



Buddhist Conception of Language and Reality

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Abstract:

Language and reality study under the language philosophy, which can be defined as the study of language. It studies the nature of language, origin of the language, meaning in use, its relationship between language users and the reality of the world and cognition. Simply, language philosophy can be defined as the study that explores the interconnection between language and reality. There are many views that support the idea, which says that the language can represent the reality and the language cannot represent the reality. Many philosophers and religious thinkers have answered to this philosophical issue.

Keywords: *Language, Reality, philosophy, language and Religious*

1. Introduction

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The Buddha's use of Language Language is the prominent achievement of human thinking process. According to the Lord Buddha, language does not merely use to communicate with the other human beings, but also for gaining the perceptual knowledge, conceptual analysis and for freedom of thinking. Lord Buddha has used Māgadhiya language or in other words, Pāli language was prominent at that time than the other languages. For that, Pāli language is used when composing Dhammapada, which consist the lord Buddha's teachings. In Buddhism, Sanskrit language has widely used along with Pāli language. Mainly, the Buddha has used a wide range of terms in order to describe language in a general sense. The Buddha used various types of terms to highlight different functions of language "as sound (sadda), word (akkhara, vacana), concept (saṅkhā, paññatti, dhammā), synonym (adhivacana, vevacana), name (nāma), term (pada) and grammar (ākāra, veyyākara)".

The lord Buddha has explained the way to use language properly in a stanza in Mahāvaggapāli. ii It says that there are several components of a language. The origin, core level and the culmination of a language should be auspicious, meaningful, consists with pure characters and a language should be full-grown. The communicator should be able to communicate language and the idea though the pronunciation to the meaning. The Buddha was an excellent communicator who used language in its real sense. For that, some words like vadantaṅvaro and maṅjussaro which means the word for silver-tongued is used to define the Lord Buddha. The Buddha expressed a wide range of dialectical terms in the Araṇyavibhaṅga sutta (Discourse on the analysis of non-conflict). The Buddha used a wide range of synonyms in order to mention the tern 'bowl' as pāti, patta, vita, sarvāva, dhāropa, pon and piṣīla.

The Buddha does not differentiate the meaning of these terms.ⁱⁱⁱ The Buddha wanted his disciples to take into consideration the purpose of the object without grasping the ultimate meaning of a particular concept. The Buddha does not merely pay his attention to the words when sermonizing discourses. Mainly, the Buddha paid his attention to the meanings of words. For that, the Buddha is named as *asattaññu*. The Buddha was able to make confabulations even with the people who were belong to other religions. It is stated as ‘*sammodanīyañ kathañ sārānīyañ*’. ^{iv} In *Brahmajāla sutta*, the Buddha is called as *atthajāla*, *dhammajāla*, *ditthijāla* and *anuttarasāṅgāmaṅvijaya*.

In addition, there are several characteristics in the *papañca sudanī* that is used to define the language of the lord Buddha. They are, “*vissattha* (clear) and *mañju* (sweet), *viññeiya* (easily understandable), *savanīya* (constantly listenable), *avisāri* (non-spreaded), *biṇḍu* (consolidated), *gambhīra* (deep), *ninnāda* (reverberated)”. Language plays a key role in Buddhism. In the *vāda sutta* of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, it is mentioned that there are four types of people. They are, (1) The person who knows the meaning (2) The person who knows only the words (3) The person who knows neither meaning nor words (4) The person who knows both meaning and words Among the above-mentioned types, the lord Buddha admired the people who are belong to the fourth type because knowing either words or meaning would be useless and will not be able to understand things.

The Buddha has used three techniques when preaching dhamma. They are *pariyāya deśanā*, *sandhāya deśanā* and *sabhāva deśanā*. *Pariyāya deśanā* used to give a meaning. To illustrate, the Buddha used the term *patavi* in order to identify the place where human being live. In the *Sandhāya deśanā* the Buddha used similar words to describe other words. For instance, the Buddha used the terms as *manussa loka* and *idha loka* in order to refer the earth. *Sabhāva deśanā* refers to indicate one entity which consists a one meaning. Furthermore, the talks that the Buddha delivered can be listed as following. They are *dāna katañ*, *sīla katañ*, *sagga katañ*, *kāmānañ ādīnavañ ocārañ*, *saṅkilesañ* and *nekkhamme ca ānisaṅsañ*.

Reality in Buddhism The term reality can be defined as the genuine, truthful, reliable things, which are the opposites of fake, illusion, untrustworthy and counterfeit. Reality exists as *satya*, which is defined as ‘really existing’ and it, is translated as reality or truth. In Buddhism, reality is called as ‘*dharma*’, which refers to indicate the natural laws. The etymology of the word is *yathā-bhuta* which can be defined as the reality as it is. Truth can be defined as the right reflection of the reality in thought. It is mentioned that, “the true correct, reflection of reality in thought, which is ultimately verified by the criterion of practice. The characteristic of truth is applied to thoughts and not to things themselves or the means of their linguistic expression”. It is applicable to thoughts. However, it is not applicable to things in themselves and linguistically usage. *Abhayarājakumāra sutta* has explained that statements are able to be true or false, pleasant or unpleasant and useful or useless. The term truth is used in accordance with reality or evidential facts. There can be seen two types of directions of fit. One is word-to-world direction, which says that language can reflect the reality and the other one is world-to-word direction that says language is able to change the reality. To illustrate, if we take the following sentence ‘there is a dog under the table’, then we can accept it as a true statement when it fits with the external world and the state of affairs of the world and when it do not corresponds with the reality we should take it as a wrong statement. The word ‘*satya*’ is “imperishable. Buddhism has introduced it as a quality that should be necessarily practiced and as an eternal quality”.^x In the *Sutta Nipāta* it has mentined that people should only speak pleasant words instead of rough words that would verbally harm others. There are some types of stories, which are named as ‘childish talk’ (*tiracchanakathā*).^{xi} They consists with different types of stories on robbers, war, villages etc. moreover, “these stories are depicted in the *Samyutta Nikaya* as inferior objects that hamper the realization of *Nibbana*”^{xii} Furthermore, the Buddha has emphasized three stages that can be used in the process of the realization of the truth. They are, 1. *Saccānuṛkkhana-* prevention of truth 2. *Saccānubodha-* discovery of truth 3. *Saccānuṅgāma-* attainment of truth. The first stage is a preliminary stage, which constructs only a statement without

any justification. Second and third steps are required to have cognitive and high intellectual capacity. According to the Buddha, people get wrong interpretations on the two truths, which are called as 'the conventional (sammuti) and ultimate (paramattha) and make contradictions with Buddhism. "The ordinary language that utilizes substantialist ideas like 'I', 'my self', 'person', 'self' and 'soul,' while nitattha is taken to be the discourses where the Buddha emphasizes impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-substantiality that reduce those concepts to their ultimate constituents like the aggregates." Moreover, the Buddha used conventional words, which were accepted by the ordinary people though they are not representing the reality. For instance, words like tree, person, chair, and house are conventional words, which are used by the ordinary people in order to use to identify something. These words are called as paññatti and sañketa in Pāli language because they are used to describe the things as symbols for the things they see. There occurs a contradiction when using the words, which are related to the ultimate truth in Buddhism instead of the commonly accepted conventional world.

2. Review of Literature

Kalupahana. J. David, (1999) The relation between language and reality has been interpreted and understood by the Buddhist texts and traditions in many ways. The Buddha looked upon language as an activity.

Williams, (1981) According to Vaibhāṣikas these dharmas have substantial existence (dravyasat) or inherent existence (svabhāva) and are ultimate truths (paramārtha satya). In other words, the conditioned dharmas are the real features of the world that exist independently of language but can be described accurately by it. In contrast to this, things that are formed out of these dharmas are said to have conceptual or nominal existence (prajñaptisat), to be conventional truths known as saṃvṛtisatya and to have no inherent existence.

Warder. A. K., (1971) The former identify the ultimately real elements, that is, the dharmas. They are not contradicted (avisamvādaka) by reality. In contrast to this, the concepts or names that are non-occurring have conceptual or nominal objects such as 'being', 'person', 'I', 'table', 'chair' and so forth. They are not ultimately true but are in conformity to the linguistic usages of the world in everyday language.

3. Methodology

The method used in this paper is a descriptive-evaluative method. The study is mainly based on overviews. It is purely supported by secondary source of data i.e. books, journals, articles and internet.

3.1 Results and Discussion

Relationship between language and reality in Buddhism The main question that arises with language is that whether language is able to define all the things in the world as they are. Thus, "the difficulties which faced the Buddha in the task of setting out his novel teachings could have been numerous and among these difficulties one was certainly the poverty of language available to convey the precise meanings which he had in mind". Suppose that there is a person who never tasted anything, which consist sweetness or bitterness, and even he or she does not know the words that refer to express sweetness or bitterness. We may try to explain sweetness or bitterness by using examples, words, arguments, logic and arguments that are available according to the context of the knowledge and experience. However, that particular person would not be able to understand the bitterness or sweetness. He will probably gasp something on that taste. However, that idea would not be enough to get a clear understanding on the taste and that idea would not be completed. Therefore, the reason behind that incident was the barrier of language. The particular person "hasn't got the words in his possession that carries the same meaning which you try to convey". Moreover, when we fail to understand the reality or the real taste though we made some efforts, we should focus on another technique. To illustrate,

when you failed “to explain the taste of a lump of sugar using the language known to you without the word sweet”, then you are able tested out to another technique. For that, we can give some sugar to eat and experience the taste of sugar. The Buddha named it as ‘experiential understanding’. The Buddha has discovered many things that were not known before. Therefore, there were no words in usage in the contemporary society to the Buddha lived that he can use. The highest attainment of Buddhism is nirvana. However, it is problematic that whether nirvana is expressible or inexpressible by using language.

In Theravada tradition, nirvana is defined as getting rid of greed, hatred, and delusion by seeing the impermanence of everything and by seeing things as they really are. When that Buddha attains the enlightenment, he knew this ultimate truth and it is expressible by the words of the enlightened people. However, if we describe the above-mentioned details with the following example, it will be easy to indicate how language functions because experiences are subjective and binned up with emotions. For instance, it is difficult to express how it feels love for me to another person because it tights up with emotions and feelings and the limitations of language. That experience can be different from one person to another person since that is a subjective experience. Suppose that if person A expresses things that how he feels about love to the person B, then the person A will realize that the words are not enough to describe that feeling. Therefore, there are limitations of language. The major thing is if person A is experienced something, but person B is not experienced that, then it will be useless to attempt to describe my experience to B because he will not grasp the experience although it is experienced by language. When this example directs to the final goal of Buddhism; nirvāna, it is a subjective dimension and it can be felt only to the enlightened people. However, entirely communicating it into others who are not enlightened would be difficult. Therefore, words will fail to convey the real message of the enlightened person.

4. Conclusion

According to the above-mentioned explanations, it can be stated that the relationship between language and reality has a broad context. The Buddha is also faced some difficulties when preaching dhamma with the existed language in the Buddha’s time. The Buddha has mentioned not to tell lies even in the five precepts because the Buddha has also admitted that language does not represent reality all the time. The main problem occurs when people do not speak truth and when they misinterpret the things in the reality. It would be able to misguide others. Another issue of language is not enough to explain what they feel or other experiences. It is true that language can transmitted some kind of an idea to the receiver. However, language cannot give complete understanding on such things. In contrast, there are no other proper communicational methods that can be used instead of using language. For that the Buddha also used language to convey dhamma by making some new words in order to express the real Buddhist teaching. Language can be a represent of the reality. Nevertheless, it does not work as the same in all the time. There can be misrepresentations, misusages, and misinterpretations of the language. The most important thing is people define the relationship between language and reality according to their definition on the nature of language and the nature of reality. There is no common agreement on the relationship between the language and reality. For that, the relationship between the language and reality is remains as a philosophical question. It is true that there is a relationship between language and reality when it takes with reference to Buddhist teachings. However, representing reality by using language is not an easy task as there are limitations of the language.

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