Ludwig Wittgenstein and Language Games
(A Literary Application)

Mirela Arsith[1]

Abstract: The hypothesis is that a language cannot transform only one way, but more *ways of seeing the world*. Therefore, the speakers will not be stuck in a rigid framework of a single belief system. As the modes of discourse are changed, the speakers accomplish, constantly, ideological changes. As Ludwig Wittgenstein sustained, the "key" of our language is not in the mind, but a way of life that pushes us towards certain ways of using signs, which are the language games. Our approach is investigating various language games in the John Fowles' novel *The Magician*, where we have identified not only various types of language games, but, in the spirit of the Austrian origin philosopher, we searched to make our expressions more accurate. We believe that according to the applications on the text *The Magician*, we were able to illustrate how Wittgenstein theme of "language games" can be exploited explicitly in the literature. What we showed is that between the activities called language games there are more relations of functional analogies or conceptual functionality.

Keywords: meaning; language game; thought; literature; analogy

1. Introduction

Different languages encode different perspectives on reality. And it seems quite plausible to assume that the speakers are willing to see a world according to the categories shared by their community. In this way it is relevant the linguistic relativity. The meaning is not a matter of recognition, but of achievement, understanding, awareness and even the achievement of a reality; it is not a question of what the text means, but it is a matter of what the text means for the reader. From this perspective, We do not capture, nor create our world with our texts, but *we interact with* them. Human language occurs in a world that has already intervened in the language.

[1] Associate Professor, PhD, Faculty of Communication and International Relations, "Danubius" University of Galati, Address: 3 Galati Boulevard, 800654 Galati, Romania. Tel.: +40.372.361.102, fax: +40.372.361.290. Corresponding author: arsith.mirela@univ-danubius.ro

2. The Language Games Shape the World

The language patterns are placed in the same plane with patterns of thought: understanding and applied. The consent is an implicit and non-formulated one, but its terms are absolutely obligatory, we could not speak, if we would not subscribe to the organization and classification of data that the consent decrees. The semantic categories are not simply properties of language, but the products of the society in which the language was modeled.

Our texts use to interact with the world, which is enshrined socially, and the one individually understood. In other words, we interpret texts in discourses in different ways. The term "language games" means specific activities in which language plays a decisive role. Language games are those creative exertions which open the access to relevant connections. And to read and "play" the language games it means to understand the language.

According to Ludwig Wittgenstein, there is a close relation between understanding and the implementation capacity of an expression, between understanding and ability to comply with a rule. Mastering the language is to be able to use expressions in different language games to which they belong. The limit is our action that underlies at the basis the language game. By using a language we construct a reality according to our needs. Consistently we humans reconfigure its categories in order to adapt to circumstances, to make it more suitable to the control that we want and to achieve our security.

In this way, the language supports an illusion of stability. It classified things for us, it allows us to label the individual experiences as generalities that we reach ultimately to manage them socially. In this process, which is the individual, it is necessarily suppressed. But this is the price that must be paid for social security.[1]

The emergence of analogy along with the game led to the development of the idea of a game language and, hence, a new technique of philosophical analysis that can be defined as a *method of language game*. Ludwig Wittgenstein said in the *Blue Notebook*: "*I will get the attention in the near future again and again out for what*

---

[1] In psychology, it is spoken of *conformity* and *cooperation*, which are categories that define the social influence ways. The human beings accept such influences mainly from the desire to be accepted in different social groups and to get approval and appreciation of others. We consider that learning and use of a language of a community can be undertaken as linguistic conformity, generated by the need for people to communicate and feel protected by the possibility of being understood by their peers.

you call language games. These are ways of using signs, simpler than those that we use every day, very complicated language signs." (Wittgenstein, 1994, p. 50-51)

We are aware that there are vast stretches of reality, the inner, subjective world of the human being, which lies beyond the conventional saying. We are talking about heart and soul as the closest approximations that we can have, referring to this experience. And even if the use of such words sometimes seems ridiculous to us, no one gives up to express their inner feelings. They have no materiality of the physical reference, but can be represented.

A specific feature is modeling the language literature to represent the understanding that escapes the conventional expression. The effect is to provide relief and effects intended to words that ultimately cannot be explained, but only experienced. The usual correspondence between words and world are destroyed and rebuilt. These matches are usually crucial. They bind us to our world and provide us the necessary illusions of security and control.

2.1. "Wait", "Wait for", "to expect for" "to expect to / as"

Wait for- means staying without doing anything, until someone or something comes or something happens. If you expect someone who is likely to come or something that is likely to occur, we carry out the activities so that we are ready, probably sit still and do nothing else but *to wait*. Wait for what? A Sign:

 "If he cried many times in this way, he said that not too often, three or four times a year when there was no wind and it was full moon. Did he cry for something else? Gustav remembered that there cried for: "I am waiting", "I am purified," "I'm ready." What we heard cried more often." (p. 289)

What Henrik was doing was waiting. He had broken ties with the world, lived a life more than austere. Bread and cheese helped him to resist in this expectation. Henrik was waiting for God. He was ready for a long time for this meeting. He refused the treatment for his eye disease to live more intensely in the imaginary world.[1] Henrik did what it took. All that it was left for him was to wait for a "perceptible" sign at the divine level. That this sign has materialized or not, one can never know for sure. All we can do is to deduce, paying attention to the word

---

[1] This is another language game "*imagine*".

"thank you", which implies the presence of "other" and that he was offered *something* that he wanted:

"Then Henrik said a word then more slowly. It was "takk", the Norwegian word for "thank you". '

We should believe the word of Conchis when he concluded "*His secret was enlightened by source of light that descended upon him.*" We will never know who was the "Other" because we do not, under any circumstances, the possibility to perceive the Inside mind of another. In this situation they are involved at least two language games "explain" and "think". "*I would have given ten years of my life to be able to perceive the inside of his mind. I did not know what he saw, but I knew there was something so powerful, so mysterious, which explained everything.*" (p. 290)

Now let us see what would be the consequences of changing "to wait" with "to expect for" / "to expect" because both contain the word "waiting". If you are waiting for someone or something to happen, do you *think* that it is possible for someone to come or that it is possible that the event takes place, but probably you will not stand still for it and maybe you will not make special preparations. In this case there are signs announcing that there is even a possibility that "Other" comes, or that the event takes place. Thus words are not interchangeable, as Henrik was just expecting the *sign*. The fact that the use of "waiting" makes no sense in the passive voice, it refers to the idea that "waiting" is an action that involves only one person (**I am waited for* is not a correct expression or it does not make sense, while *I am expected to* is correct phrase and it makes sense). Furthermore, waiting is a kind of activity, while "expecting" is a mental state.

In conclusion he was expecting someone: there were two chairs, a table with two cups with their plates, two large plates covered with a cloth and the table was set for two. But the question: "Did I chose well?" Is a clear sign that the waited one was Nicholas. The lack of surprise that Nicholas did not identify on Conchis' face, the naturalness with which he was received represents clear signs that he was the expected.

"From the first moment I realized that I was expected. When our eyes met, he had a vague smile on his face, like a rictus, without any expression of wonder."

In this case, Conchis was the one that was waiting and he was ready. The question that we could formulate: Was he waiting for Nicholas, as identity, or Nicholas, the

young man who held the job of professor at the college on the island? The answer to this question could clarify whether it was simply hazard, or an "arranged Hazard"? We could sustain that Conchis expected "the Professor from England", as they had been expected all the other substitute teachers, who were before Nicholas. Should be Nicholas the chosen one, simply because he had penetrated in Conchis' "territory"?

It is a chance that on the indicator at the gate it was written *SALLE D'ATTENTE* (*Waiting Room*). It is found usually in the station, where people wait for a train to take them to a known or unknown destination or they are between two trains, during which, most often, they seek to fill the time, not to use it. This is because they do not realize that they must fructify those moments as well. According to Conchis, "*life is short.*"

"I came to ask for a glass of water. This is...

 - You came to see me. Please. Life is short." (p. 72)

But usually in a waiting room, people enter a "pause" in their lives. Others, such as Nicholas, see in the station a point of departure for a new life, a new adventure, new expectancies. Before leaving England, according to his behavior with Alison and the note that he left to her, Nicholas did nothing else than to create expectations.

„O, God, if only I was worth waiting for..." (p. 43)

The expression *„I was worth waiting for"* is correct and makes sense in this context, because Nicholas knows that Alison is ready and she just waits for a sign from him. After his transformation, the one that is waiting is Nicholas and he is waiting for a sign from Alison.

 "*And so, I waited*" (p. 643)

"*Waiting. Always waiting*" (p. 655)

What Nicholas tells us when he Alison sees again, at the end of the novel, "*all the time I had expected some spectacular re-entry*, a mysterious phone call, a metaphorical descent, perhaps literally, in a modern Inferno" it leads us to observe that the use of language game "expect" sends us to three other different language games, "to conceive", "to imagine", "to picture".

2.2. "Observe"

Language game "observe" is very important because it may explain why Nicholas fails to correctly interpret the signs. He noticed, but he did not see. The word "observe" may come into two different language games "see" and "rule". In the first game it involves sensorial perception of seeing. And in the second game the "rule" game implies the compliance of requirements. However, Nicholas notices things, he perceived them visually, but the really important things there were always kept in his perceptive field and they did not constitute the objects of perception, to be properly "decoded". This is explained by the fact that he was not interested in people or events significant to him and therefore he was not paying attention either:

"I was only half-attentive; I liked being back with her, not especially with Alison, I liked the fact that I was in the hotel room, that I heard teeming the crowd at the fall oat nightfall, sirens, that I smelled the tired sea. For Alison I felt no attraction, no tenderness..."

And if Nicholas observed things were not directly related to him, but with Mitford, Leverrier, Lily, Rose, the islanders, the family on the ship but, above all, with Conchis. He was a keen *observer* and interpreted the "signs" that involved others, but those related directly to him he either ignored them or misinterpreted them.

The one who was a keen observer of what had a direct impact on her total being is Alison. She knew Nicholas so well, because she was totally present when Nicholas was around her. She watched and heard everything even what he did not verbalize. Hence her reaction when at Athens, Nicholas tried to confess everything.

"Because she asked gently:

- What is wrong?

- I was not sick. I lied. He looked profoundly at me and lain on her back in the grass.

- God Nicholas.

- Let me tell you ...

- Not now, not now, please. It does not matter...." (p. 258)

Another keen observer is Conchis. And he follows the behavior of Nicholas, but with scientist's eye, that is emotionally detached by the "object" of his research, as

he follows the birds, he specialized in ornithology-semantics - the meaning of birds' sounds. The study of birds, their movements and sounds brought Conchis near Henrik.

"Later in life -" *«ça sera pour un autre jour/this will be for another day»* - birds made me live an unusual absolute experience." (p. 104).

By studying birds, Conchis acquired the necessary skills to observe and to decipher the signs. So he was able to observe also Nicholas. But if in the birds' life he did not intervene, he actively involved in the transformation of Nicholas. He could "read" him very well because he learned the language of emotions:

"- Then tomorrow night we can make an experiment.

- Of communicating with other planets?

I tried to mask my disbelief in my voice.

- Yes. Up there - the sky is too full of stars. Or there. His eyes turned towards black line of West Mountains.

I risked a joke.

- Up there they speak Greek or English?

About fifteen seconds he did not smile, he did not respond.

- They speak through emotions.

- It is not a very precise language.

- On the contrary. The most accurate, if you can learn it.

He looked at me." (p. 155)

2.3. "Accept", "self-accept"; "Acceptance"

"Accept" come in three different language games and it is not interchangeable. The verb "to accept" presupposes taking or receiving something offered or given, especially voluntarily. Nicholas accepted the position of substitute teacher that was offered on the island Phraxos, although it gives the impression that Alison was the reason that determined him to accept the position:

"- Alison, what should I do tomorrow?

- You will accept.

- Do you want me to accept?

- Do not start all over again..." (p. 33)

Nicholas accepted Alison's unconditional love as something that he deserved.

"Acceptance" enters into another language game, "self acceptance", a game that is more akin to that of the search of the self. In this game Conchis trains Nicholas, from the moment he set foot on his territory. Through staging, by the reports, Conchis seeks to persuade Nicholas to find out who or what is he really, to give the chance to choose whether he wants to remain as he has find out or try out, whatever the price, to become what he could be.

3. Conclusions

We use the language to support the social order, to give us the common conventions that define the communities in which we live. Otherwise, we could not communicate. Of course we could put under the question mark these conventions, we could relieve from their constraining influence on behalf of new knowledge. But then we get to invent other conventions that would take their place.

As the language is modeled, it "brings to life", "sings" new image of reality, even if they are hard to capture. It is essential however, that language brings to their creation. Besides language, which is modeled to express them, they would not exist. Literature products represent the use of language and, therefore, they are meant to be interpreted as having some relevance to people's lives. Although they may express a specific individual perception, they do not represent, however, private statements, but public ones, being able to claim some relevance to the lives of other people (otherwise, there would be no point in being published).

4. References

Wittgenstein, L. (1993). *Caietul albastru/The blue notebook*. Bucharest: Humanitas.

Wittgenstein, L. (2003). *Cercetări filozofice/Philosophical Research*. Bucharest: Humanitas.

Fowles, John (1992). *Magicianul/The Magician*. Translated by Livia Deac & Mariana Chiţoran. Bucharest: Univers.