

# Language Idling and Language in Use Wittgenstein on Following Rules

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This paper has a simple goal: it aims to present the difference between static logic and dynamic grammar. At the same time I will stress another difference which traverses logic and grammar: the difference between language idling and language in use. There is a development from static logic to dynamic grammar in Wittgenstein's philosophy from early to late, whereas the difference between language idling and language in use pervades the whole oeuvre. Therefore I shall distinguish between four different conditions pertaining to the attempt to render the relations that hold language together. We find in early Wittgenstein 'idle static logic' and 'static logic in use,' and in late Wittgenstein 'idle dynamic grammar' and 'dynamic grammar in use.' This four-fold distinction serves to emphasize that the crucial shift to 'use,' which is usually claimed to be a feature of the *Philosophical Investigations*, already takes place in the *Tractatus*. A negligence of this 'double shift' from logic to grammar and from idle language to language in use brought about a vast amount of misapprehensions of Wittgenstein's philosophy, especially of the account of rule following.

I will begin this paper with an introduction to the problem of rule following. Secondly I shall present Kripke's reading, which goes wrong because it opens up a gap between rule and application. The subsequent presentation of Baker and Hacker's criticism of Kripke will focus on their take on internal relations. Even though they rightly hold that there is no gap between rule and application, they neglect the differentiation between idle language and language in use. An elaboration of the account of internal relations in the *Tractatus*—and how they are connected to Wittgenstein's shift to 'use' in the early work already—will show Baker and Hacker's shortcoming.

## 1. Introduction

At my first arrival in the United States at JFK Airport I bought a sandwich wrapped in paper. I was astonished upon discovering an imprint on the paper warning: "Paper is not edible." I thought it odd and senseless to have such a warning on a piece of paper that was clearly not edible. Only after having lived in the United States for some time did I realize that it indeed made sense, as there are sandwiches, 'wraps,' which come wrapped in what looks very much like paper and is edible. In addition to that the culture of lawsuits in the United States makes it imperative to have such warnings on the paper of sandwiches, in order to prevent being sued by people who mistake their sandwich for a wrap. Anyway, when I first read the warning I was puzzled and not sure how I ought to understand it. It was so obvious to me to not to eat a sandwich with its paper on that I thought there must be another message behind it. I came up with various interpretations in order to make sense of the words. What did not come to me naturally is what every U.S. citizen would have done—to just not eat the paper. At *Investigations* § 199 Wittgenstein writes:

"To obey a rule, to make a report, to give an order, to play a game of chess, are *customs* (uses, interpretations)." (Wittgenstein 1958)

The same apparently holds for signposts or warnings. In order to understand a warning and act according to it, it is crucial to be immersed in a community that has a certain practice or 'life' with it. Understanding or not understanding the warning does not consist in making the right interpretation but in abiding by the interpretation, custom or use of the community, which issued the warning in the first place. In this sense 'to understand a warning' or again 'to obey a rule' are not interpretations, but actual uses that are made in actual cases. This is what Wittgenstein says at § 201:

"[...] What this shews is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation*, but which is exhibited in what we call "obeying the rule" and "going against it" in actual cases. "

The section of the *Philosophical Investigations*, which is often called the 'Rule Following Considerations' has been read in this important way for almost two decades. More recently the reading of the 'New Wittgenstein' (called after the same book published in 2000, including authors like James Conant and Cora Diamond) stresses that there is no gap between rules and interpretations in the first place. In this book it is shown again and again how one ought to leave behind the view that there is a paradox in rule following. Let us now see how we got to the paradox in the first place.

## 2. How Kripke got it wrong

We follow Saul Kripke on his way to the paradox in his groundbreaking contribution to the problem of rule following *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* published in 1982. He presents us with a simple mathematical problem, the addition of 68 and 57. Although the rule of addition determines for indefinitely many cases how to proceed, Kripke holds that someone's grasp of the rule is problematic, as she can only compute finitely. Even though she might be sure that '125' is the right answer there is nothing she can bring up to prove that she was really following a certain rule called addition, and not another rule called 'quaddition,' as Kripke's skeptic claims she did. 'Quaddition' would look like adding up to the number 68 from whence the result is always 5. Now Wittgenstein says in PI 201:

"This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule."

Kripke's paradox takes off the ground when asked by a skeptic, one is incapable of stating any fact of whatever kind as a proof that one really did follow a certain rule. Kripke argues that whatever we do is, "one some interpretation, in accord with the rule." (Kripke 1982, 98) The problem is that anything could potentially serve as a fact about our former behavior or mental life for meaning

'plus rather than quus', as Kripke has it. Our corpus of finite data may always be subsumed under indefinitely many distinct generalizations. This means that 'quus' is as good a generalization for our data as 'plus' and we can do nothing to prove that 'plus' would be the right interpretation. But Kripke fails to acknowledge that §198 claims: "Interpretations by themselves do not determine meaning." Wittgenstein holds that to make interpretations of rules is not to follow rules. In § 201 he says:

"[...] there is an inclination to say; every action according to the rule is an interpretation. But we ought to restrict the term "interpretation" to the substitution of one expression of the rule to another."

To think that the relation between rules and the grasping, understanding or application of rules needs to be secured by the right interpretation of that relation, is a mere tendency or inclination according to the 'Wittgensteinian' interlocutor. Certainly, paragraph 195 has a vexed interlocutor say:

"[But I mean that] in a queer way, the use itself is in some sense present."

which would support Kripke's reading of the paradox, that there is something—a rule, the meaning of the word and its use present in it—that intimates 'how to go on.' But we cannot give any interpretation of 'it' that could prove what we meant (whether plus or quus or any other generalization of our finite data). Wittgenstein's response to this vexed interlocutor is the following: he has another interlocutor immediately answer:

"Of course it is, 'in some sense!' Really the only thing wrong with what you say is the expression "in a queer way"[Wittgenstein 1958, §195]

There is nothing queer or paradoxical about what we do, the second interlocutor says and points out that if we think something is queer we just have not properly understood the 'use of the word' and in what sense it is present when grasping the meaning of a word. It will hence be crucial to elaborate on what is meant by 'the use of the word.'

### 3. Baker and Hacker's internal relations

Two years after Kripke's contribution to the 'rule-following considerations' Baker and Hacker published *Skepticism, Rules and Language* an approach to the problem of rule-following that takes a definite stance against Kripke's skeptical paradox and solution. They are the first to abandon Kripke's influential reading of a paradox in rule following. Their claim is that "the absurd paradox that rules cannot guide one shows [is] that how one understands a rule need not be an interpretation, but is manifest *in acting*, in what we call 'following a rule.'" (Baker and Hacker 1984, 13f) In the third part of their book Baker and Hacker give an outline of the important role internal relations play therein. They criticize the rule-skeptic's misapprehension of what 'internal relations' are and claim that rule-skepticism ignores or distorts the internal relations that hold between rules and their application.

"[...] the rule skeptic comes into conflict with a conceptual truth expressing an internal relation between rules and their applications." [Baker and Hacker 1984, 101]

Baker and Hacker's point is—as elaborated in the chapter above—that there is no interpretation needed to

bridge rule and application, because there is no gap in the first place. The relation between rule and interpretation is internal. The rule skeptic distorts this relation. But how are we to understand internal relations?

There is a flaw in Hacker and Baker's account of internal relations. They use the term 'internal relation' interchangeably with the term 'logical or grammatical relation' and thereby they cover the fact that 'internal relation' is a prominent term only in the *Tractatus* and does not reoccur but once in the *Philosophical Investigations*. By pointing to the genesis of Wittgenstein's view of internal relations they try to justify taking them in one. Early on Wittgenstein had held that internal relations are such that it is inconceivable that entities should not stand in this relation. (Wittgenstein 1922, 4.123) They are therefore necessarily true or tautological. Later on he added that nothing external could mediate between them. Baker and Hacker do exemplify internal relations by desire and its fulfillment. There is no third—like the feeling of satisfaction—allowed entering in. It is, as they claim, 'a truth of grammar' or a 'necessary truth' that the fulfillment of the desire to drink a pint of beer is to drink a pint of beer—"it can be read off the expression of the desire." (Baker and Hacker 1984, 108) The internal relation is exhibited in grammar. Desire and fulfillment make, as it were, contact in language.

Just as rule and application are internally related, so too an interpretation as mediation would stand in the same vain and drop out. But the example of rule and application is not so easy—there is no direct contact in language as in the example of drinking beer as desire and fulfillment. Baker and Hacker claim that the contact is made by "the practice of using language, of explaining and justifying its use. [...] To understand the rule is to know what counts, in this technique, as doing the same." (Baker and Hacker 1984, 115) Understanding the rule is then to know how to proceed in applying it. Therefore the explanation of a meaning of a word is a rule or standard for its correct use.

"The uses of a word are viewed as the application of these rules (instances of following it)" (Baker, Hacker 1984, 122).

This makes Baker and Hacker privilege the rules of grammar in Wittgenstein's late philosophy to the rules of logic, or logical syntax of the early *Tractatus*. They think that the shift from logic to grammar is crucial for understanding Wittgenstein's 'new' account of rule following.

Instead I shall claim that it is the shift from idle language to language in use which is necessary to understand rule following in Wittgenstein. Baker and Hacker's account treats internal relations in the *Tractatus* not as that which is exhibited in language, but as holding between a proposition and a fact that makes it true. They claim that Wittgenstein presupposes some metaphysical harmony in his early work, which results in an isomorphism between language and world. Only later on, they claim, did Wittgenstein come to see that this harmony is merely forged in grammar.

"The harmony between language and reality is no more than a reflection, a shadow of a rule for the use of signs, a grammatical convention." [Baker and Hacker 1984, 126]

There is no gap between rules of logical syntax and their application, or between rules of grammar and their application. But it can be shown easily in a quote how Hacker and Baker do indeed treat rules of syntax different

from rules of grammar. In their book *Wittgenstein. Rules, Grammar and Necessity* published only a year after *Skepticism, Rules and Language* they make the following claim

“Wittgenstein’s ‘rules of grammar’ serve only to distinguish sense from nonsense. Unlike the depth rules of logical syntax, they do not reflect ineffable metaphysical truths.” (Baker and Hacker 1985, 40)

On my reading the rules of logical syntax and the rules of grammar stand in the same vain. They are both ‘that which shows,’ that which is exhibited when we use language. ‘What is exhibited when we use language’ is not an ineffable metaphysical truth but the rules of logical syntax in early Wittgenstein and the rules of grammar later on.

It is utterly crucial to gain a better understanding of ‘internal relations’ in order to understand why we do not need the extra step of interpretation when we try to link rule and application. What distinguishes my line of thought from theirs is that they hold the account of the *Tractatus* to be completely different from the later view in the *Philosophical Investigations*. It is the distinction between idle language and language in use that they do not take into consideration.

At this point the analysis of ‘internal relations’ as they appear in the *Tractatus* and as they pave the way from language idling to language in use should follow. Time-restrictions do not allow going into detail now. Therefore I will simply sum up with my example from the beginning.

1. Static Logic	2. Dynamic Grammar
I. Language idling “Paper is not edible”	“Paper is not edible”
II. Language in use “Paper is not edible”	“Paper is not edible”

Let us have a look at the relations between propositions and their constituents in (I.1.) Idle Static Logic. “Paper is not edible” is a tautology here because it is always true that paper is not edible; paper has the property of being not edible. Therefore the proposition “Paper is not edible” is senseless—like the propositions of the *Tractatus*, which Wittgenstein claims at the end of it (6.54). That does not mean that “Paper is not edible” is always senseless. When the proposition is actually used it ‘makes sense’ This is how (II.1.) ‘Static Logic in Use’ differs from idle static logic. “Paper is not edible”, has sense in the actual case—when it is used it is true.

(I.2.) Idle Dynamic Grammar is different from Idle Static Logic as Wittgenstein abandoned the idea of atomic constituents. The relations, which were stable between those smallest parts, became dynamic. Instead of logical rules that reigned between propositions and their constituents, one is left with a grammar of language games. Certain examples of how the word has been used before and which indicate in what ways one can use it are all the ‘rules’ we are left with. At this point it should be clear that the rule and the application of the rule fall together. Therefore I.2 Idle dynamic grammar is a fictional construct. Nevertheless Wittgenstein saw this condition as the most dangerous one, because it makes us think we actually use language, although we deal with mere idle grammar. These grammatical propositions do not do any work; they rather make us fall back into the mistake of thinking that there are rules apart from their application. Therefore II.2 Dynamic grammar in use leaves us with the proposition “Paper is not edible”, which makes sense only in the actual use. E.g. when written on a piece of paper, which is

wrapped around a sandwich, it means that you are most likely in the United States and need not try to sue the company who produced the sandwich.

## References

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