



LANGUAGE AND THOUGHT: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL TO WITTGENSTEIN AND FODOR.

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Abstract

This research explores the critical study of language and thought. It is a response to Wittgenstein and Fodor who believe in priority, superiority, and individuality of language and thought. In this paper, we can resolve this language and thought dichotomy to discuss the concept of priority issue. We shall argue that language and thought are modular concepts inside mind and there are also other modules present in our mind. This paper determines the role of language and thought and their priority in mind. Furthermore, this article shows inconsistency in priority, superiority and individuality. It also explores the role of quantification theory which discusses about the structure of thought and language, as well as about the model logic theory which discusses about the semantic part of language and thought. I shall also argue language and thought priority in Wittgenstein's and Fodor's thesis.

Key Words: Language, Thought, Fodor, Wittgenstein, Priority

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is that language and thought are intimately related to each other and their intimacy has led to priority of one over the other. Analytical tradition asserts less stress on the communicative part of language and thought, and more stress on structure, function, and abduction. Language and Thought are the concepts that have their individual nature in the domain of linguistics and logic. However, in this paper, I will consider only the philosophical nature of language and thought which would be further described on the basis of analytical methodology.

Language is not only meant to be spoken, written and communicated but it has universal, symbolic, natural, modular and implicative significance. Same is the case with the thought which has not only the nature of expression of languages and their evaluation but which is also predicative, modular, arithmetic, sentential and formal. In analytical philosophy, language and thought are clarified in the structure of syntax, semantics, quantifiers and modal operators. The idea of language and thought are instrumental and technical concepts. Modern philosophy brought a revolution in the subject of philosophy through linguistic turn which was misunderstood for the spirituality of thought. Philosophers during ancient Greek and Medieval period assumed that thoughts are those mental things which interpret perceptions. According to Frege, Thoughts are abstract which do not depend on mind like the number and sets. Descartes defined thought as the attribute of mind which is the metaphor of other conscious processes like doubting, affirming, denying, willing, imagining and reasoning (Rorty, 1979, p. 47).

There are two groups in an analytical tradition, one is the group of philosophers that consider language as prior to the thought, Wittgenstein, Chomsky, Quine and Sellars are the exponents of this view. While, other group of philosophers believe that thought is prior to language. Fodor and Piaget are the exponents of this view.

Wittgenstein regarding thought said:

If one says that thought is a mental activity one thinks of the mind as a cloudy gaseous medium in which many things can happen which cannot occur in a different sphere, and from which many things can be expected that are otherwise not possible; the process of thinking in human mind and the process of digestion. Mental processes can be true or false, and non-mental cannot be as such. What kind of things are mental processes? If the mental process or thought process is then it is known through its description (Wittgenstein L. , *Philosophical Grammar*, 1974).

According to Fodor, thinking is information processing within ‘the language of thought’. Mind is assumed as a computer, which directs action with the aid of internal representations of the world. Language of thought is innate. This language is an inner language which is different from English, Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, Hebrew and Spanish. Scientists and philosophers do not know what kind of language it is. Some say that it is symbolic; some say it is algebraic, mathematical, universal, etc. Fodor claims that thinking is performing computational operations on mental representations. These inner representations form a system with many of the basic properties of a language, so the system can be called ‘the language of thought’ (Fodor 1975).

However, many cognitive scientists hold that language processing cannot be understood simply in terms of aspects of memory, reasoning and other cognitive processes that help us make sense of the world. They argue that language must rely on a relatively autonomous set of abilities, each having its own knowledge base and the whole affair functioning, to a large extent, independently of other cognitive processes (Fodor, 1983; Chomsky, 1986).

Language and Thought

According to Gilbert Harman in his work *Language, thought and communication*, language is used primarily in thought, the majority of thinking is carried out in natural language. Jean Piaget wrote in his work *the language and thought of the child* that the function of language is not only communicating thought but more than that. According to Martin Davis, it is useful to distinguish between three kinds of priority questions: ontological, epistemological and analytical, “to say that thought enjoys ontological supremacy over language is to say that language is ontologically dependent on thought while thought is not dependent on language i.e., there cannot be language without thought; but there can be thought without language. Similarly, it is described for epistemological and analytical. Donald Davidson rejects the thesis of priority of thought over language and vice versa. He said that there cannot be thought without language. In order to have thoughts especially propositional attitudes, a creature must be a member of language community and an interpreter of the speech of others.

We can distinguish between two types of cognitive modularity which since the early 1980s, has become prominent in linguistics and cognitive science in at least two ways. First, the American philosopher Jerry Fodor has been arguing that human mind is itself modular, that is, it consists of a number of specialized subcomponents for handling different tasks, such as speaking and seeing. Second, the American linguist Noam Chomsky has been arguing that the human language faculty is modular, that is, it must consist of a fairly large number of semi-autonomous units, each of which responsible for certain particular aspects of our linguistic competence.

Fodor assumed that language of thought is innate and universal. He further believed that all languages share the common structure at some abstract level. There are many versions of the language that affect thought claim. One version which is most often associated with Whorf (1956) and Sapir (1921), is that differences between languages, such as between English and Urdu, lead to differences in thoughts. Another version, sometimes attributed to Vygotsky (1962) is that cognition is shaped by properties that all languages share. From this second perspective, the interesting contrast isn't between speakers of English and speakers of Urdu, it is between speakers of any language versus those people or animals who have no language at all.

According to Fodor, languages directly encode the categories we think in, and moreover that these constitute an innate and universal ‘language of thought’ or mentalese. As Pinker (1994, p.82) put it “knowing a language, then, is “knowing how to translate mentalese into strings of words and vice versa. People without a language would still have mentalese, and babies and many non-human animals presumably have simpler dialects”.

The language is a universal medium is the foundation of the perception of Wittgenstein's semantic framework. The explanation and appreciation of the semantics of Wittgenstein is possible only when this character is put in mind. Language is a system of symbols which represent the world as well as constitutes the logical criterion of making the symbol system coherent and consistent. Language represents everything related to the world and ourselves within itself. Even

our understanding of language is expressed in language without any requirement of meta-language. Frege and Wittgenstein conscious us that no meta-language is involved in expression and language has limits in its representation power. Wittgenstein, in order to counter the possibility that grammar can be independent of our language and holds that language contains its syntactics and semantics i.e. it contains its grammar without presupposing and independent medium to express the rules of grammar. No language is possible if it does not contain its grammar. So, Frege's theory of logical and grammar is the background of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* that develops representational framework for understanding language and the world. According to Wittgenstein, the structure of the world is the same as the structure of language and this can be unfolded by the logical structure of the meaning. Thus, the structure of the meaning becomes the main concern as it provides key to the structure of language and the world. Wittgenstein attempted to bring out the essence of language and the world in his transcendental conception of logic.

In the 1980s, however, Jerry Fodor revived the idea of the modularity of mind, although without the notion of precise physical localizability. Drawing from Noam Chomsky's idea of the language acquisition device and other work in linguistics as well as from the philosophy of mind and the implications of optical illusions, he became one of its most articulate proponents with the 1983 publication of *Modularity of Mind*. According to Fodor, a module falls somewhere between the behaviorist and cognitivist views of lower-level processes. Behaviorists tried to replace the mind with reflexes which Fodor describes as encapsulated (cognitively impenetrable or unaffected by other cognitive domains) and non-inferential (straight pathways with no information added). Low level processes are unlike reflexes in that they are inferential. This can be demonstrated by poverty of the stimulus arguments in which the proximate stimulus, that which is initially received by the brain (such as the 2D image received by the retina), cannot account for the resulting output (for example, our 3D perception of the world), thus necessitating some form of computation.

In contrast, cognitivists saw lower level processes as continuous with higher level processes, being inferential and cognitively penetrable (influenced by other cognitive domains, such as beliefs). The latter has been shown to be untrue in some cases, such as with many visual illusions, which can persist despite a person's awareness of their existence. This is taken to indicate that other domains, including one's beliefs, cannot influence such processes.

For Fodor, in line with Chomsky's ideas, innateness is also a notion frequently associated with modularity drawing from his idea of LAD (Ingram, 2007). But whereas Chomsky locates modularity firmly within language ability, Fodor locates it in the mechanisms that support language processing. Fodor believes that the language faculty is modular in that the processing of linguistic input is not affected by higher cognitive domains or by other input systems; that is each module is autonomous from other modules. The language module, as cited in Carroll (2001), - processes only linguistic representations; in other words, the system encoding language is independent of the system used for encoding thought (p. 251). Modules may have very limited access to other modules Fodor, according to Field (2004), views the mind as composed of a set of

central modules which handle general operations such as attention and these central systems are supported by input modules which act autonomously and process sensory information such as language. The input systems are modular and, according to Wodak and Chilton (2005), have the following characteristics:

Fodor, according to Perkins (2007), argues that various aspects of human cognition may be modules. In contrast to Chomsky's ideas who claim that the central system is itself constructed and is composed of a variety of modules, moreover, in contrast to Chomsky's belief that the central system is structured and tend to investigation, Fodor considers the central system to be unstructured and complicated to investigate. Fodor makes connections between his concept of modularity and that of Darwinian or computational modularity which are determined by genetic factors (Carruthers & Chamberlin, 2000). According to Crystal (2008), the main difference between Chomsky's and Fodor's concept of language modularity is that in Fodor's modularity, mind is modular in a sense that it consists of different systems (modules), each with its own distinctive properties; whereas, in Chomsky's modularity, the language system is itself modular in a sense that it consists of a number of different subsystems which interact in different ways.

Fodor's view is that language is but an input and output module to central cognition (thought perhaps drawing on a centrally stored lexicon and database), not implicated in the central processes of thinking and reasoning themselves. These latter processes are held to involve sentence like structures, to be sure, but these are not sentences of any natural language, but rather of an innate, universal, symbolic system, which Fodor called *mentalese*.

According to analytical concept of language and thought; thought cannot be possible without language. Fodor described that 'anything that is red is colored' is necessarily true because it is true in all possible worlds. Taken in this conceptual sense then, the claim that thought necessary involves language can be true only if the concept of language is implicated in the concept of thought.

Language processing depends upon the autonomous capacities of the mind. It has its own field, its knowledge base and functions. Language faculty works independently of other cognitive processes (Groome, 1999, p. 131). Fodor assumed that linguistic rules are not necessary for psychological processes. These rules are not real as they are not blueprints of cognitive processes (Groome, 1999, p. 140). We think about things, but how do these things enter into our thoughts? How do we perform the act of thinking? The language is itself the vertical component of thought. Thinking is an incorporeal process. Speech with and without thought is compared with the playing of a piece of music with and without thought. William James said that thought is possible without speech. Chomsky argues that children are exceptional learners of language because human mind is biased. What mind would like to put as the first word in input is really a controversial issue. Why children like nouns and objects than verbs and phrases. While Fodor recognizes that there is no partiality in thought. Thought is universal to every child.

Philosophers assumed that most of the knowledge about language and thought is mysterious. They questioned that in the evolution of languages and thoughts which one of them evolved first in the world. Philosophers have many doubts and questions regarding language and thought i.e. how language evolved in the world. Who used the first word in language and what was that word? What interprets language inside the mind? Is language innate or acquired, is there a Module for language and thought in the mind or is it non-modular? How thoughts arise in the mind? What analyzes, synthesizes and assembles them? Are thoughts innate to the mind or they depend on something else? What is the role of perception, sensation, images and concepts in the domain of thought? What is relationship between the module of thought and the module of language? Can a human being with thoughts survive, communicate and evolve without language and it's vice versa. Is there really a supremacy of one over other or there is no supremacy at all? Are language and thought simultaneously created? Do humans have the capacity to understand and speak with animals and birds?

According to Fodor 'we think in language but we can't think in language in which we speak, the language of the thought is different from the language in which we communicate our ideas. The language of thought is not a natural language (preti, 2001). Cartesians also take language to be an expression of thought and believe that thought is essentially creative; they claim that there is a 'creative aspect of language use'. Wittgenstein has often taken to arguing that thought is impossible unless certain specified relations hold between the individual and society. Likewise he assumes that thought is normative (Hawthorne, 1994).

Frege defined thoughts as 'thoughts have denotational content and constitute the sole focus of semantic enquiry. (Ronnie Cann, 2010). For Fodor, Human Mind is a system for manipulating symbols according to syntactic rules which determine the recursive complexity of thoughts so called 'language of thought' (Fodor 1975, 1983).

According to Wittgenstein; language can be known with its use. Epistemology exercises a significant role in the domain of language. How we know language? Is the knowledge of language innate or acquired? Are linguistic items sense data? To what extent is the knowledge of language valid? Is knowledge of the language certain? How Wittgenstein resolved the epistemic problem of language.

Epistemology and language are intimately related in the analytical tradition of Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein said that there is a correspondence between language and reality. The language manifests reality in propositional form. He further said that language pictures the reality. Knowing or understanding language is to know the world. Language hypothesis and logic are inseparable. Wittgenstein assumes that to understand a language is to take in a symbolism as a whole (Wittgenstein L., *Philosophical Grammar*, 1974).

Wittgenstein said that 'to understand a structure is much more akin to understand a theme in a music than one may think'. Wittgenstein further argued that understanding is a mental process

or hypothetical (logical) process. Understanding is not the behavioral process but it is mental state in which human behavior is the sign (Wittgenstein L., *Philosophical Grammar*, 1974).

According to Wittgenstein, “All philosophy is a critique of language” (Wittgenstein, 2001). It was Russell who performed the service of showing that the apparent logical form of a proposition need not be its real one. Wittgenstein too is of the opinion that the grammatical form of a sentence in natural language can differ from its real logical form. And if the two are not carefully distinguished from each other, all kinds of pseudo-problems can arise, and all kinds of pseudo-theories may be used to try to solve them. It was for this reason that

the task of philosophy as a therapeutic one: the aim of philosophical analysis was a logical clarification of our thoughts.

Linguistic philosophy takes the view that philosophical problems are problems which may be solved or shown as no problem at all either by reforming the language, or by understanding more about the language we presently use. According to this position the logical structure of our thought is concealed or misrepresented in language. Peculiarities of linguistic form such as analogies, metaphors and similes may misrepresent or conceal the logical structure. Once we appreciate this possibility and once we make the meaning of our words clear and the way they are combined in language explicit, most of the questions would be found as non-questions. Most of the unsolved problems are due to confusions in the way the language is used, the way questions are asked. The problems must be considered as linguistic confusions which can be cleared up. This is so because language does not consist only of rules of words, their derivation and use, and their combination according to syntactic constraints but also an enormous number of conventions not expressly formulated but always presupposed in understanding everyday language. Formulating and bringing these tacit conventions to consciousness form the process of the clarification of ideas from the basis upon which new ideas are brought out. To clarify and simplify the vague meaning of statements we must analyze the meanings of words and the logical relations between them in language. Such an enquiry is pursued to solve many problems related to determinism, skepticism and causation.

Linguistic philosophical approach is important for the study of language use in science because it emphasizes, focus's and is based upon the pivotal role of language in the development, analysis, categorization and so on of knowledge. It is important because it insists upon looking at sentences and their structures as used for the expression of ideas.

Ordinary language is ambiguous and this ambiguity can be removed only by interpretation. He gave the example of a boy in a picture walking up a hill. This picture likely represents the other way that the boy is sliding down the hill. If one tries to remove the ambiguity by attaching an arrow pointing towards uphill. The arrow signifies the direction in which the man is going rather than the direction from which he is coming (Lowe, 2000).

How might the process of parsing work? Early psycholinguistic research (e.g. Sachs, 1967; Slobin, 1966) had shown that we do not use processes that mirror linguistic rules when interpreting

sentences. Fodor et al. (1974) argued that although linguistic rule systems were not blueprints for psychological processing (i.e. were not 'psychologically real'), the end-product of parsing was a syntactic representation and this representation was the deep structure of the sentence as described by Chomsky (1965). They proposed that to recover the syntactic structure of sentences, rather than following systematic rules, we use a number of heuristic strategies, essentially rules of thumb, which generally allow us to arrive at the appropriate structure but are not foolproof and may sometimes fail and lead us astray.

Conclusion

Language and thought are contemporary issues which nowadays have become a hot debate of philosophers and other thinkers. Since most of the theories have proved a lot about it but very much is unknown also. However, we are unknown about the origin of language and thought module in mind and also the first word used. Wittgenstein claimed that proposition expresses language of reality and Fodor maintained thought has its own language. This study is the critique of Wittgenstein and Jerry Fodor and it implies that modules of language and thought are related with respect to things. There exists one more module which is known as module of relation. Nevertheless, it shows the form and meaning of language and thought with the help of quantification theory and model logic theory. In this study we are using; universal, existential quantifiers to determine the formal aspect of language and thought as well as we can use model operators which determine the meaning and aspects of language and thought.

Thought and language are universal. There is no priority of one over the other but these could be necessarily relative and created for one another. These modules are created in mind by some third dimensional force which is a type of consciousness. It seems to me that it is some kind of medium which makes thought and language possible. However, Language and thought are independent and relative. This study is based on deductive research. As concept of time and space are related, so are the language and thought. Moreover, we cannot believe on the priority of time over space and it's vice versa. In this study, quantification logic and model logic play an important role to situate the issue of universality, existentiality and modality of thought and language. Thus, it seems to me that language and thought are different modules of mind among the others. It has been concluded that all languages have a common logical form and there is no priority of language over thought and its vice versa. Language and thought are simultaneously created and evolved. However, model operators show the semantic part of language and thought and Quantifier operators show the structure of thought and language.

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