CHAPTER 2

EXPERIENCE, LANGUAGE AND MEANING
The discussion in this chapter refers, to begin with, to the psychologistic and anti-psychologistic tendencies in the interpretation of meaning, which generally characterize contemporary theories of meaning. It is then suggested that Dewey's naturalistic view of language saves his behavioral theory of meaning from lop-sidedness and other limitations of both psychologism and anti-psychologism. In the end it is concluded that a behavioral theory of meaning stands comparatively a more tenable theory than other contemporary theories.

The problem of meaning presents itself as the most important as well as an exceptionally complicated issue in contemporary discussions about man's symbolic activity. Since it is always possible that any problem be formulated in linguistic terms and a variety of solutions are entertained just on semantic plane, this possibility bestows an immense practical importance upon the need to understand the nature of language, more particularly to analyze the nature of meaning by virtue of which signs function as signs i.e. embody meanings within any particular system of language. People working in various fields of knowledge, i.e. physical and social
sciences, humanities and fine arts, have all come to realize the need of understanding and of effective use of their respective languages. In every discipline of knowledge, therefore, various techniques are being evolved to make the use of the terms as precise and effective as possible. But as suggested in the introduction, precision and specialization of languages in various disciplines is being achieved at a greater cost, for these result not only an interdisciplinary split but a split even between the theoretical and practical aspects of one and the same discipline.

Within philosophic literature — which now-a-days claims a privileged position as a clarifying agency of man's symbolic activity — it has become customary to separate scientific discourse from ethical discourse or from symbolism in art. Unfortunately, some philosophies make separations where only distinctions would do. Moreover they make separations between various types of discourse in extremely ad hoc, uncritical and superficial manner. For example, a most classical separation is made between descriptive and non-descriptive use of symbols; scientific use of symbols is considered descriptive and referential; it is distinguished from other uses of language which are termed emotive and non-referential. Discussion in chapter one about the
nature of empirical knowledge amply clarifies it that the notion of scientific statements as descriptions of facts is based upon uncritical and fallacious assumptions. Moreover, as sciences progress and become theoretical, a semantic account of them as descriptive statements grows unintelligible and mysterious. Although Dewey grants empirical significance even to the languages of values, art and metaphysics, his theory of science specifically deals with the idea that no systematic language functions entirely descriptively. His operational interpretation of scientific concepts brings out very clearly the instrumental and methodological import of any systematic language. His behavioral interpretation of meaning, as clarified in this chapter, lays stress at the contextual (or situational) and social (or interpersonal) import of man's symbolic activity in general.

To understand the nature of language a number of contemporary linguistic thinkers have made an effort to clarify the notion of meaning itself. But their theories of meaning, too, fail to arrive at any consensus. These form only a heterogeneous and disconnected assortment. Jerry A. Fodor and Jerrold J. Katz find that extreme disagreement over the nature of meaning, "... becomes apparent from even the most cursory
comparison of the work of such semantic theorists as Bloomfield, Carnap, Harris, Osgood, Quine, Russell, Skinner, Tarski, Wittgenstein and Ziff. In the writings of these theorists, one finds explications of meaning based upon everything from patterns of retinal stimulation, to stimuli controlling verbal behavior, to affective factors in the response to word, to intentions, to sentential truth conditions, to conditions for non-deviant utterances, to distribution, to rules of use.  

These various attempts to define the meaning of meaning, though happen to be heterogeneous; yet, the heterogeneity in the conceptions of meaning as displayed in the above quotation is not completely devoid of significance. In the first instance, this heterogeneity refers to the complexity and intricacies of the situation in which meaning appears. Secondly, it clearly brings out the contemporary controversy between psychologism and antipsychologism which naturally result from taking a part of meaning, as the whole of it. The totality of meaning is essentially comprehensible in a situation in which users of the language, a system of signs and

the objects of the world are in continuous interaction. Adam Schaff is of the opinion that language signs, which are themselves only natural objects or natural events "... become signs only when they enter into definite intricate relations with men who use them as signs, with reality to which they somehow referred, with the system of signs, i.e. language within which they function. It is only in such a context that an object or event becomes a sign or in other words has a meaning."

Now there are philosophers who confine their analysis of meaning only to the psychic processes which go on in the minds of the users of the language. Since for these philosophers meaning is constituted of some states of consciousness, they define it as "affective factors in the response to word", "intentions" or "patterns of retinal stimulations" etc. They obviously, therefore, in their analysis of meaning deny a significant role either to the nature of physical objects or to the nature of signs which constitute the system of language itself.

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Then there are other philosophers who accuse the former philosophers of psychologism but they themselves commit the fallacy of the other extreme by completely excluding a reference to the role of the users of language from their notion of meaning. For them meaning is either some relation between signs and things e.g. "sentential truth conditions" or between signs and signs e.g. "rules of linguistic usage". Fortunately, these two trends in contemporary theories of meaning thoroughly expose one another, each pointing to the one-sidedness and limitations of the other. Antipsychologists are justified in accusing the psychologists of making meaning entirely subjective for if meaning were so no communication by means of language could take place. Guided by the ideal of objectivity and to avoid the difficulties that one has to face in order to find way to man's subjective processing of meaning, the antipsychologists exclude the psychological processes in the development of language from their analysis of meaning and confine it only to language as a finished product.

Although the controversy between psychologism and antipsychologism is focused mainly around the process-product part of the situation in which meaning appears, yet a deeper source of this controversy can be located
more accurately in the separation, by the logicians, of
the processes of thought from the processes of
experiencing linguistic expressions, because they intend
to make logic completely independent of psychology.
Adam Schaff is opposed to this tendency and has very
aptly pointed out that a sentence does not only express
a proposition but is inseparable from it. It is not
the case that a proposition without its verbal form
cannot be expressed, it cannot even be thought of in
one's own mind. Adam Schaff is of the opinion that,
"... the thought process as a cognitive process takes
place not only with the help of linguistic means (verbal
signs), but also in an organic unity with linguistic
process. One might quite well use interchangeably the
expressions "to think" and "to experience linguistic
process", since in both cases we refer to the same process
of thinking, the only difference being that of a stress
on one of its aspects. For there is no separate thought
process and separate process of linguistic experience,
but there is always the homogenous process of thinking
and linguistic experience."\(^3\)

Dewey explicitly warns against the danger that
is inevitable if language is conceived to express thought

\(^3\)Adam Schaff, *Introduction to Semantics*, p. 287.
as a pipe conducts water. The occurrence of ideas then is noticed only as a mysterious parallel of the brain events like thinking, recollection or imagination with no community or bridge from one to the other. A very important contribution of Dewey's naturalism to the understanding of language — significant especially for the point of view developed in work in hand — lies in his suggestion that in the evolving world the development of mind and the development of language are the two aspects of the same event.

It is an empirical fact that complex animals have feelings like fulfilment or frustration connected with different activities. At sub-human level these feelings are qualities of natural events and are operative any way. They are important for the organism because certain organic integrations have to occur if life is to continue. Even at human level, without language, the qualities of organic action are feelings like pain, pleasure, odors, colors, noises, tones etc., but are so only potentially and proleptically; with language they are discriminated and identified. Feelings when discriminated and objectified by means of language make sense, which constitute the immediate and immanent meanings of things. Meanings in this immediate and immanent sense are different
from signification; signification involves the use of a quality as sign or index of something not directly given to senses. Signification is, according to Dewey, the essence of a systematic use of language. There is no language naming things in their immediate and immanent sense. Words of natural language serve both the functions of sense and signification. Language of science demands an increasing freedom from meanings in the immediate sense.

Capacity of human organism to interpret things and his capacity to use language are his overlapping functions. Eric H. Lenneberg considers it proper to speak of language as specifically human behavior, because the possibility of such behavior implicitly postulates a biological matrix for the development of speech and language. Dewey is of the opinion that in addition to the physiological and biological factors, the emergence of human mind constitute the paramount condition for language behavior because the significance resides not in sounds but in their interpretation. It is important to note that within Dewey's thought interpretation always

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takes the form of an imputation of potentiality for certain consequences in terms of some publically observable mode of action. It goes to his credit to find a behavioral interpretation of human mental capacities in the linguistic abilities of man and then suggests an interpretation of language and thought in terms of more primitive forms of human overt activities. But Dewey is wrong in maintaining that genuine use of language is necessarily scientific. He, in fact, fails to appreciate that scientific language is only one of the possible ways of utilizing the natural isomorphism of language, thought and action and that there exist various forms of man's linguistic abilities linked with different forms of overt behaviors which can be justly termed objective, reasonable or rational.

By maintaining that the scientific use of language is the only valid use of it, Dewey wishes to stress that all scientific meanings have a distinctive and concretely verifiable office to perform. But it is not a criterion which only scientific meanings have to satisfy for he certainly does not set apart scientific meaning from empirical meanings in general on the basis of this criterion. Totality of empirical meanings have a concretely verifiable office to perform. Such an objective verification in the ultimate analysis is nothing else
than social confirmation or intersubjective agreement. Dewey writes, "We find meaning as a describable, verifiable empirical phenomenon whose genesis, modes and consequences can be concretely examined and traced. It presents itself not as an intrusion, nor as an accidental and impotent iridescence, nor as the reduplication of a structure already inhering in antecedent existence, but as an additive quality realized in the process of wider and more complex interaction of physical and vital phenomena; and as having a distinctive and concretely verifiable office in sustaining and developing a distinctive kind of observable facts, those namely which are termed social."

Language, therefore, appropriately speaking, is social rather than scientific in nature.

Behavioral theory makes use of this most distinctive i.e. the social function, characteristic of all empirical meanings and identifies meaning with an indication of some course of overt activity within naturalistic situations where men are in continuous interaction with each other and with things by means of language tool. Charles Morris and Adam Schaff display a similar insight.

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in holding that meaning appears in a complicated situation. Charles Morris names this situation as semiotic situation and Adam Schaff names it as sign situation. Both of them sound a note of warning against locating meaning as existences at any one place in the semiotic or sign situation, for meaning is characterized in terms of the process as a whole. Dewey, however, is of the opinion that meaning in its totality cannot even be confined to sign or semiotic situations, for the sign situation itself takes place in a complex environment both physical and social. He says, "The ultimate meaning of the noise made by the traffic officer is the total consequent system of social behavior, in which individuals are subjected, by means of noise, to social coordination of the movement of persons and vehicles in the neighborhood and directly affected."

"Proximate meaning" is confined to the sign situation but the "ultimate meaning" does not pertain to the sign as such but to the whole complex environment in which the use of the word is embedded. Wittgenstein happens to argue in an analogous manner when he holds that the meaning of a word is its use in the language, where the structure of his language is the structure of

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the world. He seems to hold with Dewey that sign situation says a little, but what it shows is something very determinate in case of Wittgenstein while it is indeterminate in case of Dewey unless it is made so through some consciously organised effort at social level. The "ultimate meaning" becomes determinate not merely through systematization of various signs belonging to language but through elaborate effort to connect these language signs with similar behavioral responses on the part of each individual of the community. Ordinary language symbols, in fact, gradually and naturally grow determinate through continuous participation of men in shared community activities. In case of specialized types of discourse, language as a function of human association grows into conscious processes. Scientific method, moral deliberation and art creation, therefore, represent deliberate efforts to link scientific concepts, values and esthetic product with these specialized form of human activities.

"Proximate meaning", of course, exists when at least two or more persons have come to an agreement in action—action which naturally involves the use of some environmental objects. Dewey chooses to define language with reference to this minimum existence of meaning. Language, according to him, is a relationship in which
primarily two beings share; it as well includes the thing by means of which this shared activity is carried on. In order to avoid a fallacy either of psychologism or antipsychologism it is absolutely necessary that meaning may be comprehended in a sign or semiotic situation. Charles Morris and Adam Schaff, therefore, in this respect make a very appropriate start but they do not adhere to this analysis of their very strictly. Under the influence of contemporary analytical approach to language, especially that of Carnap — who finds that there are specific relations between various elements of sign situation i.e. between men who communicate, between men and reality, between sign and other signs, and gives these different relations entirely independent names and status — Charles Morris suggests to dispense with the term meaning itself. He says, "Meaning signifies any and all phases of sign-process, and frequently suggests mental and valuational process as well; hence it is desirable for semiotic to dispense with the term and introduce special terms for the various factors which meaning fails to discriminate."7

Adam Schaff, too, although fears a danger of

fetishism in the treatment of fragments of meaning as independent wholes, yet finds such a separation necessary for research purposes and grants investigations into the nature of meaning by logicians, sociologists, psychologists and epistemologists from their own specific points of view. Merit of Dewey's approach lies in recommending very strongly that issues must not be separated if methodological distinctions can serve the purpose. In fact, the whole difficulty with contemporary thinkers is their micro approach. It is only against a macro perspective that micro details can really acquire a high degree of significance. The concept of semiotic or sign situation could sufficiently significantly guard the notion of meaning from becoming the victim of either psychologism or antipsychologism if their authors could get rid of a basic micro mental attitude.

Dewey's naturalistic view of language provides a perspective in which differentiations and discriminations qualifying various types of discourse find their respective places. His behavioral theory of meaning provides a minimum criterion which all meaning in its various manifestations must satisfy. Behavioral criterion suggests that meaning is a publicly recognizable and concretely verifiable phenomenon. It is, in fact, by
virtue of this very condition that language is rendered socially communicable.

Viewed naturalistically the problem of language and meaning is fundamentally connected with the process of communication. Communication is a natural function of human association; it occurs when something is made common between two persons, this something made common by means of language sign is the meaning itself. It is universally agreed upon that sounds or written marks are in themselves only natural events or physical objects and that these become language signs only by gaining meanings. Meanings are the acquisition of significance by the physical things or natural events in their status of making possible and fulfilling the requisites of human communication. In this respect it is important to note that Dewey does not allow the process of signaling at sub-human level the status of language. He calls animal interaction ego-centric.

Whereas linguistic behavior is essentially participative, i.e. it involves the response of human A to the sign produced by human B from the stand point of B. Dewey clarifies, "Meaning... is primarily a property of behavior, and secondarily a property of objects. But the behavior of which it is a quality is a distinctive; cooperative, in that response to another's act involves
contemporaneous response to a thing as entering into the other’s behavior, and this upon both sides." *8

Dewey argues that even in cases where meaning is identified with the intent of the speaker there is postulated a second person who shares in the execution of the intent and also something independent of the persons concerned through which the intent is realized. In participative human endeavour, language naturally enters both as an economizer and an amplifying agency. Human beings naturally make use of language to realize their wants at less personal labor, for it is only and exclusively by means of signs that they procure the cooperative assistance of others. Since participation in cooperative activities is assumed as a very necessary condition for the existence of language and meaning, Dewey’s behavioral theory identifies meaning with those publicly recognizable units of conjoint overt acts which happen to be identical with various persons engaged in participative activities. It is an important feature of naturalistic view of language that it allows no other criterion for telling whether two expressions are alike or unlike in meaning except the overt behavior of their users. A naturalist avoids both the fallacies

of psychologism and antipsychologism because for him meaning is neither the objects nor the states of consciousness to which only the user of the word has access. A fixed meaning refers only to an acquisition of a common habit of action by community of men while they are engaged in cooperative action. Meanings, in fact, are no more determinate to the users of the language beyond what is implicit in their overt behavior. It is for example very normal that one is able to use a word in appropriate circumstances or act in definite way on hearing a word without being able to say that the word meant so-and-so.

Dewey's behavioral theory of meaning is a clarification and elaboration of an idea suggested originally by Peirce, that an appeal to the sensible effects could form the only and the ultimate basis for social communication. Behavioral theory insists that even in case of most complex and obscure areas of communication the only clue available is constituted of the overt behavior of the users. W.V. Quine holds with Dewey that, "Language is a social art which we all acquire on the evidence solely of other people's overt behavior under publicly recognizable circumstances."  

Totality of language symbols whether those of science, values or art have to satisfy this minimum requirement of communicability.

It is now generally accepted that words are not proxy for their objects; these are rather considered as vehicles for the mental conception of these objects. Although meanings to the semantics now are no more as tangible as physical objects, say, tree or table, yet a tendency to take meanings as determinate or for granted in the mental museum of man persists. Behavioral theory of meaning recommends a giving up of this museum figure of speech, according to which exhibits are the meanings and the words are labels. The structure of discourse is not, according to Dewey, the structure of things as it is for early Wittgenstein, it is the structure which things assume to fulfill the methodological, contextual and social criterion of that particular discourse. It is, therefore, an important implication of behavioral theory of meaning that the structure of things for a physicist is different from the structure of things for a painter, i.e. with a shift in discourse from physics to art the shift in the stimulus, say, color is evident. An intersubjective basis for meaning certainly lies in Dewey's semantic-cum-epistemological postulate that persons modify or influence one another's
behavior not simply through the use of some special language but through the special use they make of their environment by means of language tool. Totality of significance of language symbols is constituted of the ways in which things are implicated in human action for some prospective consequences. But this semantic insight is marred by the scientific bias in Dewey's thought, due to which he fails to realize that the prospective consequences differ in case of science, values and art. Control, cooperation and consummation or enjoyment are respectively the prospective consequences of man's knowing, volition and feeling.

Language symbols soon become the signs of the activities into which they enter. A fixed scientific concept results from linking it with certain very decisive operation within a cooperatively conducted scientific endeavour. Dewey holds in full agreement with P.W. Bridgman that a physical quantity, say, length or time, means precisely the way it is measured, i.e., every factor entering into the mode of measurement is open to mechanical recognition. A perfect scientific symbol in fact designates only as much and nothing more than a set of operations which do in actual performance determine the precise meaning of the concept. For Charles Morris the question whether a
sentence in the physics text book is or is not a designator is different from the question whether or not it is a true statement. The former question, according to Morris, belongs to the science of semiotics whereas the latter to the physical science. According to Dewey, however, these two are strictly one question and can be answered only by reference to the actual operations in the experimental situation with which these operations have a close bearing. Einstein's discovery that classical concepts are inadequate, forms a realization which grew out of actual experimental situations where classical concepts failed to operate. Scientific concepts possess a fixed meaning neither due to their true correspondence with the antecedent existence nor are these fixed through some arbitrary acts; scientific concepts are made so through methodological efforts to connect them with actual operations within scientific inquiry. Moreover scientific concepts register those forms of human behavior which are capable of mechanical reproduction.

In his Theory of Valuation Dewey does differentiate value propositions from scientific generalizations. He

See, Charles Morris, Sign, Language and Behavior, pp. 80-82.
maintains that value propositions "are more than simple predictions for the things in question are such as will not take place, under the given circumstance, except through the intervention of some personal act." But the meaning of this statement remains obscure in the light of his contention that value propositions are not methodologically marked off from scientific generalizations. Dewey, in fact, in this respect commits the fallacy of equating human activities qualified by different kind of organization and order and named differently as moral deliberation and scientific method.

By calling either moral deliberation or art creation an experiment, the only point which Dewey wishes to make is this: that different inquiries find their start in problematic situations and that the resolution of the problem requires an introduction of material not found in the original problematic situation, which involves some form of activity on the part of the subject, with the introduction of which the situation grows from indeterminate to determinate. What, therefore, man's various forms of methodological endeavours like

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scientific knowing, moral choosing and art creation have in common is their temporal and developing aspect. This common aspect does not warrant an entirely uniform conception of these various forms of human activities. Because scientific meanings so far are the only consciously and deliberately developed meanings and scientific methodology the only well developed and organized activity to get at empirical meanings, Dewey's analysis of empirical knowledge confines itself fundamentally with this methodology and is led to treat his theory of science as a general methodology for the acquisition of empirical meanings. This confusion of a specific logic of science with a general empirical methodology creates a distortion in Dewey's theory of value discussed in the chapter to follow.