

Theories of Language Comprehension

Differences between human and animal languages:

- Human lang. have a **script**
- Human lang. are **inflectional**

→ add new words to
create meaningful
sentences / create
new words

e.g.: Sanskrit

by adding 2 or
more words

→ Reasoning / Inferencing

→ use existing language and add **social**
context to it and derive meaning from
it

→ Intention reading

e.g.: Person 1 says : Aaj mess me paratha hai

Person 2 says : Par mera toh subah 8 baje
class hai

(which basically means he
won't be able to eat
at mess)

1) Set of Rules

English: Ram goes to forest. } order of
subject verb object } subj., verb, obj.
is important

Sanskrit: रामः वनं गृद्यति ।

do not have
order.

वनं रामः गृद्यति ।

These 2 sentences have the same meaning.

The meaning in Sanskrit is conveyed through
these:

रामः वनं गृद्यते ।

Plural : Forest → Forests

Dog → dogs (pronounced as /z/) ।

Cat → cats (pronounced as /s/) ।

Sanskrit: Singular Dual Plural

रामः रामौ रामाः

to
from

2) Ambiguity



All letters of 'DOG' together mean that animal. The letters 'D' / 'O' / 'G' don't individually represent the dog/ any part of the dog.

Onomatopoeia: Crow → called in Sanskrit

ऋणः

because it makes the sounds
'Ka-Ka-Ka-...'

3) Semanticity:

Ram goes to forest.

→ tells us

that the action
is happening
towards it

1. action

2. tense

(3rd person
singular)

→ 'Actor' is most important.

(we can't omit
the actor when
speaking a
sentence)

→ If verb is transitive : 2 obj. are required

e.g.: Ram gives a book to her.
obj. 1 obj. 2

- i) Morphological → word level
- ii) syntactic → phrase level
- iii) sentence → sentence level
- iv) discourse → paragraph level

Our speech is coded with semantics.

specifically unique to humans

order / meaning / sense.

4) Displacement

→ future tense

e.g. My aunt is going to come to India next week because she broke her past tense leg last month as she was skiing.

→ we can connect various tense events together to form a meaningful sentence.

5) Turn taking

→ speaking one after the other
→ actively involving in a discussion
→ retaining what was said earlier in the discussion and speaking further based on that.

When many people are speaking: everyone waits for the one who's speaking to finish speaking

In Indian culture, turn taking is not very prominent.

→ 2 or 3 people speak at once

→ before a person stops speaking, another starts

6) Structural Dependency

→ When a teacher explains something in a 55 min class - there's a structure in which she teaches the concepts.

concept 1 → sub concept 1

concept 2 → sub concept 2

⋮

Parrots can't do this.
They only repeat what is taught.

7) Creativity / Generativity

दशरथ

Son of दशरथ: दारारथ

Daughter of अश्वत्थ: मृत्युंजयी

} Word level

Sentence level: We'll go on speaking new sentences everyday - that we've never spoken till now. We can generate sentences based on the situation.

} In European / Western languages / cultures

this is more prominent

8) Cultural Transmission

Behaviourism → All behaviour shown by humans/ animals is a response to our external stimuli.

B.F. Skinner

1956

(The Verbal Behaviours)

Noam Chomsky - 1965

→ wrote a bad review of 'The Verbal Behaviour' in his article ('The Aspects of Theory of Syntax')

→ A child learns to speak because of its innate ability to do so.

→ A spider learns to spin a web because of its innate ability to do so.

⇒ Not due to the environment / external stimuli.

BUT:

If a human child is put in a forest since its birth, it won't be able to learn human lang despite its innate ability → as it isn't exposed to that language.

Thus, environment / ext. stimuli is also important

So: Innateness + External stimuli: both are important.

if a rat
 is given food
 every day by
 showing a red
 light, it will
 think food
 is given
 anywhere

But wife
 won't say this to
 husband, she'll say:
 పిటిషన్ → with respect
 Due to patriarchal,
 male dominated
 culture

तिनु रा :
 तिनु वे : close
 friends can
 speak like
 this to each
 other
 when they
 want to tell the
 other person
 to eat
 (Telugu)

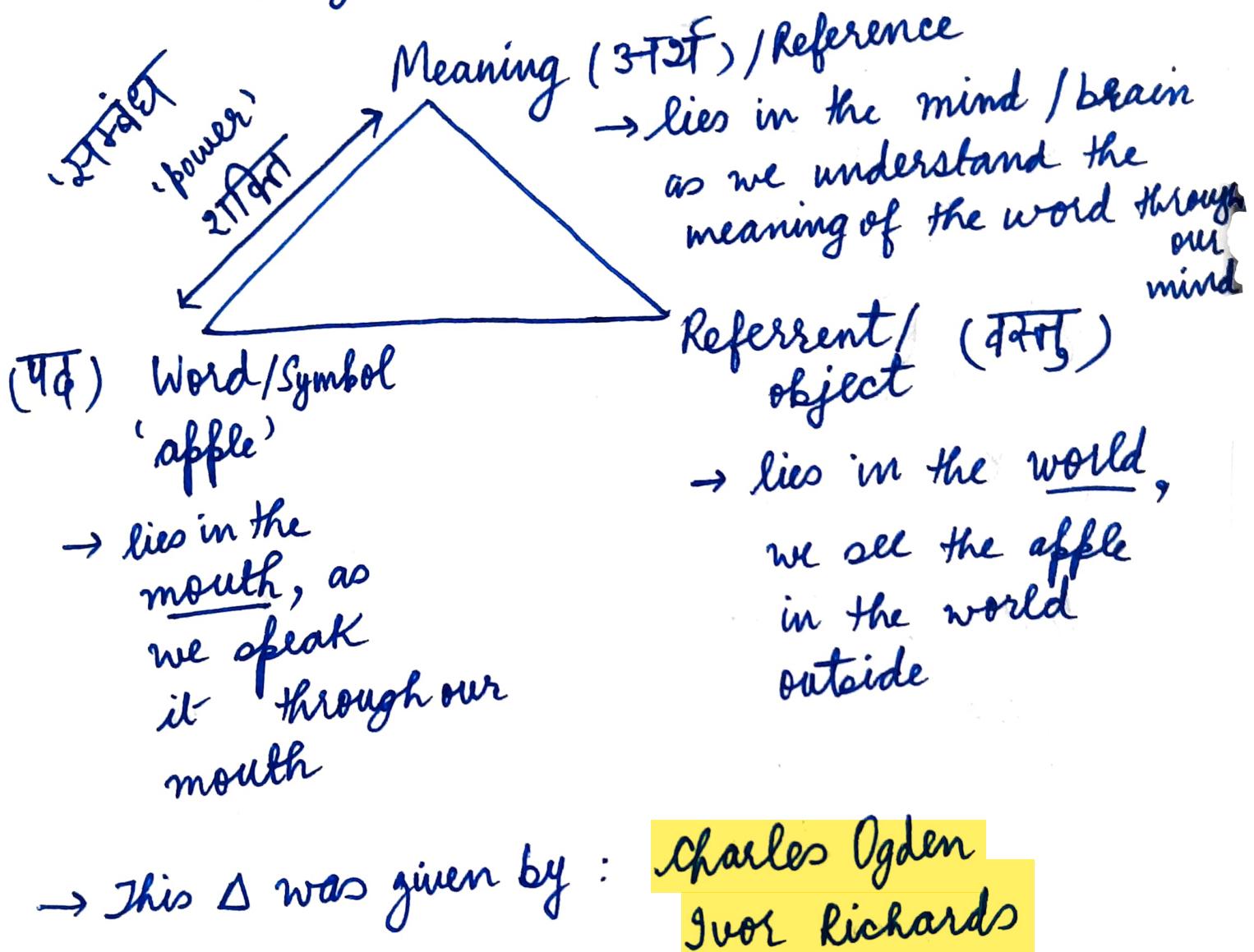
⑨ Intention reading:

Eg: I reach a meeting late and the supervisor asks me: "Meeting kitne baje tha?"
 This is sarcastic.
 I'm not supposed to state the actual time of the meeting here.
 I'm supposed to understand the sarcastic intention here and respond accordingly.

4G / Word

Semiotic

Triangle of Reference



In 1923

'The Meaning of Meaning'

Also called 'Ogden-Richard' Triangle.

Boat / bot / →

 bot / → finger

पद्) Word : combination of letters that make some sense, according to language

1) अक्षर समुदायः पदम्
~~~~~ ~~~~~ ~~~~~  
letters syllables group

2) वर्ण समुदायः पदम् → this was the original definition of 'word'  
~~~~~  
phonemes/ sounds

✓ ✗
zebra zebra

both sound the same, but only the 1st word is considered, because it has some meaning.

so, meaning along with sound makes up a word.

3) कृक्तं पदम् → - by ऋग्मंभट्ट ; 17th c
it should mean something

4) अर्थः पदम् → But by this definition, even a sentence makes sense

5) सुपितःनं पदम् → by Panini in his ऋग्मंभट्ट
(सुप् तिः अर्थ) → end (attaching to verb)

→ nominal suffixes (suffixes attaching to noun)

(दैव) + (सुप्)

दैव is not a word.

But दैवः is a word.

→ दैवः (प्रथमा विभक्ति)

(रम) + (तिङ्)

since it has a suffix attached to it.

→ रमति (3rd person)

Word is something

पदः At the end of which there are nominal suffixes/
verbal suffixes.

⑥ विभक्त्यनाः पदम् : गौतम 'न्यायसूत्र'
(Nyayasutra)
suffix
(सुप् / तिङ्)

→ Some words are not nominal/verbal.

e.g.: to इ

from ते

and वा

though तु

अथ.....

But even these are considered as words.