CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

Sahassamapi cē vāca anaddha padasaṃhitā
Ekam aṭṭhapadaṁ seyyo yaṁ sutvā upasammiti¹

If there be thousand speeches of words without meaning, a single word with meaning is better, hearing which one becomes tranquil.

Sahassamapi cē gādhā anatdhpadasaṃhitā
Ekam gādhāpadaṁ seyyo yaṁ sutvā upasammiti²

If there be thousands of praise of words without meaning, a single word of a song of praise is better, hearing which one becomes tranquil.

¹ Rāja.C.Kunhan:Dhammapada(The holy text of Buddhists),The Theosophical Publishing House,Adyar,1956,p.30
² Ibid,p.30
Yo ca gādhāsatam bhāse anatdhapadasamhita
Ekaṃ gādhāpadaṃ seyyo yaṃ sutvā upasammiti³

And he who may recite hundred songs of praise of words without meaning, a single word of a song of praise is better, hearing which one becomes tranquil (calm).

These three citations from Dhammapada say about words without meaning uttered in different senses while according to modern semantics and even according to ancient Indian linguistics there are no words without meaning; though there may be sounds without meaning. But there are fundamental problems that make it difficult to include the concept of meaning in linguistics. Thus according to Bloomfield “in order to give a scientifically accurate definition of meaning for every form of a language we should have a scientifically accurate knowledge of everything in the speaker’s word. The actual extend of human knowledge is very small compared

³ Dhammapada,p.31
to this.” He concluded that “the statement of meaning is, therefore, the weak point in language study, and will remain so until human knowledge advances very far beyond its present stage.”¹ We note that the origin of new branches of studies like information science and various philosophical branches of mathematics related to basic problems of computer science have made these advancements in an unforeseen pase.

In spite of these, as pointed out by Kunjunni Rāja, writers in the west while recognising the importance of Pāṇini’s method in the formal analysis of Sanskrit language⁵ and acknowledging their indebtedness to Pāṇini in the matter of formal analysis, have not yet paid enough attention to the Indian theories about semantics which has a history of more than 2000 years. Even before Pāṇini the speculation on meaning in India can be traced back

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¹ Bloomfield, Language, p.140
⁵ Rāja. K. Kunjunni, Indian Theories of Meaning (ITM), The Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1963, p.5
to the Vedic period. In Ṛgveda which is considered as the earliest written record, it is seen that speech is regarded as something beyond the sounds uttered. In Yajurveda also vāk is considered as the supreme Wisely Śakti of Prajāpati named Vācaspati. In Brāhmaṇas the primeval waters are considered as having been created out of Vāk by Prajāpati. The nature of highest and purest speeches is described more fully in Upaniṣads. Human consciousness work through the three stages waking, dreaming and sleeping. According to Upaniṣads there is a fourth stage which represents the real nature of the self symbolised by ‘om’.

**Through the Language History**

All living beings have their own languages. But the language we speak is different from the languages used by all other beings in their communications. The role of language in the social uplift of man is unique. It makes him able not only in communication
but also in his social and cultural achievements. It is the excitement about his surroundings that has led the mankind in his search for words. The knowledge that resulted he has handed over to his successors. This history of mankind is also the history of linguistics. The studies regarding the origin, the structure and diversity of languages have taken place in different regions at different times. Though many of the earlier analysis may seem irrelevant as seen from today’s standpoints since the present is the continuation of the past and the comparison of the old and new studies will need the science of linguistics to forward, we can’t fully discard the earlier studies. Only following the gradual development of the human race we can know the role of language in that process.

The question arises whether language is a fruit of culture. Clearly language is not something that we learn; it is something which springs automatically. Even though a baby would have learned many words from parents or close relatives, a major
part of his vocabulary is achieved in due course without any special effort. By the time a baby starts speaking he/she would have imbibed the grammar of the mother tongue. Moreover nobody would have found it difficult to handle the mother tongue for want of knowledge in grammar.

Thus language is a biological product of the special structure of our brain. It is a highly complex faculty that develops in us from the very childhood, latent in everybody with same characteristics. Therefore some cognitive scientists consider it as a psychological faculty. But we shall better consider it as an instinct like the spiders weaving their nets or birds building their nests. A boy at the age of three is an astounding grammarian of his mother tongue.

Since language is an instinct it is not the product of our thinking. Therefore the different properties of distinct languages are wonders of nature’s engineering. Charles Darwin talks of language ability as an inborn ability to acquire an art. This is not
confined to human species only - nightingales can sing, parrots can imitate and peacocks can dance.

The publication of Charles Darwin’s ‘On the Origin of Species’ in 1859 unleashed a revolution in the philosophical outlooks. It is interesting to note that prior to Darwin some linguists suggested that languages are like living organisms that evolved over time. For example as far back as 1827 Franz Bopp wrote: “languages must be regarded as organic bodies formed in accordance with definite laws; bearing within themselves an internal principle of life, they developed and they gradually die out’. ⁶

The underlying idea is that the evolution of languages can be traced by a ‘family tree’. For instance French, Italian and Rumanian descend from Latin, Latin and Proto Germanic from Proto-Indo-European etc.

⁶ Über J. Grimms’s Dentsche Grammatik, Franz Bopp, 1827
Enthused by Darwin, August Schleicher went to the extent of suggesting that linguistics should be regarded as a regular branch of biology alongside Botany and Zoology\(^7\). In his ‘Languages and Species’ (1874) Darwin himself has observed the similarity between the evolution of languages and the evolution of biological species.

The body structure dominated by the precise and peculiar brain, the energy abiding sensuous centers and the unusual unconscious mind are the boon of the past in our evolution. Along with the love and the animal instinct of pleasures he has carried with him enmity, fear and anger. He has inherited the family relations latent in social relations. It is a fact that this mental and emotional tradition that he inherited from his ancestors prior to his evolution has been a driving force in his cultural evolution. It can be seen that this is giving colors and forms to all aspects of his life including

\(^7\) August Schleicher, Darwin’s theory and Linguistics, 1863
logical and intellectual.

We can see that there existed two streams of culture from time immemorial in eastern Asia and Africa. These streams with various branches have embraced the wide border between India and Europe. The alignment of these distinct cultures has paved the way for the overall development of the mankind.

From the second half of the ice age, that is, about forty thousand years back, the structural forms of the contradictions and reactions of distinct races paved the way for the evolution and cultural and class based diversities of the single human race known as homo-sapiens. After that they had not to face the attack of any other beings except themselves.

Thus the beginning of the second half of the ice age marks the starting of the unending cultural development. With the advancement in agriculture and the explosion in technical side as a
result of the industrial revolution this cultural development was accelerated. This development might have been fueled by the attainment of the nomads of the stone-age the ability to interact orally. Like the discovery of granaries to store the food and the introduction of money storing the fruits of labour for later use, the invention of meaningful conversation would have enabled him to store the fruits of his experiences and formation of new ideas and ideals. It is like a bank which stores the fruits of past for the use in future. This development is greatly reflected in the invention of specific tools for different categories of labour like hunting, fishing, carpentry etc.

It is surprising that all aspects of the now existing visual art forms were latent in the ancient visual art forms known to us. It is known from the old scripts that they had taken different verbal and visual forms.
Linguistics

The studies of the origin, development, structure and varieties of languages have taken place in different parts of the world. All these are coming under the purview of linguistics. In this sense the science of languages has a history of thousands of years. Both West and East have contributed to linguistics, even though the branch of learning known as modern linguistics is mainly the contribution of West. In spite of this, the Indian linguistics had gone far ahead in the case of grammar and phonology. Contributions of Pāṇini in the case of Sanskrit grammar are precise, simple and constant.

There are no studies in any language that excel Pāṇini’s grammar. The study of Sanskrit by the western scholars was one of the factors that led to the origin and development of comparative philology. It is to be noted that comparative philology
had a decisive role in shaping the science of linguistics in later years. It was the phonology developed by Pāṇini that became a leading light for a systematic study of speech sounds for the westerners. But for the insight given by the Indian scholars in Sanskrit grammar and phonology, the European linguistics would not have matured.

It is more than 2000 years after Pāṇini, that generative grammar comparable to his analytic style has come into picture. The question arises why in spite of these rich treasures of knowledge the credit for the development of modern linguistics is given to the western scholars. It is a fact that we can follow the systematic development of linguistics from the time of ancient Greek to the modern days. We can note the flow of the theoretical and practical fruits of Greek linguistics to Rome, from there to the medieval times through grammarians of Latin and again to the modern age through the Europeans enriched by the awakening of the renaissance period. Because of this the continuity of the tradition of
European linguistics is not lost. Though there have been changes in theories, methods etc. these were developments from its earlier forms. But unfortunately this is not the case with Indian linguistics. We don’t know anything about the linguistics prior to Pāṇini. Moreover the studies initiated by Pāṇini lost its continuity. Because of these we are forced to construct the history of linguistics on the foundations laid by the West.

**Linguistics and Philosophy**

Since all our intellectual discourses are constituted in language (vāṅgmayā) it is quite natural to ask the question as to do the issues of language also pertain to it. Thus it is not surprising that linguistics has been a subject of study in all the major Indian philosophical systems. Innumerable references to language have been made in Indian classical texts. These can be broadly classified under two headings (a) description of linguistic elements and (b)
metaphysics of language.⁸

While for western linguists semantics is a relatively new branch of study, in India, it is an old topic of study with its roots in Vedās and fruits in six Vedāṅgās like śikṣa, kalpa, vyākaraṇa, nirukta, jotiṣa and chandas. Nirukta is that branch of science dealing with the forms and meaning of words. The formation of words is dealt by grammarians. Darśanās deal with the relationship between śabda and artha and whether the intention of the speaker and the meaning that reaches the listener are different or not. The structure of sound is made clear by pronunciation and this is the subject of śikṣāśāstra. The variations in the pronunciation seriously affect the word and meaning. Alaṅkāraśāstra deals with the extent of meaning, its contraction, its sublimation etc. These are dealt with in darśanās also.

For grammarians meanings just like words are

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⁸ R.K.Misra, Buddhist Theories of Meaning, p.9&10
eternal. Some grammarians establish it on the ground that meanings are universal which are by hypothesis eternal. Others who do not accept as universals the meanings of words establish it on different grounds. Nevertheless all the grammarians, whatever theory of meaning they might hold, admit the meaning of words to be eternal. When the two (word and meaning) are regarded as appertaining to one another, their relation expressed in the form ‘it is that’ cannot but be eternal and self existing, because meaning is not assigned to the word; it is not something not known before and made for the first time by some speaker for the benefit of some listener. Thus the relation between word and meaning is beginning-less and unbroken.

Bhartṛhari however mentions alternative views. According to him semantics is closely related, rather intricately aligned, with the outer form of words. Meaning can be retained only in an external form of the words. But the intricacies of these can be mastered with the help of grammar alone, without which we can never know the reality even
about a single word. There are two kinds of meanings (a) etymologically or grammatically derived ones and (b) fixed ones based on roots etc. There are two kinds of words as well, (a) those which derive their meanings from grammar or etymology and (b) based on the natural capability. These again may depend on the behaviour or on the *pratyaya* (suffix). This is equally true in the case of correct or incorrect words. All these words, meanings and relationships are described in the grammar directly or indirectly (either by symptoms or by names). But it is difficult to explain them all, in their details.

**Greek Contributions**

As noted earlier the history of western linguistics originates from the contributions of Greeks. We have got documents of Greek linguistics of the 6th - 5th B.C. centuries known as classic period. But before this time itself the Greek culture had its influence in the western coast of Asia and some parts of Italy for some generations. Not only in linguistics but in art, philosophy, politics
and many other fields of knowledge, Greeks were able to establish their intellectual dominations accepted by the Europeans. It was not only because of the fact that the Greeks had the habit of observing the objects and phenomena around but also they had contact with different cultures also which gave them enough opportunities to assimilate their knowledge. Their diplomatic relations with other countries on account of commerce brought them in contact with other languages. In ‘Cratilous’ which is a part of Plato’s great Dialogues he argued that a portion of Greek vocabulary might have been adapted from other languages. In the background of the victory over Persian attack in B.C. 5th century Herodotus had opined for the first time that the regional linguistic pluralities of the Greek languages should have a common framework. The Greek scripts had developed in two stages. By B.C. 2000 the Mycenaean’s had developed a symbolic representation for words. This was lost in the Dorian aggression of the dark-age. The now existing Greek alphabets were
developed from the Phinitian scripts.

**Socrates, Plato, Aristotle**

The available documents about Socrates, Plato and Aristotle show that they were aware of the importance of language as an object of study. However it is only after Aristotle that a philosophical study of language is seen to be started. It is to be noted that we don’t know much about him. We know him only through the works of Xenophon and Plato. Though there are references to some aspects of language in Plato’s dialogues it was in ‘Cratilous’ that linguistics is clearly dealt seriously for the first time. According to Diogenes Laertius, the first philosopher to deal with the aspects of grammar was Plato. But his student Aristotle took a different independent approach to the study of languages. An era in Greek history ends with Aristotle. After him the development of linguistics was under the leadership of stoics in Athens.
Philosophical grammar

It was Greeks who first attempted to analyse language in a philosophical plane. The resulting analytical system was philosophical grammar. But they insisted that the oral language depended on scriptural language and so it was the second one that was important. They developed the philosophical grammar on the basis of this misconception.

It was the Greek philosopher Crates who introduced Greek linguistics to the Romans. At the same time the Latin grammarians fully followed the Greek and they tried to fit their grammar in the Greek framework. They believed that the Greek grammar was a model for all languages.

By the end of 18th century a lot of information about different languages was collected in the west. It was by the 19th century that a scientific approach could be seen in analysing linguistic data. The pioneers of the scientific temperament were
Gottfried Wilhelm Von Leibniz and Sir William Jones. The result was the birth of comparative philology. Sir William Jones who lived in India for nine years to study Sanskrit had acquired expertise in that. The similarities of Sanskrit with Greek and Latin was according to him because of a common source for these languages which is no more existing. It is this argument which made his studies significant. Later it was found by Linguists that not only European but many Asian languages also had a single source which is known as Proto-Indo-European (PIE). These led to the birth of a new branch of linguistics called comparative linguistics. Based on some common features the languages were classified into language families. Among these it was the Indo-European family that was studied the most.

It is to be noted that in the Sanskrit tradition semantics was not the well defined domain of a separate discipline. The semantics come to the forefront of linguistics with ontological (what is real) and epistemological (what can we know) questions
arising. In the case of Sanskrit these questions became dominant in
the polemical discussions between Brāhmīns, Buddhists and Jains.
Thus a semantic theory based on Pañinīyam took shape only after
more than thousand years, in the work of Bhartṛhari.

The history of linguistics is only briefly discussed
in this chapter. Further details are given in the fifth chapter where
western and modern linguistics are discussed.