The Problem of Communication in the Context of the Language-Games

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Ludwig Wittgenstein is one of the first analytical philosophers who suggested the strategy of solving the communication problem. The communication as an exchange of meanings is supposed to have linguistic and extralinguistic aspects. The explanation of possibilities and conditions of the communication is connected with Wittgenstein's concept "language-game". To my mind the positive decision of the problem depends upon the definite scheme of interpretation of the language-games. The widespread version of the interpretation of this concept has some difficulties, which become more coherent in the social investigations. In this paper I intend to change the focus of interpretation of the language-games in order to avoid the evident paradox in settling of communication problem.

The main peculiarity of the language-games, according to their critics (Apel, Habermas) is their autonomity, self-sufficiency, and independence from each other. The language-game has its own horizon, which can be seen inside. The meaningfulness of using language expressions is established by the language-game's horizon. The diversity of human activity generates the diversity of the language-games. The language-game functions according to its own strict rules. Such facts as knowing and possessing of the rules determine the possibility of the communication. The rules are grasped in the course of one's training. The participants of the language-game don't reflect its moves. They accept the game's rules because they have been taught to act in such way. In the course of the game its participants don't ask themselves the question why they act in such way.

Thus according to such interpretation the language-games are considered to be the autonomous systems of the communication isolated from each other. As a result the situation of translation between different language-games becomes insoluble and/or problematical. The general theory of understanding is unnecessary, so that a separate case of understanding is established by individual language-game. It should be mentioned that such interpretation of the language-game loses its main peculiarity: each language-game – like the language as a whole – is an *open* system. We must remember Wittgenstein doesn't say anywhere that language-games are the interpermeable entities. He never asserted that if we were taking part in one game then we would not be able to understand another person taking part in an absolutely different game. In contrast Wittgenstein underlines the diversity of practices in which each of us is engaged.

If we come from the limits of the present interpretation then the necessary condition for the effective mutual understanding depends upon the communicators' belonging to the same language-game. The verbal communication can be interpreted in the rules of the real language-game to a large extent so that each language expression interpreted by the game's rules become meaningful for the native speakers of this language-game. I speak about the premises concerning the actual or the potential "states of affairs" which are interwoven in linguistic practice on the conceptual level. The conceptual presuppositions of language activity determine its semantic potential and hence the interpretative opportunities of the individuals taking part in definite language-game. So the effective mutual understanding can be realized only in the situation when the communicators have a shared conceptual background, that is they share common presuppositions concerning the states of affairs. It is supposed that in case the native speakers share different conceptual premises the opportunity of any communication among them is questioned. Hence the communicators need to be participants of the same language-game to reach the mutual understanding.

However for Wittgenstein a linguistic behaviour is one's ability to actualize the language in the different language-games. Moreover we operate with words and "in the course of time turn them sometimes into one picture, sometimes into another"(Wittgenstein 1953, 131 § 449).

I think the supposed interpretation of Wittgenstein's concept will not give us a satisfactory explanation how we master the new language. Wittgenstein's researchers reduce a speech activity to operating of the definite set of reactions to the signs. They assume as a basis of each linguistic practice a certain set of correspondences between the words and one's reactions to them. However it is asserted that a new reaction (or new speech behaviour) into the habitual word is impossible, because the breach of rules of the language-game means its ending. Such way of understanding the linguistic behaviour is determined by rule following implicitly contained in our language. The rules of any type of the language fix the appointed native speakers' behaviour. Hence the learning of the new rules by speakers is located out from their linguistic competence. Such model of understanding of the game's rules could not advance the process of predicting the future linguistic behaviour. But according to Wittgenstein the language-games are not stable: the new types of language arise, other become obsolete, they may be forgotten and change their character (PI § 23).

My principle hypothesis is the following: the impossibility to explain the communication phenomenon consists in attributing ontological status to the language-games. The conceptual sovereignty of the language-games is the result of their ontological understanding. An ontological feature of the language-game determines the impossibility of the dialogue between various languages practices. If we regard the language-game not as different aspects of the same language but as the different languages then any attempt to translate from one language to another leads to the loss of its specific content that can be expressed by our own language. I try to present another interpretative version of Wittgenstein's concept of the language-game. I think it is more correct and it allows coming up to the explanation of the possibility effective communication more fruitfully.

If we use the language-game metaphor to designate the numerous aspects (or models) of the speech activity (not as given ontological structures determining the referential opportunities of the native speakers of the language) then we may find the productivity of Wittgenstein's philosophical investigations helping to solve the problem of understanding. It is not of great interest to pronounce the language as mosaic of the precise outlined linguistic practices when we

try to grasp the ways of existence of the native language. It means the lack of communication problem.

The language game is a system of operating rules, which determines the functions of linguistic signs through the applications of these rules (PI § 559). The totality of the language games constitutes the *form of life*. The concept of a language-game is one aspect of the idea that the meaning of words and expressions is found in their use. Wittgenstein emphasizes on the multifarious ways in which words are used, and on the importance of considering the context in which a word is used in order to understand its meaning. Wittgenstein likens language to the tools in a toolbox, and the functions of words to the functions of these objects. That is, we do many different things with words, and in coming to see how they work we come to understand their meaning (PI § 11).

A language-game is a rule-governed activity, and to play such a game is to engage in a social practice. That language-games are governed by rules means that we can distinguish between right and wrong moves in the game. That is, there is an external check on what we do, playing the game; it is possible for others to correct us if we apply a word against the rules of a particular game. But this does not mean that the rule of the game is always explicit; nor that a person who takes part in the game is always able to formulate them when questioned. But in playing the game we do not normally think of the rules; nor do we normally learn language-games by being taught the rules. The game's rules existence beforehand a person is going to take part in the language-game. When the language-game was created the process of the game and its rules are formed simultaneously. Wittgenstein uses the metaphor of the stream and its channel.

The function of the language-game consists in elucidating the word-usage in problematic situations. We can compare the speech activity with a stream of continuous situations in the context of which the speaker needs to make the choice of the definite semantic version of the language. And the speaker has orientated already towards definite model of the language-game. We may qualify such versions as semantic quantity, which help to explain the possibility of the speech varying when we use the native language with diverse intentions and by diverse ways. In speaking of language-games we are brought to consider the contexts in which words and expressions have their life; where we see them, functioning as they do in a network of other words and expressions and actions. If we consider the context in which, say, an order is issued and ask ourselves how we know this was an order, we realize that the words and actions of this language-game, as of others, are interwoven. We must remember that the ways of using the signs are not determined by the "concept". On the contrary our concepts are the generalizations of the diverse usage of the same signs. Wittgenstein has understood the language-game as the practice, the institute, and the form of life. The research of the language-game is an investigation of the primitive linguistic forms. It may be said about the hierarchy of the games' system. Wittgenstein's presupposition consisted in clarifying the genealogy of the language-games, and so to disclose their practical significance.

Sings and their rules are not isolated entities working by themselves, but operations in human behaviour (PI § 454). For Wittgenstein the meaning of singular words is determined only in the context of prepositional moves in the language game, and thus it is from the sense of a proposition that the meanings of its component words are understood (PI §49, 138). Thus our linguistic ability includes knowledge of these meaning structures. Meaning structures are connected with words as combined in a proposition applied by living human beings (PI § 454). Nevertheless, one cannot perform a propositional move in a language game without "knowing" the meaning rules of the proposition's component words. The selection of the relevant meaning structure of a word from a cluster of such structures for a proposition depends upon the purpose of the propositional move in a particular language game. Unfortunately, this "knowledge" and the selecting mechanism remain enigmatic since they remain outside the realm of Wittgenstein's interest in his late philosophy of language. In this way, however, we can understand, according to Wittgenstein, the dependence relation between the sense of the proposition and the meaning of its words. Nevertheless, it seems that we should go further and make a distinction between the speaker and the hearer in ordinary communicational use of language in this regard. For the speaker, this relation is not reflexive, since he cannot determine the sense of his intended prepositional move from the clusters of meanings of its component words. But for the hearer and the learner of language games, the relation between the sense of the proposition and the meaning of its component words must be different (PI #54). Here the person first grasps of the component words, and through them understands the sense of the proposition in the context of its use. We should remember that words have clusters that have of senses, which determine their distinct meanings and therefore their different uses in the language games (Nesher 60).

By means of such interpretation of the language game it is possible to explain the situations of meaningful usage of the same language in various contexts. The natural language doesn't differentiate into the language-games. The language-games are the explanatory hypotheses simulating our real language behaviour. They haven't their own ontological status. The language-game's rules don't exhaust the properties and the possibilities of the actual word-usage. For Wittgenstein "no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made to accord with the rule" (PI § 201). It means the hypothetical character of each rule. According to Wittgenstein the rules are not complete and need to be supported by practice constantly. Rules' indefiniteness and their possibility of new usage in practice make the rules viability. The rule is a product of training. But people can use it differently. The method of training based on principle "do like I" is variable and it is supposed by the private application. It's precisely that the practice determines what the "rule-following" is right or wrong. But the recognition of the private application of the rule is realized by common agreement. The using of any rule is dependent on situation and how the communicators understand this situation. The variation of invariable or the usage of the rule makes the language-game an open system. The human behaviour is an intelligent usage of the rules. But one's "intelligence" consists in his skill to repeat or to use a rule in any new situations, not in his reflection.

The rules of the language-game can be interpreted as one's suppositions about reference intentions of other native speakers of the language. These suppositions are propounded in order to find the definite semantic regularities of the speakers' behaviour and then to predict their future linguistic acts. These suppositions may or not come up one's expectations. In last case a person makes other suppositions, which are radically different from the former. The natural language's rules differ from the rules of the artificial language because the last has the strict established rules. The rules of the language game connect

linguistic expressions with extralinguistic aids: objects, samples, activities, etc. The extralinguistic components of language games are, in the first place, the criteria for the meaning of the linguistics components. They become such meaning criteria only in the learning of grammatical rules. The conspicuous characteristic of the grammatical rules is that they determine the internal relations constituting the grammar of the language game. These relations are the norms of meaning that we learn and apply in our linguistic game. These relations are the norms of meaning that we learn and apply in our linguistic behaviour. Thus, the applications of grammatical rules are the use of related linguistic expressions (Nesher 55).

The rules of the "depth" grammar would not be able codified in principle (PI § 84). Our speech activity does not disintegrate into the multitude (secluded) fragments of the language. The contrary we like the native speakers have the power to realize the language in different ways and with different intentions. This power is our skill to orientate the language behaviour towards one or another model of the language-game. We can use such mode of understanding the language-games to clarify the manipulative function of the language. The specific oriented activity is one's language manipulating. The manipulating by the language is realized in one's skills to use the diverse combinations of the sentences. We should demonstrate our power to adapt the language to the new situations and the contexts, to put the schemes on the content of our experience. Such linguistic creation is the basic condition for any communication. If the individuals conduct themselves orientating into the diverse models of the speech activity then the main condition of the effective mutual understanding would be their ability to reach the common code of the communication. Thus the semantic competence of the native speakers of the language is not limited by the language-game. The contrary they're operating by the language and it allows them to overcome the limits of their actual linguistic experience and to find "common language" even in the case when the communicators belong to the different forms of life. Wittgenstein speaks of the common behaviour of mankind in the *Investigations*: "The common behaviour of mankind is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language" (PI §206).

Consequently if we regard the Wittgenstein's concept "language-game" as ontological matter then we narrow and even make impossible to solve the problem of communication. The communication is explained if we consider the language-games as mental (theoretical) constructions, or as a special way of experimenting with language mentally.

References

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