

Journal for the History of Analytical Philosophy

Volume 9, Number 4

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ISSN: 2159-0303

jhaponline.org

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A Critical Discussion of the “Memory-Challenge” to Interpretations of the Private Language Argument

Zhao Fan

In a recent paper, Francis Y. Lin proposes a “memory-challenge” to two main interpretations of Wittgenstein’s private language argument: the “no-criterion-of-correctness” interpretation and the “no-stage-setting” interpretation. According to Lin, both camps of interpretation fail to explain why a private language is impossible within a short time period. To answer the “memory-challenge”, Lin motivates a grammatical interpretation of the private language argument. In this paper, I provide a critical discussion of Lin’s objection to these interpretations and argue that Lin’s objection fails. In the case of the “no-stage-setting” interpretation, Lin suggests that the private language user can establish a stage within a short time period. However, I show that this stage is insufficient for a private language to be used correctly. In the case of the “no-criterion-of-correctness” interpretation, Lin believes that since memory is reliable within a short period, no criterion is needed for the correct use of a private language. However, I argue that his objection attacks a strawman, since the interpretation concerns the structure of justification, rather than the weakness of memory itself. I conclude with a critical discussion on memory and primitive expressions, the latter of which are crucial to Wittgenstein’s approach to public language. This discussion will help to draw a sharp line between private language and public language, and cast some doubt on Lin’s grammatical interpretation.

Special Issue: Concepts of the Psyche: Wittgenstein on Mental Phenomena

Edited by Stefan Majetschak and Yi Jiang

A Critical Discussion of the “Memory-Challenge” to Interpretations of the Private Language Argument

Zhao Fan

In the recent article “Wittgenstein’s Private Language Investigation”, Francis Y. Lin advocates for a so-called “memory-challenge” to previous interpretations of the private language argument. According to Lin, and based on remarks 257 and 258 of Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, there are two main interpretations of the private language argument: the “no-criterion-of-correctness” interpretation and the “no-stage-setting” interpretation (Lin 2017, 259). Lin argues that both interpretations fail to explain why a private language is impossible within a short time period.

The “memory-challenge” originates with philosophers’ dissatisfaction of “memory skepticism”, a view which suggests that a private language is impossible because memory is not reliable. One problem with this position, is that even though memory is not reliable over a long-term period, we may still think it to be reliable in a short-term period. For instance, Charles E. Marks suggests that the private language user might:

appeal to the fact that he has a good memory; and this appeal is more cogent if the usual reasons for mistaken memory are not present - e.g. if he carefully attended to the *S*-exemplar and had defined ‘*S*’ shortly before (Marks 1975, 155).

Marks thinks this defense from the private language user is “the hardest to handle” (Marks 1975, 156). A similar consideration is raised by Barry Stroud:

But is the general fallibility of memory really a good reason for denying that the ‘private’ speaker we are trying to imagine can

remember what sensation he had a few minutes ago, or even yesterday? Suppose he is known, and knows himself, to have a good memory in other areas in which we all can check up on him. Why then could we not give him the benefit of the doubt in this case and concede that here too he is probably remembering the sensation correctly even though we outsiders cannot directly tell whether he is correct or not? (Stroud 2000, 72)

One can see that the “memory-challenge” is supported by a very strong and common-sense belief that our memory is generally reliable (though not infallible), and that it is particularly trustworthy in a short time period. It is difficult to respond to this challenge and explain specifically why a private language is impossible even within a short period of time. More importantly, since memory is indispensable in learning and using words in public language, it is natural to think that the very reason to deny the “memory-challenge” would lead to some difficulty in understanding the possibility of public language. Lin’s rediscovery of the “memory-challenge”, and his confidence that this challenge “plagues all the previous interpretations” (Lin 2017, 278) of the private language argument he discusses, makes it undoubtedly necessary for a philosopher to reexamine the role of memory in the private language argument and its relation with private and public language.

In this paper, I take the recent interpretative debate between Lin and other interpretations of the private language argument as a chance to examine the “memory-challenge”. In the case of the “no-stage-setting” interpretation, Lin suggests that the private language user can establish a stage within a short time period. However, I show that this stage is insufficient for a private language to be used correctly. In the case of the “no-criterion-of-correctness” interpretation, Lin argues that since memory is reliable within a short period, no criterion is needed for the correct use of a private language. However, I argue that his objection attacks a strawman since the interpretation concerns the structure of justification, rather than the weakness of memory itself.

The upshot of this discussion is that it leads us to reflect on the difference between private language and public language. I suggest that Wittgenstein's remarks on primitive expressions, and the crucial role primitive expressions have in public language, can shed some light on this broader issue. Furthermore, it also casts some doubt on Lin's grammatical interpretation, and on his dichotomy between grammatical and empirical in particular.

To be clear, I am not going to argue for or against a particular interpretation of the private language argument, though at the end of this paper I will provide some methodological reflection of what a plausible interpretation of the private language argument should be. As we will see, proponents of each existing interpretation can find some textual evidence from Wittgenstein's writing to justify their positions, and therefore it is difficult to evaluate the validity of these interpretations in a single paper. The goal of this paper is only to show that the very attempt of using the "memory-challenge" fails to falsify these interpretations. I hope the investigation of the problems of the "memory-challenge" will also highlight some representative misunderstandings of several remarks in *Philosophical Investigations*, as well as clarify some general conceptual confusions.

The structure of this paper is as follows: in Section 1, I will set the stage by reviewing Wittgenstein's private language argument, and provide the context of the "no-stage-setting" interpretation and the "no-criterion-of-correctness" interpretation. In Section 2, I will explain the "memory-challenge" to the "no-stage-setting" interpretation and argue that this objection fails. In Section 3, I will consider the "memory-challenge" to the "no-criterion-of-correctness" interpretation and argue that this objection attacks a strawman. In Section 4, I will discuss memory and primitive expressions. In Section 5, I conclude with some remarks about Lin's grammatical interpretation.

1. The Private Language Argument and Two Main Interpretations

Wittgenstein characterizes a "private language" in *Philosophical Investigations* §243 in the following way:

The individual words of this language are to refer to what can only be known to the person speaking; to his immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language (Wittgenstein [1953]/1958, §243; hereinafter cited as PI).

There are two features of a private language in this characterization: first, words in this language refer to sensations of the user of this language. Second, only the user can understand this language.

The goal of Wittgenstein's private language argument is to show that such a language is impossible.¹ The main argument is discussed extensively in *Philosophical Investigations* §258, where Wittgenstein imagines a diarist who tries to create a private language by writing down words referring to his sensations. Let me rephrase the situation as follows:

Suppose the diarist at t_1 has certain sensation E, then he writes down a word "S" to refer to this sensation in his diary. Later at t_2 , the diarist feels (or at least he thinks he feels) E again, then he writes down "S" in his diary. Thus, whenever E occurs (or he feels E occurs), he would write down "S" in his diary. It appears that through this feeling-writing activity, the diarist can establish the meaning of the word "S", namely, "S" means his sensation E. "S" is a private language because on the one side, it refers to the diarist's private sensation, and on the other side, no one except the diarist can understand this word.

¹One common interpretative divergency concerning the conclusion of the private language argument is whether the impossibility of a private language is an "empirical exclusion of possibilities" or a "logical exclusion of possibilities" (Hacker 2018, 128). I will comment on this interpretative divergency in Section 4 of this paper and thereby remain neutral between these two interpretations in presenting Wittgenstein's argument in this section.

A closer examination indicates that there are two steps in establishing this private language:

- (1) The diarist needs to be able to establish the connection between the sensation E and the word “S” at t_1 .
- (2) In future time after t_1 , the diarist needs to be able to write down the word “S” whenever the sensation E occurs.

In what follows, I will analyze these two steps in detail and then introduce Lin’s distinction between the “no-stage-setting” interpretation and the “no-criterion-of-correctness” interpretation.

Wittgenstein himself is fully aware of the difficulties of satisfying both conditions. In *Philosophical Investigations* §258, the interlocuter doubts the feasibility of (1) and asks: “Can I point to the sensation?” (PI §258).² That is, the interlocuter doubts whether the diarist could establish the meaning of a word by merely concentrating on his sensation. The diarist seems to be confident that he could establish the meaning of “S” because of an inner ostensive definition. In the physical world, it appears that one could establish the meaning of a word by pointing to its physical counterpart, for example, one could establish the meaning of the word “apple” by pointing to an actual apple. Similarly, the diarist could establish the meaning of “S” by “pointing” to his sensation E inwardly, that is, by directing his attention to E.

However, in *Philosophical Investigations* §257 Wittgenstein suggests that,

When one says “He gave a name to his sensation” one forgets that a great deal of stage-setting in the language is presupposed if the mere act of naming is to make sense (PI §257).

²As one notes, there are interlocuters in *Philosophical Investigations* and it is sometimes difficult to distinguish Wittgenstein’s position and interlocuter’s position. In this paper, I will construct these “dialogues” in an analytical way, rather than worrying too much about which words are Wittgenstein’s and which words are the interlocuter’s.

That is to say, in order for the inner ostensive definition to work, more conditions need to be satisfied than merely directing one’s attention to the sensation. Actually, the requirement of a “stage-setting” poses a problem for an ostensive definition in public language as well. Augustine’s picture of language, discussed in the beginning of *Philosophical Investigations*, is often held to be problematic because words are supposed to acquire their meaning only via an ostensive definition. However, a closer look of what Wittgenstein cites in *Philosophical Investigations* §1 reveals that instead of simply pointing to objects, Augustine’s picture of language involves a person’s

bodily movements, as it were the natural language of all peoples: the expression of the face, the play of the eyes, the movement of other parts of the body, and the tone of voice which expresses our state of mind in seeking, having, rejecting, or avoiding something (PI §1).

This shows that an ostensive definition in the actual world is more sophisticated than philosophers often think. Besides pointing to objects, there are bodily expressions and interactions among different people serving as a background of each ostensive definition. These actions might be taken to belong to what Wittgenstein means by “stage-setting”. Since the inner ostensive definition only has the act of directing one’s attention to sensations, it cannot establish the connection of the private sensation word “S” and the sensation E. This is what Lin calls the “no-stage-setting” interpretation (Lin 2017, 265). We can construct this interpretation as follows:

No-stage-setting interpretation (NSSI): A private language is impossible because there is no stage-setting to establish the meaning of words in this language.

Even if, at t_1 , the diarist can establish the meaning of “S”, there are difficulties of satisfying (2), that is, it is still questionable whether he could use “S” correctly in future cases. There are two separate conditions that need to be satisfied:

- (2a) The diarist needs to be able to remember the meaning of “S” and the feeling Et_1 .
- (2b) The diarist needs to be able to compare whether $Et_1=Et_2$.

According to Lin, traditional interpretation questions (2a) because our memory is not reliable (Lin 2017, 259). For instance, we may remember that the word “S” refers to a certain kind of sensation while failing to remember specifically which sensation it refers to. This is what Lin calls “memory-skepticism”. Lin classifies this objection under the “no-criterion-of-correctness” interpretation. I would like to treat this separately. On the one hand, I think Wittgenstein has something other than memory in mind when he talks about the criterion of correctness. On the other hand, it is more convenient to treat this objection separately, as I think the “memory-challenge” works for “memory-skepticism” rather than the “no-criterion-of-correctness” interpretation.

The third difficulty for the diarist is with respect to (2b). Recall that the diarist needs to record “the recurrence of a certain sensation” (PI §258). That is, he needs to compare Et_1 and Et_2 , and then decide whether $Et_1=Et_2$. But on what grounds does the diarist identify Et_1 as the same sensation as Et_2 ? Wittgenstein does not explicitly clarify what kind of “sameness” is required. Lin suggests that we could understand Wittgenstein more clearly by introducing a distinction between “physically the same” and “qualitatively the same” (Lin 2017, 270–71). According to Lin, two sensations are “qualitatively the same” if they are the same “sensation-type” (Lin 2017, 271). I suggest to use “sensation-token” in the case of “physically the same”.³ Thus, two sensa-

³Lin suggests that to decide whether two sensations are physically the same, we need to look for “activation of neurons in the brain” (Lin 2017, 271). However, this is an implausible suggestion as he realizes immediately, “even if the two sensations are physically the same, no one can really know this” (Lin 2017, 271). Thus, I propose to use a more plausible phrase “sensation-token”, to refer to a particular intensity of a sensation-type. Two sensations are the same sensation-token if and only if they are the same sensation-type and they have the same degree of intensity.

tions are “physically the same” if they are the same sensation-token.

To evaluate Lin’s “memory-challenge”, it is better to stick with his distinction. Therefore, I follow Lin’s suggestion that the identity statement $Et_1=Et_2$ is about sensation-types. What is required of the diarist then, is for him to know that sensation Et_2 is the same sensation-type as Et_1 . Take public language as an example, when using the word “pain”, it is sufficient for the language user to confirm that his feeling at t_1 and t_2 are both the sensation of pain rather than other types of sensation. Sensation-tokens, the precise degree of pain at some particular time, is not relevant. To be clear, based on the framework of sensation types and tokens, it seems that Wittgenstein does express something similar as sensation-tokens in *Philosophical Investigations*. For example, in *Philosophical Investigations* §253, Wittgenstein claims that he once met a person who stroked himself and claimed that other people “can’t have THIS pain!” (PI §253). Here “THIS pain” needs to be understood as a sensation-token, since it intentionally refers to a specific and particular degree of pain.

However, I think it is more natural and interesting to assume the sensation-types way of reading. This is because, if the diarist is required to reidentify the sensation-tokens, it would be too difficult for him because not only is memory not reliable, but also our sensory organs are notoriously likely to be inaccurate. It is easy to find two sticks that have different lengths while in fact they are indistinguishable from each other when observed only by naked eyes. In such a case, we will attribute an identity with their lengths without being aware that our attribution is incorrect. Similarly, it is conceivable that there are two sensation-tokens with subtle differences while in fact they are indistinguishable from each other when compared only by our memory. In this case, the diarist will attribute $Et_1=Et_2$ without being aware that his attribution is incorrect. Therefore, to make Wittgenstein’s argument more compelling, it is better to interpret $Et_1=Et_2$ as reidentifying sensation-types.

Nevertheless, even if we focus on sensation-types, Wittgenstein thinks that there is no ground for claiming $E_{t_1} = E_{t_2}$, as he explains in *Philosophical Investigations* §258, “But in the present case I have no criterion of correctness” (PI §258). I will explain in section 3 what kind of criterion Wittgenstein might have in mind. Lin labels this interpretation as the “no-criterion-of-correctness” interpretation, and it could be summarized as follows:

No-criterion-of-correctness interpretation (NCCI): A private language is impossible because there is no criterion for the diarist to correctly reidentify sensation-types.

At face value, both NSSI and NCCI have textual support. However, Lin argues that neither of them is a plausible interpretation of the private language argument as they suffer from the “memory-challenge”. I will consider NSSI first.

2. The “Memory-Challenge” and the “No-Stage-Setting” Interpretation

Lin motivates the “memory-challenge” to NSSI as follows:

For the sake of argument, let us suppose that the use of a word in a public language requires a practice, then why can't the private diarist establish a practice of using 'S'? If the diarist at t_2 can remember clearly and correctly that at t_1 he associated 'S' with s_1 [E_{t_1}] (the sensation, rather than any other aspect of it), then it seems that he can compare s_2 [E_{t_2}] with s_1 [E_{t_1}] to tell whether it is also of the type S [E], and that in this way, he can set up a practice of using 'S' (Lin 2017, 266).

According to NSSI, a private language is impossible because there is no stage-setting to establish the meaning of words in this language. Lin proposes that even if a stage-setting is crucial for a private language, the diarist can somehow set a stage for himself and then satisfy the requirement given by NSSI. To be clear, Lin does not claim that a stage-setting is unnecessary within a short time period. Rather, he claims that a short time period will enable

the diarist to introduce a practice (stage) for his own use. Thus, according to Lin, the “memory-challenge” aligns with NSSI in the way a stage-setting is needed for any language, including a private language. But the “memory-challenge” does not align with NSSI about whether the diarist can establish a stage or not.

Unfortunately, Lin does not clarify what such a practice could possibly be, and thereby is vague about what kind of practice the diarist would need to set up. Interestingly, Wittgenstein considers a similar situation of the “memory-challenge” to NSSI and then rejects it in *Philosophical Investigations* §270. According to Wittgenstein, the diarist might note that whenever he has the sensation E, “a manometer shews that my blood-pressure rises” (PI §270). The diarist could then write the word “S” whenever he notes the change of the number in a manometer. In this way, it looks like the diarist establishes a practice of using the blood-pressure to help to identify his private sensation.⁴

It is debatable whether using the blood-pressure to help identify private sensations counts as a practice or not. But in my opinion, the problem of the “memory-challenge” in this case has already been given by Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations* §270: “it seems quite indifferent whether I have recognized the sensation *right* or not” (PI §270). Since introducing a practice is very arbitrary, the private sensation is not uniquely determined by the practice. Unlike public language, private language does not have primitive expressions that uniquely determine a particular sensation (PI §256). For instance, sensation E might co-occur with the rise of a manometer, but sensation F, which is a different sensation-type with E, might also co-occur with the rise of a manometer. Since there could be many other sensations co-occurring with the rise of a manometer, it is likely that the diarist uses the word “S” to refer to different sensations

⁴Wittgenstein interprets the private language user's use of the private sensation as an indication of his blood-rising. However, I think there is a symmetry here as the private language user can also use the blood-rising as an indication of the occurrence of the sensation E.

without being aware of it. As a consequence, the practice only helps the diarist to link the word “S” with a unique practice (the rise of a manometer), rather than to link the word “S” with a unique sensation. Therefore, recognizing the practice correctly is unable for the diarist to reidentify the sensation correctly. The “memory-challenge” to NCCI fails.

3. The “Memory-Challenge” and the “No-Criterion-of-Correctness” Interpretation

NCCI concerns the question of whether we have rational ground to claim that $Et_1=Et_2$. According to NCCI, a criterion of correctness is needed in order to say that the diarist correctly reidentifies the sensation-types referred to by words in a private language. In *Philosophical Investigations* §265, Wittgenstein considers whether the diarist can create a table to justify $Et_1=Et_2$, such a table contains the correlation between words and sensations. Whenever the diarist feels a particular sensation, he finds the location of this sensation in the table and writes down the correlated word. This might provide some psychological explanation of how the diarist reaches the conclusion $Et_1=Et_2$. On the face of it, this table provides some rational ground for $Et_1=Et_2$. However, for Wittgenstein, this is not sufficient. As he writes in *Philosophical Investigations* §265:

But justification consists in appealing to something independent.— “But surely I can appeal from one memory to another. For example, I don’t know if I have remembered the time of departure of a train right and to check it I call to mind how a page of the time-table looked. Isn’t it the same here?”—No; for this process has got to produce a memory which is actually *correct*. If the mental image of the time-table could not itself be *tested* for correctness, how could it confirm the correctness of the first memory? (As if someone were to buy several copies of the morning paper to assure himself that what it said was true) (PI §265).

That is, whether the diarist refers to memory directly, or refers to the table created by memory, the ultimate justification for

$Et_1=Et_2$ is only his memory. As Wittgenstein writes explicitly in *Philosophical Investigations* §265, “justification consists in appealing to something independent”. Therefore, according to NCCI, the problem of the diarist is that he does not have an independent justification for $Et_1=Et_2$.

Although a no-independent-justification-interpretation seems to be the most natural and straightforward interpretation, Lin argues that it fails to explain why a private language cannot exist at least for a short period of time. According to Lin:

A major problem with Kenny’s interpretation is that it faces the memory-challenge. If the private diarist’s memory is good, then at t_2 (assuming that t_2 is shortly after t_1) he can clearly and correctly remember s_1 [Et_1]. In that case, it seems that the diarist can remember the meaning of ‘S’ correctly, hence knows the meaning of ‘S’; consequently, it seems that his private definition can be a real definition, and that his private language can be a real possibility (Lin 2017, 261).

Here Lin refers to Kenny’s (2006) interpretation as a representative of NCCI. According to Kenny, in the table case mentioned in *Philosophical Investigations* §265, the problem of a private language is that “the meaning of ‘S’ is being used to confirm itself” (Kenny 2006, 152). That is, there will be a circularity in the diarist’s justification of $Et_1=Et_2$ unless he can find some independent justification. A correct or incorrect use of this language needs an independent justification, something other than memory.

According to Lin, the “memory-challenge” casts doubt on this requirement for correctness. It raises the question of whether the diarist needs an independent justification for the claim that $Et_1=Et_2$ in a short period of time. Although the “memory-challenge” might agree with NCCI that the correct or incorrect use of a language in the long-term needs an independent justification, this criterion is not a necessary condition in the short-term use of a language, including a private language. The consequence of this challenge, if it works, is that a private language might exist in a short time period, say five minutes.

Even if the “memory-challenge” works, it might not be a preferable outcome for the diarist, as his private language can exist only for a short period. However, this objection presupposes that the weakness of memory is the motivation for NCCI: the diarist needs an independent justification *because* his memory is not generally reliable. If NCCI is motivated by the weakness of memory, then finding a case where memory is reliable will defeat, or at least undermine, NCCI. However, the “memory-challenge” attacks only a strawman of the position.

Although it is unclear from *Philosophical Investigations* §258 whether memory is the main concern for Wittgenstein when he claims “in the present case I have no criterion of correctness”, it is clear from the example of the newspaper buyer in *Philosophical Investigations* §265 that Wittgenstein’s consideration is not psychological facts about memory, but the structure of justification (PI §265). My explanation is as follows:

Suppose the newspaper buyer wishes to know the truth of some news in a newspaper, whether there was a snowstorm in a city on 2019 March 13, for instance. Instead of checking the weather report, or some video on the internet, the buyer keeps buying the same newspaper and comparing whether each newspaper contains the same information. To verify any information in the newspaper, the buyer needs to find evidence beyond that newspaper. Using one newspaper of the same edition to justify another newspaper of that edition is circular. Similarly, using one memory to justify another memory is also circular. The weakness of memory is only a red herring in NCCI. What matters is that the diarist needs to find evidence beyond memory to justify $Et_1=Et_2$.

One might object to this reasoning by saying that the newspaper case is different from the sensation case. In the newspaper case, the truth condition of the information in the newspaper depends on the external world, while in the sensation case the truth condition of the identity of sensations depends on the subject’s own feeling. However, even if our feeling of the sensation

is vivid and our memory is generally reliable, the private language user still cannot know for sure whether he uses the word “S” correctly or incorrectly. This uncertainty will accompany all his actions unless he finds an independent justification. Thus, if the diarist believes his memory is reliable in a short period of time, this will enhance his confidence that he uses the word “S” correctly. But it does not change the fact that the diarist does not *know* whether or not he actually uses this word correctly or incorrectly, even if he did use it correctly. To get rid of this indeterminacy, the diarist might need to know exactly when his memory is trustworthy. But once the diarist has this information, it already forms an *independent justification*. This will not invalidate NCCI.

Therefore, the “memory-challenge” to NCCI fails because it attacks a strawman of the position. The relevant factor for NCCI is the structure of justification of $Et_1=Et_2$, rather than the weakness of memory.

4. Memory and Primitive Expressions

As I have shown, appealing to the general reliability of the short-term memory does not open the possibility of a private language. However, one might defend the “memory-challenge” from a different perspective. Given that memory is indispensable from all kinds of language use or human activity, is it possible to find an “independent” justification, which in turn does not depend upon memory? This form of the “memory-challenge” can be viewed as a direct challenge to NCCI.

For instance, even in the newspaper buyer case discussed above, no matter how minimal the relation to memory it has, the buyer still needs to use his memory in order to perform the comparison. Suppose the buyer forgot the content of newspaper A when he read newspaper B, he may not be able to compare the content between newspaper A and newspaper B. A summary of this line of thought can be found in Michael Stocker’s work:

We must take into account the fact that every form of checking for consistency with past usage must invoke some memory judgement, or some judgement at least in part justified by a memory judgment (Stocker 1966, 48).

Lin uses public language to illustrate a similar point. As he writes,

In fact, memory of past sensations is essential for public language. Suppose that I am shown a colour sample and am told that it is called 'red'. I then turn around and see a rose, and I can say that it is red too. In this case, the sample is not in front of me, so I do not compare the rose with the sample directly. What I do is somehow compare my current visual sensation of the rose with my memory of the sensation of the sample, and judge that the rose is red. Memory of past sensations is also indispensable even in the case where one looks at the same sample at different times. Suppose that I hold a red sample in my hand, look at it, blink my eyes and then look at it again. Of course I can say that the sample is still red. But how can I? I must somehow compare my current visual sensation with my memory of the previous visual sensation, and judge that the sample is still red (Lin 2017, 269–70).

Lin is certainly right in suggesting that memory of past sensations is essential in any language use. However, it is confusing to claim that this psychological mechanism justifies the language use or human activity. Take an extreme case: in doing mathematical proofs, we have to remember the previous step in order to draw more inference. But this psychological mechanism does not justify our actual inference, which might be justified by inference rules. Similarly, in public language, even if we need to remember the previous use of a word in order to use it at a future time, this psychological activity of memory does not constitute the justification of the correct use of this word in public language.

One might still wonder whether the very reason to deny the "memory-challenge" would lead to some difficulty in understanding the possibility of the public language of sensations. After all, the psychological mechanism underlying the use of

public language and private language seems superficially similar. In using the public sensation words such as "pain", we need to remember the feeling of a pain, the meaning of the word "pain", and we need to be able to compare different sensations of pain in different times.

To insist the possibility of the public language of sensations and the impossibility of a private language of sensations, there must be some condition that the public language of sensations satisfies, but which a private language of sensations lacks. This condition, as Marks notes, must yield

a specification of 'independently verifiable' on which the bulk of our everyday memory claims are independently verifiable while the private language speaker's claim to remember the *S*-exemplar is not (Marks 1975, 158).

Marks is pessimistic about whether such a condition can be found, and he shows that several candidates of this condition fail to save the public language of sensations (Marks 1975, 158–60). One candidate Marks does not mention, however, is the condition of primitive expressions. Primitive expressions are the natural expressions which accompany our sensations. Wittgenstein makes the following remark concerning primitive expressions in *Philosophical Investigations* §256:

Now, what about the language which describes my inner experiences and which only I myself can understand? *How* do I use words to stand for my sensations?—As we ordinarily do? Then are my words for sensations tied up with my natural expressions of sensation? In that case my language is not a 'private' one. Someone else might understand it as well as I.—But suppose I didn't have any natural expression for the sensation, but only had the sensation? And now I simply *associate* names with sensations and use these names in descriptions (PI §256).

There are two observations in this remark. On the one hand, there are no primitive expressions in the case of a private language. On the other hand, primitive expressions are crucial in

establishing the public language of sensations. Thus, unlike a public language user, a private language user does not have primitive expressions to help him to reidentify the private sensation. Furthermore, since primitive expressions are different from memory, the public language user can refer to primitive expressions to justify the language use.

The existence of primitive expressions alone, however, does not fully address the “memory-challenge”. In Section 2, we have seen that the private language user’s attempt to establish a stage by using a manometer fails. Then why does the public language user’s appeal to primitive expressions work? Intuitively, both of them are seeking something other than memory to justify their use of language. To answer this worry, we need to examine Wittgenstein’s illuminating remarks on the role of primitive expressions in learning and communication in public language.

In *Philosophical Investigations* §244, when Wittgenstein discusses how we can learn the meaning of names of sensations, he says that we can learn sensation words because “words are connected with the primitive, the natural, expressions of the sensation and used in their place” (PI §244). For example, when I feel pain, my primitive expression would be to cry out. This is not just my own primitive expression of pain, rather, it is the common primitive expression among human beings. When we grow up, we may not show this primitive expression in public, but this is only because we want to restrain our actions. Suppose on the contrary, different people have different primitive expressions of the same sensation: say person A’s primitive expression of pain is to cry out while person B’s primitive expression of pain is to laugh, it would be difficult if not impossible for person B to learn what person A means by the word “pain”. Therefore, the commonality feature of primitive expressions is crucial in learning a language.

In the formerly so-called Part II of *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein also shows that primitive expressions of sensations are not only common to all people, but also steady through time, which makes communication possible. As he writes,

If a man’s bodily expression of sorrow and of joy alternated, say with the ticking of a clock, here we would not have the characteristic course of the pattern of sorrow or of the pattern of joy (Wittgenstein [1953]/2009, §i).⁵

That is, if person A’s primitive expression of pain changes dramatically every day, then it would be difficult for him to use the word “pain” to communicate with someone else. And supposing that each person’s primitive expressions change all the time, then it would be difficult for people to communicate with each other more generally. Therefore, the steadiness feature of primitive expressions is crucial in using a language to communicate.

Therefore, because of these features, the referential relation between sensations and primitive expressions in public language is not arbitrary. This is different from the case of using a manometer, where the private language user can only establish an arbitrary referential relation. As a consequence, using primitive expressions as an independent justification dispels the worry of the “memory-challenge”. Denying the “memory-challenge” does not lead to a denial of public language. However, not all words of sensations in public language have corresponding primitive expressions. Thus, employing the notion of primitive expressions cannot provide a complete explanation of the possibility of a public language of sensations. But it does provide a first step toward such an explanation.

5. Concluding Remarks

In this paper, I have argued that the objection from the “memory-challenge” to NSSI and NCCI fails. One lesson from this interpretative debate is that although the general reliability of memory is a necessary ground for the possibility of a language, mem-

⁵The formerly so-called part II of the *Investigations* is nowadays published as *Philosophie der Psychologie—Ein Fragment / Philosophy of Psychology—A Fragment* in Wittgenstein ([1953]/2009).

ory in itself is not sufficient to make a language possible. More conditions are needed, as shown in Sections 2 and 3.

Lin's motivation to discuss the "memory-challenge" is to propose his own grammatical interpretation of the private language argument. Under this interpretation, the reason of the impossibility of a private language is "not empirical, rather it is grammatical/logical" (Lin 2017, 279). Although it remains unclear whether previous interpretations of the private language argument are all empirical interpretations, empirical factors do play some role in some interpretations. "Memory-skepticism" is clearly an empirical interpretation as it understands the failure of a private language as the weakness of memory, which is an empirical fact. NSSI might also be understood as an empirical interpretation because the stage-setting lies in human beings' expressions and activities. NCCI is tricky because the interpretation itself is neutral. An independent justification does not necessarily have to be an empirical justification. However, as we have seen, one candidate of the independent justification Wittgenstein seems to attribute to public language is primitive expressions, which is an empirical justification. And as a direct consequence, one reading for NCCI is that a private language is impossible because it lacks this kind of empirical justification.

After separating his interpretation from all previous "empirical" interpretations, Lin shows that his grammatical interpretation can answer the "memory-challenge". And since this interpretation is not an empirical interpretation, according to Lin, it is immune from any empirical objection, including the "memory-challenge". However, this seems to be a radical move and, as we have seen, this is not Wittgenstein's approach to private language in *Philosophical Investigations*, even though the concept of grammar is very important in Wittgenstein's later philosophy. From the discussion in Section 4, it seems to me that any interpretation needs to take primitive expressions into account, or at least to enable primitive expressions to play some role. Unfortunately, Lin's grammatical reading of Wittgenstein's private language

argument seems to rule out the possibility of using primitive expressions to explain the failure of a private language.

To conclude, in the introduction section of Lin's paper, Lin poses the question of whether the private language argument is an empirical argument or a grammatical argument (Lin 2017, 258). The correct answer to this question perhaps is to realize that this is not a well-formed question. We need to abandon the dichotomy between empirical and grammatical, and to reconsider the relation between them in light of Wittgenstein's philosophy in general, and the private language argument in particular.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Haiqiang Dai and Diane Proudfoot for discussions on the earlier versions of this paper. I am also grateful to the anonymous reviewers of this journal for their helpful comments.

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