# ON WHAT CAN BE SAID

## OR

# D. N. S. BHAT HIS PRONOMINALIZATION*

O. The provocaction for this paper is Dr. D. N. S. Bhat's book *Pronominalization* published by Deccan College, Poona, in 1978. Dr. Bhat's main thesis is that anything can be said in any language. I find this unacceptable as maintained by Dr. Bhat, and hence for the sub-title of this critical discussion of his thesis, I have used the device of cross reference which would be quite acceptable in Latin, French, or Cree, but which sounds odd in modern English. If the title of my paper smacks of frivolity I suspect Dr. Bhat's trump argument is no better : he would challenge any doubters to say *what* cannot be said in a language. My task then is to discuss the issues raised by Dr. Bhat in his book without getting impaled on the horns of this dilemma : either accept that everything can be said in a language or say what cannot be said in the language.

I feel rather diffident about joining issues with Dr. Bhat. He is like some wily military tactician : before his adversaries can plan their strategy to engage him in a pitched battle on one front, he usually vacates it and opens up three new fronts to fight from. His prolific contributions to descriptive and historical studies of diverse families of languages and to more abstract theoretical discussions are well known. Before less industrious and versatile people have had a chance to grapple with and review this book, he already has a couple of new books in press, and for all I know it might be too late to discuss pronominalization with him.

It is even conceivable that a less charitable critic might prefer a naval analogy for Dr. Bhat's research strategy. During the World War when the Allies could not defend their shipping against the ravages of the new German submarines, they simply

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built more ships than the Germans could hope to sink. I don't
doubt that Dr. Bhat's formidable shipyard builds less vulnerable
ships. However I do feel that there is some confusion in his
views about effability and pronominalization, that this book
might be less seaworthy than others he has launched, and inspite
of everything I feel tempted to take a pot-shot at it.

I am glad of the opportunity provided by the Linguisitic
Society of India Club to engage Dr. Bhat in discussion. It is a
forum he has himself helped to shape, and by showing on this
platform that some of Dr. Bhat's ideas are confusing, I can ensure
that clarity begins at home.

1.       The task Dr. Bhat sets before himself in this book is to
validate the so called principle of effability by subjecting it to a
cross linguistic test. I would first like to show (1·1) that Dr. Bhat's
approach is not impartial enough to ensure a fair empirical test
for the hypothesis; secondly (1·2) that his version of the principle
of effability is not at all viable; and thirdly (1·3) that in the
light of his findings his conclusions cannot be accepted as
establised. Dr. Bhat's findings are however interesting in their
own right even if their relationship to his main thesis is at best
tenuous, and I will have a few things to say about some of his
specific claims later on (2).

1·1·1   There are three reasons why I maintain that Dr. Bhat's
attitude is not impartial enough and he begs the question of
effability. Dr. Bhat starts by comparing phonetic and semantic
features. I doubt in the first place if componential semantic
analysis, or the atomization of meaning, is likely to be fruitful
at all except for a handful of words belonging to certain small
areas of the vocabulary like kinship terms or colour terms or a
few other structured concepts. However what is relevant is that
Dr. Bhat betrays his beliefs by stating at the outset that if we
were to make an overall list of semantic features occurring in
ten or twenty languages, the list would be such that "the speaker
of any of these languages would be expected to be capable of
expressing *every single semantic feature* occuring in that list."

He goes on to talk about the mechanism of two double
articulations which makes it possible for a language to express
an unlimited number of semantic features or meaning distinct-
ions. Shortly (in 1.2.2) I will have something more to say about

Dr. Bhat's equation of a language's ability to express an unlimited number of semantic features with no semantic feature being irrelevant for any language. What is relevant here is that before Dr. Bhat begins his cross linguistic study he seems to be convinced that total effability which he wants to investigate empirically can already be taken for granted as a fact of natural languages.

1.1.2 While there is nothing wrong with having your own preferences when you go about investigating an hypothesis and even admitting at the outset that you would rather see it verified than falsified, it is dangerous, I think, if you do not make any provision for failure. I submit that Dr. Bhat is guilty of just this. In maintaining that anything can be said in any language he has not considered what a failure of such radical translatability would look like. Unless some sort of a threshold of tolerance is set up for what constitutes another way of saying something in a different language, one can be led to make absurd claims. I am not saying as yet that Dr. Bhat makes such claims, but I can show how easy it is to do so.

When Dr. Bhat says that reflexivity can be manifested in the pronouns of one language and the verbs of another, one cannot possibly take exception. If one takes the example of the expression of politeness in English and an Indo-Aryan language (which I have studied elsewhere)[1] one finds that English expressions like " please " are expressed in Indo-Aryan by " mincing words " like Gujarati *jarāk* or Marathi *thoḍa*, or Sinhalese *ṭikāk* and by the use of questions and future imperatives. This is already skating on thin ice if one also maintains that it is the expression of the 'same' feature of politeness just as Dr. Bhat maintains that the 'same' feature of reflexivity is expressed by pronouns in English and verbal suffixes in Kannada. If a language has no imperative expressions so that one cannot say " Get out ! " it is unlikely to make much of an impression on Dr. Bhat as long as native speakers can push other people out, or trick them into leaving by saying they are wanted outside, for instance.

1.1.3 Lastly, not only has Dr. Bhat not considered what an inability to translate would look like, he has explicitly provided for an escape hatch when he quotes Katz " Failure means the person is not sufficiently skilful in exploiting the richness of his language

rather than that the language is not rich enough in expressive power."

I don't think anything more need be said about how Dr. Bhat has loaded the dice in favour of effability. Heads I win, tails you lose !

1·2      I will now explain why I think Dr. Bhat's formulation of the principle of effability ( or expressibility) is not viable. The principle of effability is an affirmative answer to an old and tricky philosophical question, viz. whether all that can be meant can be said or not. In his *Tractatus* Wittgenstein maintained that while anything that can be said clearly, there *are* certain things which can only be *shown* but not said. To the extent to which the *Tractatus* was an attempt to *say* what are the limits of language instead of passing it over in silence, it strayed into non-sense according to Wittgenstein.

Other philosophers however, have maintained that there are no such limits to language and anything that can be meant *can* be said. Dr. Bhat quotes Katz, " one does almost inevitably find a sentence in his language to express what he wants to say, even though the process may not always be easy and the final choice may not always be the best way to say it." One of the most important recent discussions of the principle of effability appears in John Searle's *Speech Acts*.

Searle claims that even in cases where it is in fact impossible to say exactly what I mean it is in principle possible to come to be able to say exactly what I mean. That for any speech act there is a possible linguistic element the meaning of which (given the context of utterance ) is sufficient to determine that its literal utterance is a performance of precisely that speech act.

Searle says, "I take it to be an analytic truth about language that whatever can be meant can be said. A given language may not have a syntax or a vocabulary rich enough for me to say what I mean in that language but there are no barriers in principle to supplementing the impoverished language or saying what I mean in a richer one." His main argument is that though there have been two distinct strands in contemporary philosophy of language—one which concentrates on the uses of expressions in speech situations and one which concentrates on

the meaning of sentences—there are not two irreducibly distinct semantic studies, one a study of the meaning of sentences and one a study of the performance of speech acts. The unit of linguistic communication is the production or issuance of the symbol or word or sentence in the performance of a speech act.

Since, I am not concerned here primarily with Searle's theory of speech acts it would be out of place to express my reservations about his claim that the principle of expressibility (as he calls it) is analytically true. Suffice it to say that an empirical study of speech acts does cast some doubts on his claim simply because the symbol, word or sentence, or their tokens are one kettle or fish and the actual communicative acts are often only tenuously related to their issuance. What I will do instead is draw attention to two important differences between the philosophical assertion of expressibility and Dr. Bhat's claims.

1·2·1  Before comparing Dr. Bhat's version of effability with the philosophical assertion of expressibility I would like to say a few words about the background against which the latter is often made. Every now and then people claim that language is totally inadequate to describe or express something or the other. Such claims can be for almost solipsistic individual experiences like *brahmajñāna* or a drug induced vision, for an ingroup phenomenon like the black experience in America or the shared experience of revolutionaries, or for an entire society as when people say that Westerners can never understand or describe Azande witchcraft as it manifests itself to the Azande themselves.[2] In each case there is a claim made for a permanent inaccessibility of some experience to certain people and the consequent radical inexpressibility in a certain or in *any* language.

The field in which this claim has most frequently been made for thousands of years and which contains all the three types is that of religious languages. Historians of religions tell us that the theology or philosophy—the *ism* part of religions—is invariably codified at a late stage, if at all. None of the great founded religions, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism. Hinduism, began with a philosophical framework or even a main idea. They all began with an overwhelming new experience, what Joachim Wach called " the experience of the

holy " and Max Weber "possession of the deity " the sense of being a vessel of the divine, of the All-one.

Jesus, Mani, Zoroaster, Gautama Buddha – at the very outset the leader did not offer his circle of followers a better state hereafter or an improved social order or any reward other than a certain "psychological state in the here and now " as Weber put it, an actual experience of ecstasy. In most cases, according to scriptures and legend, it happened in a flash. Mohammed fasting and meditating on a mountainside near Mecca and suddenly ecstasy, vast revelation and the beginning of Islam; Zoroaster hauling hoama water along the road and he runs into the flaming form of the Archangel Voha Mano, messenger of Ahura, Mazda, and the beginning of Zoroastrianism. Saul of Tarsus walking along the road to Damascus and he hears the voice of the Lord and becomes a Christian. God knows how many lesser figures in the 2000 years since have undergone such experiences—Christian Rosenkreuz and his "God-illuminated" brotherhood of Rosicrucions, Emanuel Swedenborg whose mind suddenly " opened " in 1743, Meister Eckhart and his disciples, and a recent mystic with a vision at the age of 16 and many times thereafter; "..often when I come out of ecstasy I think the whole world must be blind not see what I see, everything is so near and clear..there is no language which will express the things which I see and hear in the spiritual world..".

The historic visions have been explained in many ways, as the result of epilepsy, self-hypnosis, changes in metabolism due to fasting, or actual intervention by Gods, or drugs; Zoroastrianism began in a grand bath of haoma water, which was the same as the Hindu soma, and was unquestionably a drug. Following a profound new experience, providing a new illumination of the world, the founder, a highly charismatic person, begins enlisting disciples. These followers become an informally but closely knit association, bound together by the new experience, whose nature the founder has revealed and interpreted. The associations might be called a circle, indicating that it is oriented towards a central figure with whom each of the followers is in intimate contact. The followers may be regarded as the founder's companians, bound to him by personal devotion, friendship and loyalty. A growing sense of solidarity both binds the members together and

differentiates them from any other form of social organisation. Membership in the circle requires a complete break with the ordinary pursuits of life and a radical change in social relationships. Ties of family and kinship and loyalties of various kinds are at least temporarily relaxed or severed. The leader who has frequent visions, dreams, trances, ecstasies, has something elemental about him, an uncompromising attitude and an archaic manner and language. He speaks cryptically, with words, signs, gestures, many metaphors, and symbolic acts of a diverse nature. In all these religious circles, the groups become tighter and tighter by developing their own symbols, terminology, life styles, and gradually, simple cultic practices, rites, often involving music and art, all of which grew out of the *new experience* and see weird or incomprehensible to those who have never had it.

1·2·1·1    Against this longish digression, we can understand better the philosophical assertion of expressibility. Searle says that, " any language provides us with a finite set of words and syntactical forms for saying what we mean, but where there is in a given language an upper bound on the expressible, where there are thoughts that cannot be expressed in a given language or in any language, it is a contingent fact and not a necessary truth." The philosophical assertion of expressibility is thus a very weak claim indeed, compared to Dr. Bhat's rather staggering one.

One of the most damning criticisms of the linguistic philosophical tradition of Oxford philosophy in which Searle is rooted is that it represents a " mid-morning view of the world " which is hopelessly incapable of doing justice to the flights of religious language. Even then there is nothing really obnoxious about the claim for expressibility made by Searle, even if one does not agree with him. All he claims is that any inadequacy of language is contingent and what cannot be expressed in a given language should be capable of being expressed by either enriching the language, or by using another language.

Dr. Bhat on the other hand does not even admit that there may be contingent limitations on language. For him anything can be expressed in a language. This is the first crucial and fatally wrong doctrine that Dr. Bhat advocates as an article

of faith, which differentiates his principle of effability from the philosophical assertion of expressibility.

1.2.1.2    The second claim which distinguishes Dr. Bhat's version of the principle of effability from its standard philosophical assertion is even more startling. This is the claim that anything that can be meant can be said *in any language*.[2] Here Dr. Bhat goes far beyond mere effability and claims a radical translability between languages which even a philosopher would hestitate to make. Philosophers may be pardoned for not paying too much attention to the facts of language but even then Searle says, as have quoted earlier, "a given language may not have a syntax or a vocabulary rich enough for me to say what I mean in that language but there are no barriers in principle to .... saying what I mean in a richer one." But a linguist who has worked in all the language families obtaining in India has no hesitation in claiming that anything that can be meant can not only be said but *can be said in any language*.

In the following sections I will isolate three distinct strands in Dr. Bhat's sweeping principle of effability, show how each can be refuted by examples, and try to guess what motivates Dr. Bhat to make each claim.

1.2.2.1    The first specific claim that Dr. Bhat makes is that no semantic feature is irrelevant for a given language. It is easy to understand why Dr. Bhat makes this claim. While he lists some phonetic features in the preceding paragraph he does not mention any semantic features in the paragraph where he makes this particular claim. However, a little later he mentions "pronominalization, definitization, negation, question formation, time and aspect indication, case marking, etc." The trouble seems to be that he is thinking as a grammarian and not a lexicographer. Later on I will question the point behind making the sort of claim for the universality of purely grammatical phenomena also, but in the case of contentives it is easy enough to show how certain semantic features are exactly as irrelevant for a given language as phonetic features like implosion, retroflexion, or glottalization.

I have already expressed my doubts about the universalizability of componential semantic analysis. It is clear however that if a highly structured vocabulary pertaining to one semantic field

in a language uses features which are never used by another
language, one can clearly call them irrelevant for the second
language.  For my example of such clearly irrelevant semantic
features I will use Evans-Pritchard's classic description of Nuer
cattle terminology.[3]

In naming a Nuer cow one has to notice its colours and the
way in which they are distributed on its body. When it is not of
one colour the distribution of colours is the significant character
by which one names it. There are ten principle colour terms :
white (*bor*), black (*car*), brown (*lual*), Chestnut (*dol*), tawny
(*yan*), mouse-grey (*lou*), bay (*thiagy*), sandy-grey (*lith*), blue and
strawberry roan (*yil*), and chocolate (*gwit*). When a cow is of a
single colour it is described by one of these terms. An animal may
combine two or more colours, but a combination of more than
two known as *cuany*, is very rare. Normally there is combination
of white with one other colour and twelve common distributions
of this combination. There are, however, many more combina-
tions, at least twenty-seven, one of the commonest being varieties
of a striped brindled coat (*nyang*).

In describing a beast one often denotes both the form of
distribution and the colour that is combined with white. Thus an
ox may be entirely mouse-grey (*lou*); have a mainly mouse-grey
colour with a white face (*kewlooka*) white back (*karlooka*), white
splash on barrel (*bil looka*), white shoulder (*rol looka*), or white
belly (*reng looka*) : be brindled mouse-grey (*nyang looka*) : be
white with large mouse-grey patches (*rial looka*), medium
mouse-grey patches (*kwac looka*), or a mouse-grey rump (*jok
looka*) and etc. There are at least a dozen terms describing
different combinations of white and mouse-grey and there are
a similar number of terms for a combination of white with each
of the other colours. There is a wide range of variations : white
shoulder and foreleg (*rol*) may be found on a cow of any
colour, e. g. *rol cara*, *rol yan*, *rol thiang*, *rol yili* and etc. There
may also be a combination of one form of distribution with
another and, in this case, the two combinations constitute the
terms of reference and there is no need to denote the colouring
that occurs in them, e.g. a white shoulder and foreleg (*rol*)
may be combined with a white face (*kew roal*), black spots (*rol
kwac*), speckling (*rol cuor*), brown patches (*rol paara*), white

back (*kar roal*), white face and black ears (*kur roal*), and etc.
There are at least 25 terms which include the *rol* distribution,
and the other distributions likewise have wide ranges of combi-
nations with colours and with one another.

Some of the colours and hundreds and hundreds of permu-
tations and combinations of colours are associated with animals,
birds, reptiles, and fish, and this association is often indicated by
secondary terms of reference and by ritual usages, e. g. *lou*
(mouse-grey) is the bustard, *nyang* (striped) is the crocodile,
*lith* (sandy-grey) is associated with *manlieth*, the grey kestrel,
*thiang*, (bay) is the tiang, *dwai* (brown with white stripes) is
the female sitatunga, *kwe* (white-faced) is the fish eagle, *kwsc*
(spotted) is the leopard, *cuor* (speckled), is the vulture, *gwong*
(spotted) is the guinea-fowl, *nyal* (brown-spotted) is the python,
and etc. These linguistic identifications and other colour
associations lead to many fanciful elaborations of nomenclature,
e.g. a black ox may be called *rual mim*, charcoal burning or *won
car*, dark clouds; a brown ox *riem dol*, red blood, or *rir dol*, red
tree-cobra: a blue roan ox *bany yiel* after the blue heron; a mouse-
grey ox *duk lou*, the shady gloom of forests and etc. These fancy
names add greatly to the list of Nuer cattle terms.

Besides the vast vocabulary which refers to colours, distri-
bution of colours and colour associations, cattle can also be
described by the shape of their horns, and, as the horns of the
oxen are trained, there are at least six common designation in
use besides several fancy names. Words denoting shapes of horns
add considerably to the number of permutations, for they can be
combined with many of colour and distribution terms, e. g.
sandy-grey cow with horns which almost meet in a curve above
the head is a *duot lieth*, a short horn with *rial* marking is a *cot
rial*, a brindled ox with one horn trained across its face is a *gut
nyang* and etc. The ears of cattle, sheep, and goats are often
cut in different shapes and it is permissible to describe them by
reference to these incisions.

A further range of permutation is created by prefixes which
denote the sex or age of an animal, e.g. *tut*, bull, *yang* cow, *thak*
ox, *nac* heifar, *ruath*, male calf, *cou*, female calf, *kol*, calf which
has not yet begun to graze and so forth. Thus one may speak of a
*tut ma kar looka, dou ma rial, thak ma cuany*, and etc. Indeed,

if we were to count every possible mode of referring to animals of the flocks and heards, they would be found to number several thousand expressions. After describing the use of cattle names for salutations and poetry which involve further modification and elaboration Evans-Pritchard concludes the section by saying "It is not necessary to add more examples of cattle terms and their uses to demonstrate that we are dealing with a galaxy of words in the arrangement of which a thesaurus of some magnitude might be compiled. I need only emphasise that this intricate and voluminous vocabulary is not technical and departmental but is employed by everyone and in manifold situations of ordinary social life."

To generate what Evans-Pritchard calls "this fragment of a fragment" surely a fair number of semantic components would be required. What I would ask Dr. Bhat is whether none of these would be irrelevant for the description of the language of a tribe of fishermen for example. I don't think it is necessary at all to indulge in any more overkill and quote Eskimo snow vocabulary, Arabic camel (or, for some strange reason, the female sex organ) vocabulary, or Sinhalese coconut vocabulary.

1.2.2.2 The second specific claim that Dr. Bhat makes for effability can be disposed of without any overkill fortunately. This claim is that because a language can express an unlimited number of concepts therefore there is no semantic feature such that it cannot be expressed in the language. T. H. Huxley claimed that if six monkeys were to strum on six typewriters for long enough they would eventually endup typing all the books in the British Museum. While this possibility is quite conceivable, if a little remote, it presupposes that no book in the British Museum uses any symbol which is not there on the keyboard of the typewriter.

Just because the set of integers is unlimited and a monkey can generate them on a typewriter with ten digits, it does not mean that the monkey can therefore generate all the fractions unless the typewriter symbols provides for numerators and denominators. This confusion about limitlessness is too naive to deserve further comment.

1.2.2.3 We now come to the last specific claim about effability which Dr. Bhat makes. This is the claim that whatever can be

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said in a language—can be said in any language. I have shown
that some semantic features are irrelevant for some languages.
I have shown that just because a language can express an
unlimited number of concepts it does not follow that there are
no semantic features which cannot be expressed by that language.
From this it would logically follow that it need not be the case
that whatever can be said in a language—can be said in any
language. A few examples would make this more obvious.

I should point out that when I stated that something in a
language $x$ cannot be translated in language $y$, I am not making
any claim for radical and permanent untranslatability. All I
would claim is that given the resources of a certain languages
at a certain time no native speaker would be able to give a
literal and adequate translation of certain statements in another
language without first having to create certain terms or changing
the meaning of certain terms in his language to create discourse
contexts which are wholly new for his language. As the language
stands it is incapable of expressing certain translations and this
inability cannot be imputed to a native speakers lack of adequate
competence. The language may, however, be enriched and
need not be permanently or necessarily incapable of expressing
the translation.

If no member of a speech community has seen a certain
artifact—e. g. if no Nuer is acquainted with a typewriter,—there
would be a difficulty involved in talking about that artifact in
the language, which would however be easily resolved by coining
or borrowing a word. When a speech community is totally un-
acquainted with a concept or practice more serious difficulty might
arise. Merely borrowing or coining equivalents for the three
*guṇas* for example would not be very helpful precisely because
the valence of *sātvik*, *rājasik* and *tāmasik* presuppose contexts
of discourses which simply do not obtain in the target language.
Even where similar terms exist in the target language with com-
parable ranges of occurrence, for example *yin* and *yang* which
may also apply to the attributes of foods, aspects of human
personality, or simply abstracted qualities in the universe some-
what like Shiva and Shakti, translation would not be any easier
because even if the two sets of terms pertain to the 'same' universe
of discourse their relations within that universe might be quite

different. A *phlegmatic* person thus need not be the same as one suffering from an excess of *kapha* in Ayurvedic *chikitsā*. More often universes of discourse are unique and the uninitiated would be at a loss to figure out which foods are non thermally hot or cold or ritually impure ( *ajithun, Enthun, jutha, usta* ), or which jackets and cars are sports models. It is useful to remember here that the worlds that speakers of different languages live in are different worlds as Sapir demonstrated so persuasively and not just the same world with different labels attached.[4]

Just as the world-view or beliefs of one speech community as reflected in their language might present difficulties of translation because terms cannot be plucked out of the universes of discourse in which they grow, " native " descriptions of practices of the speakers of language might be nearly impossible to translate while retaining all their ties to their language and world. Thus I can translate " clarity begins at home " in Gujarati, but no richness or limitlessness of Gujarati grammer or vocabulary would capture the association of " clarity " with " charity " and of "charity" with "beginning at home" which gives the utterance its point, and which makes it capable of being said in English alone in a real sense. Similarly if a Nuer narrative contains a reference to a litigant spitting in the Leopard-Skin Chief's hands, the English literal translation might fail completely to convey that part of the Nuer's knowledge of the world which says that in disputing a leopard-skin chief's words a man will do so respectfully first spitting into the chief's hands as a sign of goodwill. The English translation might be led astray even more by the English association with spitting in the face, or spitting at someone, like a cat.

To summarize, Dr. Bhat's effability differs in two respects from the philosophical principle of expressibility, in not recognizing even contingent limitation of language and in claiming radical universal translatability, and is untenable on both counts. Dr. Bhat's claims that no semantic features are irrelevant for any language, that because a language can express an unlimited number of concepts, there are no concepts or semantic features such that they cannot be expressed in the language, and that whatever can be meant can not only be said, but said equally well in any language, are all quite unacceptable. Dr. Bhat has

embarked on his venture to prove effability without providing for the possibility of disproof or thresholds of tolerance for the judgement of success and failure.

1·3   The question Dr. Bhat addresses himself to is whether the effability principle is valid or not and how to go about proving it.   Dr. Bhat's contribution to the discussion of effability is to select one area of meaning, viz. pronominalization, and try to arrive at an exhaustive list of all that can be said within this particular area.   Once this ultimately fine grid is established—an endeavour reminiscent of George Delgerno's News to the whole world, of the discovery of an Universal Character, and a New Rational Language—for this area of meaning then it can be seen if each language can express each distinction enumerated.  If it cannot, the effability principle is doomed, if it can, it is time to move on to another area of meaning and repeat the process. Whether the language expresses each distinction by hook or by crook does not matter.   Every possible distinction within the area of meaning selected for study should be expressible in every language and wherever an ambiguity results from the absence of a regular hook in the language and the consequent need to express the distinction by crook preforce, there should be a way to disambiguate it.

I have said that there seems to be no formal limit laid down by Dr. Bhat to the human ingenuity involved in expressing a novel or unusual distinction in a language. If a bilingual native speaker connot express a distinction in the source language in his native target language, Dr. Bhat is willing to ascribe it to the speakers inadequate competence without any qualm or compunction. However if a clever informant thinks up a novel way to get an idea across possibly with a generous use of body language, Dr. Bhat is likely to be rather easily convinced that a regular device does, and must exist for the expression of the distinction in question, whereas the case for saying so might be a dubious one. It should be possible when examining an important hypothesis like the one Dr. Bhat examines, to atleast be aware at the outset of the need to distinguish between what the language can express and what a clever speaker can express using the language i.e. to define the scope of a linguistic device. Even if every semantic feature of say pronominalization can be expressed by

each language and every potential ambiguity disambiguated, it would not follow that natural languages do possess effability as one of their most important characteristics as Dr. Bhat seems only too eager to conclude. At best a significant universal might be established, but before effability can be demonstrated the task would have to be repeated in other areas besides pronominalization, and it would be a virtually endless task, given the vast number of areas of meaning.

All languages have *substitutes*, i.e. a linguistic form or grammatical feature which, under certain conventional circumstances replaces any one of a class of linguistic forms, and whose meaning consists largely or entirely of class-meaning. That is to say substitutes are token reflexive symbols, indexical signs, egocentric particulars, shifters, or indicators, class of words studied extensively by grammarians, logicians, psychologists and philosophers. Pronouns, first recongized as a separate part of speech in Western grammar by Dionysius Thrax ( 1st century B. C.), of which (at least of the personal variety) a language has an average of 8.09 with a range of deviation of−3 or 4+5 have been considered the most important class of shifters since Jesperson. During the last fifteen years or so there has been a phenomenal amount of interest among generative grammarians about the rules governing replacements of noun phrases by pronouns and the grammatical constraints on coreference, and many interesting facts have been rediscovered, and many more fascinating new facts have been discovered.

Pronouns and pronominalization and the widespread similarity in their grammatical behaviour are an especially interesting language universal because on the one hand they are not *definitional* universal like " all languages have phonemes and morphemes " and on the other, they are not *accidental* universals. Suppose it was true that all languages have a word for ' enemy ' then it would be an interesting fact which would tell us something about human nature, but it would be an accidental universal because the implication of the presence of a word for ' enemy ' for the structure of language would be trivial. The universality of pronominal substitution on the other hand contributes to our understanding of the semiotic underpinnings of languages.

Though pronominal substitution is universal, the micro-grammar of substitutes in a given language is different from that in other languages and it is necessary to write a grammar of sub-stitutions in one language at a time with an eventual view of identifying widespread regularities. If instead, one goes about comparing good, bad and indifferent existing grammers of various languages as Dr. Bhat does, to show that they are all equivalent in terms of expressibility, the information lost might greatly exceed information gained. I suspect Dr. Bhat is perfectly aware of this danger and he skirts it rather nearly. Thus in his concluding chapter he says : " The foregoing has been an attempt to test the 'Effability Principle' from the point of view of a small area of meaning, namely pronominalization. The prin-ciple claims that natural languages have an inbuilt capacity to express any idea, meaning or concept that a human being can think of." But he is presumably aware that the claim that every language has an *inbuilt* capacity to express anything, and not just that a clever enough native speaker can usually muddle through the task of translating most concepts or meanings by improvising where his language offers no help, is not at all likely to survive a fair cross-linguistic test. Why else would be hasten to exclude less tractable problems which properly and squarely belong to the area he has chosen to study, as he proceeds to do immediately afterwards ; " There are apparently a number of ways in which this effability principle can be tested. The one, which I consider to be the most suitable and profitable for the linguist to take a small area of syntax ( rather than that of the lexicon), collect the " thinkable" meaning distinctions belonging to that area through cross-linguistic and deep-linguistic studies, and test the expressive power of a selected language with the help of such a collection." Since the pragmatic use of pronouns is mainly lexical in nature, Dr. Bhat promptly and, I must add, rather conveniently excludes it along with hyper-syntatic pheno-mena from his study, which is then restricted to definite intra-sentence coreference, and not to even " a small area of meaning namely pronominalization " any more.

I intend to pursue the pragmatic use of pronouns just to find out what would happen to Dr. Bhat's hypothesis without his overprotective shelter. The pragmatic use of pronouns would

subsume personal and demonstrative pronouns. Let us look at the personal pronouns and demonstratives of a few selected languages to see (i) if each language has an *inbuilt* device (ii) to express every possible distinction. Some of the categories involved here are person, number, gender inclusiveness, status, solidarity, animateness, proximity, and matrix focus. Person can be first, second, third, or fourth, as in Eskimo. Since Dr. Bhat treats the fourth person in Eskimo as a special anaphoric pronoun, I will not discuss it here.

Mary Haas has described how in the imperative sentences of Biloxi there are separate forms depending on whether they are spoken by a male to an adult male, by a female to an adult male, or whether they are spoken by anybody to an adult female, or by anybody to a child. We are all familiar with the inclusive-exclusive distinction from the languages we speak. Would Dr. Bhat say that all languages have an inbuilt device for expressing these distinctions? Presumably the speaker can add the information that he is male and he is excluding the hearer. There is some very indirect evidence to recognise " Speaker's interruptions " as a separate category[5] and so I will let it pass.

With status and solidarity we would run into more serious problems. Linguistic structures and pronominal usage in particular, often co-very systematically with the social identity of the receiver of the message. Some languages like English have no separate honorific forms while some other European languages have two forms which primarily reflect the speaker's solidarity with the hearer. Other languages especially in South and Southeast Asia have three or more separate forms. We are familiar with *tu, tum* and *ap*, but Sinhalese and some Southeast Asian languages have separate forms for addressing monks and kings, I believe. The funniest example is Ndotka where there is a separate way of addressiug children, dwarfs, hunchbacks, one-eyed people, and uncircumscised males. Do all languages have inbuilt devices to express all these distinctions ?

With categories like animate/inanimate we are likely to be misled by a false sense of security if we think the distinction is natural and hence easily expressed in any language. The animate, inanimate category is usually subsumed under gender but I discussed only masculine/feminine under the gender rubric to show that

even under artificial simplification there are serious enough problems. The animate/inanimate distinction is far from natural. Witness the Menomini or Cree classification of 'raspberry', 'kettle' and 'knee' as animate and 'strawberry', 'bowl', and 'elbow' as inanimate. The complications associated with gender can be far more difficult. How would the masculine/feminine/neuter gender distinction in Gujarati be able to express the four Kiowa genders animal/vegetable/fruit/inanimate ? If a hasty generalization is made that all languages have two, three or four genders, surely more grammatically relevant information is lost than gained. It would not do to dismiss gender as semantically irrelevant from classes because gender does have semantic correlates. In Marathi for instance, native speakers may not notice any difference between *mali* and *peti* though they behave differently (compare *malyala, malyanna*, but *petila,* \**petyala,* \**petyanna*) but it is extremely unlikely that they might notice no differnce between *porga* and *porgi.*

We speak languages where there is usually a dual proximal/ distal distinction. But other languages have more complicated systems. In the Mozahua language of Mexico the movement words of the "come" pattern refer basically to motion towards a location identified with the speaker, there is a special way of switching the place-deictic centre from the speaker to the addressee in differential language. Ordinarily one would say "I am here and people come to me. You are there and people go to you". But in differential uses of language one uses the place-deictic words with the poles reversed, as if "You are here. people come to you, I am there, people go to me". Unlike English or Gujarati, Japanese has three demonstratives *kore, sore,* and *are* for proximal, medial, and distal, and Tlingit has a four-way contrast translatable presumably as "right here", "right there", "over there" and "way the heck over there". Estimates of distance also can follow different laws. The Saulteaux Indian measure walls, canoes, or tools with fathoms, cubits, or finger-streches, but it is not even conceivable to them that the distance between two towns can be indicated in comparable terms. About location languages show a fair amount of variation. For example, in Fijian, if I want to say somebody is in a certain town, I will choose one word for "in" if I am in that same town, another if I am not.

Matrix focus is a term used to describe a strange phenomenon

in the marking of person in Newari. In Newari first person markers are used for second and third persons, and vice versa, in interrogative constructions. In simple declarative sentences the perfomative matrix focus is the speaker and in simple interrogative sentences the matrix focus is upon the hearer. In Algonquian languages different forms for non-identical animate third persons in a context are used, the so called obviatives. Russian has three words for "someone": ('ne-xto) 'Identifiable as in "someone told me...", (exto-ni) 'but un-known' as in "there's someone at the door", and ('koj-xto) "different individual in different occasion" as in "now and then someone dies".

I could go on and multiply examples borrowed mostly from textbooks of linguistics published before 1957 to show that different languages have different and immensely rich devices to express shades of meaning which it would be sacrilegious to reduce to universal semantic features without loss of grammatically relevant information. As I have already said more than once, an attempt like Dr. Bhat's implied one, to establish forced equivalences between the devices of different languages i. e. patterns of compulsory choice and their uncircumscribed circumlocutary translations in other languages to give artificial respiration to the effability principle is destructive of the purpose of grammar and I will conclude by saying a few words about that presently.

The point to bear in mind here is that while Dr. Bhat can maintain that a language with a less differentiated set of terms in a given domain can always use circumlocutary devices to translate from a language with a more differentiated set of terms for "the same" domain, he would be hard pressed to explain the compulsory loss of information involved in translating from a less differentiated to a more differentiated language. Suppose that language A has the three terms X, Y and Z to exhaustively describe a certain domain of phenomena while language B has five terms P, Q, R, S, T, for "the same" domain. While translating from language B to A, compounds or modifiers or other devices can be used to express the extra differentiation. However, in translating from language A to B; the simple generality of X, Y, Z cannot be expressed in the less abstract but more differentiated set of P, Q, R, S, T from which the choice has to be made compulsorily.

Before I conclude however I would like to take the battle back behind Dr. Bhat's lines of defence and question whether the reflexive meaning in Kannada and English to which Dr. Bhat devotes so much space, is the same or not, I suspect that the difference between the "essential" meaning of reflexives and the "extending" of reflexive devices for indicating emphasis, possession, passive, and especially the sense of doing something for one's own benefit, is not tenable. Dr. Bhat suspects as much himself and his only reason to continue distinguishing between the essential and extended meanings of reflexivity is a determined hope to salvage his study. Witness : "It is not always easy, however, to separate the reflexive usage from these various other types of usages to which a reflexive device can get extended but an attempt must be made to keep them apart : because otherwise a cross-linguistic study like the one attempted here would lose its very purpose of understanding the variety that exists among anguages in indicating these various meaning distinctions" (p. 26). A variety, we may add, that Dr. Bhat would like to legislate out of existence for the unholy cause of effability.

I submit that unless one is doing grammar with the ulterior motive of proving shaky hypotheses and thus doing violence to the spirit of grammar, one would not make the distinction between the essential meaning of reflexivity and its extended uses. If Dr. Bhat knew nothing about English or any other language or its grammatical tradition, would he not have done more justice to Kannada, and stated simply that the verbal suffix *kol* is used to express referential identity, possession, and subject-benefactive? And if he was writing a grammar of English would he not have said that the pronominal suffix—self expressed referential identity, and emphasis, among other things ?

If Dr. Bhat accepts this, as I think he must, his arbitrary restriction of his study of pronominalization to syntactic definite coreference within sentences will not have helped him. He can get around the problem of expressing lexical pronominal distinctions in a language with a totally different set of distinctions —for example, the choice of one of the Eskimo demonstratives *manna* " this one " *anna* " that one in the north ", *quanna* " that one in the south ", *qanna* " that one in the east ", *kanna* " that one down there ", *sanna* " that one down in the sea ", etc. for

translating Samal Phillipines language demonstrative expressions translatable as " near the speaker ", "near the addressee", "near the audience", and "near none of the above", or the English " here " and " there " — by dismissing them as pronominal phenomena which are lexical, but reflexivity is at the very centre of his area as selected and circumscribed by himself. Now if he were forced to accept that Kannada and English reflexive meanings are not the same as no arbitrary separation of the essential meaning from its extended usage is possible and because the range of occurrence of the reflexive device are quite different in the two languages, what would happen to his ambitions of arriving at a totality of "thinkable" meaning distinctions separate from the devices used to express them by different languages?

3. To end this paper I would like to ask two questions : Why is it the case that to borrow examples of linguistic diversity it is better to consult textbooks published before 1957 roughly ? And in view of what has happened since 1957 what is a grammarian's job ? Not surprisingly, the answers to the two questions are related.

The answer has to do with the role of transformations as an additional tool in the linguist's tool-box, and as a religion, and consequently my earlier digression on the rise of religions might turn out to be not so irrelevant after all. With the advent of transformational grammar a powerful new tool became available for syntactic analysis and it was found that diverse languages had similar syntactic structures in an impressively large number of cases. A good example would be sentential pronominalization and the factive/non-factive dichotomy[6]. This genuine deep structural resemblance between diverse languages was to a large extent responsible for the striking uniformity of linguistic descriptions and textbooks published since 1957.

However there was another pernicious influence too. Since 1957 the old grammars were attacked as being corpus bound and just as the advent of Islam gave rise to the persecution of Kafirs or non-believers the advent of this new religion brought about a strong pressure on linguists to conform to the new way of writing grammars and on languages to conform to the structure of the most thoroughly studied language, viz. English. Linguists who had earlier been content to study the sacrosanct attested

utterances were now outdoing each other in studying and inventing ungrammatical and unattested sentences and trying to explain why they were ungrammatical : something that was unthinkable earlier. It was no longer desirable, fashionable, or permissible to go and observe what people say. The new impulse was to study what *can* be said and what *can't* be. The creativity of languag— its ability to contain or describe ( in the sense of describing a circle with your foot in the sand ), or, the newly fashionable ' generate '—an infinite number of sentences was freshly discovered and raised on the highest pedestal. It was no longer enough to study and describe speech behaviour, but limits of sayability or grammaticality had to be explored with the invention of unheard of sentences.

I realize that it is premature and foolhardy to talk in an obituary tone of transformational grammar. But I would like to analyze the notion of creativity a la Chomsky before asserting what I think is the real job of a linguist. During the last two decades linguists have emphasized the open-endedness or creativity of language. While it is undeniably true that language does not constrain us to use only those expressions which we have learnt and can understand but is built so that even previously unencountered expressions are understood easily, the freedom language gives as is only apparent, and easily exaggerated. If previously unencountered combinations of words are not necessarily a barrier to communication we may appear to be totally free to say what we want and yet hope to be understood. But though language does give us that trivial freedom to " say what we want" (within the limits of grammaticality), it inexorebly constrains us to *want* to say only what is conventionally recognizable. Hence for all the publicity given creativity by Chomsky and his friends and foes, we may only do with language what has been done before, or something close enough to what has been done before with it, to be recognizable.

There are two successive constraints over " the possible " and hence there are three degrees of freedom, like the three bulges in an inflated balloon over which two rubber bands have been slipped. One may either do what one pleases, unimpelled and unmotivated, recognizing no law or convention. This seemingly total freedom to act or not to act would suffer from one fatal

shortcoming : such behaviour will be unintelligible. Hence the first constraint viz. that of law or logic or grammar which gives rise to the second degree of freedom which, though apparently limited, is yet vast. It specifies what can be done in theory or in the abstract, or, more frequently, it specifies what *cannot* be done, and everything else–which is unlimited–one is free to do. The word " freedom " is perhaps more appropriately used here than in the first case. There is a further constraint over this second degree or freedom proper: viz. what *is* done or what *is just not done*. This constraint is not de jure like the freedom of the previous type. It is *de facto*, and a very powerful one. It does not constrain us to do only that which has been done before; yet it governs what is done or not done.

Take for example the naming of children or pets. The first degree of freedom would permit us to call them absolutely any-thing, including an unpronounceable name which is of infinite length. The second degree of freedom–or freedom proper–would be con-strained by pronounceability and perhaps by the progressively weaker claims of canonical shapes and semantic transparency. This would still enable us to call our children and pets almost anything. Yet we find that all children and pets end up getting names from a handful of common names constrained/permitted by the traditions of the community to which they belong. Or, to take another example, if one were to disregard all rules for the composition of *rāgas* in Hindustani classical music, one could have ' *rāgas* ' of only one note repeated endlessly. This obviously would not yet to be a *rāga*. Hence this vacuous free-dom is constrained by two laws : a *rāga* should be at least penta-tonic, and it cannot omit both the *madhyam* and *pancham* notes. Given this logical or grammatical constraint, one can still theo-retically have 34,848 different *rāgas*. Yet at no time are there, in actual currency, more than 150 different *rāgas*.

The corpus of possible actions or expressions in any language is thus doubly limited in that it is also limited to an *idiom*, or a conventional and perhaps ritualized mode of performing speech acts. I submit that the task of the linguist is to describe how this is done, to describe what is the case, not what might be the case. It is not an empirical linguistic's task to lay down the limits of what can be said in language. That is a task best left to

poets and lunatics by the lovers of language. To introduce another Shakespearian echo : corpus boundedness, my liege, is not so vile an offence as total freedom from facts. Faithfulness to corpora by no means precludes the possibility of trying to establish universals. It merely emphasizes what Bloomfield said, that the only useful generalizations about language are inductive generalizations.

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## NOTES

1.  See Mankodi 1975
2.  In this connection see Winch 1962
3.  See Evans-Pritchard 1963
4.  For a fine example of language study unfettered by dogmatic universalism see Sapir 1949
5.  Schaefer nd.
6.  See for example Mankodi 1973

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