

Ludwig Wittgenstein and the fundamentals of a communication philosophy

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Abstract. The starting premise of our study is that according to which the language does not have only one essence, but it manifests as an extensive collection of different uses, each one having its own logic. In the late wittgensteinian philosophy the meaning of an expression is its usage in the variety of the uses that come to build the language. The language is fed by the all human activities and behaviours and the different utilisations that we apply to it get substance and significance through our practical activities.. Therefore, language is a part of the structure of an ample “life form”. Ludwig Wittgenstein intend to grasp the importance of the role played by the expressions inside the language, the main idea being that the control of the language consists in being able of using its expressions in the different language games they belong to. The limit is our action from which the language game stems. To know how to use the expression means to have the ability to follow the rules for its use in different language games. In this study we intend to illustrate and analyse the theoretical measures in daily discourse.

Keywords: language, grammar, meaning, language game, communication uses, rules.

1. A new philosophizing manner

A new shifting in the subject of philosophy and a new method. The research programme of the philosophy of language was elaborated and it is developed with the device: philosophical issues are the issues of the language. The philosophical issues rise from the language, from its imperfection, its opacity and from the process of ignoring its way of functioning.

The fundamental idea which constitutes the binding material of the steps that philosophy of language would go through is that the specific task of the philosophy is the to clarify the thought and speech nature, working out some exact concepts and a, ideal, perfect language, as a result of a rigorous and logic analysis. “*The aim of philosophy is the logical clearing up of the thoughts. Philosophy is not the body of a doctrine, but an activity*”. A philosophical work consists of elucidations. “*The result of philosophy are not «philosophical sentences», but the clearing up of these sentences. Philosophy must clarify and rigorously mark the limits of thoughts, which, otherwise, are vague and confuse*” (Wittgenstein, 2003). This statements have become an ideal of all the philosophical investigations in the following period

2. The operational dimension of language

2.1. Communication as language game

The philosophical issues are not empiric, of course. They are rather solved studying the acting ways of our language, in a manner that determine us to recognize these acting ways, in spite of the impulse to wrongly understand them. “*Philosophy is a struggle against the charming of our intellect with the*

resources of language” (*Ibidem*). From this perspective, the philosophical issues will disappear when the acting ways of language are understood properly. Philosophy is something distinct of science, which has the mission to clear up the real facts. The philosophical step is, in its essence, a conceptual one, elaborating a grammar meant to avert the misunderstandings regarding the usage of words.

Ludwig Wittgenstein asserted that there is not only one logic of language, but several. The language does not have only one essence, but it manifests as an extensive collection of different uses, each one having its own logic. The meaning is no longer obtained through the denotation of the words-things relation, or in the representation of the relation between sentences and actions; in the late Wittgensteinian philosophy the meaning of an expression is its usage in the variety of the uses that come to build the language. The language “*is fed by the all human activities and behaviours and the different utilisations that we apply to it get substance and significance through our practical activities, because we interact with people and with the world we live in.*” (Arsith, 2005). Therefore, language is a part of the structure of an ample “life form”. Thus, Ludwig Wittgenstein gives up the belief that it is possible an unitary description of language, that explains the whole functioning of language in terms of one single theoretical model.

Language, as the Austrian philosopher said, represents a multitude of different activities. We use language in order to: report, describe, inform, affirm, negate, order, ask, narrate, joke, solve problems, translate, ask for, thank, congratulate, pray, warn, express emotions and many, many other. All these different activities are named by Ludwig Wittgenstein “language games”. As a matter of fact, the language game is a behaviour that is a part of a form of activity. In Wittgenstein’s view, the term “usage” simultaneously covers what is made by speaking and what is made through word.

The meaning of linguistic expressions is conditioned by the existence of a language game for these expressions. Based on this approach, the fundamental unit in the natural language is no longer the sentence, but the language game, which mediates and carries the meaning. The meaning of a sign is not what the sign designates or names, the meaning consists in the way in which the sign is utilitarian inside a language game.

2. 2. The meaning as effect of the use of expression

The Austrian philosopher’s justification for the use of the term “game” is the following one: in order to understand the acting ways of the language first we have to acknowledge its variety and multiplicity; then we have to accede to the idea that “*the meaning of a word is its use in language*” (Wittgenstein, 2003). The concept of use suggested by Ludwig Wittgenstein is intentionally vague because the uses of expressions are so varied as the language games in which they appear.

Ludwig Wittgenstein intend to grasp the importance of the role played by the expressions inside the language, the main idea being that the control of the language consists in being able of using its expressions in the different language games they belong to. The limit is our action from which the language game stems. The language in action, as utterance, reveals features and mechanisms of a profound grammar, that appears as a semantics which permanently enriches itself by lighting the different meanings the words can get in the complex process of communication.

The speech context can become the “translation” space of the deep relations between thinking and language. “*The slogan «the meaning is the use» has been understood and appropriated in a number of different ways, not all of them helpful in understanding Wittgenstein.*” (Hans Sluga & David g. Stern, 2007). An expression’s having a use has sometimes been explained as there being conditions under which the expression can be correctly or justifiably or appropriately applied – criteria of application.

If the notion of application is widened to include not only assertion but all other fully sentential speech acts, and to include among words sentences, we are left only with the unhelpful observation that an expression’s having a use is a matter of there being conditions under which it can be correctly or justifiably or appropriately used in communication. An expression can be endowed with meaning, or its meaning can be explained, by the use and be used correctly if the explanation is to succeed. That requires that there be some way in which those expressions are used, some regularities or general practices to which an individual speaker’s performance can conform or fail to conform.

Supposing that a person gets in a foreign country, as an explorer (linguist), with a completely unknown language, in what circumstances will this person say that people of this place give orders, understand them, obey, revolt etc.? *“People’s common way of acting is the reference system that we use to interpret a foreign language”* (Wittgenstein, 2003). Given the fact that a language game has both verbal and nonverbal components, it is difficult to establish which communicative experiences are or are not unavailing from the perspective of the understanding degree of some expressions. Our understanding consists in knowing the use of the expression in the variety of language games it appears in.

To know how to use the expression means to have the ability to follow the rules for its use in different language games. Ludwig Wittgenstein’s philosophical grammar explains the signification of the sign and that’s why *“it centralizes and generalizes all the usage rules of words in the language games”* (Crizantema Joja, 1991). The wittgensteinian grammar is a profound grammar of the network of relations existing in a sentence. Practicing the language games leads to the deciphering of this network of relations, the effect being the increase of the understanding degree of the expressions.

The status of a sentence is established by its use, that can change in time. The philosopher asserted that the rules have a constant role in the use of language, setting up the standards of the correct use of the expressions. Communication is possible by means of the language only if there is an agreement, not only in the definitions, but also in the conclusions or the explanations of the meaning: *“the understanding through language is related not only with the agreement of definitions, but also with an agreement of judgements. This fact seems to suspend the logic, but it does not. There is one thing to describe the measurement method, and another thing to obtain and formulate the results of this measurement”* (Wittgenstein, 2003). The replacement of an inadequate understanding with an adequate one is possible by means of interpretation; but the interpretations, by their own means, do not provide the meaning. What has a behaviourist aspect about understanding, in Ludwig Wittgenstein’s view, is the fact that he considers that the distinction between “exterior” and “interior” is irrelevant, because understanding does not represent a mental state, but a skill.

3. Communication as an activity governed by the rules of a “life form”

3. 1. Speech as training in following the rules

To understand any sentence means to understand the language games it is a part of; analogically, to follow a rule means to master the practice itself of following the rules that must be followed. In order to understand the rules and to follow them we have just to establish what is common, familiar, in all the different types of normative behaviour (playing chess, cooking using a recipe, solving maths exercises) and to use language in the different language games.

Ludwig Wittgenstein rejects, in his *Philosophical Investigations*, the denotative theory, according to which the rules of correct use of a word are caused by the nature of the denoted object of that word. The philosopher points out the fact that a rule is the common use of this rule by us (without having the impression that we are governed by it). Following of the rules is a general practice, established by understanding, habit and training. They are not a coercive standard imposed from outside our ways of following the rules. *“To follow a rule is similar to obeying an order. We are trained to do so [...]. The manner of acting, common to all people, is a reference system that helps us to interpret an unknown language”* (*Ibidem*). Following the rules is a common practice that we are trained in, as members of a linguistic community.

3. 2. Natural language as a “life form”

Following the rules is a practice incorporated in the customs and conventions of a community, being, essentially, public. But, if the usage rules for a language are the result of the agreement between the members of a linguistic community without an exterior objective restriction of this usage to the frame of “actions” or of “the world”, will this lead to the idea that the truth is, also, the result of our

agreements? Here is the answer give by the philosopher in *Philosophical Investigations*: “It is what the human beings say is true and false; and they come to terms in the language they use. This is not an agreement of opinions, but of life forms.” (*Ibidem*). By the “life form” concept, Ludwig Wittgenstein understood the under-laying consensus of the linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour, the assumptions, practices, traditions, customs which people, as social beings, share and which, in consequence, are presumed in the language they use; the life form is the reference framework in which we learn to work when we are trained with our community language; to learn this language means to learn the practices this language is inseparable bound with and from which the expressions take their meaning. We achieve the ability of using expressions through our training as members of that community.

The philosopher refers to the word *pain* and asserts that there is a possibility for the speech about pain to be a learned substitute for moans and starts, which would be the natural expression of pain. “A child hurts himself and cries and then the adults talk to him and teach him exclamations and then sentences.” (*Ibidem*). The idea is that the things we thing about as private states and processes, as joy, anger, they are some features of the human nature that have natural expression in the behaviour. The linguistic processes we use to talk about them are replacements of this behaviour publicly learned.

The stability of the expressions about subjective states results from the language game and not from the subjective introspection. But this says that if the meaning of the word is the same for the first and the third person, then my feelings do not have a greater value if they are expressed by me or by somebody else. In a social context this means that the sentences “My teeth hurt” and “His teeth hurt” have the same signification. The highest level of the subjective inner world is brought down to the level of community language. Nobody is allowed to place himself in self-valuation above the others.

4. Conclusions

We can conclude pointing out some modifications of the conception about the language that took place during the decades after the publishing of *Philosophical Investigations*: firstly, the acknowledgement of the acting dimension of significance and meaning; secondly, the contexts and circumstances of the discourse are emphasised in order to determine the meaning; and, finally, the speech is understood as interaction. Therefore, Ludwig Wittgenstein’s philosophical work determined new perspectives in the philosophical approach of language, a field where, on the direction of re-signification of the common language, the representatives of Oxford “Literary” School would excel in.

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