

- a framework for theories and problems of discourse, lexicography and translation

It may seem uncontroversial to observe that as the subject matter of discourse, moves from the simple, obvious, familiar, material and objective to the complex, subtle, subjective and phenomenal ; the tendency for one's words to convey ,

- no meaning,
 - many meanings or
 - some unintended meaning;
- becomes greater.

So we can speak of a semantic gradient of subject matter, Thus descriptions of material phenomena eg trees, dogs, and cars are contended to be least problematic; but descriptions of emotional experience eg sadness, joy and rage more difficult, with philosophical subjects as qualities of phenomenological categories; eg good , rational, ontology still more difficult and descriptions of mystical experience, eg innocence, meditation, oneness.; so difficult as to lead some to describe it as in part ineffable ie intrinsically beyond words. eg Lao Tse a Taoist mystic "Those who know, do not speak ;those who speak, do not know"; which it is possible should have been translated "Those who know, CAN not speak; those who speak, CAN not know"

But it is controversial, for example linguistics as a science of language can quite properly only concern itself with the objective aspects of words. The problem is, words as material symbols must have a meaning as a referent, which is here considered a category of phenomenal experience. So whilst language as a structure of material symbols is not problematic; eg etymology , sentence structure etc. The best one can say of the attempts, thus far to describe the meaning of words objectively; is they are complex, convoluted and shows little prospect of wide utility. That is linguistics currently, fails to address the following problems of language in any simple sense and the suspicion is that it never can !

- what (ontologically) is the meaning of a word ?;
- what (ontologically)is the personal definition of the meaning of a word ? and to the end of personal clarity,
- what are the minimal requirements of such a definition ?
- what (ontologically) is a lexicographic definition of the meaning of a word ? and to the end of clear discourse ,
- what are the minimal requirements of such a definition ?;
- what (ontologically) is it to 'translate' the meaning of a word ?

The theory here; which is the framework mentioned in the title; is that as that semantic difficulty (above) increases, there will need to be an ordered , series of increasingly constrained and nested 'shared language modes'; if communication is to be achieved with a particular audience ; namely :

1/ Is there a language as a vocabulary of words, in-common ?

eg for this writer the language will need to be English; but obviously many other languages exist so his universe of discourse ie his 'demographic of communication' (call it that), particularly for difficult subject matter, is reduced;

BUT IF SO

2/Is there an agreement regarding responsibility for disambiguation, in-common ?

eg for this writer disambiguation is each speaker's responsibility, but there is no universal agreement about this; in other languages eg Mandarin and Japanese and even amongst some users of European languages , the reader or listener is expected to carry some responsibility; so this writer's 'demographic of communication' (call it that), particularly for difficult subject matter, is reduced still further;

BUT IF SO

3/ Is there an agreement that descriptive language alone, un-augmented or replaced by evocative or metaphorical ; can be used ?

eg for this writer the expectation is that descriptive language alone un-augmented or replaced by evocative or metaphorical, can be used ; but there is no universal agreement about this.eg A common view of poetry is that certain subjects especially of a metaphysical or mystical subject matter require evocative or metaphorical language; so this writer's 'demographic of communication' (call it that), particularly for difficult subject matter, is reduced still further;

BUT IF SO

- a framework for theories and problems of discourse, lexicography and translation

4/ Is there an agreement regarding the 'ontological nature' of words ?

eg for this writer, words are considered material symbols whose meaning or referent is a category of each speaker or writer's phenomenological experience.

But there is no universal agreement about this. eg a common view in linguistics would seem to be that while a word is a material symbol, its meaning is not or should not be simply a category of each speaker or writer's phenomenological experience; because this is not a shared objective category and as such is not scientifically meaningful; so this writer's 'demographic of communication' (call it that), particularly for difficult subject matter, is reduced still further;

BUT IF SO

5/ Is there an agreement regarding the 'ontological nature' and possibility of a personal definition of the meaning of a word ?

eg for this writer a personal definition of the meaning of a word, to the end of personal clarity, should be a :

- concise: as using as few words as possible
 - precise: as being as unambiguous as possible
 - exhaustive: as including all relevant instances and excluding any others and
 - reductive: as in using no words as or more complex than the word being defined;
- of that personal phenomenological category

-That is, if the category so defined; includes inadmissible experience or excludes admissible experience for that person, it is false ! So a tentative falsifiable phenomenological hypothesis, describing (actually prescribing) the phenomenological category which is the meaning or referent of the word as a material symbol ; for that person.

Thus to the end of personal clarity, NOT an arbitrary construction, serving some current idiosyncratic purpose; as seems to be the suggestion in some philosophical literature, where personal definitions of word meaning can seem to be free constructions "it all depends how you define"

-The whole activity of enquiring into an accurate definition; is then considered as not different from ontological enquiry. That is the definition by describing one's meaning as prescription of its phenomenological category (if accurate), makes clear what it is and often more importantly what it isn't.

- That the ontological knowledge described in that definition, is what is recognised when 'understanding' in its second more profound sense is claimed, by a person !

eg "I understand what you are saying" might mean no more than " I can de-articulate you sentence to recover your meaning" but " I now understand 'violence '" might mean " I now see the nature of 'violence'"

But there is no universal agreement about this; many would regard the personal definition of the meaning of a word; as no more than an idiosyncratic description of that category ; or they might regard such a definition as irrelevant because they would consider etymologically that the meaning is historically fixed. Some would even doubt the general possibility of definition of word meaning in any form eg Wittgenstein famously remarked in Tractatus that "word meaning is defined by context" ; where he gives the example of the word 'game', as "undefinable". Whereas for this writer many words have multiple usages; each at least potentially definable and the word 'game' is simply one with many different usages; which yes, are selected by context; but all of which are definable and whilst there is agreement that definition of words using other words, must entail some being primitive undefined ones , if an infinite regress is to be avoided; good personal definitions are considered possible, useful and urgent.

So this writer's 'demographic of communication' (call it that) is reduced still further;

BUT IF SO

- a framework for theories and problems of discourse, lexicography and translation

6/ Is there an agreement regarding the 'ontological nature' and possibility of lexicographic definitions of the meanings of a word ?

eg for this writer lexicographic definitions of a word's meanings are considered social linguistic artefacts, which to the end of clear communication within a particular demographic, should reflect the currently most popular personal definition, in that particular demographic. which implies that the process of construction of the lexicographic definition of a usage of a word; should be a survey or at least sampling of such definitions ordered by popularity.

The implication being that lexicographic, definitions:

-are considered possible, necessary and urgent and

- should also aspire to being current, "concise, precise, exhaustive and reductive"; notice the implication that a purpose of a lexicographic definition, to the end of clear social communication of meaning, should be to capture current usage, rather than historical or etymological usage. thus

-one should not uncritically accept, the definition provided by a particular publisher, merely on the basis of their reputation

Further; to the end of clear communication, within a group, personal definitions should be identical or at least consistent with common 'good' lexicographic definitions of the word; as above ..

But there is no universal agreement about this; many would contend a lexicographic definition should simply reflect original historic or etymological usage, which they consider 'correct'.

- the difficulty and/or disinterest of linguistics in this matter, seems to be reflected in a general absence across dictionaries, of a word meaning 'the business of constructing lexicographic definitions'. Although one can find a minority usage "[lexigraphy]: "1 : the art or practice of defining words" from

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/lexigraphy>.

Of course the more general business of gathering of words and compilation of dictionaries;

[lexicography]; (Concise Oxford): "Dictionary-making" has wide currency. But to judge from the preface to the Oxford Concise even the business of lexicography seems to be an entirely proprietary one, unconstrained by linguistics !

So this writer's 'demographic of communication' (call it that) is reduced still further;

BUT IF SO

7/Is there an agreement regarding the 'ontological nature' and possibility of translation of a meaning of a word ?

eg for this writer if a lexicographic definition of a meaning of a word as in 6/ above exists in language A and reliable translations of its constituent words in language B exist, then if that translated definition corresponds to a definition of a meaning of a word in language B; we can robustly translate, that is identify a word in language A, with another having the same meaning in B.

Now each of those seven successively more restrictive components of the speaker's 'language mode', is actually a choice from a set of real options. If it was a binary choice this defines a minimum of $2^7 = 128$ modes, actually there are many more than two choices for most of those options. Each such final mode may entail a different theory of dictionaries and a different theory of translation; including for example denial of the general possibility of lexicographic definition and translation ! As mentioned, Wittgenstein a Logical Positivist would certainly not have shared all seven options of the writer above. . . How he regarded lexicographic definitions is not stated.

Overall the theory predicts that as semantic difficulty of a subject increases the demographic with whom one can converse clearly, will reduce. Now it is not contended that any of those choices are compulsory or more advantageous than others, merely that to the extent that the entirety of a language mode is shared, a speaker's communication will be clearer; this does not of course imply agreement.. In fact in this theory in its current form; even the ordering and number of those choices is tentative, although the above number does seem minimal.

-