

## WITTGENSTEIN'S USE OF 'GRAMMATICAL'

( The purpose of this paper is to bring to the focus Wittgenstein's orientation towards removal of philosophical puzzles and misconstructions by appeal to the grammar of language and to analyze his method of so doing by means of various examples. The logical distinction as also linguistic misconstructions brought forward emphasise the importance of his use of 'grammar'. Grammar, for him, guides all our linguistic practice such that any diversion from it is to be checked by using grammatical criteria. )

Philosophy, as viewed by Wittgenstein, is an activity of removing mistakes. By what criterion does he think it plausible to accomplish his task? Grammar is what, for him, guides our use of language. Any breach of grammatical rule—semantical or syntactical is the source of puzzles. And also, because of not viewing assertion in their proper context or viewing them after the analogy of scientific questions—hankering after the definitive account or over-all survey—forgetting the task of philosophy as clarification that appeal to grammar is justified. Wittgenstein comes to the fore enabling the duped philosopher realise the necessity of being aware of the grammar of language.

Grammar, as Wittgenstein uses it, is different from the grammar of ordinary English that we speak and appears to be equivalent to the logic of language. The rules of grammar pervade our use of language, they are inherent in our linguistic practice which is realised by those who have language sense.

The notion of 'grammar' is heavily worked out in *The Blue Book*, but nowhere clarified. Wittgenstein speaks of the grammar of words like 'to know,' 'chair,' taking the question "What is the grammar of the word?" as being the same as "How is the word used?" Asking the question "What is the meaning of the word 'to know'?" is, on his view, a question concerning the grammar of the word 'to know.' He speaks of the grammar of expression such as "expecting *B* from 4 to 4.30," of the grammar of phrases like "sense data." He also speaks of the grammar of sentences "*A* has a gold tooth" and also speaks of the grammar of statements and propositions. "Grammar enables us to express true and false propositions; and it does so

tells us something about the world. What can be expressed about the world by grammar being what it is cannot be expressed in a proposition. For this proposition would presuppose its own truth, i.e. presuppose grammar."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it is only the linguistic entities which are subject to grammar. The sense of words, phrases and sentences is determined by the rules for their use.

The term is employed equivocally. It is used to mean the study and description of the rules of language and also to mean the network of rules themselves. By eliciting the rules of grammar we may show which combination of words are legitimate. By describing rules of language, in particular, the rules determining the sense of sentences, it will become clear that certain kinds of expression and sentences are nonsensical and thus withdrawn from circulation and excluded from language.<sup>2</sup>

The coining of the term "grammar" should not be thought of as an alternative to the ordinary English grammar. There is an important difference in the aims for the study of grammar as pursued by the linguist and the philosopher. The philosophers are concerned to get rid of certain puzzles arising from the use of expressions permitted by English. That is to say, philosophers are "pulling ordinary grammar to bits."<sup>3</sup>

What is a rule of grammar? and what kind of rules are there? Wittgenstein never attempts to classify grammatical rules, nor even to give us a canonical form of corresponding rule-specifying sentences. He conceives of grammar not as the essence of language which could be arrived at after logical analysis. As he says, "in philosophy we give rules of grammar wherever we encounter a difficulty,"<sup>4</sup> thereby taking a grammatical rule as one of a kind governing our linguistic practices.

On his view, "philosophical trouble arises through seeing a system of rules and seeing that things do not fit it."<sup>5</sup> Wittgenstein gives innumerable examples of cases such as "Time flows," "I feel that the depth of water is five feet," "I seem to have toothache," "Goodness is red," "All that is real is my experience," which all result from grammatical confusion. These several cases brought forward breach either of the semantical rules or of the syntactical ones. Some are nonsensical, whereas others result from looking or viewing the expression out of context. Wittgenstein goes to the extent of calling 'philosophy' the activity of

pointing out mistakes, mistakes which arise when language is used automatically, without thinking about the rules of grammar.<sup>6</sup>

Wittgenstein illustrates by examples the cases in which semantical rules of language--use are breached by being misled by the analogy between cases. There is a sentence "River flows." It conveys information about an event. This leads us to make up sentences of which we say that they also ought to make sense like "Time flows." This particular sentence has no use; but because it sounds English we consider it sensible. Take another example. Many varied statements are used to express the 'locality of thought', or even to express the 'location' of a thing. It can be said, without absurdity that thinking takes place in our mind, in the head, on the paper. We should not be misled by the apparent similarity of their linguistic form into the false conception of their grammar, as none of them can be said to be giving *the* locality of thinking.<sup>7</sup> "Thinking takes place in our mind" seems alright; but the semantics of our language makes the expression appear absurd. The temptation to locate thinking or thought arises because of the presence of words like "writing", and "speaking" which denote bodily activities; "when words in our ordinary language have prima facie analogous grammar we are inclined to try to interpret them analogously; i. e., we try to make the analogy hold throughout."<sup>8</sup>

Though such expressions are rampant in philosophy, this does not show them to be inappropriate (as they can be given sense for particular purposes). But if they are used ordinarily we ought to 'understand their 'working' their 'grammar,' see that their prima facie form does not beguile us; as "proceeding by a grammatical analogy without having worked out the analogy in a detail"<sup>10</sup> is the source of philosophical misunderstanding.

Can it be said that Wittgenstein has not been able to free himself of the Tractarian view according to which the outward clothing of our language makes everything look alike; therefore we need to look into it. Elsewhere<sup>11</sup> he makes a distinction between 'surface grammar' and 'depth grammar' after having abandoned the task of building up the 'super structure.'

There can be no denying that Wittgenstein uses the same terms, but with a new sense. He impresses on us that the grammar of our ordinary language allows us to construct sentences irrespe-

ctive of semantical rules, that we build up combination of words which appear English but in fact they are erroneous. Moreover, the sentences needs to be placed in a proper surrounding. The meaning of it depends on the use we make of it against a certain background. As the sentence "Fetch me that book," might be uttered as a command or a request. It very much depends on the context whether it has to be taken as a command or a request. I will deal with this respect of the proper placement of the utterance or statements in the sequel. It would suffice for the present if we deal with the other related issues discussed by Wittgenstein. The syntactic misappropriation tackled by him rather belong to the 'surface structure' level, that is to say they concern the linguistic forms which are not even permitted by English. The statement 'I feel that this pencil is five inches long' seems to impart information; but only if a person is asked to make a guess, but he can do this if he had learned how to measure, and he knows how much five inches would approximate. But, if such a statement is made by a person who thinks that such a statement must be intelligible to others as it does not employ words which are not understood, then we are at a loss to understand. 'By merely explaining the meaning of the words 'five inches' in the usual way we have not yet explained the sense of the phrase 'feeling that the pencil is five inches long.'<sup>12</sup> We must get clear about the grammar of this statement. Of such combination of words which violate syntactic rules we remain undecided. We do not call them nonsense, nor do we say that a person is telling a lie. "But we say that we don't understand the meaning of such a phrase. It combines well-known words, but combines them in a way we don't yet understand. The grammar of this phrase has yet to be explained to us."<sup>13</sup>

Wittgenstein's exhortation that the meaning of a phrase is characterised by its use, throws light on the pragmatics of language-use. "The questions 'What is length?', 'What is meaning?', 'What is the number *one*?' etc., produce in us a mental cramp. We feel that we can't point to anything in reply to them and yet ought to point to something. (We are up against one of the great sources of philosophical bewilderment: a substantive makes us look for a thing that correspond to it)."<sup>14</sup> In reply to such questions as these What is meaning? What is length?, we need not look for some queer sort of entity (substantival or gaseous) accompanying the words, rather we

are to look for the 'use of the sign'. Wittgenstein reminds us that "words have those meanings which we have given them; and we give them meanings by explanation."<sup>15</sup> The replacement of meaning by use brings the question down to earth and helps us of the temptation to look for some object which we might call 'the meaning.'

He advocates the use theory of meaning to suggest different possible ways in which words may be used, as he think it absurd to expect the concept to conform to the narrow possibilities. "Thus your mental cramp is relieved, and you are free to look around the field of use of the expression and to describe the different kinds of uses of it."<sup>16</sup>

Wittgenstein brings forward a list of uses that may be performed by words. "Think of words as instruments characterised by their use.. A great variety of games is played with the sentences of our language: Giving and obeying orders; asking questions and answering them: describing an event; telling a fictitious story; telling a joke; describing an immediate experience making conjectures about events in the physical world; making scientific hypotheses and theories; greeting someone, etc., etc."<sup>17</sup> To this, it may be added importantly that noticing the different functions performed by one and the same word dispels the fog. Different meanings of a word should not lead one to think that those are different words and also that these different meanings together do not give us *the* meaning. It is also possible for different words to have the same meaning.

Besides bringing in these subtle distinction of sentence formation, Wittgenstein very meticulously draws attention to the other sources of grammatical misunderstandings which arise from ignoring the context, or from having been beguiled by the precision of the scientific procedures, from confusing typical philosophical questions as being experiential, or from misinterpreting grammatical rules.

It is because of the temptation to model philosophy after the sciences that problems crop up. As every discipline of science offers definitions of its terms, since they use them in a peculiar way, the philosopher fascinated by such precision adopts their method. He asks "What is time?", "What is meaning?" as if definition would answer the problem of time or meaning.

Puzzled by the *grammar* of the word 'Time' he asks for its definition. But the question "What is time?" is an utterance of unclarity, of mental discomfort.<sup>18</sup> It is thought that Time could be measured after the analogy of the measurement of length. But here the puzzled philosopher oscillates between two levels. He started with the problem of Time as if he had wanted to locate "Time" as some ethereal reality; but being aware that we talk of present, past and future also, he tries to retain the usage of Time intact and gets entangled in his own rules.<sup>19</sup>

In philosophy such questions as 'What is the soul?' 'What is God?' occur frequently. Questions as these are asked on the analogy of scientific questions 'What is salt?' 'What is water?' where the answers are given by the analysis of their chemical composition. But answers to philosophical questions framed after the model of scientific questions do not consist in such simple answers. These are typically metaphysical questions, questions which express "an unclarity about the grammar of words."<sup>20</sup>

Wittgenstein traces another sort of misconstrual imposed by scientific procedures. That is the 'craving for generality'. He says: "Philosophers constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer questions in the way science does."<sup>21</sup> What the scientists do is to explain the phenomena almost entirely in terms of certain fixed laws. Any wayward instance is not taken as repudiating the law but is relegated to some other explanation of law. The case of those philosophising mathematicians who are led to confusion by the presence of one word "kind" to explain kinds of number, kinds of proposition, kinds of apples, is such a one. They think that there is no difference between the uses of the word "kind."<sup>22</sup>

The cases so far cited point in the direction that philosophers use expressions which are based on analogical considerations between cases far apart. Wittgenstein points out in what sense we are misled by them and the way to unravel them is to show the difference in the grammar of those uses. He goes about it as if that alone would yield the solution.

It is time for us to consider such grammatical statements as 'I cannot have his toothache.' Experiential statements such as 'I can't carry the scuttle' look very much like the former ones.

Are these grammatical statements stating some matter of fact proposition? When I say, 'I can't feel his toothache' am I saying that because of there being a barrier of bodies that I can't feel his toothache? But, the grammar of 'having toothache' is very different from that of 'having a piece of chalk.' In saying that 'I can't feel his toothache' I am not stating a fact that the other does not have a toothache. "The difficulty lies in the grammar of 'having toothache.' Nonsense is produced by trying to express in a proposition something which belongs to the grammar of our language. By 'I can't feel his toothach' is meant that I can't try. It is the character of the logical *cannot* that one cannot try."<sup>23</sup>

Wittgenstein gives instances of such cases as 'Two books can't have the same colour,' 'The colours green and red cannot be at the same place at the same time,' these suggest physical impossibility. In fact they are instances of logical impossibility. "They are analogous to saying '3 × 18 inches won't go into 3 feet.' This is a grammatical rule and states a logical impossibility."<sup>24</sup> It is only because of their similarity with the expression which expresses physical impossibility like: "Three people can't sit side by side on this bench, they have no room," that we are tempted to treat them alike.

Such statements as 'The room has length,' 'I feel *my* pain', 'Two people can't have the same pain,' are grammtical rules. Statements as these are ones to doubt which would be nonsensical, or taking them to be statements of facts would be absurd. Saying 'A room has length,' results from the very meaning of the word 'room'. It is rather an analytic statement. To say 'I have toothache' or 'I feel my pain' appear queer, but can be said to be meaningful only in certain contexts. Wittgenstein remarks: "Of course, if we exclude the phrase 'I have his toothache' from our language, we thereby also exclude 'I have (or feel) *my* toothache.'"<sup>25</sup>

To recapitulate, Wittgenstein justifies the use of grammar where 'linguistic usage is involved' by innumerable instances in different cases. Grammar, so conceived, describes language by giving rules for the manipulation of symbols into well-framed sentences and statements. It thus "circumscribes language. A combination of words which does not make sense does not belong to language."<sup>26</sup> As every use of language is governed by rules, does

not that impose rigidity on the use of language? No. Rules, no doubt govern our use of language but we are unable to state them or point at them except in cases where the misformulation is obvious. The need for rules arises because "language must be systematic"<sup>27</sup> as rules justify the use of language.

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#### NOTES

1. Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge 1930-32 ed. by Desmond Lee Basil Blackwell Oxford 1980. p. 10.
2. Cf. *Philosophical Investigations* Secs. 498-500 "When a sentence is called senseless, it is not as it were its sense that is senseless. But a combination of words is being excluded from the language, withdrawn from circulation." (Sec. 500)
3. *Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge* 1932-35 p. 31
4. *Ibid*, p. 21.
5. *Ibid*, p. 3.
6. Cf. *Philosophical Investigations* Secs. 132, 38. "Naming appears as a 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 the name and thing by staring at the object in front of him and repeating a name or even the word "this" innumerable times. For philosophical problems arise when language goes on holiday. And here we may indeed fancy naming to be some remarkable act of mind, as it were a baptism of an object...a queer use of this word, which doubtless only occurs in doing philosophy."
7. *The Blue and Brown Books*, p. 8.
8. *Ibid*, p. 7.
9. *Ibid*, p. 8.
10. *Ibid*, p. 9.
11. *Philosophical Investigations*, Sec. 664.
12. *The Blue and Brown Books*, p. 11.
13. *Ibid*, p. 10.
14. *Ibid*, p. 1.
15. *Ibid*, p. 27 Cf. *Philosophical Investigations* Sec. 43
16. Malcolm ..*A Memoir*, p. 50.
17. *The Blue and Brown Books*, pp. 67-68.
18. *Ibid*, p. 26.



19. Cf. *Philosophical Investigations*, Sec. 125.  
"The fundamental fact here is that we lay down rules, a technique, for a game, and that then when we follow the rules, things do not turn out as we had assumed. That we are therefore as it were entangled in our own rules."
20. Wittgenstein, *Op. Cit.*, p. 35.
21. *Ibid*, p. 18.
22. *Ibid*, pp. 28-29.
23. Ambrose ed. *Wittgenstein's Lectures*, p. 8
24. *The Blue and Brown Books*, p. 56.
25. *Ibid*, p. 55.
26. *Wittgenstein's Lectures*, Cambridge 1930-32. p. 48.
27. *Ibid*, p. 48.

