



PICTURE TO GAME: A HUMANISTIC APPROACHED JOURNEY OF LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the transformation of Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of language from the rigid picture theory of his early work to the more flexible concept of language games in his later philosophy. The objective of the research is to examine how Wittgenstein's evolving understanding of language offers deeper insight into the lived experience of communication. The rationale behind this study lies in the contemporary need to reinterpret philosophical theories of language in ways that emphasize human agency, social context, and cultural embeddedness, particularly in an era of increasingly complex communication. Through a qualitative approach based on secondary sources, this study employs the thought experiment method by tracing the conceptual continuities and discontinuities between *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and *Philosophical Investigations*, demonstrating how Wittgenstein's thought transitions from a logical representational model to a pragmatic, context-driven view of linguistic practice. The findings reveal that Wittgenstein's journey from "picture" to "game" not only reframes the structure of language but also expands its existential and ethical dimensions. His later philosophy demonstrates that meaning emerges through social practices, shared forms of life, and the human quest for understanding rather than through abstract logical form, reflecting a shift toward a more humanistic understanding of language. As contemporary society becomes increasingly rigid in many aspects of life, the implications of this study suggest that language should be understood as a living, participatory, and human-centered activity.

KEYWORD

Picture Theory of Meaning; Language Games; Meaning as Use; Humanistic Philosophy; Philosophy of Language; Early and Later Wittgenstein.

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, the philosophy of language occupies a central position in twentieth-century thought, shaping how philosophers understand meaning, reality, logic, and human communication. Among the major contributors to this field, Ludwig Wittgenstein stands out as a uniquely transformative thinker whose intellectual journey reflects a dramatic reorientation in the philosophy of language. His philosophical development, marked by a decisive shift between his early and later works, offers a compelling account of how rigid and formal conceptions of language gave way to a more human-centered, pragmatic, and context-

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sensitive approach. This transition from the picture theory of meaning to the concept of language games forms the core focus of the present study.

In his early work, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein advanced a highly structured and logical conception of language. According to this view, language functions by picturing reality, and propositions are meaningful insofar as they correspond to facts in the world. Meaning within this framework is grounded in logical form, and the role of philosophy is to clarify the limits of what can be meaningfully said. Although this approach exerted enormous influence on logical positivism and analytic philosophy, it also imposed strict constraints on language, reducing it to a representational mechanism largely detached from lived human experience. In the *Tractatus*, language appears almost mechanical and functions as an abstract system governed by logical necessity rather than by human practice.

However, Wittgenstein's later philosophy, articulated in *Philosophical Investigations*, represents a radical departure from this earlier position. He rejects the idea that language possesses a single underlying logical essence and instead emphasizes the multiplicity of ways in which language operates in everyday life. Wittgenstein introduced the concept of "language games" to demonstrate that meaning arises from use, practice, and social interaction rather than from correspondence with an objective structure of reality. From this perspective, language is inseparable from human activities, cultural norms, and shared forms of life. This later approach marks a decisive turn toward a humanistic understanding of language that emphasizes human agency, context, and participation (Wittgenstein, 1961, 1969).

The transition from the picture theory to language games is not merely a technical shift within linguistic philosophy. It reflects a deeper philosophical transformation concerning the relationship between meaning, understanding, and human life. Whereas the early Wittgenstein sought certainty through logical clarity and formal precision, the later Wittgenstein embraced ambiguity, diversity, and the ordinary practices of human communication. This shift challenges materialistic or mechanistic interpretations of language that treat meaning as a fixed entity independent of human engagement. Instead, it presents language as a living phenomenon shaped by history, culture, and the practical concerns of human beings.

The present study examines this philosophical journey from picture to game through a humanistic lens. Its primary objective is to clarify how Wittgenstein's evolving conception of language offers deeper insight into the lived experience of communication. By tracing both the continuities and discontinuities between his early and later works, the study demonstrates that Wittgenstein's later philosophy does not merely abandon logical analysis but rather recontextualizes it within the broader framework of human life. In doing so, it reveals how meaning is constituted through social practices rather than through abstract representation.

The rationale behind this study is rooted in contemporary intellectual and social conditions. In an era marked by increasingly complex forms of communication, including digital discourse, political polarization, and cultural fragmentation, there is a growing need to rethink traditional theories of language. Rigid and purely formal models often fail to account for how meaning is negotiated, contested, and transformed in real-world contexts (Conant & Diamond, 2004). Wittgenstein's later philosophy provides valuable conceptual tools for addressing these challenges by emphasizing participation, interpretation, and mutual understanding. His humanistic turn offers a philosophical foundation for viewing language not as a static system but as an evolving practice embedded in human life (Taylor, 1995).

Methodologically, this study adopts a qualitative approach based on secondary sources and employs a thought experiment-based analytical method. Rather than engaging in

empirical linguistic analysis, the study focuses on conceptual clarification and philosophical interpretation. Through a close reading and comparison of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and *Philosophical Investigations*, the study traces the internal tensions and philosophical motivations that led Wittgenstein to revise his earlier views. This comparative approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how his conception of language evolved in response to the perceived limitations of his earlier framework.

The central argument of this study is that Wittgenstein's movement from the picture theory to language games represents a shift from a materialistic understanding of language toward a fundamentally humanistic one. This humanistic orientation recognizes that meaning is not discovered through logical forms alone but is created and sustained through shared human practices. By highlighting the human dimension of language, Wittgenstein's later thought challenges contemporary tendencies toward rigidity and dogmatism in both intellectual and social life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The philosophical contribution of Ludwig Wittgenstein has generated an extensive and diverse body of secondary literature, particularly concerning the sharp contrast between his early and later philosophies of language. Scholars have long debated whether Wittgenstein's intellectual development represents a radical rupture, a gradual evolution or a deeper continuity masked by methodological change. This literature review surveys major interpretive trends relevant to the present study, with particular attention to analyses of the picture theory (materialistic approached) and language games (humanistic approached).

Interpretations of Early Wittgenstein and the Picture Theory

Early scholarly engagement with Wittgenstein focused primarily on *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, often treating it as a foundational text of analytic philosophy. Bertrand Russell and Gottlob Frege (Frege, 1960; Russell, 1918) emphasized the *Tractatus's* logical rigor and its commitment to a formal correspondence between language and reality. Russell (1918), in particular, viewed the picture theory as a sophisticated extension of logical atomism in which propositions mirror atomic facts through shared logical form. From this perspective, language is primarily representational, and philosophical problems arise from misunderstandings of logical syntax.

Members of the Vienna Circle, including Moritz Schlick and Rudolf Carnap (Carnap, 1937; Schlick, 1932), adopted and adapted Wittgenstein's early ideas to support logical positivism. They interpreted the picture theory as a justification for the verification principle, according to which meaningful statements must be either empirically verifiable or logically necessary. Within this framework, ethical, metaphysical, and religious statements were regarded as meaningless. Although this interpretation amplified the influence of the *Tractatus*, later scholars argued that it oversimplified Wittgenstein's intentions and overlooked the ethical and mystical dimensions present in the text.

More recent interpretations have challenged purely positivist readings of the *Tractatus*. Cora Diamond and James Conant, associated with the "resolute" interpretation, argue that the *Tractatus* is not a doctrinal theory of language but rather a therapeutic work designed to lead readers to recognize the limits of sense. According to this interpretation, the picture theory functions as a ladder to be climbed and ultimately discarded, revealing the futility of seeking metaphysical meaning through representational language (Conant & Diamond, 2004). Although this perspective complicates the view of the early Wittgenstein as strictly materialistic or formalistic, it still acknowledges the central importance of logical structure in his early philosophy.

The Turn to Ordinary Language and Language Games

Scholarly attention to Wittgenstein's later philosophy has centered on Philosophical Investigations, which presents a markedly different conception of language. One of the earliest and most influential interpreters of this period, G. E. M. Anscombe, emphasized Wittgenstein's rejection of essentialism. She argued that philosophical clarity emerges through careful examination of the ordinary use of language rather than through abstract theorizing. Anscombe highlighted the methodological shift in Wittgenstein's later philosophy from constructing theories to dissolving confusion through descriptive analysis of linguistic practices (Anscombe, 1959).

The concept of "language games" has been widely recognized as a central feature of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. Scholars such as Norman Malcolm interpreted language games as illustrating the rule-governed yet flexible nature of linguistic activities. For Malcolm, meaning is not fixed by abstract definitions but by the ways in which words function within particular forms of practice (Malcolm, 1958). This interpretation emphasizes the pragmatic and social dimensions of language, positioning Wittgenstein as a precursor to later developments in pragmatics and discourse theory.

Peter Hacker (1996) provides a systematic interpretation of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. He argues that Philosophical Investigations dismantles the illusion that language possesses an underlying logical essence. Hacker emphasizes the importance of "forms of life" in grounding meaning, suggesting that linguistic understanding is inseparable from shared human behavior and cultural practices. This interpretation strongly supports a humanistic understanding of Wittgenstein's philosophy by situating language within the broader context of human life rather than within abstract formal systems.

Continuity versus Discontinuity Debate

A major theme in Wittgenstein scholarship concerns whether his later philosophy represents a complete break from his earlier views or a reformulation of enduring philosophical concerns. Anthony Kenny (1973) argues for a nuanced continuity between the two phases of Wittgenstein's thought, suggesting that both the early and later Wittgenstein were motivated by the same fundamental aim: to clarify the limits of language and dissolve philosophical confusion. According to Kenny, the primary difference lies not in the objective itself but in the method employed, namely formal logical analysis in the early period and descriptive analysis of language use in the later period.

Scholars such as Saul Kripke (1982) emphasize the radical implications of Wittgenstein's later philosophy, particularly concerning rule-following and meaning. In his interpretation of Wittgenstein's philosophy of language, Kripke presents a skeptical argument suggesting that meaning cannot be grounded in individual mental states or objective facts alone, but must instead depend upon communal practices and shared criteria. This interpretation reinforces the social and humanistic orientation of the later Wittgenstein by foregrounding the importance of community, shared norms, and collective linguistic practices.

Humanism, Pragmatism and Social Practice

Several scholars have linked Wittgenstein's later philosophy to humanistic and pragmatic traditions. Richard Rorty situates Wittgenstein alongside thinkers such as John Dewey, arguing that *Philosophical Investigations* undermines representationalism and replaces it with a conversational model of philosophy. According to Rorty, Wittgenstein's emphasis on language as a social practice aligns with a broader humanistic project that prioritizes solidarity, contingency, and cultural context over metaphysical certainty (Rorty, 1989; Williams, 1999).

Similarly, Stanley Cavell interprets Wittgenstein's later work as a profound engagement with the human condition. Cavell emphasizes themes such as skepticism, acknowledgment, and ordinary life, arguing that Wittgenstein's philosophy addresses not only linguistic confusion but also existential anxieties concerning understanding and being understood. This interpretation directly supports the claim that Wittgenstein's later philosophy expands the ethical and existential dimensions of language (Cavell, 1979).

Gaps in the Existing Literature

Despite the richness of existing works, several gaps remain. Much of the literature treats the transition from the picture theory to language games either as a purely technical shift or as an internal debate within analytic philosophy. Fewer studies explicitly frame this transition in terms of humanism versus materialism or explore its implications for contemporary communication beyond philosophy. Moreover, while scholars acknowledge the social nature of language in Wittgenstein's later thought, less attention has been paid to how this perspective can counteract modern tendencies toward rigidity, instrumentalism and dehumanization in discourse.

Positioning of the Present Study

The present study seeks to contribute to this body of literature by offering a sustained humanistic reading of Wittgenstein's philosophical journey. By examining both the logical constraints of the picture theory and the participatory openness of language games, this work argues that Wittgenstein's later philosophy represents a deliberate move away from materialistic conceptions of language toward a view grounded in human practices and shared forms of life. To do so, it aims to bridge analytic philosophy with broader humanistic concerns, highlighting the continued relevance of Wittgenstein's thought for understanding language in contemporary social, educational and political contexts.

EARLY WITTGENSTEIN AND THE PICTURE THEORY OF MEANING

The early philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein, particularly as presented in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, is characterized by a rigorous attempt to establish the logical structure of language and its relation to reality. Written during and shortly after the First World War, the *Tractatus* reflects Wittgenstein's ambition to resolve philosophical problems by clarifying the nature and limits of meaningful language (Wittgenstein, 1953). At the center of this project lies the picture theory of meaning, which proposes that language represents the world by mirroring its logical form. This section examines the central features of the picture theory, its philosophical motivations, and its limitations, thereby laying the foundation for understanding Wittgenstein's later turn toward a more humanistic conception of language (Wittgenstein, 1961).

Philosophical Background and Motivations

Wittgenstein's early philosophy emerged within the intellectual context of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century logic, particularly under the influence of Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell (Frege, 1960). Frege's work on the foundations of arithmetic and Russell's development of logical atomism shaped Wittgenstein's conviction that philosophical problems arise from misunderstandings of logical form. According to this view, many traditional philosophical problems could be dissolved through proper analysis of the structure of language (Frege, 1960).

Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus is structured as a series of numbered propositions reflecting its commitment to logical order and clarity. Its opening proposition, "The world is all that is the case," establishes a metaphysical framework in which reality consists of facts

rather than things (Glock, 2008). These facts are composed of simple objects arranged in determinate relations, and language, when functioning properly, represents these facts through propositions. The task of philosophy, therefore, is not to produce new knowledge but to clarify the logical structure underlying meaningful discourse (Wittgenstein, 1980).

The Core of the Picture Theory

The picture theory of meaning holds that a proposition is meaningful if and only if it depicts a possible state of affairs in the world. Just as a picture represents reality by sharing a structural correspondence with what it depicts, a proposition represents reality by sharing a logical form with the fact it describes (Wittgenstein, 1969). This shared form allows language to map onto the world, enabling understanding and truth evaluation. A proposition is true if it corresponds to an actual fact and false if it does not (Taylor, 1995).

Central to this theory is the notion of logical form, which cannot itself be stated but only shown. Logical form is what makes representation possible. Yet it lies beyond the limits of meaningful assertion. This leads to one of the most distinctive features of the *Tractatus*. Its sharp distinction between what can be said and what can only be shown. Logical relations, ethical values and metaphysical truths fall into the latter category, revealing the strict boundaries Wittgenstein places on language (Malcolm, 1958).

In this framework, meaning is objective and impersonal. It does not depend on individual intentions, social conventions or historical contexts, but on the formal relationship between language and reality (Anscombe, 1959). Language functions as a transparent medium that reflects the structure of the world. This conception has often been described as materialistic or mechanistic, insofar as it treats language as a system governed by logical necessity rather than by human practices (Kripke, 1982).

Logical Atomism and the Ideal Language

The picture theory is closely connected to Wittgenstein's commitment to logical atomism. The view that complex propositions can be analyzed into simpler, atomic propositions that correspond to atomic facts (Gadamer, 2004). These atomic propositions are logically independent of one another and their truth or falsity depends solely on whether the corresponding fact obtains. This atomistic structure was intended to provide a clear and unambiguous foundation for language by eliminating vagueness and confusion. (Wittgenstein, 1961)

Wittgenstein's ideal of a logically perfect language reflects a desire to overcome the ambiguities of ordinary language. Natural languages, with their metaphors, ambiguities and contextual dependencies, were seen as sources of philosophical confusion. So, on this way a logically ideal language would reveal the true structure of reality and prevent nonsensical statements. From this point of view the early Wittgenstein shared the aspirations of logical positivism, even though his own philosophical aims were more complex (Glock, 2008).

However, this pursuit of an ideal language also reveals the limitations of the picture theory. The *Tractatus* marginalizes the ways in which language actually functions in everyday life by privileging formal precision over ordinary usage. Human intentions, cultural norms and practical contexts play little role in determining meaning within this framework. As a result, the picture theory struggles to account for large domains of meaningful discourse, including ethics, aesthetics and religious language.

The Say–Show Distinction and Its Implications

One of the most influential and controversial aspects of the *Tractatus* is the distinction between saying and showing. According to Wittgenstein, propositions can state facts about the world,

but the logical form that makes such statements possible cannot itself be stated (Schlick, 1932). Similarly, ethical and metaphysical values are shown in how we live and experience the world, not expressed through factual propositions. This leads to the famous concluding proposition of the *Tractatus*, “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.”

This position has been interpreted in multiple ways. For some, it suggests a form of quietism that restricts philosophy to logical clarification and dismisses other forms of discourse as meaningless (Winch, 1958). For others, it points to a deeper recognition of the limits of language and the importance of non-propositional forms of understanding. Regardless of interpretation, the say show distinction underscores the rigidity of the picture theory and its reluctance to engage with the richness of human expression.

Criticisms and Internal Tensions

Despite its elegance and influence, the picture theory has been subject to substantial criticism. One major challenge concerns the notion of simple objects and atomic facts, which Wittgenstein never clearly identifies. Critics argue that without a concrete account of these elements, the theory lacks empirical grounding (Russell, 1918). Moreover, the assumption that all meaningful propositions share a single logical form has been questioned, particularly in light of the diversity of linguistic practices observed in ordinary language.

Internal conflicts exist within the *Tractatus* as well. The work appears to advance substantive philosophical claims about the nature of language and reality, yet it simultaneously declares such claims to be nonsensical once their elucidatory purpose is fulfilled (Malcolm, 1958). Because of this paradox, some academics see the *Tractatus* as a self-defeating work that aims to guide readers beyond the theories it expresses.

From the perspective of the present study, these tensions are significant because they foreshadow Wittgenstein’s later dissatisfaction with his early approach. The inability of the picture theory to accommodate the lived, social and ethical dimensions of language suggests the need for a more flexible and human-centered framework. The early Wittgenstein’s emphasis on logical representation, while groundbreaking, ultimately proves insufficient for capturing the full range of human linguistic activity.

Assessment: Toward a Humanistic Critique

In assessing the picture theory, it becomes clear that its greatest strength is logical clarity which is also its greatest limitation. By abstracting language from human practices, the theory offers a precise but impoverished account of meaning (Habermas, 1984). Language appears as a static mirror of reality rather than as a dynamic tool for human interaction. This abstraction aligns with a materialistic or formalistic view of language, in which meaning exists independently of human agency and context.

The shortcomings of the picture theory set the stage for Wittgenstein’s later philosophical transformation. His growing awareness of the diversity of linguistic functions and the importance of ordinary language use would lead him to abandon the search for an ideal logical structure in favor of a descriptive approach grounded in human life. Understanding the early Wittgenstein, therefore is essential not only for appreciating the originality of the picture theory but also for recognizing why Wittgenstein ultimately moved beyond it toward a more humanistic conception of language (Diamond, 1991).

LATER WITTGENSTEIN AND THE CONCEPT OF LANGUAGE GAMES

The later philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein marks a decisive reorientation in the understanding of language, meaning and philosophical method. This transformation is most clearly articulated in the *Philosophical Investigations* which is a work that abandons the

formal rigidity of the Tractatus in favor of a descriptive, practice-oriented approach (Brandom, 1994). Rather than seeking the essential logical structure underlying all language, Wittgenstein now emphasizes the diversity of linguistic activities and the ways in which meaning emerges from use within human forms of life (Williams, 1999). In this current section, the key concepts of the philosophy of language introduced by Wittgenstein in his later work will be discussed and it will be demonstrated how they lead to a humanistic conception of language.

Methodological Shift: From Theory to Description

One of the most striking features of the Philosophical Investigations is its methodological departure from traditional philosophical theorizing. Wittgenstein explicitly rejects the construction of grand theories of language, arguing instead that philosophy should aim to describe how language actually functions in everyday contexts. He argues that misunderstandings caused by language abuse, rather than ignorance of facts, are the root cause of philosophical issues (Wittgenstein, 1980; Conant & Diamond, 2004).

This therapeutic conception of philosophy contrasts sharply with the early Wittgenstein's aspiration to delineate the logical essence of language. In the later work, Wittgenstein likens philosophical investigation to an activity that "brings words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use." This metaphor underscores his conviction that clarity is achieved not through abstraction but through close attention to ordinary practices. According to this perspective, language is a collection of human activities ingrained in social life rather than an idealized logical system.

Language Games and the Plurality of Meaning

The concept of language games, lies at the heart of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. By this term, Wittgenstein refers to the various activities in which language is used (Schatzki, 1996). Like giving orders, asking questions, telling stories, praying, joking, teaching and countless others activities. Each language game operates according to its own rules and purposes and no single set of criteria governs them all.

The metaphor of a game is deliberately chosen to emphasize both rule-governed structure and flexibility. Just as games are defined by rules that participants learn through practice, language games involve norms that guide meaningful use. However, these rules are not fixed by abstract definitions but are sustained through communal agreement and ongoing participation. Therefore, meaning is a dynamic aspect of how words are used in specific contexts rather than a static quality of words (Kenny, 1973).

This pluralistic view directly challenges the picture theory's assumption that all meaningful propositions share a common logical form. Instead of seeking an underlying essence of language, Wittgenstein introduces the notion of "*family resemblance*" to explain how different uses of language are related (Wittgenstein, 1980). Rather than having a single distinguishing characteristic, words and linguistic practices are linked by overlapping similarities. This realization further challenges materialistic and essentialist interpretations of meaning.

Meaning as Use

Perhaps the most famous dictum of the later Wittgenstein is that "the meaning of a word is its use in the language." This principle encapsulates his rejection of representational theories of meaning, according to which words derive their meaning by standing for objects or states of affairs (Wittgenstein, 1969). While representation remains one function of language, it is no longer regarded as the fundamental or exclusive one.

By grounding meaning in use, Wittgenstein situates language within the flow of human life. Understanding a word involves knowing how to use it appropriately in various situations, not grasping an abstract definition. This practical knowledge is acquired through participation in social practices, education and shared activities. As a result, meaning is inherently public and communal rather than private or mentalistic (Wittgenstein, 1980).

This emphasis on use has profound humanistic implications. It acknowledges that language is learned, maintained and transformed through human interaction. Meaning is not imposed by an external structure of reality but negotiated within communities. This view resists materialistic reductions of language to mechanical representation and instead highlights the role of agency, intention and context.

Rule-Following and Social Normativity

A central concern of the *Philosophical Investigations* is the problem of rule-following. How can rules determine correct usage if any action can be interpreted as following a rule? Wittgenstein argues that rule-following cannot be grounded in private mental interpretations or explicit formulations of rules. Instead, it depends on shared practices and communal standards of correctness.

To follow a rule is to act in accordance with a practice that others recognize and uphold. This recognition is not based on theoretical justification but on participation in a form of life. The famous argument against the possibility of a purely private language reinforces this point by demonstrating that meaning and correctness require public criteria (Cavell, 1979). Language, therefore, is inherently social and understanding is inseparable from communal engagement.

This account of rule-following further strengthens the humanistic orientation of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. It emphasizes that linguistic norms are sustained by human agreement and mutual expectations rather than by objective, mind-independent facts. Language functions because human beings share ways of acting, reacting and judging, those features cannot be reduced to material structures alone (Habermas, 1984).

Forms of Life and Cultural Embeddedness

The concept of "Forms of Life" provides the deepest foundation for Wittgenstein's later view of language (Wittgenstein, 1980). Forms of life encompass the patterns of behavior, cultural practices and social institutions that give language its meaning. Language games are intelligible only within the context of a form of life, which supplies the background assumptions and shared understandings that make communication possible.

By introducing this concept, Wittgenstein underscores the inseparability of language and culture. Meaning is not universal in the sense of being independent of human ways of living. Rather, it is rooted in historically and socially situated practices. This insight aligns closely with humanistic approaches in the humanities and social sciences, which emphasize the importance of context, tradition and lived experience (Wittgenstein, 1969).

Forms of life also reveal the ethical dimension of language. Communication is not merely the exchange of information but a mode of participation in a shared world. Misunderstandings, conflicts and exclusions arise when forms of life diverge or fail to overlap. Wittgenstein's later philosophy thus invites a more reflective and empathetic approach to language, one that recognizes the fragility and contingency of mutual understanding (Wittgenstein, 1980; Baker & Hacker, 1984).

From Representation to Participation

Taken together, the concepts of language games, meaning as use, rule-following and forms of life mark a profound shift from representation to participation. Language is no longer conceived as a mirror of reality but as a set of practices through which human beings engage with one another and the world (Russell, 1918). This shift represents a clear departure from materialistic or mechanistic models of language, which treat meaning as a fixed correspondence between words and objects.

In the later Wittgenstein, language becomes a living activity which is shaped by human needs, purposes and interactions. Philosophical clarity is achieved not by imposing theoretical order but by attending to the richness of linguistic life. This participatory view lays the groundwork for understanding language as an ethical and existential phenomenon which is deeply intertwined with the human quest for meaning and understanding (Gadamer, 2004).

Assessment: The Humanistic Turn

The later philosophy of Wittgenstein can thus be understood as a decisive humanistic turn. By rejecting the search for an abstract essence of language, he affirms the centrality of human practice in the constitution of meaning. Language is shown to be flexible, diverse and responsive to the complexities of human life (Kenny, 1973). This perspective not only resolves many of the problems generated by the picture theory but also opens new avenues for thinking about communication in social, cultural and political contexts.

This humanistic orientation does not deny the importance of rules or structure but situates them within the lived realities of human interaction (Diamond, 1991). To achieve this milestone Wittgenstein provides a philosophical framework that is both analytically rigorous and deeply attuned to the human condition. The implications of this framework extend far beyond philosophy, influencing contemporary debates in education, ethics and communication theory.

FROM MATERIALISM TO HUMANISM: PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS

The transition from the early to the later philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein is often described as one of the most dramatic transformations in twentieth century philosophy. Yet this transition is not merely a shift in technical linguistic theory (Wittgenstein, 1980). It represents a deeper reorientation in philosophical attitude from a materialistic conception of language toward a profoundly humanistic one. This section offers a synthetic analysis of this transformation, arguing that Wittgenstein's later philosophy reconceives language as a human practice embedded in social life, thereby expanding its existential, ethical and cultural significance.

Materialistic Tendencies in the Early Philosophy

Although Wittgenstein's early work cannot be straightforwardly reduced to materialism in the metaphysical sense, it nonetheless exhibits materialistic tendencies in its treatment of language. In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, language is conceived primarily as a representational system whose meaning is determined by its structural correspondence with reality (Wittgenstein, 1953). Propositions function as pictures of facts and their meaningfulness depends on shared logical form rather than on human intention, context or social practice.

This conception abstracts language from the concrete conditions of its use. Meaning appears as something fixed and objective, grounded in logical relations rather than in lived human interaction. Human speakers don't contribute much to the construction of meaning

because of their cultural backgrounds, feelings, and pragmatic concerns (Cavell, 1979). From this perspective, language resembles a formal mechanism. Like an instrument for mapping the world rather than a medium of human engagement. Such an approach aligns with a broadly materialistic outlook in which meaning is treated as independent of human subjectivity and social life (Kenny, 1973).

Additionally, the *Tractatus* places ethics, aesthetics, and metaphysics in the category of the unsayable, severely restricting what can be said in a meaningful way. While Wittgenstein famously acknowledges the importance of these domains. In his framework offers no linguistic space in which they can be articulated. This restriction further reinforces the impression that the early philosophy prioritizes logical structure over human experience.

Dissatisfaction and Philosophical Reorientation

Wittgenstein's later writings reflect a growing dissatisfaction with the abstraction and rigidity of his early approach. He came to recognize that ordinary language does not function as a logically ideal system and that attempts to force it into such a mold generate philosophical confusion rather than clarity (Habermas, 1984). This realization prompted a fundamental rethinking of the nature of meaning and understanding.

In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein abandons the quest for an underlying essence of language. Instead, he adopts a descriptive method that attends to the actual ways in which words are used across diverse contexts. This methodological shift signals a rejection of materialistic reductionism in favor of a more human centered perspective. Language is no longer viewed as a mirror of reality but as a tool woven into the fabric of human life.

This reorientation also reflects a change in philosophical temperament. The later Wittgenstein is less concerned with establishing certainty and more attentive to the complexity and variability of human practices. Meaning becomes something negotiated and sustained within communities rather than something discovered through logical analysis alone (Brandt, 1994; Read, 2002).

Language as Human Practice

At the core of Wittgenstein's humanistic turn is the idea that language is a form of human activity. The concepts of language games and forms of life underscore the inseparability of language from the social and cultural contexts in which it operates (Malcolm, 1958). Words acquire meaning not by standing for objects but by being used in particular ways within shared practices.

This view foregrounds human agency in the constitution of meaning. Instead of being passive consumers of a predetermined system, speakers actively engage in ongoing linguistic practices. Learning a language involves mastering forms of action and reaction, not merely memorizing definitions. Therefore, understanding is not just cognitive but also practical and collaborative (Russell, 1918; Wittgenstein, 1969).

By emphasizing use and practice, Wittgenstein aligns language with other human activities such as playing games, engaging in rituals, or participating in social institutions (Taylor, 1995). Language develops into a dynamic phenomenon that is constantly influenced by the needs and goals of people. This conception stands in stark contrast to materialistic models that treat language as a static structure governed by objective rules.

Ethical and Existential Dimensions of Language

One of the most significant consequences of Wittgenstein's later philosophy is the expansion of language into ethical and existential domains. While the early Wittgenstein relegated ethics to the unsayable, the later philosophy recognizes that ethical understanding is embedded in forms of life and expressed through patterns of behavior and discourse. Moral concepts are not defined abstractly. Rather, their meaning is derived from their application in real world situations.

This insight has profound ethical implications. It suggests that moral disagreement is often rooted not in factual error but in divergent forms of life (Conant & Diamond, 2004; Wittgenstein, 1980). Understanding others requires more than just logical argument. It demands sensitivity to different ways of living and valuing. Language serves as a tool for ethical interaction. It can promote understanding or worsen conflict based on how people use it.

The existential dimension of language is equally significant. Wittgenstein's later work acknowledges the role of language in shaping human self-understanding. Through language, individuals articulate their experiences, express their identities and negotiate their place within the social world. Meaning is thus intertwined with the human quest for orientation and belonging (Rorty, 1989).

Humanism and the Rejection of Linguistic Absolutism

Wittgenstein's humanistic view of language also involves rejecting linguistic absolutism. This is the idea that there is only one correct way to represent reality (Williams, 1999). By emphasizing the plurality of language games he resists the temptation to privilege one form of discourse over others. Scientific, ethical, religious and everyday forms of language are understood as serving different purposes within different contexts (Cavell, 1979).

This pluralism challenges materialistic accounts that elevate scientific or factual language as the sole bearer of meaning. Wittgenstein does not deny the value of scientific discourse (Wittgenstein, 1969), but he keeps it alongside other linguistic practices rather than above them. To ensure that he affirms the richness and diversity of human expression.

Pluralism of this sort is a major factor that influences dialogue and tolerance. The acknowledgment of different language games working under different norms makes communication more timid and open. It prevents the application of strict rules to lifestyles that are not compliant with them.

Synthesis: From Structure to Life

The philosophical journey from the picture theory to language games can thus be understood as a movement from structure to life. Abstracted from human activity, the early Wittgenstein sought to ground meaning in the formal structure of language. The later Wittgenstein puts back in language within the practices, norms and forms of life that give it vitality and significance.

This shift does not represent a rejection of rigor but a redefinition of it. Later on, Wittgenstein thought being serious about philosophy meant paying close attention to how people actually use words and describing things carefully, not trying to create perfect, theoretical examples (Baker & Hacker, 1984). Being human centered doesn't make meaning less clear. Rather it makes it truer to how we use language.

Implications of the Humanistic Turn

The humanistic orientation of Wittgenstein's later philosophy has implications that extend beyond the philosophy of language. It offers a framework for understanding communication as a participatory and ethical activity which is shaped by cultural and social contexts. In an age marked by rigid ideologies and polarized discourse this perspective provides resources for fostering mutual understanding (Russell, 1918).

By reimagining language as a shared human practice, Wittgenstein challenges contemporary tendencies to treat communication as merely instrumental or transactional. His philosophy invites a more reflective engagement with language which acknowledges its power to shape relationships, communities and ways of life.

CRITICAL EVALUATION AND DISCUSSION

The philosophical journey of Ludwig Wittgenstein from the picture theory of meaning to the concept of language games represents one of the most influential developments in twentieth century philosophy. While the humanistic orientation of his later thought offers profound insights into language as a social and practical activity. It also raises important philosophical questions and challenges. This section critically evaluates Wittgenstein's transition by addressing both its strengths and limitations. As well as takes his contribution within broader philosophical debates.

Strengths of the Humanistic Turn

One of the most compelling strengths of Wittgenstein's later philosophy lies in its ability to account for the diversity and complexity of linguistic practices (Wittgenstein, 1953; Wittgenstein, 1980). By rejecting the idea of a single underlying essence of language, Wittgenstein provides a framework capable of accommodating the wide range of ways in which language functions in human life. This pluralistic approach resolves many of the difficulties faced by representational theories. Particularly their inability to explain non descriptive forms of language such as commands, expressions of emotion and ethical judgments.

The emphasis on meaning as use also offers a powerful critique of abstraction in philosophy. Wittgenstein's insistence on attending to ordinary language serves as a methodological reminder that philosophical clarity must be grounded in lived practice. This approach has influenced numerous philosophical movements. Like language philosophy, pragmatism and social philosophy. Its humanistic character lies in its recognition that understanding emerges from participation rather than from detached analysis.

Another significant strength is the ethical sensibility implicit in Wittgenstein's later work. By looking at how meaning works in real life, he highlights the importance of mutual recognition and shared practices in communication. This perspective increase empathy and openness, encourages one to engage with others on their own language (Kenny, 1973). In this respect, Wittgenstein's philosophy contributes not only to theoretical understanding but also to the cultivation of ethical dispositions in discourse.

Concerns about Relativism and Normativity

Despite these strengths, critics have raised concerns about the potential relativistic implications of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. If meaning is determined by use within particular forms of life, does this imply that there are no objective standards for evaluating linguistic practices (Carnap, 1937)? Some philosophers worry that Wittgenstein's emphasis on communal norms undermines the possibility of critique across cultural or social boundaries.

This concern is particularly acute in ethical and political contexts, where appeals to shared forms of life may seem insufficient to resolve deep disagreements. Critics say that if we don't have one standard way to judge all these different language games (Gadamer, 2004), Wittgenstein's idea could lead to a situation where we just accept whatever any culture does, even if it's unfair or cruel. Because we have no grounds to criticize it.

However, defenders of Wittgenstein respond that this objection misrepresents his position. The recognition of plurality does not imply the absence of critique. Rather it reframes critique as an internal and dialogical process. To really critique something (Malcolm, 1958), you have to understand where it's coming from first, not the other way around (Winch, 1958). From this perspective, Wittgenstein's humanism promotes a more context sensitive and ethically responsible mode of evaluation.

The Problem of Philosophical Quietism

Another recurring criticism concerns the charge of philosophical quietism. Wittgenstein's later philosophy is often interpreted as discouraging substantive philosophical theorizing in favor of descriptive analysis (Taylor, 1995). While this therapeutic approach aims to dissolve philosophical confusion, some critics argue that it leaves philosophy without the resources to address substantive normative or metaphysical questions (Russell, 1918).

This concern is especially relevant for those who seek systematic theories of meaning, ethics, or social order. Wittgenstein's refusal to offer such theories can be seen as a limitation. Particularly in contexts that demand normative guidance. Critics suggest that by focusing on description rather than prescription, Wittgenstein avoids engaging with the deeper structural issues that shape linguistic and social practices.

Yet this critique may underestimate the radical potential of Wittgenstein's method. By exposing the assumptions that underlie philosophical problems, his approach enables a more reflective engagement with language and its uses (Kenny, 1973). Rather than providing ready made answers, Wittgenstein invites individuals to examine their own linguistic practices and the forms of life that sustain them. This invitation can be seen as a strength rather than a weakness. Particularly within a humanistic framework that values autonomy and critical self-reflection.

Early and Later Wittgenstein: A Balanced Assessment

Assessing Wittgenstein's philosophical development requires resisting the temptation to treat his early and later works as simply right or wrong. The picture theory of meaning, despite its limitations, offered unprecedented clarity about the logical structure of language and influenced generations of philosophers. Its emphasis on precision and rigor remains valuable, particularly in scientific and formal contexts.

At the same time, the later philosophy addresses dimensions of language that the early work leaves unexplained. By embedding the language again in human practices, Wittgenstein corrects the abstraction of the *Tractatus* and expands the scope of philosophical inquiry (Williams, 1999). The transition from picture to game can thus be understood as a movement from a narrow but precise model to a broader and more inclusive one.

Rather than rejecting his early philosophy outright, the later Wittgenstein can be seen as responding to its internal tensions. The difficulties associated with logical atomism, the say-show distinction and the exclusion of ethical discourse all point toward the need for a more flexible approach. The later philosophy provides such an approach by reconceiving language as a human activity rather than a logical structure (Baker & Hacker, 1984; Wittgenstein, 1969).

Humanism as Philosophical Orientation

The humanistic approach of Wittgenstein's later thought lies not in the endorsement of a particular doctrine but in an orientation toward philosophy itself. This orientation prioritizes attentiveness to human practices, sensitivity to context and respect for the people. It resists the temptation to reduce complex phenomena to simplistic models and instead embraces the richness of human life (Kripke, 1982; Conant & Diamond, 2004).

From this perspective, Wittgenstein's philosophy offers a model of intellectual humility. It acknowledges the limits of theoretical explanation and the importance of human understanding. In an age of abstraction, this humanistic orientation remains deeply relevant.

Holistic Evaluation

Overall, Wittgenstein's transition from the picture theory to language games represents a profound enrichment of the philosophy of language. While his later approach raises legitimate questions about normativity and critique, its strengths in capturing the lived reality of language outweigh these concerns (Wittgenstein, 1980). By foregrounding human practice, Wittgenstein provides a framework that is both philosophically insightful and ethically resonant (Russell, 1918).

This critical evaluation reinforces the central claim of the present study that Wittgenstein's later philosophy marks a decisive shift toward a humanistic understanding of language. This shift not only resolves the limitations of the early representational model but also offers enduring resources for thinking about communication, understanding and human coexistence.

CONCLUSION

The philosophical journey traced in this work from the picture theory of meaning to the concept of language games reveals the depth and significance of Ludwig Wittgenstein's transformation as a great philosopher. This transition is not merely a technical revision within analytic philosophy but a profound reorientation in how language, meaning and human life are understood. By moving away from a rigid, representational model of language toward a practice based, contextual and participatory view, Wittgenstein reshaped the philosophy of language in ways that continue to resonate across disciplines.

In his early work, particularly the *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein tried to establish the limits of meaningful discourse through logical analysis (Wittgenstein, 1953). The picture theory of meaning offered a powerful and elegant account of how propositions represent reality by emphasizing structure. However this approach also imposed severe constraints on language by abstracting it from the lived contexts in which it functions. Meaning was treated as something determined by logical form rather than by human use.

The later philosophy articulated in the *Philosophical Investigations*, represents a decisive response to these limitations (Wittgenstein, 1980). By introducing the concepts of language games through meaning as use, rule following and forms of life, Wittgenstein embedded language again within the fabric of human practices. From this point of view, language is no longer a mirror of reality but a living activity through which human beings engage with one another and the world. Meaning emerges from participation in shared practices rather than from correspondence with an abstract logical structure.

This work has argued that this shift constitutes a movement from a materialistic conception of language toward a fundamentally humanistic one. The later Wittgenstein recognizes human agency, cultural context and social interaction as central to the constitution of meaning. Language becomes inseparable from forms of life. Such a perspective not only

broadens the scope of the philosophy of language but also deepens its relevance to real world concerns (Taylor, 1995).

The humanistic implications of Wittgenstein's later thought are especially significant in contemporary contexts marked by communicative complexity and social isolation. In various domains rigid and instrumental views of language often produce misunderstanding and conflict. Wittgenstein's emphasis on plurality, context and shared practices offers an alternative framework that encourages dialogue, empathy and reflective engagement. By resisting linguistic absolutism and dogmatism, his philosophy provides resources for navigating difference without erasing it.

At the same time, the critical evaluation undertaken in this work acknowledges that Wittgenstein's later philosophy is not without challenges. Concerns about relativism, normativity and philosophical quietism highlight ongoing debates about the limits and possibilities of his later approach. Yet these challenges do not diminish the value of his humanistic turn (Wittgenstein, 1980; Russell, 1918). Rather, they invite further reflection on how philosophical inquiry can balance rigor with attentiveness to human life.

In conclusion, Wittgenstein's journey from "picture" to "game" represents one of the most significant reconfigurations of language in modern philosophy. It demonstrates that meaning cannot be fully captured by abstract representation alone but must be understood as emerging from lived human practices. By foregrounding the participatory and ethical dimensions of language, Wittgenstein offers a vision of philosophy that is not only analytically insightful but also deeply humane. In an age of rigidity in thought and discourse this vision is very necessary.

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