



Definition of Definition

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ABSTRACT

There is an inseparable link between human existence and communication. Words are exchanged externally through all forms of communication, but in reality, what is exchanged there is its driving force: the meaning. For this reason, it is significant to know the meaning of a word. Although the meaning of a word is determined by its definition, the existence of a set of definitions for a single word raises a fundamental problem for us, the researchers whether it could be so. Based on that, this study was conducted with the primary objective of finding the definition of definition. The contextual nature of the study, language used to collect data and the time frame limited the researchers to use qualitative reasoning and literary sources. The study confirmed that scholars are in a constant struggle for more than two millennia in searching a way to find the meaning of a word. We found that the generation of new knowledge sometimes might be hampered by a gap in the existing knowledge on language and the inability to reach certain sources of knowledge. Referring to rarely referred local literary sources, we could conclude the definition of a definition while introducing a novel approach on verifying available literary information. Thus, the academia is aided, as the authors fostered novel ways of questioning the definition of the definition, which would help the scholars to set conceptual and operational definitions in their respective researches.

KEYWORDS: *Definition, Inner Form, Nirukti, Sound of a Word, Verifying Information*

1 INTRODUCTION

It is important to grasp the meaning of a word appropriately to properly understand the words and concepts we use. The meaning of a word is explained by the definition of that word. After reading articles published by many scholars to understand the concept of sustainability, it became clear that the concept of sustainability has more than 400 definitions (Nuttall, 2018). This situation has raised two solemn questions: 1. Can a single concept have multiple definitions? 2. What exactly is a definition? In finding answers for those two primary questions, we were motivated to study the method of defining the term 'definition'. As an approach we first started to observe online dictionaries, and it was found that the online dictionaries came up with either similar or different interpretations for the term definition. For example, the Cambridge Dictionary describes the term definition as "the formal expression of the meaning or significance of a word, phrase or idiom found in a dictionary" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021). Some sources point out that a definition is something that is expressed in words, meaning of a word or a phrase (Businessballs, 2021). Also, the definition is: 1. literally meaning without words, without speaking; product or semantics of a word, 2. interpretation according to the product of a word, and 3. definite interpretation as indicated (Sinhala Dictionary, 1986; Sir Ivor Jennings, 1959). Thus, keeping several doubts we could come to a simple conclusion: "definition is the meaning of the word."

In understanding the meaning of definition, we further studied the meaning of the definition with the intention of clearing our qualms. Because the study of the meaning of words was considered as a study of the philosophy of language (Gasparri & Diego, 2016), more attention for the philosophy of language was given by scholars in the nineteenth century explaining their attitude on 'word' (Blackburn, 2017; Stanford University, 2015). Gasparri and Diego (2016) stated that a word could have a linguistic definition and a metaphysical definition. This concept of having two basic methods to define a word attracted our attention as we were always having some deficiencies in the available definitions for the term 'sustainability'. The role played by a word is the linguistic definition of a word. However, the metaphysical definition is based on answering questions such as what are words? Furthermore, how should be words individuated? (Di Sciullo & Williams, 1987; Bromberger 2011; Kaplan, 1990; Kalpan, 2011; McCulloch, 1991; Cappelen, 1999, Alward, 2005; Hawthorne & Lepore, 2011). Based on various interpretations on the meaning of words, it can be seen that various theories of word meaning have also emerged such as semantic theory and a foundational theory of word meaning. The semantic theory says that word meanings clarify the philological items of a natural language. Nevertheless, the foundational theory is singling out the facts whereby lexical expressions come to have the semantic properties they have for their users. Therefore, we understand that the attempts made so far to define the term definition are incomplete and not entirely

successful. Thus, in this paper, the main aim is to provide a clear definition of the term 'definition' or to understand what is meant by a definition which will be discussed in the following sections.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We introduce this study as an effort of filling an unexplained gap in the study of definitions, which we noticed in the Western knowledge domain. As a method to fulfill this gap we associated the Eastern knowledge domain with the idea that this approach might be supportive enough to address several unexplained gaps that prevail in the Western school of knowledge in relation to the study of definitions. Therefore, we had to master with great diligence the oriental knowledge approach (Bernard, 1988) which had been used in Sri Lanka until 1818. In this study, oriental literature sources were deliberately used as an approach to achieve the above objective. By the nature of the study, the qualitative study methodology was extremely selective. The researchers could not avoid having to break the traditionally accepted research framework as they hoped to fill a gap created in the traditional knowledge framework. So, some of the content here may also be refreshing to the reader who is within the traditional framework. However, we did not limit our study only to Eastern school of literature. The nature of this study directed us to associate both Western and Eastern literature without any peculiarity. Further, we studied the literature without setting a time frame or filtering criteria to the sources based on publications' time period. Therefore,

sources as old as 2500 years had to be considered in this study.

The nature of our research questions (i.e., can a single concept have multiple definitions? what exactly is a definition?) raised the need to refer to the published sources in English, Sinhala, Hela, Pali, and Sanskrit including grey literature books and magazines. Often, we referred to Tripitaka Pali texts (Ñanamoli Thera & Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2013) to avoid erroneous English translations. Amid this effort, we hereby emphasize that this study oscillates between knowledge and wisdom. This paper affirms that there is an imperative to move towards a cognitive approach beyond the formal education framework. Therefore, due to the need for research, we had to gain practical experience with a tendency towards Dhyapana (meditation; method of acquiring knowledge by concentrating the mind) which is the root of Addhyapana or education (Buddha Jayanthi Thripitakaya, n.d.-b). We conducted this study using an Eastern school based new qualitative method to analyze our data. Current methods used in research draw conclusions by analyzing the existing data which compel one to either accept or reject the existing data by formal arguments. This situation creates a possibility of conscious / unconscious inclination towards a realistic conclusion. Or there is a possibility that the real conclusion will be displaced by the power of reason. These methods might draw conclusions that are far from the universal truth. Therefore, such conclusions might contribute to a number of controversies surrounding the same issue. Another

weakness is the inability to reliably measure the accuracy of one's conclusions. Therefore, we tried to overcome such shortcomings through the unique qualitative approach that we used in this study. The methodology we used in our study is described in the *Vimansaka Sutta Majjhima Nikāya* (Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2013). This sutta points out eight possibilities that would cause somebody to not accept something: “1. Do not accept anything based on mere reports, tradition or hearsay. 2. Do not accept the authority of religious texts, 3. Do not accept mere reasons and arguments, 4. Do not accept one's own reference, 5. Do not accept anything which appears to be true, 6. Do not accept one's own speculative opinions, 7. Do not accept another's seeming ability and, 8. Do not accept the consideration” “this is our Teaching, it should not be taken as.” (Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2013). That explanation supports a person to compare the information we receive or the conclusion according to the Dhamma principle that we discuss in the paper. Dhamma means nature (Goenka, 2010) or accept anything if it agrees with the nature, or reject anything it does not agree with the nature (Goenka, 2010).

3 RESULTS & DISCUSSION

A single unit of language that has meaning and can be used to speak or write is called a word (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021). In addition, to be a word, it must consist of one or more sounds (Dictionary.com, 2021). The meaning of a word is not easy to understand. As Matthew (1991) points out, the meaning of a word depends on the context in which

it is used and the purpose for which it is used. However, in order for communication to take place properly, one must be able to accurately understand the true meaning of a word. Because of this, scholars seem to have been working hard since ancient times to discover a scientific method to understand the meaning of a word. These scholars demonstrate how they have embarked on this endeavor through linguistic rules as well as various philosophical perspectives. Some of these scholars suggest three classical traditions regarding the meaning of a word, namely, speculative etymology, rhetoric, and lexical meaning (Meier Oeser, 2011; Geeraerts, 2013). In speculative etymology, to get the meaning of a word, the word is broken down to word forms and uncover the rationalistic description of the words. In rhetoric, scholars try to understand figures of speech such as a parallelism, climax and anastrophe that occur in sentences (Gasparri & Diego, 2016). Lexicography is the dictionary meaning. There is an opinion that lexicography has promoted the semantic theory (Putnam, 1970).

In addition, there is another practice called historical-philological semantics to identify the meaning of a word. This practice dominated the linguistic field from 1870 to 1930. Scholars who supported Historical-philological semantics era were Michel Bréal, Hermann Paul, and Arsène Darmesteter (Gordon, 1982). Focusing on the historical evolution of the meaning of a word and attaching importance to practical flexibility are the main features

that can be seen in this era. This era was able to present a systematic framework for focusing on the dynamic nature of the meaning of a word. Also, how the meaning of the word is largely related to cognition (Geeraerts, 2010) was discussed during this era.

The section that we now have here will be on some semantic and metasemantic theories in analytic philosophy. Further, it would look at how lexical meaning should be conceived and described. Among the theories below, Carnap's theory of meaning (1947) postulates and Putnam's theory of stereotypes have focused strongly on lexical meaning. Frege who is from early temporary era related to analytic philosophy looked at the priority of sentential meaning over lexical meaning and sentences were regarded as "the proper means of expression for a thought" (Frege, 1979a; 1897). Frege prioritized sentential meaning over lexical meaning. Frege was very much interested in the "building blocks of thoughts" (Frege, 1979b): i.e., not the word 'dog' but the predicate 'is a dog'. Next, Tarski's works became popular. In Tarski's (1933) work on formal languages, lexical units were semantically categorized into different classes. These different classes were individual constants, predicative constants, and functional constants depending on the logical type of reference.

Along with Frege's distinction of sense and reference, Carnap (1947) proposed a new formulation of the sense/reference dichotomy: a distinction between intension and extension. The notion of intension was connected to

Frege's "obscure" notion of sense: two expressions have the same intension if and only if they have the same extension in every possible world or, in Carnap's terminology, it was described as in every state description (i.e., in every maximal consistent set of atomic sentences and negations of atomic sentences). Carnap (1947) also introduced meaning postulates, i.e., situations connected to the relations among the extensions of lexical items. For example, the meaning postulate $MP\forall x$ (bachelor $(x) \supset \sim$ married(x)) stipulates that any individual that is in the extension of 'bachelor' is not in the extension of 'married'. Montague introduced Montague semantics. They aimed to capture the inferential structure of a natural language. In Montague semantics, inferences are taken care of by supplementing the theory with suitable Carnapian meaning postulates.

In the mid-1970s, Dummett (Daniel Isaacson, Ian Rumfitt, 2018) brought up the issue of the proper place of lexical meaning in a semantic theory. Negative ideas were brought against Montague semantics. Partee (1981) argued that Montague semantics does not fix the intentional interpretation of words. According to Marconi (1997), lexical competence was introduced under two aspects: as inferential aspect, and referential aspect. Next, in the early 1970s, the lexical meaning was revolutionized by semantic externalism. In this theory, reference was determined in Putnam's view, as a "speakers' causal interaction with portions of matter or biological individuals in their

environment." Social externalism (Burge, 1979) was also introduced as the meaning of a word as used by an individual speaker depending on the semantic standards of the linguistic community the speaker belongs to. Philosophers such as Block (1986), Loar (1981) and McGinn (1982) however, contradicted this view. Their idea was how to make a difference in determining the behavior of an investigative object.

However, the emergence of modern linguistic theories related to word meaning could be placed at the transition period from historical-philological semantics to structuralist semantics. Lepschy, which emphasizes some important differences in structuralist semantics such as anti-psychologism. Structuralist semantics has brought out the language as a symbolic system. 2) Anti-historicism where structuralist semantics privileges synchronic linguistic description. 3) Anti-localism which describes that word meanings cannot be studied in isolation, and 4) Lexical phenomena that were popularized by structuralism which gave rise to a variety of descriptive approaches to word meaning that could be grouped in three categories (Lipka, 1992; Murphy, 2003; Geeraerts, 2006). Also, the lexical field theory that was introduced by Trier (1931) emphasizes that words should be studied by looking at their relations to other words in the same lexical field. Moreover, the componential analysis was developed in the second half of the 1950s by European and American linguists such as Pottier, Coseriu and Bloomfield who argue that word meaning can be described based on a finite set of conceptual

building blocks which are known as semantic components or features. For example, 'man' can be analyzed as [+ MALE], [+ MATURE], 'woman' as [- MALE], [+ MATURE], 'child' as [+/- MALE] [- MATURE] (Leech 1974). Another school called generativist semantics has acted as the componential current of structuralism, and that were the first to produce an important innovation in theories of word meaning, namely Katzian semantics (Katz & Fodor 1963; Katz 1972, 1987). The psychological component of Katzian semantics is a twofold procedure. The first states that word meanings are defined in terms of the combination of simpler conceptual components. In contrast, the second states that the subject of semantic theorizing is not identified with the "structure of the language". In Katzian semantics, word meanings are structured entities, and the representations used are called semantic markers. A semantic marker is a tree that comes with labelled nodes. These structures will depict the structure of the represented meaning, and whose labels identify the word's conceptual components.

Another approach called the Natural Semantic Metalanguage approach (Wierzbicka, 1972, 1996; Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2002) mentions that word meaning should be described in terms of a small core of elementary conceptual particles, and they are known as semantic primes. Natural Semantic Metalanguage elaborates that primes are primitive, natural, unanalyzable semantic constituents that are lexicalized in all-natural languages (in the form of a word, a morpheme, a phrase). However,

under relational approaches, scholars view the lexicon as a structured system of entries interconnected by sense relations such as synonymy, antonymy, and meronymy. Furthermore, a chief example of symbolic approaches is Collins and Quillian's (1969), a hierarchical network model. In this model, words are represented as entries in a network of nodes comprising a set of conceptual features.

In cognitive science also, scholars focus on the structural attributes of lexical meaning rather than on the dynamics of word use, and it has a dividing line between word knowledge and world knowledge. These theories reflect that word knowledge is richly interfaced with general intelligence. Therefore, related to cognitive linguistics, at the beginning of the 1970s, Eleanor Rosch put forth a new theory of the mental representation of categories. Another major innovation that was introduced by cognitive linguistics is the development of a comprehensive approach to word meaning, as exemplified by Frame Semantics (Fillmore, 1975, 1982) and by the Theory of Domains (Langacker, 1987). Fillmore and Langacker looked more into the relationship between the semantic information associated with language users to the elements of their lexicon and encyclopedic knowledge. In psycholinguistics, the study of word meaning is understood as the investigation of the mental lexicon. This cognitive system underlies the capacity for conscious and unconscious lexical activity, as stated by Jarema & Libben (2007). Simply the mental lexicon is the inventory that stores the body of linguistic

knowledge of speakers. Thus, it becomes easy to make competent the use of the lexical elements of a language. Moreover, in neurolinguistics (at the beginning in the mid-1970s) neuropsychological research on cognitive deficits related to brain lesions produced a considerable number of findings related to the neural correlates of lexical-semantic information and processing. The literature says that two preliminary considerations should be kept in mind regarding neurolinguistics. First, a distinction must be drawn between the neural realization of word forms such as traces of acoustic, articulatory, graphic, and motor configurations ('peripheral lexicons'), and the neural correlates of lexical meanings ('concepts'). Second, there is a great talk on the wide consensus about the irrelevance to brain processing of any distinction between strictly semantic and factual or encyclopedic information (Tulving, 1972; Sartori et al. 1994).

3.1 Inner Form

In particular, Wilhelm von Humboldt's interpretation of the theory of the inner form of language later took center stage in 19th century research (Klaas Willems, 2016). Humboldt goes to great lengths to say that external definitions of a word are not important and to point out the importance of the inner form (DI Cesare, 1998). With the term internal form, Humboldt emphasizes the importance of taking into account the differences between languages in order to adequately answer the question of how linguistic meanings are generated and how they relate to the outside world. According to Humboldt, it is important to note that the

internal and external forms of a language are, in the general sense, expressions of the form of the language (Klaas Willems, 2016). The form of the Humboldt language contradicts its 'substance' and separates several layers: first, language is generally the case for specific forms in individual languages; Similarly, the external world is the specific form of language of dictionary items (words) that again serve for the specific grammatical form of language (Klaas Willems, 2016). The internal form of the Humboldt language is conceived according to a network of 'principles' (Cesare, 1998) that can change only when different languages are combined or when important cultural and historical changes occur. According to Humboldt's theory, (1827) every language must be studied as a historical and cultural figure, and as a result the door to linguistics is opened.

3.2 *Nirukṭi* Western Form

Nirukṭi is another method used to understand the meaning of a word (Monier Monier-Williams, 1923; Sanskrit Dictionary, n.d.). However, there are various acceptances of the word *Nirukṭi*. Accordingly, 'explanation, interpretation, one of the six ancient Vedas, Vedas, the scriptures of Hinduism related to ancient science' can be pointed out as examples (Monier Monier-Williams, 1923). James Lochtefeld (2002), Harold G. Coward (1990) and Maurice Winternitz (1963) further point out that etymology in the 1920s was also referred to as the definition of literature in the field. Also, 'nirukta sūtra (Apple, 2019; Buddha Jayanthi Thripitakaya, n.d.-a) has also been proposed for the word nirukta as

"Name and root origins are *nirukta*" using a traditional definition. Monier Monier-Williams (1923) explains that the Sanskrit noun *nirukṭi* means poetical derivation. Harold G. Coward (1990) further demonstrates that man creates new words to create the concepts needed to describe human actions. He points out that these new concepts are often influenced by verbal roots. Eivind Kahrs (1998) explains that the only basic *nirukta* that has survived from ancient times to modern times is the one written by Yaksha. This is inspired by Nighantu texts dating back to the 5th century BC, which gives a clue to the history of the use of *Nirukṭi*. The field of *Nirukṭi* has been used to find the meaning of words, especially archeological words that are not in use, words that were created long ago and are rarely used later. There are a large number of such words in the Vedic literature of the 2nd millennium (James Lochtefeld, 2002). It was difficult to understand the meaning of the Vedas in the 1st millennium BC, so systematic theories were formed using *Nirukṭi* in order to understand those meanings (James Lochtefeld, 2002). This shows that *Nirukṭi* is used to understand the meaning of an unknown word. In addition, some scholars point out that etymology means "dialect" or "language" (Fliatouras, 2020). Among them, there is a group of people who refer to the language as "intonation" or "chant", which are excellent prosodic features (Renou, 1965; Wright, 1996).

3.3 The Relationship between the Meaning of a Word and the Sound

Vygotsky (1987) and D'Anselmo and others (2019) have argued in favor of the relationship between the meaning of a word and the sound. From this, Vygotsky makes it very clear that there is an inextricable link between the sound and the meaning of a word. He further points out that a word without meaning has only a sound and can no longer be considered a word. For example, what does the word *sutki* mean? Twenty-four hours is a combination of day and night. "comparative analysis of a number of words shows that it was formed from the word *stuknut*' [to knock]. If we take the prefix *su-* (or *so-*) [with] and *tknut* '[to poke or prod], we get *sotknut*' (*sotykat* ') [adjoin, i.e., day joined to night]. In some provinces, *sutki* means *sumerki*, the time when day and night meet. Then day and night together began to be called *sutki*." Continuing the same idea, Kumarila and Bhartrhari (Sided by R. C. Dwivedi (1994) point out that the relationship between the meaning and sound of a word is inborn and eternal. Meanwhile, D'Anselmo et al., (2019) scientifically prove that even though the language is unknown, it has the ability to make sense of the word through sound.

3.4 *Nirukṭi* in Sri Lankan literature

'Nir' is one of the twenty prefixes used in the Sinhala language (Sinhala Dictionary, 1986). 'Nir', like the pronoun 'no', is used in the negative or in the definitive (Saddharma Rathnawaliya, pp. 514-23, cited by Sinhala Dictionary, 1986. p 4269). It is also used in the sense of going

out (Dharma Pradeepika, 9-20). For example, *Nirayanika*/ Ironless (Glossary of Economics 91-33), *Nirguna*/ without good qualities (Saddharmalankaya, 520-36), *Nirdosha* /without errors (Panchika, 57-7), *Nirbhaya*/ without fear (Sarartha Sangraha, 302-8) can be pointed out.

Nirukta is also used in various senses. Ven. Dharmapala Thera, based on *Nettiprakarana Attakatha* described *Nirukthi* as defining the meaning of a word. Also, a statement made by Ven. Sri Rahula Thera further confirms that the *Nirukthi* means the definition itself. Meanwhile, the Buddhadatta Thero of Polwatta offers two interpretations of *Nirukthi*. They are: 1. The science that gives meaning to a word, and 2. the name commonly applied to the language. Among these, several interpretations such as Etymology, Derivation, Glossary, Explanation, Grammar etc. have been given to describe the *Nirukthi* by the *Dharmasamaya Sinhala Dictionary* (Zoysa, n.d.). Chullawaggapali also describes the use of *Nirukthi*. It states that the word of the Buddha should be understood in the *Nirukthi* sense. In Samantha Pasadika (p. 897), the Buddhagosha Thera also states that the Pali language in which the Buddha preached the Dhamma means *Sakaya Nirukthiya*. According to *Dhampiya's* commentary, it is confirmed that the Dhamma in the Hela language was translated into Pali. According to *Dhampiya Atuwa Gatapadaya*, that confirmation paves the way for two realizations. That is, 1. that the Hela language was in use before the Pali language, and 2. that the *Nirukthi* should be understood in the Hela language.

Also, in *Kavyasekara* (p. 59) the *Nirukthi* is introduced as a language, a discipline. In addition, the *Panchasudani* commentary (p. 249) attempts to explain the *Nirukthi* in both the description of word and the definition. *Dhampiya Atuwa*, (pp. 57-58) meanwhile offers a different meaning to the *Nirukthi*. According to that interpretation, *Nirukthi* is a specific knowledge. *Nirukthi* Gnana has been introduced as one of the 72 Gnana introduced by the Buddha. This type of knowledge is a type of knowledge that exists for the *Siwpilisimbiya* Arahants as Artha, Dhamma, *Nirukthi* and Patibhana. Samantha Pasadika (p. 75) states: 'Thathwa wannagamo wannavipariyayo' tie than nirukti lakkanan gahethwa saddayena wa pisodaradipakkhepa lakkhanan gahethwa'. This highlights another important indication that sound takes precedence over *nirukti*. Simultaneously, *Punchibandara Sannasgala* (p. 58) and *Kotahena Pannakitti Thero* (p. 163) point out that *nirukthi* is the way words are formed, the help of the sound of a word, the explanatory wisdom.

The meaning of a word transcends the word. That is, there is still an idea, not just a word. Thus, the idea that arises beyond the word, is called definition. This is what *Nirukti* does. That is, *Nirukti* is not a word but a definition in terms. If it is difficult to understand, it is explained using various examples. It is the original Maghadi pattern preached by the Buddha. (Hela Bodu Piyuma, 2013, Volume 17). *Nirukti* is constructed in colloquial language and not in linguistic rules. The method of *Nirukti* pointed out by the Buddha is different from that of the

Sinhala and Pali etymologies. *Nirukti* is the combination of ideas used to form a word. When interpreted in this way, the exact meaning comes to languages like Magadhi and Holy Sinhala. (Hela Bodu Piyuma 2013, Volume 16). Every word used in the world has a *Nirukti*. For example, every word can be given a *Nirukti*, such as animal names or gender names. Nettiprakarana, p. 55, 'Chathubhyuhara' 'Vibhangaya' (Hela Bodu Piyuma, 2013, Volume 17).

There is a principle to understanding the meaning of a word. It is chosen by the wisdom of the *Nirukti*. (Hela Bodu Piyuma, Volume 19, p. 11). And there is a reason for a word to form in any language. Although hundreds of languages are spoken in the modern world, the primitive Brahmakalpata who lived before the advent of man on earth did not have languages that were adapted in this way. The language of those people was the original language of the emotional Sa Magadhi. Sa means holy. Magadhi means 'old' on the road (*Margaye aadii* (Hela Bodu Piyuma, Volume 19, p. 11). Accordingly, Sa Magadhi is the ancient sacred language of the road. It is not something that anyone teaches or builds. There is a sound that comes according to the '(innate)' nature of human beings. It is called 'Gathi Handa'. When 'Gathi Guna' emerges, a corresponding 'Gathi Handa' (instinctive voice) emerges. 'Innate' (Gathi Guna) 'and innate voice' (Gathi Handa) are combined. When one hears that voice, that instinct comes to the one who hears it. Therefore, it is possible to understand the idea expressed. So, there is nothing to teach in the language. It is a language that is

accessible. This language of emotion is a language common to the whole world. (Hela Bodu Piyuma, Volume 22, p. 22). Anyone with even a hint of "siwpilisimbiyapath" wisdom can get the sense of language. However, there are two types of emotional language, the language of emotions, which is characteristic of the original, and the language of emotions that can be used by the average person. (Hela Bodu Piyuma, Volume 22, p. 23). Every word is formed according to the doctrine of cause and effect. It implies that every word is a result. In that word lies the cause that influenced that result. Thus, the meaning of a word can be understood by identifying the reason behind the origin of the word. This is what *Nirukti* does. (Hela Bodu Piyuma, Volume 22, p. 24).

In addition, the literature confirms that there are two types of *Nirukti*. One type is the *Nirukti* system developed to study letters, words, phrases, grammar. That system was built by the Brahmins. Also, the literature reveals that the second method was introduced by the Buddha. For example, Anguttara Nikaya (1)'s sermon to Tikanna Bamuna on page 299 and Janussoni Bamuna on page 299 of the same book can be pointed out. Also, the theory of *Nirukti*, Gathi Guna (innate quality), Gathi Handa (innate sound), Gathi Ruwa (innate image) can be pointed out on page 136 of the Digha Nikaya (3) Aggagna Sutta. (Hela Bodu Piyuma, Volume 26, p. 6). Page 101 of Chullawaggapali- II points out that in order to define a word, it must be considered in its original form. It also takes four forms of *Nirukti*. That is, 1. as

the external features of the word 2. as the function or taste of it, 3. as the cause or origin of the word, and 4. as the basis of what is or as 'padatthana'. Whichever way you look at it, there is a possibility of getting the original meaning of the word. (Hela Bodu Piyuma, Volume 22, p. 20). It is difficult to explain the definition or the *Nirukti*. It is easier to explain with an example. If you ask a person who does not know Sinhala what 'coconut' means, it will be difficult for him to understand its meaning. Also, if you ask a person who does not know English what 'coconut' means, it will be difficult for him to understand its meaning. Also, if you ask a person who does not know Tamil what 'Thenga' means, it will be difficult for him to understand its meaning. But if you point out a coconut to all these people, they will understand that they are being told about this. What happened there. The word transcended and the meaning emerged. Here, this event is called nir+vachana (definition) or nir+ukta (*Nirukta*) (Hela Bodu Piyuma, Volume 19, p. 13).

The use of the term etymology can be further analyzed from the data obtained from the literature review. *Nirukti* is a combination of the words nir + utka. Here 'nir' means not. Also, utka means main / basic. These terms can be considered as examples of several terms in the Sinhala language (Table 01).

Sinhala word	Nirukti		English meaning
<i>Nirukta</i>	<i>Nir</i>	<i>Ukta</i>	
English meaning	No/Not	Main/ Major/ Emerged	Hidden
<i>NirBheetha</i>	<i>Nir</i>	<i>Bheetha</i>	
<i>English meaning</i>	No/Not	Fear	Brave
<i>Nirwasthra</i>	<i>Nir</i>	<i>Wasthra</i>	
English meaning	No/Not	Clothing	Nude
<i>Nirguna</i>	<i>Nir</i>	<i>Guna</i>	
English meaning	No/Not	Quality	Degeneration
<i>Nirlobha</i>	<i>Nir</i>	<i>Lobha</i>	
<i>English meaning</i>	No/Not	Greed	Generous
<i>Nirdhana</i>	<i>Nir</i>	<i>Dhana</i>	
English meaning	No/Not	Wealth	Poor
<i>Nirodha</i>	<i>Nir</i>	<i>Rodha</i>	
<i>English meaning</i>	No/Not	Travel	Stop
<i>Niruththara</i>	<i>Nir</i>	<i>Uththara</i>	
<i>English meaning</i>	No/Not	Answer	Problem
<i>Nirvindana</i>	<i>Nir</i>	<i>Vindana</i>	
<i>English meaning</i>	No/Not	Feel	Unknowingly/ Unconscious

Table 01: Simple Use of *Nirukti*

Source: Authors Compilation (Literature Review), 2020

It is evident that a person has been focusing own attention on the meaning of a word for several millennia. For

example, the Yaksha *Nirukti* explored by Eivind Kahrs (1998) goes back as far as 5 BC, and the Vedic literature as pointed out by James Lochtefeld (2002) has a history of more than two millennia. It is also clear that the *Nirukti* taught in Buddhist philosophy coincides with this period. The fact that scholars have been working tirelessly to identify the meaning of a word for so long confirms two key points: 1. the value of understanding the meaning of a term, and 2. that the work is not yet complete. Also, the scholars who have been involved in this endeavor can be identified under two main schools: 1. those who try to identify the meaning of a word in the context in which it exists, 2. those who seek to identify the meaning of a word within the word itself. Figure 01 shows a summary of the efforts made by scholars to interpret the meaning of a word. However, it is important to note that this figure is based on the needs of the study and is not chronological. It should also be noted that this chart does not include the Sri Lankan wisdom used to derive the meaning of a word. This figure well confirms how much effort has been put in by scholars during the period under consideration to interpret the meaning of a word. It shows the positive and negative aspects of all the efforts of scholars in this regard. It can be considered that they have been able to make some positive discoveries so far through their efforts. Among those positive findings is the finding that there is a discrepancy between the Neural Realization of Word Forms and the 'Neural Correlates of Lexical Meanings'. In addition, 'the link between the sound and meaning of a word', 'the eternal and

innate meaning of a word', 'specific forms in individual languages', and 'the meaning of a word depends on cultural and historical factors', can be specifically mentioned.

This lengthy literary study also revealed a pattern of behavior that interfered with the findings of these scholars. That is, it is clear that there is not enough literary research among this group. As a result, some discoveries about the meaning of the word have not progressed beyond that basic finding. For example, the connection between the meaning and the sound of a word, which is a positive finding, no longer demonstrates how scholars have been motivated to study it in depth. Also, there is no simultaneous association of Eastern and Western literature. Also, although Western scholars associated Eastern literature, at that time they exhibited an association of Eastern literature on the Western model. Therefore, in such cases they failed to experience the true depth of Eastern wisdom.

At the same time, the weakness of language skills has become a barrier to associating with sources. Oriental wisdom is often written in Pali, Sanskrit, Hela, or other Oriental languages. These books have been translated into global languages, but they are translated into words, not meaning. Therefore, it is inevitable that the meaning of those verses will be hidden. Due to this principle, it has been proved that the correct meaning has not been revealed in the association of many Eastern literatures. It was further confirmed that the correct *Sakya Nirukti* method for

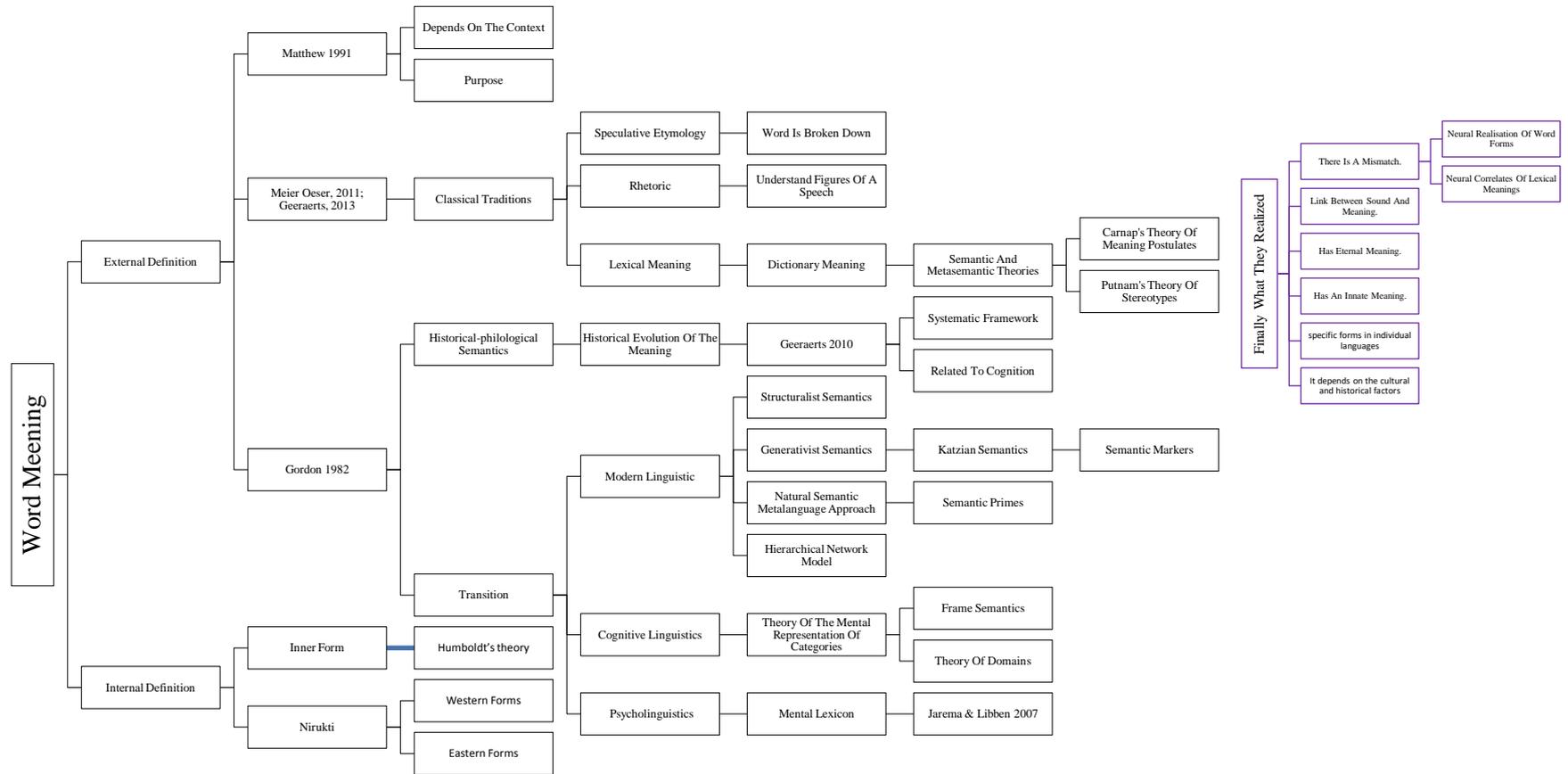
obtaining the meaning of a word had not been used in the Western model.

The Nirukthi has various meanings: defining the meaning of a word according to the definition of itself, science that gives meaning to a word, the name commonly applied to the language, etymology, derivation, glossary, explanation and grammar. However, in eastern sources of knowledge, it is mentioned that the words told in Pali language of the Buddha should be understood in the Nirukthi sense (Chullawaggapaliya). The Hela language was in use before the Pali language. Hence the Nirukthi should be understood in the Hela language (according to Dhampiya Atuwa Gatapadaya). Furthermore, *nirukthi gnana* has been introduced as one of the 72 *gnana* (wisdom) introduced by Buddha. This type of *gnana* is a type of wisdom that exists for the *Siwpilisimbiya*: Arahants, Dhamma, Nirukthi and Patibhana. And the *nirukthi gnana* suggests that sound takes precedence over *nirukti* according to Samantha Pasadika. Therefore, the words are formed with the help of the sound and finding that innate formation of a word is a wisdom.

'Nir' is one of the twenty prefixes used in the Sinhala language. (Sinhala Dictionary, 1986). 'Nir', like the pronoun 'no', is used in the negative or in the definitive (Saddharma Rathnawaliya pp. 514-23, cited by Sinhala Dictionary, 1986; p 4269). It is also used in the sense of going out (Dharma Pradeepika, 9-20). For example, Nirayanika (Ironless) (Glossary of Economics 91-33), Nirguna (without good qualities) (Saddharmalankaya, 520-36), Nirdosha (without errors) (Panchika,

57-7), Nirbhaya (without fear) (Sarartha Sangrahaaya), 302-8) can be pointed based on the Sinhala Dictionary (1986). Also, the definition is: 1. literally meaning without words, without speaking. Product or semantics of a word. 2. Interpretation according to the product of a word. (Sinhala Dictionary, 1986). 3. Definitely interpret etc. as indicated by Sir Ivor Jennings (1959). According to literary sources, many more meanings have been given to the *Nirukti*. For example, defining the meaning of a word, definition itself, science that gives meaning to a word and the name commonly applied to the language. It is also necessary to use the original word to understand the meaning of a word. For example, Dhampiya Atuwa Commentary mentions the need to use Pali or Hela to understand the word of the Buddha. It has also been

argued at various stages in the study of literature that *Nirukti* is not a knowledge that can be mastered by learning, but a wisdom that must be understood. So far, our attention has been drawn to the analysis of information obtained from the study of literature. However, there is no justifiable reason to accept / reject it because it was in the book or because it is a traditional knowledge according to Kalamasutta (Majjhima Nikya, 1954). Therefore, it is necessary to compare the knowledge gained from the book with the Dhamma. Here Dhamma should be understood as nature. Accordingly, the summary of our discussion needs to finally be reconciled with nature before reaching a conclusion. Acceptance / non-acceptance of that knowledge based on agreement / disagreement with nature can therefore be done on a scientific basis.

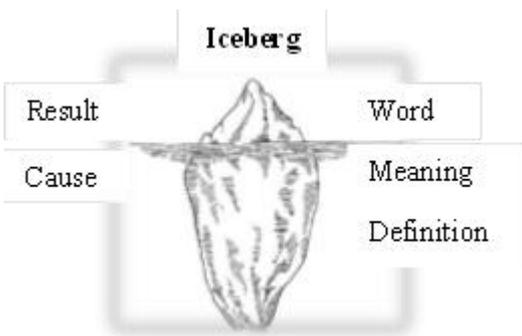


Source: Developed by the researchers based on study data.

Figure 01: Spectrum of studies on the meaning of a word

4 CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Nirukti and definitions are used interchangeably. Such emergence of meaning is based on the theory of cause and effect. Thus, the word that appears on the surface is the effect and the invisible part is the cause. Gathi Guna (innate quality), Gathi Handa (innate sound), Gathi Ruwa (innate image) are used to identify the meaning of a word. We suggest researchers to use *Nirukti* to know the original form of a word or a definition. The definition of a word is not an external implication, but the cause of the origin of the word itself. We could simply clarify this statement through an iceberg example (Figure 02).



Source: Developed by the researchers based on Iceberg Theory

Figure 02: Model for defining a word based on Iceberg theory

The picture (Figure 02) shows an iceberg and it has two main parts: the surface and the submerged part. In other words, the visible part and the invisible part. The invisible part caused the visible part of the surface that an observer easily can see. In other words, the visible part does not exist without the invisible part. The reason is

that the submerged section caused the surfaces' appearance. Thus, the knowledge extracted in our discussion can be applied to the theory of Iceberg. Through this iceberg example we suggest four circumstances: 1. the immersed meaning of a word, evoked within the word itself, is the definition of definition, 2. uncovering the hidden meaning can be done through *nirukthi* method, 3. method of *nirukthi* is everlasting and innate, and 4. the *nirukthi* method is Wisdom not some knowledge. Hence, we could find the definition for the term definition by introducing a methodology to verify the suggested definition for any term. We believe that the scholars would have the opportunity to reconsider the extent to which definitions should be used in various fields of study and extend their studies on definition of a word based on our suggestions. However, this study was limited to a conclusion that was derived based on literature published in English, Pali and Sinhala languages. Yet, the authors could make a significant contribution to the academia by introducing innovative ways to question the definition of the definition, which would help the scholars to set conceptual and operational definitions in their respective researches.

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