

Words of Destiny

But words are things,
And a small drop of ink, Falling like dew upon a thought,
Produces that which makes thousands perhaps millions think
- George Gordon Noel Byrons

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Oxford dictionary defines WORD as a meaningful element of speech, speech as distinct from action

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The above definition of WORD is defined in context to the *DOMAIN of SEMIOTICS*. That is to say that WORD here signifies a mode of communication. Its interpretation is relative to the juxtaposition of other WORDS used in a particular context as well as it has its own absolute interpretation independent of context, though not all WORDS satisfy latter condition.

So how else can we try to decipher the meaning of a WORD? In order to gain broader perspective about this question one has to imagine our existence without WORD as a mode of communication (*Communication from this point onwards will refer with respect to others as well as to oneself*).

Try to put yourself in the place of a newborn baby. What must be going on in the mind of the little angel? He surely does not know any language to recognize & classify his thoughts. For that matter does his thoughts have any wordings? Or does he have his own set of WORDS, unknown to us, to recognize his thoughts?

For us the truth is that as the newborn baby starts growing so does his repertoire of words & hence language builds up thereby helping him to recognize, classify & understand thoughts generated & conveyed to him.

Though at this moment the moot question to be asked is that does our repertoire of words determine the depth & width of realization & interpretation of thoughts?

Imagine if words wouldn't have been a part of our existence. Could we have evolved to what we are now in the absence of words? It is indeed difficult to imagine such a scenario more so because even to imagine one would require WORDS to interpretate isn't it?

In fact our progress from being a species to the current evolutionary state of being a human has happened due to the development of DOMAIN of Semiotics, especially word/language, as a mean of realizing, understanding & communicating one's thoughts.

Isn't this apparent in the development of SMS or Internet chat lexicon? What does "brb" means to you given that you are a stranger to this language? What does "ground" means in reference to electronic subject assuming you know nothing about the subject?

Hence an apt conclusion to the above discussion would be; it is unequivocal to state that **WORDS ARE MEANINGFUL ELEMENT OF HUMAN PROGRESS** and not merely of SPEECH as the OXFORD dictionary describes it.



How much do we think about appropriate USAGE of WORDS in our day-to-day existence? Are my WORDS diligently chosen to convey my thoughts or are they merely chosen without giving much importance to meaning it conveys ie does it leads to vague interpretations? *Do we really VALUE the WORDS we use?* For that matter *do we have correct knowledge about the INTRINSIC & EXTRINSIC VALUE of WORDS used?*

First let us discuss what do we mean by an intrinsic & extrinsic value of a word. Here intrinsic value means the word on its own stands for something valuable while extrinsic would be that the word stands for something valuable with respect to other words, though a word can have both intrinsic as well as extrinsic value. However it is important to remember that the *nature of value is at times (& not always) dependent upon the FREQUENCY & CONTEXT of USAGE of a WORD.* Hence an entirely new context as well as how frequently a WORD is used may redefine the nature of value, both intrinsic as well as extrinsic value or any one of them, of a word (*detail discussion of stated proposition is given below*).

		Word has Intrinsic Value	
		Yes	No
Word has Extrinsic Value	Yes	Words like <i>strategy, ground, yes, Emotion related words like love, anger, Generic words like bill, king etc</i>	Words like <i>he/she, name of a person (names which are not generic in nature as generic words have intrinsic values)</i>
	No	Words related to things like <i>phone, food etc</i>	Words like <i>is, a, of etc</i>

It's obvious that we do not & most importantly cannot analyze words as per the above grid before it is used on a day-to-day basis. But we can least by least do so at the time of learning the new vocabulary. But the next logical question that arises at this junction is that *why do we need to analyze words in terms of intrinsic & extrinsic value?* The

answer seems to be quite simple ie *if words represent thoughts then valuing nature of words means indirectly valuing nature of thought and thereby improving the value of communication.*

Further a WORD can be analyzed on few core dimensions of which the **VALUE of a WORD** was one of them. Let us list the other dimensions and explore each of them.

Dimensions:

↗ **Value** (*Has property of mutability*)

- *Intrinsic*
- *Extrinsic*

↗ **Frequency of Usage**

- *High*
- *Medium*
- *Low*

↗ **Context of Usage**

- *Juxtaposition of words*
- *Subject Domain / Esoteric nature*
- *Perceived Utility*
 - *Synonyms / Antonyms*

Unlike VALUE of a WORD, both FREQUENCY & CONTEXT of USAGE cannot be analyzed independently. This is so because both dimension are **RELATIVE** in nature while VALUE dimension is both **ABSOLUTE** as well as **RELATIVE** in nature. This is so because both dimensions are concerned with the USAGE, which has **RELATIVE** connotation & have no independent identity of their own.

FREQUENCY of USAGE of a WORD is quite straightforward to comprehend. But it is critical to remember that it has propensity to change the VALUE of a WORD. eg In the initial years of its development WORD “internet” had only INTRINSIC VALUE in CONTEXT to public domain discussion as many were either not well aware about internet or had no access to internet. But now over a period of time it has gain high EXTRINSIC VALUE due to FREQUENT USAGE in various public domain discussion/usage. Also it is not always true that a WORD having low FREQUENCY of USAGE has low EXTRINSIC VALUE. Eg WORD “motherboard” is used least frequently during a purchase of personal computer among consumers who have less technical knowledge. But it has high EXTRINSIC VALUE when used in CONTEXT to purchasers having good technical know-how.

Doesn't the above discussion on FREQUENCY of USAGE validate the argument that it cannot be analyze independently? Indeed it does, as in every reference of FREQUENCY of USAGE we are using CONTEXT to define the USAGE.

CONTEXT of USAGE can be defined on below stated 3 sub dimensions:

- **JUXTAPOSITION of WORDS:** The VALUE of a WORD can change drastically merely by its placement with respect to other WORDS. Eg WORD “alliance” may not convey high VALUE, as it would if placed after the WORD

“strategic”. Hence in this case *due to FREQUENT USAGE of combination of WORDS, EXTRINSIC VALUE of the combination is redefined ie it either increases or decreases.*

- **SUBJECT DOMAIN / ESOTERIC NATURE:** As discussed earlier WORD “ground” may not have high EXTRINSIC VALUE among public domain but among people working with Electronics it conveys great amount of information and hence carries high VALUE among these set of people. Hence esoteric nature of a WORD in reference to particular subject domain changes the VALUE of the WORD. Another example would be of WORD “derivative”. Among share brokers it means something else & among mathematicians it means entirely different thing. But how does the FREQUENCY of USAGE play a role in this sub dimension. Consider above-mentioned example of “ground” once again. Before a person learns about Electronics the VALUE of WORD “ground” is say X. Now once he learns about Electronics over a period of time he FREQUENTLY comes across this word and hence the VALUE may change to X multiplied by Y (It is not summation as the *concepts of one domain are carried forward to other domains in non-linear manner*). In fact here high FREQUENCY is not required to change the VALUE of a WORD as its mere reference even once in a while can alter its VALUE by a large amount.
- **PERCEIVED UTILITY (SYNONYMS / ANTONYMS):** Consider the sentence “We have to analyze the management problem”. Now instead of this what if I write, “We have to evaluate the management problem”. Which WORD (analyze or evaluate) would you prefer to use to frame the above sentence for the given situation in hand? We may be unaware or aware yet may not have quick recollection of a substitute of a WORD in the form of SYNONYMS/ANTONYMS. Analysis of this sub dimension is not applicable if one knows no substitute for a WORD. However if awareness exists then its USAGE is determined by the PERCEIVED UTILITY of a WORD with respect to its substitutes such that it conveys true VALUE in terms of its overall USAGE. Hence in the above case, analyzing & not evaluating a management problem makes sense in general working terms. The best example to validate the hypothesis for this sub dimension would be; which sentence will communicate true VALUE of its USAGE, “I do not hate you” or “I love you”?

Having discussed the above dimensions on which one can analyze a WORD we can conclude that a WORD has

➤ **ABSOLUTE VALUE**

➤ **RELATIVE VALUE = function of { (FREQUENCY & CONTEXT) of USAGE }**

It would be appropriate to end this article by reiterating the question “*Do we really VALUE the WORDS we use?*” as it is clear from the above discussion that **“WORDS CHOSEN DETERMINES OUR DESTINY”** & hence

the title “**Words of Destiny**”