

### Personal Details

Principal Investigator	Prof. A. Raghuramaraju	Department of Philosophy, University of Hyderabad
Paper Coordinator	Dr. Geeta Ramana	Department of Philosophy, University of Mumbai
Content Writer	Dr. Geeta Ramana	Department of Philosophy, University of Mumbai
Content Reviewer	Prof. T.K. Nizar Ahmed	Former Professor, Department of Philosophy, SSUS, Kalady
Language Editor	Udaya B.L	Freelancer, Bengaluru

### Description of Module

Subject Name	Philosophy
Paper Name	Philosophy of Language
Module Name / Title	Ideal Language and Ordinary Language
Module Id	11.7
Pre-requisites	Aristotelian logic and its limitations, context of development of ideal language philosophy in terms of idealist metaphysics and development of modern logic, basic knowledge of symbolization and quantification.
Objectives	--
Key words	logic, language, analysis, artificial, ordinary discourse, philosophical problems

## Ideal Language and Ordinary Language

**1. Ideal Language Philosophy:** Philosophies concerning ideal language and ordinary language emerged in the beginning of the twentieth century and influenced significantly, not only the perception of philosophical problems but also their resolution. Ideal language was an artificial language constructed with the help of modern logical tools, especially those of predicate logic wherein its variables can be quantified. Since this language is modeled on symbolic logic, it is precise, non-ambiguous and reveals a structure that is able to accurately represent the descriptions that language makes. This language is contrasted with ordinary language which is seen as ambiguous, vague and often misleading. In fact, ordinary language very often deals with vocabulary that has often been called ‘the metaphysics of stone age’. J L Austin however resurrects the significance of ordinary language by saying that ‘...it embodies, indeed, something better than the metaphysics of the Stone Age, namely, as was said, the inherited experience and acumen of many generations of men’<sup>1</sup>. Ordinary language is to be understood before ‘improving’ on it. The aim of philosophical analysis is to clarify the meanings of terms used in our ordinary language and not to replace them. According to Austin, though words are like tools, it is important to use clean tools and ‘we should know what we mean and what we do not’ and therefore ‘what can be said and what cannot be said’, in the interest of clarity and understanding. This method was empirical and scientific in nature and could lead to definite results. An ideal language, on the other hand envisaged a replacement of vocabulary that was imperfect and imprecise with one that was logically perfect and precise. Logic was a kind of universal language that could provide for the accuracy and certainty that was earlier sought in epistemology. The turn towards language was an attempt to arrive at the world of experience through language. Sharpening the instrument of language was like clearing one’s glasses for a better perspective.

The logicist programme<sup>2</sup> initiated by philosophers like Frege and Russell attempted to demonstrate the reduction of mathematical concepts to logical ones. As Russell claims, ‘the primary aim of *Principia Mathematica* is to show that all pure mathematics follows from purely logical premises and uses only concepts definable in logical terms’<sup>3</sup>. Mathematical and logical reasoning are entirely formal and do not require the use of *apriori* knowledge of space and time as was presumed in Kantian acceptance of *synthetic apriori* truths ( $7+5=12$ ). Post Kantian idealists believed that knowledge of the spatio-temporal empirical world is only relatively true since they give rise to contradictions (as indeed

---

<sup>1</sup> Austin JL, A Pleas for Excuses, proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, New Series, Volume 57, 1956-57 , pp 1-30.

<sup>2</sup> According to Peter Hylton, Frege and Russell differed in their conceptions of logic. For Russell, ‘the metaphysics was independent of and prior to the logic....for Frege, logic in the sense of inferences....is primary; metaphysics secondary and articulated in terms which presuppose logic’, See ‘Logic in Russell’s Logicism’ in *The Analytic Tradition (Philosophical Quarterly Monographs-Volume 1)*, edited by David Bell and Neil Cooper, Basil; Blackwell, 1990, p. 156.

<sup>3</sup> Russell B, *My Philosophical Development*, George Allen and Unwin, 1959, pp74-75.

seen in Kant's first two antinomies as well as Bradley's arguments in favour of the internality of relations)<sup>4</sup>

The grammar of ordinary language raised too many philosophical problems of denotation that had to account for not only 'golden mountains' and 'unicorns', but also negative existential statements like 'round squares do not exist'. Russell's theory of descriptions is an example of an ideal language that attempted to get rid of the denoted entities under the subject term of a proposition. Following the Fregean project of logicism, an attempt was made to get rid of entities that would be subsumed under the quantifier and escape the ontological problem of entities that one could not point to. And so, 'Round Squares', and 'The present king of France' were rephrased and described in a logical language that did not imply their existence, but were at the same time meaningful expressions. For example, Round squares do not exist is logically translated as ' $(\forall x) (Rx \supset \sim Sx)$ ' and 'The present king of France is bald' is translated as ' $\exists x (pkFx \cdot Bx)$ '. The logical analysis in fact denies that there is anything that is both round and square thus improving on the inadequacies and misleading nature of grammatical form that encourage unwarranted ontological commitments. The theory of definite descriptions is an example of how an artificial, ideal language is constructed to deal with problems of denotation, especially with respect to universal propositions like 'All apples are red' or 'All men are mortal'. In these cases there is a denial of the existence of non-red apples or immortal men and what is asserted is the truth of all values of a class or a propositional function. One is not talking of any individual thing at all. One can see this in the following equivalence:  $\forall x (Mx \supset Mox) \equiv \exists x \sim (Mx \cdot \sim Mox)$

That is, All men are mortal  $\equiv$  Denial of the existence of immortal men.

WVO Quine too follows Russell in what Christopher Hookway calls the 'paradigm use of paraphrase'<sup>5</sup> that is used in Russell's theory of definite descriptions<sup>6</sup> as well as Quine's search for a criterion of ontological commitment<sup>7</sup>. Names that occur in sentences are logically reformulated for disambiguation. Quine's example of 'Pegasus has wings' is logically interpreted to mean 'there is one and only one thing that pegasizes and has wings'. This means 'there is something which is Pegasus and has wings' and assent or dissent towards this sentence gives us the required ontological furniture<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Hylton Peter in 'Logic in Russell's Logicism', *ibid*, pp 142-143.

<sup>5</sup> Hookway C, Quine, Stanford University Press, California, 1988.

<sup>6</sup> Russell B, 'On Denoting' in *Mind*, New Series, Vol.14, No. 56, 1905, pp. 479-493

<sup>7</sup> Quine WVO, 'On what there is' in *From a Logical Point of View*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1953.

<sup>8</sup> Hookway C, Quine, *ibid*, p.23.

Although the logical form of language was exploited by Aristotle by abstracting on the grammatical subject-predicate form, modern reflections on logic that in fact began from Leibnitz who suggested that there is a deep structure of syntax below the ordinary structure of spoken language<sup>9</sup>. As Hampshire observes, Russell applies the discoveries made in modern logic to the analysis of propositions that we assert in ordinary discourse about the world. This at once also counters the earlier idealist metaphysics that established the grounds of all knowledge on the basis of subjective experience. Analysis of 'propositions' and not 'ideas' becomes a significant feature of twentieth century analytic tradition provoking Rorty to describe this move as the 'linguistic turn'<sup>10</sup>. This move against psychologism was endorsed both by Moore and Russell who argued that some form of externalism is necessary for knowledge and experience of world. Both argued that 'judgements' (Moore) 'propositions' (Russell) were to be construed as independent of our acts of judging and maintained a clear distinction between the act and object of judging. The object of judgement is represented by the content of a judgement or a proposition and thus is amenable to analysis of its terms. Ideal language philosophy was an artificial language constructed to solve some of the hard philosophical problems like that of existence and identity. Though there were limitations of arriving at 'unique descriptions' with the help of logical tools it did help in rethinking the relation between logic, language and reality. To compound this situation there also developed new kinds of logics like three-valued logic and modal logic that pictured the world radically different from two-valued logic of the 'Principia Mathematica'.

**2. Ordinary Language Philosophy:** Concern with the uses of expressions in ordinary language, providing philosophical comfort is first seen in G E Moore's discussion of 'analysis' and the role of common sense beliefs in his paper 'Defense of common sense' (1925) and 'Proof of the external world' (1939). Moore uses the terms 'common sense beliefs' in the sense of how we understand them in our ordinary language and argues for their certainty, thus claiming that these are not only true but also that we know them to be true. He believed that a philosopher's role is to analyze our ordinary understanding of terms and not their truth. There could be different theories on the 'true' nature of the object but one should never deny our ordinary ways of knowing things about the external world. He defends a common sense description of the world based on an indirect argument that logicians often use to support their basic premise. This is done by showing that the negation of the premise leads to a contradiction (in this case a self-contradiction) and therefore the premise be held true. Moore lists a set of truism that begin with all the statements one can truly make about oneself in terms of physical and mental facts that could be extended to include the past as well

---

<sup>9</sup> Hampshire Stuart on Bertrand Russell in Modern British Philosophy- Dialogues with A J Ayer and Others, Ed by Bryan Mcgee, 1986, Oxford University Press.

<sup>10</sup> Rorty R, The Linguistic Turn – Essays in Philosophical Method, The University of Chicago Press, 1967, 1992.

as the future. One could begin with 'there exists at present a living human body which is my body' and all facts concerning this statement.

Moore tries to reclaim the world lost by idealists and sceptics who have either denied the existence of the empirical world or cannot know it with any certainty. Statements like 'material objects are not real', 'self is not real', 'space and time are unreal', cannot be maintained without self-contradiction, since the idealist as well as the sceptic need to be positioned in space and time to state these positions. In fact, Moore goes on to argue that 'a philosopher who holds that there are no external objects is making a false empirical claim'<sup>11</sup>. Metaphysical propositions, on the same grounds, are not nonsensical but false.

In his 'Proof of the external world', Moore shows that 'there are external objects' is an empirical proposition and that one can indeed know things (as true) that one may not be able to prove'<sup>12</sup>. By raising two hands, Moore 'proves' that two human hands exist at this moment thus establishing the truth of common sense beliefs. Norman Malcolm critiques Moore's attempt to resolve the philosophically paradoxical statements by positing empirical and factually undeniable claims against them<sup>13</sup>. However, as Malcolm points out, the paradox is due to the disagreement at the level of language due to improper forms of speech and not facts. Despite strong criticisms, Moore's fundamental point that one's philosophical theories ought not to go *against* the grain of common sense and ordinary discourse, remains a reining principle for philosophical ventures.

Wittgenstein's later writings on 'certainty' picks up issue with Moore's list of truisms or common sense propositions which purport to give certain knowledge. The truisms are certainly significant but are examples which are true due to grammar and not fact. It makes no sense to doubt or confirm statements like 'I am a human being and exist at such-and-such a point of time'. As Malcolm too (following Wittgenstein) points out, 'In what context would we say 'I am a human being'? To Wittgenstein too philosophy should in no way interfere with the actual use of language. It can only describe it. 'Don't think but look and see' (PI-66). Wittgenstein too shared Moore's confidence in looking at ordinary linguistic practices for dissolution of philosophical puzzles. In sharp contrast to the 'Tractatus', the meaning of a word was placed within contextual circumstances and understood in terms of its use in language (rather than its denotation). 'Learning philosophy is really recollecting.

---

<sup>11</sup> Moore G E in Replies, Philosophy of G E Moore, Library of Living Philosophy Series, Edited by PA Schilpp Open Court, 1968.

<sup>12</sup> Moore G E, 'Proof of the External World' (1939) in Philosophical Papers, George Allen and Unwin Publishers, London, 1959.

<sup>13</sup> Malcolm N in Philosophy of G E Moore, Library of Living Philosophy Series, Ibid, p. 346.

We remember- that we really used words in this way (S-419)<sup>14</sup>. Words in one's language function in a variety of ways - Words are like tools in a tool box (PI-11), and though everything lies open to view (PI-126), it is surface grammar that very often misleads us. The logic of depth grammar shows us that the direction of understanding is not towards a hidden inner world of 'private' language. 'The inner process stand in need of outer criteria' (PI-580). Criteria are situated within our practices and are necessarily inter-subjective. Philosophical perplexities emerge due to the intellectual temptation that is unable to prevent the mind from moving towards the indications provided by the surface grammar of our language. The unease is therapeutically alleviated once we are alerted to the logical muddles caused by language. For example, we treat words like 'time', 'self' and 'consciousness' as names and look for a matching fit in the world, not realizing that their meaning is situated in the heterogeneity of its contextual uses and not in searching for definitions or essences. Philosophy is truly a *struggle* against the bewitchment of one's intelligence by means of language (PI-109).

Wittgenstein makes full use of the analogy with language –games that extend to the nature and scope of language itself as an activity or a form of life. Languages and games share a rule-following pattern that make the learning of the meaning of words a public affair, since rules provide standards or norms for the 'correct/incorrect use of a word, thus establishing a criterion of shared understanding (PI -85-242). Just as rules are constitutive of games, so are norms constitutive of forms of life (language – games) that are public and objective. In PI -206, Wittgenstein describes an explorer entering an unknown country and is able to interpret an unknown language only against the 'common behaviour of mankind', which settles doubts and uncertainties by recourse to what emerges clearly from a customary and conventional setting of human activities. Meaning and Understanding are thus situated in a context bounded by 'forms of life'.

Like Moore and Wittgenstein, Ryle too was concerned with meaning and philosophical analysis. He reveals the logical geography of concepts by 're-locating' them into its legitimate and appropriate logical type. Ryle, influenced by Wittgenstein, studied the different formal and informal uses that are involved in language and showed how a 'category mistake' can occur in ignoring the logical grammar of one's language<sup>15</sup>. In contrast to the operations of formal logical rules, the informal logic employed in the use of expressions in ordinary language reveal the logical howlers that result on operating illegitimately with words. 'We argue with expressions and about these expressions in one and the same breath', and so can be mistaken about the logical category to which they belong<sup>16</sup>.

---

<sup>14</sup> Wittgenstein L, *Philosophical Occasions (1912-1951)*, Ed. by James C Klagge, Alfred Nordmann, Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 1993.

<sup>15</sup> Ryle G, *The Concept of Mind*, Hutchinson, London, 1949.

<sup>16</sup> Ryle G, 'Ordinary Language' in *The Philosophical Review*, Volume 62, No.2, 1953, pp. 167-186.

The Rylean technique involves ‘extracting the logical rules implicitly governing a concept’ by observing the various uses of an expression in one’s language<sup>17</sup>. So, we do not enquire into properties or feature of a word, but what is done with it in language. In the process, we learn what not to do with them. For example, we learn to find out the meaning of a word with the help of a dictionary but not the meaning of sentences. Philosophical problems like the mind-body problem are symptomatic of ‘conjoining two terms that belong to different logical categories’. As Ryle explains, there is a legitimate use of the terms ‘mental process’ and ‘physical process’ or even ‘minds’ and ‘bodies’. However when we use both of them in the same breath as in ‘there exists minds and bodies’, a category mistake occurs akin to buying a ‘left-handed glove’, a ‘right-handed glove’ and a ‘pair of gloves’. In this context, the classic mind-body problem is an example of a category mistake, embodying a basically false assumption of two distinct kinds of existences. The myth of consciousness is another example of not paying sufficient attention to the logical grammar of one’s language<sup>18</sup>. P F Strawson finds Ryle’s metaphor of conceptual mapping too abstract since it does not specify the nature of the relations between concepts nor does it specify their purpose<sup>19</sup>. He also finds Wittgenstein’s therapist metaphor exaggerated and an abdication of responsibility<sup>20</sup>. Strawson brings out the philosopher’s role in a more ‘positive’ and ‘constructive’ engagement with ordinary language in order to lay bare ‘the general conceptual structure of which our daily practice shows us to have a tacit unconscious mastery’<sup>21</sup>. He clearly turns Wittgenstein’s ‘forms of life’ to embody that basic and fundamental structure that underlies our ordinary linguistic practices.

Strawson argued for a radical re-classification and ordering of the types of discourse that underlie ordinary language such that it reveals the overall structure of our conceptual scheme. He called this an exercise in descriptive (rather than reversionary) metaphysics and brings to the fore ‘categories and concepts which in their most fundamental character do not change’<sup>22</sup>. One needs to discover these truths since concepts underlying our theoretical discourse presuppose and rest on the basis of ‘pre-theoretical concepts of ordinary life’<sup>23</sup>. Both the cartographer and the grammarian have learnt to give a systematic account of the unconscious and unsystematic usage of concepts handled in daily practices, by laying bare the conceptual apparatus at work. For example, we know what notions of ‘time’, ‘person’, ‘identity’ mean in ordinary discourse, but not what they conceptually really mean. In this context, Strawson defends an elucidatory role for philosophical analysis that assumes an elaborate, interdependent and interconnected network of concepts underlying our ordinary conceptual

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ryle G, *The Concept of Mind*, *ibid*.

<sup>19</sup> Strawson P F, *Analysis and Metaphysics*, OUP, 1992, p. 3

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> Strawson P F, *Individuals – An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*, Methuen, London, 1959

<sup>23</sup> Strawson P F, *Analysis and Metaphysics-An Introduction to Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 21.

resources. ‘One cannot fully elucidate the concept of knowledge without reference to the concept of sense-perception and one cannot explain all features of the concept of sense-perception without reference to the concept of knowledge’<sup>24</sup>. Again, ordinary objects like a car, a stone or a chair are instances of the concept of a material object which is a basic particular. In a similar vein, ‘person’ is a primitive notion unanalyzable into ‘body’ and ‘mind’. Thus, such a connectivist model that lays bare the irreducible conceptual framework that constitutes our ordinary thought is discovered through the analysis of ordinary language. According to Strawson, these will be ‘the necessary features of any conception of experience’<sup>25</sup>.

We see that ordinary language has very fruitful relations with philosophy and philosophical problems. Though it is harder for philosophical language to connect to the ordinary world than for the ordinary world to connect to the language of science for instance. One accepts the latest scientific discoveries more readily than philosophical theories. Ironically, it is much harder to defend the unreality and illusory content of the world than the real world of ordinary discourse. It is in this context that ordinary language philosophers gently remind us that it is not wise to ignore the benefits of ordinary language. Most philosophical problems, however abstract, emerge from the everyday world of familiar objects and events in differing ways, depending on one’s philosophical orientation. Each of the ordinary language philosophers discussed in this module connect to the ordinary world and its discourse using distinctive methodological and philosophical tools. It is therefore always a challenge to address philosophical perplexities *via* the touchstone of one’s ordinary language and its conceptual resources.

### **Conclusion**

Ideal language philosophy as an artificial language used quantificational logic to get rid of metaphysical entities by getting rid of names for descriptions. A significant challenge to Russell’s theory of descriptions was seen in P. F. Strawson’s classic article ‘On Referring’ who pointed out that the context and the performative character of sentences would affect truth-value of sentences. We need to take into account the semantic presupposition of sentences like ‘The King of France is bald’ where the question of truth or falsity simply doesn’t arise when there is no King of France<sup>26</sup>. It is similar to the situation where one is asked ‘have you stopped beating your wife’ when one is not married. Either answer erroneously presupposes that you have a wife. In fact, Popper criticized the excessive analysis that was initiated by Austin, Ryle and Wittgenstein saying that in cleaning the

---

<sup>24</sup> Strawson P F, *Analysis and Metaphysics*, *ibid*, p. 19.

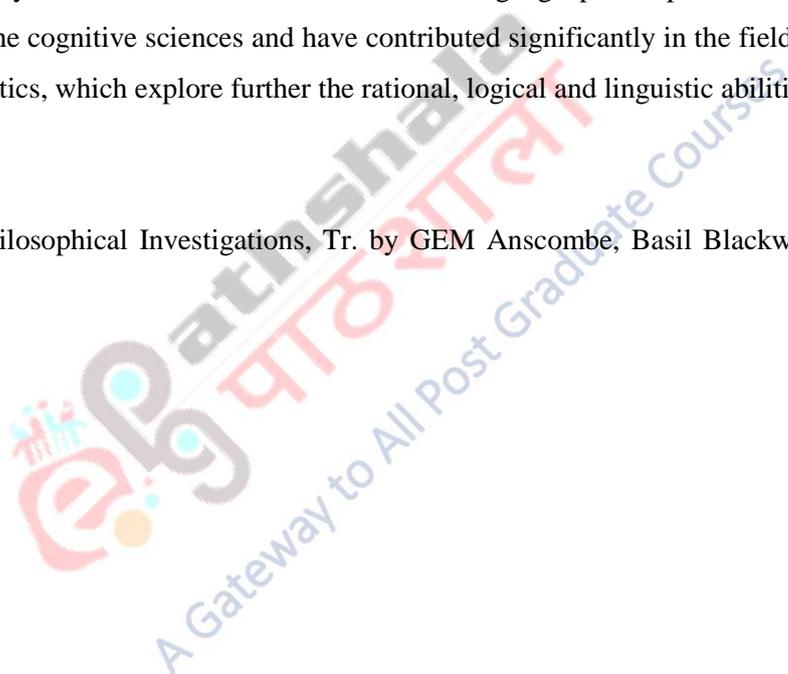
<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. 26.

<sup>26</sup> Strawson P F, ‘On Referring’ in *Mind*, New Series, Vol. 59, No. 235, 1950, pp.,320-344

glasses of language one must never forget that the purpose of those glasses is to see (the world). One's language must never deny or obfuscate the primacy of reality<sup>27</sup>.

Many philosophers like John Searle critiqued the range that descriptions could definitely hold with respect to proper names. He argued that we conventionally agree upon a 'cluster' of descriptions that would be sufficient in a particular context<sup>28</sup>. Paul Grice also very perceptively pointed to the limitations of the propositional structure that needed to also take into account the speech act of the utterer and his/her intentions for unique reference<sup>29</sup>. Despite the diverse goals of ideal language philosophy and ordinary language philosophy, there was a common assumption that language embodied a framework that could also tell us about the nature of the world. The only difference was whether we needed a new language or the dynamics of existing language needed to be explored further. In contemporary times, both artificial and natural language philosophies have developed largely in the field of the cognitive sciences and have contributed significantly in the field of artificial intelligence and linguistics, which explore further the rational, logical and linguistic abilities of human beings.

**Abbreviations:** PI: Philosophical Investigations, Tr. by GEM Anscombe, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1958.



---

<sup>27</sup> Strawson P F, Modern British Philosophy- Dialogues with A J Ayer and Others, Ed by Bryan Mcgee, 1986, Oxford University Press.

<sup>28</sup> Searle J, 'Proper Names' in Mind, 67, 1958, pp. 166-173.

<sup>29</sup> Grice P, Utterer's meaning and Intentions in The Philosophical review, 68, 1969, pp.147-77.