



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Humanities

INDIAN LINGUISTIC TRADITION AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

KEY WORDS: Knowledge, Dialectical, Discourse, Grammar, Language

Dr. Sidharth Shankar Singh

Principal, Millat College, Darbhanga

ABSTRACT

Indian intellectual tradition encapsulates the process of the formation of knowledge that defines the cultural history of India. The cultural history of India can be viewed as a continuous and cumulative system of thoughts what is generally known as Indian Knowledge Systems. Systems of knowledge in India have been dialectical, dialogic and progressive. They include different forms of discourses particularly which come from the world of philosophy, science, aesthetics, literature, grammar, mathematics, astronomy etcetera. The complex rubric of Indian Knowledge Systems can better be explained through the philosophy of language because Indian culture has always been a knowledge centric culture. The formation of knowledge is seen as an important result of language because it is language that defines the cognitive process of the human mind and the construction of knowledge. There is a rich historical account about the growth and the development of knowledge in Indian through the application of linguistic realities. The chapter intends to describe the complex trajectory of the philosophy of language in India and how this trajectory has been enriched by four prominent Indian philosophers of language.

Ekam sat, vipra bahudha vadanti,
(Truth is one; the wise expresses it in many ways)

(Vedic Proverb)

India is well known for her rich cultural tradition and history, and it is one of the oldest civilizations in the world and it has been possible because of its rich epistemological and intellectual tradition where language plays a vital role in transferring the treasure of knowledge from one generation to another. The synchronic and diachronic study of Indian philosophy and Indian Intellectual Tradition may establish the fact that the language plays a prominent role in shaping the epistemological tradition of India. In the absence of the Indian linguistic philosophy the Indian Knowledge Systems or Indian Intellectual Tradition cannot be comprehended in its totality.

India has been a knowledge centric culture. Therefore, it has a very rich intellectual tradition and several systems of knowledge have found their root in India. This can be understood by the fact that India has been the first knowledge giver society to all over the world. For example, the first book on the theory and philosophy of knowledge, Rigveda, the first prose in the form of Yajurveda, first poetry in the form of Valmiki's Ramayana, the first grammar book by Panini in the form of Astadhyai, Kalpa Sutra, the first book of Sociology, Baudhayan, the first Mathematics, Jyotish, the first book of Astronomy, Manu Smriti, the first book of Public Administration, Susruta-Samhita, the first book of Health, the first book of Art form Kamasutas, Yukti-kalpataru, the first book on Shipbuilding. Further, India has enriched the knowledge of the world by discovering Zero, Pie, Square Root, even 1 to 9 numerals etcetera.

Both the philosophers of India and the Greece have been profoundly interested in the nature, form and function of language. It is evident from the fact that out of six Vedangas, four are exclusively devoted to the form, nature and function of language. This shows the keen and profound interest of the Indian philosophers in understanding and distributing the ideas, theories and thoughts with regards to the nature of language. This in fact constitutes the philosophy of language in India. J.F. Stall in Sanskrit Philosophy of Language (1969) explicates that "at times almost excessive preoccupation with language on the one hand and with philosophy on the other may indeed be regarded as characteristic of Indian civilization" (463). After going through the synchronic and diachronic study of Indian Knowledge Systems one can enunciate that India is the birth place of the Philosophy of Language. Further, developing the science of languages, Indian grammarians have demonstrated how language can act as a 'primary modelling system' of knowledge. Some

grammarians like Panini, K ty yana and Patanjali talk about the derivation of the correct form of the lexis whereas Yaska and their followers talks about the etymological study of word-meaning. It is Mimamsa School who first discussed the comprehensive study of sentences and its interpretation. That's why Mimamsa is also called Vakyasastra. Whereas Nyayasutra only talks about the nature of the word.

The Western philosophers who have dealt with the philosophy of language have been benefited by Indian Intellectual Tradition particularly India's philosophy of language. However, they have imitated the Indian thoughts on the philosophy of language, have not acknowledged the contribution of the Indian Grammarians and Linguists.

When William Jones (1746-94) came in India (1770), he was amazed to see the Indian knowledge systems especially India's language philosophy. Even the philosophy of language elaborated by the Western philosophers echo Indian concepts on the philosophy of language particularly of some Indian grammarians and philosophers: Yaska (9th Century BC), Panini (7th Century BC), Bhartrhari (5th Century AD), K ty yana (3rd Century BC), Patanjali (2nd Century BC), Ramcandra (12th Century AD), Nagesa Bhatta (19th Century), etc. Ferdinand De Saussure propounded his philosophy of Structuralism in 1857, after getting himself well versed with Sanskrit linguistic tradition. His explanation of the linguistic Sign and its composition by the signifier and signified through the image of a tree seems to have been inspired by Bhartrhari's ideas of linguistic sign as he has explained in his magnum opus, Vākyapadiyūm.

Many allusions to language's nature, constituent parts, and their relationship to the human mind and reality have been discussed in Vedic literature itself. The numerous observations on language found in the Rig-Veda, the oldest Indo-European text, demonstrate a profound comprehension of language's nature and purpose that has already been attained. According to Vedic philosophers, language is extremely important. It can lead to happiness, just like a mother's breast can (1.164.49); it can be used to achieve goals (1.164.49); it can reveal true knowledge about objects (of senses) and reality (10.71.1); it permeates all facets of life; and nothing is beyond language (10.114.8).

Language is not a matter of chance, a garment that can be worn and worn again and again. It develops with thought, and thought develops with language. In the final analysis, they may be one and the same. Bhartrhari (5th Century AD) in his Vākyapadiya (I, 123) asserts this basic fact that "There is no cognition without the operation of the word; shot through and

through is cognition by the word, as it were. All knowledge is illumined by the word" (2).

In Vedic literature, Indian grammarians have divided language into four major categories or levels as:

1. Vaikhari
2. Madhyama
3. Pasyanti
4. Para

Many Indian grammarians including Bhartrhari, Katyayana and Patanjali have discussed the nature and manifestations of language. They treat language as the source of all origination and hence they represent it as absolute. They therefore call language as Brahma, which is undefinable, inscrutable, unknowable and that transcends all attributes and qualifications but it is the source of all existence. Patanjali in his Mahabhasya, a meta-commentary on Indian grammarian tradition and the philosophy of language has explained that language can be manifested on different levels. In the modern age, Noam Chomsky in his Aspects of the Theory of Syntax (1965) and Government and Binding Theory (1981) has explained that there are two levels of the realisation of language namely: Deep Structure and Surface Structure. Deep Structure refers to the underlying unconscious structure of the human mind which determines the cognitive activities whereas Surface Structure represents actual speech sounds uttered by the speakers. Later, Chomsky's Minimalist Programme (2005) has employed the metaphors of Logical Form (LF) and Phonetic Form (PF). The Logical Form resonates the semantic ideas of Deep Structure whereas the Phonetic Form echoes ideas of surface structure. Vaikhari is that surface structure or the phonetic form where the concrete speech sounds can be used by the speaker and the listener in their social behaviours.

Madhyama refers to the continuous interaction between the signifier and the signified in order to communicate some message in the physical world. At the level of Madhyama the sound image and its associated signified are integrated to communicate the underlying meaning. So, Madhyama is that state of human mind and the level of language where signs, metaphors, images and symbols interact with one another.

Gradually the concrete relationship between signs, metaphors, signifier and signified is dissolved however its trace is present in the form of the mist in the human mind. This layer of language is generally defined as Pasyanti. Finally, when mind transcends these symbolic orders and move into the world of metaphysics or Brahma is known as Para.

For the study of Vedic text (hymns) the Indian scholars have developed the Vedangas: the six components of Vedic study. These are:

1. Siksa (phonetics)
2. Kalpa (ritual)
3. Vyakarana (grammar)
4. Nirukta (etymology)
5. Chhandas (metrics)
6. Jyotisha (astronomy)

There were so many linguists who have enriched the complex terrain of Indian linguistic tradition with their ideas and theories. Some prominent grammarians and philosophers of language who have nurtured the foundation of Indian philosophy of language are Panini, Katyayana, Patanjali, and Bhartrhari.

Panini

Panini, is the well-known Indian grammarian around 5th century BC. In Astadhyai there are total eight chapters, written in the form of formulas. Ashtadhyai is arranged into different categories under a single unit known as Prakaran. Formula means to condense a complex idea into a single sentence.

Additionally, it should be broadly applicable and scientific, as the definition of formula has shrewdly expressed. We have a very rich grammatical tradition so Panini was not the first linguist's or grammarian, there were so many grammarians even before Panini itself like Sakatayana, Gargya, Bharadwaja, Kashyapa, Yaska, Apisali, Sphotayama, Galava and so on. Panini himself quoted more than ten grammarian in his Astadhyai itself. As he enunciates in his Astadhyai:

"The final "au" of the vocative singular before the word "eti" according to Sakalya in secular or non-Vedic literature is Pragriha".

(Astadhyai: 1.1.16)

Harold Coward and Kunjuni Raja in his Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies: The Philosophy of the Grammarians (1990) explicates about Paniniyan Vyakaran:

Panini's primary concern was the building up of Sanskrit words, both Vedic and Classical, from verbal roots, preverbs, primary and secondary suffixes, and nominal and verbal terminations; but he was also interested in syntactic problems involved in the formation of compound words and in the relationship of the noun in a sentence with the action indicated by the verb. Panini did not neglect meaning, but he was aware of the fact that meaning was likely to change over time and that the final authorities regarding meaning are people who speak the language.

(Coward and Raja, 1990:4)

There are 3,983 sutras/formulae of Astadhyai in 8 chapters of which 14 formulae of Pratyahar are included. Each chapter has 4 Paadas and the total number of Paadas is 32. The Paninian Vyakaran not only includes Sutrapath but also includes Linganushtasan, Dhatupath, Unadipath & Ganapath, in its complete scope. Both vernacular and Vedic words are included in the Paninian Vyakarana. It has been divided into units (Prakaran) where only similar treatment of words is given in a unit. Therefore, all formulae of the subject are found in one unit (prakaran). For example, formulae of Karaka, Samaasa, Sarvanam (Pronoun), Aatmanepada, Vibhakti, Itsanjna, Samhita, Parasmeipada etcetera are well organized. Mahabhashyakar Patanjali explicates that "Paninian Sutras do not have even a single letter, which is meaningless". Further, Sir W. W. Hunter enunciates "Paninian Vyakaran is of the highest order among world's grammars". In Paninian Astadhyai (5th Century B.C.), we can divide grammatical system into four major components:

- a. The Astadhyai, which means eight chapters, encompasses 3,983 grammatical rules.
- b. The Sivasutras, is the record of phonological segments.
- c. The Dhatupatha, comprises the morphological and syntactic possessions of around 2,000 roots of the verb.
- d. The Ganapatha, incorporates around 261 lexicons related to exceptional cases/ rules.

Kātyāyana

Katyayana (3rd Century BC) Indian Philosopher, grammarian and also mathematician well known for his text Vartika. It is the explanation of Paninian grammar and Patanjali's Mahabhasya. He also composed Shulba Sutras which comes under mathematics (geometry). Like Plato, Katyayana came down on the side of naturalism when it comes to the connection between the word and meaning. He believed that the relationship between the word and the meaning was not a product of human habit. In Katyayana's view, word-meaning relationships were siddha (given to us, eternal). Even though the object to which a word is referring is not eternal, the essence of the meaning, like a piece of gold used to decorate various objects, remains undisturbed and is therefore eternal. The summary of Vartika:

1. The sabda (word) and its artha (meaning) are eternal.
2. The dharma (religious) merit is obtained by using the grammatically correct form.
3. Despite the appearance of being a group of two short vowels, a long vowel should always be regarded as a

single, cohesive unit and never as a group of two vowels.

4. A syllable has no meaning on its own. Nonetheless, a certain combination of syllables that is identified as a suffix, root, or stem (pratipadika) has significance.
5. According to Vartika, since anusvara and visarga are human sounds, they are within the antastha.

Patanjali

Patanjali is well known Indian Sanskrit grammarian of 2nd Century BC. He is also known by other names like Gonikaputra or Gonardiya. His major work related to language/grammar is Mahabhasya. Patanjali's Mahabhasya is the first remarkable commentary on Paninian Astadhyai and also short comment on Katyayana's Vartikas. In his first Ahnika he explains that the language needs preservation, reconstruction, modification conciseness and principle. He also explains that for the preservation of Veda's grammar plays a vital role. The person who is well aware of basics of linguistics or grammar especially elision and the sound change can be able to understand Vedas. Sphota/ Dhvani (Phonetics) is very important for conveying the meaning of the word or text. Even a single wrong sound of a word creates a disruption in the meaning. Patanjali explicitly emphasise the importance of the Artha and Prakarana while deciding the meaning of a word.

Bhartrhari

Bhartrhari (5th Century AD) is well known Indian philosopher, linguists and Sanskrit grammarian. His most famous work is Vakyapadiya. Where he has delineated the Sphota theory. Sphota theory is one of the oldest theories in the Indian language. Basically, Sphota argues that meaning is not a sequence with a time order. Meaning is unique and unitary. Thus, a word is not a compound of sounds and sentence is not a collection of present words. Meaning making is a single indivisible act that appears all at once as a unitary, total whole. Sphota is a single meaningful symbol. As Kunjuni Raja in his Indian Theories of Meaning (1963) explicates: The Sphota is derived from the root Sphut which means "to burst", and it is defined in two ways. In its linguistic sense it is normally defined as "that from which the meaning bursts forth, i.e., shines forth, in other words the word-as-expressing-a meaning ... secondly, it is defined as an entity which is manifested by the letters.

(Raja, 1963:98)

One school of thought holds that the sphota is the initial articulated sound made by the various vocal organs contacting the distinct articulation points. As mentions in Vakyapadiya I:

Yah samyogavibhagabhyam karanair upajanyate
Sa sphota, sabdajah sabda dhvanayo nyair udahrtah.

(VP, I: 103)

It is not only Bhartrhari who uses the term sphota first time before that Patanjali in his Mahabhasya also used term sphota. He also distinguishes the term sphota and dhvani.

Sphota is the fundamental sound and may be associated to a flame; the dhvani-s like the light scattering in all directions. As mentions "Durat prabheva dipasya dhvanimatram tu lakshyate". (VP 105). Sometimes we hear the dhvani-s without identifying the sphota, just as we observe the light even without seeing the flame. Later, philosophers like Bhattoji Dikshit and Nagesa Bhatta explicate eight types of sphota. And these divisions are based on their meaningfulness. These are:

1. Varnasphota
2. Padasphota
3. Vakyasphota
4. Akhandapadasphota
5. Akhandavakyasphota
6. Varnajatisphota
7. Padajatisphota
8. Vakyajatisphota

According to Bhartrhari akhandavakyasphota, the indivisible

sentence sphota of the vyakti, is the real sphota among other types of sphota.

Bhartrhari enunciates that meaning is not conveyed by the speaker, it stimulates the meaning through the mind of the listener. For giving the meaning word itself is not sufficient to convey the meaning. There are other factors also which help to convey the meaning in the syntactic structure. First, it is Mimamsaka school of thought explicated later accepted by other schools after slight modifications. These factors are:

1. Akanksa (Syntactic Expectancy)
2. Yogyata (Logical Consistency)
3. Samnidhi (Phonetic Contiguity)
4. Tatparya (Inherent Meaning)

1. Akanksa (Syntactic Expectancy)

For the syntactic unity, Akanksa, Yogyata, Samnidhi; these three are very important. Further if we compare all these elements so Akanksa is very important.

The definition of sentence as given by Jaimini in his Mimamsasutras:

Arthaikatvad ekan vakyam sakanksam
Ced vibhage syat

(Mimamsasutra II 1.46)

As Raja (1963) expounds "A group of words serving a single purpose forms a sentence, if on analysis the separate words are found to have akanksa or mutual expectancy" (152).

Mimamsaka-s face problem while dealing in Yajurveda, because they have seen some problem while dealing with the principle of syntactic unity that how far or long a sentence can be extended.

Even Panini also explains in terms of word or especially compound word level. According to him compound word can be framed if and only if they have samarthya or capacity. This samarthya or capacity is described by many philosophers in their own ways.

2. Yogyata (Logical Consistency)

Yogyata is the logical consistency or compatibility of the words in a sentence. The word must have the competency for mutual connection.

For example- The bird is flying in the sky.

So, here we can say yogyata or consistency of meaning in the sentence, since birds have wings, so they can fly. If we take the example of -The dog is flying in the sky. The sentence lacks yogyata or consistency of meaning because it is a common knowledge that the dog cannot fly in the sky.

3. Samnidhi (Phonetic Contiguity)

Samnidhi or phonetic contiguity is the proximity of continuous utterance in a sentence or juxtaposition. Kumarilabhatta enunciates samnidhi is the continuous moving words or which gives the meaning in the mind.

4. Tatparya

Naiyayikas School believe that the meaning is contended by the speaker, they have not considered another aspect of the listener that meaning is understood by the listener's point of view but not by the speaker. Vedantins reject the notion of Naiyayikas the way they give the importance to the speaker. Further, Mimamsakas believe that the word itself has inherent capacity of meaning. According to Naiyayikas tatparya is the intended meaning by the speaker, whereas Vedantins and Mimamsakas believe that the word itself has the inherent meaning. At the syntactic level, the formation of a sentence is on the basis of individual word-meaning, as well as their mutual relationship. Anvitaabhidhana theory believes that the words themselves have the capacity of both the individual

word-meaning as well as their mutual relationship. But on the contrary Abhihitānvaya theory justifies that the word only convey the individual word-meaning; whereas the mutual relation is conveyed by the word-meanings, and not by the words.

Bhartrhari in his Vyākaraṇa philosophy talks about the importance of Kāla (time). He describes Kāla is important as Sabdābrahman. And he was the first who talks about the unity of Sabda and Bhrahman (the ultimate reality). On the one hand, Bhartrhari treats language as an act and on the other hand, he treats it as a principle (Tattva). On the one hand, language functions as a means of communication. On the other hand, language is a metaphysical principle that he uses to describe the phenomenal world. As he explicates "Like the strings controlling the movement of birds, so the objects of the created world are controlled by the string of time". (Vākyapadīya: 3.9.15). He also delineates the fact that language cannot represent the actual reality of the world. In other words, language has itself their limitations. In Vākyapadīya he delineates about the Kālasakti (time). According to him he divided three tenses; past, present and future.

Cognition

Bhartrhari also talks about the process of Linguistic Cognition. What Chomsky talks about the Syntactic Theory (1957), or in 'Universal Grammar' that the basic structure of any language in the child is by birth. The same statement was already given by Bhartrhari in 5th Century AD. Even he explains it properly by giving the example that if it is not then how the child know the throw of the air, which play a vital role while producing or articulating the sound? Secondly, why he tries to speak more and more? And the last which place or manner of articulation is used while producing the accurate sound? By giving these three examples he conveys that language is inherent or the structure of the language in the child's mind. And also, the relationship between language and cognition. Bhartrhari in his Vākyapadīya (I, 123) explicates:

Na so'sti pratyayo loke yah sabdānugamād rte
anuvidham iva jñānam sarvam Sabdena bhāsate.
(Bhartrhari, Vākyapadīya. 1965: 12)
(Ed. K. V. Abhyankar and V. P. Limaye)

Bhartrhari in his Vākyapadīya (I, 123) enunciates that "there is no cognition without the operation of the word; shot through is cognition by the word, as it were. All knowledge is illumined word" (12). He also delineates the fact that meaning is taken by the listener through sphota. As he posits:

At first, the word exists in the mind of the speaker as a unity or sphota. When he utters it, it produces a sequence of different sounds so that it appears to have differentiation. The listener, though first hearing a series of sounds, ultimately perceives the utterance as a unity- the same sphota with which the speaker began-and then the meaning is conveyed.

(Coward and Raja, 1963: 67)

The philosophy of language in India has examined the nature, form and function of language. It has established the fact that language is absolute, logocentric and universal. It is the source of all origination. Hence, it is defined as Brahma. The philosophy of language has also dealt with the idea of linguistic determinism and how language and thought are deeply interconnected. Language is the tool of human cognition and there is nothing beyond it. The philosophy of language explores the form and meaning of language and therefore, it examines the phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic layers of language and communication. Language is viewed not merely as an object of human cognition but it is transcendental and metaphysical in its existence. It also explores and explains the possibilities of explicating meaning through Sphota where the relationship between linguistic units can be observed through Akanksha, Yogyata, Samnidhi and Tatparya. To

explain it further, the philosophy of language in India contextualises the theories of Anvitābhīdhana and Abhihitānvaya.

REFERENCES

1. Bhartrhari, Vākyapadīya. Edited by K. V. Abhyankar and V. P. Limaye. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute. 1965.
2. Bhatt, G. P. Epistemology of the Bhatta School of Purva Mimamsa, Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office. 1962
3. Bilimoria, P. Sabdapramana Word and Knowledge (Series: Studies in Classical India, No. 10), Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers. 1988.
4. Bronkhorst, J. "The role of meanings in Panini's grammar," Indian Linguistics, 40: 146-157. 1979.
5. Buitenan, J. A. B. van. Studies in Indian Literature and Philosophy (Collected articles edited by Ludo Rocher), Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. 1988.
6. Cardona, G. Panini: A Survey of Research, The Hague, Paris: Mouton. 1976.
7. Panini, His Works and its Traditions (Volume I: Background and Introduction), Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. 1988.
8. Coward, H. G. Sphota Theory of Language, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. 1980.
9. Coward, Harold and Kunjuni Raja. Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies: The Philosophy of the Grammarians. Motilal Banarsidass. 1990
10. Coward, H. G. & Raja, K. K. (eds.), The Philosophy of the Grammarians, Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1990.
11. Iyer, K. A. S. Vākyapadīya of Bhartrhari, with the Vrtti, and the Paddhati of Vrsabhadeva, Kanda I (Series: Deccan College Monograph Series, No. 32), Pune: Deccan College. 1966.
12. Kapoor, Kapil. Dimensions of Purini Grammar: The Indian Grammatical System. D.K Printworld Ltd. 2005.
13. Krishnaswamy N. et. al. India's Language Philosophy. Pearson. 2013.
14. Matilal, B. K. The Word and the World: India's Contribution to the Study of Language. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992.
15. Matilal, B. K. Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.
16. Matilal, B. K. Epistemology, Logic, and Grammar in Indian Philosophical Analysis. The Hague: Mouton, 1971.
17. Logic, Language and Reality: an introduction to Indian philosophical studies, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. 1985.
18. The Character of Logic in India, Albany: State University of New York Press. 1998.
19. Mind, Language, and World, New York: Oxford University Press. 2002.
20. Pandeya, R. C. The Problem of Meaning in Indian Philosophy, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. 1963.
21. Raja, Kunjuni. Indian Theories of Meaning. The Theosophical Society, Adyar. 1963
22. Russell, B. The Problems of Philosophy. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1912.
23. Siderits, M. Indian Philosophy of Language. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers. 1991.