Language and Communication: Husserl and Heidegger

Kanya Sen Gupta
Bethuna College, Kalkuta

Abstract. Husserl’s account of meaning and communication in mentalistic terms is not adequate, as Derrida’s and Searle’s persuasive criticisms bring us closer to Heidegger’s position which moves away from inner mental life to what lies ‘outside’ it, namely the world where alone language communicates successfully. Thus meaning and communication, as we have tried to argue with Heidegger, function only in the practical horizon of the life – world, against the background of shared community practices, of co-affectedness and co-understanding.

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I

In this paper, I shall do two things: first, I shall discuss Husserl’s view of language and communication; and secondly, I shall present Heidegger’s view in ‘Being and Time’ to locate how he departs from Husserl. Husserl has discussed communication in the logical context, which presupposes that meanings remain identical across different speakers/hearers and across different contexts. But Heidegger has discussed communication in the existential context which does not presuppose such identical Sinn (sense or meaning), but possibilities. Communication succeeds, for Heidegger, if you are able to project your possibilities of doing something, and also if others understand these possibilities. Hence the focus of Heidegger is not, like Husserl’s account, on cognition but on practice, on doing things. My aim in this paper is to defend Heidegger’s position as against Husserl’s in this regard.

II

Husserl in the first investigation of his ‘Logical Investigations’ begins with language, with the understanding of meaningful verbal expressions. Let us explain what he means by the understanding of meaningful expressions. If, for example, we hear a sound like ‘abracadabra’, we have mere auditory experience which signifies nothing. But if, on the contrary, we hear or read expressions like ‘Rabindranath is the author of Gitanjali’, we have auditory or visual experience no doubt, but auditory or visual experience which becomes the vehicle of meaning. Each time I utter, hear or read the above sentence, what I mean is the same, namely that a certain person is the author of a certain work. Others who hear my utterance, provided they know English, understand the same meaning. Communication is possible, because all of us apprehend the same meaning.

Now, how to define this identical entity called ‘meaning’? Consider the two expressions, ‘Rabindranath is the author of Gitanjali’ and ‘Rabindranath won Nobel prize’. They refer to the same person, although they are intended under different aspects. Meaning is as it is intended under a certain aspect. So when the two expressions are uttered, heard or read, all of us apprehend the same meaning – one under the aspect of, ‘author of Gitanjali’, and the other under the aspect of, ‘Nobel prize winner’. It is this that makes communication successful (Gurwitsch, 1967, pp.44-46).
A crucial question, however, is whether meaning is prior to language or not. Husserl would opt for the first. He starts from a discussion of language only to highlight that in the ultimate analysis, meaning is derived from a basic mental representation (*Noematic Sinn*) that may then be expressed in language. Or, linguistic meaning is noematic meaning externalized. This is to bring home that there is a close relation between language and consciousness: for, language is used to make public what is in our mind. As Husserl says:

All expressions in communicative speech function as *indications.* They serve the hearer as signs of the “thoughts” of the speaker, i.e., of his meaning-given mental processes (Husserl, 1970, p.277).

Language, however, has a physical aspect consisting of sounds or written marks. But this physical sound or written inscription becomes a meaningful utterance only because of an intentional aspect. In this way physics gives way to semantics:

The meaning-animated expression breaks up, on the one hand, into the *physical phenomenon* forming the physical side of the expression, and, on the other hand, into the *acts* which give it meaning (*Bedeutung*)... (Husserl, 1970, p.280).

This means that the linguistic act, which begins with noises or written inscriptions, becomes a meaningful activity, because it is derived from the *Noematic Sinn* in virtue of which a mental state intends an object or state of affairs. To put it in a different way, linguistic meaning is situated in mental representation which forms the core of meaning. It is this meaning which the speaker intends to express in language. Otherwise, his utterance becomes a mere sound without saying anything.

The articulated sound-complex (the written sign, etc.) first becomes a spoken word or communicative bit of speech when the speaker produces it with the purpose of “expressing himself about something” by its means, in other words, when in certain mental acts he lends it a meaning which he wants to communicate to the hearer (Husserl, 1970, pp276-277).

This passage may be interpreted as implying two things: (a) first, when the speaker intends to express himself about something, certain acts of consciousness lend or bestow on his words a meaning. These acts are meaning-giving acts via *Noematic Sinn* in virtue of which ‘the expression is more than a merely sounded word’ and ‘means something’; (b) secondly, the speaker communicates this meaning to the hearer.

The key point of Husserl that meaning (*Bedeutung*) expressed in language is the *Noematic Sinn* of an underlying meaning-conferring act is also stated in ‘*Formal and
Transcendental Logic’ (1920), particularly in paragraph 3, on ‘Language as an Expression of “Thinking”’ where Husserl observes:

[W]e shall pay attention only to... the acts of judging that function as meaning-giving (sinngebende) acts... that finds its expression in the assertoric sentence (Husserl, 1969, p.23).

Hence, as this observation shows, meaning expressed in an assertion is the Noematic Sinn of the speaker’s underlying act of judgement, and if he intends to communicate, he communicates this meaning that finds its expression or is captured in his assertoric sentence. To explain this – by taking an example from McIntyre and Smith – suppose Holmes, from some appropriate clues, has come to believe that the murderer is in this room. This belief or judgement, on Husserl’s view, is an act of consciousness which has a Noematic Sinn component, by virtue of which the act is directed towards a state of affairs, the murderer’s being in this room. Now when the speaker makes an assertion, it is this Noematic Sinn or meaning that is captured in his assertion. So if Holmes asserts, ‘The murderer is in this room’, to communicate it to Watson, what he does is to convey to Watson the Noematic Sinn of his act of judgement expressed in his language. If communication succeeds, what Watson shares with Holmes is the Noematic Sinn of Holmes’ act of judgement expressed in words (McIntyre and Smith, 1984, pp.85-86).

The above example implies what Husserl takes to be the general account of communication. In meaningful communication the utterance of the speaker and the hearer’s understanding of it involve a common content or meaning. And this is to emphasise the ‘shared’ character of meaning: speaker’s meaning is shared by the hearer. Interestingly, we find a striking resemblance between Husserl’s account of the relation between language and acts and Searle’s account of it. He also agrees with Husserl that the Intentionality of speech acts is derived from the Intentionality of mental states. As he observes:

Since sentences [...] the sounds that come out of one’s mouth or the marks that one makes on paper are, considered in one way, just objects in the world like any other objects, their capacity to represent is not intrinsic but derive from the Intentionality of the mind. The Intentionality of mental states, on the other hand, is not derived from some more prior forms of Intentionality, but is intrinsic to the states themselves (Searle, 1983, p.vii).

This shows what Searle means to say. Language in itself may be considered only as noises uttered by someone or mere marks on paper. As mere sounds or marks, it is devoid of intentionality or the power to represent. Then from what is intentionality (or meaning) derived? How do we get from physics, from noises or sounds, to
semantics? Searle’s answer is that linguistic intentionality or meaning is derived from something which possesses intrinsic intentionality, and only mental states are endowed with this intrinsic intentionality. It is only the mind that imposes meaning on linguistic entities like sounds which are not intrinsically intentional but considered in one way, are just physical phenomena like any other in the world. In other words, the meaning expressed by language is the intentional content of an underlying mental state, and hence the linguistic expression represents the object as prescribed by that Intentional content or meaning. In successful communication the intentional content expressed in language is conveyed to the hearer.

III

As the foregoing analysis shows, Husserl indeed admits that expression is “originally framed” to serve the function of communication; meaning, as he says, can be shared by the speaker and the hearer. But this position of Husserl will become questionable if we bear in mind Derrida’s persuasive reading of Husserl’s Logical Investigations (Derrida, 1973; see also Mohanty, 2002, pp.53-58).

Derrida’s point, in short, is that Husserl surely accepts and emphasises the communicative function of expression in first investigation. ‘And yet expression’, as he observes, ‘is never purely expression, as long as it fulfils this original function; only when communication is suspended can pure expression appear’ (Derrida, 1973,p.38). Thus Husserl’s original intention to retain the communicative function of language is frustrated. Let us develop the contention of Derrida at some length.

Husserl’s theory of meaning is based on a radical dissociation between two different kinds of heterogeneous signs, between indication and expression. ‘From indicative signs’, as Husserl puts it in Section 5 of the first investigation, ‘we distinguish meaningful signs i.e. expressions’. But how does expression differ from indication? Husserl introduces this distinction in the following way: “every sign is a sign for something, about something, but not every sign has a “meaning”, a “sense” that the sign “expresses” (Derrida, 1973, p.23). Only an expression is a sign that is ‘charged with meaning’. Meaning-intention is present as the signified content only of an expression; only expression is always inhabited and animated by a meaning which occurs in the sphere of solitary mental life. But in indication, the picture is quite different. Indication has a physical and worldly side: it takes place when the speaker existing in the world indicates or communicates something to his fellow being by means of concrete physical event, the written or the spoken word. This
explains why he intends to separate expression from indication. That is to ensure that what constitutes expression qua expression as distinct from indication is the ‘voice’ that is internal, the vehicle of meaning as an ideality existing nowhere in the world. This ‘reduction to monologue’, therefore, ‘is really a putting of … worldly existence between brackets’ (Derrida, 1973, p.43). All this is the consequence of Husserl’s commitment to a metaphysics of presence, as Derrida calls it, which posits a monologue or inner speech endowed with self-complete meaning which is directly and immediately present to the speaker within the solitude of his mental life.

But if we concentrate primarily on speech or expression as monologue or mental soliloquy occurring in the solitary mental life of the subject, then we face the following consequence:

When I listen to another, his lived experience is not present to me “in person” in the original…..(H)is consciousness, in particular the acts by which he gives sense, are not immediately and primordially, present to me as they are for him and mine are for me (Derrida, 1973, pp.38-39)

But then what are we to say about communication which requires moving outside of this inner sphere? Husserl, of course, is aware of the problem. That is why he says that in the case of an effective communication, expression is always interwoven with indication (Derrida, 1973, p.20). This means that communication is a ‘representation’ of a meaning-intention of the subject that primordially takes place in his inner sphere. What is meant by the subject is indicated by means of sensible signs (audible or visible), by the actually spoken and written signs. But the significance of this ‘interweaving’ is not very clear. If we keep in mind how Husserl looks at expression, it is evident that expression must occur ‘within the internal sphere in the absence of indication’. Now if expression is a solitary monologue, as it really is, there will be no room for meaningful communication here. In the case of silent monologue, where meaning is immediately present to the subject, there is nothing to communicate, nor is there any need of it. The result is, we have speech or expression (internal monologue) without any communicative function, without any need to indicate anything to anyone. But what kind of speech is this?

What is important for us in Derrrida’s reading of Husserl is that encourages the taking of a Heideggerian stance towards meaning. Communication, it may be said, is possible only when language is not inner speech but is a way of being-in-the-world animated by socially approved rules and conventions which alone enable the hearer to get at what the speaker means to say. As language is in the world, we use it only in the context of practical activities which involve our relation with others. This
is also the stance of Wittgenstein as it is described in the following observations of Baker and Hacker on Wittgenstein’s approach:

> It is not correlation with things in the world by means of a curious mental mechanism that invests signs with the significance, but the rule governed potentiality for use and its corresponding realization in actual use [...] Mental acts of meaning do not have the capacity by themselves to endow signs with meanings (intelligible uses). Meaningfulness requires use in accord with a standard of correctness, a rule. Such rules are given by explanations of meaning (Baker and Hacker, 1984, p.120).

Wittgenstein’s point is clear. It is communal life – with its socially approved rules or conventions, and not a curious mental mechanism – that will give meaning to an expression, and make communication possible.

That meaning is a matter of rules or conventions is also emphasized by Searle in his polemic against H. P. Grice’s account of meaning in terms of intention. (This polemic predated his commitment to the thesis that philosophy of language is a branch of philosophy of mind). ‘[T]his account of meaning’, he says, ‘does not show the connection between one’s meaning something by what one says and what that which one says actually means in the language’ (Searle, 1990, p.119). He makes his point by giving a counterexample to Grice’s account of meaning. Suppose an American soldier is captured by Italian troops during the Second World War and wants these troops to believe that he is a German officer, so that they release him. To do this, he must speak German. But suppose he does not know any German except one line of a poem: *Kennst du das Land wo die Zitronen blühen?* So he utters that line in order to prove that he is a German officer, trusting that the Italian troops do not know enough German to see through his plan. If this situation is put in a Gricean context, it will come to this. The American soldier ‘intends to produce a certain effect in them’, i.e. ‘the effect of believing that’ he is a German officer, and he intends that they should recognize his intention. They should recognize that he intends to tell them that he is a German officer. But, does it follow that when he recites that line of a German poem, what he means is that he is a German officer? Evidently not. Further, it is also false that the German sentence which he utters means that he is a German officer. For what the words he utters actually mean is, ‘Knowest thou the land where the lemon trees bloom’. So when he wants to deceive the Italian troops by getting them to think that what he means is, ‘I am a German officer’, part of this deception lies in producing in them the effect of believing that this is what the words he utters mean in German. At this point, Searle refers to Wittgenstein’s observation in *Philosophical Investigations*: ‘Say “it is cold here” and mean “it is warm here”’. The
reason we are unable to do this, as he says, “is that what we can mean is a function of what we are saying. Meaning is more than a matter of intention, it is also a matter of convention” (Searle, 1990, p.120).

So, according to Searle, when the American soldier says, ‘Kennst du das Land…’, it fulfils Grice’s conditions for communicative meaning, and yet the American soldier does not mean that he is a German soldier, as the Gricean account might seem to imply, but rather Knowest thou the land where the lemon trees bloom?

Grice, in fact, never held that what a sentence means is the same as what, on a particular occasion, a speaker intends to communicate by uttering it. He did, however, hold that a sentence’s meaning is a function of, or derived from, the intentions of speakers. (For example, he once argued that a sentence’s meaning is what speakers would usually or normally mean by uttering it). The force of Searle’s example of the American officer is that it demonstrates the difficulty or indeed impossibility of defining sentence meaning in terms simply of intentions. Reference to rules or conventions is essential in any account of meaning. The point of Searle is that you cannot reduce conventions or rules to intentions. As he puts it:

[… the fact that one can perform some illocutionary acts while standing outside a natural language or any other system of [conventional] rules should not obscure the fact that in general [particularly in the business of everyday life] illocutionary acts are performed within language in virtue of certain rules, and indeed could not be performed unless language allowed the possibility of their performance (Searle, 1970, p.38).

The implication is that notwithstanding the possibility of poetic language, irony and the like, where one diverges from the existing semantic constraints or rules, the case is otherwise if one intends to convey something as part of the business of everyday life. This is not possible unless the rules permit one to convey this by using the sentence one does. Thus the intention to produce certain effects by using a certain sentence should be understood in terms of one’s knowledge of the rules and principles of one’s language. We can get hold of what the speaker means, so that there is communicative ‘uptake’, only if it conforms to community or social practices.

IV

So far we have focused, critically, on Husserl’s view that the acts of consciousness underlying a speaker’s utterance and a hearer’s understanding of it involves a common content, namely its meaning. We now need to consider how he regards the status of these meanings. Meanings, to him, are abstract entities. Historically,
however, the abstract character of meaning takes two forms. In Husserl’s earlier works, particularly ‘Logical Investigations’, meanings – as intentional contents of consciousness – are universal properties which are instantiated by particular mental acts, but which in virtue of their ideality, exist independent of their instantiations. But even in this early ontology of Husserl, there is a clear distinction between meanings taken as universals instantiated by particular acts and the objects of those acts. Thus the meaning of ‘red’ is a universal property not of red objects, but of acts directed to red things. But in the later works of Husserl, particularly in ‘Ideas’, the early ontology of meaning which commits us to mental acts and their properties has been dropped. Instead, meanings are abstract ideas of a different sort which are no longer parts or properties of acts, but are correlated with acts and are expressible in language.

This idea we find also in ‘Experience and Judgement’, where Husserl writes:

The irreality of objectivities of understanding must not be confused with generic universality. Since, in particular, any number of affirming acts...affirm...one and the same proposition...it is a great temptation to think that the proposition belongs to the various acts of which it is the Sinn as a generic universal, perhaps as the generic essence “redness” belongs to many red things...

But one must say in opposition to this is not general in the sense of generic universality, i.e. the generality of an “extension”... it is therefore, not general in the manner of essences ...

[The generic universal] ... has particulars under it, but the Sinn does not have particulars under it (Husserl, 1973, pp.262-263)

Needless to say, Husserl distinguishes this abstract meaning also from objects. The real tree can burn, but a Sinn cannot burn. Again, as we are informed by Føllesdal, in the manuscript Noema and Sinn, Husserl observes that: ‘Sinne are non-real objects, they are not objects that exist in time’; or, in the same manuscript: “A Sinn does not have reality, it is related to a temporal interval through the act in which it occurs, but it does not itself have reality, an individual connection with time and duration” (Føllesdal, 1984, p.77).

Thus Husserl employs an ontological conception of meaning, Noematic Sinn, which is neither the property of an act, nor that of an object. It is rather a third entity (analogous to Frege’s ‘Thought’) standing in between an act and an object. And Noematic Sinn, because it is akin to a Thought or sense, is sharable and communicable. It will be helpful at this point, if we digress a bit and say something
about Frege’s concept of a Thought. According to Frege, one and the same thought can be grasped by many people. Mankind, he remarked, has a common store of thoughts which is transmitted from one generation to another. This will illuminate why, for Husserl, you and I share the same thought, or how it is that you can mean by P what I mean by P, how for example, ‘pythagorean theorem’ has the same meaning for both of us.

Husserl, in his earlier phase, talks about meanings as properties of acts, while in his later phase, he talks about Noematic Sinn or Thought which is neither an act, nor any object in the world. But is it really possible to identify this abstract meaning (in any of these two senses) which, as Husserl would agree with Frege, is preverbal? Husserl unfortunately does not enlighten us on this issue. In view of the seeming impossibility of having an adequate grasp of abstract Noematic Sinn, is it not better to abandon the idea of it? We should recall Wittgenstein’s remark that the postulation of preverbal thought (or Noematic Sinn, as we may call it) is that of a myth, ‘the decisive moment in the conjuring trick’ (Wittgenstein, 1967, p.56 (e)). This point of Wittgenstein is crucial: mental states and abstract entities really have no role, play no explanatory role, in accounting for meaning. Wittgenstein, and also Heidegger, do not provide knock-down arguments against the existence of inner states: but they try to show that there is just no point in appealing to such states in explanations of meaning. We shall see soon that this is what Heidegger is doing, in effect, in spelling out the various senses of ‘assertion’—without making any appeal to these states. Their strategy is to persuade us to forget about the occult sphere of Noematic Sinn and view meaning, along with Wittgenstein, in the context of a community’s practices.

Even if we concede that we can know sense or Noematic Sinn, the situation is not improved thereby. We may consider here with profit the ‘favoured analogy’, as D. E. Cooper points out, ‘between knowing a sense’ through which we can refer to an object and ‘knowing a route’ through which we can arrive at a destination. Certainly we may know a route to Durham without taking it, but is it really sensible to say that I can take this or that particular route without being ‘a participant in a society where people engage in the activity of going from one place to another’? Strictly speaking, notions like route or destination make sense only with reference to the activities in which people actually engage. Likewise, to invoke Wittgenstein’s slab-example, when someone says, ‘Bring me a slab’, I cannot understand the sense of ‘slab’ unless I know or understand what slabs are for, what we can do with them, and in the long run something about the project of constructing buildings and their purposes, such as protection from the elements. Thus our understanding the meaning of ‘slab’ is
holistic, and finally depends “on our grasp of a ‘form of life’ in which slabs or whatever have a place” (Cooper, 1997, 51-52). In other words, this meaning of ‘slab’, like that of most other expressions, is social, since it is embedded in social practices. And only through being a participant in these social practices, can we correctly understand the meaning of ‘Bring me a slab’.

V

The foregoing comments directed against Husserl’s account of meaning has pointed us in the direction of Heidegger’s position and suggested a defence of this position. He discards the idea of identical cognitive meaning or ‘irreal’, abstract meaning. His general position is to underline the crucial contributory role of social or community practices in our understanding of meaning. Language, pace Husserl, does not come to us as a stream of meaningless sounds that are then interpreted:

When we are explicitly hearing the telling of another, we immediately understand what is said, or - to put it more exactly - we are already with him, in advance, among the entities which the telling is about…What we do not hear is the pronunciation of the sounds (Heidegger, 1962, p.207).

These remarks relate to his more general thesis that we do not experience sense-data ‘raw’, but as already interpreted (as the sound of a motor cycle or whatever):

What we “first” hear is never noises or complex of sounds, but the creaking wagon, the motor cycle. We hear the column on the march, the north wind, the wood pecker tapping, the first crackling. It requires a very artificial and complicated frame of mind to hear a “pure noise”. The fact that motorcycles and wagons are what we proximally hear is the phenomenal evidence that in every case Dasein, as being-in- the world, already dwells amidst what is ready-to-hand within-the-world; it certainly does not dwell primarily amidst “sensations” (Heidegger, 1962, p.207).

These remarks of Heidegger’s imply that when we are ‘socialized into a community’s practices’, we hear sounds as already endowed with meaning. It is by dwelling in shared practices that we understand and directly experience meaning in linguistic communication.

Now, the meaning of an item of language, for example the assertion, ‘I require a lighter hammer’ is neither an intentional state (a desire for a lighter hammer) nor the intention to communicate that sense by using words. Understanding the meaning of that assertion is understanding the purpose of doing something with a lighter
hammer. Communication, it follows, is possible only if we understand one another’s projects of doing things. Let us state more explicitly what Heidegger thinks about language and communication.

In Chapter V, Section 33 of ‘Being and Time’, Heidegger deals for the first time with ‘assertion’, and draws our attention to the following about it. He holds that it is indeed possible to interpret a ‘local activity’, such as putting an unsuitable tool aside or exchanging it ‘without wasting words’. But when the situation is more complex, we need language (assertion) to interpret it, thereby making our co-workers’ aware of it: Interpreting….may take some such form as “The hammer is too heavy”, or rather just “Too heavy”, “Hand me the other hammer” (Heidegger, 1962, p.200). Heidegger describes these uses of language by using ‘assertion’ in quotation marks. His point, to follow Dreyfus, is to distinguish ‘assertion’, which is situation or context-dependent, from assertion as the assignment of a predicate to a subject, which is how it has been primarily understood in a long tradition of theory. To say that ‘assertion’ is context or situation bound is to say that in ‘assertion’ language does its job in the context of practical activity, for instance, by interpreting a hammer as being too heavy, not good enough to serve the purpose of some carpentry work. Hence, Heidegger observes that ‘We can say that making statements about X is possible on the basis of having to do with X’ (Dreyfus, 1995, p.269). Or, as Heidegger puts it:

[Interpretative] assertion is not a free-floating kind of behavior which, in its own right, might be capable of disclosing entities in general in a primary way: on the contrary it always maintains itself on the basis of being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1962, p.64)

For Heidegger, assertion, in one of its senses, is ‘a speech act’. It is of course true that Heidegger does not use the term; but as Dreyfus explains, Heidegger is keen ‘to distinguish the act of asserting from what is asserted – the assertion – when he wants to refer explicitly to the speech act of asserting, Heidegger is forced to use the locution “aussagen machen” (to make assertions ).

In effect, we need to distinguish three senses of ‘assertion’, or the speech act of asserting, to which Heidegger has drawn our attention. These significations ‘are connected among themselves, and in their unity they encompass the full structure of assertion’.

The primary signification of ‘assertion’ is to ‘show up something as something’: for example, the looking glass as crooked, or the hammer as heavy. When one of the inmates of a newly built house asserts, ‘The looking glass behind her is crooked’, or when one asserts, ‘the hammer is heavy’ – all such statements or ‘assertions’ are
made to show up something, the ‘looking glass’ as being ‘crooked’, or ‘the hammer’ as being ‘heavy’. This enables our language to ‘point out’ things as being a certain way, as having certain characteristics. Thus in the context of shared activity of building a house, I can ‘point out’ or inform others working with me by saying, ‘The hammer is heavy’. This means, I communicate to others on the job with me that this is heavy for the specific job we have undertaken. What I want to do is to let them grasp or see the ‘shared problem’, and not ‘any representation or meaning in my mind’.

Secondly, ‘Assertion’ means ‘predication’. In predication, we ‘take a step back when confronted with that which is already manifest’, or which shows itself in a certain way, viz., the hammer as being too heavy, and attribute the ‘predicate’ (‘too heavy’) to the ‘subject’ (‘hammer’). By using this predicate, we can differentiate one property of the hammer from a lot of others, and give it a definite character which makes my communication more determinate so as to enable others to understand and share with me making the statement.

When we give [the hammer] such a character, our seeing gets restricted to it...so that by this explicit restriction of our view, that which is already manifest may be made explicitly manifest in its definite character... We dim entities down to focus in on ‘the hammer there’, so that by thus dimming them down we may let that which is manifest be seen in its own definite character as a character that can be determined (Heidegger, 1962, p197).

It is well to bear in mind in this context that when I consider the hammer as too heavy, this character belongs to the hammer only ‘as used by me in a particular situation’. ‘Being heavy’, when used as a ‘predicate’ in Heidegger’s sense, is not a predicate in the traditional, theoretical sense. The philosophical tradition which talks about predicates to denote properties is indifferent to the situational characteristics which are indicated by Heidegger’s use of the term, ‘predicate’. It is only concerned with one place predicates, like heavy, and relational predicates like ‘heavier than’, in their general logical functions. ‘But no fixed logical properties’, as Dreyfus aptly puts it, ‘captures situational characteristics like “too heavy for this job”’ (Dreyfus, 1995, p78). Though in our everyday life, we deal with things in terms of their characteristics in relation to our practice, no philosophical term is available for capturing these characteristics. That is why, Heidegger designates them by putting the term ‘property’ in quotation marks in order to indicate the specific situational character of, say, the ‘too heavy’ property of the hammer in a particular situation – one in which that hammer is unsuitable.
The term ‘property’ is that of some definite character which it is possible for things to possess. Anything ready-to-hand is, at the worst, appropriate for some purposes and inappropriate for others; and its ‘properties’ are, as it were, still bound up in these ways in which it is appropriate or inappropriate (Heidegger, 1962, pp.114-115).

Thus the intention of Heidegger is clear: it is to bring out the situational characteristics which are ignored by the ‘decontextualized features’ that Heidegger, following tradition, calls properties’.

Thirdly, ‘assertion’ means ‘communication’. When I say, ‘The hammer is heavy’, it is letting others engaged in the undertaking with me see and share the difficulty of dealing with heavy hammer. In other words, it is fundamentally in the context of shared activity that the meaning of the ‘assertion’ in question is communicated to others with me. It can be communicated also to others ‘who are not directly involved in the activity in question’.

Others can ‘share’ with the person making the assertion, even though the entity which he has pointed out and to which he has given a definite character, is not close enough for them to grasp and see it (Heidegger, 1962, p.197).

Unfortunately, in linguistic theory and philosophical logic, this pragmatic character of assertion as being-in-the-world has largely been overlooked. Theoretical reflection has taken precedence over attention to practical background.

We are in a position to sum up what Heidegger has said about ‘assertion’: ‘In short’, as he tells us, ‘we may define “assertion” as “a pointing out which gives something a definite character and which communicates”’ (Heidegger, 1962, p.199). Again, in the context of communication, Heidegger says that “being-with-one-another is discursive as assenting or refusing, as demanding or warning, as pronouncing, consulting, or interceding, as ‘making assertions’, and as talking in the way of ‘giving a talk’” (Heidegger, 1962, p.204). Thus it is not only making assertions to give information, but also to perform ‘speech acts’ like warning and consulting that makes assertion a form, or set of forms, of communication in our everyday social practices. Dreyfus finds in this an echo of J.L. Austin, who likewise holds that making a statement or an assertion, or giving a description, is as much performing an act as making a promise or giving a warning (Dreyfus, 1995, p.220). And this indicates that the acts mentioned above are not ‘externalizing something inner’; they have no ‘mentalistic’ basis.
In talking, Dasein expresses itself not because it has, in the first instance, been encapsulated as something “internal” over against something outside, but because as being-in-the-world it is already ‘outside’ when it understands. What is expressed is precisely this being-outside (Heidegger, 1962, p.205).

This remark of Heidegger’s makes it clear how completely he has rejected any appeal to inner mental life in understanding the nature of meaning and communication, and how completely this understanding requires engagement with what is ‘outside’, with the world - the practical world where alone language, according to him, communicates successfully. The paradigm of communication is not, therefore, supplied by the Cartesian model, according to which messages are somehow ‘sent’ from one isolated mind to another. ‘In communication’, as Dreyfus puts it aptly, ‘something is explicitly shared on the background of an already shared affectedness and understanding’ (Dreyfus, 1995, p221). In the words of Heidegger himself:

Communication is never anything like a conveying of experience... from the interior of one subject into the interior of another. Dasein-with is already essentially manifest in a co-affectedness and co-understanding. In discourse, Being-with becomes explicitly shared; that is to say, it is already, but it is unshared as something that has not been taken hold of and appropriated (Heidegger, 1962, p.205).

In this paper, I have argued that Husserl’s mentalistic account of communication in logical or cognitive terms is not adequate, since it overlooks, as Heidegger rightly points out, how meaning and communication function only against the practical horizon of the life-world, against the background of shared community practices, of co-affectedness and co-understanding.

Kanya Sen Gupta
sengupta.kanya@gmail.com
REFERENCES


