

**LANGUAGE IN INDIA**  
**Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow**  
**Volume 9 : 9 September 2009**  
**ISSN 1930-2940**

Managing Editor: M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.

Editors: B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.

Sam Mohanlal, Ph.D.

B. A. Sharada, Ph.D.

A. R. Fatihi, Ph.D.

Lakhan Gusain, Ph.D.

K. Karunakaran, Ph.D.

Jennifer Marie Bayer, Ph.D.

**On Interrogating Language and Cognition**

**Amitabh Vikram Dwivedi**

# On Interrogating Language and Cognition

Amitabh Vikram Dwivedi

---

## Abstract

This paper interrogates language. My basic interest is to put forth a detail analysis of the terms language, knowledge, meaning and interpretation linguistically. The paper deals them individually. Finally it tries to break the vicious circle of binary oppositions and it also substitutes a rotary<sup>1</sup> move (where language, knowledge, meaning and interpretation come one after another) to accommodate both cognition and language. It will provide readers a perceptivity to connect (in a sense *connectere*<sup>2</sup>) the descriptive fragmentary textual chunks in a whole.

**Key words:** cognition, language, meaning, interpretation, fragmentary textual chunks, etc

## On Language

While working on the limits of structuralist philosophy, I subvert not only the notion of language but also present a path for a theory of a text (the sectional arguments in this paper are put in a disoriented form; the general reason for this is that a disoriented form neither follows the substitution nor the circular route-a never ending state; the dependency of an equilibrium set like  $A+B=C+D$  where  $A=D$  rests on the variables innumerable and of infinite sorts that neither represents circularity nor substitution) that equally opposes the metaphysical and linguistic hierarchy that caused conceptual opposition<sup>3</sup>-egocentric speech and social speech-as Saussurean langue is outlined as a social system, and as a sum of collective conventions with a commonly shared code by a community (Saussure [1916] 1967: 25), and parole is an individual, psycho-physiological activity that consists of producing specific combinations from the elements that are present in the code (30).

When langue and parole are outlined in this way, there remains an ellipsis (a contextual one) between both that creates a gap: what would be the arbitrary constituent that bridges the distance between the social and the psychological, between the community and the individual, between the system and the implementation of the system, between the code and the actual use of the code?

This section answers some of these basic cognitively charged language queries. The Chomskian dichotomy between competence and performance presents a modified version

for the old Saussurean notions, such as virtual/real, description/prescription, acceptability/grammaticality, so on and so forth. I, in this paper, further proceed with the language argument from English and Hindi. Consider:

- a) John is understanding the lessons.
- b) John is getting the lessons.
- c) John has put on a nice Indian sari.

In the first example it is described in the virtual<sup>4</sup> human being viz. computer that ‘understand’ is a VERB and it doesn’t come with the progressive aspect. The example is ungrammatical as well as unacceptable<sup>5</sup> in English language reality. This example shows that the word ‘understand’ is privileged over some other verbs like ‘get’ (every word is a concept, and the agreement and uniformity among languages differ) that can be used in both the aspects – habitual as well as progressive or vice versa.

Till now we are working on the assumption that language is different, and the content of words in various languages cannot be transferred directly. An individual’s mother tongue affects his or her conceptual view of the world. Language bears witness to culture in a sense of a historically conveyed system of conceptions and attitudes. (Wierzbicka, 1997) Now if an Indian student uses the same structure as mentioned in example (a), he/she will go in this manner:

- a.i) me pa:th samajh raha: hū.  
I lessons understand live am (word translation)  
I.SIN.PRON. NOUN VERB PROG. AUX.  
‘I am understanding the lessons.’(literal translation 1)  
‘I understand the lessons’ (literal translation 2)

Hindi language permits both the aspects in its singularly structured sentence, and surprisingly the learner gets the correct meaning contextually. It is true that languages are different, and English and Hindi are no exception to it, but at the same time if a bilingual learner uses this sort of unacceptable (only to a native English speakers) usage in his communication classroom, how far a second language tutor is correct when the learner often gets corrected to follow the same grammatical routine pattern instead of putting it as a variant of Englishes.

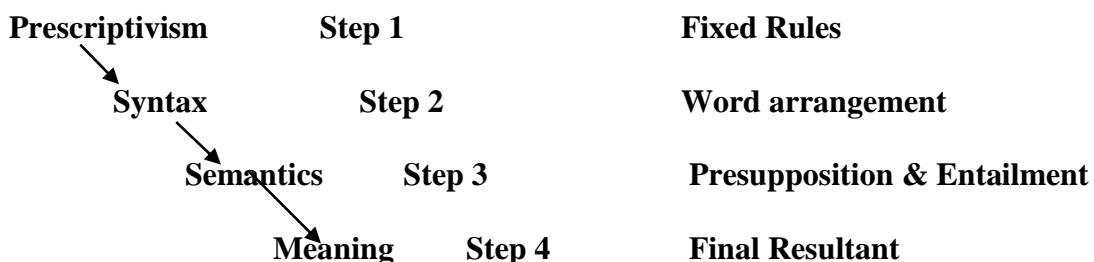
Here text is a text of another text if and only if it follows the same “text”<sup>6</sup>, and context is the context of another context iff it is correctly contextualized<sup>7</sup> as it is well said that “mistakes are so common that rationality” and reasoning have become “exceptional” in human behavior (Edelman, 1986). Let me put the whole episode in the tabular form to formulate a clear picture.

In a tabular form:

	<b>Reference in English</b>	<b>Substitution in Hindi</b>
Lexicon “understand”	Semantic	Understanding “samajh raha”
Primary source of language	Prescriptive Grammar	Prescriptive Grammar
Is meaning preserved?	Yes	Yes
Is replacement possible with prescriptive grammar?	No	Yes

**Table no.1 how the prescribed meaning gets preserved**

This table precisely demonstrates the limitation of language/languages and unfortunately tries to advocate the old saussurean notion that explicitly states that ‘language is a system of system’, and there exists hierarchies and privileges<sup>8</sup>. As we have in the above example (a).



**Figure 1 Hierarchies in Language**

#### Nature of Lexicon

This section describes the understanding of the nature of lexicon, analyzing it in both the languages in terms of their cultural significance; in fact it is the most important qualifier of perceptivity in the two languages. This is because English uses lexicon for perceptions in general in non-progressive aspect. The conception of a native speaker for these words rest on either in a completed form or for a momentarily space, it does not show a process of being (a virtual one). The elliptical flux in English is a Hindi native speaker’s progressive concept, and this SLL’s uses of the lexicon “samaj<sup>h</sup>” indicates a form from to-be to be been of a being-the missing progressive aspect comes with the other two.

Prescriptivism dominates preservation. Meaning is preserved because it is pre-conceived through culture cognitively and then follows the rules of grammar. This point raises serious argument in favour of whether equal fluency can ever be measured in a bi-lingual speaker or in a multi-lingual speaker.

When a person acquires two or more than two languages simultaneously, and when a multilingual claims for an equal fluency in the acquired languages before the critical period how far this claim can be judged, and what are the neurological factors responsible for helping him out eschewing code-switching and code-mixing. But how far can we maintain the dignity of prescriptivism in order to sustain the meaning.

Obviously, very rarely this sort of practice can be proved right. Let me elucidate it with the example (c). It says “John has put on a nice Indian sari”. This sentence is structured grammatically but meaning-wise anomalous<sup>9</sup>. The semanticity of an utterance “is connected to large-scale cultural and semiotic processes that have a history in a human cultural system (Hjelmslev, 1984).” Semantically it does not match the compositional analysis between the two grids.

<b>John</b>		<b>Sari (worn by)</b>
+human	matches with	+human
+adult	matches with	+adult
+male	does not match with	-male

**Figure 2 Compositional Analysis**

The above grids represent the compositional analysis of two elements, one male human and another minus male human, and try to show the connotative congruity between them. The mismatch between the agent and the object that is worn by him makes the whole affair unacceptable from cultural point of view.

Sense is purely dependent on the reference. Reality is dependent on epistemology rather than ontology. This indicates that nothing new or innovative is coming out in and around us, only we are accepting certain privileged strong icons over the weaker ones and that is rooted deeply in our consciousness as they are never changing. Thus, the deviation from the norm is rarely an acceptable criterion but a noticeable one.

Code-switching and code-mixing is also an iconic play. And the only innovative and creative aspect that can claim for universality is “a language ungrammatical” from a so-called native speaker’s point of view.

## **Knowledge**

Let’s start with a short story:

“Once upon a time there was a boy reaching to his manhood named “Michael”. He was an interpreter and a decoder of codes. He wanted to decode humans. Decoding always needs a language finer than the language you acquire from your mother. Hence, Michael

came out from his womb and went to a language named “Alpha”. Alpha was an intelligent language with a fine sense of super-human touch in him. Michael thought that he has got a tool to codify “animals”. But he was wrong as language is all powerful and always has the capacity to over-power you. You use language and become slave of it in a manner you cannot think without it. It is in your brain, heart, and in your veins, never leaving you alone even to die in peace, and not many people know that they are dying daily instead of living (this concept has been taken from Deleuze and Guattari, 1977).

The animals are made to be controlled, and are enjoyed by humans. We eat them, we pet them, we beat them, we (check) mate with them. Life is always being a game of Chess. There are squares, in which black and white things happen all the time (it is a strong metaphor as neither black is responsible for the visibility of white nor the white is solely responsible for the cognition of black; their mixed but distinct play makes things knowledgeable). Alpha is writing language on your possible moves-sometimes known and sometimes unknown-writing white on the same color makes an effect of invisibility similar trance is true with the opposite. The black spot always remain adjacent to white element, and the animal kingdom goes on fertilizing its breed or instinct. The animals have a typical habit of generalizing and misbehaving<sup>10</sup> if left unchecked. Alpha, for this reason, cross-checked “animals” from time to time; and explicitly in his refined manner explained them that “you are going to dogs, and even a dog will not come once I checkmate”. Animals were later on in the death list.

Alpha is an evolutionary programmer. He is growing, but not growing old. Oldness sucks, and he has been old enough to know his job better. Alpha is a start, and Alpha knows Animals’ instinct. He is a creator, reformer, and terminator. What happened to “Michael”? Only Alpha knows.”

Not many readers would be able to understand the story because it is a deviation from the norm. There might be a possibility that they totally reject the notion of writing a story puzzle in an academic paper. This happens because “inertia plays a strong role in the obstruction of...change”, and “People grow attached to their place in society, whether that place is privileged or disadvantaged (Edelman, 1988).”

I can give a finer interpretation to this story episode but then it will not define the term “knowledge”. It will not serve the purpose. Knowledge is always considered as a second hand tool, and is “explainable in terms of both a micro and a macro level of description (Smolensky, 1986).” that has been passed from one generation to another once it is confirmed in societal sphere.

The notion of knowledge, in order to actualize its existence to any subject, should be submitted itself rigorously as an evaluative powerful piece of metaphor, which proves its creativity in front of others by using the ‘gaining appraisal device’. Thus, the notion while attaining its existence faces two tests-one the critical outlook of the subject, and

secondly the demand based depending judgment which is passed by the general to support individual subject and latter on to actualize notion.

At this point, the actualization of knowledge gets affixed into a process of self-correction of knowledge (either by correcting/supporting oneself or the other). This corrective tradition establishes a modern form of seeing anything notional through institutional framework. So the outcome has more chances to be diverted and directed from the original, and the know-how would be full of multiplicity.

While interrogating the actualization, it would be appropriate to discuss the role of understanding and how gamely it plays this role to get the linguistic denotation perfection which latter comes out from its signified of ‘gaining appraisal device’, and gets its materialistic network of self-regulating realization.

To answer this we start with the argument that our first perception to knowledge is based on subjectivity which maintains its association with our position in the existential relations of subject, a certain arrangement of cultural parts of subject that is unconsciously unknown to him/her. Not only is this but he/she devised to act by the surface surroundings of his/her environment. In this whole cause the subjective element gets diseased by the shallow self-realization where self has been already trapped to satisfy the ‘self’ of the other (that is granted by other) and finally it prevents the ‘self’ from being ‘really’ realized-the notion of knowledge.

To decide whether knowledge is understood or not, we divert our argument from the understanding of knowledge subjectively and to the notion of understood subjective knowledge itself. Consequently, the critical outlook of the subject and the depending judgment free both the aesthetical idea and wanton knowledge from the ‘perception’ and entertain only the live experience and thus starts the cognitive ability to an understandable platform to perform its actualization.

We go to an institution to gain information, and finally come out with an institutionalized knowledge. The creativity is blocked. How does this thing happen? It happens because our free will<sup>11</sup> to think, act, and react is coming through a filter that allows certain things to happen and rejects other things altogether. For example, patriotism, fear, religious attitude, serving to nation, humanitarianism, etc. are purely filtered knowledge. We act accordingly because “the nature of the actions and the reasons for them (Edelman: 1988)” is built on misunderstandings, and we are taught since our childhood to behave in that specific manner though sometimes unconsciously.

The more we gain knowledge, the more we become specific and fixed. If I know that a shirt in my wardrobe is “a bright red shirt” then I will never compromise with “a shirt”. If I know that “I am John” then I will never try to think that “My name is only John and beyond that I am much more, that there are other important traits in my personality that

the phrase is shrouding". The gained knowledge is a state of inertia. It stops all the changes in the society that are really needed, and try to promote rationalization for things that are unsatisfactory and required immediate attention.

Knowledge needs a new name and concept. Knowledge should be "no-alleged". The freedom beyond the knowledge seeks for a logical synthesis. Logical synthesis in this regards seeks not a unity of effects but a unity of action; not a unity of products but a unity of creative processes for both what is assumed and for what is presumed. The word 'freedom' in this context can be linguistically understood as any creative process or work that is free from time and space, and that is associated with the moments of pure, positive happiness that can be felt by brain's eye, and then we leave ourselves from all the doubts, fears, weaknesses, and inertia in the words of Maslow the state of "Self-actualization (Rosenhan, 1973) is acquired. We feel one with the world and all distance and aloofness disappear while this unity leads us to freedom, and we come out with the expressions like "The world is worth living", or "I love this state of being". From here onwards being starts becoming, and begins to know the form of "Know Thyself"<sup>12</sup>.

Here, the verb 'know' for the subject we wish to know is not the individual consciousness but the universal subject. As man is to be studied not in his individual life but in his political and social life, similarly, any mode of expression-whether fact or fiction-seeks to achieve a condensation and centralization through working towards a common end-a universal character, in which every aspects of human life- the creation of mythical images, the processing of art, the religious rigidity etc. agree and harmonize.

## Meaning

Meaningfulness starts from meaning apart. Loaded with idiosyncratic and cultural experiences of past and present it comes into existence first locally (higher mental function, Vygotsky, 1978) and then globally.

What happens when we re-introduce the relevance of intuitional understandings of language and human experience and expression? How might the logical structure of the computation facilitate this, or rather, how can we so transform the interface to allow our intuitive faculties engage and be engaged at the very constructive level of the bit formation of the computer's being? This would call for a completely newly created hardware. Or, perhaps, hardware can grow outward from it? Can virtual reality immersive systems, being constructed on the bitwise "on/off" Boolean logic circuitry, allow this creative, expressive engagement?

Consider the phrase "English lady is not an Indian lady" (X is not Y). For a person who does not live in India, and even if the person lives in India but does not know Hindi, the meaning is central and fixed that two different nations have two different sorts of people. But the real meaning is known only to one who knows the complexities of Hindi with all

its code-mixing and tabooed language (X is not Y but Y is understood as X while interfacing the iconic knowledge of language, hence X is Y). The circuitry on/off depends upon a system but when the system fails either on/off is on or on/off is off sometimes a loose circuit makes the predictability of on/off unpredictable.

The Hindi speakers (this situation has been observed in places like Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Southern Punjab region) use the word lady in plural form and mean it singular as well as plural. They say—“not a single ladies has come yet”, or “all ladies are going to the market”. This is purely a non-cultural description for the word ‘lady’ because ‘ladies’ is used where the subject is not aware of the phonetics. But the description for using sibilant /s/ sound unconsciously instead of the correct version for the singular form ‘lady’ consciously yields an eye-opening meaningfulness to the whole episode. There are certain biological and psychological concepts that are culturally associated to the lexicon “woman” in Hindi.

- a. *Istri-* means a woman ,/s/ sibilant sound
- b. *Istrava-* means menstruation /s/ sibilant sound
- c. *riSava-* to leak, middle /s/ sibilant sound
- d. *Istan-*breast, /s/ sibilant sound
- e. *Shiil-* good moral character, /s/ sibilant sound
- f. *Srimati-* a title for married woman/s/ sibilant sound
- g. *Sushri-*a title for unmarried woman/s/ sibilant sound

Once you pronounce “ladies” the similar /s/ sibilant sound dominates your (articulators) vocal tract, and you use the conceptual code-mixing with respect to your connotative meaning that places women’s’ biological and physical characteristics in the back of your head<sup>11</sup>. Your consciousness is lost, and you are dominated by an effect that is unnatural if you know these connotations. Every time you are bound to use the language then “language becomes a tool for organizing thinking because it bears the concepts (Moll, 1990)”

## Interpretation

Interpretation is a way of thinking. It elicits a definitive description for the things that they do not infer. You imply certain things that lack inference, and try to advocate them with the help of interpretation. It is a delusory act for illusory things.

Consider the situations:

1. Students’ answer-sheets should be checked with green pen as a red color marking has a negative effect on students’ psyche.
2. The new notification in the university says “Only Vice-Chancellor is authorized to use green color”

The previous situation has no direct link to the second situation as they are occurring in different context, and having a mutual ignorance for one another. The language-context for the situation no. 1 is purely ELT (a branch in applied linguistics) based while the second situation asserts a common rule for all the faculty/staff-members of the university. It is a similar situation like in America where only a person with an American nationality can become a president though Obama is a good candidate, he pacifies multi-cultural American people.

The common interpretation for these two situations is that -what you check is going to be cross-checked in the bigger system. You are filtered by color machinery in this context where you are free for other things except one, and the machine has a non-filtering mechanism for itself that incorporates everything for its further functioning. This is a systematic relationship with a scheme of categorizing everything as "a schematic relationship reflects categorized judgment based on comparison. The over-all comparison between a schema and its instauration summaries over an indefinite number of local comparisons between corresponding substructures (Langacker, 1987)"

### **Vicious Circle**

The process is neither binary nor circular. The circle often gives you the image that it never starts and it never ends but then it is a state of completeness and emptiness. The completeness leads to a state of inertia where things never change only there locations on the periphery sideline the previous one or the later one. The movement occurs in a fix route, and the way is already decided and known.

The circular movement from language-knowledge-meaning-interpretation either starts from the language or it ends to the language. Thus the language, in a way, is in a non-dualistic state but it is not a state of oneness and of fixity as in the broader network it is not going to change we all read from left to right, or from right to left or from top to bottom and get the meaning from what is inferred or what is implied. The change will not come because the text is in a network. The net is knitted, and over-worked that the real is nothing but the same use of different anagram to get variation. The operations sometimes make the sounds /o/ and /n/ 'on' and very often 'no'. We don't know- what do we mean? The end of this paper can be put in these words:

The act of thinking became identical with suffering, and suffering with thinking..... Thinking suffering, reflecting on past suffering - as the impossibility of thinking - then came to be experienced by Nietzsche as the highest joy. But does thought really have the power to actualize itself without itself suffering, without reconstituting its own suffering? Does thought itself suffer from its own inability to actualize itself? What then is doing the suffering or enjoying? The brain? Can the cerebral organ

enjoy the suffering of the body of which it is a function? Can the body rejoice in the suffering of its supreme organ?(Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle: Ch. 2- The Origin of a Semiotic of impulses p.23).

---

---

## Notes

1. (Of a movement) moving in a circle around a central fixed point: rotary motion, Etym. mid 18th cent.: from Medieval Latin *rotarius*, from *rota* wheel. In Hindi, it is called “*roti*” as a derived form from *rotarius*, and it denotes bread, and connotes life. The type of bread a person eats is further responsible for his “*atma*” (soul) and “*buddhi*” (mind). The term “*roti*” has greater metaphorical interpretation, and a great many oriental philosophers have written their philosophy on it.
2. Physical connection with primarily five senses to the world.
3. In the process of enunciation the subject becomes unaware of what he/she is speaking this pseudo-vocalization is taken over by the thinking process.
4. According to Michael Heim, the computer we use is not a tool but an environment in which the language has its own new life and a word has its own new meaning. A computer is not human but the environment it creates is in Heim’s words-“breathes a different atmosphere.”
5. Noam Chomsky in his earlier works like *Syntactic Structures* (1957), and *Aspects*(1965) often mentioned the two general criteria for a sentence to be appropriate-grammaticality and acceptability. A famous example in this regard is “Colorless green ideas sleep furiously.” For detail study refer these two books.
6. Derridian notion of text looks text as everything-written, spoken, images, photograph; etc.-it is a wide canvas on which no fix picture can be drawn ever. For getting a wider view please read Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Derrida-*On Deconstruction*, by Barry Stocker
7. Language and Thought restrict each other, and the deeper trace always tries to overpower the weaker one.
8. The summarized version of Saussurean notion on language is: ‘language is a system of system’, ‘language is a system of differences’, and ‘the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary’.
9. Icons dominate the language, and the mediation between what we mean and what matters to us is recognized by cultural and semiotic process that at times remains aloof from the immediate spatial and temporal environment.
10. This concept is beautifully explained by Edelman in the book *The politics of misunderstanding*. Here my purpose is not to go into the depth of polity and society; hence I tried to restrict myself to the point of language and cognition.
11. Benjamin Libet (2002) conducted experiments designed to determine the timings of conscious willingness or decisions conducting to act in relation to our brain activity associated with the physical initiation of behavior. Libet concludes that the studies

provide evidence that actions are already underway before the agents' own wills to do it.

12. This phrase often states to know the difference between "Maya" and "real".
  13. This has been said centuries back by Aristotle in *On Interpretation* that "words spoken are symbols or signs of affection or impressions of the soul; written words are the signs of words spoken."
- 

## References

1. Aristotle. 1983 [1935]. "On Interpretation" In Aristotle in *Twenty Three Volume, Vol. I.* Trans. H.P. Cooke and H. Tredennick. London: Heinemann.
  2. Chomsky, N., (1975) *Reflections on Language*. New York: Pantheon Books.
  3. Derrida, J., (1967) *Writing and Difference*, Tr. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978.
  4. Edelman, Murry J. (1988) *The Politics of Misunderstanding*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
  5. Klossowski, P. (1969) *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle* Tr. Daniel W. Smith. The Athlone Press: Great Britain 1997.
  6. Libet, B. (2002). "Do We Have Free Will?" in Kane, 551-564.
  7. Losonky, M. (1999). "Introduction" to *Wilhelm von Humboldt On Language*, Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, p. x-xxxxix.
  8. Moll, L. (Ed.) (1990). "Vygotsky and Education: *Instructional implications and applications of socio-historical psychology.*" Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- 

Amitabh Vikram Dwivedi  
Faculty in English  
School of Languages  
Centre of Philosophy, Culture & Languages  
Shri Mata Vaishno Devi University  
Katra-182 320  
Jammu & Kashmir  
India  
[amitabhvikram@yahoo.co.in](mailto:amitabhvikram@yahoo.co.in)