensory organs to the higher functions of the nervous system in accordance with a known autoregulatory cognitive model.[50] This would seem to support the Sphoṭa interpretation of hearing as an integrative process in which the phonemes are perceived as meaningful due to the cognitive structuring they are given by the sphoṭa. This parallel is further supported when Piaget notes that such an autoregulatory cognitive mechanism appears as a whole which is conserved throughout a series of transformations (in both the individuation and assimilation directions).[51] Piaget, of course, rejects the Sphoṭa claim that the knowledge model is innate, but admits the necessity for some kind of autoregulatory knowledge mechanism and recognizes the infinite regression which results when the *a priori* existence of such a mechanism (e.g. sphoṭa) is not admitted.[52] This assumption of the whole as *a priori* is also accepted by O. H. Mowrer when he suggests a human infant becomes able to say or hear a word by virtue of the fact that " he already ' knows ' what it sounds like and can practice the response against the model which already exists (in memory or ' imagination ') ".[53] The neurophysiological analysis of speech and brain mechanisms by Wilder Penfield also concludes with an integrative model which is similar to the Sphoṭa theory. Penfield finds that the speech mechanism consists of two integrated halves. There is a " sound unit ", a " conceptual unit " and an integrative connection between the two.[54] As is the case with the Sphoṭa analysis, Penfield finds that the conceptual unit seems to provide the neural integration for the speech unit. Penfield suggests that there is " conceptual storehouse " of such integrative speech mechanisms existing in the brain, but cautions that neither the place of storing nor the manner of their activation is understood.[55] Understanding of meaning occurs, he says, when the sound unit and the conceptual unit are established to-

gether with their interconnections. In Penfiled's theorizing the "conceptual unit" alone would seem equivalent to Bhartṛhari's artha, the "sound unit" to dhvani, and the "mental storehouse of authomatically integrated conceptual units" to the sphoṭas. But Penfield, along with most other Western thinkers, does not seem to have any notion that such an integrated conceptual unit or sphoṭa could be an object capable of inner perception or pratibhā.

The idea that there must necessarily be some kind of centra structuring mechanism which integrates incoming stimuli is also found in the recent Western discussion centered around Noam Chomsky's notion of universal grammatical structures as being innate withing the mind.[56] However, Chomsky (along with the other contemporary Western scholars discussed above) appears to differ significantly from the sphoṭa view in that whereas his central structures seem to be neutral—in terms of meaning content—the sphoṭa is conceived of as being the very essence of meaning. From the Sphoṭa viewpoint the pertinent question for modern Western scholars such as Chomsky, would be, "How can you have a non-meaningful or neutral structure when the very function of structuring or programming incoming stimuli necessarily assumes the pre-existence of meaning—otherwise would not the structuring occur on the basis of pure chance?" As is the case with a computer programme, the organizing programme or structure must itself possess a meaning logic, which is the essential element enabling the incoming stimuli to be processed into a meaningful results.

From this brief discussion it seems evident : (1) that there are key points of conceptual contact between East and West on the question "How do words convey and reveal meaning?"; (2) that the Sphoṭa theory has sufficient logical consistency and reasonableness (in terms of ordinary experience) to enter into debate with current Western positivistic notions of language; and (3) that the Sphoṭa theory can creatively challenge contemporary Western psychological notions of *neutral* speech structuring mechanisms. This dialogue between East and West promises to be exciting and to involve issues of real significance in relation to language and revelation.

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NOTES

1. This research was conducted by a team of psychologists at *The Centre for Advanced Study In Theoretical Psychology*, University of Alberta.

2. This work on the Western side still continues with the first publication soon to appear : Royce, J. R., Kessel, F. L., Coward, H., Egan, E., and Mos, L. *Epistemological Psychology : A Critical Review*, 1975.

3. See, for example, the recent books : K.A.S. Iyer, *Bhartṛhari*; and K. Kunhan Raja, *Indian Theories of Meaning*.

4. *The Vākyapadīya of Bhartṛhari*, I : 142, trans. by K. A. Subramania Iyear. Poona : Deccan College, 1965.

5. *A Handbook of Christian Theology*, ed. by M. Halverson and A. Choen. New York: World Pub. Co., 1958, " Revelation ", pp. 327-328.

6. K. S. Murty, *Reason and Revelation in Advaita Vedānta*. New York : Columbia University Press, 1959, pp. 88-98.

7. I have given a detailed survey of these positions in my as yet unpublished book entitled : *Sphoṭa Theory : A Philosophical and Psychological Analysis*, Cp. 2.

8. *R. V.* 5.10.2 and 10.114.8.

9. As the Sāṅkhya Āraṇyaka puts it, " The whole speech is Brahman". (3.3) Various symbols are used to indicate the divine nature of speech and its evolution to form creation, e. g. Prajāpati and vāk are viewed as male and female copulating to create the world. *(Katha. Br.*).

10. T. R. V. Murti, *Some Thoughts on the Indian Philosophy of Language*. Presidential Address to the 37th Indian Philosophical Congress, 1963, p. viii.

11. S. C. Chatterjee, *The Nyāya Theory of Knowledge*. Calcutta : University of Calcutta, 1965, pp. 319–321.

12. Not only is there no record of the establishment of an arbitrary convention, says Professor Murti, but the very idea of convention itself presupposes language. " To make conventions, words have to be used and understood by the persons participating in the convention. This is clearly circular. Invoking God does not help either. How could God make known his intentions, his conventions between words and their respective meanings to persons who did not use language already ?" T. V. R. Murti, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

13. *Vākyapadīya*, I : 123. Related to this point is the Grammarian's rejection of gestures as vehicles for communicating meaning. As Punyarāja puts it, the shaking of the head indicating negation does not communicate independent of words. The gesture serves to make one think of the word " no " before it can communicate the meaning of negation or refusal. P. K. Chakravarti, *The Linguistic Speculations of the Hindus*. Calcutta : University of Calcutta, 1933, p. 72.

14. Edward Sapir, *Language*, New York : Harcourt, Brace and World-Inc., 1949, p. 15.

15. T. R. V. Murti, *op. cit.* p. 3.

16. Gaurinath Sastri, *The Philosophy of Word and Meaning*, Calcutta : Sanskrit College, 1959, pp. 102–103.

17. Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa *Sphoṭavāda*. Madras : The Adyar Library. 1946, p. 5.

18. *Vākyapadīya*, I : 44–46.

19. William Shakespeare, *The Works of William Shakespeare*. London Frederick Warne and Co., 1893, Sonnet §116, p. 1110.

20. For a convincing demonstration of this contention, see Tarapada Chakrabarti, *Indian Aesthetics and the Science of Language*. Calcutta : Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1971.

21. The above diagram is a modified version of the one presented by D. M. Datta, *The Six Ways of Knowing*. Calcutta : University of Calcutta 1960, p. 257.

22. *Vākyapadīya*, *op. cit.*, vṛtti, on I : 51, p. 58.

23. *Ibid.*, I : 1 vṛtti, p. 1.

24. For example, the early Buddhists, the Cārvākas, or in modern thought the Positivists.

25. *Vākyapadīya*, *op. cit.*, vṛtti on I : 24–26, p. 31.

26. *Ibid.*, see especially the *Second Kāṇḍa* in which he establishes the vākya–sphoṭa over against the view of the Mīmāṁsakas.

27. *The Vākyapadīya*, ed. and trans. by K. R. Pillai. Delhi : Motilal Banarsidass, 1971, II : 153 ff., pp. 72–73.

28. *Sphoṭasiddhi of Maṇḍana Miśra*, English trans. by K. A. Subramaina Iyer. Poona : Deccan College, 1966.

29. *Ibid.*, sūtra 6, p. 16.

30. *The philosophy of Word and Meaning*, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

31. *Ślokavārtika, op. cit.,* Sūtra V. Section 12, pp. 261–268. It is of interest to note here that Śaṅkara offers essentially the same argument against the Sphoṭa Theory. See Śaṅkara's Bhaṣya on the *Brahma Sūtras* 1.3.28.

32. K. A. Subramania Iyer, "Introduction" to *Sphoṭasiddhi, op. cit.,* p. 3.

33. *Sphoṭasiddhi,* sūtra 18, p. 44.

34. *Ibid.,* sūtra 19. Similar arguments are offered to show how the progressively clearer perception cannot be attributed to defects of the senses or memory through resemblance, p. 49.

35. K. C. Pandey, *Abhinavagupta.* Varanasi : Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, 2nd ed., 1963, the ābhāsa theory is summarized on pp. 400–427.

36. *Sphoṭasiddhi, op oit.,* sūtra 20, pp. 51–52; and *Vākyapadīya,* I : 88, "Vṛtti".

37. *Ibid.*

38. *Vākyapadīya, op. cit.,* I : 142.

39. *Bhartṛhari, op. cit.,* p. 144.

40. The following summary depends mainly upon Iyer's presentation of Bhartṛhari's position in *Bhartṛhari, ibid,* pp. 144–146.

41. Iyer's translation, *op. cit.,* p. 21.

42. *Bharitrhari, op. cit* p. 145.

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Ibid.,* p. 404.

45. See, for e. g. Cp. 13, "The Word Unit : The Incorporative Capacity of Language" in Wilhelm von Humboldt's *Linguistic Variability and Intellectual Development,* trans. by G. C. Buck and F. A. Raven, Florida : University of Miami Press, 1971 (Orig. German Pub. 1836).

45. K. M. Max Muller, *Lectures on the Science of Language,* Delhi : Munski Ram Manchar Lal (1861), reprint 1965.

47. E. Cassirer, *Language and Myth.* New York : Dover Pub. Inc., English trans. by S. Langer, 1946. This work, which evidences considerable influence from the Brāhmanical concept of speech (vāk), formed the basis for much of the thinking upon which Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* depends. (See "Translator's Preface", p. vii ff.).

48. See, for example, the view of L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,* London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963.

49. H. Werner and B. Kaplan, *Symbol Formation,* New York : John Wiley and Sons, 1963.

50. J. Piaget, *Biology and Knowledge,* Edinburgh University Press, 1971, pp. 36–37.

51. *Ibid.,* p. 35.

52. Loc cit.

53. O. H. Morer, *Learning Theory and the Symbolic Processes.* New York : John Wiley and Sons, 1960, p. 277.

54. W, Penfield and L. Roberts, *Speech and Brain Mechanisms.* Princeton : Princton University Press, 1959, p. 246.

55. *Ibid.,* p. 233.

56. Noam Chomsky, *Language and Mind.* New York : Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968, p. 76.

ŚAṄKARA'S CONCEPT OF ADHYĀSA : A TEXTUAL INTERPRETATION

The concept of 'adhyāsa' furnishes the one single clue to the understanding of the Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkar. This is evidently the reason why Śaṅkara in his commentary on the Brahmasūtras begins with an analysis of the concept, [why the portion of the text known as 'Adhyāsabhāṣya' forms the prelude to Śaṅkara's Brahmasūtra-bhāṣya, otherwise called Śārīraka mīmāṁsā]. Tradition has attached the greatest importance to it, and the two schools of Advaita Vedānta, commonly known as the Vivaraṇa and the Bhāmati schools, have bestowed upon it most cautious attention, and generations of adherents of both the schools have elaborately commented and reviewed upon it. In fact, most of the later writers, instead of presenting glossaries impartially on the entire text of Śaṅkara's Brahmasūtra-bhāṣya, have, in their selective approach, been rather over-thorough in their analysis of Śaṅkara's concept of 'adhyāsa' since they considered it as most vital for the philosophy of the Advaita. [Even in our own times, a galaxy of renouned scholars and great masters in the subject, like Profs. S. Radhakirshnan, K. C. Bhattacharyya, M. Hiriyanna and Drs. S. N. Dasgupta, Belvalkar and a host of others have very carefully reviewed the significance of the concept in the context of Śaṅkara's philosophy.] It becomes, therefore, a matter of shock and surprise when we are told that 'this chapter which is most important in his entire Brahmasūtrabhāṣya has been utterly misunderstood' and is given 'a cursory treatment by his commentators'.[1] It is possible that the person responsible for this over-bold pronouncement regards all treatments, however, elaborate and lengthy, as cursory, if in them the fundamental issue, raised and discussed, is, as he claims, 'utterly misunderstood'. And, it may also be that the proposition 'all classical treatment on the issue is cursory since in it the issue is utterly misunderstood' is intended to be taken as covertly analytical—no treatment of the concept of 'adhyāsa' can be regarded as enlightened and thorough if it does not fall in line with or veer round the one indisputable interpretation furnished at long last by this new commentator of Śaṅkara.