

# Concept of Verbal Cognition According to the Indian Schools of Thought

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## Abstract

The world is conceived by language and without it, the whole world would have become utter darkness. Languages are syntactic, the words and its substances and their relationship are the basis of sentences. In such a situation, a thorough analysis of the relationship between the word and its substances becomes indispensable for a better understanding of the issue. The significance of language and the process of its understanding has become a priority among the philosophers since time immemorial. Different schools of philosophical thought in India have taken this issue seriously without any exception. The discourse among the scholars of these schools of thought has presented three different significant theories *i.e.* (i) the meaning of the verbal root is prominent, (ii) meaning of the noun in nominal case ending is the prominent, and (iii) the meaning of the personal suffixes are the prominent in understanding the meaning of sentences. This difference emerges because each system starts with certain presuppositions with which others do not agree in toto. This paper is an attempt to explore and examine these different ideas of verbal understanding by different schools of thought for a better understanding of the subject.

**Keywords:** Verbal Cognition, The Indian Schools, Thoughts

## Introduction

Language is a subject of day-to-day life, dynamic, and a living entity. It is natural, easy, direct, and relatively effective medium of communication. The significance of language was given priority and the issue was taken up seriously by different branches of philosophical systems in India. All the systems of Indian philosophy put their point of view across on this issue by joining in this discourse. The depth of discussion and the height of contemplation on the subject can be understood by the following quotes. Dandin (7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> CEC), Sanskrit grammarian, author of prose romances in his text entitled *Kavyadarsa* (verse-4) enunciates that ‘these whole three worlds would have become utter darkness if the light called ‘word’ had not been shining from the beginning of the universe till the end.’ Similarly, another philosopher named Bhartrhari (5<sup>th</sup> CEC) in *Vakyapadiya* (*Brahmakanda*, verse-1) says: ‘language is omnipresent and everything in the world is conceived by language as if all knowledge has been woven by language’.

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This paper is an attempt to explore and examine the point of views of different schools of thought. Prominently, we will take up the views of the grammarians, logicians, and *Mimamsakas* who are engaged in a long debate to define the ways how the language is understood. This difference emerges because each system starts with certain presuppositions with which others do not agree in toto. This paper will project three different significant theories *i.e.* 1. the meaning of the verbal root is the prominent 2. meaning of the noun in the nominal case ending is prominent, and 3. the meaning of the personal suffixes are prominent in understanding the meaning of sentences.

A sentence is the least meaningful unit of any language. Although individual words have their own meaning and they contribute to understanding the meaning of the sentence, but it is not necessary that these words group provide exactly the same meaning in the sentence. Therefore, sentence and its meaning are not just the aggregations of words, but it is well above it. The meaning of words is not natural, but rather conventional and arbitrary. Ancient Indian tradition has proposed different theories regarding understanding the language and its meaning.

## Verbal Understanding

The understanding of the meaning of the sentence is called verbal cognition. Prof. G.M Bhattacharya in his text *sabdabodha* as a separate type of *pramana* (p-1) accepts this view, and further adds that verbal cognition is the successful communication between hearer and speaker. The very term verbal-knowledge means cognition or an understanding that arises from a sentence. It is also called understanding of association as it is an understanding of the relationships among meanings.

## Process of verbal Understanding

One of the four means of knowing is the process of verbal understanding. It is a psychological process. Sentences consist of morphemes. Each morpheme generates remembrance of its meaning and when the final morpheme generates the remembrance of its meaning, the entire chain is presented in the mind and meaning of the sentence is understood. Vishwanath beautifully describes the whole process of verbal understanding in *Nyayasiddhantamuktavali* (verse-81). According to him, the knowledge of morphemes functions as an instrument, the process is the presentation of the meanings of the words, the product is verbal cognition, and the knowledge of meaning generated by manifold factors like fitness, etc., is auxiliary or associates.

This can be explained with a traditional example *i.e.* 'pot'. The 'pot' is a product because it is produced. It is certainly a result or effect of some causes. A 'stick' that is used to move the wheel is the instrument through which the pot is produced. Hence, the stick is an extraordinary cause or an instrument. The movement of the 'wheel' functions as the operation in producing the 'pot' so, the 'wheel' is the intermediate cause. And, the knowledge of the quality of clay, etc. functions as the help in producing the 'pot' so, they are auxiliary causes.

The same cause and effect relationship can be applied here in the case of verbal cognition too. Since the verbal cognition is produced, it also must have minimum three causes. Here knowledge of the morpheme is extraordinary can cause. The recollection of the word meanings, produced from words is the intermediate cause. And, the knowledge of the functions such as expressive power between words and meanings is the auxiliary or associated causes.

Since, the auxiliary and some other kinds of auxiliary factors such as expectancy, compatibility, proximity, and purport are causes of verbal cognition a brief discussion on these issues as follows:

## **Auxiliary causes**

In the process of verbal understandings, several auxiliary causes or factors play an important role, without which a correct understanding cannot be obtained. One of the most important factors is the knowledge of the words function. Therefore, the listener should have a proper understanding of which word has which functional relationship with which word meaning.

There are three types of relationships with regard to word and its meaning (1) primary relationship (2) secondary relationship and (3) suggestive relationship.

## **Primary relationship**

It is the primary relationship and the meaning expressed by this is called directly expressed meaning or, the primary meaning. This meaning is known as literal meaning or sense of a word or indicative meaning. In the case of the word ‘pot’, the name is denoter and the object, ‘pot’ is denoted. According to the grammarians, the relation of identity exists between the denoter and denoted that is caused by superimposition (*Laghumanjusa*, p-28).

## **Secondary relationship**

When the primary meaning or literal meaning is not applicable or when the primary meaning is not compatible, the scope of secondary meaning comes into play. It takes place when the primary meaning is obstructed, and there is a scope of substitution of another meaning associated with the primary meaning, and when there is some convention or purpose. ‘There is a hut on the Ganges’ in this example since the ‘hut’ cannot be on the flow of a river like the Ganges, therefore the primary meaning is rejected and substituted by ‘on the bank of the river Ganges’ associated with the primary meaning that is an acceptable meaning. This secondary meaning is of two types (a) Conventional and (b) Purposive. When the secondary meaning becomes fixed by constant usage, it is called conventional, and the other type is called purposive when the meaning is not fixed. The secondary meaning is also divided under two heads (a) inclusive (b) exclusive as well.

## Suggestive relationship

It has the capacity of suggestiveness, which differs both from the primary meaning and secondary meaning. In the sentence, for example, 'The light went out' here the primary meaning is general 'the light is off'. In a secondary meaning, it may mean that 'a glorious man died' etc. but the sentence has the third meaning that is different in a different context. It may mean an instruction to an operator 'shut down the computer' in the cyber cafe or it may mean 'a war has begun' etc. for the people in a war waged country. It has also many other verities. Of these three, primary relationship, secondary relationship and suggestive relationship only the first two are accepted by the logicians.

## Definition of sentence

The Sanskrit tradition has proposed various theories regarding sentence and sentence meaning. According to grammatical tradition 'sentence is a combination of words or words that contain at least one verb word' (*Katyayana, vartika-10*). Wherever any verb is not found in a sentence, 'is', 'are' or 'happen' etc. must be supplied to it. According to logicians 'sentence is an aggregation of words having the four qualities *i.e.* expectancy of words, compatibility, the proximity of words and purport (*Tarkasamgraha*-pp-65-66)'. According to Mimamsakas 'The sentence is an expression of the words depicting related substances that are related to each other as main and subsidiary'.

## Expectancy

Expectancy is the foremost requirement of a sentence. According to K. kunjuni Raja expectancy is accepted as an essential condition for the unit of a sentence (Indian theory of meaning, p-157). Expectancy is a relation of one word to another word, which produces a connected idea of speech, without which the sentence cannot express its complete sense. In another way, it can be said that the desire of a word for another word expresses its complete meaning is called expectancy. Gangesa in *Tattvachintamani* and Annambhatta in *Tarkasamgraha* defines it negatively. For example, if someone simply says pot, cow, horse, man or something like that then the desire at once is created to know, what about the pot, cow, etc. And, when a verb like 'bring' or 'is' is supplied, the desire of the word for another subsides and the hearer gets a complete sense. This desire of a word for another word is called expectancy. The definition of expectancy given by Annambhatta is further modified by Visvanatha. A word 'pot' cannot become syntactically connected (with the rest of the sentence) without 'bring' or 'is'. Therefore, here we have to understand the 'pot' has expectancy for 'bring' or 'is'.

## Compatibility

It is another important requirement without which a sentence cannot express sense. For example, the sentence like 'He drenches with fire' etc. though grammatically

well-formed, do not express a sense. It is the power of the sentence, or it's a property, which makes a sentence intelligible. Otherwise, a sentence like 'the moon is made of green cheese' will be considered as a sentence. Annambhatta in his *Tarkasamgraha* (p-52) says 'competency is the compatibility of meaning'. Therefore, a word obtains compatibility with another when it gives a compatible or consistent meaning. Hence 'He burns with fire', 'A lame is jumping' etc. are not considered correct sentences as we do not understand meaning from these sentences. According to *Nyayasiddhantamuktavali* (p-191), the connection of meaning of a word with that of another is called competency. Gangeshopadhyaya defines competency as the logical compatibility or consistency of the word in a sentence for mutual association. Thus, the word 'He sprinkles with fire' cannot constitute a valid proposition nor can they generate the cognition of any rational idea, they are totally insignificant.

## Proximity

The third important requirement for a sentence is proximity. Proximity or Juxtaposition is the utterance of words without break. It is defined as the contiguity (temporal when uttered and spatial when written) between words. If words are uttered with a long interval by the same person in the same place cannot be considered a sentence and that will not convey any meaning. For example, if a word 'cow' is uttered in the morning and another word 'bring' is uttered at the night or after a month, though each of the words *i.e.* 'cow' and 'bring' fulfill other criteria *i.e.* expectancy and compatibility but cannot constitute a sentence. Therefore, Keshav Mishra of *Tarkabhasha* (T.S. P-52) points out that 'the proximity is the utterance of words without abnormal delay, which gives the listener or reader a scope to combine or constitute them together for obtaining meaning'. According to the text *Manikana*, contiguity is the presentation of the correlations of the syntax conjointly caused by words.

## Purport

Jayanta, the promulgator of this theory says: 'purport is the power on account of which the words convey a related meaning of the words contained in a meaning'. Some scholars hold that the speaker's intention too is a distinct auxiliary factor for the verbal understanding. For example, the sentence 'bring the kite', which can mean either 'plaything *i.e.* flown in wind at the end of a string' or 'certain birds'. It is the speaker's intention that enables one to choose the appropriate sense under the given circumstances. The importance of the speaker's intention in the context of verbal cognition has been recognized by almost all schools of Indian thought. Gangesha and Visvanath hold that knowledge of purport is the fourth requisites along with expectancy, compatibility, and proximity for verbal cognition. Nagesha (N.K.P-327), a prominent new school of grammarian also accepts the importance of purport. Kanada (B.R. PP-203-4), the founder of the Vaisheshika school of logic states that purport is the speakers' intention towards utterance. According to many ancient writers, the

purport is the contextual factor that determines the meaning of an utterance. Therefore, a conclusion can be drawn that purport is one of the important requisites for verbal cognition without which an intended comprehension cannot be made.

### **Structure of verbal understanding:**

Verbal cognition is held to be the comprehension of semantic relation between word meanings. Indian philosophers namely grammarians, logicians and Mimamsaka admit that the sentence meaning is essentially cognition of different syntactico-semantic relations such as substratum ness describer ness etc. between the different word meanings such as the object 'pot' and the objecthood of the 'pot' and between the objecthood and the action of bringing etc. in the sentence like 'bring the pot' etc. Despite their acceptance on the fact that the verbal cognition is held to be the comprehension of syntactico-semantic relation between the individual word meanings, they differ and propose three different proposals regarding the states of such relations and the chief qualification of such relation.

### **Grammarians structure of verbal understanding**

The grammarians accept the meaning of the root is prominent or, principal focus in the verbal understanding. For instance, in the sentence 'Maitra cooks the rice', the meaning of the root cook is prominent. The steps of verbal cognition according to the grammarians are Maitra is the nominative base refers to 'Maitra' as a person. The suffix added to the nominal case ending in Sanskrit refers to oneness in 'Maitra'. The rice having the accusative base refers to the rice and the Sanskrit suffix added to denote accusative express object and oneness. The root 'cook' is the verbal root refers to the effect of softening and the action of cooking, and the verbal suffix added to the root for third person singular and present tense refers to the agent, number and time. The relation comprehended between the various word-meanings are the identity between the 'rice' and the object. The occurrence between the object and the effect of 'softening'. The conduciveness between the effect and the action of cooking. The identity between 'Maitra' and the agent. And, the occurrence between the agent and the oneness. In the said sentence the root 'cook' is chief-qualificand which is considered the principal cause of understanding the meaning.

Hence, a verbal cognition of this sentence produced as- 'the action of cooking, which is conducive to the 'softening' that occurs in the object identified with the rice is occurrent in the 'agent', identical with Maitra having the oneness'.

### **Logicians structure of verbal understanding**

The logicians such as Gadadhara and others hold quite a different theory. According to them the subject, expressed by the nominal case ending is prominent in the verbal understanding. They opine that the nominal meaning is agent, who is independent and the controller of all other constituents in the same sentence, and not a



qualifier to others (other words). Therefore, it functions as the chief-qualificand of all the constituent relation.

The verbal cognition according to the logicians of the same sentence ‘Maitra cooks rice’ is: Rice, the accusative base refers to the object (rice). The Sanskrit suffix added for indicating accusative case ending refers to the objecthood of the rice. Maitra, the nominal base refers to the agent ‘Maitra’, a person. The suffix for nominative case ending refers to the oneness of the subject or agent. The root cook, the verbal root refers to the action of cooking. The personal suffix added to express the third person, singular and present tense refers to effort or operation.

The relations comprehended between various word-meaning are the substratumness between the object ‘rice’ and the objecthood of the rice. The describing between the objecthood and the action of cooking. The conduciveness between the action of cooking and the effort. The substratumness between the effort and the agent Maitra. The possession between the agent and the oneness. The verbal understanding is produced as ‘Maitra, the agent, possessing the oneness, is the locus of the effort conducive to the action of cooking which describes the object-hood occurrent in the rice’.

## **The Mimamsakas Structure of verbal understanding**

According to the Mimamsakas activity (a strictly productive activity) is the chief-qualificand in a sentence. According to them, not only the entities of a sentence are capable of verbal understanding but also the sentence formed by the connected utterance, which creates a conducive comprehension of the syntactico-semantic relationship, which causes the verbal cognition. They divide the finite verbs into two parts (I) an action and (ii) an activity According to them, the accomplishing activity is the main or chief qualificand in the verbal cognition. Therefore, all the parts of the sentence meaning including the action are syntactico-semantically connected to the activity in the verbal cognition.

The steps of verbal cognition according to the Mimamsakas with the same example ‘Maitra cooks’ are: the rice, the accusative base refers to the object ‘rice’. The suffix for accusative case ending refers to the objecthood an indivisible property. Maitra, the nominative base refers to the agent *i.e.* Maitra. The suffix added to the nominative case ending refers to the action of cooking. The verbal root ‘cook’ refers to the action of cooking. The personal suffix added to the verbal root for third person, singular and present tense refers to the productive activity.

The relations comprehended by the Mimamsakas are: the occurrence between the object and the objecthood. occurrence between the agent and the agency. Describing between the objecthood and the action of cooking. Conditioning between the agency and the action of cooking. Conduciveness between the action of cooking and the activity.

Therefore, the verbal cognition can be described as ‘The productive activity is conducive to the action of cooking, which describes both the object-hood occurrent in the rice and the agency occurrent in the agent Maitra’.

## Conclusion

Some English grammarians define sentence as ‘group of words giving a complete meaning’. It is quite vague as there is no definition of completeness with regard to sentence. A sentence like ‘In the home’ gives some meaning. Does it qualify to be called a sentence? A sentence may simply be defined as a group of words related among themselves. Therefore, sentence and its meaning are not just the aggregations of words and their meaning, but it is well above it. In reality, the relationship among the constituents is complex. Even if the relationship is established, many auxiliary factors intervene in the process of understanding the intended meaning. In short, according to the grammarians, a sentence is capable of conveying meaning by its own peculiar capacity. The logician believes that the meaning of the sentence is understood due to syntactical relation among the constituents of the sentence. The Kumarila school propounds that a sentence express meaning by implication. The Prabhakar school opines that the individual words are capable of conveying a meaning which is connected syntactically which what is attended by activity. The Vedantins says that the words are capable of expressing what is syntactically connected with another.

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