

Contemporary Issues In Philosophy of Mind and Cognition

Prof. Ranjan K. Panda

Prof. Rajakishore Nath

Department of Humanities and Social Science

Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay

Module No. # 01

Lecture No. # 30

Language, Representation and Meaning – I

Today we are going to discuss about the concept of meaning, and how this meaning is related with the notion of mind. That is the central topic that I will be discussing today. Since we have been discussing about Sarl and his contemporaries like Fodorian, Chomsky and many others who have also worked in philosophy of language and philosophy of mind, we would like to examine Sarl's theory of mind and meaning vis-a-vis the Fodorian and Chomskyan notion of meaning and the mind.

According to Sarl meaning is related with the notion of mind. It is related because; the mind is logically prior to the concept of meaning. Sarl does not accept the proposition that meaning is there in the mind.

Whether mind helps in articulating the meaning, in other words, it is the representational feature of the mind. It articulates the expression and the expression is directed towards the world. Meaning thereby, the world is represented by mind vis-a-vis the language.

So, language is not a kind of a primordial concept. Languages have evolved historically and as we all know that Sarl supposing the evolutionary biology. Sarl's biological naturalism presupposes two scientific theories. One is the evolutionary biology and the other is the atomic theory of matter.

So, if you keep these two presuppositions in your mind and think what is Sarlian approach to explain the nature of meaning, then in that context language is a secondary phenomenon. It has evolved after the evolution of many intentional complex mental states.

Mental states are linguistic in nature, but mental states are not necessarily. If language has evolved in the process then the mind is the primary **evolute** and then you have

language. So, what is mind? Mind is nothing, but the concatenation of certain Intentional states.

The structure of Intentional states has content and this content is linguistic in nature. The content is linguistic because the Intentional states represent things or the objects or the state of affairs in the world. Now this **aboutness** that is embedded in the structure of Intentional states is that every Intentional state is directed towards the world.

This directedness involves a content which is linguistic. This content being linguistic can also be called the semantic content. There are mental states that have a structure. For example, if I have the desire to have something or the desire is about something then this **aboutness** shows Intentionality. So, Intentionality is one of the **evolutes** or one of the features which is basically related to life. It is intrinsically related to life.

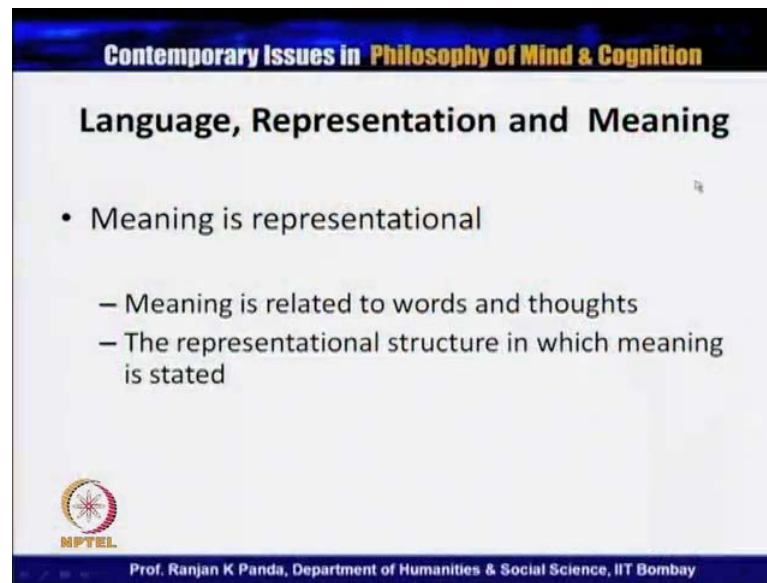
This Intrinsic relationship does not presuppose that it has the semantic content. So, language does not come along with Intentionality. It is Intentionality or the Intentional attitude of human mind that talks about meaning and the semantic content that is part of the Intentional state.

So, today we are mostly interested to talk about what is meaning? What is representation? And how meaning is part of the mind and is also related to this mind-world relationship.

So, when we talk about the Intentional relationship between the mind and the world, we also need to see how language plays a kind of a medium, a connecting principle between the mind and the world. I said connecting principle in the sense that the semantic elements of Intentional states are fundamental to meaning or to the expression and also to the Intentional states. In that sense we need to find out how language or meaning is placed when we talk about this world-mind relationship. Therefore, the title of my lecture today is language representation and meaning.

Meaning is primarily representational. Now the representational theory of meaning has a long history. It starts from philosophy of sense and reference or notion of picture theory of meaning. So, Sarl in Intentionality very clearly says that he is talking about Intentionality and about philosophy of language in continuation with the Fregean, Wittgensteinian analytic tradition.

(Refer Slide Time: 08:05)



The slide features a blue header with the text "Contemporary Issues in Philosophy of Mind & Cognition" in yellow. Below the header, the title "Language, Representation and Meaning" is displayed in bold black text. A bulleted list follows, with the main point "Meaning is representational" and two sub-points: "Meaning is related to words and thoughts" and "The representational structure in which meaning is stated". At the bottom left is the NPTEL logo, and at the bottom right is the text "Prof. Ranjan K Panda, Department of Humanities & Social Science, IIT Bombay".

Contemporary Issues in Philosophy of Mind & Cognition

Language, Representation and Meaning

- Meaning is representational
 - Meaning is related to words and thoughts
 - The representational structure in which meaning is stated

NPTEL

Prof. Ranjan K Panda, Department of Humanities & Social Science, IIT Bombay

Sarl talks about Intentionality and meaning referring to the Fregean, Wittgensteinian analytic tradition. If that is the case one finds how the concept of representation particularly the linguistic representation has been very strongly advocated by Fregean and Wittgenstein when Wittgenstein says language is the picture of reality.

It is through language and language alone, we can represent the world. Language has the potential to represent the world. The structure of language must be taken into account. What is the structure of language that represents the world? Is there a structure? Or what kind of representation it is? If somebody ask these kind of questions. It is then, that the notion of the structure of representation becomes important.

So, meaning is basically representational meaning. It is related to words or sentences or expressions. It is related to thoughts. Now the representational structure in which meaning is stated is something very important to understand if you are interested in understanding the structure of representation or the structure of language or the structure of Intentional states. Now understanding the meaning is, broadly speaking, understanding the language. So, we cannot talk about meaning if we do not talk about language - the linguistic life that every individual human being lives. Language is an important to explain how meaning is possible. So, language and meaning belong to the same logical space as do logic and logical form. This I am pointing out referring to the representational theory of language advocated by Wittgenstein. But Wittgenstein says the

language represents the world: the propositions or the pictures of the world. He thinks that the propositions have some kind of grammatical structure or logical structure: logical form of the proposition and that state of affairs that proposition represents also has some kind of a structure which is logical in nature.

And both language and the world share logical form. Hence this representation is possible. So, when we talk about logical space, the existence of facts in logical space, meaning belongs to logical facts. Meaning is a semantic fact existing in the logical space as logic or has a logical form. So language and meaning, belong to the same logical space. Now let us talk about the nature of representation. There are two kinds of representations. The representational theory advocated by Wittgenstein gives importance to language whereas, Sarl, Fodor and many others talk about mental representation. According to them mind is a representational entity. The Intentional ability, the Intentional feature of mind helps in explicating the representational structure between mind and the world. Intentionality helps in explicating the Intentional structure that is embedded in the expression and the expression representing the world.


So, there are mental representations. Intentional states have content and this content, as I said, the semantic content are related to or refer to the objects or a state of affairs in the world. So, there are mental representations and there are linguistic representations.

(Refer Slide Time: 14:57)

Contemporary Issues in Philosophy of Mind & Cognition

Nature of Representation

- **Linguistic Representation**
 - The logico-grammatical structures formally analyzable
- **Mental Representation**
 - The functional computational character
 - Ability to be represented in a formal computational machine

 IITBOMBAY

Prof. Ranjan K Panda, Department of Humanities & Social Science, IIT Bombay

Linguistic representations will talk about the logical grammatical structure which is formally analyzable whereas, the mental representation will mainly talk about the functional computational characteristics of the mind: the ability to be represented in the formal computational machine.

So, when we talk about mental representation, for example, in the case of Fodor, who is arguing for a representational theory of mind, would suggest that representational states are primary and they are in a kind of module system where mind is quite analogous to a machine. Now the function of representational states is computational in nature in the sense that, these representational states are syntactic. They are not primarily characterized by a semantic content. The semantic content can be explained by the syntactical structure of representational states. This is a Fodoric analysis of the representational states and how a representational theory of mind talks about or explains the semantic content. Now this explanation that Fodor provides, tries to understand the nature of semantic content from the perspective of a computational theory of mind where the syntax is primary and the semantics is secondary, because it is through syntax that the **semantical** content of representational states are explained.

Fodor also talks about the causal capacity, the power of representational states or the power of representation system that makes representation possible. But the Sarlian thesis of representation is slightly different. It is different in the sense that Sarl gives primacy to Intentionality and Intentionality helps in explaining meaning, it helps in explaining the structure of mental states.

And this Intentionality is intrinsically related with consciousness. It cannot be duplicated by any model or any physical system. So, Sarl argues against the computational representational theory of mind, particularly when he argues it out in the context of his (()) argument about how human mind understands the reality and how a computer, a machine, a physical system fails to understand the reality. It fails because it does not have a semantic ability. It fails because a machine is not primarily run by consciousness which is Intentional in nature.

Now, Sarl's argument is that the machine is not primarily an Intentional agent like any other human being or any other biological being. Hence the Intentional activities of the

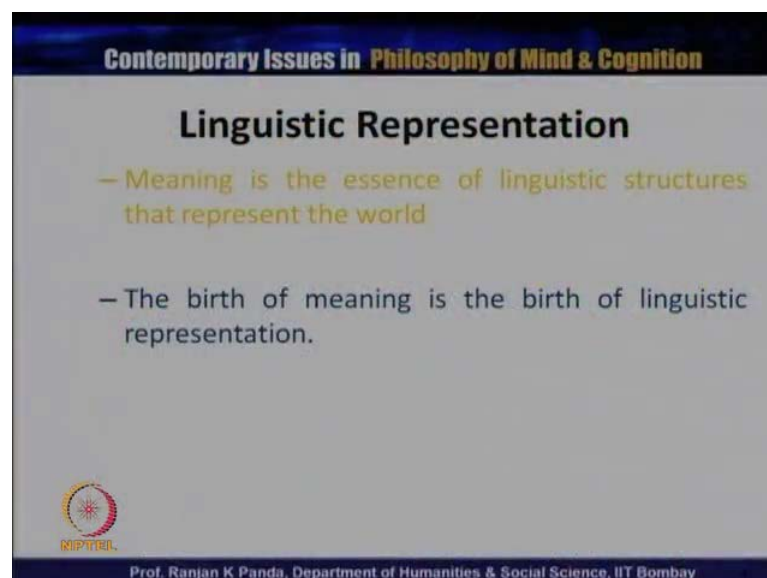
machine and the Intentional activities of human being as a linguistic being are two different kinds of Intentional activities.

The Intentional activities of a machine are purely syntactical whereas, the Intentional activities of the human beings are semantic in nature because the concept of meaning is associated with understanding experience. Whereas, when we talk about the concept of meaning taking Fodor's theory into account we do not necessarily speak in that language, that is, the language of experience and understanding. While, in the Sarl's theoretical framework one finds that there is a space to talk about experience, there is a space to talk about understanding. So, human linguistic activities are essentially governed by the semantic aspect or the semantic feature of language.

Whereas the linguistic activities in the machine the computational function of the machine is essentially governed by the syntax or the syntactic principles of the language used. So, that is the broad distinction between the two theoretical frame works that talk about mental representation

So, today we will try to understand that what this Intentional ability is and how human mind represents things. But before that, let us briefly talk about linguistic representation.

(Refer Slide Time: 22:44)



Now there is a need to talk about linguistic representation because Sarl is also talks about linguistic representation. He talks about mental representation and about the linguistic

representation. The structure of Intentional states and the structure of an expression are Isomorphic and the thing common to these two structures is the semantic content. So, the content of thoughts and the content of an expression or the content of a mental state in Intentional mental states like a desire that I talked about, is same as the content of the expression of the desire.

So, there is a kind of common structure that Sarl talks about. So, for example, if 'p' is a mental state then say 's' is a sentence: the expression of his Intentional mental states. The content of 'p' and the content of this sentence, the expression of the p, are same. They are not two different things.

So, that is something common. Sarl talks about linguistic representation and he also talks about mental representations and they have same logical structure. When we talk about meaning we necessarily talk about linguistic representation. That is, only when we talk about representational theory of mind advocated by say Wittgenstein: he talks about picture theory of mind. But then later in the case of Sarl, you will find that Sarl is saying that the philosophy of language is a branch of philosophy of action. He clearly states, when we talk about the speech act theory, that speech act is a performative act, speaking language or expressing the preposition or statement is nothing, but performing an action.

So, speaking is a kind of peculiar action. It is an Intentional action. For example, when I order something "please bring me a glass of water", "shut the door", now this is an order. I am saying it to someone to shut the door. So, when I say this following my statement someone comes and shuts the door. So, that is where an action is performed a speech is uttered. So, the utterance is an Intentional act. I intended to do it. I also intended that someone would close the door. So, this kind of analysis shows that it is not necessarily a kind of mechanical action performed by the human individuals or the human beings, rather it is connected with mind. This connection as I said earlier, is a kind of an Intentional connection. Connection that is been established through semantic content. And Intentionality is basically a kind of semantic property of the mind.

Now how Sarl shows this connection? Sarl says that when I am passing this order I am also expecting that somebody would come and close the door. So, my Intention has two components. One I am intending to perform this and I perform it. It also has an expectation or a desire behind it. The desire is that somebody would come and the desire

gets satisfied when somebody comes and closes the door. Now these Intentional activities are so complex.

When you talk about satisfaction we cannot exempt this case saying that I am not experiencing it. I feel happy when somebody comes and close the door because that is what I intended. Or if I pause or if I make a request thinking that my order will not work, but if I make a request it would work, I would succeed in making that event possible, then I would say please close the door and I would also expect in this case that my hearer would respond to my request. And if the hearer following my request closes the door then I feel happy. So, Sarl says that the condition of satisfaction is an important criterion to show that linguistic activities are related to certain mental activities because it is generating a kind of a satisfaction which is experiential in nature and when I say therefore, saying and meaning go together.

I am saying it and I must mean what I am saying. So, there is some kind of a logical connection Sarl tries to draw, when he talks about speech act and its relationship with the mind. It is not just a kind of commonality that we talk about when we talk about the semantic content the content flowing from the intentional mental states to the world. So, the kind of directions Sarl talks about the language represents the world. So, this is a kind of a intentional fit or Sarl as calls a direction of fit, that the language mind to the world direction of fit language and mind, I am putting them together for our benefit to explain.

In the case of speech act theory it was language to the world. In the case of speech act theory when you take a particular statement into account you will find that a promise is directed towards the world or an order is directed towards the world or there is a kind of fitness between the statement and the world. When I am thinking about making a statement that prior intension, before forming an action or intension before performing speech has many sub intentional states. So, my expectation or desire is part of that prior intension. That is to say that when I am making a request I also have this desire in my mind that my request would succeed. So, in that case Sarl says that there is an experiential component attached to it, a component which is attached to understanding. So, how can the computational model which talks about mental representation would ignore this fact the meaning also connected to mind.

There are philosophers who talk about meaning that exist in the mind. But Sarl is not making that kind of claim. Sarl infact argues against this very thesis that meaning is not there in the mind. Sarl is not an **Internolist** in this sense. I will talk about on how Sarl is not an **Internolist** in my later classes. He is an **externolist**. So, therefore, he would say that whenever we perform linguistic activities and talk about objectivity or talk about truth etcetera we need to have different prepositions in mind. But we cannot ignore this fact that, expressions or sayings or use of words or speech act in particular are not connected to an experience and understanding. So, when we discuss about the notion of mental representation one must keep in mind that the Fodorian theorization of mental representation tries to talk about the computational prospective through which the representational states explains the semantic content. And when we speak about the Sarlian notion of mental representation we must see how the linguistic representations are linked to consciousness.

In other words they are linked to experience, understanding and feeling etcetera. In that sense we can revise the statement that the birth of meaning is the birth of linguistic representation. So, there is a kind of a moment in which the linguistic representation is taking a shape, taking a form and for Sarl the linguistic representation takes a form through the intentional feature of the mind.

If we suspend the intentional attitude that Sarl is talking about saying that it is an irreducible feature then probably we can think along with the early Wittgenstein who says know this is how language functions or this is how the thought represents the reality. Now if you take the intentional attitude of mind, the mind that articulates linguistic expressions, we will be able to explain the concept of meaning. Representation in this sense shows how language speaks about the world. Now the being about the world for Sarl is a kind of a pre-linguistic concept because, Sarl is presupposing the fact that Intentionality is one of the first evolutionary phenomena, human minds are primarily intentional and then Sarl talks about language. So, in that order of evolution Intentionality comes first. So, there is a kind of a pre-linguistic concept which makes this **aboutness** possible, makes this directedness possible and if you look at the Wittgensteinian thinking, then language is autonomous. Language is considered as a kind of an autonomous principle where language speaks about itself.

Now, one can very well critique Sarl's position when he talks about the nature of intentional content or the nature of the semantic content. Can Sarl tell us when the semantic content is formed? And can we really separate the intentional state and the semantic content? So, my criticism would be that intentionality is basically a kind of a linguistic feature and language and mind are intrinsically related.

So, there I would be adhering to Wittgensteinian pre-propositions thinking **that language is something very important to talk about meaning** and I will also not ignore the fact that human mind experiences and understands things and this understanding, experiencing etcetera are all linguistic or semantic activities.

So, in that sense one can read Sarl or the Sarlian prospective of linguistic representation more critically and the Fodorian understanding of mental representation more critically.

(Refer Slide Time: 40:48)



Contemporary Issues in Philosophy of Mind & Cognition

Language and World

- Built into each other; constitute a single reality
- Representation is central to Frege and Wittgenstein Semantic Tradition
 - Logical relationship between language and the world
 - Later Wittgenstein's communicative approach of language


Prof. Ranjan K Panda, Department of Humanities & Social Science, IIT Bombay

When we talk about meaning-world relationship we talk about how language is connected with the world. They are built into each other. So, there is a kind of a structural isomorphism between language and the world. As I have mentioned that the representation has been theorized, particularly the Sarlian notion of representation has been theorized keeping Frege's and Wittgenstein's notion of meaning where these philosophers talk about the logical relationship between language and the world. But one

can also bring in the later Wittgensteinian notion of meaning where language is basically a means of communication.

So what is important in later Wittgenstein is communication rather than representation.

Sarl's theorization of meaning includes the linguistic representation and the mental representation where Sarl says that there is a communicative intension and there is a representational intension. The intension to speak, to perform is presupposing a fact that there is a representational intension involved in this. But think of a situation where I am not just representing things. But I am representing it to someone meaning thereby that I am trying to communicate my ideas, my thoughts, my mental states, my desires, and my beliefs to someone. So, when Sarl says that there are two aspects to representation: communication and mere representation, the communicative intension is important.

We need to find out whether Sarl is accommodating the two Wittgensteinian perspectives. The early Wittgensteinian perspective, where he says thoughts are representational, proposition represents the reality or the picture of reality, thoughts are better picture of reality and thereby the whole representational model which talks about the picture theory of meaning refers to the notion of mental. And the later Wittgensteinian model where meaning is theorized, referring to the language, language game and form of life if one finds the communicative intension plays an important role in explicating meaning.

So, there are two models we need to see here keeping all these things in mind as to how Sarl advocates the theory of meaning. I would explain it in the next class. Thank you.