Chapter Five

LANGUAGE, MEANING AND INTERPRETATIVE UNDERSTANDING
This chapter aims to develop a more comprehensive model of understanding meaning by making dialogic interaction at the centre of linguistic activity. It analyses how the fundamental historicity has ultimately come to determine our cognitive endeavours, by placing us inside a linguistic horizon.

The linguisticality of understanding, as we could see, is imposing certain limits on our cognitive endeavours. The textual meaning is not directly accessible to us, as we cannot easily do away with the influence of our linguistic categories, which determine the process of understanding meaning. In other words, we are already under the influence of the perspectival grip of our language. We have seen that, it is this inevitable perspectival grip that makes understanding meaning an interpretative endeavour.

Quine's doctrine of translation describes a situation where the linguist makes guesses about the meanings of the native's utterances. These guesses are made on the basis of two things. On the one hand, they presuppose the background of a world of objects, which is available as a common sphere of experience for both the linguist and the native. On the other hand, they depend upon the interpretations performed by the linguist in the light of the linguistic categories he inherits.

Therefore, a direct access to the world of objects would become impossible. This situation makes the theory of pure perceptions challengeable and also points to the necessity of
interpretation. A mere presence of the world of objects in the background does not tell us anything definite about the meaning of the native's utterances. This is because there is no *a priori* relationship between words and objects or facts and sentences. The stimulus-response principle lies in the background of interpretation. Based on the observation of the response of the native in the presence of the stimuli, the linguist could arrive at the theory, following a trial and error method.

In the framework of the hard-core representational semantics, the problem implied in the native and the linguist possessing different linguistic categories does not appear as important. The logico-semantic doctrine of representationalism takes care of the language-world connection, which enables the subject to make direct access to the object. Every use of language presupposes a determinate relationship between language and the world. But once this direct contact is blocked, as shown by Quine in his indeterminacy thesis, what remains is 'use' alone and consequently understanding meaning is to be viewed as consisting in an ability to use language. It is not always the case that use and meaning are interrelated in a predetermined way. Nor is it that every change in use is understood as a change in meaning. As Putnam says, meaning is a coarse grid laid over use.\(^1\) He further adds that, our criteria for change of meaning are as various and sloppy as they are explained by the different kinds of interest we have in connection with different topics and objectives. He, therefore, calls language motley, even if one can bring the motley under a uniform representation at some level of abstraction.\(^2\)

Therefore, according to Quine, the stimulus-response procedure sets only the background of understanding meaning, and does not bridge the gap between the respective ontological realms.
of the linguist and the native. This rootedness in different ontological realms is a vital aspect to be taken into account of. For both the linguist and the native, their respective languages shape all that they can experience, know and understand. The Linguist cannot step out of his ontological domain by freeing his intellect from his linguistic horizon and make a direct access to the ontological domain of the native. In other worlds, the difference in the ontological realms blocks a direct and immediate understanding of the language of the native.

The way language defining and determining an ontological realm for us has been a widely discussed topic. The pivotal role of language in the comprehension of meaning has been recognised by many philosophers. Davidson makes this idea more apparent by explicating the intimate association of our conceptual schemes with language. Unless we make such an association, Davidson contends, we will be forced to subscribe to the scheme - content dualism, and subsequently posit a mind with its categories operating with a language with its specific structure. This would make language practically alien to us, at least occasionally, and therefore it would imply a possibility where we can be and do without language. But speaking a language, asserts Davidson, is not a trait a man can lose while retaining the power of thought.

With language claiming such a pivotal position, we increasingly tend to reject the claim that reality exists independently of us as well as the language we speak. The representational idea of a world of independent objects and facts becomes challengeable. We can then, as Putnam says, no more hold the view that something extra-linguistic like the 'sense' of the sentence is determining the conditions under which any particular sentence will be uttered and the behaviour that will result if that sentence is uttered. Even if there is an extra-linguistic
world, it is of no interest to us, unless it could enter the framework of our language and thus
make us aware of it. But this notion of entering into a language again is a distorting image, as it
suggests, what Davidson calls, the scheme - content dualism and consequently presupposes a
representational model. But, as we noted earlier, language never suggests anything beyond its
use. An expression means something because, we have used it accordingly. Putnam's language
reality picture makes clear some of the implications to which this conception may lead. He
takes a radical stand about language and attempts to show how reality itself is internal to one's
perspective, which eventually is a derivative of one's own language. This is because, all our
experiences, perceptions and sensations are determined by our conceptual choices. Putnam
writes

Even our description of our own sensations, so dear as a starting point for knowledge to
generations of epistemologists, is heavily affected (as are the sensations themselves, for
that matter) by a host of conceptual choices.\footnote{6}

Language, therefore, penetrates reality. Putnam strongly opposes the metaphysical realist
position, which upholds the availability of an in-itself reality, independent of our language and
existence and which can be explained in terms of a correspondence relationship between our
language and things in the world. Without challenging the representational conception of the
functioning of language in its entirety, Putnam emphasises the perspectival aspect that is
extremely crucial as far as the questions of meaning, truth and understanding of language are
concerned. He agrees with the representationalists that the truth of a sentence depends on, and
derives from, what the sentence refers to. But this relationship of the sentence with its reference
is a casual relationship and not an obscure form of association, which the representationalists
assumed as having between words and objects or propositions and facts. This relationship of causation, definitely operates within a perspective provided by our language and consequently meaning and truth also are perspectival. From these primary propositions Putnam concludes that, reality itself is internal to our perspective.  

The emphasis on perspective forcefully asserts the interpretative nature of understanding. As Putnam puts it, there is no bird's eye view available for us to grasp reality or meaning from a no-man's perspective. Our perspectives are determined by our language and all our understanding is interpretative. In other words, the ontological significance of language makes interpretation pivotal.

Quine's doctrine of radical interpretation works out the implications of this situation. The role of analytical hypothesis in radical interpretation forcefully suggests this. The linguist who attempts to understand the language of the alien name will have to project his own ontology and its categories to the native's utterances in order to make successful guesses about the latter's meanings. For Quine, every understanding of meaning involves such projections, which are nothing but an interpretation on the basis of the interpreter's ontological categories. As a result, there will be as many interpretations and translations as the number of interpreters. As far as the question of understanding meaning is concerned, interpretation is inevitable. This factor reiterates the importance of examining the ontological significance of language.

The notion of the ontological significance of language therefore, requires a more important attention. This will lead us to examine how language shapes, not only our cognitive
enterprises, but also our very being. The vital role played by interpretation and understanding in our lives will ultimately get revealed in this examination. The dualist picture, where language is conceived as a medium, has been primarily undermined here. Explaining the evolution of man's being in and through language, it also shows how the world and being come together in language and consequently form a unique space for the latter's movement and existence.

2. THE ONTOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF LANGUAGE

The way language is ontologically significant suggests the following mutually connected concepts:

1) Language is devoid of an essence, which is independent of the various contexts of use.

2) The very being of man itself evolves out of the various uses of language in the numerous life contexts.

3) Language and meaning are historical in character.

Representationalism, though seldom stated explicitly in the modern times, developed a peculiar notion of being - subject of representation - around its doctrines of language and the language-world relationship. The Cartesian cogito is an ideal being in this framework. Kant elaborates the concept of 'epistemological subject', which is the subject of the representational framework. The idea of the *a priori* categories of understanding, and the notion of the transcendental schema of apperception also suggest that there is something fundamental which all human beings possess. This view, therefore, subscribes to the Greek idea of fixed human nature. This representational picture, in general, thus creates a unique space for the human subject, where it
exists independently of the rest of the world. It, therefore, distinguishes the self from the world with its own individuality and conceives language as a medium by means of which a contact is established between them.

But with a shift of emphasis to "use", from representation, the idea of language as a medium comes under suspicion and consequently the idea of independence of self from the world also becomes contestable. The dualistic picture of language and the world disappears. Language, in a unique way, brings together the self and the world, and this coming together, nevertheless, is revealed in language itself. It is understood, no more as representing a transcendental and a priori logical structure, which defines and determines all our cognitive encounters with reality and communicative interactions with fellow beings, but is evaluated as a normative field that shapes not only the reality around us but also our very being. It is not just a medium, which has a fixed task to perform

Wittgenstein's concept of language games envisages a unique coming together of the self and the world in language. It implicitly suggests how the various forms of life determine, not only our knowledge about reality, but also frame our very self-hood. Each language-game which we are engaged in playing reveals to us a unique individual dimension of reality, which may not sound legitimate outside the purview of that language game. Consequently, a unidimensional concept of reality is thoroughly undermined.

Again, a language game is not an independently existing phenomenon, but is intimately associated with a form of life which is formed out of various practices. A move in the language-
game cannot be understood without familiarising and practising the rule system followed by that
game. In other words, what is required is participation and not just detached observation.
Consequently, we cannot construe the picture of self-hood or of human nature, independently of
the ways the being of man is practically engaged in the various language games and the latter's
participation in the corresponding forms of life.

The idea of fixed human nature is no more at issue. Human beings rather derive their
essence out of the various ways they are involved in the language-games and forms of life. Since
there is no fixed essence for a language game and hence for language, the idea of a fixed human
nature also gets invalidated. Following this insight into language, Wittgenstein explicitly
attacks a view he held in the Tractates about the notion of the general form of propositions. He
rather says: "Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying
that these phenomena have no one thing in common - but that they are related to one another in
different ways". As language is something that is constituted of such relationships, the human
nature itself is something which evolves from them. It is only through the project and process of
various language games that the human self derives its essence and this makes it flexible and
historical. It is flexible because a rule in the language game does not stand for any a priori
essence or structure that transcends the concrete existence of human beings. And it is historical
because, no language game can exist in a vacuum. As Wittgenstein puts it, "the term 'language-
game' is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an
activity or of a form of life". Every human action and life form constituted of such actions and
behaviour patterns presupposes a background in history.
In chapter three, we have seen how the recognition of historicity presented an alternate version of the notion of human nature. What has been emphasised is the fundamental situatedness of man’s being. The examination of historicity, therefore, ultimately reveals, not only the nature of man’s being, but also the nature of human knowledge and understanding. But the real nature of man's being gets revealed only with the realisation of the importance of language in his life and all his cognitive endeavours. With the realisation of the ontological significance of language, man's complete and essential relationship with language acquires prominence. As Wittgenstein puts it, language forms part of man's natural history.

A more radical and consistent relationship between language and man's being is revealed in the hermeneutic model. Gadamer, following Heidegger, takes such a relationship as the most primitive and primary aspect that fashions our being. Language, he says, is the element in which we live and which we can never objectify to the extent that it ceases to surround us. Language is;

.. nothing like an enclosure from which we could ever strive to escape. The element of language is not a mere empty medium in which one thing or another may be encountered. It is the quintessence of everything that can encounter us at all.

Hence, in a very preliminary sense, language is ontologically significant in two ways, which together define the linguisticality of man's very being. They are:

1) Language functions as the essential hermeneutic medium which we cannot disperse with at all. Every act of interpretation happens well inside language, and
hence is never pure and objective. Therefore, our access to the world and reality presupposes language.

2) Language conditions man's situatedness in the world. In Heidegger's words, the being-in-the-world is a form of existence which gains momentum from the guiding or defining categories of language in which we dwell. We inherit our foresights from it, says Heidegger. Gadamer makes this idea clearer with the help of the concept of tradition and its prejudices.

Heidegger combines both these aspects of language in order to derive his peculiar notion of human existence. The essence of man lies in his existence, which, being historical, is a temporal process that manifests in and through language. This manifestation takes place in the act of self-disclosure that happens in the context of concrete life-world and hence is also a disclosure of this world. These two processes merge in the realisation of the understanding of meaning. Such a merger, and therefore, the disclosures and understanding meaning presuppose a background, which points to the historicity of the interpreter. This merger is actually contained in *Dasein*'s realisation of its possibilities, as the foresights represent its projects which constitute the guiding principles of its acts.

In other words, all our experiences presuppose that we have already oriented ourselves towards the world in particular ways by means of language. We can, therefore, no more experience anything as it is. We always experience something 'as' something since we are already oriented by our prejudices to experience an object in certain ways. The 'as' structure is built into the very core of our relationship with the rest of the world, exerting a normative power.
This is the normative power of our language and our tradition. This position, therefore, amounts to the rejection of the traditional idea of "pure perceptions" in a categorical way and subsequently proclaims that perception necessarily includes meaning. Every encounter with meanings and their understanding therefore, does not just involve the intervention of language, but happens in it. According to Gadamer:

The phenomenon of understanding, then, shows the universality of human linguisticality as a limitless medium that carries *everything* within it - not only the "culture" that has been handed down to us through language, but absolutely everything - because everything (in the world and out of it) is included in the realm of "understandings" and understandability in which we move.\(^{13}\)

To make prominent the historical and social dimensions of man's ontological status in the light of the essential linguisticality of understanding and existence, Gadamer explains how in the linguistic character of our access to the world we are implanted in a tradition.\(^{14}\) He thus connects the realm of pre-understood meanings as well as the self and world-disclosures (interpretations) based on them with the historical and the linguistic tradition. Understanding is the interplay of the movement of tradition and the movement of the interpreter, says Gadamer. The foresights or anticipation of meanings that govern our understanding proceed from the communality that binds us to the tradition. He writes:

Tradition is not simply a precondition into which we come, but we produce it ourselves, inasmuch as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition and hence further determine it ourselves.
Tradition, in the wider sense, will take care of the socio-cultural dimensions of language. Gadamer examines Aristotle’s definition of man as a 'being who has logos', where the term logos is understood as reason or thought. He rearticulates this statement and says that, in truth, the primary meaning of the word logos is language. We are enclosed in the linguistic world and are always at home in language, just as much as we are in the world.\textsuperscript{17} And tradition, in its turn, exists in the medium of language.

The rootedness of understanding meaning in historically existing linguistic tradition has been categorically affirmed by Gadamer. It is something, which is handed down to us. It is, therefore, not something that remains aliens to us, as we view it as a remnant of the past. On the other hand, it is something which is immediately given to us, as we find ourselves in it and cannot detach it from our very being. The immediacy of its givenness has been repeatedly asserted by Gadamer, as he says that, it is given to us in various forms like myths, legends, customs, etc.\textsuperscript{18}

This aspect of the ontological significance of language poses a problem for understanding meaning. To put it in simple terms, the rootedness in tradition generates some obstacles in understanding the textual meaning which lies at a distance from us due to its peculiar historicity. Our language and our rootedness in a tradition subsequently determine our horizon which makes up the range of vision from which only we can perceive and experience everything. This fact apparently suggests a relativistic conclusion, though it makes strong arguments against subjectivism. We shall now see how a possible threat of subjectivism as well as the self-
defeating relativistic position is avoided. These have been achieved by proclaiming the absolute autonomy of language

3. LINGUISTIC HORIZON

The idea of linguistic horizon will, at the same time explicate clearly the real meaning of the ontological significance of language and also the nature of understanding meaning. One of the immediate consequences of our being ontologically determined by a linguistic tradition is that it makes us prejudiced by determining a peculiar world-view for us, and thereby designing, not only our range of vision and cognition, but also aspirations and needs. The linguistic horizon we inherit is the sum total of all these

But though our linguistic horizon apparently makes our range of vision limited, it positively provides us a broad and comprehensive background which is essential for all understanding of meaning. We inherit this horizon as a result of our being rooted in a language or linguistic tradition, and this rootedness, in turn, helps us surpass our finiteness and narrowness as a subjective entity. The prejudices we possess are not our subjective prejudices, but are the intersubjective conditions in which the tradition has been handed down to us. In other words, the linguistic horizon is a common possession of the community to which we necessarily belong. The language that makes up the categories of our thought and guides our thinking is something which we share with others. The interpreter's subjectivity as well as the subjectivity of the author of the text does not pose any problem here because of this communality. The focus on the subject is therefore, successfully averted with stress on language and its horizon. What is experienced in
tradition cannot be taken as the meaning of another person, who is a 'Thou'. As Gadamer writes:

Understanding of tradition does not take the text as an expression of a 'Thou' but as a meaningful content detached from all bounds of the meaning individual of an 'I' or a "Thou".19

To bring out the communality aspect of language, Wittgenstein registers a series of arguments against the idea of 'private language', which argues that languages can be privately devised and learned. Sounds made in a regular fashion would not qualify to be called language, unless they were shown to have consequences or they were used as signals to others in the community. One of the strongest arguments put forward in support of the idea of private language by its proponents is that, languages are learned by means of personal sensations and various mental states through a process of introspection. In the case of sensations, it has been argued that, learning proceeds by associating words with inner experiences through a kind of private baptism. If this is correct, then it could be comfortably argued that a private language was possible, apart from the normal public language.

Opposing this, Wittgenstein categorically asserts that, learning to name an inner experience is essentially connected with public behaviour and necessarily presupposes a background in society. This is because, naming demands that a word should be consistently used, i.e. it is used according to rules.20 And the use of a words necessarily presupposes the context of a language-game, which has its own peculiar inner dynamics. The rules reflect this dynamics and subsequently provide a criterion for correct use. In the case of a private language.
the only criterion that can be pointed out is the correct use of memory. But since memory can be
defective, it cannot guarantee correctness and consistency in use.

Again, naming is not just associating a word with an object in an arbitrary fashion. It
demands a regular association of word with object, or in other words, it has to find a place in a
language-game. In the words of Wittgenstein: "Naming is so far not a move in the language-
game - any more than putting a piece in its place on the board is a move in chess .... nothing
has so far been done, when a thing has been made. It has not even got a name except in the
language-game". In various language games the name finds its uses. And to use in this way, a
definite amount of socialisation, knowledge about conventions and practices which make up the
functioning of the society are essential. Any concept to be displayed requires the existence of
the other.

Tradition and the forms of life related to it, therefore, stands for an intersubjective sphere
for action and communication. The positing of such a concept, though averts the possibility of
subjectivism, does not rule out relativism The conventions, customs and rules of the tradition or
form of life will exert a normative power over us, which makes our ontological schema
prominent in all our interactions. As we have seen in Quine's theory of translation, interpretative
understanding necessarily involves projecting the interpreter's ontological schema. Whatever
essence our language has, has to be discovered, not in any metaphysical plane - the third realm
of Frege or the objective world of the representationalists - but in the linguistic horizon that is
given to us. And what constitutes this linguistic horizon is nothing but the various uses of
language. The spirit of the tradition gets reflected in such uses.
4. LINGUISTIC HORIZONS AND UNDERSTANDING OF MEANING:

The insights we have so far suggest that certain parameters have to be observed before the problem of understanding meaning is evaluated. It has to be primarily conceived that, both the text and the interpreter are the products of two different horizons. Then the problem of understanding meaning can be reformulated in terms of the relationship between the two horizons. Or, more precisely, the interpreter's access to the text's horizon has to be explained.

Schleiermacher and Dilthey, we have seen, are envisaging the possibility of making a direct access to the horizon of the text, by placing the interpreter in the former. The demand, according to them, was to understand the textual meaning without tampering it (by mixing it with the interpreter's intentional life). For them the textual horizon is the product of the individual author's intentional life, and hence they proposed to imaginatively transpose the interpreter to the author's intentional world or subjective horizon.

We have seen that such attempts are problematic. On the one hand, with the greater role assigned to language, the focus on subjectivity appears as a defective and distorting image. The horizons to which the text or the interpreters belong are not the products of any individual subject as Schleiermacher and Dilthey contended. The concept of horizon presupposes the availability of an intersubjective plane for action, movement and communication. The horizon is therefore, not a privately owned world but a common property of a group or community. The question of subjective expressions does not legitimately arise in this context. The text is, therefore, not an independent entity, but is a property of an intersubjective horizon. Again,
language, though it has a determining role in the formation of horizons, does not suggest any easy means to overcome the problems raised by the multitude of such horizons. The horizon of the text may distance itself from the horizon of the interpreter in fundamental ways.

Since the problem here is created by language and linguistic horizons, the solution also has to be discovered in language. This consists in understanding the wider roles of language in making possible the understanding of meaning, which are implied by the fact that language is ontologically significant. Instead of conceiving the different horizons that encounter with each other as fixed, we have to see how they evolve, change and fashion themselves, along with languages, in a variety of ways in the process of historical evolution. This will show how understanding meaning is essentially a linguistic process.

Wittgenstein tries to make such a picture explicit and argues that understanding a sentence means understanding a language, and asserts that, this in turn presupposes a knowledge about the rules on the basis of which the sentences in that language are formed and used. These arguments bring out certain vital insights implied by the idea that language is ontologically significant. The rules of language are not externally imposed, but constitute the very idea of language. And since they determine the various uses of language, they are the basic rules to be observed in order to understand meaning.

Wittgenstein categorically emphasises the fundamentality of rules as far as language is concerned. It is a final element beyond which we cannot go. It is not possible to penetrate behind the rules, because, there is no behind. Rules are so fundamental and immanent to
language, that we do not first learn them and then apply. Instead, the rule is given to us in the actual applying. Obeying a rule is, therefore, a practice.\(^22\) It does not leave us any alternative and when I obey a rule, says Wittgenstein, I do not choose but obey it blindly.\(^23\)

The notion of rule, in one sense provides the key for understanding meaning. It is rules that make linguistic activity an intersubjective exercise and, therefore, a legitimate process. It is the fundamentally of rules that enables language to surpass the inner experiences - subjective experiences - of any individual speaker. The very use of language, the practice of language-game, involves the process of rule-following. And Wittgenstein says that to obey a rule is a matter of custom.\(^24\) It presupposes a community of speakers, together with whom we participate in language games. And this, in turn, brings into prominence that the speaking of language is part of an activity or a form of life. In short, the very notion of rule and, therefore, the speaking of language and participating in a language game, imply the necessary presence of an intersubjective realm - a set of shared beliefs, conventional expressions, etc.

Without raising the problem of historical understanding, Wittgenstein then examines the problem of understanding languages or language games. Each language game is unique, as they have different rule structures and are attached to different forms of life. They possess different paradigms for beliefs and actions. Wittgenstein puts it:

All testing, all confirmation and disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place already within a system. And this system is not a more or less arbitrary and doubtful point of departure for all our arguments.\(^25\)
While arguing that there can be different language games and correspondingly different forms of life, Wittgenstein envisages the possibility of understanding these different language games in terms of their respective rule structures. He makes this idea clear by differentiating the language game of science from that of religion. Scientific doctrines are, according to Wittgenstein, absolutely different from religious beliefs. He attacks Frazer, who conceived religious belief as a relic of the pre-scientific thought. Science is founded on evidence that we receive from empirical experience and hence every scientific doctrine is a testable hypothesis. But Wittgenstein held that religious beliefs were unshakeable convictions, and testing them on the basis of empirical evidence did not constitute a norm in the rule structure of this language game. They rather project new ways and attitudes towards life which call for a new language which can be learned and used inter-subjectively. It is this language that provides them the necessary framework to legitimise their belief. This language contains neither the truth-false dichotomy, nor the reasonable - unreasonable dichotomy, which constitute a central part in the language game of science. The question of understanding here therefore, poses a different problem. What acquires prominence in this model is the idea of rule-following.

Understanding meaning necessarily involves mle-following or obeying the rule. This in other words, is to participate in the particular form of life to which the rule is related. This is because, 'obeying a rule' is essentially a practice. Interpretation is based upon this. Meaning is essentially related to use, or in other words, it reveals itself in a language game which is a rule-governed activity. We understand the meaning of an expression by leaning its function in the practical context - in the linguistic and situational context, where it finds use. Grammar tells us
what kind of object anything is, says Wittgenstein. Therefore, understanding presupposes not a detached description of the language game as a whole, but rather a participation in it.

With this notion of participation in mind, we shall come back to the problem of historical understanding. Wittgenstein never explicitly analyses language games as historically situated and, therefore, never recognises the way language comes to define a horizon for us. Nor does he recognise the importance of prejudices. He rather focuses on linguistic practices that sustain through customs and conventions. The inter-subjective rules of the language games themselves are formed out of these customs and conventions, and one follows these rules when one participates in them and obey them blindly. He assumes that these rules are given in language, and since language is part of man's natural history, it is possible to learn languages and participate in language games.

Participation in a language game never calls for any external criteria of evaluation. Every criterion is rather provided from within, or the very notion of criterion is a distorting idea. From the outset, the notion of participation reminds us the hermeneutic task which Dilthey and others have attempted to set before us. But by assigning a larger role to language, Wittgenstein dissolves the problem of different historical horizons. He makes language all-pervading and hence the temporal dimension of history never poses a problem for him.

The ontological significance of language has never come to full realisation in the framework of language game theory. For Wittgenstein, the whole process of understanding meaning can be explained in terms of the concept of rule-following. Learning rules amounts to
participation in language games. But with the recognition of historicity and the power of linguistic horizons to determine our ontological status, this notion of participation appears to be a difficult task to accomplish. We cannot detach ourselves from our linguistic horizon in order to participate in different language-games by obeying their rules blindly. Rule-following is a natural process which happens blindly. But an interpreter who is already conditioned by the ontological schema of a language cannot approach the rule structure of a different language game without interpreting those rules in the light of the prejudices he inherits as a result of being so conditioned. Wittgenstein asserts that the rules of language are inter-subjective. But this inter-subjectivity does not suggest that they are ahistorical and consequently hermeneutically neutral. The historicity of language, in turn, suggests the historicity of our very being, which again makes our situatedness an issue.

Wittgenstein's concept of rule-following with its stress on inter-subjectivity fails to notice the significance of the different horizons. These horizons, since being rooted in different traditions, will necessarily project their own ontological schemata and attribute their own meanings to whatever they come to encounter. The interpreter, therefore, has a creative role to perform when he learns and participates in different language-games. It is this creative role of the interpreter that has been ignored by Wittgenstein when he made rules of language inter-subjective and hermeneutically neutral. More than determining our cognitive enterprise, in the sense of limiting them, our horizon provides us a possibility to realise the real nature of our getting determined by it. As Gadamer notes, "to have an horizon means not to be limited to what is nearest, but be able to see beyond it. A person who has an bonzon knows the relative significance of everything within this horizon as near or far, greater or small".29
Wittgenstein's purpose for introducing the idea of 'rule-governed language use' was to explain understanding of meaning without subjectivistic consequences. A similar objective could be achieved by placing ourselves in an horizon and making it so fundamental in all our cognitive enterprises. Our horizon is a creative counterpart in all our attempts to understand meaning and whatever significance things have is always relative to our horizon. As noted above, this horizon of ours is a creation of the linguistic tradition which has been handed down to us. Hence, it is not a closed individual universe. No horizon is closed. In Gadamer's words:

"The horizon is rather something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for a person who is moving. Thus the horizon of the past, out of which all human life lives and which exists in the form of tradition, is always in motion."

This will reinstate the ontological significance of language more radically than in the language game theory of Wittgenstein. By creating a horizon for us, our linguistic tradition and its prejudices determine our thoughts and actions in the most concrete ways and this suggests that there is a strong hermeneutic element in all our relationship with the rules of language games. These rules do not exist independently in an inter-subjective plane, enabling us to follow them directly. It is rather impossible to detach them from their historical rootedness and therefore, from their peculiar horizons.

What becomes relevant here is an encounter between horizons. As far as the question of understanding meaning is concerned, Gadamer says that it consists in a fusion of horizons. Such a fusion actually happens within language - not in the language of the text nor in the interpreter's language, but in a language which is common. The respective horizons of the text
and the interpreter are neither confirmed nor denied but were affirmed and asserted in this common language.

5. LANGUAGE : THE LOCATION OF MEANING

We have come to the conclusion that meanings to be understood are to be searched neither in the extra-linguistic empirical world (representationalism) nor in the author’s subjective mind (psychologism), which again is an extra-linguistic realm, but exclusively in language. It is in this context we encounter the problem of different horizons, as a horizon itself forms part of a tradition and is essentially linguistic in nature. This situation immediately presents us with two possibilities, as far as the location of meaning is concerned.

1) Meanings are located in the horizon of the text. With the idea of 'rule-following' the process of understanding meaning can be explained in this framework. This standpoint represents the objectivist idea of 'understanding the textual meaning in its own terms'. But this ultimately neglects the creative role of the interpreter in the process. On the one hand, it is practically impossible for the interpreter to detach himself from his horizon and its prejudices. It is from them that he derives the principles and categories that guide, determine and even make possible his enquiries. Our horizon thus makes us capable to address the text, to place it not just as an object to be approached in a detached way. It thus enables us to see the absolute significance the text has to us, and to establish a productive relationship with the latter, so that, we make use of it to form a better understanding, not only about it but also about ourselves.
2) We find our horizon as guiding us and we understand the text from its peculiar angle. The textual meaning, therefore, is located in the interpreter's linguistic horizon. Whatever significance the text has is related to the interpreter's horizon. But nevertheless, this horizon of the interpreter is not a subjective space exclusively occupied by him, but is a shared, inter-subjective space in which he exists as a historical being inheriting a tradition.

This position amounts to the view of cultural relativism, which stresses the difference in the ways things and events are perceived, conceived and understood. Textual meaning will be understood differently by different groups of people, depending on their perspectives, views, vision and way of life. The force exerted by the text has least relevance here, since its significance is ultimately judged from the interpreter's perspective.

Both (1) and (2) fail to see the creative process involved in the understanding of meaning. The historicity of both the text and the interpreter has to be taken into account and this would not be possible if we take resort to either of these two alternatives. Meanings are neither outside language nor are they confined to any one of the horizons. Language has the ability to 'contain' the different horizons that may encounter with each other, since each horizon is fundamentally linguistic in nature. Understanding is said to be materialising in the creation of a common language."

The creation of such a common language and the evolution of meaning in it happen through a process of understanding. This common language evolves out of the interactive
relationship between the text and the interpreter. This interactive relationship is a vital process, which derives its dynamism, not from any external source but from the two interacting horizons. Here the nature of this relationship becomes worth examining, which can be carried out by analysing the role of the interpreter in any genuine act of interpretation.

6. INTERPRETATION AND UNDERSTANDING

In every interpretative enterprise, with the aim of understanding meaning, the interpreter will have certain crucial roles to perform. He has the participating role in the process, as he is not a mere impartial spectator in the encounter. He positively contributes to the dynamism of the process with his prejudices. We have examined this aspect earlier when we discussed the role of tradition and prejudices. What makes this participating role important is the fundamental historicity of our language and, therefore, our very existence.

But interpretation is not just blind participation. It also performs a creative role, which consists in the interpreter adopting two positive steps in the interactive enterprise with the text. The first step consists in the ability and willingness of the interpreter to check the unconditional and arbitrary application of his prejudices. The very realisation of the fact that our being is situated in a historically conditioned horizon entails such an ability. "To exist historically means that knowledge of oneself can never be complete", says Gadamer. And again,"….to have an horizon means, not to be limited to what is nearest, but to be able to sec beyond it A person who has an horizon knows the relative significance of everything within this horizon as near or far, great or small". This realisation is, in fact, the acceptance of one's finitude and the
incompleteness of one's understanding. This in turn enables the interpreter to be open towards
the perspective represented by the text, or, in the words of Gadamer, to the text's claim to truth.
The Interpreter has to adopt a creative posture and allow the text to address him and let it say
something to him; be sensitive to the otherness of the text, and place the other meaning in a
relation with the whole of the interpreters' own meanings in a relation to it.\textsuperscript{35} The creativity
from the interpreter's part consists more in this latter task. As Gadamer sums it:

Rather, a person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something. That
is why a hermeneutically trained mind must be, from the start, sensitive to the text's
quality of newness. But this kind of sensitivity involves neither 'neutrality' in the matter
of the object nor the extinction of one's self, but the conscious assimilation of one's own
fore-meanings and prejudices. The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so
that the text may present itself in all its newness and thus be able to assert its own truth
against one's own fore-meanings.\textsuperscript{36}

The second step to be adopted, that makes interpretation creative, consists in such an
assimilation of prejudices in the light of the text's otherness. The question is: how is this
otherness to be constructively approached, so that it would result in the evolution of a common
language? It, therefore, concentrates on yet another aspect of the relationship between the text
and the interpreter. An openness to the text's claim to truth will eventually gives the interpreter
an access (though indirect) to the perspective of the text. This is, in fact, the perspective of the
horizon of the text and it stands for a different way of experiencing and assimilating reality. It
suggests a different form of life and designs its categories in harmony with the former. The
openness to the textual horizon, therefore, amounts to allowing oneself and one's own views and
perspectives getting challenged by that horizon. Understanding by means of the citation of a
common language in this context amounts to a situation where the truth of the text is assimilated to the peculiar concrete situations of the interpreter by means of a process of application.

Gadamer, while explaining the problem, how the textual meaning as understood by different interpreters amounts to different interpretations and hence different understanding appeals to the Aristotelian insight of phronesis, which was used by the later to explicate the difference between the practical ethical knowledge and theoretical knowledge about goodness. In ethical knowledge, what is important is to know the concrete situation in the light of what is demanded of him in general. It consists in understanding the particular situation in the light of the general norm that is relevant to the former. Gadaraer sees a similar problematic in the case of interpretative understanding. Here, the text and it's horizon which were approached by different interpreters (who belong to different horizons) stand for the universal. It is something, which is common to all interpreters. But like an ethical norm, the textual meaning also cannot be understood in an abstract way. Each circumstance is unique, and the universal norm has different applications in each of them. This situation is similar to the instance of playing a game, where the general rules of the games find application in different circumstances. Both in games and ethical situations, players and agents act in the light of universal norms and rules, but act differently in different situations. Similarly, the interpreter must relate the text to his situation, which is a creation of his horizon. Understanding meaning is therefore, not a matter of submission to the text's claim to truth. It is rather a matter of applying this truth to the interpreter's situation and hence amounts to a modification in line with his circumstances. As is evident, the norms to which ethical matters appeal cannot be applied in the same way in all
instances, but must be modified in accordance with the demands of the situation. Hermeneutic
interpretation also achieves a similar concretisation of the universal.\textsuperscript{38}

The participating and creative roles of the interpreter will be positively fulfilled only with
the creation of a common language, as the meaning and its understanding evolves out of such a
common language in the continuous process of its creation. But such a process of creation of a
common language, nevertheless, is not an easy task to be achieved. The interpreter's
participating role will always be in friction with the text's unique claim to truth. Therefore,
understanding meaning will progressively evolve, only if it can creatively progress to a dialogic
encounter. In other words, the encounter between the text and the interpreter should be a
dialogic interaction, and understanding meaning involves such a creative interaction where there
is a continuous interface between the different points of view represented by the respective
horizons of the text and the interpreter.

7. UNDERSTANDING MEANING AND DIALOGUE

Interpretative understanding now appears to be consisting in the evolution of a common
language. The ultimate goal of interpretation - the application of the textual meaning to the
interpreter's situation - which is materialised in the interpreter adopting a creative role is realised
only when the interpreter and the text come into a dialogic interaction. This is because, what is
important is to take account of the uniqueness of both the text and the interpreter.
This situation requires the derivation of a common meaning for both the text and the interpreter. And since any meaning to be understood is located in language, interpretative understanding, requires the possibility of a common language. The aim of understanding, therefore, consists in the achievement of such a common language, which will evolve out of the dialogic interaction between the text and the interpreter. This will satisfy the logically necessary condition of a dialogic encounter, of a common platform to materialise communication and conveyance of meaning. The primary prerogative of a dialogic encounter consists in the collective exploration of meaning by the different participants. At the level of conversation (in the case of textual interaction also), it starts with, as Gadamer points out, ensuring that the other person is with us. Gadamer continues:

To conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the object to which the partners in the conversation are directed. 39

This is true even in the case of day-to-day language use. It is a primary requirement that the other should be taken as a partner. In other words, understanding meaning is the result of dialogue. Language is a complex process that involves a good amount of socialisation which in turn materialises through its use in various contexts. The life of language lies in dialogue, where the other is not just a hearer, but a partner. The participating and creative roles of the interpreter have their full realisation only in a dialogic encounter. We have seen that the participating role of the interpreter - where his prejudices and presuppositions are under active operation - is in friction with the process of understanding meaning. There is thus a possibility of these prejudices getting imposed upon the textual meanings. This situation calls for a creative role from the interpreter where he has to approach the text with openness and apply it to his concrete
situation, in order to grasp it. The dialogic process concludes precisely in such an application and consequently in the formation of a common language.

To make clear the nature of dialogic interaction, Gadamer analyses the interpretative encounter by imposing upon it the logic of question and answer. He asserts that the structure of question is implicit in all our experiences. Every new experience adds something more to our existing views. Every process of understanding, therefore, enriches our perspective. In the absence of such an enrichment, understanding meaning will ultimately fail to serve its purpose. This suggests that, experience, and also understanding meaning, is not a matter of making the object fit and confine to one's own framework. The openness to the textual meaning, therefore, suggests that, the interpreter should not only allow the text to say something to him, but also put his views and opinions under check. In other words, since language is a social phenomena, it requires the interactive encounter of people. It is in this sense, Gadamer identifies the original phenomenon of language in dialogue. Though the rootedness and situatedness in particular linguistic horizons are perennial, this very fact itself contains the possibility of seeing beyond. In other words, the horizon itself does not represent any fixed and solid state of affairs. It is rather, something which evolves and expands. At the very outset, it enables the interpreter to go beyond the boundaries of its subjective life. As Gadamer puts it, the I-lessness is in essential feature of the being of languages. He continues:

"... speaking does not belong in the sphere of the 'I' but in the sphere of the 'we'... the spiritual reality of language is that of the pneuma, the spirit, which unifies I and Thou. ... the actuality of speaking consists in the dialogue. But in every dialogue a spirit rules, a bad one or a good one, a spirit of obdurateness and hesitancy or a spirit of communication and of easy exchange between I and Thou."
This explains how the structure of question is implicit in all our experiences. The interpreter's creative role which makes him open to the text's claim to truth brings the structure of question into the forefront. The openness toward the text's novelty consists in admitting that one is not the authority about the subject matter and many things are left out for one to know. This is to admit one's ignorance. The Platonic dialogue presents the nature of the tension between knowledge and opinion. The very possibility of dialogic encounter presupposes the admission of ignorance, which is not an easy task, because, in Gadamer's words.

It is the power of opinion against which it is so hard to obtain admission of ignorance. It is opinion that suppresses questions. Opinion has a curious tendency to propagate itself.\(^{41}\)

But with the admission of ignorance, by making oneself open to the text, the question emerges. Then the question presses itself on us and we can no longer avoid it and persist in our accustomed opinion. In the words of Gadamer, to ask question is to bring the object into openness. It is to proclaim one's own ignorance and make one's answer to the question unsettled and, therefore, indeterminate. Gadamer adds:

\[\text{The object has to be brought into this state of indeterminacy, so that there is an equilibrium between pro and contra. The sense of every question is realised in passing through this state of indeterminacy, in which it becomes an open question.}^{42}\]

This indeterminacy constitutes the inevitable aspect of openness. Owing to this indeterminacy, there is a chance for the various horizons that interact to present themselves as alternatives.
The reaching of this indeterminacy is only the beginning of the process of opening up, and therefore, of the dialogic encounter. Again, this indeterminacy does not in any way make the dialogic process directionless. The openness is actually to the text's claim to truth, and hence the questions that can be raised should be essentially related to the text. Gadamer here proposes to view the text as an answer to a question. The logic of question and answer that lies implicit in any dialogic endeavour implies that, the text necessarily presents itself to the interpreter as an answer to a question. The understanding of the text, therefore, consists in understanding the question to which it is an answer. But then, no question can arise in isolation and will be necessarily presupposing a horizon. Hence, understanding the question to which the text is an answer means acquiring the horizon of the question to which the text stands as a possible answer.

This endeavour evidently makes an important move by means of which the meaning to be understood is taken out of the respective horizons of the interpreter and the text. The openness exhibited by the interpreter and his admission of ignorance enable him to see beyond his horizon. The acquisition of the horizon of the question takes him out of the former. At the same time, the text also is made indeterminate by relating it to the horizon of the question to which it is only a possible reply. This factor makes the solidity of the textual meaning dissolve. In other words, viewed in this sense, we cannot say that the text has a meaning of its own in the objective sense. Its meaning is always related to the horizon of the question to which it can be a reply and therefore, necessarily goes beyond what is said in it.

But this process of going beyond the horizon of the question cannot be earned out with the application of any specific method. Here, the text itself presents the interpreter with a
question which eventually places his meaning in openness. In order to answer this question, the interpreter has to reconstruct it, which is ultimately going beyond the historical horizon the text presents with. In the words of Gadamer:

\[\text{The reconstruction of the question to which the text is presumed to be the answer takes place itself within a process of questioning through which we seek the answer to the question that the text asks us. A reconstructed question can never stand within its original horizon: for the historical horizon that is outlined in the reconstruction is not a truly comprehensive one. It is, rather, included within the horizon that embraces us as the questioners who have responded to the word that has been handed down.}^{43}\]

The interpreter's relationship with the text becomes more creative only when he approaches the text as positing a question to him. In this process of getting questioned, the interpreter's meaning is placid in openness, just as the textual meaning was placed in the openness by the horizon of the question to which it is related as a possible answer. This process of creative interaction, the mutual questioning and reconstruction of the question, happens in a newly evolving common language. Such a common language will necessarily present a unique horizon as the process of questioning and getting questioned will essentially go beyond the respective horizons that come into play. Gadamer observes:

\[\text{Every conversation presupposes a common language, or, it creates a common language. Something is placed in the centre, as the Greeks said, which the partners to the dialogue both share, and concerning which they can exchange ideas with one another. Hence agreement concerning the object, which it is the purpose of the conversation to bring about, necessarily means that a common language must first be worked out in the conversation.}^{44}\]

Understanding meaning, therefore, in no way consists in going beyond and grasp meanings from a non-contingent realm. It is well placed within language, though the latter is inevitably contingent and owes its existence to the social interaction of individuals. But the right
attitude would be, what Rorty says, to accept this contingency and incompleteness. It is such an incompleteness that allows room for expansion and enrichment. As Gadamer puts it:

.... in the successful conversation they both (the text and the interpreter) come under the influence of the truth of the object and are thus bound to one another in a new community. To reach an understanding with one's partner in a dialogue is not merely a matter of total self-expression and the successful assertion of one's own point of view, but a transformation into a communion, in which we do not remain what we were, (bracket added).

The horizon which evolves from this new communion will definitely be a more comprehensive one, as it will contain the perspectives of both the text and the interpreter in a unique way. Understanding, which consists in the application of the textual meaning in the interpreter's horizon, therefore, amounts to such an expansion and enrichment of his horizon.

With these discussions, what is getting re-asserted is the fact that, understanding meaning is an essential mode of the being of man. And since the process of understanding meaning is essentially linguistic, human existence is entangled with language and its functioning in essential ways. Since the life of language consists in dialogue, the meaningfulness of human existence consists in the acquisition of more enriched horizons as a result of dialogic interaction.