

# **Ibadan Distance Learning Centre Series**

**PHI 208**

## **Philosophy, Language and Communication**

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## **GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND COURSE OBJECTIVE**

PHI 208 attempts to achieve a significant relationship between philosophy, language and communication. While the connection between language and communication may be a bit obvious to the discerning, that between philosophy and language or between philosophy and communication may not be immediately derivable. The connection between the three concepts is very crucial to the survival and flourishing of the human society. This is because the concept of the society intrinsically assumes that human beings must communicate with language in order to even begin to understand one another. In the long run, as we will see in the course of the lectures, philosophy itself contributes immensely to our quest for adequate understanding.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Lecture One: **On Philosophy, Language and Communication**

Lecture Two: **Communication and the Idea of Human Society**

Lecture Three: **Philosophy, Language and Human Knowledge**

Lecture Four: **Philosophy, Concepts and Human Language**

Lecture Five: **The Idea of Conceptual Scheme**

Lecture Six: **Language and Cultural Identity**

Lecture Seven: **Communication and the Nature of Understanding**

Lecture Eight: **The Problem of Meaning**

Lecture Nine: **Philosophy, Language and National Development**

## **LECTURE ONE**

### **ON THE INTERCONNECTION BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY, LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION**

#### **Introduction**

In this first lecture, we will attempt to first a significant connection between the concepts of philosophy, language and communication that will serve as the basis for all the other things we will say in the succeeding lectures. Without first establishing this interconnection, then it becomes impossible to even understand what the course itself is all about.

#### **Objectives:**

At the end of the lecture, the student should be able to significantly:

1. improve his/her understanding of what philosophy is all about;
2. further understand the relationship that exist between the act of philosophising and living in the society;
3. describe adequately the role of human communication in philosophising and in the society.

#### **Pre-Test**

1. What, in your own opinion, is the significance of language to human beings?
2. How does philosophy relate with language?
3. In what sense is human communication relevant for human survival?

## CONTENT

After seeing the title of this first lecture, you may likely be wondering what the connection could be between philosophy, language and communication. Of course, language and communication are conceptual relatives. One is almost impossible without the other. For instance, we all seem to know that one of the most significant functions of language is to facilitate communication and interpersonal relationship in the society. Thus, without language and communication, even the very basis of human society is undermined. In this lecture, we want to demonstrate the relationship that philosophy as a human endeavour has with language, a unique human achievement, in the generation of communication.

Philosophy derives from the Greek word *philosophia* which translates as the “love of wisdom”. As the love of wisdom, philosophy provides deep insight into the human condition. These insights that philosophy provides serve as guide to actions in a world filled with ups and downs. The wisdom that philosophy searches for is a comprehensive set of beliefs and ideas that acts as a general vision or perspective about the universe, a person’s place in the universe, and the possible goals and objectives a person may productively pursue in the universe. Essentially therefore, philosophy seeks to promote human understanding. But that understanding is not for understanding sake. Philosophy helps human beings to understand the universe and the human condition, and in turn that understanding is brought to bear on human actions. In other words, an action becomes a meaningful one to the extent that it results from an adequate understanding of the human condition and it leads to actions that enable man to cope with the uncertainties of the universe and live a meaningful life. The survival of the human person is therefore directly tied to the idea of human understanding.

Language and communication are equally essential for human survival in the sense that both are channel for promoting human understanding. Language, simply defined, is a system of signs and symbols that stand for something external to the signs/symbols and facilitate verbal exchange among humans. It is automatically a complex system of communication through those signs and symbols. This system of communication has several dimensions that enable the communication process. Language could be seen as available sound (phonetics: the study of speech production and of the total resources of sound available for speech communication), as organised sound (phonology: the study of the pattern of speech sound used in particular

languages), or as grammar (the study of the signs and the internal relationship between them). Language could also refer either to the spoken or the written medium (as text or conversation). Human language becomes essential to the extent that it facilitates, either as written or spoken signs and symbols, the interaction among humans, and between humans and their environment.

The communication that language enables is a process that involves the definition and transference of meaning or thought content among people who have a history of communicative commonality. This process involves a sender, a message and a receiver who gives a feedback through a successful decoding of the meaning in the message. There are several models and theories that have been proposed as explaining adequately this communication process. The most common is called the transmission model (TM). This standard view of communication sees it as a means of sending and receiving information. In other words, a message is sent from a sender through a particular channel to a receiver. Following the critique of this standard model, other models—like the Sender-Message-Channel-Receiver Model (SMCR), the transactional model, and the coregulation model—were presented to better elaborate the essence of human communication.

Whatever model is used, the significant thing in language as communication is the meaning that is transferred and the understanding that is fostered. Communication in the first place is the attempt to interact with nature in the sense of understanding those aspects of nature that are conducive to human survival and those aspects that are dangerous. In the second place, communication is also crucial to cooperation and solidarity among human beings especially if they are to adequately come to terms with the complexity of the universe.

It becomes obvious, so far, that philosophy, language and communication interact or are interconnected to facilitate human understanding and in the final analysis, human survival. Philosophy, as we have argued, is primarily concerned with the construction of worldview and the critical investigation of those ideas, beliefs and values that go into the formulation of that worldview. In other words, philosophy is concerned ultimately with the attempt to understand the universe and the place of man in it. Human communication through language enables human understanding through the transmission of the knowledge we derive from this reflection to others.

We have been talking about human understanding as if it is a concept that is unproblematic. Let us next consider this concept that is so crucial to philosophy and language as communication.

### **The Idea of Human Understanding**

The urge to understand anything seems almost natural for all humans. We make every attempt to come to term with the environment around by searching for a sense of them that goes beyond just seeking for information or knowledge (Mason, 2003: 1). There are two significant questions that could facilitate our understanding of the concept of understanding. These questions are: (a) What are those things that we seek to understand? (b) How do we go about understanding these things? In other words, the best way to go about tackling the meaning of understanding is to, first, have an idea of those things we attempt to understand and then go on to examine how we use the word in ordinary language.

There are several things that keep us wondering in life. There are also several things we assume to understand, but later realise that we actually don't. There are many instances when we make statements like "I thought I understood so and so, but I really don't." Thus, the idea of understanding has bearing on so many areas of our lives. Let's examine some of these areas briefly.

- a. The first most significant and most intimate subject of understanding is *ourselves*. I am seriously interested in understanding myself—my desires, attitudes, aspirations, being, and so on. Such a self-understanding is not restricted to a set of information about me: that I'm a man, a lecturer, 30 years old, an orphan, a Distance Learner, etc. It is a critical subject because there are many times we find ourselves doing things that we uncritically see as not being in our character. In other words, there are many times when we surprise ourselves because we did things we never thought we are capable of either negative or positive. What other people say about me may be very important, but does not form a part of self-understanding.
- b. Following from the above, another crucial subject for understanding that makes the concept a difficult one is understanding *other people*. This type of understanding is as difficult as self-understanding. It is more so because there are so many things that hang

upon an understanding of those whose stories intersect our own. The problem is really that our supposed understanding of others has been subjected to shifting circumstances that conflict with our intuition about, say, a particular person. Thus, statements like “s/he was so high in my opinion until...”

- c. A corollary of understanding other people is that of understanding *people in the past*. This involves an attempt to understand a person and the person’s past motives, intentions and desires. What makes this dimension of understanding difficult is that what we seek to understand already lies in the past, far away from immediate recall.
- d. We also attempt to understand *cultures and societies* that are different from ours. There are so many cultural practices and beliefs that would, in the light of our own cultures, appear troubling, laughable and even barbaric. Yet, these practices may be meaningful in their own lights. Understanding these cultures implies an attempt to get into their own light in order to see what they see.
- e. Another subject of understanding is *religions*. This is particularly critical because religion constitutes the cause of most conflicts especially in the Nigerian state. Remember, for instance, a religious crisis in Nigeria sparked by an insensitive cartoon about Prophet Mohammed. The understanding required by religions is made difficult because religious beliefs, symbols and artefacts are usually buried under a whole load of religious terms, concepts, rites, symbolisms, doctrines, mysteries, rationality and so on that make explanation herculean. For instance, it is still a difficult thing for non-initiates to understand the Eucharist and the principle of transubstantiation.
- f. The *law* is another area where people struggle for understanding. This involves the explanation and interpretation of legal codes, principles, terms and precedents. Ardent followers of the Nigerian political history would remember the legal debate that attended the attempt to interpret the idea of “2 1/3 majority” in the Nigerian House of Assembly in the second republic. According to Mason, law “shares with personal and social understanding a reading of hidden or lost intentions and meanings, and also a characteristic indeterminacy about correctness” (2003: 11). Understanding a law or a legal code requires not only deciding on what constitutes a right interpretation, but also on the criteria for achieving a right interpretation.

- g. The same kind of problem that an understanding of law faces could also be faced by the attempt to understand *texts*. The complexity does not diminish if the text is in a person's language or in another language. So much confusion, for instance, has attended the precise understanding of, say, the Bible. This is so for texts because there is an ongoing attempt to arrive at the intention or meaning intended by the author of the text. A particular story like Shakespeare's *Hamlet* or Achebe's *Madman* presents a problem of grasping the textual or narrative sense of the work. Again, this rides on the significance that one places on authorial intention embedded in the text.

There are so many other issues that are the subjects of understanding. People attempt to understand nature, mathematics, arts, moral values, language, economics, animal behaviour, and so on. These various subjects of understanding, it would seem, demand different means of understanding. If this is so, then the question is how do we understand at all? This takes us to the second question we intend to answer: How do we understand these subjects? The Encarta Dictionary sees Understanding as "(a) the ability to perceive and explain the meaning or the nature of somebody or something; the knowledge of a particular subject, area, or situation; somebody's interpretation of something, or a belief or opinion based on an interpretation of or inference from something; a sympathetic, empathetic, or a tolerant recognition of somebody's else nature or situation." This is one way of addressing the meaning of the concept of understanding.

The second is to see how we use the term in everyday conversation. The following statements reflect some of the manners in which we use the "understanding" in ordinary language:

1. We don't understand each other
2. The behaviour of animals is a difficult thing to understand
3. I've been trying to understand our presidents' style of leadership
4. The University authority does not seem to understand the plight of Distance Learners
5. She seems to understand her husband
6. He understands the Internet

These various usages of the concept of understanding touches on so many other ideas that may help us in coming to term with the meaning of understanding. First, the dictionary raises such concepts like knowledge, interpretation, empathy/sympathy, and explanation as possible synonyms for understanding. In other words, for instance, when we understand anything, we are attempting an explanation for it. One understands the weather, say, if one can offer an explanation of its features. On the other hand, if I make a statement like “It was my understanding that the book is philosophical”, I am referring to my interpretation of the book. Understanding becomes empathy in a statement like (4) above. Statements 1, 2 and 3 translate understanding as an insight into a situation. Statement 6 considers understanding as the possession of the skills necessary to do something.

Mason explains these concepts in terms of models of understanding which grounds our understanding of understanding. Let’s consider each.

- (a) Understanding can be seen as a form of *visual representation*. This is what it means to say “I see that you mean about the guy”. This implies that to understand is to have a form of mental picture of the subject of understanding. The immediate problem is (a) does all understanding require a form of seeing? (b) Isn’t it possible that one can see without achieving understanding at all?
- (b) Understanding is also perceived as *capacity*; to understand is to possess the ability to do something. This comes to mind in a statement like “I understand Igbo” or “I understand the computer”. Thus, if I say I understand Igbo but could respond intelligently to questions in that language or write intelligently in it, then we can’t say I really understand it. However, is it enough that to understand language, for instance, all I must have are linguistic capacities? In a famous thought experiment John Searle, an American philosopher, proposes an argument that seeks to prove that the ability to stimulate an intelligent conversation in any language does not really prove that one *understands* that language. Imagine that I am in a room with a computer programme which affords me the opportunity to Chinese characters in response to other people outside the room. Thus, when they ask me a question in Chinese, I’m able to manipulate the Chinese characters with the aid of the computer programme and respond intelligently. Those outside the

room could believe that I understand Chinese but do I really understand it? And again, just like the case of visual representation, does all understanding require a form of capacity?

- (c) Another model of understanding is *interpretation*. In this sense, to understand anything is to be able to interpret or exhumate its sense. The problem with this is that the act of interpreting does not rely on the same immediateness that we see in the visual imagery. To interpret suggests rather an intermediate level between being aware of something and understanding it.
- (d) Understanding could also be taken to mean *scientific understanding*, a form of explanation in a lawlike form. One understands the movement of the planets as a result of the explanatory laws that makes it intelligible. To understand anything therefore is to understand the rules guiding the behaviour of that thing. Like interpretation, this model describes understanding at the cost of directness. In other words, it seems that to understand is *first* to explain. What then is the relationship between explanation and understanding?
- (e) One could also take understanding to mean *knowledge* or *education*. While understanding as knowledge may involve the ability to gather the relevant facts about something or somebody; education requires “grasping, seeing the point, making connections, consolidating” (Mason, 2003: 31). Educational understanding implies reordering or reappraising what is already known by way of facts rather than the acquisition of new facts.
- (f) One could also appropriate the model of understanding as an *intuitive or mystical illumination*. To understand in this context is to possess a subjective or personal awareness or insight or intuition of the sense of a thing; a sudden flash of understanding. However, since this model is fundamentally subjective, it makes it difficult to contest any claim of understanding. This is because it lacks the objectiveness of knowledge as understanding.
- (g) Similar to the above is the model of understanding as *sympathy* or *empathy*. This refers to some subjective capacity to step into the situation of another person. But if understanding is, *ab initio*, taken as an intellectual quality, would such an obviously emotional quality as sympathy qualify? This is apart from the problem of being too subjective.

The problem, therefore, is whether any of these concepts subsume the idea of understanding totally? In other words, can we say any of these concepts suffice as the sufficient definition of understanding? What seems plausible from the above discussion of the models is that explanation, empathy, interpretation, insight and knowledge could all be regarded as necessary conditions for achieving understanding of anything. Seeking for a sufficient condition or a general theory of understanding may be too far-fetched. The most that can be done in defining understanding is to see it operationally as a kind of deeper comprehension that shows how the various elements of thing hang together. This definition would also participate in the special circumstance of what is to be understood.

### **Summary**

In this lecture, we described the connection that exists between philosophy, language and communication. We found this connection in the idea of human understanding. In other words, the three concepts are crucial because they enable humans to achieve the understanding not only of their environment, but also of fellow human beings. Philosophy is critical in this process because it allow for a critical analysis of our beliefs, ideas, thoughts; in fact, our worldviews. A worldview in this context is an attempt to draw a large picture of the nature of the universe, the nature of the human person, the relationship that such a human person can have with the universe, and the kind of goals such a person can pursue in such a universe. To have a worldview is therefore to achieve some form of understanding of the world. On the other hand, language as a system of signs and symbols exists solely for communicative purpose. And communication's purpose is the transference of thought, idea, meaning and information from one person to another. Its fundamental basis is also to achieve understanding.

Since understanding is crucial to human survival, we also examine critically the meaning of understanding through two questions: What do we seek to understand? How do we achieve understanding? We then went on to examine these questions by itemising those subjects of understanding like oneself, other people, other cultures, text and stories, religions, laws, and so on. We also outlined the meaning of understanding as (scientific) explanation, as knowledge, as interpretation, as insight, as education, as capacity, as mystical illumination and as sympathy.

### **Post-Test**

1. In what sense do you think philosophy aids human understanding?
2. How does understanding ensure human survival?
3. Outline about five things, apart from the ones already outlined in the preceding lecture, that constitute the subject of understanding.
4. Out of all the meanings of understanding considered, which do you think is most plausible?
5. What is human communication?

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## **LECTURE TWO**

### **COMMUNICATION AND THE IDEA OF HUMAN SOCIETY**

#### **Introduction**

In this lecture, we will further clarify the meaning of human communication. This will then lead us to the analysis of the relationship between communication as a specific human creation and the society as another unique human creation. What is it about human communication that makes the human society possible?

#### **Objectives**

At the end of this lecture, the student should be able to do the following:

1. Understand the meaning of communication as a human fabrication;
2. Understand the relationship between communication and the evolution of human society;
3. Explain how the human society is practically impossible without communication.

#### **Pre-Test**

1. In what sense is the destiny of man tied to language?
2. Discuss how communication gave rise to human bonding.
3. What is the meaning of society?

## CONTENT

Let us begin this lecture by considering one of the wonders of nature—the social animals: bees, termites, ants. These social animals have fascinated us simply because of what we consider to be their orderly and near-human way of life. We watch them go about their daily “business” of survival in much the same way we do: They mate; collect; store; build; fight intruders; protect their territory; and so on. We say they are *social* because of the feature of organisation and relationship we perceive in their midst.

However, to be social is a uniquely human characteristic that goes beyond the capacity to manage interaction. The word ‘social’ comes from the Latin *socialis* and the root *socius* which translates as “companion”. From this, we can begin to compare the bee society or the ant society with the human society. In the first place, while association in the animal society is characterised by mindlessness and mechanical relationship, the human society is purposive. It will not do to say that an ant is also purposive because it pursues a particular act. Purpose in this sense relates to the behaviour that is motivated by a system of goals, values and objectives. This tells us that the idea of society goes beyond the mere idea of living together communally, organisational behaviour and interaction.

The first characteristic of a society is that it is guided by social action. According to Michael Ryan, in the *Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, a social action occurs “when thought processes intervene between a stimulus, an actor, and their subsequent response. In other words, it is a process whereby an individual attaches a subjective meaning to his or her action” (2005: 714). This thoughtfulness is contrasted to a mechanical and reactive behaviour involving responding to a stimulus without any thought process involved. From this point, we can begin to derive many ideas about the human society. In the first place, purposive action on the part of individuals leads to social cooperation. The human society, according to Wikipedia, refers to (a) a group of people related to each other through persistent relations like social status, roles and social networks; or (b) a large social grouping that shares the same geographical territory and is subject to the same political authority and dominant cultural expectations. In other words, this group of people that form the society interact in a space characterised by a pattern of social relations between individuals bounded by social institutions and norms. Roger Scruton defines a

society as “any aggregate of individual human beings who interact in a systematic way, so as to determine the criteria of membership” (2007: 649).

This human grouping depends on social interaction of the individuals who are committed to living within the same geographical location and sharing the same goals and values. This interaction is a process of mutual influence and reciprocity from one individual to the other. According to Spencer Cahill, social interaction is simply the “process through which two or more social actors reciprocally influence one another’s actions” (2005: 247). It should be obvious by now the kind of role that human communication would play in this interactive arrangement. How is it possible, for instance, that two cars coming on opposite sides of the road would not consistently hit each other? Or, that a man would not always grab a girl because he feels like having sex? In other words, what is it about our social interaction that makes social order possible? This is made possible in a context in which the actions of individuals are made understandable to other individuals. And this is done when those actions are brought under specific rules of conduct mutually understood by everybody concerned. Thus, when two car drivers are approaching each other, they avoid a head on collision because both understand the rules of driving. Human language therefore serves as the channel through which the meaning of social conduct and behaviour are passed from one individual and group to other.

The preceding analysis reveals that communication is critical to the survival of human society. In the essay, “Language and the Destiny of Man,” Chinua Achebe makes the case that language was so important in the evolution of man and the society that both would have been overcome by violence and bestiality had language not aided human communication (1990: 30). Language as communication, according to him, became man’s instrument for challenging the perilous fate imposed by nature. If you doubt this, assume that we all in the society cannot talk! He cites an example: imagine, before the advent of language, that a man enters a cave without the slightest cue that someone else was there already. The “landlord” was just consuming a meal. What do you think would happen? The first hint (and may be the last) the newcomer may be given would likely be a huge stone hurled at his head. Now, imagine that the “landlord” possesses the capacity to speak and communicate. Rather than throwing the stone to warn the intruder about his presence, he could simply shout “get out of here, you fool!” That would have been sufficient to avert the violent confrontation. Thus, the point of Achebe is that without the

intervention of language, the evolution of the human society would not have become possible since the attempt would have dissolved in violence. Another trivial example cited by Achebe is the trouble that parents go through over a crying baby. Is it food s/he wants? Is s/he uncomfortable? Has something bitten him or her? Does s/he want to sleep? What does s/he want? All the mother could hope to do is attempt a trial and error procedure in the hope of hitting the cause of the strident cry (Ibid: 31). Assume, however, that the baby has the power of speech.

The example of the child without the capacity for speech again illustrates another important element in communication. The communication process serves as a significant factor that cements the various elements of the society. The words “community” and “communication” share the same root meaning which derives from the Latin word *communis* or “common”. This implies that communication within a society exists on the basis of common or shared values which the society holds. The community exists on the basis of the commonalities humans share together. Communication becomes possible in the first place because of these commonalities. When a child is born into a community, s/he is eventually socialised into these shared values and meanings that make understanding ultimately possible.

Ngugi wa Thiong’o divided language as communication into three categories. These categories are equally important in facilitating the survival of the human society. The first one is what Karl Marx calls the *language of real life*. This involves the relationship of communication people enter into in the process of wresting survival from nature. In other words, the language of real life derives from the evolution of a human society and the practical requirement necessary for cooperation in the production of basic needs of the society. To produce the means of survival through the practical confrontation with nature, there is the need to cooperate; and to cooperate effectively, human beings needed to fabricate a mode of communication that expresses the relationship between them (Ngugi, 1987: 13).

The second element of language as communication is *speech*. This is very crucial to the language of real life because it serves as the “verbal signpost [that] both reflect and aid communication or the relation established between human beings in the production of their means of life” (Ngugi, 1987: 14). In other words, it is speech as a system of verbal signs and symbols that put form to the relation of production the people have established to consolidate their survival. This element of speech mediates between an individual and others. The last

element of language as communication is the *written signs*. Again, this element imitates communication as speech. This is a much more recent development in the history of man, and played a less significant role human survival compared with communication with hand and communication with speech. Language is “a representation of sounds with visual symbols” (Ibid.).

The function of facilitating the transactions of society through the transmission of messages and ideas which communication makes possible is not only limited to the confines of the society. Communication not only ensure that what goes on in the community can easily be ascertained, understood and evaluated by all (Achebe, 1990: 33), it is also valuable across societies and across generations. *Within particular societies*, communication mediates between conflicting interests, values, preferences and so on. This could be, for instance, between two conflicting religious claims, or two cultural or ethnic interests. Such conflicting claims and interests may be become volatile in the absence of communication. *Across societies*, communication mediates between two different societies and their different worldviews or perspectives. If a society has an intolerant view about other societies, then it becomes impossible to avoid conflict between those two societies. *Across generations*, communication facilitates the transfer of values, traditions, customs and cultures from one generation to the other.

Thus, communication becomes an all-embracing and all-pervasive phenomenon. It is *all-embracing* because it is intrinsic to all human endeavours; and it is *all-pervasive* because it is involved in all human activities. This phenomenon can however be hijacked if certain values that makes it effective are neglected. These values include:

- ✚ *The value of clarity*: This involves communicating one’s ideas and messages in a manner that makes them easy for comprehension. In other words, the value of clarity requires that one says what one means and mean what one says. This is possible if a person is careful about the choice of words s/he wishes to use. It also involves being careful about the economy of words. This principle also requires that one shouldn’t use too many words where just a few will suffice. Too many words or a bad choice of concepts will only complicate the meaning of what a person intends to say. Consider a statement like: “Dancing and dancing when the song, which you do not even understand and which is

unrhymed, is already ended and laughing away at the infinitude of human suffering will lead in the eternal temporal scale to no fulfilling existential return.”

- ✚ *The value of truthfulness:* This factor ensures that when you communicate, you earn the trust of people who take your word for what it is. This implies that the person communicating should attempt to stay with the reality as much as possible. If trust is lost in communication, then there is no way the message transfer can be effective. If a person says “Of course, it is raining,” but the sun is shining, the communication process has been short-circuited.
- ✚ *The value of logicity:* in communicating, the person sending the message must also ensure that his or her message follows the minimum requirement of coherence, consistence and rationality. Inconsistent or contradictory messages will not ensure effective communication. For instance, if a person says to you: “I am on my way to the United States, but I’ll see you in ten minutes”, how will you react to that message?
- ✚ *The value of charity:* This value insists that in any communication process, those involved must assume that the people they are communicating with are as human as we are. Being charitable, that is, implies that we recognise the humanity in the others we are communicating with. There is an element of the Golden Rule involved here: Treat others the way you also want to be treated. Communication is not achieved if a sender assumes less about the humanity of the other person. For instance, one cannot hope to communicate meaningfully with an animal the same way one communicates with a human person.
- ✚ *The value of tolerance:* This value already assumes by the value of charity. This value recognises first that between the person sending a message and the other receiving it, there is a whole lot of differences. Communication cannot start, however, if these differences are not surmounted. Transcending such differences requires that those involved in the communication process are civilised. To illustrate this, one can refer to the stereotyping which characterise the human society. Stereotyping involves reducing a person or a particular ethnic culture to an over-simplified category. Thus, all igbos are seen as cheats, all Hausas are dirty and savage, all Yoruba are extravagant, and so on. Communicating with this mindset becomes impossible.

Finally, there are some other factors that could hinder effective communication. This includes power, wealth and the idol of dogmatism. *Power* essentially serves as the means for moderating the base human instinct and for promoting the values conducive to human progress. Power, in other words, moderates peace in the human society. On the other hand, power could also serve as an agent of intolerance and subjection that inhibits effective communication. *Wealth* ensures that money and valuables are necessary means to the end of happiness and fulfilment. Like power, this could also be employed toward an uncharitable and uncivilised greed that hinders cooperation and progress among people. Dogmatism—holding tenaciously to one’s point of view without attempting to see the sense in other’s point—ensures that communication does not even take off. Dogmatism, for example, precludes the use of rational arguments since the dogmatic person is unwillingly to consider any evidence against his or her perspective.

### **Summary**

This lecture examines in detail the meaning of communication and how the communication process is implicated in the evolution of the human society. We saw that society came into existence on the basis of social interaction and the existence of those common values and ideas and institutions. These common values not only developed as a result of the communicating effort of human beings relating together, they also facilitate further communication. This implies that communication is both all-embracing and all-pervasive. It is intrinsic to the entire idea of the human society. Communication and community even share the same etymological root in the Latin word *communis* meaning common. We then went on to analyse those factors and values that could jumpstart, or hinder, effective communication which ensures adequate understanding and rapport in the society. In the absence of these values, there is the likelihood that the human society may degenerate into violence. These values include the value of clarity, the value of truthfulness, the value of charity, the value of tolerance and the value of logicity.

### **Post-Test**

1. What is the human society?
2. In what sense is communication necessary for the evolution of society?
3. Explain the value of charity as a factor in effective communication.
4. What does shared meaning mean?
5. In what sense is it possible for society to collapse without understanding?

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## **LECTURE THREE**

### **PHILOSOPHY, LANGUAGE AND HUMAN KNOWLEDGE**

#### **Introduction**

This lecture will broaden the concept of knowledge as it relates to philosophy and language especially in the attempt to understand the universe. We will first examine the place of philosophy in the analysis of knowledge, and then go on to examine the function of language in the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge.

#### **Objectives:**

The students, at the end of this lecture, should be able to:

1. Understand what knowledge is, from a general and philosophical perspective;
2. Describe how language facilitate the dissemination of knowledge;
3. Explain how knowledge enable the understanding of the universe.

#### **Pre-Test**

1. What is knowledge?
2. How does a philosopher relate to the concept of knowledge?
3. In what ways is knowledge related to language?

## CONTENT

Thus far, we've been examining the various dimensions in which we can understand the relationship between philosophy, language and communication. In this lecture, we'll want to further expand this relationship by looking at the concept of knowledge. In other words, how does knowledge contribute to the role of philosophy in understanding the universe? What is the relationship of knowledge to the concept of concept? In what ways does language assist in the furtherance of human knowledge?

The philosopher's interest in the idea of knowledge is an enduring one. The branch of philosophy which explains this interest is called epistemology. Epistemology derives from the Greek two words: *episteme* (i.e. knowledge) and *logos* (i.e. theory or study). Thus, epistemology is the theory or the study of knowledge. The epistemologist is concerned with the meaning of what it means "to know" anything. When we claim the knowledge of, say, God, what are we talking about? When I say, "I know that I will pass PHI 208," what am I talking about? Is it possible to know anything with certainty? How do we know what we claim to know? These are some of the fundamental questions that interest the philosopher of knowledge.

The philosopher's interest in what constitute knowledge is justified by the fact that many people take the term "knowledge" or what it means "to know" for granted. For instance, we make statements like "I know that I will pass PHI 208", "I know that God exist", "I know that my future is secured", "I know my husband", "I know President Obama", "I know how to kill a pig", "Segun knows Lagos", "My teachers knows philosophy", and so on. In the first place, serious attention to these statements reveals that knowledge is often confused with other terms. If I say, for instance, "I know that God exist", is it not the case that I really meant to say "I believe that God exist"? In other words, I have actually confused "knowledge" with "belief". Secondly, what we often claim to know often turn out to be false. Again, consider another statement "I know President Obama". This statement assumes that the person making it is so intimately acquainted with Obama that s/he can conveniently predict every turn of Obama's personality. However, more often than not, we discover that people are not so predictable.

For the epistemologist, to say "I know that so and so" implies that what we claim to know must not turn out false. If I say "I know that I will pass PHI 208" and then eventually failed the

course, did I actually know that I will pass it when I made the statement? This interest in knowledge has led philosophers to search for adequate criteria of knowledge. In other words, what are the standards a person must fulfil before we can actually say the person knows that so and so? The standard answer to this question is that for a person to know so and so, such a person must fulfil three conditions. The first is that what the person claim to know must be true. This means that one can't truly claim to know what is false. The second condition is that the person must belief what s/he claims to know. It becomes a contradiction to say, for example, "I know that the sun is hot but I don't believe it". Lastly, the person must have a good reason for believing what he claims to know. A person can't just say "I know that so and so" without going further to give credible reasons for making that claim.

The overall implication of these three conditions is that *knowledge becomes justified true belief*. That is, knowledge is what we have good reasons for believing. Such a piece of knowledge is only justified when it is true or has its foundation in facts. This conception of knowledge—what is often called the *traditional definition of knowledge*—has become a significant problem in philosophy. For instance, philosophers ask the question: Does justified true belief constitute knowledge? In other words, are the three conditions really sufficient for claiming that a person "knows" something? For instance, they have argued that it is really possible to know something without actually believing it. Imagine that I was attending an interview and I was asked to state the date of the last eclipse of the sun. I was so dumbfounded by that technical question that I just blurted the next thing that came to my mind. And I got it without believing that I did! The other situation is that some philosophers have also argued that some form of knowledge is actually possible without justification. Consider the case of those who can reliably predict the rain with accuracy without actually being able to justify how they did it. This calls into question the idea of justification central to the traditional definition of knowledge.

The lesson of the disagreement with the traditional definition of knowledge is basically that, according to Scruton, we should draw a distinction between whether a person knows so and so, and whether a person has reason to justify his or her beliefs (1994: 321). The concept of knowledge derives its significance from its capacity to help us distinguish between which of our beliefs are reliable and which we can't depend on. This is has significant implication which

contributes to human survival and flourishing. What this means is that human beings can't hope to survive and make progress in this world if they can't differentiate between a reliable and unreliable beliefs; that is, if they can't ground their beliefs in facts. In other words, we cannot hope to take significant actions on our beliefs if we are not certain that we can trust those beliefs. To survive at all, I must be able to place a level of certainty on what I believe. I must be able to rely on these beliefs (Scruton, 1994: 325). It seems a fact that a person cannot make progress in life if s/he lives in perpetual doubt. In other words, doubt cannot lead to actions and judgments. Knowledge captures the environment and breaks it down to manageable facts and concepts that can assist the person in coming to term with the things around him or her.

In this regard, knowledge requires language for effective transmission. This is because a piece of knowledge is useless unless it is transferred to others. In this sense, language, according to Rita Conan, "confers some kind of cognitive advantages on human beings over other species." To make this statement requires that we understand the intimate connection between language and knowledge; knowledge and its growth are motivated by language. Just as we have seen, language becomes significant because it conveys knowledge and concepts. First, language and knowledge enable humans to properly understand and classify nature for the purpose of controlling it. The second advantage follows from the first: both enlarge the range of human possibilities through the understanding of nature we achieve. For instance, the process of abstraction allows us to take phenomena out of their immediate context and apply it to other contexts. To abstract, we take the common characteristics of several phenomena. Thirdly, language and knowledge provide a better means of organising human experience especially through conceptualisation. Finally, language also facilitates information storage and retrieval. This is very crucial in the growth and relevance of knowledge.

In the final analysis, knowledge is a function of language's capacity to divide reality into meaningful segments that makes understanding possible. Effective dissemination of knowledge is therefore only possible when effective communication has taken place.

### **Summary**

This lecture attempts to flesh out the relationship between philosophy, language and knowledge. We saw that philosophy is interested in knowledge, in its attempt to clarify the terms we communicate with. This attempt derives from the temptation in ordinary language to confuse “knowledge” with “belief”, “opinion”, and so on. Furthermore, when we say “I know that so and so”, the philosopher—or the epistemologist—is at pain to argue that what we claim to know must not turn out false. If it does, then we don’t really know what we claim. The epistemologist therefore argues that certain conditions are required. These conditions are the truth condition, the belief condition and the justification condition. In other words, for Johnson to know, say, that the sun is fiery, then (a) it must be true that the sun is fiery; (b) Johnson must believe that the sun is fiery; and (c) Johnson must have a reason for believing that the sun is fiery. Thus, knowledge translates into justified true belief. While this definition of knowledge may not enjoy a serious prestige in epistemology, it reveals a fundamental lesson. This is that our beliefs must have a basis in justified facts if they are to serve as the foundation for actions and judgement. We can’t just act on the basis of our beliefs unless we are certain that they are beliefs we can act upon. If there is any level of doubt, then progress is stunted. This further tells us that knowledge is crucial in the organisation of human experience. But knowledge is not even possible except through the instrumentality of language. It is the capacity of language for categorising the world that gave birth to the human ability to know what the world is like and to advance in this understanding of the universe.

### **Post-Test**

1. What is the traditional definition of knowledge?
2. What sense of knowledge is significant for human survival and flourishing?
3. How does language enable the growth of knowledge?

## **LECTURE FOUR**

### **PHILOSOPHY, CONCEPTS AND HUMAN LANGUAGE**

#### **Introduction**

This lecture will introduce the students to the relationship between philosophy and language as two unique human enterprises. The lecture will attempt to answer the questions: In what sense is philosophy made possible by the evolution of language? What is the relationship between philosophy and language?

#### **Objectives**

The students will, at the end of this lecture

1. Understand philosophy better as an enterprise that requires linguistic capacity;
2. Describe the relationship between philosophy and language.

#### **Pre-Test**

1. In what sense is language essential to philosophising?
2. In what sense is philosophy essential to language?

## CONTENT

The idea of what philosophy is and what it means is a problematic one simply because what philosophers do over the ages has shifted from one thing, idea, methodology and argument to others. It is therefore difficult to say categorically which of these ideas of what philosophy is constitutes the real definition of philosophy. However, in spite of this fact, it seems obvious to everyone that whatever idea we may have about philosophy and what it means must of necessity be encapsulated in language. In other words, language serves as the immediate channel through which we must articulate whatever ideas, doctrines, arguments, and beliefs we may have. Just as we saw in lecture one, philosophy and philosophers trade in ideas and arguments. And in doing this, they seek to achieve understanding of the concepts and ideas they argue for.

There has always been a serious distrust of, and fascination with, ordinary language by philosophers. On the one hand, we have philosophers who strongly suspect and antagonise what Nietzsche calls the “seductions of grammar.” This implies that language has a way of pulling us in certain directions that prevents us from getting a glimpse of what the universe is *really* like. Thus, according to these philosophers, if we trust the way we look at the world through the language of our daily lives, we are bound to be misled. These philosophers therefore took it as a challenge to scrutinise ordinary language and challenge its assumptions and presuppositions. On the other hand, we have philosophers who argue that philosophy has gone too far away from commonsense and ordinary language. This neglect, according to them, is what led to false philosophical problems.

Language therefore provides two immediate functions for philosophers. The first function is that philosophers employ language for clarification purpose. This is important because many non-philosophers regard philosophy as an obtuse and obscure enterprise which cannot achieve understanding because of its esoteric and vague use of language. Everyone wants to achieve clarity about whatever s/he wants to say. This is more so for philosophers because the philosophical enterprise is a critical analysis of human ideas and beliefs. This requires a command of language if philosophy itself is to be possible. In other words, if we consider philosophy to be the love of wisdom, and if wisdom serves as a guide to living a meaningful life, then it takes little reflection to see the significance of language to that task. Without language, then philosophical understanding is practically impossible. Language thus assists the

philosophers in the task of opening up new ways of understanding the universe and human existence.

A. J. Ayer captures this importance of language to philosophy when he remarked that “A philosopher who has no mastery of language would be as helpless as a mathematician who could not handle numerals...” (1969: 404). For Oladipo, this pursuit of clarity essentially leads to “the pursuit of meaning”. This, for him, involves “the clarification of thought by analysing the meaning of the concepts or terms through which we express our ideas and values, and determining the real sense of our propositions” (2008: 22). This is significant because human beings think with words. This makes thought and the analysis/clarification/interpretation of thought important. Such an analysis or clarification involves the words we employ in expressing the thought or idea “or the concepts that compose [the thought]” (Scruton, 1994: 9). Thus,

The fundamental philosophical question is...the question of *meaning*. We must analyse the meaning of our terms (i.e. the concepts expressed by them), in order to answer the questions of philosophy. This explains why the results of philosophy are not merely scientific results, and also why they seem to have a kind of eternal or necessary truth. When a philosopher asks ‘What is a person?’ he does not seek the particular facts about particular people, nor the scientific truth about people in general. He wants to know what it *is* to be a person: what makes something a *person* rather than a mere animal, say. Hence he is asking what the word ‘person’ means (Ibid.).

In this way, therefore, philosophy seeks to make our thought clear by clarifying the concepts and words we use in expressing that thought. This task also has an advantage for the study of language. This is because such a linguistic analysis also assists us in the precise and concise use of words. In other words, the clarification function of philosophy also leads to the interpretation of language itself. This is the second function language provides for philosophy. If words and concepts must be meaningful in appropriately representing thought and ideas, then our words, terms and concepts must be adequately purged of vagueness and ambiguity. It is in this sense that philosophers believe that language, properly analysed, can yield an understanding of the world. This therefore means that if we want a new way of thinking about the world, we must take the challenge of refining, elaborating, interpreting and expanding our grammar. We must make language elastic enough to deal with new experiences about the world. A scholar puts it this way:

...I think there is a lot in ordinary language and in received grammar that constrains our thinking—indeed, about what a person is, what a subject is, what gender is, what sexuality is, what politics can be—and that I'm not sure we're going to be able to struggle effectively against those constraints or work within them in a productive way unless we see the ways in which grammar is both producing and constraining our sense of what the world is (Judith Butler, 2003: 44).

This tells us that apart from using language as a means of expressing meaning, philosophers take language itself serious as a subject-matter. Philosophy attempts to free human understanding by critically examining everyday language and how that language conceives the world and reality around us.

In describing the two tasks of philosophy in relation to language, concepts become critical in the philosopher's attempt to clarify words. Much more than this, concepts are fundamental to human experience and the evolution of language itself. This therefore proves that philosophers, in clarifying language, are constantly clarifying concepts. The idea of conceptual analysis seems therefore to be a natural extension of clarification. Conceptual analysis is critical to a philosopher's interpretation of human experience. And concepts play a serious role in the organisation of these experiences.

What then is a concept? The Encarta Dictionary sees it as “a broad abstract idea or a guiding general principle, e.g. one that determines how a person or a culture behaves, or how nature, reality, or events are perceived.” Wikipedia also considers it as “a cognitive unit of meaning—an abstract or a mental symbol sometimes defined as a ‘unit of knowledge’...” John Locke, the British philosopher, further clarifies this when he defines a concept as a general idea that is created by abstracting or removing the uncommon characteristic from several particular ideas. The remaining common characteristic after the abstraction becomes the general idea or concept. The concept of red is that general idea that is common to all red things: apples, blood, and so on. The concept of cat signifies the family of lions, jaguars, lynxes, cheetahs, tigers, etc. Concepts can also be subdivided, as in the case of “humans” differentiating bipedal rational beings from “animals”; and furthermore, “male” and “female” (separating between a particular class of humans). We can better clarify what a concept is by differentiating it from the act of naming. When we name something, we ascribe an identity to that thing that differentiates it from something else. When we conceptualise, we bring so many things that share certain common characteristics or elements under one term. In the process of conceptualising, we also establish a

range of meaning. In other words, we define a sense through which we should understand the concept.

Since concepts are critical elements of thought, they stand between our minds and the world. In other words, concepts aid our thinking about the world. It is from this character that we derive their essential importance. The first importance of concepts is that they enable us to apply our thought to our surrounding. If a person, for example, utter the statement “lions are killers”, we assume that the person making that statement possesses the concept of lion and the concept of killer. And further that the person is also able to use the concept in a number of ways like “lions can hunt in the night” or “lions are strong” or “lions are animals”. In other words, such a person can combine concepts. Secondly, concepts allow us to categorise. With concepts, we are able to classify things in terms of the characteristics or elements they have in common. This capacity to categorise helps us to distinguish between the essential features of a thing and its inessential features. Thirdly, concepts allows for the growth and development of human knowledge. Knowledge can only grow or advance if we are able to analyse the multifaceted human experience and dissect it into categories. For instance, we can categorise between pleasure and pain, love and hate, husband and wife, heaven and hell, science and myth, humans and animals, cold and hot, and so on. On the basis of these distinctions, one can go further to make predictions. For example, if I possess a concept of hell, one can infer that it is hot. Thus, the concept of hell can extend one’s knowledge since it already contains the idea of hotness.

It is this capacity for conceptual awareness that makes philosophy and language essential for human understanding. Concepts are linguistic expressions that assist in the task of thinking meaningfully about our world. Conceptual awareness therefore signifies the philosophical capacity to understand the universe in its complexity and dynamism. In other words, the conceptual awareness that philosophy promise enables us to cope with the changing nature of the universe and still be able to achieve a level of understanding that will help us in living meaningful lives.

## Summary

This lecture was concerned with the analysis of the relationship between philosophy and language. We saw that the most obvious link between the two derives from the fact that philosophical ideas depend on language as the means of conveying philosophical ideas and truths. However, the relationship goes beyond this in two ways. In the first place, philosophers are interested not just in conveying their ideas about the universe and human existence, but also in communicating with as much clarity as possible. A significant dimension of the philosopher's task of constructing and critically investigating our worldviews involves the task of clarifying the ideas and beliefs upon which those worldviews are based. The clarification of ideas and belief becomes important in the overall task of achieving human understanding of the universe and of other people. The second way in which philosophy relates with language is that language itself is a field of study for philosophers. In other words, if language must properly achieve the philosopher's desire for understanding, then the linguistic meaning that is communicated in language must be critically studied.

We then went on to inquire into the idea of concept as an important idea in language and philosophy. This is because a concept is crucial to the function of conceptual clarification and even more critical to the evolution of language and human experience. We defined a concept as a cognitive unit of meaning; a general idea derived from abstracting the general characteristic of several particular phenomena. Concepts are important to human experience and to language because they allow for the categorisation and differentiation of the universe. In other words, concepts allows us to make distinction between the different aspects of the universe. Concepts aid human thought by allowing human beings to think meaningfully about their environment. Such thinking is facilitated by the fact that we know the difference between "human" and "animal"; "male" and "female"; "day" and "night"; "hot" and "cold"; "pain" and "pleasure"; "love" and "hate"; and so on.

## Post-Test

1. What is a concept?
2. How is a concept critical to human experience?
3. What is the conceptual clarification function of a philosopher?
4. How does the task of conceptual clarification benefit language?

## **LECTURE FIVE**

### **THE IDEA OF CONCEPTUAL SCHEME**

#### **Introduction**

This lecture will develop the thought addressed in lecture three. In other words, this lecture will analyse the relationship between concepts and the idea of conceptual scheme. The lecture will further examine the role of concepts in the conceptual framework that allows a culture to analyse, interpret, understand and relate with the universe.

#### **Objectives**

After the lecture, the student will be able to:

1. understand more the role of concepts in the organisation of human experience;
2. the need for a coherent framework of concepts;
3. the role that such a framework plays in cultural understanding of the universe.

#### **Pre-Test**

1. what is a conceptual scheme?
2. What role does a conceptual scheme play in the organisation of human experience?
3. How does a conceptual framework enable cultural understanding?

## CONTENT

In the last lecture, we say that one of the significant function of concepts to assist human beings in organising their experiences. Such concepts become more useful because they also assist different cultures to come to relate and cope with their experiences as a people. There are so many cultures in the world, and each culture is constrained by different cultural and physical circumstances. In other words, a particular culture may have a particular environmental condition in the universe to deal with. This implies that the experience of an Eskimo, for instance, will likely be different from that of a Kalahari Bushman. The point therefore is that though each one of us as members of different cultures inhabits the same universe, we confront different aspects of this universe. The way we actually conceptually structure our experience will likely differ from culture to culture.

Cultures relate to their environment and understand it through the conceptual framework they have developed over time. The evolution of any culture strictly depends on the capacity its people have to confront and cope with their physical and non-physical environments. This involves, for instance, the use of concepts and conceptual categories to classify things into edibles and inedibles, safe and hostile, good and bad, hot and cold, beautiful and ugly, and so on. All these concepts enable the culture to structure and explain everything else they needed to successfully ensure their survival not only in terms of the basic bio-social necessities of food, clothing and shelter, but also cultural needs (i.e. the need for social and cultural identity), and psychic need (i.e. the need for self-dignity, sexual expressions and human communication) (Oladipo, 2008: 80). It is this conceptual framework that distinguishes one culture from another. And to a large extent gives such a culture a cultural perception of a universe different from that of others.

What then is a conceptual framework? According to Donald Davidson, conceptual schemes "...are ways of organizing experience; they are systems of categories that give form to the data of sensation; they are point of views from which individuals, cultures or periods survey the changing scene" (cited in Bunnin and Yu, 2004: 136). What this implies is that given the organised conceptual framework which a culture or an individual has developed from their confrontation with the universe, every other experiences and circumstances they confront is

made meaningful through the existing framework. The conceptual scheme becomes a sort of cultural lens by which we view and understand events, ideas, circumstances, and experiences.

Imagine, for example, an individual whose conceptual scheme is seriously conditioned by the Christian or Islamic principles. Such an individual already has the conceptual weapon that enables him or her to relate with any experience in life. Imagine further that such an individual is confronted with the issue of, say, barrenness for a period of seven years. What do you think is the likely reaction of this individual? Of course, s/he is likely going to interpret the situation as a spiritual “attack” from whatever source. This interpretation is possible because s/he already has an underlying sets of ideas and principles by which s/he relates with reality. This conceptual structure therefore defines for her what is good, true, beautiful and right. For Harold Brown,

A set of concepts and propositions that provide a framework for describing and explaining items of some subject-matter along with criteria for recognizing which phenomena are to be considered deviant and in need of explanation. For example, ancient astronomers thought of planets as moving in circular paths at constant speed and attempted to reduce observed non-circular motions to systems of underlying circular motions that appear non-circular from our perspective (1995: 146).

Let us now go on to see what philosophers have said about the idea of conceptual scheme.

### **The Philosophical Argument for Conceptual Scheme**

Immanuel Kant, the German philosopher was the first person to articulate the idea of a conceptual scheme. This idea came from his attempt to understand the extent of human knowledge. In other words, Kant wanted to understand what is possible for humans to know and what they can't know. This is to respond to the protracted debate between the empiricists (who claim that knowledge is only possible through sense experience) and the rationalists (who argue that knowledge is derived from reason).

According to him, the only world we can claim to have any knowledge of is the world constituted by the human mind. This is the world of trees, stones, rains, clouds, lions, chairs and so on that we are used to. The knowledge that we have can't go beyond this constituted world. Thus, we can argue, according to Kant, that human experience is already structured in space and in time. But since space and time are categories that are not part of our experience, then we must argue that they are features independent of our experience. In other words, space and time that

circumscribe our experience “are necessary ingredients of the way things appear to our senses” (Forrai, 2001: 1). This would therefore imply, Kant argues, that the world as it is independent of our experience should be distinguished from the world as we experience it. It is therefore the world as we experience it through the categories of space and time that we can truly claim to know. This is the first part of Kant’s argument.

The second part begins with the claim that what is presented to the human mind through space and time does not really constitute knowledge. This is because the mind just receives them passively. The mind receives this sensory information as series of impressions that are chaotic and unorganised, and hence does not give any picture of “a stable and rule-governed environment” (ibid). What is therefore received from the environment only serves as the raw material for knowledge. There is a further need to translate these raw materials into knowledge. What is required in this regard is for the mind to actively confront these raw materials ‘by imposing on it divisions, classifications, and various kinds of ordering’ (ibid: 2). The mind achieves this ordering of the raw materials of the senses through the application of concepts. These concepts could be *a priori* (concepts that can be justified or known independent of human experience) or *a posteriori* (which is known through experience). Since there is no problem with knowing *a posteriori*, Kant’s attention is focused on the *a priori* precondition for human experience and knowledge. It is these *a priori* concepts that act as the systematising framework for the disorderly impressions of the sense.

It therefore becomes clear from this philosophical argument for what we know that everyone confronts the universe and acquires the knowledge of what is in it through a conceptual scheme. This implies, as we have earlier noted, that the conceptual scheme we have developed stands between us and the universe as we know it. In other words, we can only manage knowledge of the world as it is presented to us through the conceptual categories we have established. Kant however holds that every human person shares a universal conceptual scheme which allows us to see the world as it is, in spite of the cultural and historical diversities we have in the world. Other philosophers (i.e. Gottfried Herder) challenged this assumption as being inconsistent. If there are cultural diversities in the world, it is certainly strange to assume that this diversity can be served in the same way by one universal conceptual scheme. What makes a culture strange to us, in the first place, is that it has a conceptual scheme that is different from

ours. And this is so because that culture has developed its own conceptual framework for perceiving the universe. According to Forrai,

Suppose there is an ancient text or an alien people which or who we find difficult to understand. We are trying to make sense of what is written or said, because what we come up with seems strange, irrational, or outright crazy. If there is no clear evidence to the contrary, we prefer to regard the other as a sensible being. But then the oddity calls for an explanation. If the other is just as sensible as we are, how come her ways seem so weird? It is at this point that the notion of conceptual scheme comes in. The weirdness is due to the fact that she is using a different conceptual scheme. Once we manage to explore her conceptual scheme, we shall find that viewed from within her scheme, her opinions are reasonable and well-motivated—or, at least, her mistakes are not that numerous or serious (2001: 2).

We therefore make a transition from Kant's universal conceptual scheme to a multiplicity of historically and culturally motivated schemes. What conclusions do you think we can begin to derive from this understanding of the plurality of conceptual schemes which serve as the frameworks by which different cultures understand their world and act within it? Let us examine these conclusions.

### **Conceptual Schemes and Relativism**

If a particular culture has its own unique framework for understanding and interpreting the world, it implies that we can only begin to understand that culture or society only within the context of that framework. Consider, for instance, that a particular culture believes that the highest honour it could pay any person when s/he dies is to eat the dead body. Thus, if a man loses his wife, the man can only honour the wife's memory by eating the body. Other members of the community also honour the dead woman by partaking of the body. This would appear horrifying, isn't it? Consider the reverse: A person from that culture also visits your culture and met a burial ceremony. It got to the point that the dead body had to be lowered into the ground. Imagine that immediately you lower the dead body into the ground, this person from the other culture suddenly started throwing up. And when you asked him or her, s/he said she just couldn't understand why you would give a last respect to a loved one by throwing his or her body into the ground for worms to eat!

How, for instance, do we arrive at a judgment about the rightness or wrongness of each act of burial? Can you reasonably accuse the other culture of cannibalism? The issues concerned goes beyond the idea of morality to the very fundamentals of thought. In other words, if thought

is only meaningful from within a particular conceptual scheme, how is it possible for other conceptual scheme to understand that thought? One serious implication is that communication becomes impossible since we can't even begin to formulate that thought into a different language or conceptual scheme. Furthermore, whatever is true, moral, right and beautiful would depend on what a conceptual scheme takes it to be. What is therefore right for me will not be right for others.

However, it seems that relativism—conceptual, ethical, linguistic and so on—is inherently wrong. The simple argument is this: People actually pass moral and conceptual judgements on other cultures. For example, a lot of us claimed that the terrorist attack on the United States is a morally inexcusable. We have also judged that the killing of twins, infanticide, genocide, and other such acts are morally wrong. Apart from this, it is a fact that people communicate across cultures. Therefore, we can conclude that relativism is wrong. This conclusion immediately affects how we think about conceptual schemes. One plausible explanation is that while we may continue claiming that conceptual schemes respond to cultural and historical dynamics, all conceptual schemes interpret the same universe but interpret it differently with the aid of different theoretical framework or vocabularies which are amenable to cross-cultural interpretation and understanding.

### **Summary**

This lecture examines the idea of the conceptual scheme. We saw that a conceptual scheme is the consequence of our attempt to understand the universe in which we live so as to be better able to cope with its accidents and circumstance, and also to be able to act in a rational manner within it. We sketched a philosophical argument emanating from Immanuel Kant which outlines a conceptual scheme as the attempt to know the object of human experience. This gave us the implication, from Kant, that there is only one universal conceptual scheme. This conclusion was rejected by others who claim that the fact of historical and cultural diversities leads to the fact of different conceptual schemes following cultural peculiarities. If there are different conceptual scheme, and if a conceptual scheme outline a people's worldview, then it would follow that different cultures may not be able to communicate or interact since what is implied in my conceptual scheme may be strange to you. This conclusion will only be correct if we further assume that there are as many worlds as there are cultures; in other words, that each culture has a different world which its conceptual scheme interprets. However, from the fact that cross-cultural communication is possible, it also follows that cultures don't inhabit different worlds. Rather, all cultures confront the same universe but with different theoretical vocabularies which are not incommensurable or radically different.

### **Post-Test**

1. What is a conceptual scheme?
2. How does a conceptual scheme presuppose relativism?
3. Is it possible to judge another culture as being wrong or right?
4. How does a conceptual scheme enable the knowledge of the world?

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## **LECTURE SIX**

### **LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL IDENTITY**

#### **Introduction**

This lecture is a logical continuation of the previous one. One of the premises that lead to the argument that there are different conceptual schemes by which different cultures interpret the universe is that language is a form of identity by which persons, and hence a culture, is constituted. We will therefore in this lecture examine the ways in which language and culture constitute a person and makes him or her a cultural being.

#### **Objectives:**

The students, at the end of this lecture, will

1. understand the relationship between culture and language;
2. understand how language, and the conceptual scheme it enables, creates an identity which differentiates one person from the other.

#### **Pre-Test**

1. What is culture?
2. How does culture and language interact?
3. What role does language play in identity formation?

## CONTENT

It takes only a simple reflection to argue that if conceptual scheme determine how individuals perceive reality around them, then such a conceptual scheme must also play a significant role in determining how such individuals perceive themselves in relations to other individuals. Cultural identity flows from the claim that a person becomes who s/he is by virtue of his or her culture and cultural relations. A culture in this sense thus assumes the role of an encompassing framework which gives meaning and value to the aspirations of any individual. In other words, cultural identity claims that “a person achieves the fullest humanity within an accepted context of traditional symbols, judgments, values, behaviour and relationships with specific others who self-consciously think of themselves as a [cultural] community...’ (Loughney, 1998: 1919).

Globalisation is a process that has affected so many concepts and ideas that people have taken for granted. Culture is one of such concepts that has become essentially difficult to define. In fact, there are over 200 definitions of what culture is. Rather than taking of this definitions for granted, let’s just attempt a broad characterisation of what culture is that will serve our purpose in this lecture. In this sense, we can take culture to be a socially transmitted system of thought and action consisting of language, customs, morality, types of economy and technology, art and architecture, modes of entertainment, legal systems, religion, systems of education and upbringing, and so on (O’Hear, 1998: 1922). All these are the means by which the members of a culture achieve meaning and significance in life.

The realm of culture (taken from the Latin *cultura*, meaning “to cultivate”) is what differentiate humans from the animals. To cultivate in this sense implies some form of production or the space of accomplishment through which human beings ascribe meanings to their existence. It is with this in mind that Edward Tylor defines culture as “...that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as member of society” (Tylor, cited in Gilmore, 2000: 563). This inclusive notion of culture led to a more comparative approach which seeks to generalise cultural patterns across different cultures. The consequence is the general definition of culture, given by Kroeber and Kluckhohn, as

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture

consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action (cited in Gilmore, 2000: 564).

Culture therefore serves as a framework that produces a distinctive identity not only for a particular society, but also for members of that society. In other words, culture becomes both a product of action as well as a guide for future action for its members. Culture in this sense derives from a people's confrontation with their environment. It evolves from the attempt by a group of people to "cultivate" the means by which they can find meaning in an inclement world. Language plays a very significant role in this evolution of culture.

According to Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the Kenyan novelist, language possesses a dual character which enables it to serve both as a means of communication and also crucially as a carrier of the culture and history of a people. We noted earlier that, for him, language as communication has three dimensions. We have language of real life, language as speech and language as written signs. These three dimensions especially where they interact in a broad harmony lead to the conception of language as a carrier of culture. Language is a system of signs and symbols. It is through this symbolic capacity that language assists a culture in assigning terms and concepts to experiences the culture use in dividing and comprehending reality. This implies that language itself derives from a people's cultural experience while at the same time reflecting or enabling the symbolisation of that culture and its ethos. We can therefore say that language expresses a cultural reality; language embodies a cultural reality in the sense that people create new experiences through language; and lastly, language symbolises a cultural reality in the sense that each sign and symbol is already value-laden. This is how Ngugi sees this relationship:

...communication between human beings is also the basis and process of evolving culture. In doing similar kinds of things and actions over and over again under similar circumstances, similar even in their mutability, certain patterns, moves, rhythms, habits, attitudes, experiences and knowledge emerge. Those experiences are handed over to the next generation and become the inherited basis for their further actions on nature and on themselves. There is a gradual accumulation of values which in time become almost self evident truths governing their conception of what is right and wrong, good and bad, beautiful and ugly, courageous and cowardly, generous and mean in their internal and external relations. Over a time this becomes a way of life distinguishable from other ways of life. They develop a distinctive culture and history. Culture embodies those

moral, ethical and aesthetic values, the set of spiritual eyeglasses, through which they come to view themselves and their place in the universe. Values are the basis of a people's identity, their sense of particularity as members of the human race. All this is carried by language. Language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history. Culture is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes possible its genesis growth banking, articulation and indeed its transmission from one generation to the next (1987: 14-15).

In reflecting the experiences and values of a people, language as culture becomes a person's image-forming agent through such person's approach reality. Ngugi claims that a person's conception of who s/he is, as an individual or as part of a collective, is determined by these images and pictures formed by the person through the medium of language. These images, however, "may or may not correctly correspond to the actual reality of the struggles with nature and nurture which produced them in the first place. [But] Language as culture is thus mediating between me and my own self; between my own self and other selves; between me and nature. Language is mediating in my very being" (ibid: 15).

It is in this context that we talk meaningfully about cultural identity and the role that language plays in it. Language serves the marker of the collective norms and values by which a group of people identify itself as belonging to the same culture, and especially in opposition to some other people who don't share these values and norms. We can now identify four ways by which language enables the creation of cultural identity. First, language constitutes the memory bank of the people; the storehouse of every significant aspects of their experience with nature and with others. Second, language responds to the evolution of society in order to capture new experiences. Third, language preserves a people's cultural integrity. This implies that if a language dies, then in a way, the culture also dies. Lastly, language aids the transmission of cultural values, ideas, and beliefs across generations especially through education.

### **Summary**

This lecture examines the role of language in the formulation of cultural identity. We saw that language participates in the evolution of any culture in the sense that it reflects a culture's attempt to comprehend its universe while also symbolising the culture's experience of the universe. Language therefore serves as the linguistic repertoire by which a people symbolise their values, ideas, experiences, and so on. It is in this sense that language is transformed into an image-forming agent by which an individual makes sense of him or herself either as an individual or as a member of a collective. Cultural identity therefore derives from a people or a person's identification with the sets of norms and values uniquely belonging to a particular culture and encoded in a particular language by which the culture had made sense of its reality.

### **Post-Test**

1. What is cultural identity?
2. How does a language reflect culture?
3. Describe how language serves as an image-forming agent by which a person identifies him or herself.

## **LECTURE SEVEN**

### **COMMUNICATION AND THE NATURE OF UNDERSTANDING**

#### **Introduction**

This lecture will be concerned with the nature of communication and its relationship with understanding.

#### **Objectives:**

The students will be able to:

1. Understand the meaning of communication the more;
2. Describe adequately how communication relates to the search for understanding;
3. Understand how communication constitutes a search for understanding in the human society.

#### **Pre-Test**

1. In what sense is meaning intentional?
2. Describe the idea of communication as a process.
3. What does a universe of meaning means in communication?

## CONTENT

In our previous lectures we made the attempt to come to term with the notion of understanding. We noted that since the circumference of what we seek to understand and how we seek to understand them is very broad, the concept itself becomes a notorious one to define. Defining it would imply arriving at a set of criteria which will enable it to serve as an operational construct for any kind of understanding. This conclusion is further complicated to the extent that understanding also features as a critical core in the communication process. How then do we communicate in such a way that understanding will not be distorted?

Communication involves the transmission of intention or meaning from one person to another. This process is not complete until the receiver adequately understood what the sender's intention is. In this sense, we can see communication appropriately as dialogue or a conversation. Dialogue derives from the Greek *dialogos* which translates as "speak with each other". To assume conversation at all is to assume that meaning has been successfully transferred and understood between two or more people. In defining communication, we come across three important components. The first is that it is a process. The implication of this is that communicating is an ongoing and vibrant activity given to multiple transformations. This process could encompass, for instance, meeting your future spouse for the first time. The uncertainty that characterised that meeting is later subordinated to a free flowing interaction that leads eventually to marriage which is also a form of continuous interpersonal communication that lasts for life. There is a constant movement in such a communicative process from one dimension to another.

The second component of defining communication is the exchange of message—verbal or non-verbal—from one person to another. These messages are the vehicles of interaction. When you stand in front of a person and make no attempt to communicate any message, then you have not entered the communication act. The last component in a fruitful definition of communication is that of meaning. The second component, in itself, is unenlightening unless the other person can participate in your intention. Imagine standing with a Yoruba person and saying in English: "Could you please lend me your pen?" You have not communicated anything unless the person you are speaking with share the space of meaning embedded in the English language. If s/he is not literate in English, then you have not communicated any meaning. For West and

Turner, “meaning is what people extract from a message....words alone have no meaning; people attribute meaning to words. We create the meaning of a message even as the message unfolds” (West and Turner, 2009: 10).

Meaning therefore becomes a central item in communication and understanding. According to Scruton, meaning has four dimensions. The first is that meaning is an activity; it is what people do. In other words, meaning is an attempt at unravelling intention behind a message. Secondly, meaning is a relational term; it represents an attempt to communicate. That is, “John means something by his gestures to Mary” (1994: 254). Thirdly, “meaning is an intentional act: to mean something is to do something with a particular intention. And that intention is directed towards the other person” (ibid). Fourthly, in making a particular gesture or uttering a particular sign, I intend that the other person should understand what I intend. It is this aspect of understanding the intended meaning that becomes problematic.

For the task of understanding to even begin, there is an assumption that the person you are communicating with is part of your universe of meaning. Communication in this sense includes “the manner and style in which messages are conveyed and imparted always against the background of the tightly woven fabric of professional and everyday life, with its shared experiences, participative relationships, joint endeavors, and moral concerns” (Scrag, cited in Pat Arneson, 2007: 6). Thus, you can’t assume that you have communicated with another until you are sure that what you mean is what s/he understands. The question then is: How do we ground that idea of understanding?

Consider this example from the Internet: A man announces his plans to clean the gutters. His wife asks what ladder he is using. He answers. She comments that it might be too slippery from the rain. He replies, no. Next she suggests that he wait until their son comes home to help, to which he immediately replies that he is not waiting. Then he blows up at her and accuses her of criticizing him and treating him like he’s stupid. She is surprised at his response. But what he wanted was to be left alone to do the task, and felt nagged by her questions. She, on the other hand, always appreciates his collaboration and opinions when she works on a project, but has trouble getting him involved. What do you think has happened between the couple? Simple: the message she sent was not the message he received.

To understand the meaning intended in a conversation is to attempt to make sense of what the other is saying. To make sense of what others are saying implies attempting to place oneself within the broad space of meaning from which the sender is communicating his or her meaning. A person may say, for instance, “Thank God it’s Friday”. This expression may communicate different meaning to different people. For non-Muslims, for example, it may signal the end of a work week. For others, it may be something else (ibid: 11). What then should understanding meaning consist in? If I say, “I am a bad person,” what does the expression mean? And how does another person understand what the expression means? In other words, what does it mean to understand such an expression in the process of communication? Does it consist in knowing what the express I used mean?

The challenge of communication is therefore the challenging of piecing together what the other person is saying. It involves a theory of understanding or of sense-making. Such a theory enables the receiver to see clearly (without accepting the visual metaphor for understanding) what sense the conversation makes. It is only when such an understanding has been achieved that one can truly say that the meaning intended has been extracted and finally that communication has taken place.

### **Summary**

This lecture is built on the previous lectures that examine the nature of understanding and the relevance of communication to the human society. In this lecture, we saw the three dimensions of communication as a process, as involving messages sent from a person to another, and as involving the retrieval of meaning encoded in the messages. This implies that the communication act is a continuous process of sending and retrieving meaning which is meant to be understood. The communication process does not even begin in an act of soliloquy in which a person is conversing with him or herself. And in a situation involving two or more people, that process begins when a message is sent with an encoded meaning, and the meaning is understood by the receiver. To understand what the sender intended is to fashion for oneself a theory of understanding which could see the act of understanding as that of getting an explanation, achieving a visual image of the sender’s meaning, possessing a capacity, interpretation, and so on. The first condition for such an understanding is that the sender and the receiver must both participate in the same space of shared meaning.

### **Post-Test**

1. What does shared meaning implies in a communication theory?
2. What is the first condition in achieving a theory of understanding?
3. Outline the three components in communication. Describe one of them.
4. In what sense is meaning a relational term?

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## **LECTURE SIX**

### **THE PROBLEM OF MEANING**

#### **Introduction**

So far, we have been discussing the idea of language, communication, knowledge and understanding as if it is a smooth issue to transfer ideas, meaning and thought from the sender to the receiver without any remainder. In this lecture, we'll examine the meaning of meaning. In other words, we want to critically look at what we transfer when we communicate with others.

#### **Objectives:**

This lecture will enable the students to

1. Understand the problem inherent in the communication process;
2. Understand the difficulties in language that may hinder communication;
3. Explain the problem of meaning in the philosophy of language.

#### **Pre-Test**

1. What is meaning?
2. Which theory of the nature of meaning do you consider viable?
3. What is the role of meaning in communication?

## CONTENT

Imagine that someone just told you something. Then you nodded and replied “I understand what you mean”. This simple example tells us something important about the communication process. This is that when we communicate, what we are attempting to do is to transfer meaning or what we mean to others. In other words, we put a sense into certain signs and symbols and we hope that when these signs get to the other person, s/he would be able to decode what we mean. The idea of meaning could therefore be linguistic in form or extra-linguistic. Meaning is *linguistic* when it is communicated to another person through the medium of language. The meaning could therefore be deduced from concepts that the words of the sender express or through the context in which the sender uttered the words. It is extra-linguistic when it is not communicated through language. Meaning in this *extra-linguistic* sense often refers to the interpretation that a person has about phenomena in the world. For instance, a person could be asked about the meaning s/he read into a movie, an action, or a situation. The second sense in which meaning can be extra-linguistic is the sense in which body language communicates something to others. This body language flows from body signals like tears, blushing, and so on. Extra-linguistic meaning could also be natural or pragmatic. It is *natural* when a particular sign is associated with a natural event. For instance, when you see a weathervane pointing in a direction, we take that to “mean” that the wind is pointing in that direction. Meaning is *pragmatic* if we take it to derive from the consequences of an expression. When we talk of a light bulb, the consequence of “light bulb” might be the capacity to be able to read at night.

In philosophy, there is a serious concern with the nature and understanding of what meaning means. This is important because it is not all the time that one can confidently say “I understand what you mean”. The issue becomes complicated if we had to act on what we could turn out to be a wrong interpretation of meaning. There is a famous story about the relationship between Thomas Becket, the 12th century Archbishop of Canterbury and King Henry II of England. The friends clashed over the interpretation of the church’s relationship to the common law of England. The disagreement between them led to the exile of Thomas Becket. When Becket returned from exile, he became too temperamental for King Henry to bear. So, one day, King Henry exclaimed: “Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest?” Four of King Henry’s

knights who heard this exclamation (mis)interpreted it as a call to action. On December 29, 1170, these four knights murdered Thomas Becket right in the cathedral!

The significance of this story is that actions can emanate from a misinterpretation of meaning and intention. King Henry was only exclaiming his seeming impotence with regard to Becket. The four knights thought he was giving them a direct order. Such misinterpretations derive from ambiguities and vagueness which are intrinsic to language. Ambiguity refers to the property which a linguistic expression has to encode more than one meaning. On the other hand, a linguistic expression is vague if it has no “uniquely determinable value or interpretation” (Clark, 2009: 3). Let’s consider an example each of these concepts. Consider a statement like: “I’ve brought the seal”. This statement is ambiguous because the word “seal” could refer to either a sea creature or a device for closing up an opening. To therefore say “I’ve brought the seal” leaves the hearer undecided on what the speaker is saying. Again, consider another statement: black ties and trouser. How do we interpret this statement? Are we talking about ties and trousers that are black or to only ties that are black and to trousers whose colour is indeterminate? Other ambiguous words would include: “bright,” “bank,” “apothecary,” “biweekly,” “good,” and so on.

What about vague statement? Consider: “The man is rich”. The concept of rich has a whole range of interpretation such that it becomes difficult to pin down a specific meaning. To be rich could range from having N10, 000 to having N10 billion. The same could be said for words like “painful”, “child,” “triangle”, etc.

These examples are important considerations in a philosopher’s interest in what constitutes meaning. According to Lycan,

That certain kinds of marks and noises have *meanings*, and that we human beings grasp those meanings without even thinking about it, are very striking facts. A philosophical theory of meaning should explain what it is for a string of marks or noises to be meaningful and, more particularly, what it is in virtue of which the string has the distinctive meaning it does. The theory should also explain how it is possible for human beings to produce and to understand meaningful utterances and to do that so effortlessly (2000: 1).

Understanding the nature of meaning is different from understanding the human capacity to produce speech. What interest philosophers is the nature of linguistic expressions themselves and

how they can constitute meanings. Let's take another look at linguistic expressions and outline why they are considered significant by philosopher.

1. Singing lawn party incessant university
2. Everybody has the right to disenfranchise him or herself.
3. Jhjhb zhjhjs jhb jbkjsy

These three represents different sequences of linguistic signs with different consequences for meaning and meaningfulness. Sequence (1) represents a string of linguistic signs linked in such a way that doesn't make any grammatical sense. (1) is therefore different from (2) which is a sentence containing individual meaningful words linked to make sense. Sequence (3) is simply nonsense. We can therefore say that sequence (2) exhibits the unique property of *meaning something*. Lycan then lists what he considers the data from which the philosophical study of language must begin:

- ✚ Some strings of marks or noises are *meaningful sentences*.
- ✚ Each meaningful sentence has parts that are themselves meaningful.
- ✚ Each meaningful sentence means something in particular.
- ✚ Competent speakers of a language are able to understand many of that language's sentences, without effort and almost instantaneously; they also produce sentences, in the same way.

What then is the nature of these meanings that we communicate to others? How do we know that meaning has been communicated? Are meanings entities? If they are entities, what kind of entities are they? Are they similar to the chairs and tables around us? If they are not entities, what then are they? Philosophers have constructed several theories that attempt to explain the nature and meaning of the meanings we communicate in meaningful sentences.

## Theories of Meaning

### *Referential Theory*

The most influential and commonsensical of these theories is the referential theory. The simple idea behind this theory is that linguistic expressions have meanings because they stand for something outside of themselves. Therefore, what an expression means is what that expression stands for in reality. If I say, for example "University of Ibadan," that linguistic sequence is meaningful because it represents a particular entity—an institution of higher learning—in the

world. One could also say something like: “The book is under the table.” In this case, “the book” represents a particular book, “the table”, a particular table, and “is under” will stand for the idea of being under.

This theory is influential because it seems natural as an explanation of what gives linguistic expression meaning. “This is my dog” only conveys meaning to me because I actually see a dog beside you on a leash. However, our familiarity with this theory hides serious philosophical problems. In the first place, just as we have names that denote real things in the world, we also employ names which stand for non-existing things. For example, one could say “Pegasus is a flying horse”. If an expression is meaningful because it represents a particular state of affairs in reality, what then would “Pegasus” represent? One could also have a statement like “I saw nobody” in which “nobody” would not represent anything. We might also have other words like “fat,” “anyone,” “what,” “abstract,” “behalf,” “of,” “very,” “yes,” and so on which are meaningful but do not really denote anything.

### *Idea Theory*

Meaning, according to this theory, represents mental contents or ideas which linguistic expressions stand for. In this sense, a linguistic expression is not meaningful because it stands for a state of affair in reality; rather, it is meaningful because it represents a particular idea which the speaker intends to communicate to the hearer. Thus, if I utter a statement like “I want to study Physics,” this statement is meaningful because it conveys a certain idea I wish to pass across. These ideas or mental images are private and therefore independent of language. The function of language in this context is to convey these images to others. The extent to which a linguistic expression is able to indicate these ideas or make them public is what makes the expression meaningful.

This idea is powerful because it gives us the obvious insight that the function of language is to communicate thought from one person to another. For instance, it resolves the problem of finding a reference for those words—“of,” “yes,” “what,” “yes,” etc—which are really meaningful to us, but has no reference to point at. Unfortunately, the theory makes the issue of meaning too private to enable communication.

### *Use Theory*

This theory claims that the meaning of linguistic expressions is not an entity, but rather can be found in the use which the expression serves. In other words, a word or expression means what competent users of that language say it means. “Kitchen,” for the competent speakers of the English language, means a place where cooking is done. If a speaker of the Yoruba language utters a word like “Ma’ami”, within the Yoruba linguistic community, that expression signifies or means something which may be different from the same sign sequence in another culture. The use theorist would therefore say we should not ask for the meaning of a linguistic expression; rather, we should ask for its use within a conventional practice. The conventional rules governing a particular linguistic community grounds the framework by which words and linguistic expressions are used. In this sense, not all expressions would refer to entities.

The essential idea behind this theory is that it sees meaning as an inter-subjective matter among people. For Peregrin, “Indeed, the *point* of meaning is that it can be shared by many: that new people can always enter the realm of a language, learning the meaning of its words and then participating in the language games staged by its means”. The idea of inter-subjective nature of meaning gives the use theory an edge over the idea theory of meaning.

### *Verification Theory*

According to this theory, what makes a linguistic expression meaningful is the method which leads to the verification of that expression. In other words, a statement like “the cat is on the roof” is immediately meaningful because the hearer knows by what means s/he can go about proving or demonstrating the meaning, and therefore the truth or falsity, of that statement i.e. by the empirical method of checking the roof to see if the cat is really there. If a proposition or a linguistic expression can’t be verified, then that statement is meaningless. For instance, you can state statements like “God exists,” “stealing is morally wrong,” “souls are immortal,” and so on.

### *Pragmatist Theory*

The meaning of a linguistic expression or a statement, according to the pragmatist, is determined by the consequence of the application of that statement. This theory, following Charles Pierce, the American philosopher, derives from the Pragmatic Maxim: Consider what effects, that might

conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object. By implication, a pragmatist theory is not concerned with the relationship between a statement or an intentional experience and an objective reality which the statement is supposed to correspond to. Rather, meaning derives from the relationship between the statement and human experience. As a relation rather than an entity, meaning for the pragmatist involves three terms: a sign, what the sign stands for (or what it signifies), and the response or effect produced by the sign. These three constitute the relations of meaning.

### **Summary**

The lecture has the objective of showing the role that the nature and problem of meaning plays in the communication process. When we communicate with others, what we are doing is conveying intended meanings to others. We note, however, that meaning could be mistaken when communicated. This could be due to the inherent ambiguity or vagueness in our linguistic expressions. If ambiguity and vagueness could therefore interfere with the communication process then there is the need to understand the nature of meaning itself as what is crucial in language and the communication process. Thus, the philosopher reasoned, if we could achieve an understanding of what meanings are, then we may actually know when meaning has been communicated. The crucial question for the philosopher therefore is: In what sense do linguistic expressions like statement constitute meaning which we then communicate to others? There are several answers to this question. We examined five such answers in the lecture. The referential theory which is the most obvious of all the theories of meaning sees meaning as being constituted by reference to an external state of affairs. For the idea theory of meaning, meanings are ideas or mental images that linguistic expressions represent. In the use theory, meaning is not really an entity which a statement attempt to signify; meaning is the conventional use of the expression as agreed to by competent users of the language. The verification theory of meaning conceives meaning as deriving from the empirical method of verifying the linguistic expression carrying the meaning. Finally, the pragmatist theory interprets meaning as being the consequence of the application of an expression.

### **Post-Test**

1. What is the philosopher's interest in meaning?
2. How does meaning feature in the communication process?
3. Outline the use theory of meaning.

## **LECTURE NINE**

### **PHILOSOPHY, LANGUAGE AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

#### **Objectives:**

At the end of this lecture, the students should be able to do the following:

1. Understand what national development means;
2. Describe the role of philosophy and language in such a development;
3. Why cultural identity is a necessary requirement in national development.

#### **Pre-Test**

1. What is national development, especially within the context of Nigeria?
2. In what way is a viable language policy necessary for national development?
3. What is philosophy's specific contribution to national development?

## CONTENT

If you were asked what the fundamental problem with Nigeria is, what would your answer be? I suspect most people would think of problems like leadership, followership, lack of infrastructure, bad educational system, corruption, ethnicity, underdevelopment, poverty, injustice, and so many other woes. Let's capture all these as the fundamental problem of national development. Compared with other states in the world, say, the United States of America, Nigeria is a state which has not achieved any significant index of national development. In a very deep sense, Nigeria is not a viable society. In the first place, there is a pervasive sense of suspicion and distrust amongst those who call themselves "Nigerians". This is revealed, for instance, in the various kinds of ethnic and religious stereotypes that we circulate in the national space. For instance, a Hausa person is naturally dumb—a 'mola'; a Yoruba person is naturally given to extravagance and "owambe"; an Igbo man is naturally cunning and dubious. The other minority ethnic groups do not even enter into consideration here. They just don't exist in the national scheme of thing.

Another manifestation is the declining and degenerating state of social institutions that are supposed to serve as the regulatory mechanism for social life. This has therefore led to a rampant social disorder and normlessness. Take the educational institution for instance. Education no longer serves the purpose of giving the individual an established ground from which to make sense of his or her life. It is now totally an endeavour channelled towards getting employment for the recipient. Finally, Nigeria is cursed with a leadership that has no conceptual capacity to understand the national predicament and act decisively on it.

The consequence of all these is that we live in a society whose foundation is fundamentally flawed. For Prof. Oladipo, the critical problem arises from the Nigerian leadership orientation which predisposes us to constantly battling with superficial national issues at the expense of the fundamental ones. For instances, most of us have at one time or the other read in the newspapers about issues like prostitution, same-sex marriages, rotational presidency, religious identities and problems, the health of the president, tenure for public office holders, and so on. These issues, though important, can't be compared with such other fundamental issues like that of social justice (i.e. Niger Delta), social order, an appropriate value system for a developing country, poverty and the issue of wealth creation and distribution, unity in diversity,

realising the common good, and such other fundamentals (Oladipo, 2008: chap. 5). We can therefore begin to read the trouble with Nigeria as really that of our lack of the foundations for social life which serve as the basis for a composite, all-round development of any country. What then is national development, and what are the conditions for its achievement?

### **Social Existence and the Foundation of National Development**

The orthodox template that defines national development is the one which sees it as the capacity a country has to improve the social welfare of its citizens through the provision of basic social amenities like good education, housing, electricity, healthcare facilities, pipe-borne water, and so on. In other words, national development is seen in the narrow sense of the provision of infrastructural facility. This understanding is important to the achievement of national development, but it does not tell the whole story. Infrastructural and economic development in any state is veritable tools that ought to lead to the achievement of certain non-economic objectives. The most significant in this regard is the achievement of human well-being for the citizenry. Human well-being is assessed in terms of the quality of life which an average individual is confronted with in any national space. It is also factored into the extent to which individuals happy and free to achieve self realisation.

To achieve such an objective, there is the need to put in place certain foundations on which social life in a state can evolve. These foundations refer to those conditions that human beings require to live a conducive life in the society in which they find themselves. These conditions are basically three: (a) the adaptation to external human and physical environment; (b) provision of human bio-social needs; and (c) the establishment of the requirements necessary for social cooperation. The first condition requires that human beings adjust to whatever physical environment they find themselves in order to ensure their own survival. Such an interaction with the environment would involve the people achieving shelter, clothing and feeding in, for example, an environment dominated by mountains (i.e. Panama), or ice (i.e. Iceland), or thick forest (i.e. the Amazon), or oceans (i.e. Japan), or sand (i.e. Saudi Arabia). Apart from this, there is also the complementary need to adjust to the human environment. This requires that the individuals in a particular society be protected through adequate care and support especially those who are weak and vulnerable like the aged, the sick and the young ones.

The second condition for a conducive social life involves the provisions of such bio-social needs at three levels. The first level include: the need for food, clothing and housing. The second level includes cultural needs like the need for social and cultural identity i.e. the idea of who and what we are. The third level of needs include the psychic needs like the need for self-dignity, sexual expression, and so on. Finally, the last condition for social life has to do with the orderly coordination of the affairs of society in such a way as to make social cooperation possible.

Conceiving national development in terms of infrastructural development has the tendency to lead to an uncritical acceptance of science and technology—manifesting in rapid industrialisation and modernisation—as the sole index of development. No one can deny the fact that significant development in contemporary life depends to a large extent on the capacity of a society to move forward technologically. However, no one can also deny the fact that social institutions—consisting of political institutions, economic institutions, cultural institutions and kinship institution—help human beings in building and cementing their social life. These institutions on their part are held together by certain values which inform their functions. Values refer to the estimated worth of something, the principle or standard which guides a group or an individual, or the ideals which represents the fundamental end or purpose an individual or group pursues. These could include the value of trust, honesty, reciprocity, tolerance, compassion, etc.

It should not be difficult for you as a Nigerian to see that these values are lacking in the Nigerian society. It is also not difficult for us to know that the social institutions in Nigerian are collapsing. To be sure, just think of the educational system from the primary to the tertiary level. You also need to think of the attitude of government workers and ordinary citizens like you and me to government work. What happens if you get an employment in the local government? Will you not be joyous? Thus, again, for Oladipo, when we talk of national development,

[Our] focus should be on the extent to which the institutions of a given society enhance the capacity of the people, as individuals and as a social collective, to secure the condition for the persistence of social life... (2008: 82).

To adequately measure national development, therefore, attention must be paid to the capacity of any state to provide two fundamental variables: freedom and decency. *Freedom* refers to the presence of those conditions in the society which enhances an individual's ability to

realise their goals in life, as well as the provision of adequate security to enjoy these conditions. When you are living in a society and there are no constraints to your self-realisation as an individual or as a group, then we can say you are free. If you consistently find it difficult to become the kind of person you want to be in life because of certain difficulties made possible by the social arrangements in a country, then we can't say you are actually free. This therefore implies that for you to be really free, there must be some level of "social efficiency" that ensure that certain things can be taken for granted in the society: We should be able to assume that our transportation will work efficiently, that electricity will be available, that ATM machines will not commit "electronic robbery", that we can complete our education at the stipulated time, that we can achieve a genuine health care at reasonable cost, that phones will work, and so on. Freedom also entails that there won't be any reason for any individual to depend on others for survival because of economic or political deprivation. For instance, the situation of workers in Nigeria today, even those working in the universities, is that they have been reduced to an existence of perpetual expectations of arrears and loans. In other words, once there are no arrears owed them by the government or loans from cooperative societies, then workers can't really fashion a project for themselves and on their salaries alone. In this sense, we can't really say they are free. They are captives of the economic and political situation of the country.

*Decency* is also another variable for measuring national development. This has to do with the behaviours or attitudes of the people in a society which conform with the accepted and acceptable standard of what is right, what is modest, what is civil, what is wholesome, what is dignifying, and what is respectable. It refers to the level to which these values which enhance social cooperation are fully entrenched in any society. For instance, imagine you are driving on a lonely road and saw a stranger flagging you at a distance. What is likely to be your reaction? You speed away, of course! Why will you speed away? Well, for one, you don't know the person. And secondly, you don't trust him or her not to be harmful. Thus, the absence of trust in our society is one of the problems that makes social organisation of our society inefficient. In this respect, Nigeria is a normless society; a society defined by a lack of acceptable norms or values by which we can direct the way we think and perceive events around us.

## **The Contribution of Philosophy and Language**

The first contribution of philosophy to national development therefore comes from its function as a means to self-understanding; the definition or redefinition of who a people are and what they can be. The question of how best to organise the human society in such a way that people can live the good life, is one of the basic problems of political philosophy. It is also one of the most critical problems that plural societies face today in a world that is becoming more global and more complex. A *plural* state is any state in which the people are deeply divided along religious, linguistic, ethnic and cultural lines. Nigeria, for example, is multi-linguistic (i.e. there are more than 600 languages), multi-ethnic (i.e. there are equally the same number of ethnic groups), and multi-religious (i.e. there are at least more than three religious affiliations). Thus, one of the important functions of philosophy is how that universal capacity human beings have to philosophise can assist us, first in improving our sense of human solidarity; and second, in helping us to craft the social hope that will enhance our sense of living together in spite of our religious, cultural, linguistic, and ethnic differences. Richard Rorty argues that philosophy is a quest not for knowledge as an end in itself, but a knowledge as a means towards greater human happiness; a genuine human capacity which enhances “our ability to trust and to cooperate with other people, and in particular to work together so as to improve the future” (1999: xiii).

This presupposes the existence within the national space of what is called the “philosophic spirit”. The philosophic spirit refers to the human capacity to critically and reflectively challenge the structure of existence, of knowledge and of ideas and ideals in order to determine their tenability for coping with life. This spirit therefore ensures that citizens are always ready to examine and challenge the basis of national existence. This is because the philosophic spirit is an orientation which requires that we always ask for the justification of whatever is considered to be valid or right or good. The philosophic spirit will ensure that we no longer pass the responsibility for our failure either as a nation or as individuals to God or the devil. The philosophic spirit also ensures that we take the full responsibility for our self-actualisation as individuals and as a state. This will help the society, in the long run, to pay attention to the fundamental issues—rather than the superficial ones—in the economy, in public administration, in politics and in culture. And further, the society can also begin from this critical

and reflective foundation to begin the task of reconstructing those ideas and institutions that can serve as adequate guide for organising the society.

The second significant contribution to national development comes from language and the idea of cultural identity. There is a sense in which national development can't even begin until the citizens are able to achieve a sense of social belonging; a confidence in the capacity of the state to satisfy their deepest aspirations for the basic necessities of live. At the beginning of this lecture, we mention the fact that a deep sense of doubt and mutual suspicion characterise social relationship in Nigeria. In such a situation, it becomes difficult for the leadership to mobilise the people against any national challenge.

One good reason for such mutual distrust is the multilingual situation of Nigeria. There are close to 400 ethno-linguistic groups in Nigeria. The first implication of this is that there is no national lingua franca on which the burden of development can be placed. National development in this sense is a function of the capacity a state has to develop one indigenous language around which the necessity of cultural identity can be built. Education becomes an important instrument for fashioning a cultural identity. This is because educating the citizenry in their indigenous languages assists in the eradication of illiteracy; and this achievement enables the citizens to better appreciate the predicament of the state and respond to it.

There is therefore the need for a national language policy that will focus Nigeria's search for nationhood. This does not imply that such a national language policy requires the establishment of only one national language. This is not advisable in a plural state like Nigeria. it however requires the enshrinement of possible national languages in the Nigerian Constitutions as the language of administration, commerce, diplomacy, teaching, government, and so on. For instance, each region or zone in Nigeria could adopt an indigenous language as the regional language which the people can identify with.

### **Summary**

Having considered the relationship between language and philosophy in most of the lecture, it's only fitting that we conclude with a look at the relationship between philosophy, language and national development. This grounds the relevance of the course itself to the task of national development in Nigeria. We argue in the lecture that national development goes beyond the provision of infrastructural facilities to the capacity to achieve certain non-economic variables like happiness, freedom and well-being. This deeper sense requires the establishment of the foundation of social life which include the provision of basic necessities of life as well as the provision of cultural and psychic needs. Nigeria is a state that is lacking in both senses of national development. Apart from these requirements, any state that desires national development can't do without philosophy and what we called the "philosophic spirit" which is the human capacity to interrogate the conditions for national existence. Language is also significant because it serves as the basis for the generation of mutual sense of belonging which is required for mobilising the citizens against national challenges.

### **Post-Test**

1. What are the foundations for social life?
2. In what way does language enable cultural identity?
3. Outline what you consider to be the problem of Nigeria?
4. In what way is infrastructural development insufficient as an index of national development?

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