

# Language and World in Wittgenstein: the True Social Bonding

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## Section – I: Social Nature of Meanings

By discarding the notion of privacy of language, Wittgenstein brought language from the isolated regions of a speaker's mind to the realm of social reality. In this social reality, these meanings are continually generated and discarded by the community of speakers. Meanings are not constructed in the mind of the speakers in isolation to every thing in the world, or every other speaker of the world. Neither are they constructed just by referencing to outside reality. Because there could be cases where no objective reference is there and still the words are meaningful. For example, the words like Cinderella and Santa Clause. Language is, thus, for Wittgenstein social in nature and meanings are constructed because of the social interactions of the people. In these interactions, the context needs to be considered to chalk out the meaning of the word. For this reason, the meanings, according to Wittgenstein, are not to be located in the words themselves, but rather in the different uses to which they are put.

According to Wittgenstein, language and life are internally related. Life provides the foundation to language. Language reflects all the aspects of life – mental, moral, ethical and religious. It mirrors the deep structures of human thought and experience. Life is a public space in which all language users co-habit and communicate in an interrelated linguistic network. This space cannot be divided into individual (private) spaces. Wittgenstein uncovers this public space by denying the possibility of private language first and then by making language use a social phenomenon. This saved language from being disintegrated into fragments. Thereby Wittgenstein saves meaning from disappearing. The rejection of private language gives an important role to rule-following in such a way that private rule following is totally abandoned and the rule following activity is taken completely as a social practice. This leads to the emergence of a social theory of language.

Since language is fundamental in forging and encouraging social interaction among the people, society becomes the base of any such linguistic practice by its members. For a man to grow into a normal human being, he has to be continually on the road of different learning aspects of life throughout his life. This learning process thus elevates language develops from a simple system of symbols to a complex system. From the society, a human being not only learns his/her linguistic ability but also develops his/her self as an ethical and moral being, i.e., acquires the capacity of judging him/her self and knows which action is right or wrong. But this is not possible for a private linguist since, it has the danger of entering into a Solipsistic tendency where whatever one chooses to be correct will be correct for him i.e., whatever he thinks to be right is right only for him. If we see language in that perspective, then teaching, learning and practice are possible only in a society. So, in order to say something is right, we need training in what Wittgenstein calls a "technique"; and the exercise of technique is practice. But in case of private practice, one cannot distinguish between having a rule and actually obeying it. As "obeying rule" is a practice, therefore, thinking that one is obeying a rule is not obeying a rule. It is the society which provides the context of all linguistic practices. But

this is not possible in case of a private language. The private language user, thus, does not have criterion of rightness and wrongness in his language. The rejection of private rule-following brings out the idea that rule-following is not one man's private practice rather it's a social practice. The rejection of private language brings into view the social character of meaning. Meaning, like rule-following, is not a private mental process. The idea of a private meaning is, therefore, unintelligible.

Language is thus primarily a social phenomenon. All aspects of life are learned and taught through language only. Since man cannot live in isolation to other members of the community or society that he belongs to, and since language is the very basis of his communication, language also becomes a bridging link between him and the world. Language is therefore essentially embedded in the world. How this embedding is carried out is illustrated by Wittgenstein by the idea of language games and forms of life.

## Section – II: Language Games: Depicting Social Reality in Language

On the one hand, there are language-games a method of making context differentiation between various linguistic activities which are necessary for the construction of meanings, and on the other hand, these are ways through various aspects of life and world are captured in the language. Wittgenstein illustrates the point of meaning construction through following example of simple primitive language game:

...A is building with building stones: there are blocks, pillars, slabs and beams. B has to pass the stones and that in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they use a language consisting of the words "block," "pillars," "slab," "beam." A calls them out; –B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call. – Conceive this as a complete primitive language.<sup>1</sup>

In this language-game, the assistant B understands what "slab" means. Here, B understands how to participate in the language-game of naming things and B knows which the name "slab" stands for. Here, both A and B are carrying on a linguistic activity while performing the action of building. So, in order to do the building activities both have to participate in such a common language-game, which would enable them to understand each other. Otherwise, it would be very difficult for both of them to carry on the activity. Here, both A and B are able to perform the linguistic activity because both of them have been trained in the same language-game. Such training enables B to understand the linguistic signs issued by A. When A utters the word 'slab', B understands and acts accordingly to perform the linguistic activity in which he has already been trained. A will understand B, if and only if he knows how to participate in the naming of things. Because, in order to understand A, B should have the proper understanding of what A says. Therefore, B should know to what objects the

<sup>1</sup> Wittgenstein Ludwig, 1953, *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford, Sec. 2.

name "slab" could be given. One has to look for the context, the use of a word, in order to understand its meaning.

According to Wittgenstein, language is system of language-games and a system of activities carried on in languages. It includes everything from the most primitive language to the language of the most sophisticated kind. It is not a *single* system of symbol but is conceived of as consisting in *many* language-games. It is a network of linguistic activities i.e., linguistic practices which human beings undertake amongst themselves, and wherein they also interact with world. Thus, each language-game is an activity, a *form of life*. Speaking of language is a part of an activity or a form of life. To talk of form of life is nothing but to talk of a linguistic activity. Each language-game is an activity, a "form of life" which is closely associated with the way human beings live as linguistic beings. So, language is not considered here from a narrow logical point of view, but as it is closely embedded in human life. Each language-game is a form of life and is an expression of human action. So language is not one man's language rather it is the language of the human community. Here, language is not only the medium of communication but also a tool that allows a person to express himself. In *Blue and Brown Books* Wittgenstein writes:

... I shall in future again and again draw your attention to what I shall call language-games. These are ways of using signs simpler than those in which we use the signs of our highly complicated everyday language. Language-games are the forms of language with which a child begins to make use of words. The study of language-games is the study of the primitive forms of language or primitive languages. If we want to study the problems of truth or falsehood, of the agreement and disagreement of propositions with reality, of the nature of assertion, assumption, and question, we shall with great advantage look at primitive forms of language in which these forms of thinking appear without the confusing background of highly complicated process of thought.<sup>2</sup>

Language-games have many functions. They display different kinds of human activities. Each language-game is a complete system of activity.

Wittgenstein emphasizes the fact that there is no limited number of such language games in language. There are as many language games as there are activities of the human beings. There are thus multiple language-games. Wittgenstein gives a few examples. According to the particular linguistic activity, or form of life, there could be many language games like giving orders, and obeying them; describing the appearance of an object, or giving its measurements; constructing an object from a description (a drawing); reporting an event; speculating about an event; forming and testing a hypothesis; presenting the results of an experiment in the tables and diagrams; making up a story; and reading it; play-acting; singing catches; guessing riddles; ....<sup>3</sup> Each of the above activities may be seen as a language-game. And each of them has its own way to carry an activity in the language. Each is distinct from the other as no two of them stand for the same activity.

Language-games, as described above, consist of particular activities, e.g., intending, hoping, pretending, believing, etc., which include both language-use and thought. Language-games thus consist of linguistic as well

as non-linguistic activities. That is, language-games are the expressions of thoughts or feelings and also the use of words in a proper context. In other words, language-games explain how words function in a context, and how they express the thoughts and feelings of the speaker.

By carrying out various linguistic and non-linguistic activities, these language games serve an important function of explaining how words and sentences are related to the world. In this regard, Wittgenstein maintains that language-games do not share a one-to-one relation with the world. The relations are multifarious and complicated like the language-games themselves. The word-object relationship is *shown* in the language in which the word is used, rather than *said* in words. According to Jaako Hintikka in this regard, the relationship between language and reality takes place in the way the language-games hold their semantic links with the world. These links run from the linguistic expressions, i.e., words and sentences in various ways. The statements of facts are only one variety of language-game where the semantic links are clear-cut. But there are other ways of talking about the world, e.g., making a prediction, or guessing or just imagining certain possible occurrence of an event which do establish a link with the world. In these cases, there is no either/or relation with the world. Determination of the truth or falsity of these sentences is no easy task.

Each language game thus depicts a distinct form of life through which it depicts the world or the social reality in turn. The concept of form of life has many implications in Wittgenstein's philosophy such as the following:

1. There are many forms of life which have family resemblances among them. There is no essence of forms of life which we can call "the form of life."
2. However, in spite of the differences among the forms of life, there is a broader unity among them in the sense that they are the *human* forms of life.
3. Language-games and forms of life are two faces of the same reality. What is called a language-game is itself a form of life. Language in that sense embodies life and this life is not just added to language externally.
4. Language and life constitute one original whole. There is, therefore, one and only one system-the system of language-use.
5. Language-games are public activities. They are played in the open social space ruling out privacy in language-use

The link between language games and forms of life is that language-games are the mirror through which different forms of life depicted by the language. Since these forms of life are nothing but different aspects of life and social reality of the world, language emerges as the medium through which life and world can be presented. This link is not arbitrary one or different for different languages. It is an essential link and is the same for all the languages of the world. It is essential because without language, world cannot be accessed at all. It is through language only that we apprehend our world and make it meaningful. Language and world are thus in essential relationship with each other. Thus, we see, that life and language, stands intricately woven up into each other in Wittgenstein. Life with all its subtleties and privacies gets expressed in language and language is that which connects a subject to his world.

<sup>2</sup> Wittgenstein Ludwig, 1978, *The Blue and Brown Books*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* Sec. 23