

# Theories of Language Comprehension: India and Beyond

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## 1 Words and Word Meanings

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## On 'Word-Meaning'

### Word-Meaning



## Contextual Meaning (?)

(ON A YACHT)

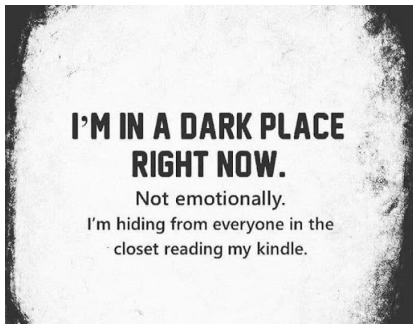
ME: \*raises glass\* to our new "YAKT"

HER: the "c" is silent

ME: \*staring out at the horizon\* yes it's very tranquil, ur right



## Literal vs. Secondary Meaning



My mom said that my poster is robust as a kitchen shelf cover. Finally someone calling my research "robust".



## Secondary Meaning ?



## Pragmatics ?





## On 'Word-Meaning' (1/7)

## Primary and Non-Primary Word-Meanings

*Śakti*: The Power of a Word

K. Raja's Book (P. 231-238)

- ① *Abhidhā* (Primary word meaning)
- ② *Lakṣaṇā* (Secondary word meaning)
- ③ *Vyañjanā* (Suggestive word meaning)



## On 'Word-Meaning' (2/7)

## Śakti: The Power of a Word

① *Abhidhā*

'saying', 'denotative' power of a word  
Primary/ Literary meaning of a word

“*saḥ mukhyaḥ arthaḥ abhidhā ucyate* /” (Mammata's *Kavyaparaksha*)

“*vācyaḥ arthaḥ abhidhāyā bodhyaḥ* /” (Visvanatha's *Sahitya-darpana*)



## On 'Word-Meaning' (3/7)

Śakti: The Power of a Word

2 *Lakṣaṇā* or *Gauṇī*

'indicating' / 'pointing' / 'signifying' power of a word

Also known as a 'metaphor', Indirect meaning of the word

Applied Only when (1) primary meaning is misfit and (2) secondary meaning is related to the primary meaning, (3) Secondary meaning is conveyed either by convention or speaker's intention.

“*mukhyārtha-bādhe tadyoge rūḍhito'tha prayojanāt |*  
*anyo'rtho lakṣyate yat sā lakṣaṇāropitā kriyā ||*” (Mammata's *Kavyaprakasa* II.9)



## On 'Word-Meaning' (4a/7)

Śakti: The Power of a Word

③ *Vyañjanā*

'Suggestive' power

It is a Figurative use of words

Emotive and other associative meanings

Propounded by Anandavardhana in his *Dhvanyāloka* (9th C)

*Dhvani*- Reverberations of meaning

Hearer-relative, appeals to the sensitive reader (*sahṛdaya*)

Both primary and indicative meanings are understood

It can be understood via inference (*anumāna*) as well,

Hence, according to some scholars- It is not a separate power of a word.



## On 'Word-Meaning' (4b/7)

*Vyañjanā*

The relation between the words and its suggestive meaning is that of:

- Between the limbs of a beautiful woman and her beauty (*Dhvanyāloka* 1.4) (Substratum-One that rests Relation),
- Between the lamp and the its light (*Dhvanyāloka* 1.9) (Manifestor-Manifested Relation), and
- Between the beautiful woman and her shyness (*Dhvanyāloka* 3.28) (Part-Whole Relation, Contextual).

Thus word is: *vācaka*, *ādhāra*, *sādhana*...

And the suggesting meaning is: *vācya*, *ādheya*, *sādhya*.



## On 'Word-Meaning' (5/7)

Non-Primary Word-Meanings: *Lakṣaṇā*

**Examples:**

- ① Sanskrit- '*gaṅgāyāṃ ghoṣaḥ*' (Cowshed on the Ganges → Cowshed on the bank of the Ganges), '*mañcāḥ krośanti/ hasanti*' (Beds are shouting/ laughing → Children on the bed are making noise)



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- ④ Telugu- '*msg pettyanu*' (I have put the msg → I have sent a msg), '*fan vesko*' (Drop a fan → Switch on the fan), '*emotions to adukovaddu*' (Don't play with [my] emotions!)



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- ⑤ German- '*die leseratte*' (Read-rat → A Bookworm)
- ⑥ French- '*buveur d'encre*' (A drinker of ink → A Bookworm)



## On 'Word-Meaning' (6a/7)

Non-Primary Word-Meanings: *Vyañjaṇā*

**Examples:**

- ① English: *'Tomorrow is another day!'*<sup>1</sup>, *'But still, like dust, I'll rise...'*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 'Gone with the Wind', 1936 novel

<sup>2</sup> 1978 poem by Maya Angelou

<sup>3</sup> Famous telugu song by Veturi Sundararama Murthy from 1993 movie 'Matrudevo Bhava'



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- ① English: *'Tomorrow is another day!'*<sup>1</sup>, *'But still, like dust, I'll rise...'*<sup>2</sup>
- ② Telugu: *'rali-poye puvva neeku ragalenduke....'*<sup>3</sup>

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- ② Telugu: *'rali-poye puvva neeku ragalenduke....'*<sup>3</sup>
- ③ Marathi: *'mor hava asel tar apan-ch mor vhave...'*

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## On 'Word-Meaning' (6b/7)

## Non-Primary Word-Meanings

*Vyañjanā* Power of a Word**Examples:**

- 4 Urdu:  
*'mere ashq bhi hai isme, ye sharab ubal na jaye...*  
*mera jaam chune wale, tera haat jal na jaye...'*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> By Anwar Mirzapuri

<sup>5</sup> From 1986 Hindi movie Ijaazat, penned by Gulzar



## On 'Word-Meaning' (6b/7)

## Non-Primary Word-Meanings

## Vyañjanā Power of a Word

## Examples:

4 Urdu:

*'mere ashq bhi hai isme, ye sharab ubal na jaye...  
mera jaam chune wale, tera haat jal na jaye...'*<sup>4</sup>

5 Hindi:

*'mera kuch saamaan, tumhare paas pada hai...  
sawan ke kuch bheege bheege din rakhhe hai...  
aur mere ek khat me lipti raat padi hai...  
woh raat bujha do... mera wo samaan lauta do...'*<sup>5</sup>

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## On 'Word-Meaning' (7/7)

### Situational Meaning

Also known as *Contextual* Meaning (by Ludwig Wittgenstein, 20th C)

Acquired through practice, guessing, inferencing...

J. R. Firth- "You shall know a word by the company it keeps!"

Examples:

- 'I am not feeling well.'
- 'Wear a mask as you always do.'
- 'Breathe...'
- 'Order!'
- 



## Reading Material:

- ① K Raja's 'Indian Theories of Meaning'
- ② BK Matilal's 'The Word and the World' (p. 32)



## Key Takeaways:

### Key Takeaways:

- 1 Type of word meanings (Application and Examples)
- 2 Contextual/ Situational Meaning

