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# An Investigation into Heidegger's views on Language and Technology w.r.t. 'Enframing'

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**Abstract**—Heidegger's views on language present a radical departure from the conventional and dominant grammatical conception of language. This conception considers Man speaks Language as a system of the elements, structures, and rules. Heidegger, however, insists- 'Language speaks'. For Heidegger, it is the language that actually speaks, and a man just responds to its saying. Here, Man's response is manifested as a human recognizable physical-physiological expression and is studied in the various disciplines of Linguistics, like- phonetics, semantics, syntax, pragmatics etc. Heidegger asserts that language needs a man to express its saying or essence, and so it equips man with the required mode of expression.

Likewise, Heidegger gave a new conception of 'Technology'— not as a tool to facilitate human efforts, but as a mode of unconcealment. And, he brings forth the conception 'Enframing'<sup>1</sup>, as an essence of modern technology, and an obstacle to this unconcealment. He suggests that modern technology is the culmination of Aristotelian metaphysics, actually focuses on building up of framework or set of rules to make use of Reality as an object of calculation. Evidently, Enframing refrains human from grasping the authentic meaning - the true understanding of the Saying or Saga.

Summarily, this study discusses a comparative understanding of the broader and narrower definition of both language and technology. Language, in a broad sense, is a medium of unconcealment or revealing, and not merely, a medium of expression- as a narrow sense. And, Enframing, as a narrow sense of technology, restricts language by ordaining its revealing. Under Enframing, a linguist aims to find the set of rules that govern language and so considers language as an object of calculation, thus follows the conventional conception.

**Keywords:** Heidegger, Language, Technology, Enframing, unconcealment, metaphysics

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is based on the study of the German Philosopher Martin Heidegger's views on language and technology. His views on language are taken in contrast to the popular and dominant view, which is driven by the grammatical conception of language, i.e. the theory of the elements,

structures, and rules for structures in a language. Here, these structures contain information which is mediated by language between the speakers. Whereas, for Heidegger, the role of language is beyond a mediator of information transfer; instead, language actually participates in the formation of meaning and information. Thus, the language should be considered as constitutive, as it also constitutes the meaning, and not just mediating.

Ordinarily, it's unbelievable to accept this fact as to how can the language speak. Instead, it's the man who speaks and whatever he speaks, we receive it in terms of speech as a collection of sounds perceivable by any ordinary human being. This kind of notion of language is welcomed by the dominant view of studying language in the branch of linguistics called Phonetics. But Heidegger considers it as taking up only superficial aspect of language by traditional approach, as phonetics studies only sound-signs. He, instead, posits the more broad definition of language, where he escalates language to the level of 'Being'. Now, instead of looking at language with traditional Aristotelian logic or considering it as a rational-representational system, he brings forth the alternative view of considering the language with an existential-ontological perspective. In this sense, if one asks what language speaks, the answer is 'Saying or Saga'. The 'Saying' is the essence of language that is being spoken to the man, and the man responds to it by 'listening' to it. On the other hand, when the man speaks i.e. expresses in terms of sound-signs, this ability of man is actually appropriated by language itself to man in an 'Appropriating Event'.

To repeat, it is the language that actually speaks, and the man just responds to its saying. Here, Man's response is manifested in the physical-physiological expression, which is easily recognizable by a human being. Heidegger explains that language needs a man to express its saying or essence, and so it equips man with the required mode of expression. That is, the phrase 'Man speaks language' should be inverted as 'Language speaks man'.

Here, Heidegger unveils us the broader aspect of language, which is at the level of Being. It's the Being reveals itself to the man through the language. So, the language, as an

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<sup>1</sup> Heidegger defines, "Enframing means the gathering together of that setting-upon which sets upon man, i.e., challenges him forth, to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve." (Heidegger, 1977, 20)

instrument of expression, is merely a narrow reduction of its true i.e. broader nature or a mode of unconcealment.

This phrase is not given by Heidegger. Instead, this is a representative of my own understanding of the whole debate and will be the foundational stone of this research.

## 2. LANGUAGE IN A NARROW SENSE: “MAN SPEAKS:

As this study aims to throw light on the broader definition of language, it will be useful to know how broader sense is distinguished from the narrower one, such as being an instrument. What are the factors that restrict its definition in a narrow sense?

So, this section presents Heidegger’s criticism of the traditional approaches. It attempts to establish how these approaches draw from ancient metaphysical thinking? It sets into how various disciplines which claim to study language, such as Linguistics, Philosophy of language etc., are actually reincarnations of metaphysics? Throughout his works, and at several places, Heidegger has provided his reflections that are against the various sub-disciplines of linguistics.

### 2.1 Heidegger’s criticism of traditional conception

When we seek to study Heidegger’s point of view on language, we should first focus on the way he goes beyond the narrow definition of language. Here, it is worth to put Heidegger’s own words on the logical-grammatical conception of language: “The dominant approach to individual languages and to language in general is passed on to us through what we call *grammar*. By this we understand the theory of the elements, structures, and rules for structures in a language; separate groups of sentences, individual sentences, and sentence types; analyzed into groups of words, individual words; words into syllables and letters, γράμμα. (*grámma*)

The *grammatical* conception of language is taken for granted in the customary notion of language, especially in linguistics and in the so-called philosophy of language. Moreover, this view has taken hold in a centuries-long tradition and can claim for itself a certain semblance of naturalness. For what is more accessible and tangible than just this analysis and ordering of the otherwise completely unmanageable amalgam of a living language in sounds, letters, syllables, words, word-constructs, and sentence structures?” (Heidegger, 2010, 80)

Here, we see how clearly Heidegger digs up the key aspects of the traditional approaches, and what they are dealing with in an attempt to understand its nature. For the conventional approaches, grammar or set of rules is the key object of study. And, this pursuit is continued since the centuries of human existence. Obviously, these sounds, letters, words etc. are the most easily accessible and visible entities to put under analysis with an objective to understand the invisible entity-i.e. language.

Arguing further and for the sake of exposing more discretely the popular view on language as speech, according to Heidegger, as he mentions in his seminal work, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, raises the key question:

“What does it mean to speak?

The current view declares that speech is the activation of the organs for sounding and hearing. Speech is the audible expression and communication of human feelings. These feelings are accompanied by thoughts. In such a characterization of language three points are taken for granted:

First and foremost, speaking is expression. The idea of speech as an utterance is the most common. It already presupposes the idea of something internal that utters or externalizes itself. If we take language to be utterance, we give an external, surface notion of it at the very moment when we explain it by recourse to some-thing internal.

Secondly, speech is regarded as an activity of man. Accordingly we have to say that man speaks, and that he always speaks some language. Hence we cannot say, "Language speaks." For this would be to say: "It is language that first brings man about, brings him into existence." Understood in this way, man would be bespoken by language.

Finally, human expression is always a presentation and representation of the real and the unreal.”(Heidegger, 2001, 190)

This way, Heidegger summarizes the traditional definition under three key points- viz. Language as an expression, as an activity of man, and representation of the real and the unreal.

Now, he contends that role of language is beyond this, and cannot be restricted to mere expression. And therefore, he calls for the more comprehensive definition, where the expression could be considered as one among many activities that human being performs while coping with the existential conditions in the world. A broader sense of language is needed to be pondered in such a way that it may encapsulate this narrow sense as well.

He suggests that rational-logical explanation brings out merely a logical description of language. This, in turn, gives primacy only to the figurative and symbolic character of the language over the exclusive character of word-meanings as concepts. As a result, disciplines like Biology and Philosophical anthropology, Sociology and Psychopathology, Theology and Poetics are believed to have described and explained the comprehensive nature of the linguistic phenomena. (Heidegger, 2001, 191) Here, Heidegger argues as these disciplines still keep following the fixed or narrow view on the nature of language, and therefore the conception of the language in grammar and logic, philosophy of language and linguistics is still the same for over 2500 years, despite the fact that we have accumulated huge knowledge or information about the language in one way or the other. He further argues

that "...the whole field of the varied scientific perspectives on language. They have their roots in an ancient tradition. Yet they ignore completely the oldest natural cast of language. Thus, despite their antiquity and despite their comprehensibility, they never bring us to language as language."(Heidegger, 2001, 191)

### 3. LANGUAGE IN A BROAD SENSE: "LANGUAGE SPEAKS"

Now, the major question is what exactly the language is? If these disciplines don't take language as the language that Heidegger appeals to ponder upon how this 'Language' is defined.

#### 3.1 Language speaks

With the purpose of overcoming the narrow definition, Heidegger enhances the status of language to the Being, and he proposes one of the great slogans he had been positing in his works. This is '**Language Speaks**'. This describes, for Heidegger' the true nature of language, in opposition to the common view, i.e. 'Man Speaks'. He asserts that primarily, it's the language that speaks, and man responds to it by listening to it. And what we call as the human speech is actually the manifestation of human ability in the form of physical activity. This is how man expresses his innermost feelings, as believed by the popular view on language. At this moment, following assertions give a clear conceptual position that Heidegger holds:

"Man acts as though he were the shaper and master of language, while in fact language remains the master of man. When this relation of dominance gets inverted, man hits upon strange maneuvers. Language becomes the means of expression. As expression, language can decay into a mere medium for the printed word." (Heidegger, 2001, 213)

This way, he enlightens us that actually language is our master. It is the language that is our true guide in our endeavors of coping in this world. Language dominates and shapes the life of human beings like us. Language ordinarily reigns at the higher echelon of being, and where it is equivalent to Being. And what man speaks, hears and understands is mere a narrower derivative of the broader aspect.

In this context, he further explains that,

"Man first speaks when, and only when, he responds to language by listening to its appeal. Among all the appeals that we human beings, on our part, may help to be voiced, language is the highest and everywhere the first."(Heidegger, 2001, 214)

#### 3.2 Language is to be experienced

Another appeal that Heidegger does is that language can be understood not by analyzing, but by experiencing it. And, then the next question comes to our mind- "what is to experience?"

Heidegger beautifully explains in '*On the Way to Language*':

"To undergo an experience with language, then, means to let ourselves be properly concerned by the claim of language by entering into and submitting to it. If it is true that man finds the proper abode of his existence in language-whether he is aware of it or not-then an experience we undergo with language will touch the innermost nexus of our existence. We who speak language may thereupon become transformed by such experiences."(Heidegger, 1971, 57)

This is going beyond the master-servant relationship. This is being devoted to the language that is in the role of a protector. What he clearly put that by submitting to it, i.e. following the Saying communicated by language, man can find himself the proper abode of his existence in language. Undoubtedly, in such a beautiful manner, Heidegger puts his most popular slogan- "**Language is the house of Being.**"

Yes, this short phrase is enough to communicate the nature of language, which goes beyond the narrow definition of language as a tool or instrument etc. that we have already discussed previously. Here, It provides shelter to man. It shapes his life. It is extremely crucial to man for his existence, and this can be understood only by experiencing it.

Here, Heidegger cautions that "to undergo an experience with language, is some thing else again than to gather information about language."(Heidegger, 1971, 58) This is where he again makes a clear distinction between narrower and broader meaning of language. The narrower view is more concerned with the information that language contains, and therefore it analyzes the language in that manner, i.e. considering language as an object of study, as an information structure. And, thereby, it seeks for the structure of the language that confers it the meaning that may be understood by the man. It ignores the fact that meaning lies in the experiencing, and not in analyzing. Analyzing language as the system of word-signs is a mere empty tautology, which is not going to meet the desired objective of grasping the essence or true meaning.

#### 3.3 Language is beyond the information carrier

Heidegger criticizes the linguists' ambition to produce the general structure of language, i.e. 'metalinguage' that could give us the meaning, and is continuously being attempted by "information-linguists and philologists of the most diverse languages, psychologists and analytical philosophers, compounded with the scientific and philosophical investigation of languages."(Heidegger, 1971, 58) He wittingly laughs at Analytical philosophy, "which is set on producing this super-language, is thus quite consistent when it considers itself metalinguistics."(Heidegger, 1971, 58) Here, he brings our attention about metalinguistics "That sounds like metaphysics- not only sounds like it, it is metaphysics." He further suggests that "Metalinguistics is the metaphysics of the thoroughgoing technicalization of all languages into the sole

operative instrument of interplanetary information. Metalanguage and sputnik, metalinguistics and rocketry are the Same.”(Heidegger, 1971, 58)

Here, we see how nicely Heidegger has proved that how the traditional approach, which is essentially the metaphysics, considers language mere as an operative instrument for carrying information. This is how, he explains that despite having the capability of playing a much broader role, i.e. shaping the human existence, the traditional approaches have constricted its role to a narrow role of the information carrier. Language, despite being master, is being presented as the servant of man, which is serving man by carrying information. And, the proponents of AI machines consider it as an automata or automatic machine, wondering to discover the best algorithm to program it and to simulate it for the purpose of human convenience and service. Needless to repeat, that the narrower or instrumental approach to language refrains us from the true meaning of language, which is possible only with acknowledging the broader definition, and this narrow approach is the nothing else but traditional metaphysical logic in disguise.

#### 4. TECHNOLOGY

This section deals with the concept ‘Enframing’. For this, key text utilized is *Question Concerning Technology*. The detailed exposition on the characteristic features of Enframing has been provided, so that they may be referred in the later chapter to explore it further.

##### 4.1 What is Technology?

The current conception of technology, according to which it is a means and a human activity, can, therefore, be called the instrumental and anthropological definition of technology. That is, technology is a means to an end, and technology is a human activity. Thus the two definitions of technology belong together the concept of modern technology.

In the seminal text *Question Concerning Technology*, Starting from deriving the understanding of Technology from its Greek root ‘*techne*’, and current conception of Technology, as instrumental and anthropological, Heidegger establishes Technology as a mode of revealing or *Aletheia*, which, through the occasioning of fourfold causality renders into poiesis or bringing-forth and the unconcealment of what is concealed. On the other hand, Modern Technology is a special kind of revealing, which involves only the current conception- i.e. instrumental and anthropological.

Further, Enframing is defined as the essence of modern technology, characterizes as a special kind of revealing, in which it is a challenging revealing. It's an ordering revealing. Wherever this ordering holds sway i.e. control, it eliminates every other possibilities of revealing. And, revealing remains restricted to what ordering instructs.

##### 4.2 Enframing and Language:

In order to extend above discussions to our guiding proposition, let's look into how traditional approach is related with ‘Enframing’, a concept explicated by Heidegger.

Heidegger clarifies that language speaks by Saying, which is appropriated to man in the appropriating event. Here, “Language, which speaks by saying, is concerned that our speaking, in listening to the unspoken, corresponds to what is said. Thus silence, too, which is often regarded as the source of speaking, is itself already a corresponding. Silence corresponds to the soundless tolling of the stillness of appropriating-showing Saying. As Showing, Saying, which consists in Appropriation, is the most proper mode of Appropriating. Appropriation is by way of saying. Accordingly, language always speaks according to the mode in which the Appropriation as such reveals itself or withdraws.” (Heidegger, 1971, 131)

Here, he brings the concept of Framing<sup>2</sup> (Ge-Stell,...). He states “Framing challenges man, that is, provokes him to order and set up all that is present being as technical inventory, Framing persists after the manner of Appropriation, specifically by simultaneously obstructing Appropriation, in that all ordering finds itself channeled into calculative thinking and therefore speaks the language of Framing. Speaking is challenged to correspond in every respect to Framing in which all present beings can be commandeered.”(Heidegger, 1971, 131-132)

He further explains “Within Framing, speaking turns into information. It informs itself about itself in order to safeguard its own procedures by information theories.” (Heidegger, 1971, 132) Heidegger warns that “Framing-the nature of modern technology holding sway in all directions-commandeers for its purposes a formalized language, the kind of communication which "informs" man uniformly, that is, gives him the form in which he is fitted into the technological-calculative universe, and gradually abandons "natural language."

Even when information theory has to admit that formalized language must in the end always refer back to "natural language," in order to put into speech the Saying of the technological inventory by means of nonformalized language, even this situation signifies only a preliminary stage in the current self-interpretation of information theory. For the "natural language" of which one must talk in this context is posited in advance as a not-yet formalized language that is being set up to be framed in formalization.

Formalization, the calculated availability of Saying, is the goal and the norm. The "natural" aspect of language, which the will to formalization still seems forced to concede for the time being, is not experienced and understood in the light of

<sup>2</sup> ‘Ge-stell’- is the German equivalent of both ‘framing’ and ‘Enframing’. So, both words refer to the same concept.

the originary nature of language. That nature is physis, which in its turn is based on the appropriation from which Saying arises to move. Information theory conceives of the natural aspect of language as a lack of formalization.

But even if a long way could lead to the insight that the nature of language can never be dissolved in formalism to become a part of its calculations, so that we accordingly must say that "natural language" is language which cannot be formalized-even then "natural language" is still being defined only negatively, that is, set off against the possibility or impossibility of formalization. (Heidegger, 1971, 132)

## 5. CONCLUSION

As stated in the title, this research is an investigation into Heidegger's views on language and technology. So, it's an effort to re-examine Heidegger's claim in the purview of new developments in the traditional approaches. Definitely, Heidegger's ideas on language are in contradiction to the popular views.

Now, as suggested, the summary of the study:

### **Language speaks, Enframing refrains.**

To explain further, 'Enframing refrains man from grasping the authentic meaning'. More precisely, authentic meaning can be understood as the true understanding of the Saying or Saga. In other words, it is the understanding at the level of Being, whereas man experiences the language beyond his social-cultural identity.

Enframing obstructs the man from properly grasping the essence of language i.e. Saying. Enframing involves putting the things into a framework while analyzing the results with a hope of finding the essential nature of language. Heidegger defines language as a method of revealing, so this framework actually impedes the unconcealment.

Thus, in a nutshell, this study seeks arguments how Enframing refrains what language speaks. In other words, Language is a medium of unconcealment or revealing, and not just a medium of expression. Whereas Enframing is an ordering revealing, thereby it restricts language by ordaining its revealing. Hence, it aims to find the set of rules that govern language and so considers language as an object of calculation.

Last but not the least, the purpose of this study is to relook into the validity of Heidegger's claim in the current day's scenario. Because of the strong opposition by Heidegger of the traditional approaches and modern technology, they have made great efforts in improving their conception and methodology. For instance, Hubert Dreyfus, an ardent follower of Heidegger, wrote two notable criticisms of Artificial Intelligence, which have made the great impact on the disciplines of computer science and artificial intelligence. Questions of the distinction between narrower and broader conception of language are still prominent in the academia related to language studies.

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