

Degree iii, (English Honours)

Paper – VIII

Section – 4

Subject- Linguistics

Lecture- 2

Meaning and Concept of Semantics

Importance of Meaning

Although the structuralists tried to study language without meaning, the importance of meaning has been recognized since the immemorial. In the Vedas, meaning is treated as the essence of language, and the speech without meaning has been called ‘the tree without fruits and flowers. Ancient Indian scholar such as Katyayana, Patanjali, Vyadi, Vyas, etc. regard the relationship of word and meaning as eternal. According to Patanjali, words naturally express meaning. One word would have meant one and the same thing in all the languages; there would have been no semantic change, and men would not have felt any necessity of learning words. Nevertheless, some Western scholars too have started talking about semantic universals now a days and today, there is a wide arrangement than it ever was that meaning is the soul of language.

Difficulties in the Study of Meaning

The problem of meaning is quite difficult, it is because of its toughness that some linguists went on to the extent of excluding semantics from linguistics. A well-known structuralist made the astonishing statement that linguistic system of a language does not include the semantics. The system is abstract, it is signalling system, and as soon as we study semantics, we are no longer studying language but the semantic system is associated with language. The structuralists were of the opinion that is only the form of language which can be studied, and not the abstract function. Both these are misconceptions. Recently a serious interest has been taken in the various problems of semantics. And semantics is being studied not only by the linguist but also by philosophers, psychologists, scientists, anthropologists and sociologists.

Scholars have long puzzled over what words mean or what they represent, or how they are related to reality. They have at times wondered whether words are more real than objects, and they have striven to find out the essential meaning of words. For example, difficulties may arise in finding out the essential meaning of the word table in water table, dining table, table are amendment, and the table of 9. An abstract word like good creates even more problems.

By, Arshad Khan

Dept. of English

J N College Madhubani