



Language: The Arbiter of Thought, Perception and Reality

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Abstract - Language is not merely a tool for communication but a fundamental framework through which human thought, perception, and reality are shaped and interpreted. This paper examines the role of language as an active mediator of cognition, arguing that linguistic structures influence how individuals conceptualize the world, form knowledge, and assign meaning to experience. Drawing on insights from linguistics, philosophy, cognitive science, and social theory, the study explores how language shapes perception, constructs social realities, and reinforces cultural norms and power relations. By analyzing the interplay between language and thought, the paper highlights the extent to which reality is not simply perceived but linguistically constructed. Ultimately, it argues that understanding language as an arbiter of reality is essential for grasping how knowledge, identity, and worldview are formed and transformed.

Keywords - Language and cognition, Thought and perception, Linguistic relativity, Reality construction, Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.

I. Introduction

The term 'thought' has diverse connotations in the philosophical literature. Standardly, the term has taken on several meanings in various philosophical studies encompassing themes like mental processes, ideas, consciousness, the nature of a thinking being etc. However, in the present context, my use of this term does not bear any semblance to any of the aforesaid themes. My aim in this paper is to examine the importance of language in understanding the relationship between thought, perception, and reality, and, in addition, to argue for the inevitable role of language in shaping our conception of reality. The conception of the Thought, Perception and Reality that I wish to advocate is deeply Fregean in spirit. Frege defined terms like 'Sense' and 'Thought', in a way that is starkly different from their customary usage. Sense, he opined, is the mode of presentation of an object, it is the way in which an object is given to us; and Thought is the sense of a sentence for which the question of truth and falsity arises. Thought, Frege regards, belongs to a third realm; a realm that neither touches upon the external world of physical objects nor does it belong to the mind of the perceiver. This third realm is untouched by material objects or the ideas of the perceiver (human consciousness). Frege's treatment of thought gives it a pristine purity, such that it is not contaminated by any inkling of our perceptible world.

It is this immaculate status of thought which Frege claims is untouched by the inner and the external realm that I intend to challenge in this paper. The key characteristics of thought that Frege advances are the following:

- Thoughts are not produced by us, but they are apprehended.
- Thoughts are expressed by declarative sentences.



- Thoughts are not to be confused with sensations and ideas.
- Thoughts are objective.
- Thought is a form of reality.
- Thoughts are the bearers of truth value.
- Thoughts are language independent

The justification Frege provides for assigning thoughts an objective status is rooted in their inherent truth-values; specifically, their capacity to be judged as either true or false. This serves as the primary distinction for why a thought must be distinguished from private human consciousness or individual ideas. Since ideas are essentially subjective, one individual's mental representation of an object might be valid (or true) for them while another's representation is invalid (false). However, regarding thoughts, our mode of expression transcends purely subjective boundaries. For example, when discussing the definition of a triangle, I might utilize a proposition such as "a triangle is a geometric figure bounded by three vertices." To properly articulate the thought that is expressed by this respective sentence, I do not refer to "my personal idea of a triangle," because my internal image could be true for me yet false for someone else. If my goal is to transmit the identical thought, exactly as I understand it, so that it can be grasped by other minds, then thoughts must reside in a domain that is independent of human consciousness, mental imagery, or private notions. This necessity is precisely what compels Frege to propose the existence of a third realm where thoughts are located.

While I concur with the Fregean premise that thoughts must be distinguished from subjective ideas or sensory impressions, I find his assertion regarding the linguistic independency of thoughts to be somewhat problematic. It is noteworthy that although Frege maintains that thoughts are apprehended, he provides a relatively limited explanation concerning the actual mechanism of this apprehension. Upon a deeper investigation into this inquiry, one finds that the function of language appears to be inextricably linked to the way we grasp these thoughts. Consequently, the act of apprehension seems impossible to separate from the linguistic framework that facilitates it. This suggests that rather than being independent entities that language merely labels, thoughts might be fundamentally structured by the very language we use to access them.

Frege makes a distinction between:

- Apprehension of thought – thinking (this happens when we form sentences)
- Recognition of truth of a thought – judgment (this occurs when we judge a thought to be true or false)
- Manifestation of this judgment – assertion (once we understand a thought as true or false then we assert it)

The ambiguity in Frege's position stems from the fact that, when discussing the foundational stage of apprehension, he failed to provide an exhaustive account of the process. This specific lack of detail creates a theoretical opening for me to interpret the grasping of thoughts through a distinctly linguistic lens. By not thoroughly explaining how the mind accesses the third realm, Frege allows for the possibility that our arrival at a thought is directed by the structures of language itself. Therefore, I am able to argue that the way we come to understand these objective contents is not a direct, non-mediated intuition, but is instead a process that is fundamentally oriented and shaped



by our linguistic capacities. What Frege says about the apprehension of thought is merely this: "We perform the first act when we form a sentence-question. An advance in science usually takes place in this way, first a thought is apprehended, such as can perhaps be expressed in a sentence- question"

At this juncture, one might legitimately ask what the actual process of grasping a thought entail. What does it mean to apprehend a thought? This inquiry remains unsolvable unless we venture into the domain of language. It is through language that we give structure to our perceptions, translating our raw sensory encounters into communicable thoughts and aligning them with the world. In other words, the decision that a thought corresponds to the truth signifies a synthesis of abstract thought with objective reality, a connection that is made accessible through language. The determination of whether a thought is true or false can only be maintained by confirming the presence or absence of a specific state of affairs. For instance, the thought expressed by the sentence "this tree is currently devoid of leaves" can only be validated if we compare it to a physical situation or a state of affairs that exists in that exact manner. Consequently, it is the linguistic constructions we create that generate thoughts; these expressed thoughts are then compared against reality and evaluated for their truth-value, rather than the process working in the opposite direction. Frege says that thoughts are language independent and are apprehended:

When one apprehends or thinks a thought one does not create it but only comes to stand in a certain relation, which is different from seeing a thing or having an idea, to what already existed beforehand.

My primary challenge to this assertion is that if thoughts possess an inherent, pre-existing nature, they must logically antedate the manifestation of states of affairs or the actual occurrence of events. This perspective would imply that thoughts remain fundamentally detached from the structures of language. Furthermore, such a view suggests that thoughts reside in a "pre-applicational" state, yet this very ontological autonomy casts doubt upon the nature of their truth-value. Since truth-value is the defining characteristic of a thought, if a thought precedes the emergence of a state of affairs, then the conditions for determining its truth or falsity cannot logically exist. In that scenario, a thought would have to be viewed as necessarily true simply because it exists as a static entity awaiting apprehension. In reality, it is the concrete existence of situations or specific states of affairs that makes the evaluation of a thought's truth or falsity even possible. Therefore, thoughts do not possess the degree of independence that Frege's philosophical framework attributes to them.

Additionally, I wish to argue that thoughts possess an inherently structural nature. By invoking the concept of structure, I am asserting that a thought is composed of constituent parts, with temporal reference serving as a vital element. Frege himself acknowledges that a sentence failing to specify a time conveys only an incomplete thought; it is the inclusion of a temporal marker within a proposition that brings a thought to its completion. Crucially, time is a dimension of our external reality, populated by perceptible phenomena. If the saturation of a complete thought necessitates a temporal indication, then the premise that thoughts exist in total isolation from the internal or external realms is significantly undermined. Since time is rooted in



the perceptible world, a thought must effectively penetrate or interface with the external domain to achieve its full realization. It appears unfeasible to grasp thoughts without some foundational link to both the perceptible realm which encompasses the structure of language and the mental sphere. Just as the reliance on time compromises the alleged purity of the third realm, Frege's assertion that thoughts are independent of language faces the same conceptual hurdles previously examined.

One cannot logically sustain the claim that we grasp thoughts without crossing the two realms, i.e. internal and external, a movement that contradicts Frege's own insistence on maintaining the strict separation of his three realms. This tripartite ontology reveals an inherent friction within the nature of thought itself. Although Frege attempts to anchor thought within a static and objective third realm, its inescapable reliance on sensory perception, temporal markers, and linguistic structures suggests that the existence of thought is inseparable from the fabric of human life.

Consequently, language serves as the essential bridge between these ontological spheres, harmonizing internal perception with the external world. Asserting that a thought exists independently of any subject is as nonsensical as suggesting that a musical masterpiece exists without the hand of a creator. Both the physical entities in our surroundings and the thoughts that we grasp are integral components of a more comprehensive state of affairs. We cannot ontologically isolate 'thought' from human consciousness, as it is precisely the engagement between humans and reality that generates these states of affairs. Thoughts are articulated through declarative sentences that describe the states of affairs; thus, we do not merely compare a thought against a separate reality. Rather, we perceive reality first, and use that perception to verify the truth of the thoughts that are expressed via language. It is this interaction between thought, perception and reality through language that leads me to forge an integrated understanding of the three.

II. conclusion

This study has demonstrated that language functions not merely as a passive medium of expression but as a powerful determinant of thought, perception, and the construction of reality. Through its structures, categories, and symbols, language shapes how individuals interpret experience, organize knowledge, and engage with the world. The analysis underscores that perception is filtered through linguistic frameworks, while social realities—such as identity, norms, and power relations—are sustained and transformed through discourse. Recognizing language as an arbiter of reality reveals the profound influence linguistic systems exert on cognition and culture. Consequently, a critical awareness of language becomes essential for understanding how realities are formed, challenged, and reimagined, emphasizing the need for reflexive and inclusive approaches to language in both scholarly inquiry and everyday life.

References



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