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Meaning as expression

Angel García Rodríguez
University of Murcia
agarcia@um.es

Abstract This paper provides an expressive account of linguistic meaning, based on Wittgenstein's later work. Its central plank is a non-relational conception of expression, according to which expressed content and expressive vehicle are not two different ontological items; instead, the former is an intrinsic aspect of the latter. Applied to the linguistic case, the claim is that meaning is an intrinsic aspect of utterances, inclusively construed as comprising words, intonation and bodily gestures in context. An expressive account of meaning, thus understood, is then argued to help clarify the natural, yet cultural, character of language.

Keywords: aspect, culture, language, meaning-blindness, nature

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0. Introduction

According to a common reading of Wittgenstein's later work, linguistic meaning is use. The focus of this paper is a related theme – namely, that linguistic meaning is expression. With his emphasis on use, Wittgenstein targets the idea that language is a calculus, by noting instead the role language it plays in people's lives. In carrying out this project, the notion of expression is a useful tool, for highlighting the expressive nature of linguistic behaviour is an effective way to show its role in people 's lives. In this respect, the meaning-as-expression thesis defended here is a clarification of the more familiar meaning-as-use thesis.

The link between meaning and expression is an underdeveloped theme in Wittgensteinian scholarship. The link has been explored mainly in connection with first-person psychological sentences (e.g. Wright 2001; Finkelstein 2003; Bar-On 2004). This paper seeks to go beyond a specific part of discourse to consider the link between expression and meaning *simpliciter*. In doing so, the paper awards expression a bigger job than what is commonly the case in contemporary philosophy of language. Accordingly, as the reading of Wittgenstein to be recommended here puts expression at the centre of any of the things that can be done with language, not just some of them (as per Austin 1962 and Searle 1969), the notion of expression can be said to do metaphysical, not just pragmatic work.

This focus on pragmatics is a key element of recent defences of expressivism in the philosophy of mind, e.g. by Finkelstein and Bar-On. According to them, expressing is not all thing speakers do with first-person psychological sentences; they also simultaneously assert what their own psychological life is like. Thinking of first-person psychological sentences both as expressions and assertions involves a commitment to a relational construal of

expression, where linguistic vehicle and (expressed-cum-asserted) content are thought of as two different ontological items. By contrast, the metaphysical task taken on here by the notion of expression involves replacing a relational with a non-relational construal, for meaning is but an intrinsic aspect of the linguistic vehicle.

To show the major impact of the project in contemporary philosophy, note that since the cognitive revolution of the 1960s, the debate as to the nature of meaning has featured two main players – namely, behaviourism (e.g. Quine 1960) and, in different guises, mentalism (e.g. Fodor 1987; Grice 1989). According to the former, all there is to meaning is (a set of dispositions to) linguistic behaviour, understood as physical movements (as in Carnap 1932-33 and Hempel 1935). According to the latter, meaning is a matter of the psychological structures (say, semantic and communicative intentions) that cause linguistic behaviour. At first sight, these two options exhaust the alternatives worth considering. Yet, placing the focus on expression is a way of opening the field, by providing a third-way understanding of meaning, which is the aim of this paper to present.

To anticipate, the significance of Wittgenstein's expressive account of linguistic meaning, non-relationally construed, lies in that against behaviourism, the mental nature of meaning is not denied; and yet, against mentalism, no set of further ontological items over and above linguistic behaviour is postulated. Appreciating the significance of the expressive third way requires noting both that the debate between behaviourism and mentalism takes place under the aegis of the picture of the inner and the outer, and that the latter is an assumption that leads the debate astray. The picture embodies a common enough view of mind as a set of internal items over and above outer, bodily behaviour, and mentalists about linguistic meaning endorse it. But the picture must be discarded, or so Wittgenstein maintains, as it rests on an impossible, because unintelligible, view of mind. To replace it, a non-relationally expressive view of mind is put forward, and on its basis, a similarly non-relationally expressive account of linguistic meaning.

The defence of an expressive third way between behaviourism and mentalism has been a familiar theme of Wittgensteinian scholarship for quite some time, including the influential readings put forward by McDowell (1982) and Hacker (1986), amongst others. In developing such a theme, much attention has been paid to matters concerning access to other people's minds (what they feel as much as what they think). Yet, too narrow a focus on epistemic matters risks obscuring the metaphysical work done by the notion of expression in Wittgenstein's work. Thus, expression is often allocated the epistemic work of helping in the defence of a perceptual, rather than inferential, form of access to other people's minds, but a rejection of inference is compatible with a die-hard adherence to the picture of the inner and the outer, as in recent mereological or cluster accounts of emotions (see García Rodríguez 2021 for details). Instead, to discard such a picture altogether, a non-relational construal of expression is required. It is in the development of such a construal where the original contribution of this paper to Wittgensteinian scholarship lies.

Against this backdrop, the paper is structured as follows. Sections 1 and 2 introduce the non-relational notion of expression that holds the key to a Wittgensteinian understanding of mind. Subsequently, section 3 applies the notion to linguistic meaning. Finally, section 4 puts the ensuing expressive account of linguistic meaning to work, in order to clarify the natural, yet cultural, character of language.

Throughout, the emphasis will be on exegesis, hence on the presentation of the Wittgensteinian, non-relationally expressive approach to linguistic meaning being recommended here, rather than on its critical assessment. The reason is that any critical assessment must be preceded by the recognition of Wittgenstein's proposal as a *bona fine* player in the debate about linguistic meaning; hence the need for detailed presentation. In doing so, extant readings of Wittgenstein will not be explicitly engaged with, apart from occasional flagging. Once more, the reason is that any critical assessment of the superiority

of the reading of Wittgenstein's texts recommended here must follow a clear presentation of such a reading. Overall, then, the value of the paper rests in its provision of a textually supported story about the crucial link between meaning and expression in Wittgenstein's later work; moreover, one that is relevant to current philosophical concerns.

1. Expression

PI 304 states that there is all the difference in the world between pain-behaviour with pain and pain-behaviour without pain – namely, that the former involves a feeling missing from the latter. In slightly different terms, the former behaviour expresses pain, while the latter does not. Here, "express" is a factive term, meaning that if pain-behaviour expresses pain, then feeling is not absent. Therefore, pain-behaviour with pain is, whereas pain-behaviour without pain is not, expressive behaviour. To be sure, pain-behaviour can appear to be expressive, but if feeling is absent, it is not[1].

There is nothing controversial about this. So, why does Wittgenstein bring it up? Two related ideas are the motivating force: one, that it is easy enough to have a wrong conception of feeling; two, that as a result it is tempting to endorse a mistaken conception of expression.

In more detail, feeling is widely thought of as an inner phenomenon; moreover, it is so thought of on account of its being a mental phenomenon. By contrast, bodily behaviour (inclusively construed) is normally thought of as an outer phenomenon, on account of its bodily nature. As a result, expressive pain-behaviour is taken to involve a relation to an inner feeling, and therefore expression is conceived in relational terms. What is wrong with this, according to Wittgenstein, is that «an 'inner process' stands in need of outward criteria» (PI 580); in other words, there are no criteria for inner phenomena *per se*, i.e. conceived independently of expressive behaviour. Therefore, Wittgenstein concludes that the picture of the inner and the outer makes feeling «irrelevant» (PI 293) to the language-game of expression. As this contradicts the factivity of expression, the picture must be discarded; or so it will be argued next is what Wittgenstein wishes his readers to realize.

Before doing so, it must be noted that a relational conception of expression is a tempting way to accommodate the distinction between vehicles and content. For when some behaviour is expressive of feeling, two ontological items appear to be involved – namely, the expressed content and the expressive vehicle. In fact, a given content can be carried by different vehicles, as when slightly different facial configurations express the same feeling; and conversely, a particular vehicle can carry different contents, as shown by the fact that tears can express such feelings as pain, joy or frustration. This all suggests that, even if behaviour (vehicle) and feeling (content) happen to go together, they can also be pulled apart; not least in cases of pretence or dissimulation. So, what could be more natural than a relational conception of expression?

And yet, Wittgenstein demurs. To be sure, particular facial traits can express different contents, but only in the context provided by the whole face. As he puts it, «a smiling mouth *smiles* only in a human face» (PI 583; italics in the original). And again: «an eye can smile only *in a face*» (LW1 860; italics in the original). This means that what counts as the expressive vehicle of feeling is not a stand-alone trait, but the whole facial configuration. In turn, this allows the blocking of the move from the acknowledged fact that particular facial traits can express different contents to the relational conception of expression. The move relies on the expressiveness of individual traits, apart from the whole in which they belong, something opposed by Wittgenstein.

[1] In line with standard practice, references to Wittgenstein's texts are given by means of book initials and paragraph or page numbers. The list at the end of the paper contains full details.

In addition, note that there are two approaches to whole faces – namely, as geometrical sets of lines and shapes, and as features of human beings (see LW1 154-159). Taken as geometrical sets of lines and shapes, slightly different facial configurations can express the same content; after all, the shape of the different parts of the face, as well as the distances and angles relating them, vary among people. But this does nothing to promote a relational conception of expression, as facial expression is not a matter of geometrical properties *tout court*. As Wittgenstein puts it, «a tender facial expression can[not] be described in terms of the distribution of matter in space» (LW1 954). And again, «the description of facial expressions […] does not consist in giving measurements of the face!» (PI 285). In this respect, geometrical differences notwithstanding, when a particular feeling is attributed to different people on the basis of their facial configuration, the same facial configuration is attributed to them all, too – say, a happy or a sad face. As a result, the move from the acknowledged fact that slightly different facial configurations can express the same feeling to the relational conception of expression is blocked. The move relies on a geometrical approach to face expression, which Wittgenstein resists.

Furthermore, there is no reason to think that cases of pretence or dissimulation will help promote a relational conception of expression. To be sure, there is the temptation to think of them either as cases in which what is usually expressive behaviour takes place in the absence of feeling (pretence), or as cases in which feeling is present in the absence of any expressive behaviour (dissimulation). In other words, there is the temptation to think of pretence and dissimulation along relational-expressive lines. However, pretence and dissimulation are not merely theoretically possible scenarios, but real phenomena in ordinary, practical contexts, just like sincere expression – the contrast between theoretical and practical deception is Wittgenstein's; see LW1 252-271. This means that pretence and dissimulation have dedicated expressive vehicles, which are what must be picked up by observers in order to distinguish them from sincere expression; for instance, the «genuine loving look, distinguish[able] from a pretended one» (PI part II, 360).

Plays are interesting in this respect. According to Wittgenstein, «the best example of an expression with a very specific meaning is a passage in a play» (LW1 424). This applies to expressive behaviour in general, both genuine and insincere («a play […] shows what instances of dissimulation look like»; LW1 263). For pretence and dissimulation are successfully depicted in a play by means of the bodily (i.e. facial) traits of actors in the midst of the practical situations that make up the plot.

So far, the discussion has highlighted some of the problems with a relational conception of expression. But the picture of the inner and the outer on which the relational conception of expression is based is also the target of Wittgenstein's attack. As mentioned earlier, the attack focuses on the absence of a criterion for the presence of feeling, when the latter is thought of as an inner phenomenon. Here, "criterion" is used metaphysically; i.e. what in the Blue Book is referred to as «the defining criterion» of something (BB, p. 25). Therefore, Wittgenstein's idea is that in the absence of expressive behaviour, no metaphysical grounds for feeling are available.

To defend such a claim, Wittgenstein argues that the metaphysical grounds for the inner cannot be provided in either neurological or physiological terms. The reason is that the (empirical) search for the neurological-cum-physiological basis of specific feelings rests on the prior availability of a criterion for the presence of feeling, which in turn means that the criterion is being presupposed, rather than provided, by the search. Or, putting what is essentially the same point differently: defending a neurological-cum-physiological criterion of feeling amounts to defining what feeling is; therefore, the very idea of searching for the neurological-cum-physiological basis of specific feelings ceases to make sense. But as the search makes sense, all that the (alleged) neurological-cum-physiological criterion does is screen the initial problem out of view (see PI part II, 236).

The alternative is a phenomenological ground – namely, one according to which feeling is as feeling appears to be (to the subject at the time of the experience). However, this provides but an illusory criterion. Wittgenstein makes the point in several, related ways. Sometimes, he emphasizes that, thus conceived, feeling lacks stability, as the appearance could change from time to time (see PI 265, 271); whereas a criterion is supposed to provide stable metaphysical grounds. Other times, his focus is on whether, thus conceived, feeling is real rather than apparent (see PI 311); or correctly rather than incorrectly identified (see PI 258, 265). Overall, his point is that, as phenomenology fails to provide for such distinctions, it fails to make available a metaphysical ground for feeling.

Given the failure of both the neurological-cum-physiological and phenomenological strategies, Wittgenstein's conclusion is that the picture of the inner and the outer makes feeling irrelevant to expression. Importantly, this is not to say that he considers feeling irrelevant, or superfluous; rather the opposite, which is why the picture of the inner and the outer is opposed by him. Equally important, Wittgenstein's target is a certain picture of feeling, not its very existence (see PI 307). So, what alternative is there?

Succinctly put, feeling is to be conceived as an intrinsic aspect of bodily-cum-behavioural engagement with the world; and consequently, expression is to be construed in non-relational terms. This means that feeling is not an extra ontological item, over and above some (expressive) bodily behaviour, an inclusive category where gestures, tone of voice and general demeanour belong. Thus, to return to PI 304, there is all the difference in the world between pain-behaviour with pain and pain-behaviour without pain (hence between sincere and insincere pain-behaviour), because they are altogether dissimilar behaviours, on account of the subtle differences between them in tone or gesture, say (see PI part II, 360). To clarify, although this is a behavioural difference, it is not a difference in behaviour rather than feeling. The latter way of putting it reveals a commitment to the picture of the inner and the outer. But Wittgenstein's point is that the picture is not the only way to make sense of what makes pain-behaviour with pain unlike pain-behaviour without pain; indeed, that a conception of feeling as an intrinsic aspect of bodily-cum-behavioural engagement with the world can make better sense of the difference, not least because the conceptual difficulties broacher earlier with the picture of the inner and the outer are avoided.

The outcome is a non-relational construal of expression. The latter does not deny that appropriate bodily vehicles express mental contents (e.g. that a certain facial configuration expresses pain). Rather, as stated, the gist of a non-relational construal of expression is that expressed content is an intrinsic aspect of certain bodily vehicles. Therefore, the intentionality of expression is preserved, but without the postulation of extra ontological items. PI 536-537 is particularly clear in this respect: timidity and courage, says Wittgenstein, "live" in the features of the face, rather than being merely associated with them. The same could be said about pain, and other feelings. Here, association is a relation between different ontological items; and in opposing it, Wittgenstein is rejecting a relational conception of expression. By contrast, his talk of mental content living in facial features is an endorsement of a non-relational construal of expression.

Thus understood, a non-relational construal of expression relies heavily on the notion of an aspect. The next section explores this in more depth.

2. Aspects

The notion of an aspect features prominently in Wittgenstein's discussion of a series of inter-connected phenomena to which Gestalt psychologists had drawn attention early in the 20th century; most famously, the perception of ambiguous pictures such as Jastrow's duck-rabbit. But Wittgenstein's interest goes beyond the latter, and includes a miscellany of phenomena (as pointed out by Ahmed 2017). For their significance for current purposes, two points will

be emphasized here: one, that aspects are robust features of the world; two, that their nature is, in a way that needs spelling out, complex.

The robustness of aspects refers to their independent reality. Robustness follows from the fact that aspects are objects of perception, on the (plausible) assumption that it is in the nature of perception to reveal what is already there in the world.[2] As it happens, the assumption is endorsed by Wittgenstein; for instance, when he states that « 'Observing' does not produce what is observed. (That is a conceptual statement.) Again: I do not 'observe' what only comes into being through observation. The object of observation is something *else*» (PI part II, 67; italics in the original). Therefore, if aspects are objects of perception, their robustness follows. Importantly now, perceivability is one of the key elements of Wittgenstein 's analysis of aspects.

For illustration, consider Jastrow's picture. Several situations are noted by Wittgenstein. On the one hand, if missing the ambiguity inherent to the picture, one sees only its rabbit aspect, an aspect is seen continuously. On the other hand, if the picture's ambiguity suddenly strikes one, because the previously missed (say, duck) aspect presents itself, a different visual experience is undergone; what is called the dawning or lighting up of an aspect. Finally, if one manages to switch between aspects, more or less at will, another visual experience takes place, as the duck and the rabbit aspects are seen alternately. The differences between all three experiences notwithstanding, their being cases of seeing, rather than cases of thinking or hypothesizing, is beyond question (for Wittgenstein); and for that reason, he draws the conclusion that aspects are robust features of the world.

On the way to drawing such a conclusion, Wittgenstein takes great pains to explain that, although the experiences in point are not cases of simple seeing, they are visual experiences, nonetheless. To mark the contrast with simple seeing, Wittgenstein uses different formulas; e.g. that they are «half visual experience, half thought» (PI part II, 140), that they are «a fusion of [seeing and thinking]» (PI part II, 144), even «an echo of thought in sight» (PI part II, 235). Less colourfully, it can be said now that they are complex visual experiences. But what does their complexity consist in? Several dimensions are involved.

To begin with, consider the intentionality of aspect perception vis-à-vis that of simple seeing. The objects of the latter are, say, states of affairs (e.g. seeing that it is raining), events (e.g. seeing a road accident) or ordinary, three-dimensional objects (e.g. seeing an apple); therefore, simple seeing is a dyadic relation between a subject and an object, broadly understood. On the other hand, the objects of aspect perception are a content in a vehicle (the rabbit in the picture, or the pain in the face, say). Therefore, a complex object of perception is involved, and for that reason, aspect perception is a triadic relation between a subject, a vehicle and a content. The conclusion is that the nature of the experienced object makes aspect perception a complex phenomenon.

To support this, note some highlights of Wittgenstein's analysis of aspect perception. To begin with, the relevant section of PI begins by emphasizing that two senses of perception (simple and complex, in the terminology used above), and two objects of perception, must be distinguished (PI part II, 111). The distinction is subsequently exemplified in several ways: for instance, when the perception of a knife and fork (plausibly a case of simple seeing) is contrasted with aspect perception (PI part II, 122). The distinction also underlies the idea of continuous aspect perception (PI part II, 120-121), which only makes sense from the viewpoint of someone alive to the complexity of seeing aspects (say, in Jastrow's picture), as opposed to someone who has the ability for simple seeing. Finally, the distinction also helps clarify the nature of aspect blindness (PI part II, 257-258) – namely, as a matter of missing

[2] The assumption falls prey to radical scepticism, but only if the latter makes sense, something denied by Wittgenstein; see e.g. OC 115, 120, 232.

the complexity of the object experienced by aspect-sensitive people, despite retaining the ability for simple seeing.

In addition to intentionality, the complexity of aspect perception is also a function of its multimodal and contextual nature. According to the former, different sensory modalities can be involved simultaneously in the perception of aspects. According to the latter, context is also involved. As an example of contextuality, consider the fact that surrounding Jastrow's picture with rabbits has the effect of preventing the visual experience of the duck aspect, and vice versa if the picture is surrounded by ducks (PI part II, 125). As an example of multimodality, consider the perceptual availability of feeling and emotion, which is often a matter of simultaneous visual and auditory information; e.g. the pain both seen in someone's contorted face and heard in their lament (PI part II, 228).

To relate the latter to the intentionality of aspect perception, note that it is the complex nature of the object of aspect perception (i.e. a content in a vehicle) that underlies both multimodality and contextuality. Thus, pain is the intrinsic content of a vehicle that includes a (seen) particular facial configuration, a (heard) tone of voice, and other bodily features (e.g. posture), in a particular context. To insist: tears are not the vehicle of pain by themselves; only when they belong in vehicles including whole facial configuration, tone, posture and surrounding context.

A final dimension of complexity follows from the metaphysics of aspects, as the latter are neither properties, nor reducible to properties. Instead, aspects are internal relations to other objects (PI part II, 247)[3]. On the one hand, aspects do not resemble properties like shape and colour, as the inversion effect makes plain; for although the same shapes and colours are seen before and after the inversion, the latter makes aspects disappear from view (PI part II, 150-151). On the other hand, aspects cannot be construed as an extra kind of property (i.e. organization), consisting in the relations between shape and colour. The reason is that copying what is seen can faithfully reproduce such relations, despite the aspect being missed (PI part II, 131-136).

Finally, consider the relationship between aspects and properties. To be sure, properties such as shape and colour (even organization) are involved in aspects; thus, in Jastrow's picture, aspect perception is a matter of seeing the rabbit or the duck (or both, alternately) in a collection of particularly shaped lines. But the attempt to reduce aspects to properties misses the holistic nature of the perceived object (i.e. the content in the vehicle), and therefore of the experience. The difference between missing and seeing an aspect, hence between people who are aspect blind and people who are not, further attests to this. For aspect-blind people lack the holistic experience in point, even though they are able to see colours and shapes organized in a particular way (for instance, the particularly shaped lines in Jastrow's picture). To characterize such a holistic experience, Wittgenstein further argues that the difference between seeing and missing an aspect is a difference in attitude; i.e. a difference in the reaction to (in how one treats) what is seen or missed (LW1 665-670). A difference in reaction is a bodily difference, but not in the sense of something felt in one's muscles and joints (PI part II, 231). Rather, it is a difference in bodily behaviour, «primarily: gestures, faces, tones of voice» (PI part II, 296). Therefore, meaning-sensitive people act in ways unavailable to the meaning-blind; for instance, certain spontaneous exclamations are made by them, upon suddenly noticing an aspect. Such exclamations are their felt reaction to the lighting up of an

[3] PI part II, 247 reads: «what I perceive in the lighting up of an aspect is not a property of the object, but an internal relation between it and other objects». In other words, when an aspect of X lights up for one, what is perceived is not a property of X, but an internal relation between X and other objects. Now, as what is being perceptually experienced then are aspects, the latter are to be conceived as internal relations to other objects, as claimed in the main text above.

aspect. Crucially now, in so far as neither shape nor colour can be construed in a similar way, the *sui generis* nature of aspects vis-à-vis properties and their relations ensues.
Overall, then, aspects are robust features (not properties) of the world, consist of a non-detachable content in a vehicle, and are available in a holistic, multimodal and contextual perceptual experience.

3. Meaning

There are different ways to approach the nature of linguistic meaning. Thus, one could begin by acknowledging that not all uttered sounds (or marks on paper) are meaningful, and subsequently enquire into the difference between meaningful and meaningless utterances. A plausible answer here is that only meaningful utterances express a thought, and although the answer is correct, it is not sufficient on its own, the answer leaves unexplained what the expression of a thought by an utterance amounts to. Taking this approach into the nature of meaning, Wittgenstein focuses on the difference between speech with (or expressive of) thought and speech without thought (see PI 330 and the subsequent text). His objective is to pit two possible accounts of the difference against each other, in order to clarify the nature of linguistic meaning. The rest of this section gives the details.
According to one possible account, expression is a relational property between a given vehicle and a certain content; therefore, the difference between meaningful and meaningless utterances is that the former stand in a (semantic) relation to a certain content, whereas the latter do not. The content in point is a thought; therefore, the difference between meaningful and meaningless utterances is that only the former are accompanied by thought. Similarly, what makes meaningful utterances differ from one another is the diverse thoughts accompanying each one of them.
Wittgenstein rejects this account. According to PI 317, it is based on a «misleading parallel» with the expression of pain by crying, «as if the purpose of a proposition [meaningful utterance] were to convey to one person how it is with another; only, so to speak, in his thinking part and not in his stomach». In other words, if our model for the expression of thought by utterances is a relational construal of the expression of pain (or more generally, feeling), a wrong view of meaning ensues; indeed, one that inherits the misconceptions present in a relational conception of the expression of feeling. As seen above, the latter fails on several fronts, including the holistic nature of expression, its non-reducibility to geometrical properties and relations, and its commitment to the picture of the inner and the outer. Arguably, the same problems afflict a relational construal of the expression of thought; let us take them up one at a time.
First, as seen above, the expression of feeling is not a matter of a single bodily trait, but rather of the holistic configuration of several such traits. Thus, a joyful smile is a matter of the face as a whole, not just the shape of the mouth. Similarly, the meaning of an utterance is not just a matter of the words used, but also the intonation with which the words are uttered, together with the accompanying gestures, posture and facial traits. In other words, when utterances are the vehicles of meaning, the latter include intonation as well as accompanying gestures, posture and facial traits. As an example, consider tongue-in-cheek utterances, which differ in meaning from the straight utterance of the same words. The difference is a matter of the intonation used, together (as is often the case) with the twinkle in the speaker's eyes, or the gesture of placing the tongue in one's cheek in a characteristic way. In this respect, there is a physiognomy not only to feeling, but also to linguistic meaning, as noted by Wittgenstein (e.g. PI 568), which in turn gives significance to his usual mention of tone of voice and gesture in this context (e.g. PI part II, 74, 264, 296). To sum up, the linguistic vehicle of meaning is a holistic configuration of words used, tone of voice and other bodily traits.

Second, as also seen above, the expression of feeling is not reducible to a set of geometrical properties and relations, say the lines and shapes of the different parts of the face. Yet, the expression of feeling is not merely associated with such geometrical properties and relations, either. Thus, the sadness of a face cannot be separated from the lines and shapes that make up its actual (e.g. sad) configuration. Common to talk of reducibility and (irreducible) association is the assumption that expression must be thought of in terms of a set of properties and relations. Yet the assumption must be discarded, as shown by the fact that the inversion effect applies to the expressive content of faces (PI part II, 150). Similarly, the fact that the inversion effect applies to written words shows that the expression of meaning must not be thought of in terms of geometrical properties and relations, either. Thus, unlike a well-known written word, an exact right-to-left inversion of it fails to convey the familiar impression of meaning, despite the fact that the geometrical properties and relations of the letters (their shape) are unchanged (PI part II, 151).

Third, a relational construal of the expression of feeling goes hand-in-hand with a view of feeling as an inner phenomenon, to be contrasted with outer (expressive) behaviour. Yet the picture of the inner and the outer fails to provide metaphysical grounds (criteria) for feeling, independently of behaviour. Likewise, a relational construal of the expression of meaning leans on a similar picture of inner thought or meaning vis-à-vis outer linguistic behaviour. Thus, on the one hand, there is the (inner) thought one means to communicate, and on the other, the (outer) utterance that makes the thought, or the communicative intention, public. Equally, when one understands the utterance one is making, the mental act or process of understanding must be an extra ontologically item, different from the behaviour that expresses it. Or so it is natural to think when meaning, thought and understanding are construed under the aegis of the picture of the inner and the outer. But Wittgenstein rejects the picture for feeling and linguistic meaning alike, and on the same basis – namely, the absence of independent criteria for the inner.

Thus, in the Blue Book (pp. 7-8), Wittgenstein imagines an experiment in which subjects observe a reading of the physiological processes going on inside them, whilst they think. The physiological reading provides the subjects with indirect access to the thoughts they undergo, but only on the assumption that there is a correlation between physiology and thought. In turn, this means that a prior criterion for the presence of thought is being presupposed by the experiment; therefore, that the appeal to physiology cannot provide the criterion for thought. In other words, the picture of thought and meaning as inner phenomena cannot be defended on physiological grounds.

The appeal to phenomenological grounds fares no better; i.e. the idea that meaning and understanding are to be thought of as experiences of speakers, prior to their actual linguistic behaviour. Besides the difficulties with the stability of experience thus conceived (see section 1 above), a further difficulty here is that meaning, understanding and intending, unlike experiences, are abilities, which in turn means that the criteria for possessing them are behavioural, rather than phenomenological. This is not to say that Wittgenstein dismisses *ab initio* the very idea of experience in this context; rather, his point is that as conceived under the aegis of the picture of the inner and the outer, the existence of such experiences of meaning, understanding and intending is irrelevant. Differently put, taking such experiences seriously, as Wittgenstein does (see below), means that they must be explained without recourse to the picture of the inner and the outer. In turn, phenomenology is shown not to provide metaphysical grounds for the picture of thought and meaning as inner phenomena.

Summing up the results of this section so far, the difference between meaningful and meaningless utterances is not a matter of the fact that the former are accompanied by something (say, a thought or a communicative intention) lacking from the latter. Such an account of the difference falls prey to the picture of the inner and the outer, and must be discarded. But is there an alternative?

There is; the key is to replace a relational construal of the expression of meaning with a non-relational construal. According to the latter, linguistic utterances are the vehicles of thought or communicative intentions; yet, the latter are not construed as ontological items over and above linguistic behaviour, as in the relational construal. Instead, they are construed as an intrinsic aspect of linguistic behaviour itself. Thus, to return to PI 317, it is misleading to construe the expression of meaning on the model provided by a relational conception of the expression of feeling. But the remedy is at hand – namely, to construe the expression of meaning on the model provided by a non-relational conception of the expression of feeling. On this account, the difference between meaningful and meaningless utterances is a matter of the utterances themselves, not something else that happens to accompany only the former. Throughout his later work, Wittgenstein makes the point in several ways. Thus, he opposes the idea that the thought expressed by an utterance is an extra item by humorously defying the idea that word order in thought differs from word order in speech (PI 336); also by explaining what the speed of thought vis-à-vis the slowness of speech amounts to (PI 318); and additionally by confronting the idea that the meaning of a given word can be arbitrarily allocated to a different word, as would be the case if vehicle and content were distinct items, ontologically speaking (PI part II, 263).

To complete the textual evidence for a reading of Wittgenstein's work along these non-relational lines, attention is turned to another phenomenon, aspect blindness. As claimed in section 2 above, the existence of aspect blindness lends support to the non-relational construal of expression promoted by Wittgenstein. This is because the contrast between aspect perception and aspect blindness turns on the existence of a feature that is the key element in a non-relational construal of expression – namely, aspects. What matters now is that there is a special form of aspect blindness pertinent to semantic matters – namely, meaning blindness, i.e. the inability to experience the meaning of a word (PI part II, 294). Meaning blindness shows up when a word that is repeated several times over is experienced as having lost its meaning, or when someone cannot experience the meaning of the word "till" as a verb rather than as a conjunction (PI part II, 261), and also when words are not experienced as having the meaning allocated to them in a special code (PI part II, 263). In other words, there is such a thing as experiencing the meaning of a word, and such a thing as losing or lacking such an experience; the latter is what meaning blindness amounts to.

Aspect blindness can take different forms, including the following:

- the inability to see the two alternate aspects of a double cross (PI part II, 257);
- the lack of a musical ear (PI part II, 260), e.g. the inability to experience that a chord is a conclusion or a parenthesis (PI 527), or else that is being transposed to a different key (PI 536);
- the inability to comprehend pictorial depiction, by failing to see galloping horses or animals pierced by arrows in pictures (PI part II, 175, 180);
- the inability to be absorbed by games of make-believe (PI part II, 205-207);
- the failure to see or read the expression of a face, say its sadness or its timidity (PI part II, 231-232).

What happens under such circumstances is that the experienced object lacks complexity: the conclusion is not heard in the chord, or the sadness seen in the face, say. Instead, what is heard and seen is a collection of sounds or a set of lines and shapes, respectively. Therefore, aspect-blind people lack the holistic experience of aspects, thought of as robust features of the world; moreover, features that are neither reducible to (geometrical, acoustic) properties and relations, nor (irreducibly) associated to them.

Meaning blindness follows the same pattern. What meaning-blind people lack is the holistic experience of linguistic aspects, thought of as robust and complex features of the world.

Unlike meaning-sensitive people, what the meaning-blind experience upon pronouncing or hearing (certain) words is sounds, not the meaning in the sounds. This could be an occasional episode (e.g. when a familiar word is repeated over and over again), or a more stable state (i.e. people to whom the experience of meaning is alien; see PI part II, 294). The meaning-blind can proficiently use language; yet lack the experience of having the right word on the tip of their tongue, and do not struggle to find the word with the precise connotation (say, one that is not demeaning or overly offensive; or alternatively one that is).

Overall, then, Wittgenstein thinks of linguistic meaning as an aspect of utterances, in the familiar sense of being robust and complex features, available to a holistic experience. Moreover, he thinks of linguistic meaning as an intrinsic aspect of utterances, for the content of the holistic experience is the meaning in the utterance. As with feeling, the meaning experienced in the utterance is a non-detachable whole, as shown by the fact that what the meaning-blind experience is not a linguistic utterance, but a collection of mere sounds or of lines and shapes. Saying that the meaning-blind experience mere sounds (or a set of lines and shapes) is not to say that they experience the utterance minus the meaning. For meaning and utterance are not merely associated with each other, and cannot be pulled apart so as to retain one without the other. Hence, the holistic experience of a (non-detachable) complex whole undergone by the meaning-sensitive.

Thus, to sum up, as is the case with feeling, Wittgenstein conceives of linguistic meaning in non-relationally expressive terms. In doing so, the claim that meaning is use, a crucial interpretative tool of Wittgenstein's later work, is not superseded; rather, the close link between meaning and expression, non-relationally construed, means that there are two varieties of language use, one of which includes an experiential element. For the contrast between the meaning-blind and the meaning-sensitive is a difference in language use, as the meaning-blind retain the ability to use, and understand the use of, language, but not in an experiential sense. By contrast, the ability for language use and understanding of the meaning-sensitive is a matter of their experientially appreciating (i.e. seeing, hearing) the meaning in the utterance. Both for the meaning-blind and the meaning-sensitive language is use, but in significantly different ways. Therefore, as claimed in the introduction, revealing the connection between meaning and expression, non-relationally construed, is a way of clarifying the familiar view of linguistic meaning as use.

4. Nature and culture

Let us take stock. It was claimed at the outset that Wittgenstein offers a third-way understanding of linguistic meaning that differs from both behaviourism and mentalism. Sections 1 through 3 have substantiated such a claim by presenting the non-relational account of linguistic expression that is the alternative to the picture of the inner and the outer underlying the debate between behaviourism and mentalism. To underscore the fruitfulness of Wittgenstein's approach, this section shows how a non-relationally expressive account of linguistic meaning helps to clarify the natural, yet cultural, character of language.

Wittgenstein says that language-games, i.e. the activities in which we engage by means of language, are part of our «natural history» (PI 25). Yet language is paradigmatically a cultural phenomenon, something Wittgenstein is also alert to; for instance, when he compares the surroundings of language to the cultural context for a coronation (PI 584). So, the conclusion is that for Wittgenstein language is both a natural and a cultural phenomenon. But how can this be, as the very categories of the natural and the cultural appear to be mutually exclusive?

To relieve the (alleged) tension between the natural and the cultural character of language, it is tempting to draw on a distinction between the general linguistic ability shared by all humans, whatever their cultural differences, and its particular manifestations (say, English or Italian). On this line of thought, the former is a natural ability, and the latter are its cultural

manifestations; as a result, language turns out to be both a natural and a cultural phenomenon. The distinction lies beneath current studies in biolinguistics, which endorse the methods of the natural sciences, rather than those employed in the humanities for the study of particular cultural manifestations of the language ability. Is this divide-and-conquer strategy the correct way to defend the natural, yet cultural, character of language?

The strategy looks promising, but is arguably not what Wittgenstein would recommend. To see why, note that the strategy treats the natural-cultural divide as an ontological partition, in so far as the use of different methodologies goes hand-in-hand with the commitment to taking the general ability for language as a different item from its cultural manifestations. In turn, the latter involves a commitment to the relational construal of expression. For this reason, the divide-and-conquer strategy turns out to be vulnerable to the problems reviewed in earlier sections of this paper, which is why Wittgenstein would not recommend it. Yet, the distinction between a general linguistic ability and its cultural manifestations must be upheld. But how?

The alternative comes from the endorsement of a non-relational construal of expression, according to which the general ability for language is an intrinsic aspect of particular languages. In other words, such cultural products as utterances of, say, English or Italian intrinsically manifest the human ability for language in that they are, not mere sounds or marks on paper, but rather meaningful utterances. Alternatively put, as English and Italian utterances are meaningful via their role in people's lives, the general ability for language turns out to be not an entity over and above particular utterances used in ordinary contexts, but rather an intrinsic aspect of the latter.

A proposal along these lines gains support from Wittgenstein's conception of abilities, which as seen above are thought of not as inner items (events, processes or experiences), but as performance in potential-cum-actual circumstances. Thus, someone's understanding of a mathematical series is a matter of how they behave (i.e. how they follow the series), under appropriate actual-cum-potential circumstances (assuming sufficient motivation, absence of distractors, and so on). *Mutatis mutandis* for linguistic abilities, i.e. the ability to use and understand utterances of, say, English or Italian. (For extended discussion, see PI 150ff.)

Crucial support for the proposal comes from Wittgenstein's discussion of the significance of language acquisition. Thus, he says regarding sensation language that «words are connected with the primitive, the natural, expression of the sensation and used in their place […] the verbal expression replaces crying» (PI 244). It is tempting to read this quote as promoting the view that natural, non-linguistic expression is replaced with linguistic, hence non-natural, utterances. But although the quote does say that crying is a natural expression of pain, it does not say that its linguistic replacement is not. For this reason, the following is a better reading: language acquisition amounts to the replacement of one natural expression by another culturally moulded, yet natural expression.

To see that this is a better reading, note that children's expressive crying is a reaction to the challenges and pressures they face in ordinary situations (say, absence of food or drink, illness, and so on). As children grow, their progressive insertion in a culture makes available to them new ways of reacting to the challenges and pressures they still face. For although challenges and pressures mutate over the life of individuals, they do not disappear. After all, throughout the process of language acquisition and acculturation, human subjects never cease to be bodily beings in a particular ecological setting, itself a continuous source of challenges and pressures. Given so, talk of a natural reaction both before and after language acquisition is justified.

"Reaction" is a term often used by Wittgenstein when he discusses the expressive nature of mind (e.g. PI 284, 343, part II, 289); so, the reading of PI 244 defended here applies beyond sensation-words. The general idea, then, is that expression by means of utterances of, say, English or Italian is a natural reaction to ecological challenges and pressures no less than

non-linguistic expression is. In turn, this means that defending the natural character of language need not involve the postulation of an extra ontological item – namely, the general ability for language, over and above particular utterances of, say, English or Italian. Instead, *qua* expressive reactions, such particular utterances are themselves natural; and the need for an extra ontological item lapses.

The need lapses, but the very idea of a general ability for language is not abolished. For despite the undeniable differences between the linguistic abilities intrinsically manifested by the use of particular utterances of, say, English or Italian, the notion of a general linguistic ability is a timely reminder of the similarities between such utterances. What bears emphasizing now is that reification is avoided, for such similarities do not form a separate ontological item.

An (alleged) objection to the preceding line of argument is that the cultural character of language goes hand-in-hand with its conventionality, which in turn jars with a naturalist view that emphasizes the continuity between linguistic and non-linguistic expressions. For, such a naturalism leaves no room for conventions based on agreement between speakers as a source of linguistic meaning. Therefore, if the cultural-cum-conventional character of language is to be preserved, the preceding naturalist line of argument cannot be right; or so the objection goes. A plausible rebuttal is that the cultural character of language need not be exclusively or even primarily a matter of agreed-upon conventions. The point is not that there is absolutely no room for conventions in linguistic meaning; for the existence of special codes and similar linguistic devices testifies that there is. Rather, the point is that convention cannot be the source of all linguistic meaning, as shown by the fact that the agreement on special codes and the like rests on prior linguistic abilities. In turn, this opens the door to the earlier naturalist story about expressive continuity in a cultural community as a source of linguistic meaning.

Linguistic meaning is normatively constrained, meaning that utterances of, say, English or Italian can be used and understood correctly and incorrectly (e.g. phonetically, syntactically or semantically speaking). Can a naturalist story that places the source of meaning in expressive continuity within a community, rather than in agreed-upon conventions, sustain the normativity of linguistic use and understanding? It can, for normativity is not always a matter of agreed-upon conventions. Compare the difference between linguistic utterances and special codes. For the latter, normativity *is* a matter of how certain sounds (or marks on paper) are conventionally agreed to be used and understood, but not for the former. Thought of as reactions to ecological challenges and pressures, linguistic utterances are not (mere) sounds awaiting normativity to be externally attached to them by conventional agreement. Instead, their being such reactions defines their function within the community, and for that reason they incorporate their own normative standard, to the effect that conformity or deviation from it (e.g. by new expressive members of the community) is what correct vs. incorrect use and understanding amounts to. In short, then, naturalism about linguistic meaning does not leave normativity out.

Key to this vindication of the natural character of such cultural products as utterances of particular languages is the non-relational construal of expression; for particular utterances used in specific contexts are themselves (intrinsically) linguistic expressions, rather than mere sounds (or marks on paper). In turn, this shows that, as claimed at the outset, Wittgenstein's non-relationally expressive account of linguistic meaning is an effective tool for the clarification of issues of interest in contemporary philosophy, including the natural yet cultural character of language[4].

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