IS 'NAMING' JUST PLAYING A 'GAME'?

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In his *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*[1] Wittgenstein propounds a theory how and what names mean, and he then uses this theory as the core of his theory of how all words in language have meaning. In this paper my attempt is to understand what role the concept of 'Game' has in the *Philosophical Investigations*[2] given that it plays a central role in the Tractarian theory of meaning. Thus, the problem is : in the *Investigations*, does Wittgenstein reject the theory of naming given in the *Tractatus* ? My interest, to discuss the theory of naming, is not so much in the question which words in a language are names[3] , but in the question how we can describe and explain the linguistic role which names fulfil. In this context, 'naming' should not be taken to refer solely to certain acts such as the naming of pet cats or dogs, though such acts may be an important part of any correct account of how names function. I shall show, that in the *Investigations* Wittgnstein, by introducing the remarkable concept of 'game', accepts the description and explanation of how names function which he gives in the *Tractatus*. That is to say he has remodelled his early conception of 'names' and 'naming' making sufficient provisions for a game model semantics, than rejecting them.

I

The Tractarian theory of names is explicitly seen from the following important passages :

1.   Objects are simple[4].
2.   A name means an object. The object is its meaning[5].

3.   In a proposition a name is the representative of an object[6].

It is imperative, now, to compare these statements of *Tractatus* with some remarks Wittgenstein gives in *Investigations* about names and namimg. As Wittgenstein writes:

> The word 'to signify' is perhaps used in the most straight-forward way when the object signified is marked with the sign. Suppose that the tools A uses in building bear certain marks. When A shows his assistant such a mark, he brings the tool that has that mark on it. It is in this and more or less similar ways that a name means and is given to a thing.- It will often prove useful in philosophy to say to ourselves : naming is something like attaching a label to a thing[7].

This conception comes up to his mind when he says further :

> ... To repeat - naming is something like attaching a label to a thing. One can say that this is preparatory to the use of a word. But what is it preparation for?[8]

Again, to make more substantial to the above passages Wittgenstein tellingly remarks :

> ... It is important to note that the word 'meaning' is being used illicitly if it is used to signify that the thing 'corresponds' to the word. That is to confound the meaning of a name with the bearer of the name. When Mr. N.N. dies one says that the *bearer* of the name dies, not that the meaning dies...[9]
>
> ...And the meaning of a name is sometimes explained by pointing to its bearer[10].

An examination of the passages of *Tractatus*, especially 3.22 seems to expound a theory of naming which is essentially in agreeent with the passages of *Investigations*, sect. 15 and 43. If this agreement is accepted, there is a temptation to think that Wittgenstein does not change his views of naming when he wrote the *Investigations*. However, it can not be ignored to see that there is a direct opposition between *Investigations* sect. 40 and 3.203 from the *Tractatus*. So, the temptation to see agreement between the *Investigations* and the *Tractatus* about a basic theory of naming is made

problematic by this discrepancy in the cited passages and it definitely needs a dissolution.

In favour of Wittgenstein, my key to resolving it lies in separating two aspects of a theory of naming. Naming also represents referring or denoting. On the one hand, a theory of naming must tell us what the semantic or linguistic role of names is. In view of *Tractatus*, it must tell us what the distinctive contribution is which names make to the truth conditions of propositions in which they occur. This aspect of a theory of naming is satisfied by the claim made at 3.22, i.e. 'In a proposition a name is the representative of an object.'

Besides, a theory of naming explains the relation of things or objects to names. As the first part of a theory of the meaing of names puts the thesis that a name is intended as the representative of an object, and thus it compels us to raise some questions like (i) What sorts of things can names be representatives of ?, and (ii) what is the precise nature of the relationship between a thing and its name ?

In answering these questions, as it seems, Wittgenstein never abandons his original claim about the linguistic role of names but that he believes it a mistake both in trying to explain in a uniform way how a name corresponds to its bearer, and in trying to justify, as condition of meaningfulenss, the existence of bearers of names. In other words, he thinks, that these questions are superfluous since they are simply not properly part of the theory of meaning of names.

According to Wittgenstien, as seen above, the function of a name is like that of a label and it fulfils its role by being 'attached' to that thing which it names, i.e. a bearer of the name. The label metaphor is different from anything which occurs in the *Tractatus*, though the point of the metaphor is essentially the same as the point of aphorism 3.22. However, it is quite clear that Wittgenstein intends his comparison of names and labels to be metaphorical. Obviously, there is nothing as expectation to have access to the bearer of a name in precisely the same way as it has in the case of

label and thing labelled. A bottle in a medicinal discoures, for example, has its label stuck on to it, whereas there can only be a figurative sense in which 'Moses' is attached to Moses. But, the important feature of the metaphor is that the name gets attached to its bearer, the linguistic role of the name that it has. That is to say, a name is semantically significant in association with its bearer. Wittgenstein describes that the linguistic (Semantic) role of names is like that of labels but that it is not part of that role to guarantee that the item labelled exists[11]. Even names that do not, in fact, have a bearer can have meaning though their linguistic role can still be described as like that of a label which purports to label something. Wittgenstein believes that a name can be like a label without postulating a necessarily existent 'object' as a bearer of the name. The trouble with this aspect of the *Tractatus* view of naming is that it tries to get too much out of the idea that a name can be used to label an object. But, as he claims so far :

> Naming appears as *queer* connexion of a word with an object. - And you really get such a queer connexion when the philosopher tries to bring out the relation between name and thing by starting at an object in front of him and repeating a name .... innumerable times[12].

This passage suggests that on account of the linguistic role of names, as Wittgenstein claims, naming is preparatory for language[13]. The view that naming is preparatory to the use of a word in language is easy to misunderstand. Wittgenstein's view is not like an empirical claim about the order in which a language is learnt. As in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein contends that names have meaning only in the 'nexus of a proposition'. This thesis comes, as in the case of semantic determinants of names, due to Frege[14] and is echoed in the *Investigations*. As Wittgenstein very aptly remarks :

> Naming is so far not a move in the language-game-any more than putting a piece in its place on the board is a move in chess. We may say : *nothing* has so far been done, when a thing is named. It has not even got a name except in the language-game. This was what Frege meant too, when he said that a word had meaning only as part of a sentence.[15]

This passage matters to belive as when Wittgenstein commits to thesis

that naming is 'preparatory to the use of a word in language' he does not tell us to think that, as a matter of empirical fact, a child first learns names of things and then uses these names in his language. Rather, an association which a child is trained to make between a name and a thing only becomes that of naming when it is part of some language-game in which the child engages. Associating itself is also playing a game. So, language-game as described by Wittgenstein consists of answering questions such as : What is that called ? - or inventing names of objects and saying: this is ...[16] However, this ostensive activity does not alter the basic conception which Wittgenstein makes in the *Investigations*. He says : 'A thing has not even *got* a name except in the language-game.'[17] It is a conceptual point which Wittgenstein makes in describing naming as preparatory to the use of a word in language and not a point about language acquisition. Language acquisition has its own semantic contents so far as language represents the reality i.e. the world as very rightly noted by Carruthers'[18]. This is the contents have during his transition period Wittgenstein finds in-compatible with the *Tractatus* view of naming by how Frege's concept of 'sense' is justified in different ways in the *Tractatus* and *Investigations*. In the *Tractatus* the meaning of a proposition is given by the truth condition of the proposition. This truth condition is explained by the picture theory, which is an account of the relation between a proposition and state of affairs of which it is a picture or model. The truth condition is considered an *at least* potential part'[19] of a reality which is modelled in the proposition, and that is why the *Tractatus* is said to offer a realist account of meaning'[20]. The meaning of a name, then, is that constituent of reality which name picks out i.e. an object. However, a name only does this 'Picking out' by being itself a constituent in a proposition, a picture of reality. So in the *Tractatus*, as it seems, Wittgenstein takes care of Frege's principle by appealing to a reality theory of names and propositions[21]. Meaning is explained in terms of truth conditions and truth conditions were themselves thought of in a realist way as being 'combinations of objects', 'states of affairs'. The meaning of a name is, then, that object in a state of affairs which the name represented in the proposition which pictured that state of affairs.

It is very much pursuasive to see that in the *Investigations* the realist explanation of meaning has been criticised and Frege's principle is given a different justification[22]. Wittgenstein's later conception of language modelled by his key concept of 'language-game' has brought into sharp focus the view that language is a system[23], and this system represents' a system of propositions'[24]' woven into the fabric of human life'. Afterall, language is seen as' a rule involved activity'[25] that represents a form of life replacing the atomistic conception so much espoused by Frege, Russell, Carnap, Ayer and logician-analysts alike. The very simplistic representational function is dropped in advance of Wittgenstein's later look at use of the language relating it with our life. Naming, then, is treated as preparatory for the use of words in language and the use of words in laguage is explained in terms of language-games. In language-games statements have roles in the context of our actions. The use of words as names is conceptually dependent on the use of statements and statements earn their meaningufulness as asserted in the various life-situations that form assertibility conditions for them. Using Wittgenstein's own analogy, now we would be able to describe naming as like putting the chess pieces on the board. Doing this, however, is not yet making moves in the game, but it is a necessary prerequisite to making moves. Here making moves, in genuine sense, is like using statements in the wider context of actions, i.e. engaging in language-games. Moreover, it is the possibility of making such moves which gives point to our putting and operating the pieces on the board. Unless there is the game of chess, our placing of various pieces of wood on a board would not be 'placing chess pieces in their place in preparation for a gane'. The interdependence of names and sentences as found in the *Investigations*, is every bit as important as the interdependence of names and propositions in the *Tractatus*, though the explanation of these interdependences is so different that we are apt to lose sight of the continuity as noted by Malcom[26].

II

Now, it can be said that there is some sort of continuity in Wittgenstein's treatment of names in the *Tractatus* and *Investigations* with

respect to the semantic role of names. No doubt, in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein gives in detail a realist view of propositions and names, and in the *Investigations* and other works of his later philosophy he emphatically remodells this realism by assertibility conditions that represent the various forms of life. Accordingly the concept of 'naming' appears just as a 'game' i.e. chess and its role is as 'playing the game'. However this conception seems to be a controversial issue and some thinkers, e.g. P.Carruthers,[27] J.V.Cenfield,[28] P.K.Sen[29] etc. think that the *Investigations* offers a radically different theory of naming from any which can be found in the *Tractatus*. Considering the evidences from the later works of Wittgenstein and clues from semantic roles that names have, we may extend an alternative theory to see how the concept of 'naming' is more likely to be correct and near to Wittgenstein's later understanding of language.

In developing his arguments in a more enternenced manner the clues come from the *Investigations as* Wittgenstein tellingly puts :

> Consider this example. If one says "Moses did not exist", this may mean various things .... We may say, follwing Russell : the name 'Mouse" can be defined by means of various descriptions ....
>
> And this can be expressed like this : I use the "N" without a fixed meaning.
> (But that detracts as little from its usefulness, as it detracts from that of a table that it stands on four legs instead of three and so sometimes wobbles.[30]

That is, in this passage Wittgenstain uses proper names as examples of words whose usefulness is in no way impaired by the vagueness which seems to attach to them. This argument of vagueness, I shall suggest, begins with earlier remarks of the *Investigations* (i.e. Sect. 65) and continues upto the section 79 and then the discussion on the concept of rule sets out. What should make us substantial in understanding Wittgenstein's theory of naming is Russell's theory of descriptions[31]. This theory is called a 'definite descriptions theory'. According to Russell "I" is also a logically proper name, i.e. it is one of the items that have all the responsibility of a proper name. However, 'SATRUGHNA' is a proper name by courtesy; it is nothing but a disguised description. Though Russell's theory of descriptions has been severely criticised by Strawson, this theory

more or less has some positive bearings upon Wittgenstein in understanding his theory of 'names' and 'naming'. Without going on in detail for Russell's theory of description or all the criticisms which have been levelled at it, however, it is imperative to us to find out the theory of naming Wittgenstein tells in the *Investigations*, Sect. 79 due to limitation of our discussion, and that may be construed as 'an emendation of this theory'.

A careful reading of the passage 79 in the *Investigation* gives us sufficient clues to cope two major problems relating to the definite descriptions theory of names, viz, (1) it is perfectly imaginable that one or more of the definite descriptions of which the name is said to be an abbreviation do not pick out the appropriate individual, though this along may not make us want to give up the name as meaningful, and (2) it may well happen that two people who use a name think of it as abbreviating different definite descriptions. But it seems inconsistent to conceive that one and the same name can be used correctly to refer to a particular person and so have totally different meanings.

In accordance with these negative implications of a definite theory, according to some critics[32], in explaining the *Investigations* sect. 79 Wittgenstein advocates a 'liberal descriptions theory'[33]. According to this theory, the meaning of the name is determined by a set of descriptions but this set is flexible and liberal. It can vary from one user of a name to another. Thus, the name 'SATRUGHNA' is connected with a large set of definite descriptions; 'a research scholar in philosophy', a lover of Wittgenstein, 'a post graduate product of Utkal University' etc. In fact any one or several of this set can turn out not to specify a person uniquely. However, it does not impress the liberal descriptions theory as advocated by Wittgenstein. For, according to this theory, a name is not simply a precision for some specified descriptions. Advocating such a theory John Searle points out;

> If the criteria for proper names were in all cases quite rigid and
> specific then a proper name would be nothing more than a shorthand
> for these criteria, a proper name would function exactly like an

elaborate definite description. But the uniqueness and immense pragmatic convenience of proper names in our language lie precisely in the fact that they enable us to refer publicly to objects without being forced to raise issues and come to agreement on what descriptive characteristics exactly constitute the indentity of the object. They function as pegs on which to hang descriptions[34].

Searle supports a liberal theory of descriptions since he believes in an action-model theory of meaning[35]. For him, describing or giving descriptions to a name represents some sort of actions that a speaker performs in language. So names seem like containers i.e. pegs according to Searle on which descriptions are kept. Naming thus, represents describing an object or individual, which is an action itself. Actions define criteria or conditions under which our naming, describing becomes meaningful. Searle seems to come very close to Wittgenstein in advocating a liberal theory of descriptions. As Wittgenstein tells us :

> In order to describe the phenomenon of languaage *one must describe a practice*, not something that happens once, no matter of what kind[36] (italics mine).

Wittgenstein himself also, as the *Investigations* sect. 79 shows, attacks a definite descriptions theory, unique model of naming or defining an object so as it justifies his acceptance of a liberal theory of descriptions over and above as in Russell. Naming for him is just participating in a game and so can be said with puting descriptions to a name. The impulsion behind him to formulate this conception is to say, 'to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life'[37] and 'that is' where we ought to have said; *this language-game is played*[38].

To sum up : for Wittgenstein, descriptions used liberally or in definite sense matter nothing but presuppose language. And that is, what he remarkably says, 'naming is preparatory to language' from which our discussion on the issue concerning to 'names' and 'naming' begins with. What we can say something more is that 'names' and 'naming' are constituents of our 'system' and 'naming' barring everything *queer* reveals involving in

this system. Language represents a system and *vice-versa*

NOTES

1.   L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, trans.
     D.F. Pears and B.F. MCGuinness (Routledge and
     Kegan Paul, London, 1961).
2.   L.Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans.
     G.E.M. Anscombe (Blackwell, Oxford, 1953),
3.   Some philosophers have maintained that words like 'red' and 'pain' no less
     than ordinary proper names, like 'Moses' function and are meaningful in this
     same way. Of course, there is evidence that Wittgenstein holds such a view
     when he wrote the *Tractatus*.
4.   Wittgenstein, *TLP*, 2.02.
5.   *Ibid*, *TLP* 3.203.
6.   *Ibid.*, *TLP* 3.22.
7.   Wittgenstein, *PI*, Sect. 15.
8.   *Ibid.*, *PI*, Sect. 26.
9.   *Ibid.*, *PI*, Sect. 40.
10   *Ibid.*, *PI*, Sect. 43.
11. *Ibid.*, *PI*, Sect. 41, 42.
12. *Ibid.*, *PI*, Sect. 38.
13. *Ibid.*, *PI*, Sect. 26.
14.* G. Frege, "On Sense and Meaning", in *Philosophical Writings of Gottlob
     Frege.* (ed) M. Black and P.Geach, (Blackwell, Oxford, 1952) PP. 56-78.
15. Wittgenstein, PI, Sect. 49.
16. *Ibid.*, PI. Sect. 27 and also see, Sect. 7, 23, for his concept of 'languagegame'.
17. *Ibid.*, PI, Sect. 49.
18. P. Carruthers, *Tractarion Semantics,* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1989) Chapt. I.
19. G.P. Baker and P.M.S. Hacker, *Scepticism, Rules and language* (Blackwell,
     Oxford, 1984) Chapt. I. As they say it is a 'Potential" part of reality because
     the state of affairs may not obtain.
20. Diane F. Gottlieb, "Wittgenstein's Critique of the *Tractatus* View of Rules",
     Synthese, 56 (1983) PP.126-151.

21   Frege, *"Logic" in Posthumous Writings*, eds. H.Harmes, F.Kambartel, and F. Kaulback, trans. By P.Long and White (Blackwell, Oxford, 1979) PP.126-151.

22.   M.Dummett, *The Interpretation of Frege's Philosophy*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge-Mass, 1982).

23.   Wittgenstein *PI*. Sect. 122.

24.   Wittgenstein, *OC*. Sect. 141, 225.

25.   Rule concept is very much prominent in Wittgenstein's philosophy of language. For a detail discussion on the rule concept see, S.Behera, *Rule Scepticism : A Study in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein & Kripke*, (Anu Books, Meerut, India, 2000).

26.   N. Malcolm, *Wittgenstein : Nothing is Hidden*, (Blackwell Oxford, 1986) P. 27.

27.   P.Carruthers, *Tractatarian Semantics*. Chapt. I & II.

28.   J.V.Canfield, *Wittgenstein : Language and world* (U-mass Press, 1981).

29.   P.K.Sen, 'Wittgenstein and the context principle, in *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research*, Vol. VIII, No. 3, 1991, PP. 19-28.

30.   Wittgenstein, *PI*, Sect. 79.

31.   Bertrand Russell, "Descriptions' in *Classics of Analytic Philosophy* (ed) by Robert R. Ammerman (Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing Company Ltd. Bombay -New Delhi, 1965).

32.   Suresh Chandra, "Wittgenstein and Starwson on the Ascription of Experiences", in *Philosophy & Phenomenological Research*, March, 1981, PP.280-298.

33.   Suresh Chandra, "Wittgenstein's Reaction to Russell-Strawson controversy on Referring expressions" in the *Research Journal of Philosophy* (Prajna) Vol-VIII, 1987, PP. 1-21, P.G. Deptt, of Philosophy, Utkal University, Bhubaneshwar, Orissa.

34.   Searle, Jhon. R. "Proper Names" in *Mind* Vol. 69, 1958, P. 172.

35.   Searle, "What is a Speech Act ? "in the *Philosophy of Language* ('ed) J.R. Searle (Oxford, University Press, 1971)

36.   Wittgenstein, *RFM*, V, 34,

37.   *Ibid., PI*, Sect. 19.

38.   *Ibid., PI*, Sect. 654.

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