CHAPTER II

"Our clear and simple language-games stand as objects of comparison . . ."

- Wittgenstein

PI, p.130.
CHAPTER II

LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGE GAME

Analytic philosophy gives a new direction in the study of philosophy with a more emphasis on the consideration of the relationship between the language and the world since the beginning of twentieth-century. We can describe the reality of the world through language, which we normally use. The story of twentieth-century philosophy is very largely the story of the notion, sense or meaning. The problem of language and reality play, therefore, a very important role in Wittgenstein’s philosophy.

In the introduction of the Revolution in Philosophy, Gilbert Ryle writes on the different considerations of meanings by different philosophers.
"Meanings are what Moore's analyses have been analyses of; meanings are what Russell's logical atoms were atoms of; meanings in one sense but not in another, were that Russell's 'incomplete symbols' were bereft of; meanings are what logical considerations prohibit to the antinomy-generating forms of words on which Frege and Russell had tried to found arithmetic; meanings are what the members of the Vienna Circle proffered a general litmus-paper for; meanings are what the Tractatus, with certain qualifications, denies to the would-be propositions both of Formal Logic and of philosophy; and yet meanings are just what, in different ways, philosophy and logic are ex-officio about."1

The inquiry into the meaning of our expressions has become a very important and fascinating area of study in philosophy. The very debate over the importance of meaning and its interpretation is as old as philosophy. We can trace back the

roots of the concern over meaning to the history of ideas since its inception. But the study of meaning is considered as an important area of philosophy from the beginning of twentieth century. The analysis of meaning has become more popular and influential after the publication Frege's celebrated work on Sense and Reference. Regarding the contribution of Frege to the analysis of language vis-à-vis his theory of meaning Michael Dummett clearly spells out in the following manner:

"It was not, therefore, qua logician, but qua philosopher, that Frege pushed his inquiry further; he was not satisfied with giving an analysis of language – or, at least of a large part of language – adequate for the purposes of the logician: he wanted to give account of the working of language, an account which did not proceed by talking any fundamental concept for granted. An account of the working of language is a theory of meaning, for to know how an expression function, taken as part of language, is just to know its meaning. So Frege's philosophy, so far as it is concerned with language generally, rather than
specially with mathematics, is largely constituted by his theory of meaning".2

This tradition of analysis of language as a philosophical problem spread out through the Continental and the British philosophical community. As contemporary trend the discussions on the problems of meaning are carried on in many part of the world. In England, Russell, Wittgenstein and other analytic philosophers joined the new movement of philosophical study. They advocated their own theories of interpretation of human expressions in search of meaning. According to them, the task of philosophy is to describe the world that we live through the analysis of language.

The objective of this chapter is to explore Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy with particular emphasis on his view on the relationship of language and world. The author will concentrate the present discussion on the theory of meaning as reflected in Wittgenstein's two major works, i.e., the Picture theory of the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, 1921 and the Use

---

theory of the Philosophical Investigations, 1953. When we talk about Wittgenstein's philosophy we can generally classify his works into two phases – the early and the later phases. The Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus represents the early phase and the Philosophical Investigations the later one. The study of the meanings of an expression, according to Wittgenstein, is considered one of the most important tasks in philosophy. It is certainly true that our thoughts, feelings and desires are expressed through a language to give a definite meaning in our communication. Language is used as a means of communication to convey some meaningful ideas to other people in our social discourse.

The difference we have referred to earlier is the difference in the conception of philosophic method between the earlier and later philosophies. This change in the conception of language parallels the change in the method of philosophical analysis. There are two radically different ideas of language:
1. Language as logical picture depicting forms and structure of objects through forms and structure of names;

2. Language as one human activity, integrated with other human activities through countless different kinds of uses of words.

Wittgenstein's conception of language in the earlier work emphasizes the essential structures of language. The meaning of a word is determined through the name of an object that depicts the object as it is. There is a common structure between the structures of word and name of an object. The structure of language has the superficial similarities with the structure of the grammars of ordinary language. This superficial similarity creates confusion when we try to know the language of our discourse deeper. We have to dig out the hidden essential structures by using a logically correct symbolism that will prevent mistakes. Wittgenstein shows this intricate relation of the structure of language with the structure of world in the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus. He says that now, too, we
understand our feeling that once we have a sign language in which everything is all right. We already have a correct logical point of view. According to Wittgenstein, the task of philosophy is an analysis of a sign language that is governed by logical grammar in place of ordinary grammar.

The new metaphor of language as a box of tools replaced that of language as a picture, in the *Philosophical Investigations*. The idea of the absolutely simple logical picture was replaced by that of the model of language-game. At the same time the idea of the all tools having something in common or all games having something common which will be the essence of game or tool, was abandoned. And this reduces super concepts of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* such as name, object, sentence, reference and descriptions to ordinary words without single, final and meanings.

While we study the meaning of an expressed thought, our analysis will confine to a technical sense of the term, not to the lexical and the grammatical sense. To determine the meaning of

---

A given sentence we will observe the grammatical structure and necessarily it refers to the grammatical rule of syntax that governs the forming of a meaningful sentence in a language system. If the rule of syntax is not violated in use, then every sentence is meaningful. Otherwise it is not. Moreover, the meanings can be understood in the lexical and semantic sense, too, as something that has to be conveyed or signified by the sentence. In this sense, every word or a combination of words has a peculiar meaning. But, in Wittgenstein's view, every statement, which has been used to express an idea in our language, does not necessarily have a meaning, even though the statement appears to be meaningful from grammatical standpoint.

The meaning of a statement is shown the relationship between the statement and its state of affairs. A statement, for instance, 'the stone is soft' may have perfect meaning in a particular context of discourse but it is not true, vis-à-vis, impossibility to ascertain in the real experience of external phenomenon. Wittgenstein, for example does not speak of the use of a word (1) as grammarians or students of linguistics do or
(2) as most logician do or (3) as linguistic philosophers, such as J.L. Austin, do. He does not, in other words, speak of the use of a word to bring out linguistic, logical or cultural points about language, but rather to bring out philosophical points of the kind philosophers traditionally have been interested in.\(^4\)

To determine the truth value of a statement is another inquiry of philosophy. A statement or proposition, which is taken as synonymous term by Wittgenstein, can be divided into atomic and compound propositions. An atomic proposition has its own truth-value. It can either be true or false by virtue of being a picture of reality. In this respect Wittgenstein points out that “In order to tell whether a picture is true or false we must compare it with reality”.\(^5\)

The truth functional value of a compound proposition is determined by the truth-value of the components atomic propositions along with the respective logical connective. Let us take a compound proposition, for instance, “If it is raining then I

---


\(^5\) Ludwig Wittgenstein, op. cit., section 2.223.
am not going out” has a truth functional value. In this proposition if the antecedent of the proposition is true and the consequent is false, then the truth-value of the proposition will be false. However, the inquiry of such determination of the validity of an expression is not related with the study of meaning.

The early work of Wittgenstein mainly devotes to a study about the structural meaning of language as relating to the reality of the world. Russell’s remark that Wittgenstein is concerned with a logically perfect language and not with any ordinary language is just not true if we see that Wittgenstein is interested in the problem of description. To forbid nonsense it is enough to show that the true function of language is to describe. Metaphysics is only a pseudo-description.6

Wittgenstein thinks that language is to depict the facts of the world. According to this view, he puts forward that every word does have a meaning with reference to object and sentence also have a particular sense vis-a-vis the objects. Thus every

sentence has a meaning of its own because it is an outcome of a combination of words which consist of names signifying simple objects. The early position of Wittgenstein's philosophy stated on the determination of meaning, assumes that the ultimate meaning of the word consist in what the object names or means. This theory of meaning is not exactly similar to the view presented by Augustine's theory of particular picture of essence of language.

It is held in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* that any proposition presupposes the whole of language. "If objects are given, then at the same time we are given all objects. If elementary propositions are given" and "If all objects are given, then at the same time all possible states of affairs are also given". An elementary proposition is a combination of names, and in order to understand the proposition one must in some sense know the objects for which the name stands. In understanding any proposition at all one must know all objects and all possibilities. Any proposition whatever carries with it the whole of 'logical space'. The view is connected with the idea that

---

7 Ludwig Wittgenstein, op. cit., section 5.524 and 2.0124.
there is an essence of propositions. The essence of propositions is the "essence of all description and thus the essence of the world". The essence of proposition is the same as the universal form of proposition. That there is a universal form of proposition is proved by the fact that all possibilities – all forms of proposition – "must be foreseeable".

Language represents or depicts the reality of the world in the sense of signified assertions. An elementary proposition is a picture of reality especially of a state of affairs. In a picture a certain situation is depicted. The picture has the same structure as the situation. It is the way in which the structure of the language pictures a possible combination of elements in reality, a possible state of affairs. "Wittgenstein's Tractatus may be called a synthesis of the theory of truth functions and the ideas that language is a picture of reality. Out of this synthesis arises a third main ingredient of the book, its doctrine of that which cannot be said, only shown". In the opening line of the Tractatus, Wittgenstein states that 'the world is all that is the case'.

---

8 Ibid., section 5.4711.
9 Ludwig Wittgenstein, Notebook, p. 89 and op. cit., section 4.5.
Language is an instrument with which we describe the reality of the world. The limit of our language is the limit of our world. The point simply is that man cannot imagine a thing without language or beyond the boundary of his language. The language that a man possessed is used to map out the limit of his world. It shows that there is an isomorphic relation between the structure of language and the structure of the reality. This means a one-to-one correspondence between the components of language and the components of the reality so as to depict the picture of the world. The state of affairs or the facts are independent of us. Propositions cannot represent logical form: it is mirrored in them. What finds its reflection in language, language cannot represent. What expresses itself in language, we cannot express by means of language. Propositions show the logical form of reality. They display it.\textsuperscript{12}

Wittgenstein further shows the relation between language and reality in the phrase "What can be shown, can be said".\textsuperscript{13} It means that something which can be said at all can be said clearly

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., section 4.121.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., section 4.1212.
and what cannot be talked about we must pass over in silence. “The world of reality not only determines the truth or falsity of our assertion but gives content to them. Language is hooked on to reality all the time by displaying it in a form of common to the arrangement of facts."\textsuperscript{14}

The above Wittgensteinian analysis of meaning is called the picture theory of meaning. But this theory of meaning fails to interpret all the uses of language. Thus, Wittgenstein himself rejected the picture theory in the later part of his work.

For the later Wittgenstein, the meanings of words are grounded neither in the external objects to which they refer nor in the internal objects, sensations, images, or feeling accompanying them. The meanings of words are given by the rules or norms that govern their use. Use, according to Wittgenstein, means necessarily public use and refers not just to a conceptual, linguistic sphere in a particular context, but also to the life form in which our concepts are constructed. And again, according to Wittgenstein, the rule or norm is not so much that

\textsuperscript{14} S. N. Ganguly, op. cit., p. 13.
which tells a person unambiguously what he must do. Rather the rule or norm is that which displays the sense or meaning of the action or practice, once it is carried out. In the Philosophical Investigations, Wittgenstein came to know that the picture theory of meaning has certain limitations in determining the meanings of our expressions in some cases. The picture theory of meaning fails to solve the problem arising from the fact that we use the same expression in conveying different meanings in different situations and contexts.

Moreover, it also fails to interpret the meanings of the statement expressed by one as private language user. The Private Language Argument was developed in the Philosophical Investigations. The fascinating argument was intended to establish the impossibility of conveying of meaning in a private language. This problem of meaning in the private language will be discussed later on in a separate chapter on Private Language Argument. Wittgenstein gave more analysis on the possibility of meaningful expression of language. Wittgenstein tries to adopt a new approach of inquiry into meaning in his Philosophical Investigations with a critical analysis of Augustine’s theory. He
opines that 'the meaning of word is its use in the language'. This form of language is used in public. To determine the clear meaning of the word, Wittgenstein adopted a distinctive method of study that has been used to analyse the primitive form of language, i.e., the analysis of language-game.

The *Philosophical Investigations* emphatically rejects the idea that each proposition carries with it the whole of language. A sentence does presuppose a 'language game', but a language game will be only a small segment of the whole of language. An example of a language game is the following, which appears at the beginning of the Investigations. Wittgenstein gives a clear example of language-games in the form of relationship between two persons when they perform an activity. Wittgenstein writes:

"That philosophical concept of meaning has its place in a primitive idea of the way language functions. But one can also say that it is idea of a language more primitive than ours.

---

Let us imagine a language for which the description given by Augustine is right. The language is meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B. A is building with building stones: there are block, pillars, slabs, and beams. B has to pass the stones, and that in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they use a language consisting of the words ‘block’, ‘pillar’, ‘slab’, ‘beam’. A calls them out; - B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call. – Conceive this as a complete primitive language.”16

Wittgenstein called the words and the actions with which they are joined a language game. He said that it is complete in itself and could even be conceived to be the entire language of a tribe. If we think it is incomplete we are only comparing it with our more complex language. In the Brown Book there is an analogy of someone’s description of the game of chess without mentioning pawns. As a description of chess it is incomplete, yet we can also say that it is a complete description of a simpler

game. This simpler game does not presuppose chess, nor does the part played, for example, by the words 'block' in the game its use in description or question.

The Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus assumes that there is a universal form of language, just as it assumes that there is a universal form of number which is common to all numbers. The Investigations rejects this assumption. There is nothing common to the various forms of language that makes them language. The language is an activity in which we speak or write whatever we think, feel and desire to communicate with the others just like performing an action or playing a game. One language can differ from another language. As there are different communities, there are different languages. Every language community has its own activity of language in which we learn to speak the words or sentences. These activities are similar with playing a game. There is not something common to all games. We are asked to consider the various kinds of games. There are, for example, board game, card game, ball game and the variety within each game. If we pick out a feature common to two games we shall find that it is absent from some other place in the spectrum
games. Not all require competition between players and so on. What makes all of them games, what gives unity to those activities is not some feature present in all games but a multitude of relationships overlapping and criss crossing. Wittgenstein says family resemblances are mere resemble of genus, not common to all the species. He writes:

"And the result of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail.

I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than 'family resemblances'; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc., etc., overlap and criss-cross in the same way. – And I shall say: 'games' form a family.

And for instance the kinds of number form a family in the same way. Why do we call something a
'number'? Well, perhaps because it has a direct-relationship with several things that have hitherto been called number; and this can be said to give it an indirect relationship to other things we call the same name. And we extend our concept of number as in spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre. And the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibre.\textsuperscript{17}

Wittgenstein employed an analogy of a family resemblance. One can often see a striking resemblance between several generations of the same family. Study them at close hand, one may find that there is no feature common to all of the family. The eyes or the build or temperament are not always the same. The family resemblance is due to many features that overlap and criss-cross. The unity of games is like a family resemblance. This is also the case with sentence, description, and numbers.

\textsuperscript{17} Ludwig Wittgenstein, op. cit., section 66-67.
Language-game is the fundamental method of Wittgenstein’s analysis of language that measures the sense of an expression in the *Philosophical Investigations*. In trying to determine the sense of a sentence in the later philosophy we have to look at the use of the sentence in connection with a particular language activity. The same sentence can have different meanings depending on what we are using in different situations and contexts. The intended meaning of an expression can be fixed by looking into the manner how we use the words when we express it. Language is mere activity of use with many words.

The later philosophy of Wittgenstein as shown clearly in the *Philosophical Investigations* is a coherent arrangement of his discrete ideas found in the prototype work of the Blue and Brown Books. Wittgenstein begins to analyse the philosophical problem from a new dimension. He thinks that we have a tendency to be misled by substantives to look for something that corresponds to them. Doing philosophy is an effort to answer many questions that comes in our minds when they interact with the physical environments. There are a number of questions to be
answered when we critically look at the world, such as what is
time?, what is meaning?, what is knowledge?, what is thought?,
what are numbers?, etc. and expect to be able to answer these
questions by naming something. Wittgenstein formulated the
technique of language game to break through the hold of
tendency:

"I shall in the future again and again draw your
attention to what I shall call language games. These
are ways of using signs simpler than those in which
we use the signs of our highly complicated everyday
language. Language games are the forms of language
with which a child begins to make use of the words.
The study of language games is the study of primitive
forms of language or primitive languages. If we want
to study the problems of truth and falsehood, of the
agreement and disagreement of propositions with
reality, of the nature of assertion, assumption and
question, we shall with great advantage look at
primitive forms of language in which these forms of
thinking appear without the confusing background of
highly complicated processes of thought. When we look at such simple forms of language the mental mist which seems to enshroud our ordinary use of language disappears. We see activities, reactions, which are clear-cut and transparent."  

The view stated in the Philosophical Investigations has been considered as a turning point of Wittgenstein's Philosophy. In the later work, Wittgenstein changes the earlier view to a new a dimension while studying the concept of meaning. In the analysis of language, Wittgenstein deals with language into two ways in order to serve his own purpose. Generally we use language in the interaction among us as community based language. Through this medium one can communicate one's thought. The expressions of a thought in a language system can be interpreted within a community of language users. They can share the idea and checked the truth value of whatever they expressed. We may use, on the other hand, the language at the level of personal purpose like the language written in personal diary, codified language of a group. It is true that language may

---

be classified into two ways of using; one is the public language and another is private language. The public language is one, which is applied to our ordinary discourse. It can convey meaningful ideas because it is governed by a certain fixed rule, like practices, customs of a community of language-users. Using a rule while we speak a language is a must just as we use a rule of game while we play any form of game. We will discuss rule following in another chapter. In Wittgenstein's philosophy of language rule following concept has been given more important role to understand the meaning of an expression in a language. Learning a language of the particular speech community is to habituate to the use of the words or sentences and rule thereof. "To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life".19

The rule of a language plays an important role in our communication system. For instance, a certain fixed rule is needed to communicate a meaningful idea to each other just like we need a rule while we play the game of chess. A successful game is guided by rule of the game. If some one disobey the rule of the game, i.e., wrong movement of knight, the chess

match cannot be continued with the pleasure of the game. Wittgenstein in his terminology calls it the rule following of language by learning the process of naming the objects and its varied uses of meanings in different contexts. By using this game theory, we can interpret the meaning of all our expressions. Thus, the expressions in a language have a meaning after we interpret them within the rule of the language. As the language is governed by the rules of language, other people should interpret the expressed sentences within this rule.

The meaning of language is determined by various functions of its words what we use in communication process. The functions of language can be compared with the function of tools in a toolbox. Wittgenstein said that “think of tools in a box: there is hammer, pliers, a saw, a screwdriver, a rule, a glue-pot, glue, nails and screws. The functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects.”20 The language has meaning in their function as the tools have shown the functional meaning when it is used. The language users of particular language community can understand this function. When a communication

20 Ibid., section 11.
occurred between two persons they should have shared a common language rule to be able to grasp the meaning of the words or sentences they speak. Wittgenstein thinks that a rule is required while playing a language-game, so that the various meaning of the language can be fixed in the function. Suppose if one violate the rule of the game there cannot be a meaningful discourse at all. Thus rule following is an important criterion for the determination of meaning of an expression of sensation. The present work will discuss Wittgenstein's conception of the rule following in detail in a separate chapter later on.

The words and sentences in themselves are dead – they are mere vibrations in the air or marks on paper, and such have no meaning,21 if they are not to be used as means of communication amongst persons. The symbol that has been used in a sentence has become meaningful only when there is at least a process of exchanging ideas and the symbol is important in determining the meaning. A philosophical analysis, devoid of the account of other people, will itself be meaningless. According to Wittgenstein, philosophical problems are outcomes of our

21 George Pitcher, the Philosophy of Wittgenstein, New Jersey, 1953, p. 255.
misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the meaning, which is actually expressed by the language. "The problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known. Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language." 

Another more important aspect of Wittgenstein’s criterion of meaning is that the competency of language user has also played a vital role while we are trying to determine the meaning of a language. It is true that the meaning of the words or sentence is also determined by the competency of the language user in accordance with the situations and contexts. We see, for instance, a 'blue' car and 'blue' light in the street. The word blue is the same but it signifies different meanings according to the context of using the word. A particular game of language is used here to signify the word in different meanings. In absence of this rule one cannot distinguish the different meanings of the word 'blue'. Again the phrase the red book may have different meaning in the mind of other people because of their political leaning. Delivering a lecture to a group of farmers about space

technology is a mere senseless noise but it will be meaningful statements to the students of physics. The change in the meaning of the same statement is observed in different situations and contexts and also according to the competency of different minds.

Wittgenstein maintains that the meaningful statements are only those statements expressed in public language that are shareable and testable correctly by the language users with reference to a fixed rule. He denies the meaning of the statements that falls in private language category. A private language is not governed by the rule of language. Therefore errors cannot be checked and it is also not shareable. There are some forms of language that has been used in a private manner. Such are code language, telegraphic massage, etc. etc. These languages are not private language because they follow certain rule. However, language in the form of introspective talk, dreams or hallucinations, imaginations are under the category of private language. They are not considered as language in the true sense of Wittgenstein's term by considering their meaninglessness and due to lack of commonly shareable rule.
The private language is outside the purview of language rule and it does not abide by any rule at all.

There are always doubts on the legitimacy of private language so far the conveying of meaning is concerned. In a situation one may be considered in duel forms – subject and object. Considering a person as an object of knowledge from the standpoint of other person, if he says himself, ‘I am in pain’ or ‘I have headache’ then a question may ask here, ‘Is the statement meaningful’. Wittgenstein is of the opinion that such expression is meaningless. This statement falls within the category of private language. Wittgenstein rules out the putative language speaker following the rules of his own language on the ground that there is no criterion for him to check whether he is following a certain rule correctly.

From the above discussion it is known that meanings are not ipso facto in the language in itself. To know the meaning of an expression in language is to interpret it within a rule that prevails in the speech community. For interpreting an expression the primary ingredient is the existence of speaker and hearer,
that is, other minds to exchange certain ideas by following a fixed rule of language. Language is used to communicate to each other within a certain rule just like playing the game of chess. In Wittgenstein’s philosophy the concept of rule following is important tool to interpret the meaning of language.