

Nature and Development of Linguistic Analysis



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**NATURE AND DEVELOPMENT
OF
LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS**

TO
SUREKHA

Preface

The nature of the whole treatment of the subject is more expository than critical. More often than not, we have let the philosophers under study speak for themselves, as we hear them in their major works. The aim of the entire venture is to acquaint the uninitiated readers with what is going on in Linguistic analysis from Frege almost up to date, and to provide a proper perspective to the initiated readers. No claim, needless to add, is made, or even suggested, here for being perfect or *being* exhaustive in the treatment of the subject. The philosophers selected here can be considered 'milestones' in the development of linguistic analysis. Here also the inquisitive and knowledgeable readers may find some important philosophers missing. I have no excuse to offer for that shortcoming except that of limitation of time and space.

The expression 'Linguistic Analysis' is used here in a rather wider sense than is usually used. It is used as a blanket term to cover some of those philosophers whose main concern was language and their method analysis. And so, although these philosophers differ in details, they agree in considering language as a powerful means of acquisition, organization and communication of knowledge.

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Introduction

The central issue that was hotly debated during the period of our study, the period, that is, from the early 20th century almost up to date, was concerned with ordinary language, the language which we use in communicating with others. The issue can be expressed in the form of a question: Is ordinary language, as we find it, useful and sufficient to resolve the philosophical problems that we face? Philosophers are bound to disagree on the answer to this question. There are almost two groups of philosophers contesting among themselves the claim for the ordinary language, the claim, namely, that ordinary language is quite in order and is useful for philosophical purposes. One set of philosophers hold that, since the ordinary language as we find it is vague, equivocal, unprecise, it is not useful to resolve the philosophical problems that we face. Therefore, so they hold, we should construct an artificial language, very much on the model of language constructed and used in scientific discourses, for resolving the philosophical problems. This set of philosophers may be called 'artificial (or formal) language philosophers'. It includes, among others, Frege, Russell, early Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein of the "Tractatus"), Carnap, and Quine. The other set of philosophers, the opponent, so to speak, of the first set, holds that there is nothing wrong in accepting ordinary language as we find it; it is perfectly in order

and useful. What is needed (to be done) is a proper analysis of the behaviour of this language in the linguistic community. This set of philosophers may be called 'ordinary (or natural) language Philosophers' which includes among others, Moore, later Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein of the "Philosophical Investigations'), Ryle, Austin, and Strawson. Thus we witness a sort of debate between the ordinary language philosophers and the artificial language philosophers and this debate is about the nature and utility of ordinary language in philosophical disputes. It is the analysis of this language which is commonly understood as the meaning of 'linguistic analysis.'

This description of the meaning of 'Linguistic analysis' can not satisfy our philosophical curiosity. We may like to ask the following pertinent questions about it.

- (1) *What* do we analyse in linguistic analysis ?
- (2) *How* do we analyse in linguistic analysis ?
- (3) *Why*, what for, do we analyse language ?

These questions are pertinent for they, i.e. the answers to them, may shed more light on what philosophers are doing when they are engaged in linguistic analysis. The first question may invoke the response that in linguistic analysis we are analysing language. But surely language is made up of sentences, sentences of expressions, expressions of words. These words on their part are signs of a particular type. Do we analyse all these constituents of the language; or only some of them? And, again, language has a grammatical form, a logical form, a syntactical form, a semantical form, a linguistic form, the study of which respectively constitutes such disciplines as grammar, logic, syntax, semantics, linguistics. Do we analyse language from all these points of view or only from some of these ? Even these disciplines are very complex in themselves. Take semantics, for example. The important semantic concepts are 'meaning', 'truth', synonymity, 'analyticity', 'denotation', to mention a few. All the above questions are very important for the proper study of the nature of the language that we find and use. We will have occasion to return to these questions when we consider the philosophers mentioned above in detail.

The second question, as to how we analyse language, is

about the nature of the method of analysis. Ever since Russell gave lectures on the Philosophy of Logical Atomism in 1918, in which he explained his views on the nature of analysis that should be followed in philosophy, the concept and form of analysis has undergone a lot of changes. From Russell onwards, philosophers came to accept analysis in various forms such as giving real, conceptual or contextual definition, as reduction and translations of linguistic complexes into more simple or ultimate units of discourses, or as logical syntax. In Austin and Strawson we find a totally different sort of analysis (practised by them); analysis seems to have been replaced by elucidation of expressions or concepts. It should be observed at this stage—pending detailed consideration in subsequent chapters—that the change in the form of analysis, in the concept of ‘analysis’, could be traced in the change in the whole theory of language as was implicit in Russell—Wittgensteins’ views on logical Atomism and Austin—Strawson’s variety of analysis.¹

The third question is concerned with the point of the whole movement of linguistic analysis. What purpose does analysis serve or achieve? Here again philosophers give differing answers. These answers take such forms as (1) ‘insight into ‘facts’, whatever ‘facts’ might mean, (metaphysics), or ‘insight into what type of things exist, (ontology), and (2) ‘insight into the structure or form of language we use.’ In other words linguistic analysis relates language to non-linguistic or, extra-linguistic reality as in (1) on the one hand, and on the other, relates language to ‘thought’ as expressed in language, not ‘thought’ as a psychological entity, as in (2). We see thus that the interest of the philosophers in linguistic analysis is not *in* itself, not *for* itself but in something which goes *beyond* language *per se*. It stretches either to metaphysics or to ontology or to thought. This should not be taken to suggest, however, that these philosophers agree among themselves on various points of details. They do not; this will be clear as we proceed. The only force that binds them is their concern with not mere interest, in language.

Another feature of the movement of linguistic analysis which these philosophers generally share is its antagonism to

essentialistic thought of the idealists and psychologism and acceptance of extensionalistic thought of the realists and physicalism.

The development of linguistic analysis which has its origin in Russell-Wittgenstein's Logical atomism can be seen in a new turn which it takes at the hands of Carnap, Quine and others. This is based on the distinction between object-language and meta-language. Although such a distinction became quite familiar among the philosophers during the present century, the metalinguistic analysis today has become a philosophical force to be reckoned with. It should be sufficient at this stage merely to note the difference between *object-language* and *meta-language*. When the object of our talk/study is a particular language that particular language is called the 'object language', while the language in which we talk about the object language, i.e. the language which we use to talk about the object language is called the meta-language; and if we which talk about such a meta-language then the language in which we talk about it, i.e. the language which we use in talking about it, will be called 'meta-meta-language' and so on. (Cf. Tarski : Semantic def. of truth.) There is thus a hierarchy of languages with 'first order' language, 'second-order' language and so on.

There are two influences which are noticeable on the nature of linguistic analysis in this century. They can be called 'direct positive' influence and 'direct negative' influence. The influence of Frege's thought on the subsequent thought can be said to be 'direct positive' in the sense that the philosophy of language which Russell-Wittgenstein put forward can be roughly described as 'a follow-up' of Frege's thought. On the other hand the influence of Bradley's thought-Frege's contemporary—on the subsequent thought can be said to be 'direct negative' in the sense that the subsequent thought, of Moore and Russell can be roughly described as 'a reaction against' Bradley's idealistic thought. It will be, therefore, worth our while to acquaint ourselves with the philosophical views of Frege and Bradley, in that order.

We shall consider Frege's contribution under the following heads :

- (1) Frege's views on the nature of language.
- (2) Frege's distinction between concept and object.
- (3) The problems which Frege's distinction between sense and reference is meant to solve.
- (4) Frege's distinction between sense and reference.

(1) Since it is generally accepted that Frege did not go to philosophy directly, but, like Russell and Wittgenstein, reached it via logic, starting from the foundations of mathematics, we will consider his philosophy of language by taking a clue from his views on Arithmetic.

In his attack on formalism in Arithmetic, Frege³ draws a distinction between what he calls '*formal*' arithmetic and (what he calls) '*meaningful*' arithmetic as follows:

(1) By formal arithmetic he means the use of signs, numerical signs, without their reference, i.e. numbers, or quantitative ratios, and by meaningful arithmetic he means the use of numerical signs with their reference. (p. 184)

(2) In formal arithmetic we need no basis for the rules of the game—we simply stipulate them. We just introduce figures with rules for their manipulation. We then regard these rules as properties of the pieces, and thus we can arbitrarily create things having the desired properties. We must note here that Frege is employing the analogy of chess in using such words as 'figure' and 'pieces'. In chess figures are signs without reference and sense. In meaningful arithmetic we have a basis for the rules in the referents, i.e. in numbers, since the rules of meaningful arithmetic "cause numbers to make substantial contributions to our knowledge of nature." "This applicability", Frege remarks, "cannot be an accident, but in formal arithmetic we absolve ourselves from accounting for one choice of the rules rather than another." (p. 185)

(3) In formal arithmetic equations are comparable with the position of chess pieces, transformed in accordance with certain rules without consideration for any sense. In meaningful arithmetic, on the other hand, equations are sentences expressing thoughts. (p. 186) In other words, whereas formal arithmetic has no thought as its content and as such will be without possibility of application, meaningful arithmetic, since

it expresses a thought as its content, will have the possibility of application. "It is applicability alone", asserts Frege, "which elevates arithmetic from a game to the rank of a science." (p. 187)

Thus according to Frege it is necessary that the arithmetician attach a sense to his formulas. Unless he does it, arithmetic will not be a science, but a game similar in nature to the game of chess, with arbitrary rules and without application. And such a game cannot give us any knowledge. In order that we get knowledge "it is necessary", says Frege, "that formulas express a sense and the rules be grounded in the reference of the signs. The end must be knowledge and it must determine everything that happens. Formal arithmetic forsakes this goal." (p. 188)

What is relevant and useful for our purpose here is the Fregean view that numerical signs with reference i.e. its content alone are meaningful. What is true of numerical signs is also true by extension of linguistic signs such as sentences, expressions, words. Linguistic signs also have form and content. The form of such signs and their relations is the proper subject for logic. The content of such signs splits into sense and reference, which will occupy us later. In the mean time we must note that according to Frege it is because linguistic signs refer to objects and concepts that they can be used in sentences that assert and express *thoughts* and also that the *rules* for constructing sentences containing linguistic signs, i.e. for constructing meaningful sentences, are not arbitrary but are grounded in the reference of these signs, viz., objects and concepts. We can see, thus, that for Frege language was meaningful rather than formal. Words and expressions are not just figures, but they are genuine signs standing for objects and concepts. Such a language will be a scientific language, which will be an instrument of scientific knowledge, and will be different from a game. However, as Walker says, "...Frege did not believe that the natural languages of everyday use had achieved this status (of scientific language). It seems sometimes that he believed that certain logical stipulations would turn everyday language into a proper instrument of science.³ We get here a glimpse of Frege's robust realism; his clear vision will become manifest, when later on

we consider his views on truth-values.

It is clear from the above that Frege distinguishes these three kinds of uses of the language we use ; 1) to communicate thought and achieve common knowledge ; 2) to express truths and register knowledge ; 3) to construct valid proofs and arguments. Corresponding to these three uses are—

- (1) ordinary language with its metaphors and defects;
- (2) scientific language and
- (3) a symbolic notation (cf. Walker, p. 158).

Thus according to Frege ordinary language differs from scientific language of the scientists on the one hand, and from the formal language of the logicians on the other. In contrast to the formal language, ordinary language suffers from several defects. First, as Walker⁴ points out, is about "the principles of assigning proper names to definite objects". No name should be permitted which either fails to refer to any object or that refers to more than one. (Cf. Russell's Theory of Description) Similarly, no name should have more than one sense in each given context. Names should differ only in so far as they present an object of reference in different ways; for it is both legitimate and necessary to assign different names to one and the same object. Ordinary language is defective in each of these respects. It contains apparent proper names of fictional beings, mythical places, names which fail to refer to any object and which therefore are not names at all. And such genuine names as it contains usually have many different senses attached to them. Further, difference between names for one and the same object do not always go with differences in their modes of introducing the object. (The concepts of 'sense', 'reference' and 'modes' will be considered in details in our consideration of Frege's distinction between 'sense and reference'.)

Ordinary language differs from scientific language in being "irreducibly metaphorical and 'sensible'". (Walker, p. 157). It expresses not only thoughts but also emotions and further not only emotions, but also 'ideas', the different mental images that we possess and the different association a sentence or a word may have for us. This is what Frege calls 'colouring' (colour) and "shading" (shade) which abounds in poetry and so

is not objective as sense and thought.

We can now sum up Frege's position on the nature of language as follows:

(1) Language is symbolic, since it uses linguistic signs, such as words and expressions.

(2) Signs are either meaningful or meaningless.

(3) Meaningful signs are those signs which have a reference, while meaningless signs are merely formal.

(4) Sentences, when they consist of meaningful signs, express thoughts.

(5) Thoughts so expressed are capable of being true and false.

(6) Thoughts so expressed should be distinguished from 'ideas' associated with a particular linguistic sign or a sentence.

(7) Thoughts so expressed should also be distinguished from the sentences in which they are expressed, though there is a correspondence in structure between a thought and a singular sentence expressing it.

(8) Thoughts are about objects and concepts. Corresponding logical parts of the singular sentence are arguments and functions; while corresponding grammatical parts of the singular sentence are subject and predicate.

It is now time for us to turn to Frege's distinction between object and concept.

2. In 'On Concept and Object' Frege⁵ joins issue with Kerry on the distinction between concept and object. The point at issue is this: although the relation between concept and object is "a peculiar and irreducible one", does it follow from this that "the properties of being a concept and of being an object are mutually exclusive?" (p. 43). Frege takes up a positive stand while Kerry, a negative one. Kerry contends that just as although the relation of father and son is irreducible, it does not follow from this that a man could not be at once a father and a son i.e. the properties of being a father and of being a son are not mutually exclusive. So is the case with a concept and an object. It is this claim that Frege contests. As he says, "If there were, or had been, beings that were fathers but could not be sons, such beings would obviously be quite

different in kind from all men who are sons. Now it is something like this that happens here. The concept (as I understand the word) is predicative. (It is, in fact, the reference of a grammatical predicate f.n.) On the other hand, a name of an object, a proper name, is quite incapable of being used as a grammatical predicate". (p. 43) In order to substantiate his claim Frege makes the following points:

(1) The usages of the word 'is' in 'The morning star is Venus' and in 'The morning star is a planet' must be distinguished. (p. 44)

(2) The criterion is that singular definite article always indicates an object, whereas the indefinite article accompanies a concept-word. (p. 45)

(3) This criterion does not relate to definite article in plural. (p. 45)

(4) The concept being of a predicative nature, it must first be "converted into an object" or "represented by an object", in order that it be a reference of the grammatical subject. We designate this object by prefixing the words "the concept." (pp. 46-47)

(5) What is asserted about a concept can never be asserted about an object; for a proper name can never be a predicative expression, though it can be part of one. (p. 50)

(6) The behaviour of the concept is essentially predicative even where something is being asserted about it. (p. 50)

(7) It is by a kind of "necessity of language" that at least one must be 'unsaturated' or predicative; otherwise they would not hold together. (p. 54)

Before we elucidate these points about the difference between object and concept one by one, it should be borne in mind that the word 'concept' is used by Frege in its logical sense, and not in its psychological sense. Frege, in other words, distinguishes concepts from ideas and mental images. These are subjective entities while concepts are objective concepts are essentially public in the sense that all of us can have access to them; while ideas and mental images are essentially private in the sense that only the person having them has access to them. As he says, "In order to be able to compare one man's mental