

Wittgenstein's Approach to the Language-Reasoning Use of Propositions

Alexandr Sobancev, Yekaterinburg, Russia

The relation of language and reasoning which is of great significance for the problem of propositions' interpretation, concerns the problem of the expression of a thought. We will argue certain points that refer to some lack of understanding of the relation between language and reasoning. In the first section we will offer a way to receive an understanding of the distinction between Wittgenstein's account of sentences and that of propositions in connection to Frege's influence on him. In the second one we will suggest a hypothesis for the use of propositions concerned with reasoning as language.

1. Firstly, we assume that the concept of proposition in the *Tractatus* was influenced by Frege's *Thought: A Logical Investigation*. Consequently, Wittgenstein treats it as a kind of a thought because descriptions propositions in the *Tractatus* and of thoughts in Frege's terms correspond to each other. Its objectivity means an agreement of both philosophers about the location of such items. Frege takes it for the third world that exists independently of any particular thinker. Wittgenstein describes the propositions in terms of logical definitions that are constant. On the one hand, to make clear what is the main idea in this system, Frege supposes that it is the sense of a sentence that is either true or false. As he writes, "And when we call a sentence true we really mean its sense is." (G. Frege 1956, 292) On the other hand, Wittgenstein says in one of the most cited paragraph that there is a general form of a proposition. It should be mentioned that these two positions are similar to each other in at least two aspects. The first is that Frege's contribution is that he puts forward the idea of sense and reference as well as the question of a division of a thought and its expression. He notices that,

"If we use the mere form of the indicative sentence, avoiding the word 'true', two things must be distinguished, the expression of the thought and the assertion. The time-indication that may be contained in the sentence belongs only to the expression of the thought, while the truth, whose recognition lies in the form of the indicative sentence, is timeless. Yet the same words, on account of the variability of language with time, take on another sense, express another thought; this change, however, concerns only the linguistic aspect of the matter." (Frege 1956, 310)

But the latter aspect is of interest for Wittgenstein. And that is why he constructs his own logical system of the *Tractatus* that contains a concept of an elementary proposition. "A proposition is a truth-function of elementary propositions. (An elementary proposition is a truth-function of itself.)" (*TLP*, 5) He affirms a method of logical analysis of propositions and its uses. And he argues that the general form of a proposition is a tool to make language clear. The problem is that the tool was not created for all kinds of propositions. It was made only for propositions as pictures.

The very concept of a picture has much in common with the one of *thought* in Frege. Wittgenstein writes: "What a picture represents is its sense." (*TLP*, 2.221) Then, "The agreement or disagreement of its

sense with reality constitutes its truth or falsity." (*TLP*, 2.222) The definition of a proposition in the *Tractatus* and that of a thought in Frege's paper have the same origin that is an idea that there is a realm of independent-from-anybody thoughts and propositions. That is, Wittgenstein makes a similar ideal system in which a proposition corresponds to a thought as Frege does.

Quine notices,

"Wittgenstein construes the proposition as a sign, namely the *sentence*; but it is the proposition as the denotation of the sentence, *i.e.* as the entity, if any, whereof the sentence is a symbol, that is the present concern. It is these elusive entities, presumably, that are the elements of the propositional calculus and are denoted therein by the variables "*p*," "*q*," etc., and their combinations." (Quine 1934, 472)

But the variables are determined by the constant that is a truth-function of elementary propositions. (*TLP*, 5) Thus, it is applicable to scientific propositions used to formulate some theory.

Also, Wittgenstein argues in *Tractatus*:

"The totality of true propositions is the whole of natural science" (*TLP*, 4.11)

But it can be said that propositions playing the main role in the process of scientific knowledge are expressions of a scientist's thoughts. The process of thinking is the expression of thoughts in sentences. Scientist analyzes a sentence and infers a proposition. Then he analyzes a proposition and gets an analyzed one. Not only a proposition can be interpreted in different ways but a sentence can, too. Consequently, the very question of language-reasoning use of propositions can be asked in the context of an application of an expression of thoughts by means of sentences. It is obvious that there is nothing but sentences of ordinary language to express thoughts. A way to find a resolution is, firstly to accept the possibility of a multiplicity of propositions' interpretations, and, secondly to consider every interpretation as a version of thought-language in the language of analyzable sentences.

Reasoning is a language that has thoughts as its sentences. An interpretation as a version of one's language-reasoning is as possible as another one. Wittgenstein treats questions like "what is a sentence?" as a misunderstanding of the way of it functions. And one important thing one should take into account is that it is impossible to say something about a sentence as well as about language. It is much more useful to learn how sentences act in language-reasoning that is how we can express our thoughts with them. As Wittgenstein writes,

"For a *large* class of cases—though not for all—in which we employ the word "meaning" it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language." (*PI*, 43)

But this is another point of view that has little in common with the early Wittgenstein. The concept of a general

form of propositions and of language in the *Tractatus* presupposes the search for the essence of propositions and language.

The objectivity of Frege's *thoughts* and of Wittgenstein's *propositions* fails the actual use of language. Propositions are ideal entities in the *Tractatus* as well as thoughts are in *Thought: A Logical Investigation* and that is why they are lacking a particular speaker. Even strict forms of a scientist's sentences have just a similar appearance of propositions. A certain definition of a proposition, – that is about what we can say it is true or false, – will be irrelevant to the question of its application to the process of thinking because I think with the very same sentences as I express my thoughts. And sentences are to be propositions only after their analysis by reasoning. But the objectivity of propositions does not concern the sentences that are used in reasoning.

2. Wittgenstein states that a proposition ought to be expressed in order for us to understand it, as he says in the *Tractatus*:

"We use the perceptible sign of a proposition (spoken or written, etc.) as a projection of a possible situation. The method of projection is to think of the sense of the proposition". (*TLP*, 3.11)

Consequently, he means that the proposition has much to do with a sentence in ordinary language. In the *Philosophical Investigations* with another style, and with another aim he writes:

"For instance, if A has to describe complexes of coloured squares to B and he uses the word "R" *alone*, we shall be able to say that the word is a description—a proposition. But if he is memorizing the words and their meanings, or if he is teaching someone else the use of the words and uttering them in the course of ostensive teaching, we shall not say that they are propositions. In this situation the word "R", for instance, is not a description; it *names* an element—but it would be queer to make that a reason for saying that an element can *only* be named!". (*PI*, 49)

In a certain way the passages mentioned are opposing each other because of the two stages of Wittgenstein's thought. The first passage has an original mixture of a kind of metaphysical analytism and logical methodology of clarifying thoughts. The second one represents a new research position for the consideration of language usages. We have to make a comparison of these views to observe clearly how the division of the language and the reasoning is hard to reach.

According to Wittgenstein, an object can be named as well as it can be described. Naming and describing are different cases of expression. An expression of a proposition whether it is naming or describing involves a sentence of a language. But the main problem is that an expression of the ordinary language can misguide us in our investigation. As it is stated in the *Philosophical Investigations*,

"Misunderstandings concerning the use of words, caused, among other things, by certain analogies between the forms of expression in different regions of language.—Some of them can be removed by substituting one form of expression for another; this may be called an "analysis" of our forms of expression, for the process is sometimes like one of taking a thing apart." (*PI*, 90)

Analyzed expressions do not confuse those who consider their different uses.

With respect to reasoning, as it was mentioned above, it requires a proposition, a description, for instance, for a thought to be formulated. Not being the only one expression of a thought, one sentence is a case of the use of proposition's interpretation. But Wittgenstein warns us of an attempt of absolute expressions' analysis:

"But now it may come to look as if there were something like a final analysis of our forms of language, and so a *single* completely resolved form of every expression. <...>

It can also be put like this: we eliminate misunderstandings by making our expressions more exact; but now it may look as if we were moving towards a particular state, a state of complete exactness; and as if this were the real goal of our investigation." (*PI*, 91)

The real goal is not an absolute exactness but the conceptual analysis. Its aim is to show how the language functions through different examples of its usage; to observe its irregularities changing them for a kind of a correction of the concepts. Since thoughts can be interpreted in different ways sentences (as thoughts' expressions) may have different interpretations as well. But it is important to distinguish between an internal sentence interpretation and an external one. The former is governed partially by propositional attitudes and the latter is determined by social conventions.

The problem is that we cannot state one's interpretation as true because there are many versions that constitute language. That is the interpretations make language, thus it is the cause of many language users. Wittgenstein views the use of language as a game so we should regard his attitude to it as a new methodological aspect of its investigation. The method is characterized by observing the use of sentences. Thus, the question is resolved in the discussion about the meaning of a word, the proposition of one's reasoning that is in one's language. This language is not private one. It differs from a common language by its variety of sentence interpretations.

It is quite clear that there are a lot of views on how to treat the question but there are a few ones that pay attention to the point of the relation between language and reasoning with regard to its expressions. This paper is aimed to bring more specification how to consider the problem of language-reasoning use of propositions in Wittgenstein's terms. The way to present this remains an open question.

Literature

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Email: shu-sobancev@yandex.ru