

# Searle on Representation: a Relation between Language and Consciousness

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I

The central concept of Searle's philosophy of language and mind is intentionality. According to him, "Intentionality is that property of mental states and events by which they are directed at or about, or of object and states of affairs in the world" (Searle 1983: 1). Intentionality is an intrinsic feature of the mind or consciousness. The intentional representation unfolds the directedness of the mental states. Not all mental states are representational states. For instance, in the case of sudden feeling of joy and fear do not refer to anything beyond themselves, whereas, belief, desire and intention are genuine intentional states. They represent something about the world. The intentional mental states are expressed in language. Whenever, let's say, I utter a sentence that 'it is raining outside'. This utterance represents a fact as an intentional state of belief. The act I perform (illocutionary act) involves the intentional state of meaning. Intentionality is present in mind and is represented in the linguistic act of stating the fact that 'it is raining outside.'

Representation at the state of thought can be called mental representation, whereas at the state of expression or communication of thought it can be called linguistic representation. These two levels of representations are isomorphic in structure with same *representational content*.

[Intentional state (intentional content)]→Representation  
→object & state of affairs in the world

[Speech acts (Propositional content)]→Representation→  
Objects & state of affairs in the world

The logical relationship between the two structures of representation shows the *flow* of intentional content of mental representation to the propositional content and illocutionary force of linguistic representation (speech acts). Emphasizing the continuity of the content, Searle writes, "If I am right in thinking that intentional states consist of representative contents in various psychological modes, then it is at least misleading, if not simply mistake, to say that a belief, for example, is a two term relation between a speaker and a proposition. One should say, rather a proposition is not the object of a statement or belief but rather its content" (Searle 1983:18). The content is the essence of intentional states, is concealed to the conscious thought processes, till it is revealed in the expression. Moreover, the expression also reveals the psychological mode and condition of satisfaction in the very act of representation. They are logically correlated with each other. For Searle, content is realized in its manifestation of linguistic representation, but it is not identical with it. Rather, the content is the intentional property of mental states, which in essence embodies intentionality.

Representation being common to thought and expression shows how the *content* is mental and, is also externalized in language. The linguistic representation of content does not make the intentionality linguistic. Rather, language has evolved from the more basic and complex intentional states to represent the object or states of affairs. The structural similarity between speech act and

intentional states is important for two reasons. Firstly, it avoids one of the misunderstandings that philosophy of mind is branch of philosophy of language. Secondly, it helps in explaining the various forms of intentionality.

Searle's naturalistic approach shows intentionality and language as being developed through an evolutionary process of linguistic representation where meaning we associate comes later than the development of mental states or intentionality *per se* (Searle 1983: 160). In this regard, human linguistic activities can be explicated through intentionality. The content of speech act or linguistic expressions is derived from the intentional content of mental states or thoughts. Nevertheless, the naturalistic grounding of the mental is derived from the thesis that "mental states are *caused by* the operation of the brain and *realized in* the structure of the brain" (Searle 1983: 265). This raises the question about the representation and its causal relationship with the neurophysiology of the brain.

II

The naturalistic approach advocated by Noam Chomsky and Jerry Fodor upholds the causal relation between mind and language. Defining the role of language, Chomsky writes, "Language serves as an instrument for free expression of thought, unbound in scope, uncontrolled by stimulus condition though appropriate to situations, available for use in whatever contingencies our thought process can comprehend" (Chomsky 1980: 222). This 'creative aspect' of language use is specific property of humans biological designed to acquire language. Language acquisition explains two things, firstly the innate capacities of the organism and, secondly, the constant interaction with a linguistic community. Chomsky defines the innateness of language referring to his notion of 'generative grammar'.

Generative grammar operates at two levels: surface structure and deep structure. The surface structure is about the linguistic representation, whereas the deep structure refers to the regulation and grammatical transformations. The function of grammatical transformation at the deep structure helps in both having linguistic experiences as well as human intelligence. It has some specific properties, like phonological rules, principles of rule ordering, etc which correlate with deep structure.

Chomsky relates deep structure of the language with the mental states. The mental states are linguistically identified by just being characterized by syntax which are causally related with the neural states of the brain. Thus, there is no division between language, mind and the brain processes. According to Chomsky, "We conceive of mind as a system of 'mental organs', the language faculty being one, each of this organs has specific structure and function, determined by the general outlined by our genetic endowment, interacting in ways that are also biologically determined in large measure to provide the basis of our mental life"(Chomsky 1980: 241). Language formulation or

the emergence of linguistic states depends upon the function of various specific aspects of mental organism.

Jerry Fodor's conception of mental representation comes closer to Chomsky's conception of generative grammar. The mental representations, according to Fodor, have two basic concerns, firstly, it must specify the intentional content of mental states, and secondly, the symbolic structure of mental states must define the functions of the mental process. The specification of intentional content of mental states describes its relationship that holds between the propositional attitudes and intentional content. Now the question arises, how the intentional semantic content of the propositional attitudes is incorporated in the mental state or the network of mental states? For Fodor, mental states are token neural states which are syntactically characterized. Semantics is not undermined in Fodorian schema, rather the very function of the brain organism and the characterization of syntactic mental states are such that it has a specific mechanism which transforms the mental representation without affecting the content of propositional attitude. This process is carried out by *qua language or language of thought* (Fodor 1981: 200).

The language of thought is a formula of having only the syntactic structure, meant for evaluating the semantic properties of the representation. He further states that "Language of thought want to construe propositional attitude tokens as relation to symbol tokens. (Token of symbol in question is neural object). Now symbols have intentional contents and the tokens are physical in all the known cases. And qua-physical-symbol-tokens are right sort of things to exhibit causal roles. Language of thought claims that mental states – and not just their propositional objects – typically have constituted structure" (Fodor 1987: 135-136). Causal connections among the cognitive states are fundamental because they determine the content of propositional attitudes.

Thus, in brief, Fodor's notion of mental representation not only tries to relate the mind with the world through the language of thought but also uses it for the 'evaluation of semantic content'. Both Chomsky and Fodor strongly hold that language processing or the thought processing is a cognitive activity but not a conscious activity. We are not aware of how *qua language* and *generative syntax* function in the brain. This is a higher order physical activity of the complex neural structures of the brain organism. The complete explanation of neurophysiology of the brain will explain the emergence of linguistic structure which constitutes the essence of language. It not only rules out the role of consciousness in thought process but also discards the other semantic features like intentionality as an intrinsic property of language.

### III

The Searlean notion of mental representation rejects the primacy of syntax. Showing the significance of syntax and semantics, Searle writes, "The Chinese room argument showed that semantics is not intrinsic to syntax. I am now making the separate and different point that syntax is not intrinsic to physics" (Searle 1992: 210). Mental representations are not like computational states in the computer; rather they are associated with thinking, experience, feeling, and understanding. While processing the data the computer does not *understand* the cognitive states, because it lacks *semantic content* which is essential for understanding. Emphasizing the semantic aspect of representation, he writes, "...the generative component of linguistic theory is not syntax ... but semantics... the grammar starts with the description of meaning of a sentence

and then generates the syntactical structures through the introduction of syntactical rules and indexical rules" (Searle 1994: 19). The syntax in the computational process is 'observer relative.' And the observer can interpret the symbols with a syntax and semantics (Searle 1992: 223). Thus, in the Searlean naturalistic framework there is not causal reduction of symbols to the neural states and processes. Though Searle believes that symbol tokens are always physical tokens still they are not defined in terms of physical features (Searle 1992: 225).

Moreover, the intentionality of the content as an intrinsic feature of representation brings out the compatible relationship between (mind and language [*intentional content*]) → [the world] and vice-versa. This logical compatibility unfolds the two essential components of intentional states called *propositional content* and *psychological mode*. Whenever someone is representing something he also expects that there would be change in the state of affairs according to the representation of belief. That shows the directedness of intentional content from *mind-to-world*. And if changes occur favourably to their belief then directedness is *world-to-mind*. Thus, intentional relationship between the mind and the world becomes more concrete through the intentional content.

### IV

The content of representation is revealed in different modes of intentionality working simultaneously, such as seeing, experiencing, believing, desiring, hoping, etc. They are logically connected to each other and intrinsic to the consciousness. When I wish to do better in the game, I must believe in myself, my performance, I must desire to learn different tactics to do well and finally not to repeat the mistakes, etc. This tiny expression involves so many intentional states. Their correlation is based on intentionality and the experience of various levels of intentionality. Intentionality working as conscious mode of representation is about the experience of the content of representation, rather than the object of representation (Searle 1983: 18).

The content is not an object of observation, rather is experienced in intentional mode of consciousness. While seeing a flower, my experience of the flower unfolds to me being conscious of the content of the object of perception; the content is formed in visual experience. The very act of experience and realization are not only conscious activities but also linguistic activities. Linguistic activity is grounded on intentional content. Intentional content is intrinsic to consciousness and thus it discloses the notion of being as language-centric-conscious being. Searle says, "The essential thing about human beings is that language gives them the capacity to represent" (Searle 2008: 35). The intrinsicness of being language centric is revealed in the being's feature of expressibility. They can manipulate their expressions.

Expressibility makes the being transparent by expressing the inner mental states. Thus Searle move away from the Cartesian tradition of interiority (Mohanty 1985: 131). The intrinsicness of language to the human being or human life reveals the autonomy of human existence with relation to the world. The linguistic being has two important dimensions: the verbal and syntactic. As Pradhan illustrates; "Life, seen in the empirical way, is positioned state of human existence, it is conditioned, limited, and finite. It has verbal dimension and it is thoroughly structured with rules of the symbolic organization. Yet, it has a dimension of givenness which is not dictated by a priori logical machinery" (Pradhan 1993: 42-43). The verbal dimension of conscious being signifies the necessary

link between consciousness, language and the world. This link is established not because of the being's inherent consciousness but because of its inherent linguistic feature. It is due to the fact that intentional content is present in the very act of expression and realization. And it is also extended to the realm of the functional domain of language. That is, language with reference to the exercise of meaning and truth is embedded in language games and forms of life.

To conclude, the representational feature of intentionality is not causally reduced to the biological origin, rather maintains its functional autonomy at the realm of the network of the mental states. In this way, mental states are biologically prior to their linguistic representation which is the representational states stands in continuation with the linguistic counterpart. The semantic rules and socio-cultural background construe meaning of representation. So far as linguistic activities are concerned, semantic rules determine the very function of the performative expressions. Whereas, the language use in general is embedded in the socio-cultural background of human beings. And, 'representation as an institutional fact would require language' (Searle 2008). Intentionality works in both the levels connecting the constitutive and regulative features of speech acts and forming as well as developing the socio-cultural etiquettes. In this regard, intentionality helps in explicating different levels of relationship from the biological to the mental and from the mental to the social.

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