

# A language game can be used philosophy essay



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A language game can be used as a metaphor for organisations. This is how post modern theorists think we should now look at firms; in terms of text. This will allow them to look and analyse organisations from a different perspective as they believe theories such as Taylorism are now becoming obsolete. This essay looks at language games in terms of three philosophers: Wittgenstein, Foucault and Derrida. The essay will also look at how organisation can be described as a result of such language games.

According to Wittgenstein a Language game can be described as ' language and the actions into which it is woven into' (Goldstein, 2004, p. 546). To be able to imagine language in this sense means to imagine a form of life. Forms of life are the various types of activities undertaken by humans, in this sense we look at them as speech, this leads to the perception that our forms of life are complicated because of the complexity of the language games we partake in. In his later work of Philosophical Investigations, section 23, Wittgenstein lists some of the language games that humans play: ' Giving orders and obeying them, Describing the appearance of an object, or giving its measurements, constructing an object from a description (a drawing)', (Wittgenstein, 1958). We unknowingly take part in language games every day and each game has its own rules and goals. Wittgenstein pays little attention to the players in language games, and suggests that it would be almost impossible for two language players to have the same linguistic pragmability, (Kopytko, 2007). This means that each human player is unique in terms of experience in a social context. An example of a player would be a child learning to talk. In Wittgenstein's Language games, the words we use to speak are the objects used in the game.

For Wittgenstein the rules the most important factor in a language game. Although a rule cannot be defined, Wittgenstein applies it to the 'family resemblance' concept, words which are used in one game may be used in another; they are all deeply intertwined. Each community has a slightly different set of rules for language games, depending on the understanding, certainty and awareness of the rules. Therefore humans that are playing language games they may have different rules and there may be confusion in understanding each other, for example two food retailers may have the same objectives but use different language games between staff to define these objectives e. g. stocktake/inventory. For rules to be followed in language games a certain amount of foreknowledge is needed to be able to understand them, Wittgenstein believes that for one to understand the rule they must be able to apply it (Kopytko, 2007). Grammar within language also enforces a network of rules which determine which linguistic moves make sense and which do not. For example, one cannot say that 'I know I have a brain' because of the doubt and scepticism about knowing something that has not been seen. Wittgenstein argues that there is not final set of rules that we follow and they are constantly changing.

In the beginning of *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein criticises his earlier work in *Tractatus*. In *Tractatus* he 'attempts to produce a universally true language about reality', (Jorgensen, 2006, p. 5). The assumption here is that every word has its own meaning and this meaning is in conjunction with the word. Augustine's work in *Confession's* follows this idea, and suggests that there is no difference between kinds of words. However, Wittgenstein now proposes that this is a very primitive way of perceiving how language

functions. In *Philosophical Investigations*, he uses the example of 'five red apples' and questions how the shopkeeper knows what to do with the three words when no such question of the meaning of the words came into thought. These primitive forms of language are used by children when they are learning to talk. The ostensive teaching of words is used to teach children a primitive language; it allows them to associate between an object and a word. To establish different understandings using ostensive teaching, a different form of training would need to be used for that particular use of the word. For example, a button, one is used on a computer to switch it on or off, another is used to open doors within a building and a third is a button on a cardigan, which connects the material. 'The point is that words do not only have one meaning and that there is no one single characteristic that characterizes one word' (Jorgensen, 2006, p. 6), leading to the assumption that words are polysemic. By looking at Language in terms of multiple meanings allows us to see that language is not an 'isolated phenomena' (Jorgensen, 2006) but something that is dependent on the experiences that we have had and the way human players perceive things.

Wittgenstein describes language as an ancient city: 'a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses' (Wittgenstein, 1958, p. 18). This quote describes how Wittgenstein sees language and suggests that language is not permanent, but something that is constantly changing with traditions. It also describes how new language games come into existence whilst others become forgotten. The change that occurs however is always dependent on

history and the contextual rules of the game. This quote also leads to Wittgenstein being able to clarify that no word has a definitive meaning and therefore there is no common essence that characterises language (Jorgensen, 2006). Therefore it can be said that language games do not all have something in common, but they are connected by 'family resemblance', a rule of language games. This concept, introduced by Wittgenstein, is a metaphor saying that languages all look alike in the same way family members do. 'We see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail' (Wittgenstein, 1958, p. 66). Thus language is called language as they are similar or look alike, just like organisations. As there is no essential core of a word, to find a meaning for a word, one should investigate the different uses of the word; this common factor is the family resemblance.

The Private Vs Public Language argument is a topic which Wittgenstein devotes a section of *Philosophical Investigations* to. Wittgenstein believes in a public language and that private games do not make sense. 'The individual words of this language are to refer to what can only be known to the person speaking; to his immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language' (Wittgenstein, 1958). Even though private language experiences are real for individuals, the phrase is an oxymoron as it means making sure that the rules of the game are being followed which is an impossible task as the rules are indefinable. The concept of a private language means we are restricted in what we say, as we cannot express all of our experiences, for example only one can know when they are in pain, no

one else can share that pain, they can only experience the description of the given pain. A public language is needed otherwise we would not be able to communicate in society therefore the goal of public language is communication between human players.

Alongside language games are knowing and doubting games, these games relate to uncertainty in language. Wittgenstein uses the example of 'here is one hand' (Wittgenstein, 1979), this ostensive definition is making an empirical claim which allows us to make sense of things. If humans were to doubt that a hand exists then we would make very little sense of language. Wittgenstein suggests that a proposition such as 'here is a hand' must be looked at in context or it would be meaningless. We take these types of propositions for granted and must accept that these sorts of propositions should not be doubted or questioned. In each language game played, the rules of the game may be doubted if they are unclear or indefinite. In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein compares these types of propositions to a river bed, and within a river the river bed must stay in place and not be doubted to allow the river of language to flow smoothly through it, (Sparknotes, 2012). Knowing and certainty link together as if you propose that you know something, you must be certain of it, for if you are not certain of a fact then you cannot be certain of the meaning of the words you are using either. To say you know something removes the doubt from the language game. However we must have a degree of certainty within the language games to make sense and agree on things.

One of the overall goals of Wittgenstein's Language games is not to solve philosophical problems but to dissolve them. For example although he

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criticises Augustine's theory of pointing and naming things, he does not attempt to replace it with another theory of language but he wants us to see that we do not need a theory to describe the link between language and reality. Another goal of language games is to allow us to see past misleading pictures that our cultures complicate through communication, meaning that by using a public language and understanding the rules of the games we should understand more about language.

A second theorist is Foucault who is known for his work on discourse which concerns the manufacturing of knowledge through language (Hall, 1997). For him, a main purpose of his work 'is to show how individuals in the present are subordinated by particular discourses or language games' (Jorgensen, 2006, p. 19). He believes that in modern day organisations power is embedded in the rules of language games and regulates and controls how the games are played. For example, when we begin a new job, we are taught by managers who control and limit how much we know about the company and what we can do within the company through the power they have within the workplace. Having this authoritative voice allows them to judge others. This suggests that the key players in Foucault's language games are professionals: teachers, managers, doctors, Politian's and prison guards. These professionals establish the norms of society and create docile bodies within institutions so that the bodies are controllable. One of the rules that Foucault applies to language games is that non-appropriate topics are disregarded within a discourse, for example within a meeting in an organisation it would be appropriate to talk about profit and loss not what you are doing at the weekend.

The professionals within institutions use objects as control mechanisms. Examples of these are timetables and the panopticon. The timetable is an object within a language game as they tell people where to go at particular times e. g. the language that is written on the timetable controls the daily routine of a factory worker; they have set times to start work, have breaks and finish work. Another object is the panopticon is a vertical form of surveillance and produces self monitoring of individuals through fear. These objects of language games are there to sustain the games and enforce rules on the individuals and within each of these objects there are different rules to different language games. Leading on from this ' for Foucault one of the most significant forces shaping our experience is language...We not only use language to explain ideas and feelings to others, we use it to explain things to ourselves' (Danaher, 2000, p. 31). This proposes that everything we do is surrounded or influenced by language, written or spoken. By affecting everything we do shows how powerful language can be.

Knowledge and power are not seen as negative aspects and are produced by episteme which also holds them together. According to Foucault ' domains of knowledge and relations of power are intrinsically tied together, and this fundamental intertwinement is what is referred to by that hybrid power/knowledge' (Oksala, 2007, p. 48). This hybrid is possessed by the professionals within society, they normalise and enforce what should be considered as knowledge. For example when we go to work, we generally accept what the manager tells us to be true and do not question their knowledge about the company or job that needs doing. This leads to the conclusion that truth and knowledge are the result of scientific discourse and



that Power and knowledge are fundamental in language as they reinforce truth. It is the goal of language games to shape knowledge and power relations through episteme, this is the mega game which makes all other games possible.

Derrida is another philosopher who has studied language and the games that humans play. Derrida believes that we should look at process instead of the structure of things. ' So deep does structure run in our mental habits that when we try to analyse process we turn it into structure. Derrida's task has been to reverse this predilection and show that process is primary to structure' (Cooper, 1989, p. 480). This suggests that we naturally look at the structure of things and not the process of how they happen, by looking at the process will allow us to make more sense of things. Derrida believes that humans are the players within his language games of deconstruction and différance.

Derrida's views of discourse analysis are exhibited through deconstruction, this refers to moving away from structures towards a processual approach so that one can see and grapple with natural contradictions. Undecidability is used to explain deconstruction through looking at binary opposites e. g. high/low and manager/employee. This leads to the assumption that these terms cannot exist without each other as without them they would not make sense; a common example of this is Schrodinger's Cat in the box. Derrida uses the term logocentrism within his work, by this he meant that language is simply a mechanism that communicates thoughts. This is a problem for deconstruction as it is faced with the issue of how to open up a text ' without merely endorsing the wider framework to which its terms belong' (Wood, <https://assignbuster.com/a-language-game-can-be-used-philosophy-essay/>

1987, p. 32). To prevent this occurring Derrida employs overturning and metaphorization. These are processes of deconstruction which allow us to look at language as the product of meaning through *différence* and dissemination.

*Différence* comes from Saussure's concept of 'signs' and it is an important concept to Derrida's view of process. *Différence* embodies two meanings which govern the production of meaning; *différer* can mean to be deferred or to differ in space. *Différence* relates to Derrida's Semiotics. 'A sign and its meaning are both members of diachronic or temporal series of that sign's occurrences and the simultaneous pattern of that related to signs in language. The reference to both of these is essential to the sign's meaning. The meaning of each sign is relative to this combination of present and absent signs' (Cahoone, 2012). This means that signs can be looked at in two ways, the first is by looking at the historical path of the word, the second is by looking at what other signs are related to it. For example when we look up a word in the dictionary it leads us another meaning of a word, it is an endless chain of meanings, i. e. signs are polysemic. From this, leads us to one of Derrida's rules of language 'there is no outside of the text', by this he means 'there is no access to the real world except through language' (Bennett, 2004, p. 30), therefore there cannot be any meaning outside context because there is nothing we know or have experienced that isn't in context. The second meaning - to differ in space, refers 'to a differentiation which he also terms 'spacing' and which prevents any sign from having a self-enclosed identity', (Deutscher, 2005, p. 31). This suggests that a fixed meaning of a word cannot exist and a sign can have more than one identity

based on the context in which it is placed, for example the word 'organisation' has different meanings depending on the context in which it is being used.

The above links to the objects of language games, in terms of Derrida's work they are the meanings of signs, and having already concluded there is no one meaning to a sign, the goal of Derrida's game is to therefore look at meanings or rules of signs and attempt to understand them by stabilising the rules. To do this human's must have experience in the context of the sign they are trying to understand and the meaning they come to will be based on past experiences of that.

It is clear that comparisons can be made between the authors on their theories of language games. Firstly, a contrast in Wittgenstein and Derrida's work. Wittgenstein suggests that language games should be played through speech and his work reflects this, however Derrida proposes that language games should be in the form of writing. Although both theorists do agree on the concept of multiple meanings as they both believe that words/signs have an indefinite number of meanings depending on the context in which the word is being used. Another comparison is between Foucault and Wittgenstein who both think that we are constrained by our language and that we can only speak based on the language we have experienced, this links with private language games. A final comparison is of Derrida and Foucault who both use timetables in their work to describe forms of control through language.

By using the work of all three theorists I think that organisations can be described in terms of language games. Organisations can be described using Wittgenstein's and Derrida's theories of multiple meanings in this way as when problems occur new solutions are found, however these solutions come with more problems so it is an endless cycle where no one solution will solve a problem, just like there is no one meaning of a word, this relates to Tamara, an endless story. A family resemblance may also be used to describe an organisation as although they do look the same, there are vital differences between each organisation, such as management structures and shift patterns. Also by using the private language argument, each individual within an organisation will have had different experiences within their job role, meaning that they cannot express all of their thoughts as there will not be a common public language at all times, this also links to Tamara as each individual experience is unique. Using Derrida and Foucault's example of a timetable within language games is another way of interpreting an organisation, as it is something that is used everyday within an organisation, such as specifically timed lunch breaks and clocking in cards. This form of self surveillance is regulated by language from managers and superiors within the organisation. In addition, in line with Derrida's work, it is important to look at organisations in terms of arenas of processes and to look at the outcomes, not look at them as structures. Finally Foucault's players within a language are the professionals. Within an organisation these are the managers and it is their voices that set the rules of the language game within that organisation i. e. we accept what they say as the truth because of the power and knowledge that the manager has. In conclusion if organisations were to be looked at in terms of text it would allow us to

interpret organisations differently and look for different ways of solving problems. This linguistic turn is a way of using text as a metaphor to give us the correct tools to use in organisations.