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**INTENTION AND CONVENTION
IN COMMUNICATION —
REUNDERSTANDING BHARTṚHARI**

*Four are the definite grades of speech
The learned and wise know them
Three of these are deposited in secret
They indicate no meaning to the common man.
Men speak the fourth grade of speech
Which is phonetically expressed.*

Rg Veda, 1.164,45.

In view of the recent developments in the area of philosophy of language, there has been a gradual shift of interest from *form* to the *language act*. Language is no more considered to be a simple matter of phonetics, syntax and convention, but a complex network of activities involving the speaker's intention, hearer's understanding, context of speech, linguistic meaning, intended meaning and many more elements. So the recent discussion on the philosophy of language marked a tendency to cross the boundaries of *linguistic meaning*. These new developments prompt me to take stock of a very ancient, yet a very bold philosophy of language propounded by Bhartrhari. I strongly feel that the endeavour is not totally fruitless. My task is not in any way associated with the romance of reliving the past. Rather, it is undertaken with the intention of getting some insights from the past to understand the present better. As Bhartrhari himself puts it, "the goddess of learning does not smile on those who neglect the ancients"¹. However, I also make it clear that my intention is not to pass any judgement on the relative superiority of either Bhartrhari or recent thinkers in the area of study, but to examine how these two trends of thought separated by several centuries explicate some central issues in philosophy of language.

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The philosophical discussions on the problem of language and meaning during the last four decades are dominated by two distinctive strands of thought. On the one hand the formalists like Frege, early Wittgenstein, Chomsky projected language as a rule-governed activity; on the other hand, the communication-intention theorists like later Wittgenstein, Grice, Austin and others highlighted the functionalistic and communicative dimension of language. Both the schools agree that language is a rule-governed activity but they differ regarding what should be considered to be the primary meaning. For the Formalists, *linguistic meaning* is primary, whereas for the latter, the *communicative meaning* is primary. In other words, the communication-theorists argue that the fundamental concept of meaning should be understood in terms of 'speaker's *meaning something* by an audience- directed utterance on a particular occasion'. As a result they contest the formalists' thesis that the rules of syntax and convention are the only things which need to be taken into account if one has to understand the concept of language. They rather insist that the rules and conventions are explicable in terms of the communication-intention. Grice even goes to the extent of arguing that it is possible to expound the concept of communicative meaning without presupposing the notion of linguistic meaning. He shows that a system of convention can be modified to adjust the needs of intention to communicate, which we can scarcely imagine to exist before the system existed. And these modifications, in turn, can create the possibility of thought which would not have been possible without presupposing these modifications. This proves that language is not just a reproductive activity on the part of the speaker; it is creative too. There is always a scope for modifications and enlargements in the area of linguistic meaning, making language a living affair. There is always an interplay between the rules and conventions on the one hand, and the intention to communicate, on the other. As Strawson succinctly puts it, "Primitive communication-intentions and successes give rise to the emergence of a limited conventional meaning- system, which makes possible its own enrichment and development which in turn makes possible the enlargement of thought and communication-needs to a point at which there is once more pressure on existing resources of language which is in turn responsive to such pressure. And of course there is an element of mystery in this; but so there is in human intellectual and social creativity any way"². The communication-intention thesis definitely unfolds a very important dimension of language by exploring beyond the limits of the linguistic

meaning. One may not agree with Grice on the point that communication—intention itself is sufficient to explain the conception of meaning without any reference to the rules of convention and syntax. But, at the same time, no body can deny that a close relation between the communicative needs and rules of convention should be presumed, if one has to conceive language as a living social affair. Still, it seems that the presumption about this relationship is not adequate enough, if one intends to investigate the nature of language and its capacity to convey meaning. It becomes mandatory for him to examine the nature of the relationship between the communicative intention and the rules of syntax and convention. The element of creativity that is a part of linguistic expression, which Strawson prefers to leave aside by calling it “an element of mystery”, should be explored further to have a comprehensive idea about the true basis of the communicative role of language. Besides, there are certain baffling questions about linguistic communicability which needs considerable attention, viz, Is linguistic communication possible just because the speaker expresses his intention to communicate through the uttered speech? If so, then why in certain cases, the hearer, inspite of listening to the complete utterance by the speaker, fails to grasp the meaning? Again, how, in certain cases, even before the speaker has completed his utterance, the hearer grasps the meaning? These questions make one uncomfortable about accepting the communication-intention theory of meaning without probing further into some of the basic concepts of communication. For any thinker who advocates the theory of communicative meaning, explication of three primary ideas becomes mandatory, viz, (I) the speaker, (II) the hearer, and (III) the common bridge of inter-subjectivity. The *speaker* is the one, who not only utters certain strings of words, but also *intends* to communicate his thought or belief to somebody. Moreover, he not only intends to communicate but through his speech-act, he intends ‘to secure an uptake’ (if I may be allowed to borrow the phrase from Austin) from the hearer. The *hearer* is the person who *understands* what the speaker intends to communicate through his utterance. He follows it up either by speaking his reactions, or by acting in accordance with the speaker’s intention. But the most crucial concept in case of communicative interpretation of meaning is providing a ground for the inter-subjectivity. In other words, one has to explain how the meaning is transferred from the speaker to the hearer? The obvious answer to such a question seems to be: because the speaker and the hearer belong to the same linguistic community,

they share the same rules and conventions of the "language in use". This answer seems so obvious that it prompts David Lewis to remark, "It is a platitude-something only a philosopher would dream of denying-that there are conventions in language"³. But the philosopher is like a devil, who often loves to tread the area where the angle dreads to step. And he does it with success and sufficient justifications. So philosophers of language analyse the concept of 'convention' and examine whether it can serve as a solid bridge for communication between the speaker and the hearer. Before I take up how the communication-intention theorists handle the issues, I deem it fit to discuss Bhartrhari's views on the notion of language, meaning and communicability.

II

Bhartrhari belongs to the grammarian tradition of India- a tradition which is never considered to be a part of the classical Indian systems of philosophy. This is one of the reasons for the apathy and indifference meted out to his philosophical contributions by the scholars on Indian philosophy. However, Bhartrhari's magnum opus *Vākyapadīya* stands out as a unique work in philosophy of language that once formed the part of Indian scholarship. My claim can be supported by the way Bhartrhari himself outlines the scope and limit of the so-called "grammatical" work. He specifies eight topics as coming within the fold of grammar, they are- (1) meaning determined through analysis (abstracted meaning), (2) given or stable meaning conveyed through the sentence (3) linguistic forms that figure in grammatical derivations (4) the linguistic forms that are to be analysed (5) cause-effect relationship between the intention of the speaker and the utterance (6) the relationship of capability between the forms of speech and meaning (7) the relations that lead to merit, and (8) the relations that bring out communication⁴. Does the "grammarians", as we understand the term today, deal with such questions? The topics specified above clearly indicate that Bhartrhari's interest is not confined to rules and forms of language, but a depth-analysis of the concepts of 'language' and 'meaning'. His aim is to explore the general conceptual conditions of language as a whole. In this sense, he is more a philosopher of language than a grammarian.

Before we proceed on with our task of examining Bhartrhari's views on the issues raised in the introductory part of the paper, one point

must be made clear. All through our discussion, we are going to use the term *Śabda*. The term is loosely translated as 'language'. But in English 'language' usually means "the uttered or written meaningful expressions determined by the rules of grammar and syntax". But *Śabda* has a broader denotation in Bhartrhari's philosophy. It not only refers to the uttered words, but the very linguistic potentiality and the principle of expressibility through words, which is present in any conscious being. We have already noted that Bhartrhari includes the problem of linguistic communicability within the scope of his study on language. *Vākya-Padīya* contains many insightful remarks about the problem, which shows his deep interest in the subject. The way he handles various issues associated with the problem of communicative meaning impels one to take serious note of his views. It also makes one confident enough to reinterpret his thought in modern philosophical idiom. At the outset, one may also note how his views broadly agree with the basic stand of the communication-intention theorists. He believes that language is primarily a means of communication. It is, no doubt, a rule-governed activity, but at the same time it is something more than that. He admits that there is an interplay between the needs to communicate and the rules of convention. Rather, he holds that the intention to communicate is conceptually prior to the rules of convention⁵. He very successfully proves this point by arguing that convention cannot be the basis of language because convention itself pre-requisites the use of language. Thus far there seems to be a broad agreement between Bhartrhari's and communication-intention theorist's views. But these points of similarities should not be stretched too far without a proper assessment of their respective approach to the subject-matter. So, it will be better for us to examine in more detail Bhartrhari's conception of language and meaning.

Bhartrhari conceives *Śabda* to a complex and multi-layered affair. The uttered level of *Śabda* is just tip of the ice-berg. Though the level of utterance is a very important phase of linguistic expressibility, it is not the whole of it. Even when the uttered speech is not at work, our linguistic competence does not slumber, for this is the very basis of our thought, consciousness, as well as knowledge of the world. Anything that exists is as good as non-existent unless and until it is named and linguistically conceived. So, the phonetic level of speech is nothing but externalisation of the very speech-potentiality present within us. Our phonetic expressions are not simply sounds caused by air and the vocal organ. It is the manifestation of *Śabdātva* or linguistic potency or

linguistic principle. This potency is manifested through *Prāṇa* (breath) and *buddhi* (intellect)⁶. So when a speaker intends to say something he thinks of the appropriate words to express his thought through verbal means. What is on the level of thought finds expression in the form of utterance with the help of vocal organ and articulation. The essence of Bharṭhari's theory of meaning is epitomised in his concept of *Sphoṭa* (etymologically speaking, that which has a tendency to burst forth, i.e., *Sphuṭ*). It is very difficult to find a correct English synonym for the term. It has been translated by different interpreters as 'Real-word', 'Meaning-essence', 'Real language', 'Logos' etc... But the standpoint from which I intend to handle Bharṭhari's philosophy of language, it will serve our purpose better, if the term *Sphoṭa* is understood as 'Linguistic Potency'. According to Bharṭhari, this potency is manifested through three levels of speech, viz., *Paśyanti Vāk* (unitary level of meaning, *Madhyamā Vāk* (mental level of speech) and *Vaikharī Vāk* (phonetic level of speech).

Since the modern discussions on language centres on the concept of uttered speech, it will be preferable for us to start with Bharṭhari's analysis of *Vaikharī Vāk*. This offers us a better scope to explicate his views in modern idiom; and also allows us to note how much of it is relevant and how much of it has become obsolete with time. The first and foremost point which I want to emphasize is that for Bharṭhari, our uttered speech is not just a string of inert and sterile symbols; it is an *act* of doing certain things. This is clear from his concept of *Artha Pravṛtti*. He specifies: "On language depend the principles governing the practical purposive activities..... What depends on language may be the speaker's intended meaning, the possibility of applying a word to thing, the ability to combine words into sentences, the connecting of objects with actions, identification of a thing to be accomplished or the projection of the content of an awareness as an external object"⁷. With this, he brings into light the various types of activity involved in speaking and using the utterances. But very broadly speaking, language is used as a means of expressing the speaker's intention. This intended meaning may refer to facts both physical and mental or may be used to accomplish certain acts; i.e., the act of commanding, questioning, stating etc... This shows that the *Vaikharī Vāk* is a very important phase of the analysis of *Śabda*.

If we look at the constitutive factors of *Vaikharī Vāk*, we note that, for Bharṭhari it is a complex network of many important elements. Initially Bharṭhari identifies two. According to him, in any

expressive language, two elements can be discerned, i.e. the sound-pattern and forms of words (*dhvani*) and the meaning (*Śabda*). But an elaborate study of his treatise shows that apart from these two, some other elements also are involved in the act of speech. Accordingly, I shall try to bring out four important constitutive elements of the uttered speech. They are : (a) sound - pattern (the phonetic element), (b) form of words (syntactic element), (c) meaning (semantic element), (d) intention of the speaker (pragmatic element).

He identifies the phonetic element as *dhvani* or *nāda*. The *dhvani* occurs due to the presence of our vocal organ. The phonetic element is characterised by variations in accent, pitch, intonations from speaker to speaker. Of course, later on, he introduces a subtle distinction between two levels of *dhvani*, i.e., *Prākṛta dhvani* and *Vaikṛta dhvani*. The former represents the sound pattern vocally unmanifested and the latter represents vocally manifested sound. So to be specific, we must say that, at the level of utterance the phonetic element can be identified as the *Vaikṛta dhvani*. We shall discuss *Prākṛta dhvani* later on. The *Vaikṛta dhvani* gives vent to the structure and forms of words. The second element, i.e., *vācya* is the expressive linguistic form which is the conveyer of meaning. The role of the forms and structures of expressive words (*vācya*) is very crucial, for it is that to which the hearer pays attention when the speaker wants to communicate through utterances. It is that element which has to be recognised by the hearer before he grasps the meaning of the utterance and the speaker has to think of it before he expresses his thought. Bhartrhari points out, "Both the speaker and the hearer have to think of the word first before thinking of the meaning"⁸. When the hearer fails to recognise the form of the uttered words, he asks the speaker "what did you say?"⁹. But people intending to understand meaning, often fail to recognise the distinction between the expressive words and the expressed meaning. In fact, the *vācya*, the forms and structures of words, are just the bearer of meaning. *Vācya* is the symbol which symbolises the meaning. This brings us to the third element of *vaikhari vāk*, i.e., the *vācaka* (the meaning/content). *Vācaka* is that which finds expression through phonetic and syntactic element. So, there is a close relationship between *vācya* and *vācaka* because the words have a natural fitness (*yogyatā*) to express meaning. It is a relationship of the conveyer and the conveyed, which is otherwise known as *vācya - vācaka bhāva*. However, the element of meaning considered in isolation stands for certain unitariness which is diversified by sequential nature of the

uttered words. The whole meaning cannot be expressed simultaneously, because our utterances by nature are sequential. We utter words syllable by syllable; and the moment one syllable is uttered it is replaced by another syllable. It should be noted here that not only Bhartrhari, but most of the schools of Indian philosophy point to this peculiarity of the uttered speech. The philosophers of the present century have not paid much attention to this peculiarity. It seems that they consider it to be an insignificant characteristic. But in Indian philosophy of language, this characteristic of uttered speech occupies an important place. They consider that the question of communicability of meaning cannot be settled unless and until one decides how the discrete and sequential phonemes and syllables convey the unitary meaning to the hearer. This issue gets much attention in Indian philosophy of language, because they explicate meaning not only from the speaker's standpoint, but hearer's too. The hearer has to attend to the sequential speech form to get the sequenceless meaning out of it. So the element of meaning is in a sense unitary, expressed in a diversified form through the uttered words. The fourth element of the uttered level of speech is the intention of the speaker. "The uttered level of speech is possible, because the speaker intends to communicate"¹⁰. The relationship between the speech and intention is named as *kārya - kāraṇabhāva*. Bhartrhari points out that it is the intention of the speaker which necessitates the use of particular forms of words. So, it is a relationship of *kārya-kāraṇa* (cause - effect). "When the speaker seeks to superimpose linguistic forms into his intended meaning, the language appears to change its nature into something else (meaning) and project it as sounds from the vocal organ"¹¹.

Apart from these four elements, the uttered speech, the *Vaikhari Vāk* necessarily implies the issue of referring. The act of referring is no part of the phonetics and syntax; it is rather the function of the meaning. What is meant or conveyed has the function of referring. When one utters the word '*ghaṭa*' (jar) it refers to the object '*ghaṭa*'. But the relationship is not a sort of 'Fido' - Fido" relationship as Mill conceived it. There need not be one-to-one relationship between the meaning and object, nor does the act of reference imply the existence of the object. We may as well refer to the entities that do not exist at all, such as the 'wheel of fire', or 'hare's horn'. The act of meaning is not confined to stating facts only. It can be used in various ways such as eliciting acts as in the case of the command 'bring water', or refer to certain mental states, or even to understand the forms of language. The

act of meaning has the primary function of making all sorts of cognition possible. Therefore, the understanding of *Vaikhari Vāk* remains incomplete if we analyse it only from the standpoint of the *speaker*. *Hearer* is an important factor too. So in Indian philosophy of language, the concept of *Śābdabodha* or the hearer's understanding is given a very important place. The functionalistic interpretation of language makes it imperative to examine the concept of hearer's understanding. Bharṭṛhari remarks, "Hearer's knowledge of a sentence arises from the words of the speaker and it reaches him through the words, and these words having been understood ends in the shape of knowledge, which is again in the form of words"¹². Further elaborating this concept of hearer's meaning, B.K. Matilal says, "The structured thought that is supposed to arise in such an ideal hearer is something that is inter-subjectively available; it is presumably shared by any competent language-user who hears the sentence uttered"¹³.

At present it will suffice for us to note the two most important consequences that follow from the inclusion of hearer's role in the analysis of uttered speech. First, Bharṭṛhari strongly advocates that *sentences*, not the *words*, are the primary units of the meaning communicated. Second, a distinction is to be maintained between the linguistic meaning and the intended meaning. Regarding the former issue, a series of arguments and counter - arguments are recorded in the history of Indian Philosophy. Bharṭṛhari offers some very subtle yet incisive arguments in favour of the sentence - meaning to silence his opponents who argue in favour of the primacy of word-meaning. But once a thinker admits the communicative-theory of meaning and thereby admits the role of hearer, cannot but accept that it is the sentence which conveys meaning. Even if the speaker utters just a word, the hearer understands it in sentential form. For example, when somebody comes running and utters 'fire', the hearer understands that 'some building or some object is on fire'. The primacy of sentence - meaning has been so unanimously accepted by present day linguists and philosophers of language that it seems unnecessary to dwell on this point any further. So, let us proceed to discuss the second point, i.e., the distinction between the linguistic meaning and intended meaning. Bharṭṛhari does not elaborately discuss the issue. But he makes the point clear with several examples. While discussing the role of homophones, he indicates that in such case the hearer must take into account the factors like situational-context and sentence - context to discern the intended meaning. Besides, in our day to day life, we come across the use of many sentences where the implied

meaning is more important than the linguistic meaning. Bhartṛhari offers us some illuminating examples to prove this. When a traveller says to his companion, "We must go and look at the sun", the meaning conveyed by the speaker is not that of looking at the sun, but the hearer must realise how late it is in the day¹⁴. Similarly, in response to the command, "see that the crows do not steal the butter", not even the child is so literal minded to allow the dogs to steal the butter¹⁵. These examples in a way prove that the hearer has to grasp the intended meaning, not the linguistic meaning. The importance of the concept of intended meaning cannot be properly explicated if, in the analysis of communicative meaning, the entire emphasis is shifted to speaker only.

III

Thus far we have been discussing the structural and functional components of the uttered speech, as envisaged by Bhartṛhari. It gives us sufficient scope to realise that Bhartṛhari succeeds, to a large extent, in focusing attention on the multiple facets of speech at the level of utterance. But Bhartṛhari does not believe that *vaikhari vāk* on the uttered level is enough to explain the concept of linguistic communicability. Communication implies that speaker must say something and the hearer must understand him. But how is the meaning transferred from the speaker to the hearer? Is meaning conceptually inseparable from words? If this is so, then the same meaning could not have been expressed in different forms of sentences. And further if this were so, then one language could not have been translated into another. Again, how, in certain cases, the hearer understands what the speaker intends, even if he rumbles something. So, it will be too simplistic to say that the meaning is conveyed because the speaker utters a string of sounds in accordance with the rules of grammar and syntax; and because the hearer follows the same rules, he will understand the meaning just by listening to the utterances.

Bhartṛhari's answer to such questions would be that utterances are just a part of the linguistic expressibility. The level of utterance points to the level of thought. Before the speaker uses the spoken words, he thinks of the appropriate words to express it. The hearer, too, hears the sound in a sequence and then thinks of the meaning that might be conveyed to him. This stage is known as the *Madhyamā vāk*, the middle stage of linguistic expressibility. At this stage the distinction between the form of the words and the meaning is

maintained. The sequentiality associated with spoken words is also present in *Madhyamā vāk*. But the audibility of *vaikhari vāk* is absent on *Madhyamā* level. So, interpreters identify it with the *Prākṛta dhvani*, noted earlier. But this is not the ultimate ground of intersubjectivity as well as linguistic expressibility. *Madhyamā vāk* refers to a still deeper level of thought known as *Pasyanti-vāk*. To understand the importance of this stage, we need to have a brief discussion on Bhartrhari's conception of thought, cognition and awareness.

Bhartrhari offers us a sort of linguistic cognitivism which is evident from the following remark; "There is no awareness of this world without its being intertwined with the word. All cognitive comprehensions appear to be penetrated, as it were, with the word"¹⁶. This remark should not be understood in the sense that all our thought and cognitions are nothing but as Plato would call it "the silent dialogue of soul." Nor does he advocate a sort of Pan-Psychologism. He simply puts forth that, as Davidson would put it, 'the two (language and thought) are indeed linked in the sense that each requires the other in order to be understood'¹⁷. For Bhartrhari the linkage between thought or cognitions or awareness and language is fundamental and essential. There can be no concepts without words and no words without concepts. Our consciousness itself is intertwined with the power of linguistic expressibility. Even our pre-linguistic awareness is not free from linguistic latency. If anything is cognitive, then it has a speech potential. This latent form of speech (*Śabda bhāvanā*) is inherent in all conscious beings. So he says, "when everything is merged in the speech-latency, no verbal usage can be accomplished in concept-free awareness... Just as illumination is the nature of fire, just as consciousness is the nature of mind, like wise, speech - latency is the nature of each awareness"¹⁸. Of course, one should be cautious enough not to confuse speech-latency with the audible noise. "This does not mean that we always make audible with our vocal chord whenever we cognize, think or perceive anything. Nor is it proper to say that we make 'inaudible' noise. On the other hand, it implies that we verbalize at some deeper level as we cognize, and we cognize as we verbalize"¹⁹. But, by tying up the notion of verbalisation with the concept of thought, is not Bhartrhari taking recourse to a form of psychologism? Frege and early Wittgenstein avoided this path of analysing language and meaning on the ground that 'thought' implies a type of privatisation. We know that mental events and cognitive episodes are private, whereas language is public. The speech-latency, the latent form of speech, is something personal and private for each

person. So, this sort of explanation of meaning and language demolishes the 'objectivity' of language. But what Bhartrhari argues is that 'Śabda-bhāvanā (linguistic-latency) is expressible in audible speech and can break through the enclosure of privacy; it now becomes something which is intersubjectively available. Besides, the consciousness intertwined with 'Śabda-bhāvanā is something quite unlike "pain" that is purely private. Nobody can feel other's pain. It is something 'incurably private'. In this connection, we may take help from Bernard Williams's contrast between different paradigms of privacy. In case of 'pain', there is a difference between having the sensation of pain of oneself and thinking about some one's else's having pain. The other is the case of episodic 'verbalisable' thought. The second case is 'curably private'. As Williams remarks, 'episodic thought, which is totally verbal, is nevertheless the nearest thing in the inner life to public thought'²⁰. In the true sense of the term, Bhartrhari is not analysing the process of thinking, but the structural conditions of thought. I have this little digression to make the relation between thought and language clear, because Bhartrhari's concept of 'śabda bhāvanā and his transference of the problem of language - analysis from the level of speech to thought may be misconstrued as a form of psychological explanation of meaning.

Coming back to the concept of *paśyantī vāk*, we should note that for Bhartrhari on this level the distinction between *vacya* and *vacaka* merges into the indistinguishable one. "The power of being conveyer, i.e., the symbol ('śruti śakti or Prakāśakatvam) and the power of being conveyed, i.e., the symbolised (*artha śakti or prakāśyatvam*) are always inherent in *śabdatattva* or the speech - principle"²¹. And it is this principle, inherent in conscious being, which is ultimately manifested through articulated speech. This power to manifest itself is called *sphoṭa*. Much misunderstanding is associated with the term *sphoṭa*. Bhartrhari's contemporaries and subsequent thinkers and even the 20th century scholars conceive that Bhartrhari was taking resort to mysticism by propounding the philosophy of language in terms of *sphoṭa*. Once this cobweb of mysticism is removed, it seems such a plausible concept. Etymologically *sphoṭa* implies 'that which has a tendency to burst - forth'. The inherent linguistic potency latent in all conscious beings finds its manifestation through some form of verbalisation. This principle of expressibility may find manifestation through different forms of verbal structure which may be adopted by different linguistic communities. The *paśyantī* is the stage where the

meaning is in latent form; this is the stage in which language is in the form of *sphoṭa*. This *sphoṭa* is the ultimate ground of intersubjectivity. We do not realise its importance because we often confuse audible speech with 'śabda. The linguistic potency is present both in the speaker and the hearer. They share the same 'śabda-bhāvanā, i.e., language in latent form. Therefore, the communication does not mean transferring the meaning from the speaker to the hearer. Rather the spoken words arouse in the hearer the 'śabda bhāvanā, and through it the hearer grasps the meaning. Communication is possible not because the speaker and the hearer obey the same rules of convention, nor is it due to sharing a particular language, but Bhartrhari would insist that it is possible because they both share the common content of meaning and common linguistic potency.

Therefore, the understanding on the part of the hearer and the conveyance of intention on the part of the speaker imply a process of unification and diversification. Speaking from the speaker's standpoint, the unitary meaning is diversified in the form of *vācya* and *vācaka*, the conveyer and conveyed. The speaker, now, thinks of the appropriate words through which he can convey his thought and this results in further diversification in the form of sound, forms of words and meaning. Speaking from the hearer's standpoint, the process is just the reverse. The hearer listens to the diversified linguistic expression, and then unites *vācya* and *vācaka* and ultimately understands the unitary meaning. Bhartrhari explains the hearer's position with the simile of the painting process. The painter, while painting, first of all sees the object in parts, then he has the vision of the whole and then paints it part by part²². Similarly, the hearer listens to the words in a sequence, and through it grasps the unitary meaning and ultimately responds as a speaker's standpoint, the *sphoṭa* or linguistic potency is the *nimitta* (causal ground) of the audible speech, and this audible speech conveys the meaning. But viewed from the hearer's side, audible speech is the causal ground (*nimitta*) of the awakening of linguistic potency, which, in turn, is the conveyer of meaning.

I have emphasised all along that in Indian philosophy of language, a lot of importance is attached to hearer's understanding of words (*śabdabodha*). So, the question is raised regarding the process of hearer's understanding, i.e., "how does the hearer grasp the meaning?" Bhartrhari's answer to the question is - It is through *Pratibhā*. Loosely speaking, the term implies an inherent intuitive capacity of the mind. On the notion of intuition or *Pratibhā*, Bhartrhari

makes elaborate discussion. But we must present here in brief those aspects that are relevant to the present discussion. For him, intuition, as a means of knowledge, is different from perception and inference. It is a "means by which we understand the undifferentiated meaning-whole"²³. It is not the type of awareness which is produced by piecing together the fragments of meaning of different words. It is regarded as a flash of understanding which arises spontaneously in all conscious beings. It is a faculty of sentient beings for its root-cause is the speech-potency, which again is potentially inherent in all sentient beings. The acceptance of intuition as a means of knowledge can very well solve the problem of incommunicability of meaning in certain cases. Sometimes, even though one reads a passage several times, or listens to a sentence carefully he fails to get the meaning. Then suddenly in a flash of understanding, the meaning becomes clear.

So now we are in a position to come back to the original question, i.e., how is the interplay between the intention to communicate and conventional framework possible? We have stated how the intention to communicate puts pressure on the existing convention-structure, and this structure again leads us to think of newer ways to express ourselves. The principle of linguistic potentiality constantly forces us to enlarge the narrow confines of conventional forms. This makes language an act of creativity. Therefore, Bhartrhari claims that the relationship between the forms of words and language is not conventional but eternal. There is a relationship of natural fitness (*yogyatā*) between the symbol and the symbolised, *vācya* and *vācaka*. This view may seem very inconsistent with what so far we have been discussing about Bhartrhari's conception of linguistic communicability. If we accept this position at face value, then we have to admit that in Bhartrhari's philosophy, there is no scope for enlargement and enrichment of vocabulary. To understand the true implication of Bhartrhari's view, one must make a distinction between language as a principle and language as a form of usage. So, let us look at Bhartrhari's remarks on the issue. He says, "The natural fitness of a word to convey meaning is known to us through convention (*samaya* or *sāmketa*), which is understood as the observation of use of words by elders. This use follows the natural capacity of words to convey meaning and he does not create it. Human beings cannot create the relation between words and meaning whether we look upon the latter as eternal or transitory"²⁴. He again remarks: "Language is of two kinds - eternal and produced. The produced sort is involved in usage and

reflects the nature of language. The eternal sort of language is the source of all usage, unsequenced, within everyone, the seat of all modifications, the locus of all actions, the basis of satisfaction and frustration...."²⁵ These statements make it clear that he considers language at two stages. The linguistic potentiality which manifests in the conveyance of meaning implies the power of words to express meaning. This power is not human creation. But on the empirical level, when language is taken as a type of expression (Hindi, English etc.), then the relation between word and meaning is conventional. That the particularised form of language is conventional, is supported by Bhartrhari's statement, "The grammatical treatises are composed from time to time by spiritual elite in difference to differing capacities of individuals by taking into consideration the changed capacities of expression as far as merit and demerit are concerned"²⁶. This amply proves that Bhartrhari conceives the linguistic expressibility, the intention to communicate conceptually prior to the conventions. This also explains how the interaction between the intention to communicate and enlargement of conventions and rules of language in use are possible. He does it through the concepts of speech-principle.

IV

So far we have been examining the basic presuppositions of Bhartrhari regarding the question of linguistic communicability. Let us now take a brief stock of the recent developments in this field, keeping Bhartrhari's account in the background. I admit, my analysis will be brief and sketchy. There have been such an upsurge of views and theories highlighting on different dimensions of language in the present century that it is almost impossible to accommodate them within the narrow confines of the paper. Since our task, at present, is confined to an assessment of communication-intention theory I shall concentrate on three philosophers, Grice, Austin and Searle, and discuss those aspect of their philosophy which are relevant for the purpose.

The awareness that language is not exclusively a matter of 'structure' but of 'function' too, was crystallized after Wittgenstein advanced the dictum "Don't look for the meaning but for the use". However, it was Grice who came out openly with a communicative interpretation of meaning in his paper entitled 'Meaning'. He emphasized two important dimensions of communicative role of language. First, meaning something by an utterance is as good as

somebody intending to produce some effect on the hearer. As Grice specifies : "A meant something by X is (roughly) equivalent to 'A intended to produce some effect in an audience by means of recognition of his intention". Secondly, there cannot be a simple meaningful linguistic expression without somebody (speaker) claiming to utter it. This sort of analysis makes it clear that Grice wants to obliterate the distinction between the 'linguistic' meaning and 'intended meaning'. In case of meaningful utterance what matters are the 'speaker' and his 'intention' to communicate. The hearer's role is not at all emphasized by Grice.

Austin, on the other hand, exposes some more complexities involved in case of linguistic expressibility. In his book *How to Do Things with Words*, he shows that saying something is *doing* something, *in* saying something we do something, and *by* saying something we do something. In short, language is a matter of act and it involves complex layers of acts. The most important feature of his analysis of language is that he gives us a comprehensive account of language in terms of phonetics, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. Moreover, by showing the distinction between 'meaning' and 'force' of an utterance he makes the elements of propositional meaning (sense and reference) and intended meaning a part of what is conveyed to the hearer. But still one may note that the hearer's role is neglected here. Of course, he talks of perlocutionary act as a separate category of act. Perlocutionary act refers to "the achievements of certain effects by saying something". But communication does not, in all cases, mean achieving certain effects on the thought, belief or action of the hearer. The hearer has to *understand* what the speaker means by his utterance. Therefore, perlocutionary act is an element of the speaker's meaning, not hearer's meaning. As Searle very rightly points out "Human communication has some extraordinary properties, not shared by most other kinds of human behaviour. One of the most extraordinary is this : If I am trying to tell someone something, then (assuming certain conditions are satisfied) as soon as he recognizes that I am trying to tell him something and exactly what it is I am trying to tell him I have succeeded in telling it to him".

We find a proper balance between the convention and intention, and balance between the speaker's meaning and hearer's meaning in the theory of Searle as propounded in his book *Speech Acts*. He agrees with Grice so far as he projects meaning as a communicative affair, But Searle does not go the extent Grice goes in claiming that communication of meaning is exclusively a matter of intention, and not

a matter of convention. Besides, Searle does not share Grice's view that meaning can only be defined in terms of intended effect on the hearer, because speaker does not always intend produce such an effect on the hearer. On the other hand, he agrees with Austin that "all linguistic communication involves linguistic acts", but he differs from Austin by analysing meaning not exclusively in terms of speaker's meaning but hearer's *understanding* of what is being conveyed.

Searle starts his investigation about the nature of language with three basic presuppositions :

1. Speaking a language is engaging in a rule governed activity.
2. Whatever can be meant can be said. (A given language may not have adequate vocabulary to say what we mean, but in principle, we can always express what we mean). This is otherwise known as the *Principle of expressibility*.
3. Sentence, not the word, is the unit of linguistic communicability.

Keeping these three presuppositions in mind let us understand how he explains the speaker's role, hearer's role, the concept of intersubjectivity and the relation between convention and intention.

Speaking from the speaker's standpoint Searle identifies three levels of acts i.e., (1) the act of uttering (utterance act) (2) the act of referring and predicating (propositional act) and (3) the act of expressing the intention (illocutionary act). Speaking from the hearer's stand, the act involved is the act of *understanding*. While analysing the problem of linguistic communicability from the speaker's stand-point, Searle makes a clear-cut dichotomy between the propositional act and illocutionary act, i.e., what the utterance *means* and what is *meant* by the utterance. Though he admits that in actual speech-situation these elements are not separable, yet on the level of abstraction the distinction is of considerable importance. This distinction should not be understood simply in terms of linguistic meaning and intended meaning. It is something deeper than that. In each case of utterance there is the propositional element (the element of reference and predication) which is stated by the act of utterance. This is one of the reasons because of which the same propositional element can be used to indicate different intentions of the speaker, such as, stating, warning, commanding, etc... But very broadly speaking, both the elements, i.e., the propositional element and force element, constitute the meaning that

is conveyed by the speaker to the hearer. The hearer's understanding also includes the understanding of these two elements.

Now the crucial question for us is to understand what according to Searle is the common ground of inter subjectivity between the speaker and the hearer. How does the hearer understand what the speaker wants to convey? Searle's answer is "the bridge between the speaker's side and hearer's side is provided by their common language". This answer is apt to dissatisfy us. Is 'common language' enough to explain the concept of communicability? Then why in certain cases the communication fails though speaker and hearer share a common language? Can't the person of a different linguistic community understand the speaker though the speaker uses a different language? To elicit Searle's reply to such questions one must examine what Searle means by the term 'language'? We know that he defines language as a 'rule governed activity'. But what are those 'rules'? Are they the rules of syntax and grammar set by the conventions adopted by a particular linguistic community? Are they the rules of *language* or *particular languages*? If he is talking about the rules of *particular languages*, then he fails to achieve his avowed task of providing us with "philosophically illuminating description of certain general features of language". Searle, of course, clarifies what he means by the rules of language, with the introduction of a distinction between the constitutive rule and regulative rule. According to him 'regulative rules regulate antecedently or independently existing forms of behaviour... But constitutive rules do not merely regulate, they create or define new forms of behaviour'. He further argues that on the basis of our knowledge of constitutive rules of language one can translate sentences from one language to another. So he clearly states that : "When I say speaking a language is engaging in a rule governed form of behaviour I am not concerned with particular conventions one involves in speaking this language or that... but understanding the rules which conventions manifest or realise".

So, we can safely conclude that for Searle the basis of transferability of meaning from the speaker to the hearer is the common constitutive rules of language. When he says that language is not a matter of intention but convention, too, he does not use term 'convention' as it is ordinarily understood. By highlighting the concept of 'rules' he parts company with Grice, for he insists that not only phonetics and syntax is a matter of rule but the illocutionary act too is guided by rules. Of course, from such an explanation one must not

conclude that Searle started with communication intention theory but ultimately comes back to a formalistic interpretation of meaning and language. He strongly believes that meaning is communicative and the speaker's intention plays a major role in his analysis of speech acts. His presupposition that whatever is expressible can be stated meaningfully is a pointer to the fact that the existing rules of convention and syntax can be responsive to the needs of intention to communicate. Unlike Formalists, he believes that understanding the concept of language is incomplete without explicating the concept from the standpoint of communicability. So, the conception of language as a rule governed behaviour along with the principle of expressibility leads him to analyse language in terms of speech acts, speaker's intention, hearer's understanding, propositional meaning and the rules governing the language. This makes his communicative-intention theory of meaning more comprehensive. Yet, certain questions remain unanswered - Even if the speaker and the hearer share the same constitutive rule, how come, in certain cases, communication fails? Again, how in certain cases the hearer understands what the speaker intends to convey without a complete utterance act and propositional act? Such questions seem unanswerable as long as the analysis of meaning is confined to the level of speech acts.

However, one may note certain points of similarity between Bhartrhari's and Searle's views on language. Searle's principle of expressibility, though not as sweeping as Bhartrhari's notion of speech latency (*Śabda bhāvanā*), seems to hint at certain *a-priori* conditions of linguistic communicability. Both share similar views on the notion of conventional and pre-conventional notions of linguistic expressibility. Both accept that the sentence, not the word, is the unit of communicability. But one should not go on adding the points of similarity without carefully noting the basic differences in the approach of these two philosophers belonging to two different ages and two philosophical traditions.

For Bhartrhari linguistic communicability is a multi-layered affair, and without excavating the hidden layers beyond the uttered speech no analysis of language is complete. Therefore, he explicates the level of utterance with reference to the logical conditions of thought and cognition. But Searle avoids transgression into the area of 'thought'. He prefers to confine his analysis within the level of utterance and speech. He explains both, the speaker's *intention* and

the hearer's *understanding* in terms of the constitutive rules of language. Though the analysis of meaning in terms of intentionality and mental episodes is no more considered to be a form of psychologism, yet in his book *Speech-Acts* he avoids the route.

The second and the most important divergence of approach emerges from the distinction maintained between the propositional element and force element. This distinction was originally conceived by Austin, and it has been welcomed by most of the subsequent philosophers. Though the concept of 'Proposition' is the cause of serious bafflement for the Western thinkers, yet it continues to dominate the area of philosophy of language. For Bhartṛhari, propositional element and force element have no distinctive purpose, because whenever a statement is uttered its meaning exhausts the force, excepting certain ambiguous expression. In such cases contextual factors help the hearer to decipher the meaning. This difference of approach owes its origin to the role of 'proposition' in the Western philosophy of language. In this regard B.K. Matilal's remark is very illuminating. He observes, "Indian philosophers and logicians do not operate with the notion of proposition, which is so well entrenched in the Western tradition. Let me explain : each cognitive episode, unique as it may be as an event, has a *structure* which gets expressed in a linguistic utterance, and by virtue of that structure it differs from another cognitive event. But the structure may coincide in totality with that of any other cognitive event, or events taking place in the same person or different persons at the same time or at different times, in which case all these cognitive events will be structurally indistinguishable except by virtue of their temporality or by their occurrence in a different person or by both. All structurally indistinguishable cognitive events are treated by Indian philosophers alike in so far as their logical properties as well as philosophical analyses are concerned. The cognitive events, even when they are viewed and identified in this way, do not become propositions. The structural content is the minimal abstraction that is proposed here. The practice of the Indian philosophers, is to refer to cognitive events (structurally abstracted, but still treated as particular events) by identical linguistic expressions in which they are verbalised".

It is, perhaps, because of such understanding of linguistic expressions that Indian philosophers often refer to the mental level either in the form of *samśkāras* or continuity in memory (as accepted by *Mīmāṃsā*) or in the form of '*śabdabhāvanā*' (as accepted by Bhartṛhari) to explain how the complete sense of meaning is grasped from the

sequentially uttered speech. But such differences of stand-points are bound to exist when the analysis of problems is based on certain key concepts, which to a large extent, are determined by the period of time and cultural conditions. However, this should not deter us from understanding the ancient thought in terms of the present and enrichment of the present thought in terms of the wisdom of the ancients.

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