Seeing Realities: How Language Acquisition Shapes Our View of the World*

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Abstract
Language is one of the tools humans use to express ideas, thoughts, images, and understandings about the world. However, the position of language between thoughts and the reality of the world observed through our five senses is not yet clear. The question is whether language influences the way humans view the reality around them, or if, on the other hand, reality influences humans' thoughts about the world. This paper seeks to explain the issue of language's position between thoughts and the world by comparing the concepts of the Principle of Linguistic Relativity proposed by Benjamin Lee Whorf and Language Games introduced by Ludwig Wittgenstein. Literature studies were conducted by examining Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* and works that influenced Whorf's *Language, Thought, and Reality*. This paper concludes that the position of language is not between thoughts and the reality of the world, but rather encompasses and bridges both. The key to understanding this relationship lies in the two-way interaction that language regulates. This reciprocal mechanism is often overlooked in language learning and neglecting the fact that language can shape each individual's perspective of the world. Realities are seen in many ways, as many as languages used to perceive them.

Keywords: *Linguistic Relativity Principle, Language Game, Whorf, Wittgenstein,* bildung

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Introduction

Language is a limitless medium that carries everything contained in human understanding. We think and convey thoughts through language. However, in relation to thoughts, the position of language is still unclear. Does language influence our thinking about the world? Or does thought determine the form of our language?

There are several opinions on this matter. Chomsky (1988) defends the modular theory of mind with the assumption of various autonomous subsystems that are mutually independent. As stated by this theory, language is treated as an innate human capacity that develops independently of other cognitive domains. Piaget as a representative of cognitive psychology is of the view that the development of thought is a constructive cognitive process that does not depend on the development of language (Kienpointner, 1996:476). de Saussure

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(2011) argues that language is a link between thought and sound. Language is a means for thought to be expressed as sound. Language is created because thoughts are made orderly and sounds are articulated. Saussure argues that language lies between thought and sound.

Furthermore, if we really want to relate it to Marxism, we can say that language is seen as a secondary phenomenon that depends on the economic and cultural basis of a society. However, the influence of language on thought cannot be denied at all. Among these views, we can summarize and divide the answers to these questions into two groups. First, those who support that language is crucially involved in the formation of thought in addition to being used for communication purposes. Second, those who defend the idea that language is not fundamentally involved in the process of thinking, but only serves to facilitate the communication of thoughts.

Carruthers (1998) pinpoints that the position of the first view is relatively weak compared to the second. He highlights at least two things. First, language, in this thesis, is put forward only as a natural necessity. In other words, language is not conceptually necessary. There is a contrast in this sense with the idea that the thesis is an a priori conceptual thesis. Second, the thesis that language is involved in human thought is not universally maintained. This means that the involvement of language is very limited to certain types of thought, especially conscious propositional thoughts.

According to the second view, the only natural function and purpose of language is to facilitate communication. This function is expressed in written, spoken form with others or with oneself which is called "inner speech". In contrast, the cognitive conception of language sees that language is constitutively involved in our thinking process. In this sense, language is directly involved in the central cognitive processes of thought, such as believing, wanting something, reasoning, and forming meaning. This means that meaning cannot be separated from the existence of language in the mind as its tool. As we all know, since the beginning of civilization, humans have always tried to give meaning or significance to every aspect of life. This attempt at interpretation is manifested in language.

In an effort to answer the questions raised above, this paper will look at the production of meaning and how it can be crucial in shaping our view of the world. Therefore, I would like to examine Whorf and Wittgenstein's views on language. Both are intellectuals in the fields of linguistics and philosophy related to language and thought. From them, we can expect a description of language and how it interacts with the mind and the world in terms of obtaining meaning. Whorf explains the principle of the relativity of language which emphasizes that language has natural characteristics as relative meaning. In Wittgenstein's hands, language is a language game. Meaning comes to life through its use.

The method used is a literature review of two language paradigms. The first is the Linguistic Relativity Principle (LRP) offered by Benjamin Lee Whorf. The second is the Language Game or Language Game proposed by Ludwig Wittgenstein. The main sources of this research are the original works of both, *Language, Thought and Reality* (1956) and *Philosophical Investigations* (1986). The two ideas are then compared using the lens of referential realism proposed by John McDowell in *Mind and World* (1996).

Benjamin Lee Whorf formulated his linguistic hypothesis known as the Linguistic Relativity Principle (LRP). This relativity principle is based on the argument that each person is not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar or, in some cases, can be calibrated (Lee Whorf, 1956:214).

Language phenomena are considered as background phenomena that are not consciously or very vaguely conscious of the speaker and this kind of unintentional automatic patterns are specific to each language and constitute the formalized side of language or its grammar.

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In this sense, grammar does not mean the same as the term that, for example, our teachers teach us at school. Wittgenstein, 1986:168; §664) distinguishes between "surface" and "depth" grammar. In the framework of his work, at this point, grammar refers to the latter. For some discussion of this linguistic term see Lee Whorf (1956:262). Different users of grammar are designated by their grammar by the way they observe objects. This process will lead to different evaluations and eventually lead to different meanings and form different world views. The meaning of a word depends on its use in language and the meaning of a language depends on its use in life. That is the point that Wittgenstein really wants to emphasize in *Philosophical Investigation*. Its use is determined by rules he calls "Language Games." These rules are more than just a system of language structures. Language Games consist of verbal and nonverbal activities (1986:5, §7). Wittgenstein considers language itself as a vehicle for thought (1986:107, §329).

We need to involve more than just speaking a particular language to play the Language Game as Wittgenstein suggests. The embedding of language in the context of actions and activities and forms of life is the framework that shapes our picture of extralinguistic reality more than a purely structural language system. Rules of use can fix the references of linguistic expressions and determine the truth or falsity of statements (Kienpointner, 1996: 481).

Context is actually the equivalent of intent that Wittgenstein constructs in terms of the grammar of Language Games. Every meaning of a word and sentence cannot be separated entirely from its use in the context of the speaker's underlying life. For example, the first is the word "left." If used in the context of discussing the relationship between capitalism and communism, then what is meant is "communism". If used in the context of Islamic studies, it means "liberals" who are opposed to the traditional (right). If used in the context of traffic signs, it can mean "turn left". Second, the word "house". If the user context refers to a building, it most likely means "house". When used in a cultural context, it means "cultural roots" or "origin".

Another case is when a word is used in the context of a particular scientific standard or discipline. For example, the typical scientific words of economics, "supply and demand" when used in the context of economics, have a clear meaning. However, if these scientific words are used in the context of everyday life, they can cause many misunderstandings. The words "supply and demand" can be understood as "demands to work harder" and "offering to stay at his house".

Likewise, if a word or phrase is used according to the context of the interlocutor. For example, the word "God" when conveyed to a small child will be very difficult to understand. So, we need another word that fits the context of others, such as "Lover" or "Father". All these descriptions clearly show that every word or sentence is very much tied to the context of its users. Failure to follow the rules will lead to confusion of meaning. This condition is exactly the same as the importance of following the rules of football. Players must obey all the rules so that the game can run smoothly.

From Whorf and Wittgenstein, as well as from their opponents, we learn that the meaning of a word is relative and does not stand alone. To form and acquire meaning, language must place itself on a reliable basis, namely reference. Whorf and Wittgenstein's explanations, in some ways, do not capture the process by which language acquires its reference. To address this issue, I want to look further by reading referential realism.

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Method

The method used is a literature review of two language paradigms. The first is the Linguistic Relativity Principle (LRP) offered by Benjamin Lee Whorf. The second is the Language Game or Language Game proposed by Ludwig Wittgenstein. The main sources of this research are the original works of both, *Language, Thought and Reality* and *Philosophical Investigations*. The two ideas are then compared using the lens of referential realism proposed by John McDowell in *Mind and World*. These two classic works have been discussed extensively, one for each is McDonough (2024) and Mei (2024) respectively for Wittgenstein and Lee Whrof.

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Discussion

Linguistic Relativity Principle

Whorf believes that language is a guideline for social reality. Individuals do not live in an objective world, not only in the world of social activities as generally understood, but also determined by certain language statements that are the medium for society. No two languages are similar enough to represent the same reality. Therefore, we can say, for example, that the mental world of an Indonesian will be different from the mental world of a Dutch person because of the difference in language. Through words, the smallest structure of language, Whorf stated that we will know that language can influence an individual's mind.

In this sense, several objections arise. For the objectors, LRP is considered a cage that imprisons thought (Kienpointner, 1996:447). The objection arises because of Whorf's statement which clearly states that no one, even linguists, is able to overcome the cognitive limitations of LRP (Lee Whorf, 1956:214). This means that the mind has a total dependence on language. If that does happen, it will create a fallacious condition. This condition makes it almost impossible for us to carry out the translation process. However, in reality, translating any text from one language to another is still possible. I agree with Kienpointner, 1996:477) when he distinguishes between translatability and understandability. Understanding, as quoted by Lakoff and Johnston (1981), is possible even in cases where explicit verbal translation reaches its limits.

Another substantial criticism is that Whorf did not convincingly distinguish between language as a system *(langue)* and language as a discourse utterance *(parole)*. This concept was introduced by Saussure. From his work we see the emergence of a tripartite system, namely *langage*, *langue* and *parole*. *Langage* is the easiest to understand because it is a fundamental universal system, so that the structure of linguistic communication can work. *Langue* is the actual language spoken by its speakers, such as Indonesian, English, French and so on. *Parole* is an individual speech act. Whorf also failed to distinguish between the world view expressed by everyday language and the typical language that is more specific for several purposes such as politics and religious issues.

Regier and Kay (2009) finds that, in the case of color naming and perception, Whorf's hypothesis is half-true in two different ways: language influences color perception primarily in half the visual field and cross-linguistic color naming is shaped by language-specific and universal abilities. Psycholinguistic experiments have shown that even speakers of languages

with only a few color terms can learn new color expressions more easily if they point to a focal color. These colors are easier to see through the human neuro-physiological apparatus. This has been proven in experiments with speakers of the Dani tribe, one of the tribes in West Papua, Indonesia. The Dani people only know two color adjectives, namely *mili* which is used for dark colors such as black, blue, green and *mola* for light colors such as white, red and yellow Kienpointner, 1996:479). Despite this disagreement, language does have an influence on human experience. I cannot deny that language provides a perceptual view and at the same time imposes a certain conceptual view. Language is a verbal lens for seeing reality. Language gives a certain nuance to an idea.

Regarding meaning, although Whorf stated that the essence of linguistics is the search for meaning, he did not develop his semantic idea in as much detail as Wittgenstein. According to Whorf, the important point is clear. Language has an influence on thought and, therefore, characterizes the way we see the world. Language imposes the conceptual views of language users because humans indirectly judge reality based on the language they have. In this way, language influences our reasons for carrying out certain actions. For example, Israel considers Palestine's efforts to gain international recognition of its sovereignty as an act of "rebellion" while Palestine calls it a "struggle". Based on this difference in meaning, both take different approaches and actions towards what is essentially the same thing. Language can determine thought, but then, we are not talking about language as a specific structural system. We are dealing with language as a limited use of the system. This situation brings us to Wittgenstein with his famous slogan, "meaning is use".

Language Game

Wittgenstein (1986: 32, 36; § 67, § 77) put forward the idea of family resemblance. This means that our concepts do not have essential primitive features to define them, but they are connected to each other in an overlapping manner like the features of family members. As we know, each family member may not have one feature, for example the same nose, but resemble each other. Wittgenstein emphasized that linguistic signs are dead until they are used in conventional settings.

Through Language Games, Wittgenstein criticized fundamental issues in the world of philosophy that tend to be very difficult to understand. According to him, this happened because philosophers did not pay attention to the rules of grammar which caused chaos. He placed grammar as an expression of an essence (1986:116; § 371). He added that like everything metaphysical, harmony between mind and world can be found in grammar. Lee Whorf (1956:240) said,

"…segmentation of nature is an aspect of grammar…. We cut up and organize the spread and flow of events as we do, largely because, through our mother tongue, we are parties to an agreement to do so, not because itself is segmented in exactly that way for all to see".

To understand meaning, Wittgenstein said, we cannot imagine meaning as an unreal connection with the mind made between a word, for example a seed containing a tree (Chatterjee, 1985: 45-47). Gilbert Ryle (2002) delivered his criticism of Wittgenstein's view. According to him, it is important to establish a clear boundary between the standard of ordinary language and ordinary everyday language. This refers to Wittgenstein's opinion which emphasizes the difference in "ordinary use" and "ordinary usage" which complements the concept of Language Games.

As exemplified in the previous section, "supply and demand" is a typical phrase for Economics. This difference must be maintained as a standard term according to each discipline. Although the words "supply and demand" are also found in ordinary everyday language use, if they are not regulated in a standard manner according to the discipline, they will trigger chaos in meaning. He complements the language game which only stops at the limits of the context per se, by adding a categorization system at the level of scientific and non-scientific language, although both are rooted in the use of the same language.

Ryle also mentioned that language is not interest-free. Every word and language carries a certain interest. Because language is not free, I agree with Gadamer (1977), who agrees with Martin Heidegger, who said that understanding language is actually an activity of investigating the universal process of human nature's actions to exist. Understanding should be seen as a fundamental attitude to "understand" how humans themselves are. In this sense, the meaning of a word or language must be explored from every element that completes the building of the words themselves, as contained in the full meaning of the words themselves; words always contain a complete meaning and the complete meaning of the Being that builds them. Every word must carry interest, desire, and intention in it.

For example, George Soros coined the phrase "Open Society". If we look at the context, we can conclude that he is carrying the interests of his global business expansion. He invites local communities, through his open society campaign, to positively accept the presence of "outsiders" who carry out economic activities in their area. Ryle also appeals that applying the philosophy of ordinary language and Language Games will be difficult if associated with text.

The text itself, according to Ricoeur, is "any discourse fixed by writing". Ricoeur's term "discourse" refers to language when communicated, either orally or in writing. For the case of discourse in oral form, it does not require many problems because it creates direct communication. This is inherent in the speakers so that we can clearly see their intonation and gestures (Ricœur, 1982:165).

It will not be easy when discourse is corrected with writing. Problems of understanding and interpretation may arise. Ricœur (1982: 199) then brought up two very important text keys in his thinking, namely "what the text says" and "how the text expresses" (act of said). The first key is the meaning contained in a text. This means that the text is written so autonomously, standing alone, completely separate from the context of its author. I consider Wittgenstein's thinking only suitable for understanding the meaning of language in direct communication and not in text.

Meaning and Referential Realism

Whorf and Wittgenstein agree that language produces relative meaning. Relativity is caused by the nature of language's dependence on reference. In Whorf and Wittgenstein's simple terms, the meaning of language depends on its context and conventions.

So how does language, in relation to the mind and the world, get its reference? Let's start with the correspondence theory of meaning. This theory believes that language must adapt to the world. The way in which language relates to the world is by identifying certain basic content-bearing expressions when choosing objects that actually exist and things that occur repeatedly or qualities of sensory experience respectively (Hanna and Harrison, 2003:20-25).

In order to use some concepts, we must know the object. For example, the word "green" can only be understood through the process of knowing the object referred to as green. According to the sense data theory what we immediately know is our sensation of green. For the Realist, terms like "green" do not refer to or pick out sense data, but pick out simple

features of the world; all the mind does is pick out the sound "green" to "name" that feature.

When faced with expressions that do not correspond to the separate realities of language, we have several problems. The problem arises with concepts that do not seem to be identifiable with some feature of the world, or with some sensory content. Such unidentifiable things, to name a few, are "legal" or "government." At this point, semantic foundationalism is called for.

The problem is whether we can show that the terms of language ultimately rest on a mind-independent reality. The answer lies in showing that there are some basic concepts that are mind-independent. Any other concept that does not fall into this group has a claim to contain content only if it can be shown that it is derived from these basic concepts.

For Russell, the famous proponent of semantic foundationalism, there are two parts to language, namely, primary or object language and verbal language. The first consists of basic words, which identify the concept being studied without relying on other words, learned by other words through the process of becoming acquainted with them. The last are non-basic words, words whose meaning can be learned without being familiar with the concept itself, but by being familiar with the basic words that underlie and define it (Hanna and Harrison, 2004:30).

Semantic foundationalism is considered a version of referential realism. It is motivated by the perceived need to avoid being forced to admit that the mind never encounters a reality that lies outside its own conceptual or linguistic constructions. One manifestation of referential realism was made by John McDowell. The argument that led him to a version of Platonism. Its manifestation appears in a puzzle suggested by Kant. Kant distinguishes between the understanding, which is considered the source of the concepts by which we interpret our experience, as a spontaneity to be contrasted with the institution that only receives sensory experience. This is the understanding, the active faculty of thinking, which is different from the passive reception of sensory impressions or representations contributed by intuition. When Kant describes the understanding as a spontaneity he reflects his view of the relationship between reason and freedom. According to him, rational necessity is not only compatible with freedom but is also part of it. In a slogan, the space of reasons is a space of freedom.

But if our freedom in empirical thought is total, especially if it is not limited from outside the conceptual sphere, that seems to threaten the possibility that judgments of experience may be based on the way in which it relates to the reality external to thought. Such a foundation is, of course, necessary if experience is to be a source of knowledge and more generally if the bearing of empirical judgments on reality is to be placed sensibly in our picture. The more we toy with the relationship between reason and freedom, the more we risk losing our grip on how the application of concepts can be justified judgments about the world. This is the problem to which, for Russell, semantic foundationalism provides a solution. That solution, he labels the "Myth of the Given." McDowell rejects it for good reason. His basic objection is that "the Given" fails to provide a second-order warrant. The difficulty is that the idea of "the Given" is a series of mere sensory effects. These sensory effects, McDowell claims, are not reasons. To address this case, he offers a solution that he calls his own naturalization of Platonism. It is achieved through the right interpretation of Aristotle and Wittgenstein, namely that the attainment of conceptual capacity involves not merely passive attention to the contents of sensory experience, but active engagement in the world. The progressive education, or Bildung, of a creature whose animal nature already involves him in that world (McDowell, 1996:88).

The concepts acquired in this process should not be regarded as constructions of the human mind. They are, whatever truths may be articulated in relation to them, imposed on the mind by the world. But they are accessible to the human mind only through the process of Bildung. For McDowell, this is in keeping with the naturalized platonist belief that no view of the origins of our conceptual schemes in Bildung can be accessed from a standpoint outside those conceptual schemes.

The "social pragmatist" view of meaning, according to McDowell, is one according to which there is no normative structure within which meanings arise except their acceptance and rejection by the community at large (McDowell, 1996:93). For the naturalized platonist, the requirement of reason exists in order to be open to them. The naturalized platonist is committed to the doctrine that concepts are not made but discovered, with the corollary being that it is as possible to be wrong about the conformity of one's concepts to reality as it is to be wrong about the conformity of one's beliefs to facts.

Some concepts are legitimate, others are not, and what legitimizes the members of the former group is that they can be encountered in nature, through the process of bildung. The naturalism of the naturalized plantonist following Wittgenstein's version is that we have no way of seeing the world independently of the "space of reasons" acquired through participation in bildung, with the result that the conceptual structure of reality is, for us, inherently tied to our humanness. McDowell's solution (1996:90), by contrast, denies our accessibility to Nature that is not inspired by the spontaneity of thought. This is a way of closing the skeptical gap between mind, language and world. With referential realism successfully addressing the problem of how language, mind, and world are supposed to work, I can say that the mind cannot carry out the process of thinking by itself. The mind often relies on language to construct ideas and concepts.

Conclusion

The content of the conclusion is a formulation of the answer to the research objectives, not a summary of the research results and is made in paragraph form (not numerical). The conclusion contains research findings as a synthesis between the results of data analysis and discussion results, and emphasizes new things that contribute to scientific development (maximum number of pages 15% of the total pages of the manuscript I strongly agree with Wittgenstein when he said, "the limits of my language are the limits of my world" (the limits of my language are the limits of my world). Because the world view is formed by meanings that are only produced by language, it is almost impossible to think of thoughts without the involvement of language. Everything in the world can only be "seen" through the lens of language.

The key to the interaction of mind and world is language. References to meaning can come in two ways. This depends on things that exist in the world or are conceptualized in the mind. The crossing of directions can only be done through language. The relationship between language, mind and world is a two-stage relationship. Language and mind are related to practice, and only practice is related to the world. Bildung is included in the process. I can say that language is a form of Bildung. In this area of practice, we can see that it is clear that, in the end, language and thought always have an undeniable attempt to influence each other. For me, thought without language is unthinkable.

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