

Yaska's discussion of the meaning of a word in relation to objective reality:¹

The arguments of a critic are given as follows:

- 1) every being should be called by the same name when performing the same action, so if aśva-, "horse", means "running", then everyone who is running should be called aśva-;
- 2) every object should be called by as many names as actions are performed by it; for the designation of an object is anyhow not clear when it is determined only by its action, for it can perform any action, and exists in itself before and after the action;²

Yaska answers:

- 1) not everyone gets the same name by performing the same action, not everyone who cuts wood is called takṣan-, "a carpenter", but only one who does it often and regularly;
- 2) though one is involved in many different activities, one gets his name from a particular action only. There are even many things which get their names from their subsequent actions.³

What we see here is that a critic by his arguments is trying to identify the image created by a word as it functions in linguistic reality with the image of an object as it functions in objective reality. He wants to establish a true correspondence between these two levels of reality, one of which lies beyond time and space⁴, in the subjective realms, and the other - in the objective time and space. The critic seems to understand the problem very well when he says that an object cannot be defined by a word, for it exists before and after the action that the word indicates.⁵ But we may say that the word persists in its own reality beyond the reality of time and space. Since we live, act, see, understand the world using our linguistic reality, the name once given to the object, whether it was relevant or seemed to be relevant for a particular speaker, could remain for some time, even if it had very little to do with any action of the object. The reason why this or that name was given to the object was not in order to satisfy an objective reality but rather a subjective one; it

1 Nirukta 1,12-14: yaḥ kaś ca tat karma kuryāt sarvam tat sattvam tathā ācakṣīran / yaḥ kaś ca adhvānam aśnuvīta, aśvaḥ sa vacanīyaḥ syāt/ atha api cet sarvāṇyākhyātājāni nāmāni syuḥ / ...

² Actually these arguments show that the understanding of the word was not 'logocentric' in India, for the difference between the signified and signifier was clearly perceived.

³ Nirukta 1.14. The relativity of application of name to the objective reality is clearly stated here.

⁴ I think, that linguistic reality, the reality of structural semantic as well as of the 'signified', can be said to lie beyond the objective time and space; "*signified*" is beyond actual time, 'it is never there' by Derrida's definition, and the "*signifier* is always in time and space, but 'it is never that'. For it evidently belongs to a different order of time and space than physical reality, though still it belongs simultaneously to the realm of 'manifestation', and exists in a subtle space and time.

⁵ The phenomenological treatment, see also Nietzsche's levels of metaphors.

was named by a speaker imposing his wish, opinion, knowledge, will on the object. Once the name has been used, it would persist in memory until a new name effaces or changes it.

Yaska only emphasizes the difference between these two realities, as well as pointing to the corrupted and conventional character of the word, without answering the critic's argument about the approximate character of definition itself. It is interesting to see these two views representing the transition from the Vedic understanding of the Word, based on transparent etymology,⁶ which was now already becoming obscure and non-functional in the consciousness of a speaker, to the beginning of a new reasoning approach. The critic's arguments sound childish to the reason, because they are still focusing on the inner source of words, while the reason focuses on observing their outer applications.

Answering the question of how an object could be called by a certain name, when it is performing a different action than that indicated by the name, Durga, commenting on the Nirukta, says: "śabda-niyamaḥ svabhāvata eva loke", "in spoken language [in the world], the law of using the word follows its [the word's] own nature". According to him, this svabhāva- is an inherent characteristic of the word as a sound-meaningful entity. It has its own existence and can therefore be applied to any object at will by a speaker, thus creating a new contextual meaning, for the word in its semantic aspect continues to carry its own significance.

The word "carpenter" then, in the pragmatic sense, means a distinctive skill and style of living in a society. So when a speaker wants to denote this complex of knowledge-ability-life-style-activity by one word, he says: a carpenter. But in the linguistic reality this word does not refer to any particular carpenter, or a real person;⁷ it evokes only an idea of someone who cuts wood for his living (pragmatic sense); at the same time it includes the formal semantic of the grammatical usage of the word (syntactic sense) - that is, how the word is used in relation to other words in grammatical structures;⁸ and above all it has its own hidden source of meaning - an etymon in the system of seed-sounds.⁹

When Durga says that word lives and acts in the world according to its own nature, he implies that any word not only reflects an image of objective reality but also introduces and implements an image of its own. For the hidden system of etymons (Semantics) and the relation of the

⁶ When the etymology of the word is transparent then the other meaning is known: the meaning-sound, the meaning-power. Therefore in the old times the names were kept secretly, for they were a key to the essence of the being. Cf.: Kena Up., etc.

⁷ Cp. with 'a signified', a concept;

⁸ Cp. with Chomsky's generative grammar.

⁹ About which nobody speaks in the West, taking mistakenly the structural semantic, 'sign' or 'trace', for the meaning itself.

word with other possible words in the system of language (Syntactics) influences the general contextual meaning on the pragmatic level. Therefore even on the purely communicational level the word acts as a meaningful entity, influencing and creating the society of man, which is nothing but a product of this communication.¹⁰

"He spoke in sentences from the unseen Heights.
A casual passing phrase can change our life.
For the hidden prompters of our speech sometimes
Can use the formulas of a moment's mood
To weigh unconscious lips with words of Fate."¹¹

Patanjali and the Syntactic aspect of the word.

Patanjali in his Mahabhashya, the commentary on Panini's Ashtadhyayi, says that in order to know the meaning of a word one has to go not to the learned linguist, but to the market place, for the meaning of the word in its natural usage differs from the linguistic one. The life which the word as a 'signifier' has in the world is different from the conceptual or 'signified' part of it. This was a new approach to the human tongue in comparison to the Vedic theories of the origins of speech. Patanjali points out to a different value of speech, which had not been focused on before: a communicative aspect and the life of a 'signifier' in relation to the 'signified'.

Here I would like to quote one example, where Patanjali is discussing the topic of the simplest meaningful units, which is similar to the modern understanding of linguistics in regard to phoneme:¹²

There are three words kupa-, a well, supa-, a soup, yupa-, a sacrificial post, which differ in their first phonemes; therefore, concludes Patanjali, the k-, s-, y- are meaningful units, for these words are distinguished by their initial phonemes. But at the same time the meaning cannot be learned from these in isolation: k-, s-, y-; while the part -upa- is also meaningless alone. Thus Patanjali admits that phonemes have a differentiating significance within the units which bear the meaning.¹³ Such a unit he considers to be saṅghāta-, a single entity which is 'indivisible and one', it can be a word or a text. Patanjali here compares it to a chariot, as a single entity which consists of many parts that are incapable of moving, while the chariot as a whole is an entity which can move.¹⁴ The sound of the word or a text is simultaneous in the mind of

¹⁰ This much is obvious even to modern science, but not connected with the etymon level.

¹¹ Savitri, p. 373

¹² Mbh, V 1, pp 31-32: anarthakās tu varṇāḥ/ ... na hi prativarṇam arhā upalabhyante/ "the phonemes are meaningless ... it is not from the phonemes that the meaning is gathered...."

¹³ Saussure's fundamental discovery.

¹⁴ It is a clear example of introduction of semantic into syntactic use: Sphota.

the speaker but it has to be pronounced in time and space and therefore it creates an illusion of the significance of the components.¹⁵

There are few remarks which I would like to make to clarify the shift from the Vedic intuitive approach to the mental and analyzing approach to the word.

Patanjali tries to discover the semantics of the word in a purely syntactic way, breaking up the semantic entity of the etymon into a formal, structural succession of sounds, presuming that they should be meaningful as such. This approach does not help us much, although it brings some clarity about how the etymon is to be approached - as a syllable only. If we examine carefully the nature of the sounds in speech, we will see that *k-* is not a sound, but only an articulating device, which can be meaningful only when a vowel sound is there, forming it into a syllable¹⁶. Of course it reflects the significance of its place of articulation, but in itself it has no sound, and cannot be pronounced. So *kū* is to be compared, which differs from *sū* and *yū* not only in form, but also in sense, at the primal layer of meaning. Thus a prototypal and original root *kū* has many parallels in other Indo-European languages: Engl., "*cave*" see also Lat.; Russ., "*ko-p-aty*" to dig; Engl. "*cup*", etc. *Sū*, is "to press out a juice", so *sū-pa-* is a "soup" in English, "*sup*" in Russian, etc., also *soma-*, the "*ambrosia*", and *sū-nu-*, the "*son*", as a carrier of the essence. The root *yū* thus gives us different meanings: *to unite* and *to divide*, in other words *to hold the two in one*. From this root we have many derivatives: *yuj*, *to unite, to bind, to fix, to use* etc., *yuga-*, "*pair*"; cp: Engl. "*yoke*"; *yoga-*, "*union*"; *yūpa*, "*sacrificial post*", where the sacrificial animal is to be tied up.

The "single entity" of which Patanjali speaks should belong to the origins of the word, to its inherent and hidden semantic, - an etymon, and not to its conventional significance, supported by the mind examining the syntactic structure of the word.

But what is interesting that Patanjali for the first time proposes three different approaches in the studies of speech-utterance:

- 1), meaningful word;
 - 2) dhvani, an uttered sound;
 - 3) sphoṭaśabdaḥ, an impression of the sound in the mind.
- So the meaningful word, arthasampratyāyakaḥ śabdaḥ, is perceived through the articulate sound, dhvani, by the listener as sphoṭaśabdaḥ. This was the beginning of the Sphoṭa theory.¹⁷

¹⁵ Patanjali on the rule of Panini 1.4.109, p.356.

¹⁶ Not all human languages function syllabically, or even vocally. Isolated and Hieroglyphic types are based on vision rather than sound. Languages of the numbers, geometrical figures or colors are of the sight origin.

¹⁷ This view of Patanjali most probably belongs to the linguistic tradition about which we don't have any earlier evidences. Panini though mentions in his Aṣṭādhyāyī the name of Sphoṭāyana among ancient grammarians, which may be the reference to this particular theory.