



LINGUISTIC PHILOSOPHY: A METHODOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT :

Linguistic philosophy as a philosophical method tries to solve the problems of philosophy that have arisen from the misinterpretation of language by proper understanding and analyzing the actual meaning of language. The search for the roots of our understanding of thought and reality in language can be called the linguistic turn or linguistic philosophy. It is the turn towards language as the only key to understand the world. This linguistic turn appeared against speculative metaphysics. In this paper, an attempt has been made to show that linguistic philosophy is a philosophical method or methodical analysis.

Keywords: *Language, metaphysics, reality.*

I. Introduction:

During the first decades of twentieth century, there we witnessed a dramatic change in philosophy. During this period there we witnessed a linguistic philosophy or linguistic turn in philosophy. The linguistic turn is, broadly speaking, the search for the roots of our understanding of thought and reality in language. This linguistic turn is philosophically known as *linguistic revolution*. The pertinent question that needs to be taken care of at this juncture is: what actually was the philosophical significance of this linguistic turn appeared in the twentieth century? What was the philosophical branch against which this linguistic turn or revolution had been generated? In this regard it can be said that linguistic turn of twentieth century appeared against speculative metaphysics. Before the appearance of linguistic turn in twentieth century, philosophy had mostly been dominated by metaphysics, more succinctly called, speculative metaphysics. It had been revealed by the then linguistic philosophers that if philosophy in general was the subject matter of metaphysics as it was in the past, then there



would not be any progress in philosophy. Philosophy then would be a meaningless enterprise, a dominant discipline. Metaphysics dealt with such issues which could not be interpreted with scientific outlook. Metaphysical issues are not the outcome of experience. Therefore, to make philosophy as a progressive science, metaphysics has to be eliminated. Accordingly, it can be said that *linguistic revolution* or *linguistic turn* appeared as a philosophical method with a background of science or anti-metaphysical background. It is the result of a group of like-minded philosophers having scientific background. They conceived that there was no progress in philosophy like other natural sciences.

II. Objectives of the Study: The primary aims of this paper are:

- 1] To investigate the role of linguistic philosophy as a systematic framework for resolving philosophical conundrums.
- 2] To examine the implications of the “linguistic turn” on our understanding of reality, thought, and language.
- 3] To illustrate how linguistic philosophy provides a rigorous analytical tool for critiquing speculative metaphysics and linguistic misinterpretations.

III. Methodology:

This paper uses a qualitative research approach to study linguistic philosophy as a method for solving philosophical problems. The research involves reviewing existing literature from both primary and secondary sources, analyzing key concepts, and evaluating the strengths and limitations of linguistic philosophy. It also uses an analytical approach to examine how language relates to thought and reality, and how linguistic philosophy can be used to critique speculative ideas. By using this approach, the paper aims to provide a clear understanding of linguistic philosophy and its importance in addressing philosophical issues.

IV. Analysis and Discussion:

All traditional philosophical problems stem from linguistic confusions. It has been argued that these problems arise from the misinterpretation of language or a failure to grasp the true logic and meaning of language. That means that traditional philosophical problems are



nothing but linguistic in nature. Therefore, such problems can only be solved or resolved or dissolved by proper understanding the nature and meaning of language. Repeatedly speaking, philosophers in the past were duped by the meaning or logic of language. Language is a sharpen tool according to Wittgenstein. To use language is not an easy job as language can bewitch us. Wittgenstein says, “Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our understanding by means of language” (Wittgenstein, 1953). It can be said, after Wittgenstein, that traditional philosophy is adjudged as non-sensical character lies in misuse of language. The function of philosophy, Wittgenstein suggests, is to clarify the puzzle or confusion in language. In other words, the function of language should be teaching the correct usage of the language. Wittgenstein says, “What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday usage ... when philosophers use words – ‘knowledge’, ‘being’, ‘object’, ‘I’, ‘proposition’, ‘name’, and try to grasp the essence of the word, we must always ask: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language which is its original home. For philosophical problems arise when language goes on holiday” (Wittgenstein, 1953). Thus, it appears that misuse or misinterpretation of language creates a lot of philosophical problems. Philosophers in the past, particularly, metaphysicians were careless about the use of language. They actually misinterpreted language, misused language and as a matter of fact a bundle of traditional philosophical problems were generated out of the misinterpretation of language. In this sense linguistic turn or revolution appeared in the 20th century deserved philosophical significance. It attempted to solve philosophical problems by proper understanding and proper analyzing the actual meaning of language.

It has been claimed that understanding language is the key to understand philosophy. Apart from interpersonal communication, language is very much part of doing philosophy. The point is that in philosophical domain language is used in the following ways:

- (a) language is used as a medium of communication; and
- (b) language is used as the content or subject matter of philosophical discourse.

When it is claimed that the function of language is to communicate, the question then is: what does it really communicate? The answer can be given in two ways, such as:



- (i) Language communicates something extra-linguistically; and
- (ii) Language communicates something that has no existence apart from language.

As far as (i) is concerned it can be said that what language communicates can be known or empirically verified as the object of communication does exist independent of language. If the so-called philosophical application of language is confined within (i), then there would be no problem in philosophy as philosophy would be equated with natural science. However, this is not to be the case in that philosophy is no longer a natural science. If we look back, philosophers of the past undertook language not as the medium of communication. They considered language as the content or subject matter of philosophy. As a result, what language communicates is nothing but language itself and to understand language is to understand philosophy and any misunderstanding, misinterpretation or confusion on the part of language generates a lot of philosophical confusions or muddles. This is, in brief, how the so-called traditional problems were engendered in philosophy. Hence, philosophers of the 20th century seem to have conceived that philosophical problems are linguistic in nature and a proper understanding of language or careful examination or use of language is an amicable way to overcome the problems of philosophy.

The other important philosophical significance of linguistic turn is that it introduced in philosophy a linguistic method. After the linguistic revolution, language in philosophy had been treated as a method like other method, such as, phenomenological method, Cartesian method etc. In this regard, there we find a subtle distinction between *linguistic philosophy* and *philosophy of language*. Even though these two concepts are two sides of the same coin and one can be discussed in terms of other, but unlike philosophy of language, linguistic philosophy is very much a philosophical method. Linguistic philosophy is a philosophical method of clearing the slum of problems underlying in philosophy. Or in other words, it is a philosophical method of solving philosophical problems, particularly, the so-called traditional philosophical problems via analyzing the meaning of words, by proper analyzing and understanding true logic of language and also by analyzing the logical relations between words of natural language. Thus, linguistic philosophy as a philosophical method tries to solve the so-



called traditional philosophical problems as those concerning *determinism*, *skepticism* and *causation* etc. It would not be an exaggeration if we claim that these problems are so critical and crucial that after centuries of discussion philosophers are still very much confused and embarrassed to find out an amicable solution. Philosophers are confused, as Max Black remarks, “by the resurgence of doubt about free will, the reality of time, the existence of other minds and the external world, the possibility of knowledge about the feature or matters of fact, and any method which promises to give a satisfactory and permanent answer to such skeptical questions deserves careful examination” (Black, 1949). Black, however, inclines to say that by analyzing language linguistic philosophy being a philosophical method can solve the so-called philosophical problems. Linguistic philosophy as a philosophical method involves an investigation into certain aspects of the world by examining, scrutinizing the classification and distinctions that we make in language. Since the nature of the so-called traditional problems in philosophy is linguistic in nature, philosophers having the linguistic persuasion have keenly been aware and hence realize that philosophical inquiry must give a distinct place to linguistic phenomena. For example, when a philosopher engages himself to know the nature of *X-ness* or *Y-ness*, then he is actually analyzing the very meaning of the word ‘X’ and ‘Y’, not otherwise. Since it has been held that if language is employed carelessly, engenders unworthy philosophical problems, then the so-called linguistic philosophy being a philosophical method works for eradicating, eliminating the unanalyzable pseudo-philosophical problems.

It is important to note that language was not completely foreign to the philosophers of the early traditions. Philosophers of the past were associated with language in doing philosophy since the time of Greeks. When in his *Euthyphro*, Plato asks what is piety; he thereby wants to know the concept piety. Moreover, in his *Republic*, Plato says, “Whenever a number of individuals have a common name, we assume them to have also a corresponding idea of form” (Plato, 2000). The very meaning of this quotation hinges that Plato is calling our attention to a pervasive feature of language can only be realized by proper understanding of meaning. There is no question of doubt that during the time of Plato, the relation between word (language) and thing (object), name and object, had become a usual topic of discussion. Even the criticism of the Sophists by Socrates was, in fact, in principle an attack on the conventional theory of language and an attempt to re-establish a trust in language. Besides, Aristotle built his logic on



language because his logical system is determined wholly by Greek language. Aristotle admits that language is the basal presupposition of that logic. In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle says, "...one might even raise the question whether the words 'to talk', 'to be healthy', 'to sit', imply that each of these things is existent, and similarly in other cases of this sort; for none of them is either self-subsistent or capable of being separated from substance, but rather, if anything, it is that which walks or sits or is healthy that is an existent thing. Now these are seen to be more real because there is something definite which underlines them (i.e., the substance or individual) which is implied in such a predicate; for we never use the word 'good' or 'sitting' without anything this" (Aristotle, 1985). Here Aristotle attempted to substantiate an independent existence of substance via language. It is needless to say that the interest in language was revealed in the philosophy of Locke and Hume. For Locke all words originate in sense experience of physical or external things and then carried over to the non-physical. According to Locke and von Humboldt, language and cognition are close and inseparable.

All these literatures mentioned above clearly hinges that pre-occupation with problems of language is not only the twentieth century phenomena; it has been an essential accompaniment to the development of European thought and culture. Let us now grant that there is a close relation between philosophy and problem of language since early traditions. If this is supposed to be the case, the immediate question then is: why the so-called revolution of linguistic turn in philosophy appeared in the 20th century? To reply this question, it can be said that although philosophers of the past were engaged with language, conscious of language and practiced linguistic analysis, but they were not at all conscious of what they were doing. For example, when in his *Sophist*, Plato analyzing the very notion of *knowledge and justice*, he undertook a detailed examination of the form '*A is not B*' in order to dissolve metaphysical confusion regarding the existence of 'non-Being'. Thus, it seems clear that clarification of language was there in the past, but what was absent in the past is that they did not realize *language as an end in itself in doing philosophy*. They did not aware the role of language. They did not aware that language could play a distinctive role in philosophy as they were careless about the function of language, about the very use of language. Philosophy at that time was treated as meaningless study.



Unlike philosophers in the past, linguistic philosophers of the 20th century claimed that philosophical problems are linguistics. Even they conceived that *language is an end in itself in doing philosophy*. For them, language is philosophy and philosophy is language. What is new in 20th century linguistic philosophy is the study of language in order to achieve the outcomes on other subjects, namely, mind, moral, nature, even God. It is claimed that language can be made to yield truths about such subjects. But philosophers of the past, being the firm believers of metaphysics, attempted to establish a consistent metaphysical system with the help of language. On the contrary, linguistic philosophy appeared in the 20th century as a complete distrust on metaphysics as there are no real problems in metaphysics and all metaphysical problems are pseudo-problems. According to Hume metaphysics is worthless, an idle speculation. Kant conceived metaphysics as non-sense. Wittgenstein, like many other contemporary linguistic philosophers, says in the *Tractatus* that metaphysical propositions are nonsense. He writes: “Most of the propositions and questions, are not false, but non-sensical. We cannot, therefore, answer questions of this kind at all, but only state their senselessness.” (Wittgenstein, 1961). Like Wittgenstein, logical positivists hold that metaphysical questions are pseudo-questions, and therefore, unanswerable. Metaphysics is the body of meaningless statements according to Vienna Circle and logical positivism. So, one can say without exaggeration that linguistic philosophy was the upshot of the anti-metaphysical standpoint as well as the influence of science. It has been claimed by many that linguistic philosophers of the 20th century were equally scientists as they could not evade themselves from the influence of science. With the influence of science, philosophy of the 20th century had turned into a new direction. Instead of molding metaphysical hypothesis about its nature, linguistic philosophers, with the influence of science, seek to know the way to talk about the world. For them, philosophy is nothing but clarification about clarification, talk about talk and language is the parameter of this process. The close association of linguistic philosophy with logic is again an influence of science. The task of science is to talk about the world and the actual job of philosophy is to talk about the talk of science. If this view holds good then metaphysics is eliminated. Thus, nobody can deny that with the influence of science and logic, linguistic philosophy appeared as a philosophical method which is grounded on the clarification and analysis of language.



The past prolong philosophical foundation of metaphysics or ontology was first conflicted with G. E. Moore. It was Moore who first reacted against the idealist's principle, i.e., the doctrine of the *internality of relations*. Moore out-rightly rejects the idealist's presupposition that 'All relations are internal'. It is mistaken as if this metaphysical doctrine is taken into account, then common-sense appears to be false. But this cannot be the case. Thus, on the basis of his appeal to common-sense, Moore concludes that relations may be both internal as well as external. Russell, like Moore, throw-outs the principle of idealism as it goes against logic and mathematics. Wittgenstein, Russell and Moore, thus, deny metaphysics as meaningless in that metaphysics is not a body of sentences of empirical science. Metaphysical sentences are neither analytically true nor are true by virtue of experience. In his *Language, Truth and Logic*, Ayer excludes metaphysics from science and thereby conceive that metaphysics as pseudo-science (Ayer, 1959). Logical positivists like Schlick, Carnap and Ayer hold that the meaningfulness of sentences can be determined on the basis of the principle of verification. This has led the positivists to reject metaphysics because metaphysical sentences represent knowledge beyond all experience. Metaphysical sentences by any means cannot be verified and hence metaphysics can have only pseudo-claims. For them, the task of philosophy is to analyze the language of science and common-sense for the sake of clarification of meaning. Since the problems of life and the world are rooted in language and hence the best way to solve the philosophical problems is to correct an erroneous notion by proper analysis and clarification of language. Thus, the only way out of the so-called philosophical problems is by language analysis alone.

The above consideration makes it clear that linguistic philosophy is an aftermath of the logical positivistic movement. Linguistic philosophy as a philosophical method tries to establish that the so-called philosophical problems are essentially linguistic in character and this can be solved on the linguistic plan. Equally it attempts to eliminate metaphysics. The reason behind linguistic philosophy tries to abolish metaphysics is that it is, in fact, born out of the dead-bed of metaphysics. Linguistic philosophers bring the whole-body of metaphysics within the parameter of the analysis of language and thereby admit that the so-called philosophical problems arise in philosophy due to the misapprehension of language or an exaggerated and unnatural use of language. In short, metaphysical confusions arise out of a



deep-seated failure to understand the complex functioning of our language. Unless understand language correctly or failure to understand language properly give rise to a kind of linguistic anxiety that tempts to ask and answer metaphysical claims. Linguistic anxiety is the outcome of linguistic confusion. The prime objective of linguistic philosophers is to be free from this linguistic anxiety which is the result of linguistic confusion. Since metaphysical claims are pseudo-claims and so dealing with such claims surely give rise to linguistic anxiety and any attempt to answer such claims would create never-ending confusions. This is the reason why metaphysical questions remain to be unanswered. Linguistic philosophers wanted to cure philosophy of the disease of metaphysical speculation. The task of linguistic philosophers is to dig up the root causes of linguistic anxiety by proper analysis of language. Since the so-called philosophical problems are the outcome of misinterpretation of language, proper understanding of language would dissolve such philosophical problems. Proper analysis and clarification of language helps us to “shows the fly the way out of the fly bottle” (Wittgenstein, 1953). It is interesting to note here that rigorous and logical analysis of language shows the philosopher how to escape from the philosophical torment. So, careful language analysis can cure philosophical puzzlements or philosophical problems.

V. Conclusion:

At the end it can be said that linguistic turn of 20th century actually opened a new dimension in philosophy. Normally it has been said that the very function of language is to communicate successfully between the speaker and the hearers. This is no longer a special function of language for philosophy. It is a general function of language. Every discipline has utilized language as the medium of communication of the subject matter. But when we are engaging the relevance of language in philosophy, we are doing altogether a different issue. Philosophy of language is not confined only with the communicative function of language. Here linguistic philosophy as a philosophical method actually tries to solve the problems of philosophy that has been aroused from the misinterpretation of language. In this regard, emphasize has been given to the proper analysis of language, proper understanding of the meaning or logic of language. Thus, in a nutshell it can be said that linguistic philosophy as a philosophical method tries to solve the so-called traditional philosophical problems arising out



of mishandling of language. Moreover, linguistic turn reveals reality or ontology for us. In answering the question *why does language matter to philosophy*, it can be said that language matters to philosophy because language reveals reality or ontology for us. *How does language reveal reality or ontology for us?* In this regard, it can be said that language reveals reality or ontology for us through the process of identifying the objects of the world. There are, of course, different proposals available in linguistic philosophy regarding the very nature of language. Linguistic philosophers in the past were argued with each regarding the very nature of language as an authentic method of linguistic philosophy. Whatever, the nature of language may be, the pertinent question that needs to be addressed at this juncture is that language as a philosophical method not only successful to revolve all outstanding philosophical problems, but in doing so, it can help us to know the reality as such. This actually hints in what sense linguistic turn as a philosophical method is significant.

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