

# Wittgenstein on “Critique of language”

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## Abstract

*This paper tries to determine the philosophical nature of language, its functions, structure and content. It also explains the concept of natural language, ordinary and ideal language i.e. how there is a need of artificial perfect logical language without errors and unclarity in that language. This paper further shows the logical form of language with its syntactical, semantical, innate and acquired criteria for the evaluation of the languages. It deals with the analysis of language to clear what is unclear, to know what is unknown, to make definite what is vague. In this paper I used the method; logical method for interpretation and argumentation, analytical method for simplification, and critical method to investigate the real domain of language. This paper does not deal with ordinary functions of the language but it deals with the conceptual and modular functions of the language. The fundamental aim of this written up is to determine the analytical approach of Wittgenstein to sketch the ‘language as a tool to discuss the state of affairs or facts of the worlds that is also what philosophy does. This paper describes the contributions of rationalism and empiricism in the field of knowing the truths of language.*

*Key Words: language, ideal language, state of affairs, facts, syntactics, structure, analysis, Wittgenstein, innate, grammar, philosophy.*

## Introduction

As far as Wittgenstein is concerned, every language consists of its structure concerning which nothing can be said in the first language but there may be another language dealing with the structure of the first language and having itself a new structure and that to this hierarchy of languages there may be no limit. Totality does not exist is mystical. The totality which is logically inexpressible is a fiction and a delusion. It seems to me that “according to Wittgenstein in the hierarchy of languages; all languages have one unique feature that is their structure, their form. The structure of the language is understood by the structure of another language. Every language expresses propositions. Propositions are only way which make language a logical construction otherwise there are many things in language that are not logical but psychological, mathematical and biological. When one learns first language and the language that occurs in his mind (innate structure) are both in structure; logical but, in expression they are not. When we recourse towards the concept of Kant like there are some innate principles or casual principles in the mind he named them categories or his statement like “knowledge begins from experience but not arise from it” and “Concepts without percepts are empty; percepts without concepts are blind” indicates that reflection and sensation is necessary for the construction of knowledge. Mind is the constitutive of both the sensational part and the perceptual part. Some things are innate to the structure of the mind and some are acquired (gathered and schematize by experience. Kant’s famous saying about the reconciliation of the rationalism and empiricism is;

Thoughts without contents are empty

Intuitions without concepts are blind.

Language for me & before the parrot are same, the difference is only in expression and understanding. The logical side of language is its structure, its form, use, meaning and context. In order to understand the logic of the language, we must approach the theories of rationalism, empiricism, criticism, for the source of help. So, “we can’t read others mind but only the expressions”. The study of mind is both psychological and logical (philosophical). Logic without the approach of logical reasoning: Induction and deduction; we can’t study theory of Mind. Even if we know something like contents or mental states about mind, it needs logical approach to analyze and clarify the inner and the outer. Thus, “language without logic is empty and reasoning without language is blind”. Most of the thoughts are same, their structure and their nature is, and only they differ in expression or representation. As Wittgenstein had already described that thoughts picture the reality that is correct because what thoughts are in the minds of Chomsky and Wittgenstein may be these thoughts are also in the mind of others, who is not known to them. And the third person is expressing these ideas or thoughts in

his first language and that language is not known for both the Chomsky and the Wittgenstein. Of course in this world there are many theories propounded by different philosophers, linguistics and logicians, are same in their nature, but different languages explained and interpreted them differently and in different words and terminology but the proposition of which these language consists are of same only when the proposition expresses the fact and is an assertion having truth functions otherwise, in certain different conditions it is not logical.<sup>1</sup> Linguistic expressions are like geometrical figures which can be projected differently but the nature (or projective proportion) of the figures could remain same. Likely, linguistic expressions can be implied and understood differently but the syntactics and facts of the linguistic propositions remain unaltered. The concept of triangle is one and original and all other triangles like “equilateral, isosceles, rt-angled triangle, can be projected differently”. According to Wittgenstein both the proposition and the fact must have common projective properties.<sup>2</sup> Now the question is, ‘What comes first; language or thought?’ intuition cuts both the ways.<sup>3</sup> Thought came first and language is only to manifest the thoughts. Even thoughts is a language and that language is symbolic and non verbal. Logicians, linguists and philosophers of the mind has of the common view that ‘there is an abstract structure and mechanism of thoughts and languages. It is the acquired language which the condition or environment provides to the child otherwise there is a universal or philosophical language to every child.

#### *Ordinary language, ideal language and natural language*

Ideal language<sup>4</sup> is postulated only when it is meaningful in function. Language is always more or less ambiguous and vague. The only conditions like syntax, meaning and its functions make it perfect.<sup>5</sup> Bertrand Russell believed that by means of a study of syntax we can arrive at considerable knowledge concerning the structure of the world. The linguistic program for metaphysical inquiry recognizes the possible correspondence between sentence structure and structure of fact. Each of the facts of the world has its ontological structure. If a sentence has to assert a fact it must have logical structure which has something in common with the ontological structure of fact. In other words, there is a correspondence between the structure of a sentence and the structure of the fact which is expressed by that sentence. The pivotal road to metaphysical knowledge consists of investigating the structures of the sentences. Russell argued that common language is not sufficiently logical. We must first construct an artificial logical language before we can properly investigate our problem. The nature of such an ideal language, however, has never been completely specified. Consequently, an ideal language must be neither vague nor ambiguous, it should be logical. The ideal is a language which prevents every logical mistake. If we logically devise perfect language, then its structure must have something in common with the structure of the world and by examining the one we shall come to understand the other. Thus an ideal language is an important tool or technique of a philosophical inquiry. Ordinary language have the relational property of vagueness. The proper way of exhibiting the structure of our world is to formulate an ideal language in which we can talk about the world. Form the structure of such language is, in some sense, a picture of the structure of the world as Wittgenstein held. Ideal language is not a language which can be spoken; it is only a blueprint or scheme which is complete and exhaustive enough to show, in principle, ‘the structure and systematic arrangement of all the major areas of our experience. The language of science, however, is actually spoken and written, and is used to achieve greater efficiency and precision. Note that Russell’s arguments suggest that language of science is not identical to ideal language because the second criterion of completeness or exhaustiveness is not met by it.

Ideal language is, by definition, a symbolism which would be entirely free from the philosophical defects which Russell claimed to find in ordinary language. If language had been invented by scientifically trained observers for purposes of philosophy and logic, precisely this symbolism could have resulted, And it would be logically perfect in the sense of conforming to what logic requires of a language, which is to avoid contradiction. Every symbol is a logically proper name denoting objects of acquaintance. There can be one word and no more for every simple object, and everything that is not simple can be expressed by the combination of words. These words which have meaning in the absence of instances of the universals (for instance, shades of color given by sense data) they denote, will not be included in the ideal language. By definition only those words that denote the entities present will be included. Again by definition, the words presently used in an ordinary language must be considered as unintelligible in the absence of the entities they denote. Proper names in the grammatical sense and all other types of words in the ordinary language will be disqualified for inclusion in the ideal language. They all play a dubious role, because they function as logical descriptions while they are not really so.<sup>6</sup>

The oxford philosopher Austin holds that there is little point in tightening up or reforming ordinary usage until we know that this usage is. He thinks that if we spend more time in observing how we ordinarily use certain words, our eyes would be opened to the difference between normal usage and philosophical usage. The senses given to certain ordinary words by philosophers differ from the senses they have in non-philosophical discourse. We find that philosophers do make use of ordinary connotations of ordinary words,

but they use those words in contexts wherein such words would not be ordinary used. Philosopher Austin offers no guarantee that this realization of differences in use of the same words would dissolve all the philosophical problems. And yet it is worth our while and effort if the reforms of language (as proposed by philosophers of ideal language school) is postponed until our present linguistic resources are fully exploited. The ordinary language philosopher does not claim that all the puzzles of various types of philosophical propositions would be solved by looking at the manner of using ordinary language. The solution to puzzles both real and apparent is not sought by explaining the peculiar nature of the subject matter of sentences in which the puzzles are expressed, 'but by reflecting upon the peculiar manner in which these sentences work'. The ordinary language philosopher will demonstrate how these statements go against ordinary language use. Such a recourse to the ordinary language may be objected to by saying that ordinary men are ignorant, misinformed, and therefore frequently mistaken. One may assert that the sentences and phrases used by people need not always refer to truth only. When a person says I know for certain, it does not mean all the time that he knows for certain whatever thing is referred to by him. E.g., at one time, everyone declared that the earth was flat, when it was actually round. In order to answer the objection raised above, we need to consider that there are two ways in which a person may be wrong when he makes an empirical statement: he may be making a mistake as to what the empirical facts are, or, he may know. Putnam argued that natural languages (assumed to be sets of sentences, which in turn were taken to be strings of words) must be decidable. This was on the observation that people are very good at distinguished well formed sentences from arbitrary strings of words. since the human brain is, according to Putnam, a finite computing device, it follows that there must be an effective procedure for each language capable of deciding which strings are sentences of the language. Putnam coupled this with an argument that the theory of transformational grammar prevalent at the time allowed grammars that would generate un-decidable languages. The latter argument was based on the observation that transformational grammar could mimic arbitrary Turing machine operations by means of insertions and deletions. Hence, Putnam concluded. Transformational grammar as it was being developed at the time was too powerful a theory of natural language syntax. Here mathematical and psychological considerations were combined to argue against a linguistic theory.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Function of philosophy for languages*

Language is a system for combining symbols (such as words) so that an infinite (unlimited) number of meaningful statements can be made for the purpose of communicating with others. Language allows people not only to communicate with one another but also to represent their own internal mental activity. Language is a very important part of how people think. The structures of languages all over the world share common characteristics. languages involve world order, word meanings, the rules for making words into other words, the sounds that exist within a language, the rules for practical communication with others, and the meanings of sentences and phrases. Grammar is the system of rules governing the structure and use of a language. It includes rules for the order of words known as syntax and morphology; the study of the formation of words. Morphemes are the smallest units of meaning within a language. The word playing consists of two morphemes 'play' and 'ing'.<sup>8</sup> Every philosophical proposition is a bad grammar and the discussion in matters to these propositions is a mistake. "Philosophy is not a theory but an activity". The only role of philosophy is to classify the thoughts. The proposition and the fact must show the same logical manifold. Philosophy is one of the natural sciences. The word philosophy must mean something which stands above or below, but not accurate to natural science. The purpose of philosophy is not to deal with the number of philosophical propositions but to make propositions clear. it should make thought clear and delimit sharply the thoughts which are opaque and blurred. Those propositions which cannot be verified and cleared are then meaningless propositions.<sup>9</sup> The essential property of language is that it provides the means for expressing indefinitely many thoughts.<sup>10</sup> Wittgenstein thought that it is just an ultimate fact about human beings that they find certain a priori inferences natural. Logicians are chiefly concerned with language used informatively in affirming or denying propositions, formulating arguments, evaluating arguments, and so on. Many other purposes are also served by language, however, and its informative use may be better understood when contrasted with other uses. The great philosopher of analytical tradition and notable logicians, insisted rightly in his work 'philosophical investigations, 1953) that there are countless different kinds of use of what we call 'symbols', 'words', 'sentences'. Among the examples suggested by Wittgenstein are giving orders, describing an object or giving its measurements, reporting an event, speculating about an event, forming and testing a hypothesis, presenting the results of an experiment, making up a story, play-acting, singing, guessing riddles, telling a joke, solving a problem in arithmetic, translating from one language into another, asking, cursing greeting and praying.<sup>11</sup>

#### *Wittgenstein argument for innate and acquired language*

Language is not innate but language learning process is innate. a child can learn both the English and Japanese, we can't attribute the knowledge of English to the child as innate property. It seems reasonable to postulate that the principles of general linguistics

regarding the nature of rules, their organization, the principles by which they function, the kinds of representations to which they apply and which they form all constitute part of the innate condition that “puts a limit on admissible hypothesis.”<sup>12</sup> Innate ideas means that mind has some parameters of memory span memory capacity. The only innate conditions that must be postulated are those that apply to all reasonable “computing systems” and no behaviorist should feel any surprise at this.<sup>13</sup> All the language of the world consists of philosophical grammar or universal grammar. The grammars are called universal as it is based on the innate pre-deposition or capacities. Every statement of the kind is in the form having subject predicate and copula term, it means that generative grammar systematically represents the innate part (internalizing of the concepts) and further asserts and accounts for the empirical part of the concepts which provides limit and arrangement to the data processing. There is a difference between the grammar of the particular language and the universal grammar of all the native languages while particular language consists of grammar that does not depend on logical conceptions which means that grammar of one language differ from another language, neither for universal or philosophical grammar which consists of those logical term that is same for all the language. It is the grammar which is internalized by the structure of the sentence itself. Logically all the languages of the world might have an innate mechanism of processing of truths and the empirical conception to set up and arrange the sentences. We have primary linguistic data (rationalism) and secondary linguistic data (empiricism) to analyze and critique the modern linguistic theory.<sup>14</sup>

### *Syntax and semantics*

According to Wittgenstein, a logically perfect language has “rules of syntax” which prevent non – sense and at the same time it has single “symbols” which always have a definite language meaning. Wittgenstein demands a “sign – language that is governed by logical grammar”.<sup>15</sup> Humboldt; language makes “infinite use of finite mean linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogenous speech- community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitation, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance. A fundamental distinction between competence (the speaker –hearer knowledge of his language) and performance (he actual use of language in concrete situations). Linguistic theory is mentalistic, since it is concerned with discovering a mental reality underlying actual behavior, observed use of language are hypothesized disposition to respond habits and so on may provide evidence as to the nature of this mental reality.<sup>16</sup> The study of linguistic universals is the study of the properties of any generative grammar for a natural language. Particular assumptions about linguistic universals may pertain to either the syntactic, semantic<sup>17</sup> and are phonological grammars that are the product of language learning. The property of having a grammar meeting a certain abstract conditions might be called formal linguistic universals, if shown to be a general property of natural languages.<sup>18</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Language is the symbolic representation of the thoughts or ideas. Language is the tool through which humans can communicate. Language is the form of life as Wittgenstein said. Philosophy is the critique of language, it means that there are many things in the field of language where we are using philosophical methods to make the truths of the language clear and definite. Wittgenstein tried to gave language a new shape which can picture the reality. He said that ordinary language is vague and ambiguous things full of misconceptions and fallacies. So, in order to unveil the vagueness and hidden meaning, we should devise a language that is logical language contains symbolism in which there is no chance of fallacy and misconception. He treated language as the representation of the thoughts. Thoughts picture the reality. Logic shows the connection and relation among the various familiar things in the world. Wittgenstein stated that language should be meaningful and verifiable, it should not be that which expresses metaphysical entities. Language is symbolic and having universal in structure. There is universal grammar/philosophical grammar for every language. Every state of affairs in language expresses thought and proposition. It is only logical analysis which makes language ideal and perfect. Thus Wittgenstein declared that it is task of philosophy to make language clear and definite and the clarification of the state of affairs or symbolism that shows the relation of concepts in the world.

### *Notes and References.*

<sup>1</sup> L. Wittgenstein, Tractatus, (Oxford: Routledge, 2001), p. xviii.

<sup>2</sup> Wittgenstein, Tractatus, p. ix.

<sup>3</sup>A. P. Martinich, & D. Sosa, A companion to analytical philosophy, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001, p.307).

<sup>4</sup> Ideal language in analytical philosophy is a language which is precise, free of ambiguity and clear in structure.

<sup>5</sup> Wittgenstein, Tractatus, introduction by Russell, p. xi

<sup>6</sup> M. S. Thirumalai. Language in Science, Mysore: Geetha Book House, 1979, p.58-60

<sup>7</sup>See N. Chomsky, Critical Assessments, Edited by Carlos. P. Otero, Vol. 4: From Artificial Intelligence to Theology: Chomsky's impact on Contemporary Thought: Tome I, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 83-84

<sup>8</sup> S. k. Ciccarelli, G. Meyer, introduction to psychology, (New Delhi: Pearson, 2008, p. 344-45.

<sup>9</sup> Wittgenstein, Tractatus, P. XIV.

<sup>10</sup> N. Chomsky, Aspects of the theory of syntax, p. 3-4

<sup>11</sup> I. M. Copi, C. Jetli. P. Prabhaker, Introduction to Logic 12<sup>th</sup> ed., (New Delhi: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> N. Chomsky, Mind and Language, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 152-53.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 160

<sup>14</sup> N. Chomsky, Aspects of the theory of Syntax, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1969), p. 25.

<sup>15</sup> See C. Roy, Studies in Philosophical method, p. 204

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.6.

<sup>17</sup>Semantics is the branch of philosophy which deals with the study of meanings and descriptions. It also sets the rules for determining the meaning of words and sentences.

<sup>18</sup> N. Chomsky, Aspects of the theory of Syntax, p. 28-29.

