THE PRAGMATICS OF MEANING: REVISITING WITTGENSTEIN'S USE THEORY OF LANGUAGE

A PRAGMÁTICA DO SIGNIFICADO: REVISITANDO A TEORIA DO USO DA LINGUAGEM DE WITTGENSTEIN

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Abstract: This article examines Wittgenstein's critique of Saint Augustine's referential theory of language in *Philosophical Investigations*, analyzing its limitations and exploring Wittgenstein's alternative framework centered on use, language-games, and forms of life. Augustine's model – where words name objects, meaning is reference, and learning occurs via ostension – serves as Wittgenstein's primary target to dismantle essentialist and representational theories of language. The research has two key objectives: 1) to demonstrate how Wittgenstein's rejection of Augustine's "naming-describing" dichotomy reveals the diversity of linguistic functions (e.g., psychological statements like "I have toothache"); and 2) to argue that Wittgenstein's shift from meaning as reference in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* to meaning as use in the *Philosophical Investigations* resolves philosophical problems surrounding private experience, solipsism, and public language. The methodology combines conceptual analysis of Wittgenstein's texts with critical engagement with secondary literature to trace the evolution of his thought. Key findings include: a) ostensive definitions fail for immaterial concepts (e.g., pain); b) the "beetle in the box" analogy critiques Cartesian privacy, showing sensations gain meaning through public language-games; and c) grammar, not ontology, governs word-use, as seen in contrasts like "I have toothache" (expression) *versus* "He has a book" (description). The article concludes that Wittgenstein's later work replaces Augustine's "physical language" model with a pluralistic view of language as a toolkit embedded in social practices, challenging nominalism and reshaping debates on intentionality and linguistic diversity.
Keywords: language-games; meaning; language; pragmatics; Wittgenstein.

Resumo: Este artigo aborda a crítica de Wittgenstein à teoria referencial da linguagem de Santo Agostinho, as suas limitações, e a alternativa centrada no uso, jogos de linguagem e formas de vida. O modelo de Agostinho – no qual as palavras nomeiam objetos, o significado é referência, e a aprendizagem ocorre por ostensão – serve como alvo principal para Wittgenstein desconstruir teorias essencialistas e representacionais da linguagem. Este artigo tem dois objetivos: 1) demonstrar como a rejeição de Wittgenstein à dicotomia agostiniana "nomear-descrever" revela a diversidade de funções linguísticas (e.g., enunciados psicológicos como "Tenho uma dor de

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dentes"); e 2) argumentar que a transição de Wittgenstein, do significado como referência no *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* para o significado como uso nas *Investigações Filosóficas*, resolve problemas filosóficos relativos à experiência privada e à linguagem. A metodologia teórico-conceptual centra-se nos textos de Wittgenstein para traçar a evolução do seu pensamento. Entre as conclusões, destacam-se: a) as definições ostensivas falham para conceitos imateriais (e.g., dor); b) a analogia do "escaravelho na caixa" critica a privacidade cartesiana, mostrando que as sensações adquirem significado através de jogos de linguagem públicos; e c) a gramática, e não a ontologia, governa o uso das palavras, como se observa em contrastes como "Tenho uma dor de dentes" (expressão) *versus* "Ele tem um livro" (descrição). Conclui-se que a obra tardia de Wittgenstein substitui o modelo agostiniano de "linguagem física" por uma visão pluralista da linguagem como um conjunto de ferramentas enraizado em práticas sociais, desafiando o nominalismo e reconfigurando debates sobre intencionalidade e diversidade linguística.
Palavras-chave: jogos de linguagem; linguagem; pragmática; significado; Wittgenstein.

Texto de autor convidado.

Introduction

The relationship between language and reality has been a central concern in both philosophy and semiotics, with profound implications for understanding how meaning is constructed, communicated, and contested in society. Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (PI) marks a decisive break from referential theories of language, particularly the Augustinian model, which posits that words function primarily as names for objects and that meaning is established through ostensive definitions. Augustine's account, rooted in his *Confessions*, presents language acquisition as a process of correlating words with objects – a view that Wittgenstein systematically dismantles to reveal the rich diversity of linguistic practices that cannot be reduced to mere labeling.

This article examines Wittgenstein's critique of Augustine's referential theory, demonstrating how his alternative framework – centered on use, language-games, and forms of life – offers a more nuanced understanding of meaning, one that is deeply embedded in social interaction. The relevance of this debate extends beyond philosophy into semiotics, where the structuralist (e.g., Saussure) and pragmatic (e.g., Peirce) traditions have similarly grappled with the arbitrariness of signs and the social conventions that govern their interpretation. While structuralism emphasizes the systemic nature of signification, Wittgenstein's later work foregrounds the pragmatic and contextual dimensions of language, aligning with contemporary sociolinguistic and

discourse-analytic approaches that examine how meaning is negotiated in real-world interactions.

Regarding the research objectives and theoretical framework, this article has two primary purposes: 1) to expose the limitations of Augustine's naming-describing model, particularly its inability to account for non-referential language uses (e.g., expressions of pain, commands, or social rituals), considering that Wittgenstein's famous example – "five red apples" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1996, § 1) – illustrates that meaning cannot be derived solely from object-word correspondence but depends on situated practices; 2) to demonstrate how Wittgenstein's shift from meaning as reference in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (TLP) to meaning as use in PI resolves longstanding philosophical problems, including the critique of private language and solipsism. The "beetle in the box" analogy (WITTGENSTEIN, 1996, § 293) underscores that even subjective experiences (e.g., pain) acquire meaning through public language-games, not private ostension.

Methodologically, this analysis combines close readings of Wittgenstein's texts with critical engagement with secondary literature on grammatical investigations and semiotic interpretations to trace the evolution of his thought and its implications for semiotics and social theory.

Concerning the semiotic and sociolinguistic implications, Wittgenstein's later philosophy challenges not only Augustine but also rigidly structuralist and idealist theories of language. His emphasis on language-games – rule-governed but flexible practices – resonates with Peircean semiotics, where meaning emerges through interpretative habits, and with Bakhtinian dialogism, where utterances are shaped by social context. Crucially, Wittgenstein's insistence that "the meaning of a word is its use in the language" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1996, § 43) aligns with sociolinguistic research on language variation, where norms are not fixed but negotiated within communities.

This perspective has critical implications for debates on linguistic authority and power. Augustine's model, by privileging a "correct" naming relation, inadvertently reinforces normative hierarchies (e.g., "standard" *versus* "dialectal" speech), whereas Wittgenstein's pluralism legitimizes diverse language-games, from technical jargon to vernacular speech. In societies marked by linguistic inequality (e.g., postcolonial

contexts), this shift from reference to use helps deconstruct prescriptive ideologies, revealing how meaning is politically contested.

The structure of the article is simple and based on three sections; it proceeds as follows: section one focuses exclusively on Augustine's model and Wittgenstein's negative critique; section two develops Wittgenstein's positive alternative (language-games, public criteria); section three explores philosophical consequences (solipsism, grammar's autonomy).

Wittgenstein's PI unfolds through a natural three-section progression that moves from critique to reconstruction to implication. The first section meticulously dismantles Augustine's referential theory of language, exposing how its reduction of meaning to naming fails to account for ordinary language use. This critique isn't merely destructive – it creates the conceptual space for Wittgenstein's positive account of meaning as use within language-games, which forms the heart of the second section. Here, Wittgenstein replaces Augustine's static naming model with a dynamic vision of language as embedded in social practices, where words gain meaning through their employment in concrete contexts and public criteria replace private ostension.

The third section emerges organically from this foundation, exploring the profound philosophical consequences of this linguistic turn. By demonstrating how grammar operates autonomously from metaphysical commitments and how solipsistic worries dissolve when we examine actual language use, Wittgenstein completes his transformative re-conception of philosophy itself. This threefold movement – from Augustine's errors to language-games to their philosophical payoff – mirrors Wittgenstein's therapeutic method: we must first diagnose the disease of philosophical confusion before prescribing the cure of grammatical investigation. Each phase builds indispensably on the last, creating a cohesive arc that begins with what language is not (Augustine's picture), establishes what it is (a toolkit of language-games), and finally reveals why this matters, freeing us from conceptual bewitchment. The elegance of this structure lies in how each subsequent part answers questions raised by the previous one, while deepening our understanding of Wittgenstein's revolutionary approach to language and meaning.

By reframing Wittgenstein's critique in semiotic and sociolinguistic terms, this article underscores the necessity of viewing language not as a static nomenclature but as a dynamic, socially embedded practice – one that shapes and is shaped by the communities that use it.

1. Wittgenstein's critique of the Augustinian picture of language

It is well-known that PI begins with a critical analysis of a "particular picture of the essence of human language" based on Book I, § 8 of Augustine's *Confessions*. Augustine describes how he learned to use words as an child: first, when his elders named an object he physically grasped the thing to which their utterances and movements were directed; second, the intention of his elders was shown through their behavior (bodily movement, facial expression, direction of look, tone of voice, etc.) that Augustine recognized as expressions of states of mind; third, he trained his own mouth to form signs and expressed his desires.

According to this intended Augustinian picture of language:

1) words are names and name objects (*rerum signa*);
2) sentences are combinations of names that describe how the things are;
3) every word has a meaning (which is correlated with the word);
4) the meaning of a word is the object for which a word stands;
5) the main process to explain the words is by ostensive definition;
6) naming and describing are the two essential functions of language;
7) language is entailed to reality through connections between words and the world.

Why does Wittgenstein mention Augustine instead of the interesting studies of Frege or Russell on logical semantics (which were very important works at that time)? It was not only because Augustine related the aim of word use in language-acquisition and language-learning. On the contrary, Wittgenstein quotes the *Confessions* to base his new and critical analysis of language and to reject the misleading Augustinian perspective, considering that not all words refer to objects and that the meaning of words is not the object, but the use of words.

Wittgenstein points out that this Augustinian conception of language, focused on the operation of naming and describing, gives a distorted image of language, ignoring a wide variety of aspects that characterize our common use of ordinary language. Wittgenstein observes that Augustine does not speak of there being any difference between kinds of words. It seems that Augustine had only in mind a set of words that name physical objects, i.e. objects that can be observed in the external world through the denomination of a system of physical language (WITTGENSTEIN, 1996, § 1). If words stand for things in the world, what is the meaning of "five red apples"?

For this reason, the first sixty-four or so paragraphs of PI develop and criticize this faulty and naïve Augustinian account of language. Wittgenstein could not find a better pretext for introducing one of the main topics of PI: common language use and its meaningful understanding of different kinds of words and expressions. The opening remarks of PI represent Wittgenstein's intention to dismantle the Augustinian picture of language.

2. Language-games and the social foundations of meaning

To a certain extent, the Augustinian picture of language is vulnerable to many criticisms, e.g. Augustine's language-learning is, *prima facie*, supernatural, because, on one hand, the learning of words depends on the learner already knowing about language (WITTGENSTEIN, 1996, § 31), while, on the other hand, learning by ostensive definition is impossible for immaterial things such as feeling a pain (WITTGENSTEIN, 1996, §§ 28, 33). We do not learn psychological words by ostensive definition (GEACH, SHAH & JACKSON, 4 ff.), since they are intangible. According to Wittgenstein, we must study the usage of words in social practices governed by language-games (WITTGENSTEIN, 1996, § 43). In this way, it is important to distinguish between a physical language (viz. applied to objects of an external world) from a phenomenal language (viz. applied to inner and subjective experiences). This topic leads to the solipsistic problem, the language-use with the word "I", as demonstrated below.

Wittgenstein's opening critique of meaning as an object designed or signified by a word dwell upon several related topics. One of them is that there are no linguistic essences, because one word can have many uses, forming a field of family resemblances

(WITTGENSTEIN, 1996, § 67). The Augustinian picture of language helps Wittgenstein's critical remarks to form new and revolutionary ideas, such as that it is a mistake to suppose that there must be an essence or common meaning or use to all words.

For Wittgenstein, philosophy is the description and clarification of ordinary language use and does not require specialized vocabulary as science (SAVICKEY, 1999, p. 105). In his last philosophical works conceived between 1948-49 and 1949-51, Wittgenstein underlines the purpose of the use of the words (volume 1 of *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*, §§ 384-385; volume 2 of *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*, p. 2; see also Wittgenstein, 1998c, p. 97 and 1996, p. 212). In TLP and in PI, he develops the idea of a sign's meaning given for its use: "If a sign is not necessary then it is meaningless" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1999, 3.328); "The meaning of a word is its use in the language" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1996, § 43).

According to § 185 of PI, the essentials of language-games are the way of using the signs and its rules; not the meaning, even when Wittgenstein says that the meaning of a word is its use in the language (WITTGENSTEIN, 1996, §§ 138/197). Under Wittgenstein's view, language is rule-governed. During language learning, the child is exposed to the way words are used by adults. Through intensive training, children assimilate the rules and the correct mastery of words according to the application of rules. Since "the meaning of a word is its use in the language", learning the meaning of a word is learning how the word is used, i.e. the grammar for its use.

Therefore, if the Wittgenstein's task of philosophy is to make a clearer distinction between the factual (the world of objects, things and experiences) and the grammatical (the language of words for objects and sensations) it may be said that his single, cyclical and long track from TLP (written *circa* 1914-18) to On Certainty (written *circa* 1950-51) is the elucidation of grammar, which is redefined throughout his writings.

In his last writings, Wittgenstein identifies the meaning with the use. As he points out in *The Blue and Brown Books*, the meaning of a word is its use in the language or, in other words, that the use of a word in the *praxis* is its meaning (WITTGENSTEIN, 1998a, p. 69). This meaning conception emphasizes the idea that the use of a word is something available to be described and not an entity or process that is hidden from us.

2.1. The beetle inside the box

Wittgenstein spends the first years of the 1930's decade dismantling misconceptions about language. Besides the Augustinian picture of language, source of many confusions and mistakes, Wittgenstein also tries to make amends for the language conception of TLP, replacing it with a diametrically opposed and revolutionary viewpoint. His idea is that the use of language depends on conceptual grammar. This new approach to language deals with mental entities connected to words. According to Wittgenstein, mental states are not mental objects. The example of the beetle inside the box (WITTGENSTEIN, 1996, § 293) is a metaphorical criticism of the idea of mental privacy, since private experiences are not mental entities.

The simile of the beetle shows that the grammar of the language of bodily feelings cannot be based on the Augustinian model of object and designation. The beetle is like a sensation and the box is like one's conscious experience. Everybody has beetles in their boxes but no one can compare their beetle with that of another person, because each person's beetle is personal and private, to a certain extent. The problem is that the beetle has a use in language, i.e. the sensation can be expressed in words like "I have toothache".

In § 293 of PI, Wittgenstein uses an analogy to clarify some of the problems about the mind. In his story, he supposes that:

1) people have a small box;
2) people keep a beetle inside their box;
3) no one is allowed to look in anyone else's box;
4) people is only allowed to look inside their own box;
5) there is no way of checking or comparing what is inside each box;
6) it seems quite possible people have something different in each box;
7) people talk about what is in their boxes;
8) the word "beetle" comes to stand for what is in people's box.

The beetle represents the private sensation, to which only the subject of experience has access. Wittgenstein is trying to point out that the beetle is like an individual's mind. No one can know exactly what it is like to be another person or experience things from somebody else's perspective, but it is generally assumed that the mental activity is very

similar to everyone. To say, like Descartes, that there must be special mental entity called a mind that makes our experiences private is wrong, because language obtains meaning through public usage. The word “beetle” means “what is in the box”, i.e. “what is in the mind”. Wittgenstein attempts to show us how the object of sensation drops out of the language game.

The “beetle” could be seen as the phenomenological content of consciousness (or sensation). But the characteristics of consciousness are irrelevant to the meaning, since they do not play any significant role in the language-game so-called “expressing sense data”, they cannot be determinable in public language. Therefore, it would be indifferent if they change or not, if they were different or not in each person.

However, for some authors, the “beetle” refers to a certain interpretation of the phenomenological aspects of our sensations (i.e. the beetle is not a sensation, but the Cartesian sensation) (cf. PRADES & SANFÉLIX, 1990, p. 227)

In the end of § 293 of PI, Wittgenstein criticizes “the model of object and designation”, since we cannot accept, using this model, that the mental eye can identify the phenomenological contents of consciousness and point to the beetle. The characteristics of consciousness are internally connected to the way we express them. For the grammatical structure of psychological sentences is not similar to that of descriptions of objects (PRADES & SANFÉLIX, 1990, p. 227). My description or my identification of objects does not establish their features, unlike sensations.

2.2. Expressive and descriptive uses of words

The uses of words to express bodily feelings (and the like) do not follow the same grammar as the words for physical objects. A verbal expression of inwardness is not always a clear one. While I transmit the content of my subjective experience to someone through a verbal expression like “I have toothache”; in the atomic and external word my utterance about some object would be an objective description like “This ball is green”.

The need to confront the physical and phenomenological language forms derives from the fact that a hypothetical solipsist chooses a way of speaking that refutes the normal conditions applied to the social and quotidian operation of ordinary language. In daily conversations, the linguistic expression of experience is accomplished using the

quotidian language forms. Broadly speaking, the more words we have in our lexicon the more "tools" we must accomplish the task, irrespective of the private and interior nature of the experience. Perhaps it was for this reason that Wittgenstein was concerned about establishing the difference between propositions:

> "There are propositions of which we may say that they describe facts in the material world (external world). Roughly speaking, they treat of physical objects: bodies, fluids, etc. I am not thinking in particular of the laws of the natural sciences, but of any such proposition as 'the tulips in our garden are in full bloom', or 'Smith will come in any moment'. These are on the other hand propositions describing personal experiences, as when the subject in a psychological experiment describes his sense-experiences; say his visual experience, independent of what bodies are actually before his eyes and, n.b., independent also of any processes which might be observed to take place in his retina, his nerves, his brain, or other parts of his body. (That is, independent of both physical and physiological facts.)" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1998a, pp. 46-47).

This revealing passage from Wittgenstein suggests that two types of words or propositions exist, as if they were built of different materials: one physical and the other mental. This last type is associated with the particularities of the philosophical approach, in so far as it perceives that certain words, with grammatical specifics, are not used in such a direct and observable way as the name of an ostensibly defined object.

Although we intend to describe inner states using words, it is not conceivable to think of a certain word with two meanings, whose applicability depended on a public context and another internal or private context. Nor is it conceivable to think of certain words to designate, respectively, what is accessible to all and what is only accessible to the subject who had the sensation. Confronted with the problem of never knowing what other person means, for example, with "brown" or what one person really sees when he says in all honesty "I see a brown book", Wittgenstein proposes the hypothesis of using two different words for "brown": a word for "particular impressions"; and another word with a meaning that would allow others to understand what is being said (WITTGENSTEIN, 1998a, pp. 72-73).

As all words and symbolic notations of our common language permeate our life forms, our means of expression are conditioned by the grammar and by usual linguistic practices. A plausible hypothesis would be that two or more different manners exist of using the same words and propositions (WITTGENSTEIN, 1998a, pp. 58/138/173). For example, the different use of the propositions "He has toothache" and "He has a gold

tooth", cannot be used in a similar way, because they differ in their respective grammars (WITTGENSTEIN, 1998a, pp. 49/53/70).

2.3. Depth grammar *versus* surface grammar

In § 664 of PI, Wittgenstein distinguishes "depth grammar" from "surface grammar" of words, recommending a careful use of language. Traditional philosophy goes astray focused on the latter, in the immediately evident characteristics of words, forgetting their use (WITTGENSTEIN, 1996, §§ 10-14). He criticizes the traditional method used by philosophers and psychologists to analyze and classify language, because "they classify clouds by their shape" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1993a, § 462). "Surface grammar" (the sentence structure: morphology, syntax) of the statement "I have a toothache" is identical to that of "I have a book" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1996, §§ 572-573) whereas "depth grammar" (the philosophical grammar: rules and criteria of language use) between statements is different. Words possess several combinations and propositions represent different moves in the language-game.

Wittgenstein advises that surface grammar may cause conceptual misunderstandings and mistakes in philosophical activity. Let us consider the general statement-form "X have y": in the immediately evident perspective of the word characteristic and sentence structure it is neglected that "X" could be replaced by "I", "you" or "he/she" as well as "y" could be replaced by "toothache", "a gold tooth" or "a book". To the surface grammar, the general statement-form accepts indistinctly "I have toothache", "I have a book", "He has toothache" and "He has a book". On the contrary, the depth grammar between these four statements is different, since this perspective considers that the words possess several combinatory possibilities and the propositions constitute different moves in different language-game, according to their atmospheres.

It seems plausible that "my own relation to my words is wholly different from other people's", as Wittgenstein (1996, p. 192) states. What does it mean to say that my relation to my words is different from other people's relations? It means that whenever I say "I have a toothache" I know it surely without the assistance of any outward criteria or on the basis of observing my own pain-behavior (I am not describing anything, but expressing pain), because words are connected with the primitive and natural expressions of the

sensation and, consequently, words are used in their place. It also means that whenever I say “He has toothache” I depend on the availability of outward criteria (his or her observable pain-behavior) for my third-person statement.

Therefore, it is appropriate to separate the logical-semantic levels of the use of words as “to have” and “to believe” or the expressions already mentioned relative to the existence and the belief in the third person’s toothache and gold tooth, for example, because, in spite of the pain and the gold tooth in that person’s mouth, the properties are different (WITTGENSTEIN, 1998a, pp. 48-49).

All expressions have their due meaning inside of the respective contexts for their use. If the genuine proposition “I am in pain” and the hypothetical proposition “He is in pain” were on the same logical level and belonged to the same semantic field, as the propositions “I have a green book” and “He has a green book”, then they would be interchangeable and we could say with sense that “He now has my pain” and “I now have his pain”, in the same sense in which it is permissible to say “I now have his green book” and “He now has my green book”. However, it is not the case, since the pronoun “I” in the genuine proposition (unlike the pronoun “He” in the hypothetical proposition) does not denote an owner or a bearer, although this could be indicated (cf. VALDÉS, 2003, p. 82). The sentence “To have toothache”, i.e. without the pronoun “I” like in “I have toothache”, could indicate or mean that the pain belongs to the person who is the center of the respective language, i.e. the center of my or his language. Imagining all the languages with different people as their centers (each of which I can understand and the one with me as its center has a privileged status, as Wittgenstein says) is like imagining a multiplicity of private languages that could compose a simple and singular public language that could be inter-translatable.

These linguistic particularities were forgotten by the solipsist idealized in TLP, somebody who could not make similar use of these propositions because, from the beginning, he was unable to recognize the other as existing in an external world. If the solipsist says, “Only my experience is real” or “Only this present experience is real”, we would say that the other fellow’s toothache deserves another name (GEACH, SHAH & JACKSON, pp. 50/176). However, there is a certain axiomatic truth in the solipsistic view on personal experience:

> “There is a temptation for me to say that only my own experience is real: ‘I know that

> I see, hear, feel pains, etc., but not that anyone else does. I can't know this, because I am I and they are they.'" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1998a, p. 46).

Wittgenstein's criticism goes deeper by saying that the idea that words stand for things or take their place is inadequate. As previously stated at the beginning of the present section, Wittgenstein tries to show that the meaning cannot be assigned to a word merely through an act of ostensive definition (pointing to something and saying "it is called such and such" can never fix the meaning of a word) and that the meaning of a name is not its bearer and that a name can have a meaning even in the absence of its bearer.

In TLP Wittgenstein understands the language and its limits as a simple reflection of the world and its limits (WITTGENSTEIN, 1999, 2.12, 2.223, 4.01, 4.021, 4.06), whereas in PI he admits interpersonal communication (WITTGENSTEIN, 1996, § 491). Therefore, there is a radical opposition between TLP's conception of language and that of PI. In his latter work, Wittgenstein goes right to the point, saying that the name relation is not simply a correlation between a name and its bearer and that the relation cannot be established merely by setting up such a correlation (e.g., through an isolated act of ostentation similar to the one that Augustine dealt with), but it is the result of a form of life.

Therefore, if the source of the concept of meaning adopted by Wittgenstein in his philosophical discussions is, to a certain extent, the primitive Augustinian philosophy of language (WITTGENSTEIN, 1993c, § 19), he argues that Augustine, in his *Confessions* (cf. 1990, I-8) does describe a system of communication, but not everything that we call language is this system (WITTGENSTEIN, 1996, § 3). To reject the Augustinian conception of language, on the one hand, and to show the multiple ways that words function, on the other hand, Wittgenstein developed the idea of language-games. This is one of Wittgenstein's central ideas in PI.

The theory of language in TLP is self-destructive, since Wittgenstein began to lose faith in its principles in the 1920's, mainly on three grounds:

1) there are many meanings and uses of words in everyday contexts that give rise to philosophical problems;
2) the idea that only the words with direct real-world referents can be meaningful

is troubling;

3) the principle of meaning that links simple names to elementary objects seemed to fail, because there are attribute words that form systems (HARRÉ & TISSAW, 2005, p. 61).

From PI's point of view, TLP's conception of language is inaccurate, because it is based on the ostensive definition that sustains that learning language only consists in giving names to objects. Wittgenstein's criticism of this conception is that it ignores the multiple ways in which words in our language function.

In a certain way, Wittgenstein is against the nominalism which states that there is a correspondence between objects and names. Like Augustine, engaged with a certain logical atomism, nominalism interpreted words as names and was not concerned in describing their uses. TLP also developed such a tendency for this medieval doctrine, as Wittgenstein himself recognized and tried to correct in PI.

On the contrary, Wittgenstein asked for the concept of "meaning" associated with the concept of "denomination" and rejected the idea that all words are used as names and, consequently, they have a definite signification in the presence of a certain correlative object. Since this simplistic language perspective establishes that the connection between a name and an object or the name's signification is made by an ostensive definition, the nominalist conception of meaning is attached through the idea that "a name corresponds to an object".

However, Wittgenstein argues that this conception wrongly uses the word "meaning", because it confounds the meaning of a name with the bearer of the name, i.e. the word "meaning" is used to signify something that corresponds to the word:

> "When Mr. N. N. dies one says that the bearer of the name dies, not that the meaning dies. And it would be nonsensical to say that, for if the name ceased to have meaning it would make no sense to say 'Mr. N. N. is dead'." (WITTGENSTEIN, 1996, § 40).

The name doesn't lose its meaning if its bearer ceases to exist (i.e. if he dies) (WITTGENSTEIN, 1993c, § 27). For Wittgenstein, the meaning of a proper name is never an object, because Mr. N. N. can die, but not the meaning of the words "Mr. N. N.". There are different species and functions of words, i.e. different grammars. The problem of Augustine's language description lay in the fact that it did not recognize this difference

and did not distinguish the words. Like money, a name has several uses (WITTGENSTEIN, 1993c, § 27). Wittgenstein's criticism extends to TLP.

The meaning of a name is neither the thing we point to when we give an ostensive definition of the name nor the bearer of the name, but the role that a name accomplishes when it is used. This idea helps to understand that the meaning of a name and the bearer of a name are not the same. If two names have one single bearer, thus, the bearer of one of these names identifies himself with the bearer of the other name, but this doesn't mean that the meaning of both names is identical.

The multiplicity of language-games does not allow the uniformity of uses or the existence of a universal, applicable and descriptive formula, such as "this word signifies *this*". Each word has a set of possible and different uses in language-games and that's why they cannot be learned through an ostensive definition. There is not any specific and founding act that connects the word to the meaning or the respective object. It is nonsense to talk about the meaning as a unique and homogeneous representation of some object. For example, the meaning of the word "red" is independent of the existence of a red object, which can be destroyed, unlike the color red. It makes no sense to say that the color red is torn up or pounded to bits (WITTGENSTEIN, 1996, § 57). In other words, the meaning is not the product of a particular mental process, but of the context.

3. The consequences for solipsism and autonomous grammar

In PI, Wittgenstein clearly rejects the view that the meaning of a word is the object it stands for. His aim is to distinguish the meaning of a word from the bearer of a word. Wittgenstein seems to adopt a clear position that emerges in § 79 of PI, where he discusses the meaning of the proper name "Moses", that can mean several things if Moses did not exist. When I assert something about Moses, I am saying that such-and-such a person has such-and-such features and did such-and-such. When I make a statement about Moses, I understand by the name "Moses" someone, who did what the Bible relates of Moses. But who do we mean by "Moses"? Has the name "Moses" got a fixed and unequivocal use in all possible cases? If Moses did not exist or he were already dead, the meaning of the name "Moses" does not change.

In § 402 of PI, Wittgenstein claims that when he says, “Now I am having such-and-such an image”, the words “I am having” are merely a sign to someone else and the description of the image is a complete account of the imagined world. His imaginary interlocutor asks if the words “I am having” are like “I say!...” and if that should be expressed differently. Wittgenstein answers that we disagree with the expressions of our ordinary language when we have a picture in our heads which conflicts with the picture of our ordinary way of speaking. In Wittgenstein’s words: “we are tempted to say that our way of speaking does not describe the facts as they really are” (WITTGENSTEIN, 1996, § 402).

Wittgenstein warns against a misinterpretation of language performance and criticizes idealists, solipsists and realists, saying that they attack the normal form of expression as if they were either attacking a statement or defending it. It is true that the words “I am having” in the above-quoted sentence are merely a sign to someone else and they do not signify anything in the image. Thus, they function as an advance notice, like “I say!...” (it could be like the heralding of an announcement by means of the words “Attention now!...”), i.e. to call one’s attention to the following words that I will say. On the other hand, one might compare “I am having…” to a direction-arrow on a map: the words “I am having…” and a direction-arrow belongs to the ordinary language and to a map, respectively; and the both show what we can do with the language and with the map.

In spite of the physical language with which I describe the world and I tell other people what happened in a social and observable event that I witnessed (WITTGENSTEIN, 1996, § 363), “I am having such-and-such an image” performs its role in our ordinary language, because it is used to tell other people what I am imagining. As Hacker points out, “I am having such-and-such an image” has the same grammatical form as “John has such-and-such an image”, i.e. the above-mentioned general statement-form “X have y”, but a very different use, because the latter is asserted on the basis of behavioral criteria, involving reference to a person and the possibility of misidentification of the person and mistaken description of what he is imagining, whereas the former is groundlessly avowed (HACKER, 1997, p. 276). “They can both be said to be descriptions; but if so, then descriptions of logically different types”, says Hacker.

> Philosophers who criticize the first-person mode of expression have a picture, viz. a picture of ‘unowned data’, which conflicts with the picture of our ordinary mode of

> expression, viz. the subject as owner of the image. (HACKER, 1997, p. 276).

Therefore, “I am having…” is not fulfilling the same role as “John has…”. The role of the former, unlike that of the latter, is not to identify a person who has a certain image, but to describe what image I have. Those who hear what I say will identify who is imagining. This explains how some language uses are meaningful, as Lewis Carroll shows in his *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass* (cf. 2004, pass.). Where the use of a given word questions the English code shared between the cat and Alice, so that the communication between both is established with success. In this perspective concerning the value and inconsistency of language, let us also take Alice’s example in Wonderland, in that one of the characters takes “nobody” for the name of somebody, due to the fact that in English grammar the word «nobody» is a word of the same nature and function as “somebody”, a situation that exemplifies the frequent mistakes in the use of language, because of the semantic likeness between words conceptually distinct. Wittgenstein (1998a, p. 69) proposes that we imagine a language in which, instead of saying “I found nobody in the room”, one says “I found Mr. Nobody in the room”, in such a way as to appreciate the philosophical problems that would appear of that linguistic convention.

The following § 403 of PI helps us to understand Wittgenstein’s stance against the solipsist, who cannot get “any practical advantage when he advances his view”. The hypothesis of a novel notation to the word “pain”, i.e. the reservation of this word solely for what the solipsist had hitherto called “my pain” and others “solipsist’s pain” would not cause any problems since another notation is used. The change of notations does not change the facts, so people would have pains and notations for such pains.

During the late forties, Wittgenstein takes for granted that learning a language is learning a technique, because understanding the word “pain” means learning how to compose and to use all sentences where this word enters. The technique is present in questions like “What does the word ‘pain’ mean?”. What Wittgenstein had in mind is that the concept of “technique” helps us to get rid of the common idea in TLP that language is like a mirror, an idea that suggests that a sentence has a meaning if something corresponds to it. Thus, using a language is to put a technique into practice.

Unlike in TLP, Wittgenstein argues that language has grammar that is autonomous,

i.e. features of the world do not determine grammar or the possibilities of word use. We use words according to rules, but we do not justify these rules by pointing to the world. The rules of grammar are justified through the practice of the linguistic community.

Arguing that use is a technique, Wittgenstein makes an analogy with a map, as if everything that is on the map were the representation of something. However, the act of representing is not represented on the map. The map represents; its function is like that of the grammar. Representation is the necessary and sufficient condition to be a map, i.e. being a map implies mainly two things: first, that the map represents a given reality; second, that the map can be used in a certain way. It is its use that makes it a map. In the same way, it is the use of a word or a sentence that makes it intelligible. When we learn how to read a map, Wittgenstein claims, we learn how to use certain signs that are printed on the paper. In this sense, a map is like sentences: is something that must be used in a precise and defined way, i.e., a map represents also a certain technique or manner of use, as if it were a given instruction manual. But it does not teach us how we should use it.

The remarkableness of this view lies in the fact that it suggests that the meaning of some words (e.g. “gold tooth” or “book”) can be shown pointing to something, but the meaning of other words (e.g. “pain” or “toothache”) or rather the meaning of a sentence, cannot be shown. Thus, while a map reader is someone who knows how to use a map, a speaker is someone who knows how to use a word or a sentence, i.e. acoustic images (sounds) and visual images (the aspects of the word). They resemble each other in respect of use and in mastery of a technique.

On one hand, if I say that a given sheet of paper is a map, I am saying that it has a defined use; on the other hand, if I understand certain sounds or marks as words and sentences, I can use them in a defined way.

The distinction between the primary world of phenomena and the secondary world of physics is latent. I think that Wittgenstein says that the world we live in is the world of sense-data and the world we talk about is the world of physical objects.

Conclusions

This article presents a theoretical and conceptual approach of Wittgenstein’s critique of Augustine’s referential theory of language and develops several key

conclusions about the nature of meaning, language, and philosophical methodology. The relevance and pertinence of Wittgenstein's critique lie in its radical departure from traditional conceptions of language and its therapeutic resolution of philosophical problems.

Therefore, the main conclusions reside in the critique of referential theories of meaning, to the extent that Wittgenstein systematically dismantles Augustine's picture of language, which reduces words to names and meaning to object-correlation. He demonstrates that this model fails to account for the diversity of language uses, such as psychological statements (e.g., "I have pain") or abstract concepts, which cannot be explained through ostensive definitions. This critique extends to his earlier work in TLP, rejecting the idea that language mirrors reality through logical correspondences.

A significant aspect of Wittgenstein's later philosophy is his assertion that meaning is determined by the use of words in language-games. Wittgenstein replaces Augustine's naming model with the concept of language-games, where meaning emerges from how words are employed in specific social practices. This shift from reference to use highlights the pragmatic, context-dependent nature of language. The "beetle in the box" analogy underscores that even private experiences (e.g., feeling pain) require public criteria to be meaningful, dissolving solipsistic worries.

Another relevant aspect is the autonomy of grammar, since language operates according to its own grammatical rules, which are not justified by metaphysical realities but by communal practices. This autonomy explains why words like "Moses" retain meaning even without a referent and why psychological and physical statements follow different logical structures (e.g., "I have pain" *versus* "He has a book").

Wittgenstein's approach is therapeutic: he exposes how philosophical confusion arises from misapplying language (e.g., conflating surface grammar with depth grammar) and resolves it by examining actual use. His method rejects grand theories in favor of clarifying how words function in "forms of life".

This article not only concludes but also highlights the relevance and pertinence of Wittgenstein's language approach based on an anti-essentialism. By rejecting Augustine's essentialism (words as names) and TLP' logical atomism, Wittgenstein challenges the search for linguistic or metaphysical absolutes. His focus on family

resemblances of words and context-dependent use offers a flexible, anti-dogmatic framework for understanding meaning.

Wittgenstein philosophy of language is innovative and revolutionary by insisting on the resolution of linguistic traditional problems. The shift to language-games and public criteria resolves longstanding issues like solipsism and private language. For example, the asymmetry between first-person and third-person claims ("I have pain" *versus* "He has pain") shows how grammar, not ontology, governs meaning. It is a pragmatic turn. Wittgenstein's analogy of language to a map emphasizes its instrumental role: meaning lies in application, not representation. This pragmatic turn aligns with later semiotics (e.g., Peirce's interpretants) and sociolinguistics, where meaning is negotiated in practice. Therefore, Wittgenstein philosophy of language has a meta-philosophical impact, since his method reorients philosophy from theorizing about "what is" to describing "how we use". This demystifies philosophical puzzles (e.g., "What is meaning?") by tracing them to grammatical misunderstandings.

Wittgenstein's approach is significant due to its innovative and revolutionary reconception of language. It contributes both to semiotics and linguistics: to semiotics by complementing pragmatic and philosophical theories of signs, demonstrating that meaning arises from use rather than fixed referents; to linguistics by anticipating discourse analysis and sociolinguistics through its emphasis on context and communal norms. Crucially, Wittgenstein's method dissolves (rather than solves) philosophical problems by returning to ordinary language, thereby freeing thought from conceptual traps. Wittgenstein's conception of language is revolutionary because it replaces abstract theories with a grounded, practice-based understanding of meaning – one that prioritizes the lived complexity of human communication over reductive models.

In response to the research objectives, Wittgenstein's critique of Augustine's referential theory exposes its fundamental flaw: the assumption that all language functions like naming objects and describing states of affairs. Augustine's model, rooted in ostensive definition, fails to account for the vast array of linguistic practices that do not fit this narrow framework. Wittgenstein demonstrates this by analyzing examples that defy the naming-describing paradigm: psychological statements and language-games like imperatives and questions or abstract and non-referential words.

Regarding psychological statements (e.g., “I have toothache”), unlike physical-object statements (“This is a book”), pain expressions are not descriptions but avowals – immediate manifestations of sensation (WITTGENSTEIN, 1996, § 244). Augustine’s model cannot explain how we learn psychological terms, since pain cannot be pointed to (WITTGENSTEIN, 1996, § 257). Instead, such words acquire meaning through behavioral criteria (e.g., wincing, groaning) embedded in social practices (WITTGENSTEIN, 1996, § 293, the “beetle in the box”).

Concerning language-games like imperatives and questions or abstract and non-referential words as speech acts, these are not naming or describing but acting within language (WITTGENSTEIN, 1996, § 23). They illustrate how words serve non-descriptive functions, as well as abstract and non-referential terms like “five,” “red,” or “justice” lack concrete referents but function meaningfully in context (e.g., “five red apples”). The notion of family resemblances (WITTGENSTEIN, 1996, § 67) replaces the search for essential definitions with a recognition of overlapping uses. Therefore, by dismantling Augustine’s dichotomy, Wittgenstein reveals language as a toolkit of diverse practices, not a uniform naming system.

In response to the second research objective, which is to argue that Wittgenstein’s shift from meaning as reference in TLP to meaning as use in PI by resolving philosophical problems surrounding the use of ordinary language, Wittgenstein’s shift from TLP to the PI transforms how we understand meaning, addressing key philosophical problems.

One of the key philosophical problems is private experience and the rejection of private language. In TLP, meaning was tied to reference (e.g., names to objects). This led to the solipsistic idea that sensations like pain are purely private. In PI, Wittgenstein argues that a “private language” (where words refer to inner states only the speaker can know) is impossible (WITTGENSTEIN, 1996, § 258). Meaning requires public criteria. Even “pain” must be anchored in shared behavior (e.g., pain-expressions).

Another key philosophical problem is dissolving solipsism. The solipsist claims, “Only my pain is real,” but Wittgenstein shows this is grammatical nonsense. The word “pain” gains meaning from its role in public language-games, not private ostension (WITTGENSTEIN, 1996, § 293). The asymmetry between first-person and third-person claims (“I have pain” *versus* “He has pain”) reflects grammatical rules, not metaphysical

privacy (WITTGENSTEIN, 1996, § 404).

There is still the key philosophical problem of language as a form of life. TLP's "mirror theory" of language (words picturing facts) is replaced with use-based meaning (WITTGENSTEIN, 1996, § 43). Grammar is autonomous: rules arise from communal practices, not reality. For example, "Moses" means what we do with the name, not its historical referent (WITTGENSTEIN, 1996, §79). Wittgenstein's later philosophy resolves these problems by grounding meaning in shared practices, not private reference. This avoids solipsism while preserving the richness of subjective experience.

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