SPEECH-ACTS : AS LINGUISTIC COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTION*

Man utters meaningful sounds in order to communicate. And so much depends upon the hearer, because in order to be communicated he ought to share the same conventions of meaning attached to those sounds, as is meant by the man who utters it. Otherwise, communication fails, even if one speaks and the other hears. In that case they might be men of different linguistic conventions. A man who knows Oriya language only, cannot be communicated anything when he is spoken to in Malayalam language. For him it is just a string of meaningless noises. When both the speker and the hearer are the users of the same language, communication takes place. One of the important facts about : the human being is that they can be communicated by a wide variety of the uses of languages and definite meaningful expressions and this distinguishes them from animals. By way of communication, the speaker imparts and the hearer gets informations, understands ideas, feelings, emotions, desires, judges situations, etc. The whole affair is known as speech activities within the subject-matter of philosophy of language and analysis of speech acts, made by philosophers like Austin, I am not entering into a detailed discussion of it now. Speech activities aim at a successful communication, A communication is successful, if the hearer- may be the receiver-gets the desired information properly. In the three following sections I shall discuss the means, the content and the conditions of suceessful communication in the context of speech acts.

a) **Means of Communication :**

Sounds constitute essential ingredients for the communicative function of the language. But all pieces of sounds cannot impart informations. Some of them are completely meaningless and are mere

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noises and many of them are purposive. A purposeful sound is an articulated one. The sound produced by the utterance of "octomoque" is a mere noise, whereas the utterance of- "Good morning to everybody" is articulated and meaningful.

Communication is also established by means of some written marks. One may read it and be communicated. Reading involves reading of a sentence of a language or of signs. On the road side one may read, "curve ahead", or one who does not know English language gets the information out of the mark ' ⊃ ' given by the side of it. As we know, 'Curve ahead' is an expression of English language whereas, the mark can not be claimed to be part of any particular language. It shows that communicative functions may be linguistic or non-linguistic.

This point cna be analysed with the help of a few examples. A driver of a bus with a picnic party inside, cautions the passengers not to shout on the ground that the language of the vehicle is not audible to him. Here the sound produced by the vehicle may not be meaningful to the passengers but certainly it has some meaning for the driver. If 'being-public' is the most characterstic feature of language, then we cannot use the expression "the language of the vehicle" for the sound of the vehicle, since it does not cummunicate anything to the passengers (public). Such communication is an example of non-verbal communication. Similarly there are many other sounds which are public, do communicate certain informations, and yet cannot be part of any language. For example, out of the sound of the continuous bell in a college premises, about a thousand students, one hundred exployees and one hundred teachers receive the information that the college hour has come to an end for the day. So also the siren sound informs serveral thousand workers regarding the change of the shift. All these are non-verbal communications very much different from the sounds of uttering "Good morning" or 'Suprabhātam', which are verbal ones.

It will not be very much outside the context to observe whether the sound produced by animals, like the dog and the cow, or birds like the cuckoo or other singing birds are verbal or not. An example may help us to take any decision. A dog is barking in a particular manner and the owner provides food being informed that the dog

is hungry. The dog barks in another manner, the owner says, "Rocky, stop, stop, it is my friend" and the dog stops barking. Are these sounds produced by the barking of the dog purely non-verbal communication?

A humnist's answer will be an affirmative one. Because for him, the sounds, where human speech alone is involved, are verbal ones[1]. (I shall agian enter into this discussion in the last section). A linguist may take the cue from the humanist and propose that non-verbal communications are non-linguistic communications. The verbal communications are human speeches and linguistic expressions in the sense that those are made in accrodance with the rules of language. Language involves several aspects like syntax, semantics, phonology, phonetics, morphology, etc. When human beings talk in a language, they do so by observing the usual rules of that language.

But a follower of Austin with reference to the distinction between rhetic and phatic acts may further specify the levels of distinction between the various sounds by saying that the barking of the dog is utterance-like and so is a phonetic-like act. Because it has a sense it may be a rhetic-like act. But it is neither phatic nor phatic-like act as it is beyond the rules of any language. The Austinian break up of a meaningful lucutionary act shows that it contains, three distinct units, namely; units of utterance (morphemes) units of language (Pheme) and units of speech (Rheme).

b) Contents of Communication :

It is now clear that verbal linguistic communications are a sort of linguistic functions called as speech-acts, which come under the orbit of the discussions about philosophy of language. The chief-function of language is its communicative function through various linguistic expressions (*LE*). Before deciding that when the *LE* satisfies the communicative function, it is also necessary to see what the *LE* communicates or in other words what is really the content of the communication? Is it (i) 'a thought' or (ii) 'the meaning of a sentence' or (iii) 'a meaningful utterance'.

Out of such possibilities, Pit Corder[2] would prefer to answer that 'a thought' is the content. With some reservations Frege[3] would

accept it. But this answer begs a further question : what is a thought? As it is known that the mind is the substratum of the thoughts, but it cannot communicate those thoughts without the help of language, the thought requires a manifestation in and through the *LE* and consequently it takes the shape of a sentence. Even though it is not free from controversy but granting that thought can in principle be communicated in language the role of the person involved is also no less important. While manifesting it into a sentence he should be careful to see that the rules of the language (syntactical rules) have been observed. And the thought has been placed in the LE with its proper force (intention). In such a manner, 'thought' which is the potential propositional content, through LE becomes a statement and refers to a state of affairs. Thus to say that 'a thought' is the content of communication is to accept that a 'statement' or 'a proposition' is communicated.

Let me come to the second alternative answer, where not merely a sentence but the "meaning" of a sentence is the content of communication. It seems now that the sentence alone is a passive one. The sentence might have been written on a block, or on a wall or at a road side. No-body knows who has written and when it was written. Such a statement, uttered by a sensible being, fitting to the circumstances of utterance, bears meaning. This 'meaning' is significant for the purpose of communication.

Here it seems as if the 'meaning" of the sentence can be conceptually separated from the complex structure of "meening of a sentence". The meaning is communicated but not the sentence. In what manner such a premise can be accepted? Davidson proposes an answer which we find in Strawson's language, "syntactic and semantic rules together determine the meanings of all the sentences of a language and do this by means, precisely, of determining their truth-conditions"[4]. Probably it can be clarified by the help of one example that the sentence "I am happy" can issue so many units of truth, and also equal number of meaning units, if uttered by a number of persons in different circumstances. It shows that the 'meaning' has inseparable relationship with the truth-value and hence with the truth which can be conceptually separated from the sentence. Thus meaning of a sentence expresses a truth which includes who, under which circumstance, expresses what supposition. Here for the

involvement of the speaker and the hearer, it leads to the other possible answer.

Let us consider the case of the third possible answer which seems to include both the previous answers and also speaks something new. 'A meaningful utterance' has got the potentialities of a thought, sentential form, a report of a state of affairs, or at-least a reference to a state of affairs and a meaning. It further involves an utterer (the speaker) and a hearer (for whom the utterance is made). Thus the meaningful utterance involves a sentence, the thought or the supposition made by the sentence as related to the utterer, the uttering circumstances of the utterer and the report of the utterance, etc. All these various factors are nothing but the bearers of truth-value as Strawson puts it : Primary or essential bearers of truth-value, variously named and no doubt variously conceived as statements propositions, thoughts (Frege) and *seemingly reportive-propositions*[5] or constatives (Austin)[6].

It shows that meaning is essentially related with the truth-condition of the utterance. Frege would express it strongly as that the thought of a statement is the sense of the statement which is decided by the truth-condition of the statement, i.e., meaning is dependant upon truth-condition.

At this stage it is obvious to conclude that the truth-condition which is taken as the 'meaning of utterance' is the content of communication. We know that truth-condition is not the truth itself. A falsity can also be communicated as a truth and can be communicated. 'Sun rises in the East' can be communicated in the equal manner as 'Himalaya is the second highest mountain of the world' can be communicated. The truth-condition of a proposition has nothing to do with the logical analysis of a proposition. That 'Meaning' has got factual references does not mean that facts determine the meaning or meaning is dependent on facts. However, the above findings out of the third (iii) probable answer creates another problem with regard to "meaning" and its relationship with truth, but it is not the aim of the present paper to discuss all these.

The only point that impresses us from the entire analysis made in the section (b) is that if the truth-conditions are absent, the purpose

of communication seems to be defeated. A satisfactory truth-condition leads to a successful communication. It is no doubt very much important, otherwise if there is no need of communication there is no need of language at all.

c) When does communication succeed?

The success of communication greatly depends upon the hearer, not the speaker. If the speaker utters meaningless noises, no hearer will put his attention towards him, no response is expected there.

Similarly, if the speaker utters an irrelevant statement no hearer takes note of it. And we know that the relevance of the statement depends upon the context. What is communicated also involves to whom it is communicated and when it is communicated. This is an agreement with Pit Corder's "Whilst language may be used to express our thoughts, this is certainly not its only function"..... The first thing, then, that we have to face is that we cannot say what the function of a bit of language may be if we take it in isolation from its context and the situation in which it is made"[7]. For example, 'Pass me the salt' is a relevant utterance if it is uttered only seating by a dining table. It is absurd while going for a horse race or teaching inside the class room. This relevant utterance serves the proper purpose of communication if the hearer gets the point and passes the salt towards the speaker or gives a reply that there is no salt in the container. Here we find that where the bearer responds justly we say that the communication succeeds.

II

Communication and Austinian Abstraction of Locutionary Acts:

An abstraction of a locutionary act, shows that it contains three acts namely; phonetic acts, phatic acts and rhetic acts. Here in this part I want to discuss the role of the three levels of acts for a successful communication.

A phatic is necessarily phonetic and a rhetic is also phatic and phonetic. The first component of the proposition cannot be doubted. But the second needs further illustration.

A report of the phatic act is a rhetic act and a rhetic act

expressed in language observing the linguistic rules is the phatic act.

It seems phonetic act is uttering something, phatic act is uttering within a language and rhetic act is uttering with sense and reference (Meaning). A communication is successful when the three acts are successfully observed.

Now the question comes to the forefront as to whether phatic act is a necessary condition of a locutionary act for successful communication? In other words, are all the fault-phatic acts non-sensical? If anybody will use his own arbitrary linguistic code and rules, then certainly it will not be communicable. But can we allow some relaxation to this? Let us consider the case of poetry. The poems are not bound to any grammatical rules yet do communicate sense and reference. In another case, when lower class students write essays in English, numerous grammatical mistakes are seen, still they convey sense and reference to the teacher. A person not knowing English language, in order to know time from an English speaking person, can also ask, 'time? time?', and can get the reply. These are the cases where the grammatical rules are not observed. If the grammatical rules constitute a phatic-act, then the above examples are cases of fault-phatic.

On the other hand, we can have grammatically correct sentences but yet they do not convey any definite sense or reference. For example. "There are ten drops of water present in the lower pocket of my coat."

Now if locutionary act is to give only reports, then all these cannot be locutionary ones and do not convey any meaning. As faulty phatic these would be non-sense or meaningless for Austin. But practically excepting the last one which is a phatic act but not rhetic, those are not mere nonsenses.

Moreover, 'Thank you', 'Excuse me', 'Come here', 'Help me', 'Don't go' are all meaningful utterances in English, but do not possess any grammatical rules and yet do communicate definite sense. It shows that for the purpose of communication, though phatic is a sufficient condition, it cannot be a necessary condition. It amounts to syaing that the speech can be separated from the language.

Here it may be noted that the utterances of the later category are having illocutionary force rather than locutionary meaning. Now a border line between the locutionary and illocutionary acts has to be fixed. This I propose to do in the next part of the paper.

III

Intention and Communicability in Speech Acts.

There are many non-intentional communications or unintended LEs. For example, 'X' is staying alone in a house and is suffering from acute pain in his abdomen. At a particular moment when the pain is unbearble, he utters, "O, God' save me', No more can I stand it". Here for the LEs of X there is no hearer. As there is no intention behind the LEs there need not be the question of finding out the 'effect' (in Grice's terminology) or 'response' (in Strawson's terminology) or 'securing the uptake' (in Asutinian terminology) of the utterance. It is not a case of mutual communication. We say so because of the absence of hearer. Hence the hearer's presence and absence decides the intention of communication. When the hearer is absent, we say it is non-intentional communication. But can this criterion be followed strictly? Now let us consider another example. A person, Y, who has utilised the pen of his friend for putting a signature while returing the pen, even though engaged in some other activities deeply, streched his hand with the pen towards his friend and uttered, 'thank you' just as a matter of habit, but there is no sign of obligation on his face. Can we say that the *LE* of Y is an intended one? Does this *LE* of Y contain the sense that "I am thankful to you"? Certainly the point is debatable one. Are the habitual utterances intentional? Here according to the criterion mentioned in the above paragraph, only for the presence of the hearer, the *LE* of Y is intentional. If the utterance of Y, 'thank you', does not indicate any "attitude of giving thanks", then how can we accept that it is an intentional communication? Thus mere presence of the hearer cannot decide the intentionality of the communication. Hence we can agree with the basic psychological view that the intentionality (and non-intentionality) is, in fact, present in the speaker's mind. If the speker is conscious of his utterance, then he must be conscious for whom he is making the utterance. If he is making an utterance but not conscious of it then such utterance is also non-intentional one. A non-intentional utterance does not create any problem with

regard to speech-activities. It is the intentional *LE* which involves another problem of being-communicated or not being communicated. Being intended or not partly depends upon the presence of the hearer but being communicated or not fully depends upon the hearer. A non-intentional *LE* has no connection with mutual communicability. It is in the case of *ILE* (intentional linguistic expressions) that the question of being communicated or not, is raised.

We know that propositions consitute the major part of every language. In section (b) of the first part, it has been made clear that propositional aspect of language has truth-conditions which play a significant role for the meaning of the propositions. Such propositions, if they are audience-directed, are *ILEs*, otherwise, they are neutral linguistic expressions. (A neutral linguistic expression falls more in the category of non-intentional *LE*). An *ILE*, when it communicates a state of affair or is a report regarding the state of affairs, we call it a declarative or reportive sentence or a proposition, i.e., *ILPE* (Intentional Linguistic Porpositional Expression) But all *ILEs* are not *ILPEs*. Sometimes *ILEs* stand for a request or demands or answer or expresses somebody's happiness or satisfaction or answer desire or astonishment, etc. Since regarding the later *ILEs*, we cannot dacide the truth-value, these cannot be considered as *ILPEs*. Those are merely Intentional Lingusitc Sentential Expressions (*ILSEs*). Thus the distinction between *ILPE* and *ILSE* within *ILEs* cannot be ignored totally.

Now if truth condition is the criterion of meaning then the ILSEs are bound to be meaningless. Frege has given a concession to some intervogative sentences, which invites "Yes-No answers because they can convey thoughts". Such concession is not extended to imperatvie sentences. Some linguists have said that these are neither pure *LEs* nor the part of Language. These are language like expressions. One may be astonished, but some have equated these expressions with the "calls of animals". And certainly we cannot accept that a sound which has got resemblance with the utterance of-a-few words of language has got a meaning and hence is an *ILPE*. If this is to be accepted, then language would cease to be a viable medium for expression of emotions, etc. If emotions have no place in language then language will be a stock-book of declarative sentences. Probably we have reached a similar point of view which

has been proposed by Wittgenstein in *Tractatus*.

The Language expresses all that is the case. The Language is the totality of declarative sentences; not of emotions or imperatives.

The language divides into declarative sentences. One need not wonder in accepting the antimetaphysician's consideration that the lack of truth value makes metaphysical statements nonsensical which is also   grounded on equal footings.

But it cannot be claimed that language is not learnt through "meaning". Rather it is learnt through "uses" as Wisdom puts it. "Don't ask for the menaing, ask for the use". The expression of request, "please pass me the salt" is a meaningless one, because its truth-value cannot be decided. But when human beings are also well versed with communication of feelings and emotions through non-verbal expressions, to say that their utterances of emotions and feelings are all meaningless amounts to putting a restriction of not using the transitive verbs or the performatives in a language, or the presence of performatives in a sentence makes the sentence meaningless. Let us consider one example. X and Y have kept their vehicles at the middle of the road which has caused one accident. When they were condemned by the people for their irresponsibility,

X says, (i) I am an irresponsible person.

I shall change this habit.

Y says, (ii) I apologise for my mistake.

I hope, I will be excused.

Now with reagrd to the explanation of X the menaing of the explanation has got much relevance with the truth of the situation. So an interested person can make a truth-valuation of his statements and can determine its meaning. But with regard to the explanation of Y, rather than the bare meaning of the utterance, a desire of begging excuse is more important. It needs an evaluation as to whether his desire has been properly put into the language or not. With regard to the speech act of Y as the satisfactoriness of the expression is the aim of the expression, the satisfactoriness evaluation can be proposed. In other words, whether through explicit perfor-

mative formulae he could make explicit his intentions, is to be judged. It is now not merely speaking something but doing something in speaking something. Here one will unhesitatingly agree with Furberg that if we distinguish the 'sense' from 'reference', then conceptual separation between the "meaning of the utterance" and the "force of the utterance" is warranted. If truth-valuation decides the meaning of the *ILPEs* then the satisfactoriness-valuation or the warrantability-valuation (as Strawson's put it) decides the force of the *ILSEs*.

Thus in matters of communication, an *ILPE* has got the locutionary meaning which communicates a particular sense to any number of hearers irrespective of speech situation. And an *ILSE* has got the illocutionary force which is communicated to an audience in a definite set up.

Thus *ILSEs*, which are considered to be language like expressions or animals' call-like expressions by certain linguists, do positively communicate the force of the utterance to the hearer and occupy a sizable area in our language. As love, fellow-fealing, kindness, cordiality, etc., contribute a lot to the life of human-beings, they must occupy their place in the language of human-beings. While appreciating the colour of a lady, one will certainly prefer to express 'O, what a sweet colour you possess 'than to say that 'you possess an appreciable white colour'.

Grammar has accommodated not only declarative sentences but also imperatives, interrogatives, exclamations, etc., The verbs are not only intransitive but sometimes transitive also. One who wants to acquire some amount of mastery over a language he cannot avoid *ILSEs* in which we find profuse use of the transitive verbs through imperative, interrogative, exclamatory sentential patterns. Thus for the purpose of communication the *ILSEs* are more important then the *ILPEs*.

Now we find that language is a rule-governed (both syntactic and semantic) system of expressions in accordance with the demands of the speech-situation. We fulfil and satisfy a lot of our demands and social needs making a requisition of similar demands by means of language. We can please others or harass others by means of commnunication. Here I agree with the linguist Halliday[15] who says

that "the nature of language is closely related to the demands that we make on it, the functions it has to serve." We cannot separate the language completely from the speech situation. So I wish to differ from those linguists, who deny that both with regard to language and speech human involvement is a necessary condition and here I agree with P.F. Strawson that one knows nothing of human language unless he understands human-speech[16].

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NOTES

1. I have not taken here Forguson's Phatic-Locutionary ambiguity into account.

2. S. Pit Corder, *"Introducing Applied Linguistics"*, Penguin Books, 1977, p. 36.

3. Frege, "The thought. A logical inquiry". Trans. Quinton, *Mind*, 1956, pp. 21-3.

4. P. F. Strawwon "Intention and Convention in Speech Acts", *Logico Linguistic Papers*, Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1974, p. 177.

5. Words in italics are my additions.

6. P. F. Strawson, "Austin and Locutionary meaning", *Essays* on J.L. Austin, Edtd....Oxford, Clarendron Press, 1973-p.56.

7. *Op. Cit.* p. 37.

8. J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Oxford University Press, 1976-p.92. Noises of certain types belonging to and as belonging to a certain vocabulary in a certain construction, i.e., conforming to and as conforming to a certain grammar, with a certain intention, etc. This act we may call a phatic act.....

9. John-Lyons, 'Human language' in *Non-verbal communication*, ed. R. A. Hindle. Royal Society and Cambridge University Press. (Linguistic expressions are attitudinals and cognitives; cognitive communicate states of affairs, attitudinals communicate

ι emotions etc.)

10. Frege. *op. cit.,*

11. L. Wittgenetein, *Tractratus Logico Philosophicus* Trans. Anscombe.

    1. The world is all that is the case.

    1.2 The World is the totality of facts.

    1.3. The World divides into facts.

12. John Wisdom, "Ludwing Wittgenstein, 1934-37, *Mind'*, LXI No. 242, April, 1952, p. 258.

13. Mats Furberg, "Meaning and Illocutionary force" Sympossium on J.L. Austin Edt. K.T. Fann. Routledge and Kegan Paul p. 445.

14. P.F. Strawson, *op. cit.* p. 68.

15. M.A.K. Halliday, "Language structure and Language function", *New Horizons in Linguistics* ed.. John Lyons, Penguin books. 1973 p.141.

16. P.E. Strawson, "Meaning and truth" *Logico Linguistic Papers.* p. 189.

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