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Wittgenstein and Husserl: Context Meaning Theory

Sanjit Chakraborty

Abstract

The present article concentrates on understanding the limits of language from the realm of meaning theory as portrayed by Wittgenstein. In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein's picture theory provides a glimpse of reality by indicating that a picture could be true or false from the perspective of reality. He talks about an internal limitation of language rather than an external limitation of language. In Wittgenstein's later works like *Philosophical Investigations*, the concept of picture theory has faded away, and he deeply becomes more interested in the 'use theory of meaning' and 'language game.' My other attempt in this paper is to show Husserl's theory of meaning and try to find out its compatibility with Wittgenstein's thoughts. Husserl thinks that as a part of phenomenological experience, 'meaning' should be an act character that Wittgenstein rejected as an appeal of inner experience. Like Mohanty, I also attempt to show the Husserlian idea of meaning as an essence that is related to the meaning rather than linguistics. Both the giants are talking about description of language from different levels. My effort would be to illustrate how these two giant thinkers proclaim their meaning theories in such a way that leads to a well-known internalism versus externalism debate in the philosophy of mind and language.

Keywords: Wittgenstein, Husserl, Meaning Theory, Language game.

Sanjit Chakraborty is pursuing Ph.D. in the department of Philosophy of Jadavpur University, Kolkata, W.B. (India).

Email: cogitosanjit@gmail.com

Introduction

Though a clue of negative remark about ‘theory of meaning’ we will find in Wittgenstein’s later writing, where he claims that “The mistake is to say that there is anything that meaning something consists in” (*Zettel* 16), yet in both periods (*Tractatus* and *Philosophical Investigations*) his primary aim is to understand the limits of language in terms of the theory of meaning. We can say that he has an intention to provide a new foundation of meaning. In the period of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein believes that a name having ‘meaning’ depends on its being co-related to an object. A sentence is a combination of names, and the meaning of a sentence is determined by the meaning of its constituents. Wittgenstein admits that the meaning of a sentence does not depend on its truth-value. My attempt would be to revisit the position of Husserl’s meaning theory at the end of the paper. Let us first focus on Wittgenstein and his diversified approaches on meaning.

***Tractatus* and the Picture Theory of meaning**

Tractatus is painting a picture of our language for its clarification. This model helps us to understand that “A proposition is a picture of reality; for if I understand a proposition, I know the situation that it represents” (*Tractatus* 4.021). He also believes that the totality of proposition is language. Then one may argue, “Is there any constitutive feature by which a picture denotes its picturesque”? Wittgenstein answers that the pictorial form is the possibility of a relationship between the elements of the picture because it is considered as a common element of pictures. This is the process how a picture seems attach to the reality. A picture is actually a fact, and then we assume that the picture is a fact composed of the elements. Wittgenstein believes that only facts can express sense, but a set of names cannot. Therefore, Wittgenstein concludes, “What a picture represents is its sense” (*Tractatus* 2.221). Each picture has some fundamental features:

- a. In a picture, the elements of the picture are actually representatives of objects.
- b. What constitutes a picture is that its elements are related to one another in a determinate way.
- c. A picture should be attached to its reality.
- d. Every element of a picture has a corresponding identical element to pictorial form.
- e. Every picture has two pure forms – one is logical form and other pictorial form. The relation between picture and pictorial form will be non-arbitrary and co-related.

f. Wittgenstein thinks that a picture may be true or false from the perspective of reality. There are no pictures that are *a priori* true. (*Tractatus* 2.225)

P.M.S. Hacker aptly mentions, “As we have seen, the picture theory is what it purports to be – a theory of propositional representation. It is intended as a quite general theory which will provide an analysis of any type of proposition” (127-128). Wittgenstein believes that a picture can both say and show; they show their sense by the circumstance that “What would be the case if things were true” (*Tractatus* 2.221) and say that the state of affairs they claim to represent is the case (*Tractatus* 4.022). The state of affairs may be existence or non-existence of facts. However, we cannot think illogical ways. The logical form of picture theory has three fundamental issues – language, thought and reality. Early Wittgenstein’s philosophy seems close to the representationalist view and his semantic is well known as the logical semantic. Some interpreters mainly Jaakko Hintikka has a tendency to claim that “Hence all matters of logical form belong to the sphere of what can only be shown, not said, because of the ineffability of all semantics” (8).

Hintikka’s Claims

Language is the best medium to understand the world. Language has some limits. If we consider explaining the logic of language in regards to the “Truth functional Structure,” then we will find that there are two different conceptions of logic, ‘logic as calculus’ and ‘logic as language.’ Hintikka aims to put language as a universal medium. The doctrine of ‘limit of language’ has an intimate relation to his belief ‘Language as the universal medium.’ Hintikka claims, “For Wittgenstein, the most important ‘limit of language’ therefore was, not the external (as it were) boundary of language, but the internal limitation of language, viz., the inevitable restrictions on what one can say in language about that language” (17): Wittgenstein also thinks that the meaning of a symbol is involved in calculation. Hintikka considers that in *Tractatus* we may find “ineffability of semantics.” Logical form of semantics can be shown but not said. Wittgenstein believes that one can resolve the indispensable nature of language to any concrete language by analysing it into an elementary proposition. The conception of the elementary proposition in a language instigates the idea of logical formula that deals with the limit of language. As we know, the slogan of the *Tractatus* is ‘The limits of my language mean the limits of my world’ (*Tractatus* 5.6). This is the Wittgensteinian way to insinuate the world in the “clothed of language” (28), as once Ayer mentioned. The concern is not to see whether Wittgenstein’s approach to ‘my world’ goes to astray (in the sense of solipsism) or not. Here one can concern about the *substantial necessary truth* that may construct the idea of reality from the background of language. Its progeny reminds Wittgenstein’s contemplation that the proposition does not stretch out inside the limit of language (i.e. a factual discourse),

so it cannot be asserted, but the proposition can be showable in logical structure. The philosophical propositions are neither based on factuality nor contingency. They have some ambiguous sense in the case of expressions. Hintikka, who might have been impressed by the Chomskyan idea of 'syntactic structures,' where syntaxes are in the brain, while semantic locates in language and the world. Wittgenstein appeals in *Tractatus* that the elementary propositions are logically independent of each other, as its truth-value never entails from one another. A logical necessity in Wittgenstein's sense is based on the essential nature of the proposition. If there is a thought that one can grasp without expressing it seems 'substantial nonsense' in Wittgenstein's outlook. Here the logical structure of language itself averts the elementary proposition to articulate thought in a sayable mode.

Meaning Theory and *Philosophical Investigations*

Wittgenstein's theory of meaning takes a radical change in his later writing, especially in the *Philosophical Investigations*. Here an investigation of meaning gives more importance to how speakers learn to use the expression. So we may call it semantics with a 'primitive learning theory.' In *Philosophical Investigations*, the meaning plays the central theme. Wittgenstein thinks that the meaning correlates to understanding and similarly understanding relies on the explanation. In his last book the *Zettel*, Wittgenstein remarks, "I am making a connection between the concept of teaching and the concept of meaning" (412). One may ask, "What is taught in language"? The answer will be the language teaching is not only training but also a concept of meaning as use. However, in *Philosophical Grammar*, Wittgenstein cautions, "Let's only bother about what's called the explanation of meaning, and let's not bother about meaning in any other sense" (68-69). For this reason, in the *Philosophical Investigations*, the conception of 'picture theory' has faded away. The picture theory is basically based on the logical forms, but later Wittgenstein is interested deeply in the language. Therefore, we may consider the "language game" as universal from the perspective of limit of language.

The idea of "language game" is first introduced in the *Blue Book*, which is regarded as preliminary studies for the *Philosophical Investigations*. In that book Wittgenstein writes, "Language-games are the forms of language with which a child begins to make use of words. The study of language-games is the study of primitive forms of language or primitive language" (17). In *Philosophical Investigations*, we find that Wittgenstein quoted the conception of "ostensive definitions" which is characterized by Augustine as a paradigmatic instance of a mistaken view how a child learns to speak. Wittgenstein thinks that we play with words in our language. The comparison of language to a game does not suggest that language is something trivial. Indeed the speaking of language is a part of communal activity, a way of living in a society that Wittgenstein calls 'a form of life,' and something as formalized and shared. In Wittgenstein's 'language game' hypothesis, A is building with some building

stones; there are slabs, blocks, pillars, beams etc. *A* needs them. For this purpose, the builder (*A*) and his assistant (*B*) use a language consisting of the words 'slab,' 'block,' 'pillar.' *A* calls out and *B* brings them, which he learnt to bring at such and such a call. Wittgenstein calls the former kind of language games as 'pure language games' and later kind that includes non-linguistic behaviour as an 'impure-language game' (Pitcher 242).

Anthony Kenny thinks that both the purely linguistic behaviour and the behaviour which are a mixture of linguistic and non-linguistic, can be regarded as the key conception of Wittgenstein's "language game." We may consider the conception of 'pure language game' as the original home where we can draw inferences in calculating, providing a theorem etc. as it has some logical and mathematical backgrounds. But 'impure language games' lie in the background, when words are used in pure ones. Malcolm suggests, "According to Wittgenstein, an expression has meaning only in the stream of life" (75).

Why does Wittgenstein consider that language is a game? A game can follow the distinctive features:

- a. Games are designed for playing
- b. Games has certain rules of obligations
- c. Games are goal-directed
- d. The rules of games are arbitrary
- e. Games are bound in the sense that it starts and is finished.

We may consider 'language game' as something like a game that is played with words. There we find a crucial similarity between language and game. Both of these have some performatory utterances. Wittgenstein's 'language game' gives an expression of its meaning, which plays an important role in its social network. Actually, Wittgenstein believes that philosophy is nothing but analysis and discussion of language. Language is a style of life and the activity of man is a game. Wittgenstein's theory of meaning is regarded as "use theory of meaning." In *Philosophical Investigation*, Wittgenstein's says, "For a large class of cases—though not for all—in which we employ the word 'meaning' it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language" (sec. 43).

Wittgenstein believes that the meaning of a sentence or a word lies in its use. Language game is a kind of picture in which the speaker rules and the contexts are fully explicit. In language game, we have to follow certain rules. Actually obeying a rule is a practice; Wittgenstein says, "Following a rule is analogous to obeying an order. We are trained to do so" (*Investigations* sec. 206). The concept of rules is based on grammar, which has a characteristic pattern with 'form of life.' But the rules of grammar are 'arbitrary.' Even in our formal language, rules are not well

designed. This kind of rules also defines what is possible and permitted in the language game. R. C. Pradhan aptly claims, “If the rules had been designed for a specific purpose, language would cease to be autonomous and self-contained” (124). For Wittgenstein ‘private rule following’ is impossible because the rule following depends on public activity or in a community circle.

Husserl’s Theory of Meaning

For Husserl, Intentionality is considered as the general theme of phenomenology and the peculiarity of consciousness of something. Phenomenology seems to be a descriptive science that copes with consciousness. Even the consciousness of the mind has an intention towards the objects. Husserl considers, “The ‘noema’ is nothing but a generalization of the idea of meaning (Sinn) to the field of all acts” (*Ideas Pertaining* 89). We may find that a ‘noema’ has two components: a. One that has some objects with certain properties is common to all acts; b. One that has different characters associated with the different acts.

The ‘noematic’ meaning has a virtue which consciousness relates to the object. It is an intuitive grasp of an object, which must be an internal object. It seems an ideal object has no physical or mental structure. One can consider it as an intended object. Now one may ask “is it a replica of the Platonic idea”? The answer will be something controversial. Though like Wittgenstein Husserl also makes a distinction between Meaning and Essence, Husserl finds out the conception of transcendental essences under phenomenological reduction where he mentions that our mental picture theory of meaning is not a ‘copy theory of perception.’ He gives importance on the phenomenological reduction to bracket the real existence of a perceived object. Besides, ‘noematic meaning’ has an act. Husserl thinks that sameness of Sinn (meaning) takes place only where the objects remain identically alike. It depends on same properties etc. His ‘noematic meaning’ is actually the meaning that is not only attached with the acts but also to linguistic meaning as once Frege claimed. Husserl also makes a distinction between meaning and reference. In his *Logical Investigations* we find that Husserl makes a threefold distinction between subjective mental content, objective entities, and abstract entities.

Linguistic meanings as an intentional entity are ontologically separated from the grasp of consciousness. Husserl claims meaning to be an act character, a part of phenomenological experience, whereas Wittgenstein rejected the appeal of inner experience. According to Husserl, “The meaning expressed as the *Bedeutung* of the words is the meaning, the noematic sinn, of the underlying act. This meaning is what is communicated from speaker to hearer” (qtd. in Smith and McIntyre, *Husserl and* 180). Husserl has a general view that the words used in speech act express their meaning through ‘noematic act’ of consciousness. Actually, the intentional act which refers to an object is the primary unit of consciousness. Husserl says that the referring

to the meaning of a sentence is regarded as a reflective act of thinking. The act of experiencing the object by the mind is called *noesis*. McIntyre and Smith aptly indicate,

The key to understanding both linguistic and mental representation, then, is the notion of meaning. Nonetheless, we would emphasize one huge difference between these two kinds of representations. Linguistic expressions are representational because of their meanings we face, but a linguistic expression cannot give meaning to itself ... the representational or intentional character of language is “derivative”, derivative from the fact that we conscious beings can give meaning to various sounds and marks. Thus, the meanings that made linguistic expressions representational come to them from “outside”. By contrast, Husserl holds, the representational or intentional character of our mental states comes to them from the “inside”. The noesis of an act is an intrinsic part of the (“real”) phenomenological content of that act itself, and the chief role of the noesis is to give “meaning” to the act. (*Theory of* 150-151)

There are two different levels in understanding the meaning: (a) Linguistic level and (b) Phenomenological level. Linguistic level deals with empirical consciousness of the mind while phenomenological level deals with pure or transcendental consciousness of mind. The ‘noema’ belongs to the empirical sphere and ‘intuitive act’ belongs to the realm of pure consciousness, whereas ‘noesis’ is considered as an actual act of experiencing the object. However, ‘noema’ is a particular method of experience the object. Therefore ‘noema’ is not a real part of the act.

Mohanty’s Points

In his theory of meaning, the misleading point is “Meanings are ideal entities.” The conception of making a distinction between ‘meaning’ and ‘reference,’ Husserl has taken the mentioned thought from Frege, and he extended it beyond linguistic expressions just through the act of consciousness. Husserl feels that the understanding of pure phenomenological analysis is possible in terms of the disconnection of the mind from the objects of the external world. Here his process was to bracket the objective world to know the conception of selfhood or conscious being. Generally this process of bracketing and the achieving of selfhood is called the transcendental phenomenology. Here Husserl’s purpose is to find out the realm of universal consciousness that leads him to accept the transcendental subjectivity that is beyond the necessity of objective world. Husserl takes up consciousness as relation. Actually, it is a relation that means an object by upholding the meaning act. Brentano aims to distinguish between the physical phenomena and the psychological phenomenon from the perspective of intentionality. Brentano believes that intentionality is exclusively applicable to psychological phenomenon. Husserl takes a U-turn from Brentano by initiating the idea of mental inexistence of an object. For Brentano, the intentional experience denotes

an appearing object as such (Mohanty, *The Possibility* 17-20). But Husserl adds that not only a phenomenon in this sense refers to an appearing object as such, but it also means certain intentional experiences. As intentional experience points out a range of fashions to the objects, so we should accept some intentional sense, which is allied to the presentative experiences. Husserl thinks that the Brentanian idea of the intentional is affected by the problem of ambiguity. He tries to evade psychical phenomenon and reinstate the word intentional experience, which specify the characteristic of intention that always leads towards something objective. Here the important thing is that in *Logical Investigations*, Husserl introduces the idea of intentionality as the very essence of consciousness instead of intentionality as an act of consciousness. As he allowed the prominent idea of pure ego which cannot be reduced, so the essential aspect of the sphere of experience would depend on the two noteworthy ideas.

First, every cogito is directed to an object, and secondly, we should accept necessarily a cogito of this ego. Husserl looks at intentionality as a unique experience. Though we cannot claim that every experience has some intentionality, the understanding of the way of intentionality rests on experience. In the case of everyday experience, the directness towards correlated objects may not be available. Here, the conception of intentionality remains concealed. Basically, Husserl avoids the term physical phenomenon to facilitate the term 'experience' in the sense of *intentional experience*. Here intention obviously indicates the reference of something objective. Husserl also thinks that expression and intention is an act, i.e. aiming at something. Mohanty quoted from Husserl,

The location "intentional experience referring to an object" should not be construed as meaning that two things are present in experiences, an object and an intentional act directed towards it. Only one thing is present, an intentional experience, and "if this experience is present, then *eo ipso* and through its own essence (we must insist), the intentional 'relation' to an object is achieved, and an object is 'intentionally presented'." (*Intentionality* 71)

In *Logical Investigations*, we find that though Husserl thinks meaning and species do not coincide, yet he believes in "meaning as species." Mohanty says that the conception of "Meaning are ideal entities" are coming from the other conception of ideal entities which is regarded as 'essences.' He also thinks that there is a sharp distinction between the meaning of $\sqrt{4}$ and the essence or number 2. Even the concept of essence is an ontological concept while meaning is an epistemological concept, which is also regarded as a medium of reference. Therefore, we may consider essences as entities, but not meaning as such. Now one may ask, "Are all Husserlian essences meaning"? Mohanty refutes this thinking to say, "They all are certainly objects of possible reference. Just as one and the same real thing may be referred to

through different meanings. So one and the same essence (the number 2, for example) may be referred through the different meanings (for example, the meanings of ‘ $\sqrt{4}$ ’ and $3\sqrt{8}$ ’)” (*On Husserl's* 230).

Mohanty also claims that Husserl’s meaning theory is not a linguistic theory; it is actually a speech act. Derrida’s points seem to be a powerful criticism of Husserl’s theory of meaning. Mohanty thinks that Derrida is mainly trying to attack on the metaphysical presuppositions of Husserl’s phenomenology to show that it is based on a separation of expression from the indicative sign. For Husserl an expression is an indication in communicative speech. However, he turns away from communicative speech to solitary monologue where we will not find any indicative function of our ascribing expressions as Derrida claimed against Husserl. Because speaker’s inner mental states are something his/her own. Here Derrida finds a kind of ‘reduction’ from the physical event to inner speech. But Mohanty criticizes Derrida’s thinking to suggest that in solitary monologue speech refers to the world. Therefore, Derrida makes a mistake to think that Husserl’s idea of indicative function covers all that falls subject to the reductions, factuality, and world of existence etc. Now Mohanty opposes, “Husserl’s general theory of the ideality of meaning, then, does not need his reduction of speech to “inner monologue.” On the contrary, it would seem to need “sharability” and “communicability”” (*On Husserl's* 241). Derrida points out that there is an unfailing complicity submerged between the idealization and speech. He says, “ideality of the object needs that the consciousness of it should be non-empirical” (75-76). Mohanty’s response to Derrida sounds to me more intriguing as he says,

There also lurks in this argument of Derrida’s deep misunderstanding of what the relation is between empirical and transcendental consciousness in Husserl’s Philosophy—a relation, a ‘Parallelism’, which Husserl often characterized as the wonder of all wonders. (*On Husserl's* 244)

Concluding Remarks

Both Husserl and Wittgenstein make a distinction between ‘meaning’ and ‘essence.’ Wittgenstein thinks that ‘essence’ is the result of language going on holiday. Essence is expressed by grammar, which is related to the family resemblance. Husserl, an opponent constructed the idea of transcendental essence under phenomenological reduction. Our mental picture theory of meaning is not ‘copy theory of perception.’ Actually, Husserl’s aim is to bring the conception of phenomenological reduction to bracket the real existence of perceived objects. Husserl seems to argue that there is a ‘naivety’ that we may find in Wittgenstein’s theory of language. Wittgenstein presupposed the conception of language, thought and reality in his meaning theory without making any inquiry of their own foundation. We need to search for foundation otherwise; our philosophy will mislay its ground. Husserl and Wittgenstein both believe

in the description attitude of language. But Husserl's conception of description arises from phenomenological ground that reduced level of ordinary language, while Wittgenstein portrayed it through the ordinary language level. We can find a keen distinction between Husserl's and Wittgenstein's theory of meaning here. In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein writes that a picture may be true or false from the perspective of reality. Husserl quietly supports this thinking. His intentionality theory says that the 'noematic' meaning relates to the object through the consciousness. So here an intuitive grasp of the internal object is relevant than the perceived objects. Ayer aptly points out, "Wittgenstein's well known dictum an 'inner process' stands in need of outward criteria is pedagogically true" (77). For Wittgenstein meaning is not something like an internal phenomenon. To him meaning is considered as a considerable communal embedding. For Husserl, every real object is 'bracketed' by the phenomenological reduction. Every intentional experience has its intentional object that is relied on its objective meaning. Husserl's thought promulgates that the mindless world cannot be possible, but world less mind exists. Because Husserl believes that though intentionality is a fundamental feature of consciousness, but that does not confirm that the intentional object really exists, as the existent of the external world is accidental for Husserl. Husserl intends to emphasize a difference between conceiving of the subject as an object in the world and conceiving of the subject as a subject in the world. Zahavi puts Husserl's thought in this way that seems more stimulating,

Husserl's formulations and terminology are not always transparently clear, but I think the central idea that eventually crystallizes is something like the following: Husserl consistently claims that reality can only appear thanks to subjectivity. But eventually he came to the realization that the subject does not remain untouched by its constitutive performance, but is, on the contrary, drawn into it, just as constitution is not simply a relation involving a singular subject and the world, but rather something that must be considered as inter subjective process. (363)

Wittgenstein's theory of meaning takes a clear shortcut to externalism to say that there is nothing like private rule following. The thinking is that without any social sanction the conception of the 'use of language' will be unfeasible. However, Husserl's transcendental phenomenology is close to internalist view. Husserl believes in eidetic reduction from fact to essence and then a reduction of the object facts to the unities of meaning given in the subjective experience. Actually, intentionality has been understood by Husserl as the unique characteristic of experience to be consciousness of something. The phenomena, which are presented to consciousness is regarded as apodictically self-given reality. The idea of an object (*noema*) is intuitively grasped by the cogitation that must be related to the internal object.

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