



* On Tales, Tellings, Poetics *
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Signifying Everything

Language and the Interminable Mystery of Meaning that Knows Every Which Way

Language provides a means for articulating thought and communication. It is difficult to think of thinking without language. The very composition and assertion of identity seems dependent upon language. Thus it can be considered the 'medium of human consciousness.' However, the ways in which language is composed and functions in that consciousness is viewed variously. Some assert that the complexities of language mirror the structure and dynamics of the mind or psyche—that understanding the latter can be approached by examining the former. In so far as there are more and less reductive uses or interpretations of language and how it composes meaning, it is an important consideration for understanding epistemic modes of knowing the radical complexity of concurrent being and becoming.

The Meanings of Meaning in, of, and around Words

It is evident that words make meaning, or at least that meaning is made by the usage of words. Dictionaries exist to provide a reference for a commonly shared understanding of word meanings. And yet, there are both denotational and connotational categories of meaning for words—some meanings being considered explicit and some implicit. Words appear then to be 'polysemous,' or multiply meaningful. Furthermore, the 'location' of meaning in language can be approached from a more or less reductive perspective. The former view regards words as having exact, specific meanings—meanings that correspond to the literally true conditions of existing things and phenomena. The less reductive view regards words as signs—textual or spoken--each signifying a composite meaning derived from other words which are in turn signs for composites of other words in an ultimately indefinite and recursive set of references for the meaning of each particular word. In this view, individual words have no meaning in the absence of definitions supplied by groups of other words, whose

meanings are similarly derived. There is then a perspective on the meaning of words as being ‘of themselves’ and that derives from or corresponds to ‘the actual status of things.’ Then there is a view that regards words as meaningless ‘by themselves’ or in isolation. In one sense, meaning is ‘in’ words that are ‘of’ the actual world. In the other sense, meaning is ‘around’ words but not ‘of’ them—meaning is dispersed throughout language and its interminably various associations.

In a related sense, words tend to have various meanings depending upon the context in which they are encountered. Associations with differing other words, position in differing sentence structures, as well as tones of voice, can produce various or even multiple meanings (puns and double entendres). The view that the meaningfulness of words is relative to the context of their usage amplifies the sense that each one signifies variously and even indefinitely. Another indication of the instability and diversity of word meanings is evidenced in the etymological changes in word definition and usage over time. Words not only mean differently in one social or geographic context, but also in different eras of time.

Ordinarily Reductive Usage and the Denial of Indefinite Meaningfulness in Language

In more ordinarily practical and habitual language usage words tend to be used with confidence in the specificity of their meanings by persons of a similar socialized context. Social identity depends upon such confidence in shared meanings. Though assuming that others understand the meaning of one’s word usage can lead to confusion, it is surprising how common conventions of reductive language usage appear to maintain an unquestioned, practically literalistic, mechanistically useful sense of shared reality. However, such reductive and positivistic usage that tends to equate words with things in a singular and exact manner obscures the richness and diversity of meaning in language. Pragmatically ordinary vocabularies, such as are used in the writing of more widely read newspapers, magazines, popular novels, songs, and movies, are typically a fraction of the words available for expression in a given language.

The effects of this reduction of word meanings to more singular associations and of vocabulary to a more rudimentary range is accompanied by restrictive conventions of usage. Phrasings that foreground the inherent diversity of word meanings are assiduously avoided. Thus puns, double entendres, poetic metaphors, and complex phrases are rather rare in ordinarily reductive language usage. When metaphors are used the intent is typically more humorous or merely illustrative of a literalistic meaning (such as the use of sports terms to describe politics or emotions to characterize weather). Thus there is a remarkably noticeable difference between what

people accept as practical language versus what might be considered poetic, literary, intellectual, or mythical usage. Sensitivity to that distinction indicates how effectively common usage restricts overt experience of the intrinsically diverse and multiple meanings words have as signs of radically complex derivations of associative meaning. More ordinary usage thusly tends to circumscribe and delimit not only the indefinite meaningfulness of language—how it ‘signifies everything’ and ‘knows in all directions’—but also consequently the broader play of human consciousness, of which it is the medium of manifestation.

Extra-Ordinary Usage and Engagement of Being's Mysterious Concurrency in and through Language

When the more reductive tendency of language usage is evaded and words are regarded as all the more meaningful because of the diverse and uncertain quality of their significations, the intrinsic complexity of how language models consciousness become more evident. The term ‘poetic diction’ indicates a notable shift in language usage tends to amplify the multiplicities and instabilities of meanings among words. This poetic mode tends to associate words in ways that foreground the complexes of the meanings that reverberate between particular words in particular associations. It also tends to ‘take seriously’ the metaphorical usage of words to present a sense of accurate representation of ‘how things really *really* are.’ Phrases such as ‘the road of water’ and ‘the time falling bodies take to light’ are thusly used to indicate very genuine and often ‘intensely felt actualities’ of life experience.

The way in which such language usage is meaningful can be understood as deriving from its dynamic modeling of the radically complex associations and interactivities of concurrent being and becoming. Whereas reflexively reductive ordinary usages is useful in negotiation such complexity in a practically functional manner, usage that foregrounds the overlapping and interminably complicated contexts of meaning composed by word-signs gives more appropriate expression to the ultimately mysterious multiplicity of states of feeling, thinking, and being that are intrinsic to concurrent qualities of self and world. Demonstrating how language can ‘signify everything’ by manifesting diversely concurrent thus transient and yet meaningfully appropriate complexes of associations mirrors the strange capacity of consciousness to ‘know every which way’ without losing a sense of specificity. Such language usage provides a formal modality for precipitation of participation in the many-ness of oneness.

Thus notably extra-ordinary modes of language usage can be considered quite essential to any broader, more inclusive understanding of self, others, and world. Poetic,

literary, and intricately intellectual usages are intrinsic to engaging all that is, quite necessarily, evaded by habitually reductive manifestations of ‘consciousness in/as words.’

Further elaboration of these notions in Chapters One and Three of text **Manifesting the Many in the One** on page of that title

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