Language As An Imaginative Agency: A Comparative Study Of Vākyapadīya And The Rule Of Metaphor

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Abstract

The task of paper presentation in the workshop motivated me to dive into the rich Indian cosmos of philosophical discourse— and it happened to be the study of Vākyapadīya— mainly that of the partial and comprehensive translation of K Raghavan Pillaiwhich seemed similar in interests and had many things common to my earlier research work. The paper starts with the old notions of language and goes into detail to understand what it is that we call language and how is it to be a 'linguistic being.'It ponders over the phenomenon of language as 'if' it is metaphorical. The metaphor at large reveals the imaginary, illusionary, arbitrary sides of language and linguistic truths that it produces. The Rule of Metaphor of Paul Ricoeur is chosen to analyze the main ideas on the subject and the same is done with the scholarly Indian treatise called Vākyapadīya of Bhartṛhari— the one coming from a modern French discourse and the second coming from the ancient Sanskrit linguistic grammar. In the end, a short but comprehensive comparison is made to understand how common and similar both authors are— having quite different traditions, conventions, and different spaces and times.

Introduction

On intellectual grounds, many would think that Indian philosophical discourse, for the last 500 years or so, the so-called Indian Philosophical imagination had been hijacked by the European imperial powers and the modern-day truth-making machinery. How much truth is in this mindset will remain a debatable concern for the historiographers of the times? Since time immemorial, the language had not been a subject of serious concern. It was just a gift of God as described in the scriptures i. e. Vedas, Bible, Al- Qur'an, etc. The idea that human experience originates in a language is in every way similar to that of the philosophy of language in Indian philosophy. My interest in this paper is to understand the nature of language through Indian philosophy in the modern and postmodern context.

It is said that we mortal millions live in the world of language as also tells Martine Heidegger that "language is the house of Being." This language world equally needs the same care and concern as it is with our earthly world. Scientific research should also be conducted as in today's ultramodern world it is given to the study of earth sciences, environment, and all other scientific and physical knowledge to understand and explain the unexplored, unexposed, and all hidden secrets. In the same fashion, language also needs to be seen and taken as an object yet unexplored, unexposed, and hidden territory which has yet not been disclosed and discovered completely. Language as a tool has been exclusively a human property that has telepathic origins. Biologist defines the modern man as a "homo sapiens" which stands in Latin, for "wise man." The possession of language defines the animal as "homo loquens," Latin, meaning "talking man," which looks like an appropriate name. "When we study language," says Chomsky," we are approaching what some might call the "human essence", the distinctive qualities of mind that is, so far as we know, unique to man. This quality is more than any other human attribute that distinguishes human beings from other living animals on earth. This is a language that makes a man powerful along with all its limitations and complexities. That is why Heidegger

becomes fond of saying: "Man is Language." In other ways, humans themselves are words if not exaggerated. Language, as a system of relation, resemblance, recognition, reference, and significance or signification makes a connection between thought and reality, self and world, subject and object, ordinary and divine, mortal and immortal, physics and metaphysics. For this connection, one, first, must understand the nature of language that makes humans feel connected.

There is no doubt that language is the source of human life and power in most of the myths and religions of the world. In Africa, a child who just arrives on the earth is a "Kunta" that is only a "thing" and a "muntu," a "person." Learning a language makes him "homoloquens," a "talking man," rather the child becomes a human being according to this African tradition. The "thing" becomes human because of the possession of a language at least and for them to be human is to be linguistic. Now, curiosity brings us nearer to the question that what does it mean to know a language? What is its nature, and how does it work?

Metaphor, in itself, has more than three thousand years of history of its time and is viewed in various ways there are various views i. e. the similarity view, the interaction view, the relational view, the pragmatic view, and the cognitive view. After twenty-five centuries of rhetoricians' attention to the metaphor, philosophers, thinkers, grammarians, literary theorists, and critics are unable to make a general way to identify and recognize the metaphor's nature to understand it. The question arises if anything they serve to tell us?

II

In the second half of the twentieth century, the thinkers of language made radical understandings of the nature of language that it is metaphorical. Metaphor, in itself, has more than three thousand years' history of its time and is viewed in various ways. There are different views of looking at it e.g. the similarity view, the interaction view, the relational view, the pragmatic view, and the cognitive view, etc. Understanding the nature of language has

become one of the most significant topics in the interpretation of human life. It is not the text that is weaved in language, but the human life as a whole in language. In the later part of the twentieth century, thinkers of language made radical understandings of the nature of language. Language has flux in itself and it bears the necessity of its critique when it is discovered. One of the ways to understand the nature of languages is that it is metaphorical in every sense of the term. Language is metaphorical because it relates itself to the objects that it describes only as an image, in other words, the relationship of language with its objects is not syntactical but imaginary, illusionary, or arbitrary. If we assign some concrete meaning to the metaphor, such an attempt is rooted in the ideological thinking of the views of metaphor.

Traditionally the study of language and linguistic meaning takes place within a sub-field called semantics which is also a sub-discipline in philosophy where the relationship between meaning and formal logic is emphasized. Semantics and semiotics are the two different branches of language study which deal with the study of meaning that language provides. Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols and how they are used. Semantics is the study of the meanings of words and phrases in language, the meaning of words and phrases in a particular context. Thus Semantics has two branches: first Lexical Semantics focuses on the meaning associated with individual Lexical items e.g. words. Second: Provisional or relational semantics, which focuses on those relational meanings that we typically express with a whole of the sentence.

III

Paul Ricoeur in his magnum opus The Rule of Metaphor (1975) primarily argues that metaphor and metonymy do not primarily define figures and tropes but they strongly define the general process of language. Metaphor belongs to the heuristics of thought and ceases to be arbitrary and trivial. There is a fabulative invention that proceeds with enabling elevation. Language is at work of saying and

poeticizing. Metaphor as a Figure serves when the ideas lack proper sign— and similar is with that of catachresis. Catachresis stands for a situation with a sign already having one idea and another idea is made available to the sign on an ad hoc basis. The word metaphors are clubbed with semiotics and statement metaphors with the semantics of discourse. At this point, he indicates the limitations of Saussure's understanding of language (sign= signifier and signified). Thus, metaphors also increase polysemy at the time when they are dead and all the living metaphors are at work to evolve and create a new language. Ricoeur reflects that there is a metaphorical crisis found in the context of a word, there is an abyss, a constant ignorance as the message always remains with a sentence. The word is at the mercy of being connected— the connecting layer between phonema and syntegma.

Metaphors add to how we perceive and— this becomes the poetic function of metaphor and language. Metaphor bears a semantic challenge— something he calls semantic new impertinences and semantic innovations. This description and redescription add to the language. Ricoeur adds a novel idea that metaphor has a split reference, therefore, for him, the expansion for the real reference becomes the condition of access to a virtual mode of reference.

Thus Ricoeur criticizes Levi-Straus rigorously but in a friendly way and questions structural linguistics carefully both in terms of operational and foundational presuppositions in the essay: "Structure and Hermeneutics." Despite the universality of the finite structure of language, according to Ricoeur, there exists an infinite power in the dialectic of levels, and language at this highest level remains wide open e.g. what we come across to know is that it "also says" and it also means. This results in a dialectic of "finite-infinite," and "closed-open" relations to language and speech. Ihde adds about this finite and infinity of language: There the infinity of "verb," or word act was mediated and located through the finitude of perspective. The significative situation of man is

primordially both perception and language as seeing and saying. Now within language itself, the finitude of structure mediates the infinity of events (Don Ihdex iii)

In Ricoeur's view, "word" is a system and an act, structure, and history. In this way, the word within itself appears to be polysemic which poses itself with a certain potential for opacity, very difficult to explain and very difficult to understand, he says that is the richness of the "word" and also discusses the problem of the same in the following lines:

> The word is much more and much less than the sentence. It is much less, because there is not yet any word before the sentence. What is there before the sentence? Sings, that is, differences in the system, values in the lexicon. [....] ... the word names at the same time what the sentence says. It names in sentence position. In the dictionary, there is only the endless round of terms which are defined circularly, which revolves in the closure of the lexicon. But then someone speaks, someone says something. The word leaves the dictionary; it becomes word at the moment when man becomes speech, when speech becomes discourse and discourse a sentence. [......] words are signs in speech position. Words are the points of articulation between semiology and semantics, in every speech event.
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> Thus the word is, as it were, a trader between the system and the act, between the structure and the event. On the one hand, it relates to structure, as a differential value, but it is then only a semantic potentiality; on the other hand, it relates to the act and to the event in the fact that it's semantic actuality of the utterance. [....]. The sentence, we have seen, is an event; as such, its actuality is transitory, passing, and ephemeral. But

the word survives the sentence. As a displaceable entity, it survives the transitory instance of discourse and holds itself available for new uses. Thus, heavy with a new use-value-as minute as this may be- it returns to the system. And, in returning to the system, it gives it a history. (Ricoeur 92-93)

For the nature of language, meaning and interpretation, action and subjectivity, philosophers, linguists, literary critics, and social scientists have been highly engaged throughout the last century with the nature and the problem of language. It has entered into sustained dialogue with the traditions of hermeneutics, the dialogue with this tradition that has focused for centuries on the problem of interpretation.

According to Thompson, the examination and the philosophical operation of Freud's psychoanalysis, the confrontation of Ricoeur with structuralism, and the critique of both raise many fundamental questions regarding the nature of Language. Therefore, in response, Ricoeur develops a theory of language, which later gets connected to the philosophy of hermeneutics. This theory is originally premised upon a fundamental distinction and division between "system" and "discourse." In Thompson's view, the base of this distinction is related to the Saussurian dichotomy between langue and parole, but Ricoeur is primarily indebted to the French linguist Emile Benveniste (1902-1976). For Ricoeur, discourse is an internal dialectic between events and meanings that has an eventful character; therefore, the notion of meaning is analyzed into two basic divisions.

The first one is the "objective aspect" e.g. whatever the sentence means and the second is the "subjective aspect," e.g. whatever the speaker means. Ricoeur further draws the component of the objective aspect into two categories of meaning: the sentence has both— an "ideal sense" and at the same time a "real reference." According to Ricoeur, it is on the level of sentence that language can refer to something beyond its usual and functional capacity, that is, in a sense the "closed

universe of signs" which seems to be related to an extra-linguistic world. Thompson adds that this referential relation is a crucial characteristic of discourse. The basic condition of creativity is the intrinsic polysemy of words, the feature that a word in natural languages has more than one meaning. The boundaries of polysemy can be understood by the semantics of the sign, as the potential uses of a word are accumulated and codified in the lexical system. According to Ricoeur, the actual function of polysemy can be grasped only by the semantics of the sentence. The words only have meaning to the sentence, and, the sentences are uttered and inscribed only in the particular context.

The polysemy of the word brings an additional meaning or a surplus of meaning. Despite the richness of a word, being polygenic can be deciphered by interpretation. Ricoeur's philosophy of hermeneutics aims at certain "privileged words" the symbolic words. Therefore, the primary task of Ricoeur's hermeneutics is to interpret and investigate those "privileged-symbolic" words having certain types of multiple senses and references attached to them. The surface meaning sometimes hides, conceals, or contains a less obvious depth meaning that can also be a surplus of meaning which is not dependent on the surface of literal meaning. Moreover, Ricoeur'swords of symbolic significance take a specific shape and get a metaphorical structure. This is the problem of hermeneutics, the task and primary aim of hermeneutics is to unfold the multiple, polysemy/symbolic/metaphoric nature of the word that is implied in the literal meaning. Don Ihde writes that this model of a hermeneutic task in Ricoeur's thought becomes much more than only a matter of textual interpretation.

The polysemic nature of the word provides the basis for the creative extension of meaning through metaphor. Ricoeur, therefore, develops his new ideas on metaphor through a detailed analysis of traditional rhetoric where a metaphor is considered and identified only as a type of troupe and that is when a figurative word is substituted for a literal word.

The traditional metaphor never tells anything new, it is merely a decorative device only for the embellishment of language; therefore, Ricoeur refreshes the current understanding of metaphor and develops a theory and a philosophy of metaphor on his own. Ricoeur refers to some Anglo-Saxon authors such as I.A. Richards, Max Black, Monroe Beardsley, etc. to give a critique of and reflect on whatever they have thought of metaphor. Ricoeur starts looking at metaphor from the Semiotic level to the point of hermeneutics. Each of them corresponds to the other e.g. the word to semiotics, semiotics to sentence, the sentence to semantics, semantics to discourse, and at the end, the discourse to the hermeneutics.

IV

For Ricoeur, metaphor and metonymy do not primarily define figures and tropes but they strongly define the general process of language. He associates metaphor with poetics—especially with the theory of mimetic structures, which subordinates muthos. Metaphor has a sense and a reference, a sense that has to do something with meaning and the reference to reality out there. In this way, metaphors describe and redescribe reality. They are at work of saying and poeticizing. Ricoeur associates the word metaphors with semiotics and the statement metaphors with the semantics of discourse, therefore, metaphors also increase polysemy at the time when they are dead and all the living metaphors are at work to evolve and create a new language. Ricoeur reflects that there is a metaphorical crisis found in the context of the word, there is an abyss, a constant ignorance as the message always remains with the sentence. The word is at the mercy of being connected— the connecting layer between phonema and syntagma. Ricoeur says that polysemy adds same-senses relation and synonymy and homonymy add productive vagueness in a generic sense as a constant demand of more and further discrimination made on the actual context. He says that synonymy plays two distinct roles at once—stylistic and reinforcement/ emphasis.

Ricoeur calls polysemy a lexical ambiguity as they all create and add to the empire of language. Metaphor has an iconic moment and the resemblance and fictive aspect of metaphor also add to some new situations and contexts to function in language. Metaphors add to how we perceive and— therefore it becomes the poetic function of language in human discourse. Metaphor bears a semantic challenge— something that Ricoeur calls semantic new impertinences and semantic innovations. The description and redescription add to language as they add and satisfy various purposes such as congruence and plentitude. Ricoeur adds a novel idea that metaphor has a split reference (one side referring to something not antecedently accessible to language), therefore, for him, the expansion for the real reference becomes the condition of access to the virtual mode of reference. The splitting of reference and redescription of reality gets attached to the imaginative variation of fiction. Thus it requires an epoche— a suspension proper! In metaphorical expression or metaphoric truth, there is speculation. Thus the epoche of natural reality becomes important. The similarity and resemblance also add imaginary and illusionary dimensions to it. Metaphor has a schematic structure that invokes images— and thus, there is an epoche required— that is the suspension proper to the imaginary or illusionary (meaning).

Human beings are distinct from other beings in the sense that they use language, make meanings and they interpret meanings. In other words, they live their life by the meanings that language creates for them. The nature of language has been one of the most significant issues in the interpretation of human life. It is not the text that is weaved in language, but the human life— humans are inscribed in the narratives, and therefore, to be human is generally meant to be linguistic. We are human beings because we can say that we are humans. This instance on the significance of language is reflected in many of the philosophers like Bhartṛhariभर्तृहरि or Bhartrihari (5th century CE) who was a Sanskrit writer and the author of

the influential text in Sanskrit Vākyapadīya, on Sanskrit grammar and linguistic philosophy.

Vākyapadīyais one of the foundational treatises in the Indian grammatical tradition in metrical discourse. It explains interesting theories on the philosophy of words and sentences. This text brings us very close to Paul Ricoeur's philosophy of language and his hermeneutics. Bhartṛhari (भर्तृहरि) mentions that there are tow schools i. e. Monistic and Plurilistic schools and both have different views. K Raghavan Pillai writes in the "Introduction" of the Vākyapadīya that it is one of the "principal authoritative works in Sanskrit Grammer" which primarily talks about the "Supreme Word Principle," and the "speech function as the source of all universes (Shabdabraman)." Speech appears to be the prime productive principle that has a key place and also is man's other self(XI). A similar injunction is also found in a short description in the Al- Qur'an i. e. "Kun fayakūn" (فَيَكُونُكُنْ, read as "kun fayakoon" meaning— "Be, and it is" that is used in reference to Almighty's all creation powers and process in Surah Baqrahthe, the phrase appears as: "The Originator of the heavens and the earth. When He decrees a matter, He only says to it: "Be! And it is" (2:117).

Unlikely Bhartṛhari focuses on the metaphysical aspects of the word and Ricoeur on the practical aspect of the word in human life. Ricoeur talks of metaphorization and Bhartṛhari of the functioning of the "Supreme Word" in speech although he does talk of the sources of sentence meaning. For Bhartṛhari the word has a phonetic structure and meaning pattern. Ricoeur tells that words (metaphors) have a sense (meaning) and reference (reality out there). For Monists, the meaning of a sentence arises as a "flash of insight" (partibha). This flash of insight is derived from six sources: nature, action, practice, meditation, invisible causes, and the gift of the wise. The same is found with Ricoeur when he subverts Jakobson's model of verbal communication.

Bhartṛhari divides speech into small, large, and larger units that require proper interpretation, so does Ricoeur i. e. word metaphor to semiotics, sentence

metaphors to semantics, and discourse to proper hermeneutics. The big debate between shorter and larger units of language or the semiotics or semantics aspects in language, Pillai mentions in the "Introduction" about the word and the division that the ancient Indian scholars had:

> There are two schools of thought— those of the Monists and of the Pluralists amongst the philosophers of speech. According to the first, the sentence alone is the reality— the single unit. The words and syllables only appear to be complete entities. According to the later, the syllable has a reality of its own, the word is a sum total of the syllables and the sentence is on the words added together. In the view of the Monists, the difference of diction and the like which belongs to the category of the produced sounds are superimposed on the indivisible Word-principle named sphota, and are wrongly conceived to belong to the latter." (Comprehension from 71-77 Shlokas, XXIV)

Vākyapadīya openly glorifies speech at large along with its uses and so does Ricoeur. In the first part of Vākyapadīya (119-143 Shlokas) Bhartṛhari mentions that for Monists "the word is only convenient and conventional fiction created for the sake of pragmatic analysis" and the speech is merely a pragmatic necessity. The word can convey meaning but they lack context— that is something Ricoeur calls an abyss in words and they are meaning containers. For Bhartṛhari, words lack a form to be settled in for being functional and meaningful— Ricoeur called the same to be connected with phonema or syntagma! Similar to Ricoeur, Monists believe, mentions Bhartṛhari that:

> …. words specify meaning of the sentence. The words themselves are not meaningful in the sense that the sum total of the meaning of the words will constitute the

meaning of the sentence…. The meaning of the sentence is a unitary concept which is not a sum total of individual word-meaning…. Reality is understood only through speech (language) and it is understood only in the form in which it is presented by speech (word or language). But language cannot describe the intrinsic nature of things, although we know things only in the form in which words describe them. (431-437, XXXII, III)

It will be very difficult to deny that any "fixation" in human discourse will not be complex enough to interpret. How far will it be correct to believe that king Thebes was right in condemning the art of writing and the act of fixing? Keeping the modern-day consequences in mind, this might lead to a long debate. Is it true that there will come no Hermes again? Will the Theologians, clergymen including the general readers knock on the doors of prophethood to be reopened again? Or, has everyone today acquired the art of Hermes? Are we not living in a time where the textual territories have been occupied and colonialized by "some groups" or "communities" who have their grip over all the intellectual think–tanks? Do they not use the so-called theorists which very much sound like literary terrorists— as a strong weapon and instrument befitting their policies, plans, goals, aims, and ideologies? Do they not evolve an attitude of looking at the world of the texts? Are we not living in the age of constant gatekeeping?

Fixing, according to Theuth would make men wiser and more capable of containing knowledge than ever before but the prophetic king Thebes comes up with a "No!," in his reply, an open reply that seems to be correct as the modern-day students and scholars look to have more information and less knowledge. The king rightly cried that in this way "[souls] will become more forgetful once they have put their confidence in external marks instead of relying on themselves from within." (Ricoeur 39, Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of

Meaning) Socrates, too, writes Ricoeur that, "writing is like painting which generates non-living being, which in turn remains silent when asked to answer." (38-39) Presenting a short apology for this harsh critique, Ricoeur writes that discourse is "written in the souls of the one who knows, the one who can defend himself and keep silent or talk as required by the soul of the person addressed" (39) Although, Rousseau and Bergson "link the main evils that plague civilization to writing." (39) According to Rousseau, adds Ricoeur in this regard that:

> … [As] long as language relied only on the voice, it reserved the presence of oneself to oneself and to others. Language was still the expression of passion. It was eloquence, not yet exegesis. With writing began separation, tyranny and inequality. Writing ignores its addressee just as it conceals its author. It separates men just as property separates owners. The tyranny of the lexicon and of grammar is equal to that of the laws of exchange, crystallized in money. Instead of the word of God, we have the rule of the learned and the domination of the priesthood. The break-up of the speaking community, the partition of the soil, the analycity of thought, and the reign of dogmatisms were all born with writing. (39)

Might this not be one of the reasons that the majority of prophets from Adam to Jesus Christ including Prophet Mohammad and the mystics believed in instant statesmanship as they articulated thought and did not leave anything written primarily? But the problem with us is that we have 'Writings!' The present chapter will be an attempt to look into the matter within the phenomena of writing and reading dialectic for communication and human survival inventing a hermeneutic framework for all sorts of fixation and affairs in and with writing.

Ricoeur also dogmatizes the same ideas (split-reference) discussed in the above paragraph. Bhartṛhari thinks that words in sentences are primary actions affected by men through an object. A Ricoeur thinks that to metaphorize well has to do something with verb not noun so is the case with Bhartṛhari, he mentions that reality is only expressible in the form 'it exists' that is to be compounded with a verb which is the most important part of any speech. In one of the Shlokas Bhartṛhari also says that "the meaning of the word is abstracted and derived from the sentence. For this the interpretation of the sentence is necessary." This is what Paul Ricoeur says when he talks of justful hermeneutics of suspicion in the sacred or secular textual discourse. Bhartṛhari does not discuss the depth of hermeneutics and concepts of structured analysis or the principles of interpretation. The terminology of Vākyapadīyais all grammatical and Ricoeur's philosophical at large.

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