CHAPTER II

LANGUAGE AND SPEECH ACTS
The very survival of an organic species demands that certain acts or activities must be performed that are directed to reproduction and preservation. Animals move about in search of food and shelter. But in case of human species the need for survival calls for acts or activities that are, to a large extent different in nature and dimension from that of other living beings. In other words what makes an activity human is that certain acts on the part of man are backed up by will and intention on the part of the doer of the action. Doing an action may involve the use of motor organs directly or doing something by and through the tools which are again the products of acts. The term "act" need not necessarily refer to the physical activities that are observable to people outside oneself for it also signifies the acts of the human mind or intelligence that are, though not perceptible to persons outside, are a reality for the person who performs mental acts. Of course mental acts may have external expression in behavioural or other manifestations. Human interests being multifarious human acts are also so. What renders man more privileged over other creatures is that, he is a language wielding creature. Human knowledge is cumulative and is a growing phenomenon. This is possible primarily because of language.
Through language man achieves a great variety of things. Group living requires that man in order to express ideas, to give information, and to achieve various other purposes needs an inter-subjective medium. That is language. As any movement does not count as a piece of human action, any utterance of sounds is not the wielding of language. In order to be so the sounds must be backed by certain intentions on the part of the speaker which he wants that the hearer should understand. Searle remarks —

"If we were certain the marks were a consequence of, say, water erosion, then the question of deciphering them or even calling them hieroglyphs could not arise. To construe them under the category of linguistic communication necessarily involves construing their production as speech acts."1

✓ Austin would distinguish a speech act into three distinct aspects viz., phonetic, phatic and rhetic. The phonetic act consists in producing certain acoustic blasts and the phatic act consists in arranging the sounds into words, phrases or sentence patterns and the rhetic act consists in uttering or using the symbols or expressions in such a way that they are meaningful to the hearer.

Any speech act presupposes a speaker, a hearer and the utterance. As it has already been mentioned a speech act must be backed by the intention of the speaker. Thus the speaker is a necessary component of the linguistic activity. The speech activity is necessarily directed to a person at the receiving end i.e., the hearer. And in course of the communication between the speaker and the hearer what is transmitted is the meaning which the speaker intends the hearer to recognise. This shows that language is a carrier of meaning or ideas and the meaning is supposed to be related to the context of the expression so that a person conversant with the given linguistic convention and the context of the use of the language can grasp what the speaker intends to mean. Like many other activities such as playing a game, conducting oneself in a social gathering etc., speaking a language is also rule governed. It is the rules that make language objective and inter-subjective. What converts a phonetic act into a phatic act is that the sounds produced must conform to certain conventional rules pertaining to that language: they are the rules of syntax. In order to convey that "the cat is on the mat," it is not only necessary that I make use of the terms 'cat,' 'mat,' preposi-
tion 'on,' the verb 'is' and the article 'the;' it is also necessary that they must be uttered or written in an order that is, grammatically permissible, namely, "the cat is on the mat." And again what turns a phatic act into rhetic act is that one conforms to certain other rules over and above the rules of syntax. In other words any syntactically sound sentence may not be meaningful irrespective of the context of its use. For example, "His kindness is long" is syntactically a valid expression but the oddity of the expression is not so explicit. This goes to prove that the oddity of meaning cannot be overcome unless one abides by the semantic rules. The semantic rules refer to the set of conventions, linguistic or non-linguistic sufficient to make the use of an expression meaningful. This enables us to recognise the fact that apart from articulation of symbols, language gets its meaning from the context: the totality of the non-linguistic conditions constituting the context of the utterance imparts meaning to the expressions. As it has already been noted semantic conditions are not exclusive of the syntactical rules and therefore signify the linguistic and non-linguistic conditions necessary for the meaningful employment of
language. Philosophers make a distinction between regulative and constitutive rules of language. To take an example - the advice to walk on the left, to respect the elders are regulative in nature in so far as they tell us how to walk on the road and how to behave with the elders. Similarly there are also rules regulating a game. But what makes a game, a particular game, e.g., chess, is that there is a set of rules determining the moves of the knight, pawns, castle etc. These rules being there a game is said to be unique of its kind and is distinct from other games. If these basic rules are violated we are said to be at least not playing the game. So these rules are constitutive of the game of chess. So from this point of view semantic rules can be seen to be constitutive in so far as they are found to be indispensable for the meaningful employment of language.

Besides recording facts and communicating our thoughts; language is used for other purposes, as well. As Max Black puts it:

"A man may speak in order to impart information, to deceive his hearer, to show friendliness, to ease social tension, to relieve his feelings, to show sympathy or some other attitude - and so on indefinitely." 2

Wittgenstein's remark in this regard is equally illuminating. He writes in his *Philosophical Investigations*:

"But how many kinds of sentence are there? Say assertion, question and command? - There are countless different kinds of use of what we call "symbols," "words," "sentences." And this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten."3

Hence there is found to be multiplicity of speech acts. There are some speech acts which are performed in saying something and those that are performed by saying something. The former is termed as illocutionary and the latter as perlocutionary speech acts. An illocutionary speech act is performed by mere utterance of expressions in appropriate circumstances and they include such acts as describing something, asking questions, giving informations, making promises etc. On the other hand the perlocutionary speech acts are performed only when the given expression produces the intended effect on the hearer. For example, persuading the child to take the medicine is an act which can be said to have been performed only in the event of the child actually being persuaded to take the medicine. Hence the semantic rules

determining the correct use of illocutionary and perlocutionary act are different. One can also make a logical distinction between the constative and performative speech act. Making a categorical statement is to perform a constative speech act. "The sky is cloudy," "the teacher is bad tempered" are examples of constative speech acts. These can be said to be either true or false. But unlike them a performative act implies that the person performing the speech act must indulge oneself in action. For example, "I welcome my guest," "I swear to take revenge," "get out from my room," are cases of performative speech acts.

Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations* is not so much concerned with the syntactical aspect of the use of words or with the classification of different speech acts as with their semantic aspects. He not only is painfully aware of certain paradoxes in philosophy but traces them to certain misunderstandings about language and meaning. Wittgenstein's caution "grammar is dangerous avoid it" is highly suggestive. He would make a distinction between the surface grammar and depth grammar. The surface grammar roughly corresponds to the grammatical aspect of the putative expression. In fact as we have noted earlier,
the meaning of an expression cannot necessarily be read out from the external clothing of it for the meaning of it has to be discovered by looking to its use in its actual employment in a given context. Meaning of an expression - is the way it is used. Since language is wedded to a form of life the meaning of an expression is determined by the way it is used in a life situation. There is a distinction between the use of words to do something and use of them in doing something. By language, as it was indicated earlier, men performs various speech acts such as giving information, concealing them, to bless, to curse, to please, to annoy etc. But one may, while relating a story, may make use of more than one speech act such as giving information, asking question, uttering exclamatory sentences and so on. Thus the above speech acts are seen to be used in course of relating a story. Now one can still make a further distinction between telling a fictional story and describing something. Both these cases refer to a broader framework or rather to two different universes of discourse which may make use of speech acts such as giving information, asking questions etc. Wittgenstein would call them language games. Let us take the example of speech acts
which may be involved in, say, "giving information." A sentence which purports to give information in a fictional story may refer to a possible state of affairs having no actual cognitive context. But a corresponding statement in the descriptive language game does necessarily stand for some actual happening or state of affairs. Though an informative statement may have similar grammatical structures in two different language games they may have different meanings in the respective frameworks in which they are used. "An expression has meaning only in the stream of life."4

It is sometimes supposed that Wittgenstein advocates ideal language in the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus and ordinary language in the Philosophical Investigations. Further it is said that the two works differ mainly on this point. This point stands in need of clarification. There are surely passages in the Philosophical Investigations which lay emphasis on ordinary language. Wittgenstein says, "ordinary language is in order." But what is an ordinary language? What are its criteria of identity? Wittgenstein is not explicit on this point. He sometimes uses empirical criteria and at certain other

4. Malcolm, Memoir, P.93
times logical criteria to characterize ordinary language. Ordinary language is distinguished from scientific and technical languages. A language is ordinary which is used in day to day commerce of life. It is the language of common man. According to Wittgenstein ordinary language is the basis of all other languages. This is how other languages (both technical and scientific) are parasitic upon ordinary language. Thus ordinary language not only gives meaning to scientific language but it sustains it. But the following objections can be raised against this view of ordinary language. This takes for granted that the boundary of ordinary language is fixed for all time to come.

But as a matter of fact this is not the case. There is always a mutual relationship between ordinary language and scientific language. In due course of time expressions from scientific discourse find their way to ordinary discourse. The scientific jargon of yesterday becomes the common platitude of today. Where to put the dividing line, between ordinary and non-ordinary or scientific language? To obviate the difficulties Wittgenstein advances another criterion known as logical one. It is based upon the principle of significant negation. This means that an expression is meaningful and its negation also is meaningful.
Sometimes philosophers use certain expressions violating all rules of meaningfulness. A word is meaningful only when it is distinguished from other words. As for example, to say that this table is black, is to say that there are tables which are not black. The expression black is meaningful in so far as it is distinguished from not black. To say that everything is black is not to say anything at all. So it can be said that this use of language is not ordinary. In this sense ordinary is not opposed to 'scientific' or 'technical' but opposed to 'extra-ordinary.' Some philosophers use ordinary expressions in extraordinary way. As a result confusions emerge. This ambivalent attitude is very much present in the Philosophical Investigations as an exercise in listing out the actual uses of expressions. Any speech act has to satisfy minimally this logical criterion of ordinary language. If it fails to do so it can't perform its task.