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WITTGENSTEIN ON PHILOSOPHY OF PSYCHOLOGY: THE “MEANING-BLINDNESS” AS A COMMUNICATION PROBLEM

Abstract: In 1946-47 Wittgenstein delivered his last course of lectures at Cambridge before his retirement. These lectures and discussions were on philosophy of psychology, in general, and specifically on experience, language, meaning and understanding. In this article, the uses of the “meaning-blindness” concept by Wittgenstein in the context of his work and around these topics are discussed. This article presents a theoretical approach based on Wittgenstein’s linguistic psychology, assuming the thesis that the linguistic production affects the ordinary use of language. In this perspective, it is argued the difficulties revealed by an inter-subjective semantics, with the aim of revealing the semantic aporias manifested by the “meaning-blindness” concept.

Keywords: communication, meaning-blindness, philosophy of psychology, inter-subjectivity, Wittgenstein.

1. Introduction

Communication, whether verbal or non-verbal, is a general, multifaceted, and ambiguous process of interactivity and semantic inter-subjectivity to convey information between interlocutors. Considering the Latin etymon *communicatio* and *communicationis* (meaning the act of communicating or sharing, i.e. to put in common or to have in common, share), we usually understand this term as the process of transmitting coded information which establishes a relationship between speakers through a stipulated

system of signs (that act as stimuli), to the point that the actions, thoughts, intentions or sensations of an emitter stimulate and provoke responses in the receiver.

However, Wittgenstein only applies “communication” as an opportunity regarding the interpersonal language. Communication aims at some type of exteriorization exercise. As well as being the object of philosophical interrogation, communication appears as a practical problem in Wittgenstein’s work, derived from individual experience of having a sensation or a subjective moment of existence. Such experience is an inner experience directed towards others in an interaction process that arises from the recognition of the other people, in so far as communication is understood as the privileged relationship based on subjective and transmissible experiences.

Wittgenstein’s attention was drawn to the informal language of everyday life. His interest is in the fact that language is primarily a medium of communication. However, there are some minimum requirements which a form of linguistic behaviour must meet to be intelligible to us, argues Glock (1996, p. 128). Language is not agreement in opinions, but in forms of life. Language is a form of life. The use of a language is a manifestation and an expression (i.e. the act of communication) of a form of culture. Communication requires that a similar idea expressed by the emitter is produced in the receiver. According to Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, “if language is to be a means of communication, there must be agreement not only in definitions but also in judgements” (Wittgenstein, 1996, § 242).¹

“Communication is not a matter of making something happen in the hearer’s mind, the grasping of a sense, such that it is irrelevant what happens thereafter”, explains Glock (1996, p. 373). To participate in a communication process, speakers and hearers must use and “play” the same language-game. According to Wittgenstein, we operate with signs in the language-games. For the effectiveness of these communication systems as a mechanism, one expects that the speakers of a code would be able to operate the signs correctly. But what does it mean “to operate signs”? It means to participate in a communication process where we interact with other speakers, and we use signs to relate reality. It is in these processes that the signs acquire their importance and fulfil their function.

The relevance of discussing communication conditions (i.e. the use of ordinary language forms) passes through a consideration regarding the process of coding and symbolisation of what is intended to be transmitted. The content of an experience cannot be exteriorised

1. Wittgenstein’s published works are quoted by the date of the editions consulted and abbreviations in references to works are preferably not used. Wittgenstein wrote for the most part in numbered paragraphs, except in the case of *The Blue and Brown Books*, *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology II* and Part II of *Philosophical Investigations*. For this reason, the writings with paragraphs are cited by the symbol §, which indicates, precisely, the paragraph number. The writings without divisions, in sequential text, are cited only by the page number.

or the meaning of an expressive or descriptive statement be understood if a prior convention does not exist to define and regulate the possible accurate use of signs. As in the case of a given signs X, there is a convention that specifies what (and how) we can and should codify the system of signs to which X belongs.

Any communication presupposes using a form of language and previous knowledge of the established code that defines the significance attributed to the signs. It would be more properly correct to say that the experience is exteriorised (and not simply communicated) using the signs of a certain system, in so far as it is revealed, manifested outwardly (and not deliberately and ostensibly transmitted). The sensorial aspect of the sign (the signifier, i.e. the external perceptible element) carries out the primordial function of being susceptible of be received by the interlocutor’s sensory organs. Although the significance, which carries the meaning attributed to the signifier, resulting from a mental elaboration (being the interior significative of content) also plays an important part in the process of the experience exteriorization, the sign becomes present in the interlocutors through the signifier and it presents them the coded content of the exteriorised experience.

Deviation or anomalous cases (related to the application of meanings) must be considered in the discussion about the expression/communication of experience. For that very reason, Wittgenstein probably introduces the so-called “meaning-blind” concept in his discussion about philosophy of psychology (Wittgenstein, 1998c, § 175).

The “meaning-blind” concept is, *lato sensu*, linked to communication and meaning processes developed over time, i.e. diachronic processes of communication and meaning, as well as processes that proceed from the speakers interaction, in certain ways using the words they consider most convenient and adequate to represent what they intend.

Therefore, based on Wittgenstein’s last lectures and discussions from 1946-47 on philosophy of psychology, it is intended in this article to argue the uses of the “meaning-blindness” concept in the context of Wittgenstein’s work around related topics such as experience, language, meaning and understanding. Following a theoretical and conceptual approach based on Wittgenstein’s linguistic psychology, it is discussed the thesis that any linguistic production affects the ordinary use of language. This perspective is a personal understanding to underline the natural difficulties revealed by an inter-subjective semantics represented and shown by the “meaning-blindness” concept.

Considering the purposes of this article, the conclusions stated are the following:

- › all communication processes start with a minimum of meaning-blindness and develop to the interlocutors mutual understanding;

- › the meaning-blindness may remain, be reduced or be totally eradicated with the mutual communicative understanding;
- › there is an inter-subjectivity semantic that allows the understanding of what it is mean when it is said.

Language is always an agreement in a specific form of life. The use of a language is an expression of a given form of culture. If language is an agreement, the content of an experience cannot be exteriorised or the meaning of an expressive or descriptive statement be understood without a prior convention about the meanings and the rules that regulate the use of signs. Words impact on us when we hear or see/perceive them as a sound or mark (a sign) and grasp their meaning.

2.Expression, communication, and “meaning-blindness” conceptual investigation

During the last two years of his life (from May 1949 to April 1951) Wittgenstein wrote philosophical notes according to his own definition of “conceptual investigation”. These manuscripts can be divided in three thematic groups, as Georg H. von Wright and Heikki Nyman argued in the preface of volume two of *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*. The first thematic group, about knowledge, doubt, certainty, and other topics in epistemology was published in 1969, in a bilingual edition (German/English) under the title *On Certainty*. The second group deals with colour concepts and appeared in print in 1977 under the title *Remarks on Colour*. The third group, in general about psychological concepts, deals in particular with the so-called inner/outer dichotomy, i.e. the confrontation between mental states and behaviours, and appeared in 1992, with the title *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology I*, complementary to second part of the *Philosophical Investigations* and others writings from 1946-49.

The remarks included in this last thematic group are not restricted to follow Wittgenstein’s positions of other writings. On the contrary, there are some new remarks. For instance, remarks about the connection between experience and language, the importance and statute of the linguistic expression of psychological states or the treatment of psychological concepts.

As mentioned in the introduction to this article, we usually understand the term “communication” as the process of transmitting coded information. This process is established through a stipulated system of signs. Wittgenstein repeatedly refers to

the term “communication” to emphasize the linguistic character of his investigations into the philosophy of psychology. In Wittgenstein’s philosophy, the relevance of this concept can be demonstrated by several remarks in his writings. Considering his last philosophical work, “communication” should be understood at a par with another fundamental concept: “expression”. While the expression consists in a behavioral manifestation associated with contexts of experience such as that of pain, communication consists in an utterance of a declarative sentence in an informative context, consequently susceptible of being considered true or false.

In his countless remarks on this subject, Wittgenstein reflects about the communication process as it is usually understood. He criticizes it as a matter of “one telling anything to anyone”, i.e. “as if the whole point of communication lies in this: someone else grasps the sense of my words – which is something mental; he as it were takes it into his own mind” (Wittgenstein, 1996, § 363). He means the common and accustomed language process as a *medium* of communication (i.e. communication through language and *vice-versa*), which implies agreements in forms of life, definitions and judgments (Wittgenstein, 1996, § 242). Language is necessary for any form of life and culture. Without language we could still communicate with one another; but we cannot influence other people in such-and-such ways, cannot build roads and machines, etc. In the same perspective, without the use of speech and writing people could not communicate (Wittgenstein, 1996, § 491).

As we may read in Wittgenstein’s *The Blue and Brown Books*, we are inclined to say that when we communicate a feeling to someone, something which we can never know happens at the other end and that “all that we can receive from him is again an expression” (Wittgenstein, 1998b, p. 185). By means of the subjective content of our experiences referred through the common use of ordinary language, “we communicate with other people without knowing if they have this experience too” (Wittgenstein, 1996, § 181).

Let’s take for granted the grammatical difference between “communication” and “expression”. The former concept (unlike the latter one):

- › is a general, multifaceted and ambiguous process or activity of conveying information;
- › can point to the true or false polarity;
- › can point to affirmative or negative sentences;
- › belongs as a rule to an informative/descriptive context;
- › is necessarily interpersonal (there is no communication without two

persons, at least: the utterer and the receiver) and guided by the normality of the linguistic *praxis* and the grammar, which compel to some conditions of exteriority, rationality, and regulation.

Many forms or ways of communication are language-games, activities, or forms of life such as: giving orders, describing the appearance of an object, reporting an event, reading a story, telling a joke, translating from one language into another, asking, thanking, or praying (Wittgenstein, 1996, § 23). The concept of “language-game” started to appear after 1932, when Wittgenstein began to consider the analogy of the game to language as a whole, i.e. as an activity governed by rules. It is difficult to ascertain exactly when and in what text Wittgenstein uses this term for the first time. However, the idea of a language-game may have occurred in the typescripts probably dating from 1932-33. It also appears in posthumous works, like the *Blue Book*, 1933-34, where this concept was presented for the first time to define the simple means of using signs or words (Wittgenstein, 1998b, pp. 17, 81) or in the *Philosophical Investigations*, as language forms in which a child begins to make use of words (Wittgenstein, 1996, §§ 5, 7).

Given the multiplicity of systems of social practices of communication governed by rules, language-games are rooted in our forms of life. For “language-game” Wittgenstein intends to understand the ways in which we operate signs (a different language-game corresponding to each different use of the words). Wittgenstein compares the axiomatic systems to a chess game, in so far as the meaning of a sign, just as a chess piece, is the sum of the rules that determine its possible applications. Just as in any other game, language-games are autonomous, they are not justified by external objects, unlike other activities such as cooking (Wittgenstein, 1993b, 184-185 and 1993c, § 230). For Wittgenstein, the use of the concept of “language-games” enhances the heterogeneous nature of the language itself. He states that thinking is working with expressions, and language is always present in all thoughts, i.e. in all human experience.

More relevant than the concepts of “expression” and “communication” in this conceptual investigation is the concept of “language-games”, which help us to understand the main concept of “meaning-blindness”. In this article, the “meaning-blindness” concept is understood as a literal translation from the german *Bedeutungsblindheit*. According to Joachim Schulte (2003, p. 67), this expression is also used by Fritz Mauthner, but with a different meaning. Schulte do not put aside the connection with “soul-blindness”, another concept mentioned by Mauthner, because two possible Wittgenstein’s influences are Ernst Mach and William James, and both refer to several events related to the “soul-blindness” concept.

This conceptual investigation is important to understand the linguistic expression as the main theme-problem of Wittgenstein’s last writings. In this perspective, it is imperative to mention what Wittgenstein means by “meaning-blindness”. In the second part of the *Philosophical Investigations* (namely in the section xi), Wittgenstein argues the occurrence of the meaning experience. Other remarks about this subject appear also in his last writings, but all of them suggest some questions:

- › how to characterise the ordinary experience of communication?
- › how to communicate the human experience?
- › what can we express or communicate through the use of (using) language?
- › what does one means when one uses a certain expression?
- › what does it mean “to understand someone”?

All these questions are about regular linguistic expressions and are crucial to understand the ordinary use of language. Therefore, this theme/problem reveals itself important to understand pathological linguistic phenomenon related to inner and subjective experiences of meaning.

In the 1946-47 lectures on philosophical psychology (i.e. notes taken by P. T. Geach, K. J. Shah and A. C. Jackson titled and published as *Wittgenstein’s Lectures on Philosophical Psychology 1946-47*, cf. Geach, Shah & Jackson, 1988), the concepts “aspect-blindness” and “meaning-blindness” were used interchangeably. However, in subsequent writings to those lectures (*viz. Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* and *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*) Wittgenstein usually reserves the expression “*Bedeutungsblindheit*” for a certain inability to experience words, so that “meaning-blindness” is a sort of “aspect-blindness”. Wittgenstein acquires an interest in the experience of meaning of words (*viz.* how words impact on us when we hear or see/perceive them as a sound or mark and grasp their meaning) probably under the influence of William James. The origins of this interest go back particularly to William James’ *The Principles of Psychology* (cf. 1998). After that, when Wittgenstein was investigating the concept “seeing as...”, he realizes there was a connection between the phenomenon of seeing an aspect and the experience of meaning. This concept does not appear in the second part of the *Philosophical Investigations*, but it refers to specific cases (e.g. lacking perspicuity using words and sentences or lacking understanding about the status of the words used to communicate).

The consequence is obvious: it is difficulty to differentiate behaviours either from

a “meaning-blind” person or from a regular person with normal linguistic behaviours. The way how words impact on us when we have an inner experience of them (i.e. when we simply grasp the meaning) is not observable. Wittgenstein uses this concept similarly to the deficiencies or deviations of use the meanings of words. He seems to be concerned with the way a “meaning-blind” person acts or behaves using and understanding words. This supposes how a person would be in a deficient state to use the meaning of words, compared to a frequent and normal use. Therefore, the “meaning-blindness” concept is a kind of fictional name for a hypothetical disease, disorder, or syndrome, in order to refer a nonfictional and real inability or lack of perspicuity to experience words, “suffered” by individuals who never experience meaning (at least correctly).

3. “Meaning-blindness” as a communication problem

Wittgenstein begins the above-mentioned section xi of the *Philosophical Investigations* arguing what is or what means “to see one aspect”. He considers one direct association between the concepts “to see one aspect” and “to experiment one meaning”. This view justifies the pertinence of Wittgenstein’s investigation so-called philosophy of psychology because the linguistic meaning is analysed as topic of philosophy, but into the psychology scope.

From this interdisciplinary view follows the “meaning-blindness” question, which is based in the Gestalt psychology. The well-known representation of the Gestalt psychology is the duck-rabbit ambiguous figure of Joseph Jastrow. This representation corresponds to Wittgenstein’s hypothesis of people that simply have fault in the ability to see something as something, i.e. people without the ability to experiment the perception of one aspect or to see the change form from one aspect to other aspect. These people, for example, are not able to pass over the divisive moment from “to see one duck” to “to see one rabbit” in the same representation.

Wittgenstein calls “aspect-blindness” this pathology or default (1996, p. 213) and compares it with the lack of musical ear. The blindness belongs to the human being, not to the meaning. The *Philosophical Investigations* reveals the importance of this concept, putting it between two other crucial terms in this subject discussion (“to see one aspect” and “to experiment the meaning of a word”). Wittgenstein asks: what would miss to someone that did had the meaning experience of a word? This question helps to understand the “meaning-blindness” concept and the respective importance to the expression. The answer would approach one’s lack of abilities to produce and understand sentences and utterances, i.e. the lack of language skills

necessary for interpersonal communication.

Wittgenstein’s pragmatic conception of language admits the hypothesis of a definitive ability of recognition or “sensation” for our uses of words. However, this ability can be affected or even be lost, according to certain circumstances. It can also be reacquired by training. According to Russell Goodman, William James already had emphasized this sensation of words which seemed to acquire an entirely no-natural aspect, when they are repeated several times and lose the respective meaning. “Repeating a word does not of course strip it of meaning – if we pronounce the word ‘till’ again and again in isolation it remains a good English word – but it feels that way, and this is the point made by James and then by Wittgenstein” (Goodman, 2002, p. 139).

This example introduces a particular case of subjective ability using the meaning: a person who always used words mechanically, almost instinctively and without any “sensation” of distinction between this type of use and the regular use. This distinction belongs to Wittgenstein’s concerns about linguistic expression, i.e. the idea of language-use and language-training during the acquisition of abilities to speak and to understand what is said.

In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein develops his conceptual project or inquiry in the philosophy of psychology domain. He mentions the “aspect-blindness” associated to the visual experience. He asks: “Could there be human beings lacking in the capacity to see something as something – and what would that be like? What sort of consequences would it have? – Would this defect be comparable to colour-blindness or to not having absolute pitch?” (1996, p. 213). Answering to these questions, we will call it “aspect-blindness” and will next consider what might be meant by this. According to this conceptual investigation, the aspect-blind man is supposed not to see the aspects A change.

Someone lacking the ability to see something as something would be able to participate in a language-game such as “to show, among these figures, the one that contains a black cross”. Such person would be able “to see one definitive aspect”, but he couldn’t adjust to the circumstances, namely “to show now, among these figures, the one that contains a black cross” (i.e. “to try the sense of a word”), because an “aspect-blindness” person, for Wittgenstein, has a different image association comparing to a regular person.

The use of the “aspect-blindness” concept has an evident importance for Wittgenstein. It represents the possibility to connect the concepts “to see an aspect” and “to experiment the meaning of a word” (Hark, 1990, p. 163). In his *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Wittgenstein (1998a, § 189) also mentions indiscriminately other types of blindness: “meaning-blindness”, “sensation-blindness”, and “form-blind-

ness”. But the blindness, in this aspectual case, has to do with a change of aspect not perceived by the “aspect-blind” person. A paradigmatic example of “aspect-blindness” is someone incapable to see something in a certain way, in opposition with someone with a more refined look (Wittgenstein, 1998a, §§ 202, 888). According to Wittgenstein, the importance of this concept lies in the connexion between the concepts of “seeing an aspect” and “experiencing the meaning of a word”. What would one be missing if one did not experience the meaning of a word? What would one be missing, for instance, if one did not understand the request to pronounce the word “till” and to mean it as a verb (or if one did not feel that a word lost its meaning and became a mere sound if it was repeated ten times over)? (Wittgenstein, 1996, p. 214).

The problem, according to Wittgenstein, is the ability to say, for example, the word “March” to ourselves and mean it at one moment as an imperative and then as the name of a month. Therefore, we should ask if the same experience accompany the word both times (Wittgenstein, 1996, p. 215). Doubts and confusions appear when something ambiguous is said, i.e. using words or expressions with different meanings or meanings changeable with a simple intonation. The same words may be used in different ways and, therefore, they may intend and mean something distinct: “If a sensitive ear shows me, when I am playing this game, that I have now this now that experience of the word – doesn’t it also show me that I often do not have any experience of it in the course of talking?” (Wittgenstein, 1996, p. 215). I then also mean it, intend it, now like this now like that, and maybe also say so later is, of course, not in question, says Wittgenstein.

The speaker’s ability (his disposal to follow the norms and to have suitable linguistic behaviours) is the *conditio sine qua non* to the linguistic expression process. This can be more or less standard consonant the followed grammatical norms and deviations. Despite to see one aspect, a person with this anomaly or inability to experiment or to live the meaning of a word (i.e. a “semantic-blindness” person) could participate in the same language-games and everyday communication processes.

In the *The Blue and Brown Books* (dictated between 1934-35) Wittgenstein points out different types of language-games. These language-games work as “communicative systems”. They are cultural, shared forms of live for public and verbal interaction. Wittgenstein’s conceptual concerns turn around the problem to define the scope of his studies on the linguistic expression of experience in the so-called philosophy of psychology: the deviation and norm of our language-use. There are several language-uses and some criteria pointing for what is a normal or deviation using language. The grammar is a set of criteria to avoid semantic pathologies and understanding problems, such as a certain specific type of “meaning-blindness”.

The signs get their meanings in our forms of life, in our cultural and social

practice where language-games are (Wittgenstein, 1998c, § 504; 1998d, § 913). Arguing this thesis is following an anthropological conception of language. Wittgenstein does it with the concept of “language-game” as a form of life, a linguistic practice or current use of language. The “meaning-blindness” concept is ambiguous and a sort of “semantic-blindness”. However, it seems necessary to exclude from the meaning of this concept the case of a person who was born without the vision sense, because what a “meaning-blind” man lacks is not a certain type of sensation or sense impression. According to Joachim Schulte (2003, p. 68), it would not be correct to say that a “meaning-blind” man is incapable to make something, in general, with the meanings of words or with the meanings of ambiguous words. Wittgenstein shows explicitly this type of blindness allows the “meaning-blind” man to say, in one moment, a certain meaning struck upon his mind and that, later, one other meaning also occurred to him (1998a, § 242). For Schulte, the absence of the capacity which a meaning blind person lacks does not, as Rhees rightly emphasizes, prevent him from being just as able as the rest of us to take part in most language games. “On the other hand, what he is lacking is not something which only very few people have like ‘the eye of a painter’ or ‘the ear of a musician’. No, what he is lacking is something like a ‘musical ear’” (Schulte, 2003, p. 68). He is similar to someone, says Schulte (2003, p. 68), who is “able to distinguish ‘piano’ and ‘forte’, ‘allegro’ and ‘andante’ but incapable of making anything of Schumann’s direction to play something ‘as from afar’ or of the indication ‘Play this [or hear this] as if it were the answer’”.

In short, what the “meaning-blind” man lacks is neither one sense-experience (e.g. the sight) nor the domain of a given ability (e.g. to see and distinguish colours), but a meaning-experience or a specific type of meaning-experience. Schulte (2003, p. 70) compares a person in this situation with a musician playing mechanically (regardless the stave, the audience, or the context) or a person drinking different types of wine without noticing any difference. In some cases, Schulte adds, it is possible to help these people to acquire what they lack and the problem turns toward the technique of using and training the language, i.e. forms allowing the acquisition of abilities through correct meanings application and understanding. A “meaning-blind” man will be able to (re)learn the expression techniques and understand different meanings, as well as a vocabulary to communicate with accurate and understandable meanings.

3.1 The “atmosphere of the word”

In the *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Wittgenstein suggests the use of words with more than one meaning. For example, the word “still” can be a connective (“still”) and a verb (“to calm”); the word “despite” can be a substantive (“spite”) and a preposition (“although”). Uttering the sentence “Bad as things are, still they might be worse”, the word “still” can’t be a verb. According to Wittgenstein (1998a, § 333): “Now say to yourself: the connective ‘still’ is really the same as the verb ‘still’ just as ‘away’ = ‘a-way’ and ‘despite’ (noun) = ‘despite’ (preposition) and pronounce the sentence ‘Bad as things are, still they might be worse’, with ‘still’ in the meaning of the verb!”.

Language misunderstandings came from the superficial use of grammar, which looks only to the structure or characteristics of words. According to Wittgenstein, to avoid conceptual misunderstandings and mistakes in the philosophical activity, we must consider a depth dimension of grammar, the atmosphere of each word within its language-game. Therefore, what is the “atmosphere of the word”?

If I say “Mr. White turned white”, I mean the first “White” as a proper noun and the second one as a common noun, since my experience of meaning (associated with the word “white”) tells me that different things have to go on in my mind at the first and second “white”, i.e. the mastery of grammar makes me aware of the correct meanings of the first “white” and of the second “white”. When I utter the sentence in the usual way, having in mind the meaning shift, something happens or takes place, namely the distinct understanding of my first and second “white” listener, and not a kind of parade of meanings of words in the mind.

What Wittgenstein seems to say is that every familiar word carries an atmosphere with it in the mind to be used correctly. The possibility to use words in their proper context and their accurate meaning is given to us by the experience of meaning. “[...] if the possible uses of a word do float before us in half-shades as we say or hear it – this simply goes for *us*. But we communicate with other people without knowing if they have this experience too.” (Wittgenstein, 1996, p. 181)

My experience of meanings is identical to other people’s experiences of meanings, i.e. those who share the English language with me have the same experiences of meaning. But my experiences of meaning only and simply go for me, such as other people’s experiences of meanings are valid, in the same personal way, for themselves.

Consequently, “the meaning of a word is not the experience one has in hearing or saying it, and that the sense of a sentence is not a complex of such experiences” (Wittgenstein, 1996, p. 181; 1998d, § 361), since it is a grammatical experience that

teaches us: every word seems to have a different character in different contexts and, at the same time, it always has a singular character, a single physiognomy, as if it looked at us.

In toto, “experience of meaning” refers to the language application which intends understanding through the meaning. The relevance of the “experience of meaning” concept is shown when we crave for language understanding; when we really feel we need to be understood through the words we utter. According to § 711 of Wittgenstein’s *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology I*, we do laugh at puns because we understand the meanings of the words and, to that extent, we experience these meanings. It is like the experience of the “word that hits the mark”, in which one utters a precise or appropriate word in relation to what one intends to express. In this perspective, Wittgenstein mentions the “act of meaning” in the game to mean the right thing, i.e. no other word or meaning would do for us to use it “*here*”, because it has “*this*” meaning (Wittgenstein, 1998d, p. 78). There wouldn’t be a better expression than “the word that hits the mark” to represent the main purpose of any act of meaning: to express the right thing, “*that*” atmosphere.

It is through the “experience of meaning” that every language speaker gets his competence to use the arbitrary signs to understand each other. According to Wittgenstein, meaning is a physiognomy. The meaning of a word is a particular physiognomy that we recognize (Wittgenstein, 1996, § 568 and pp. 181, 210). Knowing how to use a word is to recognize the familiar physiognomy of the word or to have this sensation about its meaning (Wittgenstein, 1996, p. 218).

For example, let’s think of the case proposed by Wittgenstein (1998d, § 712): the words exchanged by lovers, words loaded with feelings, like the words of a poem, which we cannot simply agree to substitute for any other sounds. Even the simple tone of words uttered affects the understanding of an expression. The speaker cannot change the words without also change the subjacent emotional tone. It is as if each word had its own atmosphere, in addition to its meaning (Wittgenstein, 1998d, § 726).

A person who did not experience the meaning of a word would not have a set of skills (Goodman, 2002, p. 155), such as taking the same word as a noun or a verb; feeling a word he understands has “a definite slight aroma”, “an atmosphere”, “a different *character*” or “an imponderable something” corresponding to his understanding of the word (Wittgenstein, 1998a, § 243); he would not experience the double meaning of puns (a “meaning-blind” person can only focus on one meaning).

The atmosphere of the word indicates the word’s place in the sentence’s meaning (Wittgenstein, 1998a, § 335; 1996, p. 182). The difficulties to express the experience are obvious and the use of “Bad as things are, still they might be worse” is doubtful,

because it's not possible to know exactly when and how we develop the “word atmosphere” (“still”) or “meaning-sensation” when we learn to speak. One hypothesis to understand the “meaning-blindness” concept could be the inaccuracy of the word “meaning-sensation” acquisition. In this case, all speakers have “meaning-blindness”, because nobody can remember when learned to speak or to use a given word, when one develops the “meaning-sensation” or when and how one starts to develop the supposed “meaning-sensations” for the words one uses (Wittgenstein, 1998a, §§ 346, 348). Wittgenstein always mentions the language-use in association with “blindness”. It does not seem adequate to connect the term and the “meaning-acquisition” instead the “meaning-use”. The following Wittgenstein's remark shows the difficulty and complexity to inquiry the meanings presupposed using an expression: “Indeed, someone who does philosophy or psychology will perhaps say ‘I feel that I think in my head’. But what that means he won't be able to say” (Wittgenstein, 1998a, § 350).

When we learn the expression “in my head”, we associate what this means with the idea of thought activity. We learn the meanings of words through associations with the use we can do (Wittgenstein, 1998a, § 354). For example, we learn the expression “the word... has the meaning...” associating the significant and the meaning, i.e. associating what represents the idea to transmit and the proper content of the idea to transmit. From this structure we develop a process which allows us to acquire the meaning of the linguistic experience.

The importance of this meaning is questioned by Wittgenstein in the *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*. It has to do with the ordinary language-use which allows us to say, for example: “This is what I meant with this word”. The importance inhabits in the interest for the quarrel concerning the psychological phenomenon: “But the interest here does not depend on the concept of the ‘meaning’ of a word, but on the range of similar psychological phenomena which in general have nothing to do with word-meaning” (Wittgenstein, 1998a, § 358).

Deviation or anomalous cases (regarding the application of the meanings of words) must be considered in the quarrel about the expression of the experience. Perhaps for that reason Wittgenstein (1998a, § 175) introduces in the *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* the so-called “meaning-blind man” concept. To avoid these deviations and anomalies, the atmosphere of the word and the deep grammar are both useful in everyday language-use.

3.2 Diachronic communication process: the essence of inter-subjectivity semantic

The “meaning-blindness” concept is entailed, *lato sensu*, with communication processes and meaning understanding. The communication processes and the meaning understanding are both diachronic; both are developed through the time and proceed from the speaker’s interaction. We use words in certain ways and criteria; we choose the words we know which are most adequate to represent what we intend to say. Therefore, “if you say ‘As I heard this word, it meant... for me’ you refer to a point of time and to an employment of the word” (Wittgenstein, 1998a, § 175). There is a relevant relation to a given point of time, and the “meaning-blind” would lose that relation.

Time and interaction determine the meanings and the ways to use words. A word can mean completely different things consonant the context where it is inserted. Wittgenstein (1998a, § 37) already had warned for this linguistic peculiarity, regarding the contradiction saying, “This is beautiful and this is not beautiful”, pointing at different objects and pronouncing the words “this” and “beautiful”.

Despite the same word “this” means different things, in each one of the two moments or periods of time it is applied, the two uses of “this” have the same meaning. However, they cannot have the same referent, as it is the case of applying the expression “This is beautiful and this is not beautiful”. To defend this idea will be the same to support the word “today” has the same meaning today as it had yesterday, i.e. in accordance with the utterance’s time. The same happens with the word “here”, consonant the place referred.

As mentioned previously, in the sentence “Mr. White turned white” (1998a, § 37), the former word “white” cannot have the same meaning level than the latter. Therefore, the word “white” cannot have the same use. If it had the same use, we would only speak about one and the same word.

The association with time becomes important to understand words and expressions. The “meaning-blind man” would lose this association and, consequently, he would compromise the mutual communication and understanding. Therefore, the above-mentioned § 175 of the *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology I* resembles what is said in the *Philosophical Investigations* about the “meaning-blind man” expression, which is not mentioned in the latter work: “In saying ‘When I heard this word, it meant... to me’ one refers to a point of time and to a way of using the word” (Wittgenstein, 1996, p. 175). It is this combination that we fail to grasp, adverts Wittgenstein.

The misunderstanding of temporal sequence (when we hear a word and attribute one meaning in a certain moment) is determinant for the meaning effectiveness. It would allow us to understand what is referred by any other strange form of expression.

The “meaning-blindness” concept is indicated to a case where there is neither utterances perspicuity nor understanding the used words statutes. As consequence, this does not allow us easily to differentiate the linguistic behaviours of a “meaning-blind man”.

According to Rush Rhees, in the Preface of *The Blue and Brown Books*, Wittgenstein uses the “meaning-blind man” concept connected with language-use deficiencies or deviances and he seems interested about how a “meaning-blind” man act or behave during the employment and understanding of words. Wittgenstein supposes how it would be the linguistic act in such deficient situation, i.e. the semantic effects caused by the use of words comparing to usual and normal situations.

The “meaning-blindness” situation reveals the doubt raised by the hypothesis about other person’s experiences, i.e. the question about knowing other person’s words with a defined meaning in one exact moment. When a word is heard outside any context (in a fleeting moment) it has one meaning and the next moment another. If one utters the word again and again, the word seems to lose all meanings. This is a matter of something’s coming into one’s head (Wittgenstein, 1998a, § 167).

Wittgenstein uses the “meaning-blindness” concept to consider the possibility of a deficient or confused use of meanings. However, this possibility would not hinder the experience and expression subjectivities. Everyone with such semantic pathology would be an atypical rule-follower. The normality imposition would not take place and the rules would be used to express what one intends in a most preferred way. Therefore, “what should we say about men who didn’t understand the words ‘Now I’m seeing this figure as..., now as...?’” (Wittgenstein, 1998a, § 168). Would they be lacking in an important sense? Is it as if they were blind? Is it as if they were colour-blind or without absolute pitch?

There are forms of blindness which does not allow normal behaviour, i.e. does not presuppose the way frequently followed by other people. For example, someone who did not like to see a drawing or a photograph, because he says a colourless human being is ugly; or someone who admire the landscape looking at the map and exclaiming “What a glorious view!” (Wittgenstein, 1998a, § 170). Situations like these are absurd, they have no meaning.

The ambiguous use of words may indicate one thing when something different is intended (Wittgenstein, 1998a, § 202). If an emitter utters a word and a receiver hears and understands it, both (the emitter and the receiver) share the same word,

but they haven't the same experience of meaning. Therefore, it's important to distinguish a normal use from a deflected or pathologic use of words. People use language in definitive ways; they have certain experiences of meaning.

For Wittgenstein (1998a, § 232), if we compare “the coming of the meaning into one's mind to a dream”, our talk is ordinarily dreamless; therefore, “the ‘meaning-blind’ man would then be one who would always talk dreamlessly”, because he would not have appropriate interpretations or experiences of meaning. If our words are normally senseless or without sense variations, the pathologic case would be evident, since we would use deficient, inappropriate, or incorrect words and meanings to relate different realities or experiences.

In Wittgenstein's view, a person in this situation would speak without dreams, meanings, or understandings. If the dream report is a sentence like “At that moment I thought that you meant...”, I dream when I understand a sentence, i.e. the dream report. If the meaning comes to mind like a dream, the speech is usually without dreams, because words are not conceived to represent reality differently from person to person. We would not have possible agreement. Due to the deficiency using and understanding meanings, a “meaning-blind” man would be someone that would always speak as if he did not have dreams. Meanings would not appear in his mind. “If, then, the sentence ‘At that point I believed that you meant...’ is the report of a ‘dream’, that means that I always ‘dream’ when I understand a sentence” (Wittgenstein, 1998a, § 235). For that reason, if we follow Wittgenstein's suggestion in § 232 of *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology I and compare* the coming of the meaning in the mind with a dream, we would usually speak without dreams. This is what happens with a “meaning-blind” man.

The same situation happens with other meanings, especially in psychological situations: when we intend to transmit ideas during ordinary conversations, the linguistic signs are used conventionally. Frequently, we give signs to our interlocutors, i.e. several types of signs to represent internal states of pain, pleasure or understanding. However, how we really know if there is a transmission by signs? Wittgenstein (1998c, § 500) asks: How do we know that someone is enchanted? How does one learn the linguistic expression of enchantment? What does it connect up with? With the expression of bodily sensations? Do we ask someone what he feels in his breast and facial muscles to find out whether he is feeling enjoyment?

The emotions excited when we read a poem also suggest questions like those placed above in *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology II*. How can the words of a poem create impressions? How are we touched by the poem? If every reader feels impressed or touched by the poem, we can say the poem has the linguistic expression of enchant-

ment. If just one person feels impressed or touched by the poem, it could be the case that certain sensations always appear when this person reads the poem; the person may feel sadness, will to cry or a sensation like a knot in the throat. If a poem makes an impression on us as we read it, do we feel the same when we read it as when we read something different? Words can give a satisfactory answer for what we feel?

The emotional experience rising during the reading is uncertain, despite being provoked through the linguistic expression of a poem. However, what the words of a poem have? How they provoke or arouse definitive impressions? It is the harmonious association of words? It is the meanings of the words? It is the meaning, or the idea transmitted? Wittgenstein enhances the value of the words for thought and life, saying “only in the stream of thought and life do words have meaning” (1998c, § 504) and “the meaning of words, what stands behind them, doesn’t concern me in normal conversation” (1998c, § 603).

We operate with signs in language-games. For the communication systems effectiveness, speakers of a code would be able to operate correctly with signs. But what it means “to operate with signs”? It means to participate in a communication process, to interact with other speakers and to use signs to relate reality. In these processes, signs acquire their importance and fulfil their function.

If I use an ambiguous and polysemous word (e.g. homographs words which are spelled the same, but with different meanings) and utter a sentence (e.g. “I go to the bank”) my interlocutor may ask which meaning I thought and intend when he heard the word “bank”. The sentence may refer to the garden seat or to the financial institution. When he hears “bank”, the meaning “money-bank” may come to his mind. It is as if a germ of meaning was implanted, experienced, and then got interpreted (Wittgenstein, 1998a, § 94). According to the notes on Wittgenstein’s lectures on philosophical psychology taken by P. T. Geach, K. J. Shah and A. C. Jackson published as *Wittgenstein’s Lectures on Philosophical Psychology 1946-47*, “suppose I say ‘Go to the bank’ and change my mind in the middle about what I mean – surely this is an experience that the ‘meaning-blind’ tribe would miss?” (Geach, Shah & Jackson, 1988, p. 58). If the change went with looking at (imaging) a different picture, are there two changes – in picture and in meaning? And are these changes of the same sort?

In other words, how can one see a meaning, if a meaning is arbitrary? To understand the technique to use a word and a corresponding meaning in a moment, and then to have experiences of meaning, it is like taking an ambiguous word one way. The “meaning-blindness could be taken as lacking the experience of transition of aspects; or as absence of the experiences to which and from which this transition occurs” (Geach, Shah & Jackson, 1988, pp. 108, 113).

The ability to use a word is a state of mind. If I can't understand, explain, or answer the question “What did you mean when you said ‘bank’?” and find this question senseless, I may explain what “bank” means in “Go to the bank”, but I could be a “meaning-blind” man. When we have the experience “to hear the word ‘bank’”, we may consider it as “an observable inner phenomenon”. This situation can also be interpreted as the expression of the experience, translated by the sentence “to hear the word ‘bank’ to mean ‘money’, ‘seat’ or ‘river bank’, etc.” However, what allows me to say “when I hear the word ‘bank’, it means... to me”? What technique of language should I use to say “when I hear the word ‘bank’ it meant... to me”? What is the employment of the word “to mean”? What is the use of the word “bank” if I never hear it or what is the use of the word “dream” if I never had one? “Let us just imagine human beings who are unacquainted with dreams and who hear our narrations of dreams”, suggests Wittgenstein (1998a, § 101). Let us imagine one of us coming to this non-dreaming tribe and gradually learning to communicate with the people. Perhaps we think they would never understand the word “dream”, but they would soon find a use for it (Wittgenstein, 1998a, § 101).

If we don't establish the meaning for these words, the language-games do not allow us to associate their accurate meanings. Therefore, the “meaning-blind man” would not have sensitivity to distinguishes the ambiguity of the word “bank” and he would always jump mechanically from one meaning (“garden seat”) to another (“financial institution”) without noticing the understanding change moment.

4. Conclusions

The main contributions of this article are related to two essential aspects: 1) the recognition of an important philosophy of psychology later on (therefore not as well-known as other themes and problems) developed by Wittgenstein and related to the experience of ordinary language; 2) the acknowledgement that meaning-blindness is an effective communication problem, as frequent as it goes unnoticed. This last aspect is the essential point that we intend to discuss and reflect on in this article. In fact, the “meaning-blindness” is considered a communication problem in the field of Wittgenstein's philosophy of psychology. For this reason, it is important to determine, *in primis*, Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy of psychology. What Wittgenstein understood by such a designation was a philosophical investigation which is, deeply, a conceptual and psychological investigation with an informative countenance, i.e. restricted to the description of the use of common psychological concepts.

The philosophical enterprise is a descriptive attempt of the use of words, taking grammar into account, as Malcolm Budd, for example, points out: “the aim of the philosophy of psychology is the construction of perspicuous representations of everyday psychological concepts; this aim is achieved by the delineation of the grammar of psychological words” (Budd, 1991, p. 1). The importance of the philosophy of psychology derives from its underlying purpose, which is the dissolution of philosophical problems about the nature of the mind, says Budd. These problems can be treated successfully only by attaining a synoptic view of the ordinary language of psychology. Therefore, the philosophy of psychology is purely descriptive and in no way explanatory, points out Budd (1991, p. 1).

The intention of Wittgenstein’s investigations (the description of the use of some psychological concepts) is not the philosophical kind that demands accuracy but aims at the understanding of psychological concepts through a clear representation which consists of seeing the interconnections.

The “meaning-blindness” concept is ambiguous and complex. Wittgenstein’s explanation about the meaning of the “meaning-blindness” concept is not clear, despite the examples and situations presented in his last writings on philosophical psychology, specifically *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology, Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* and in the notes taken by P. T. Geach, K. J. Shah and A. C. Jackson known as *Wittgenstein’s Lectures on Philosophical Psychology 1946-47*.

There are several forms of blindness: “soul-blindness”, “colour-blindness”, “form-blindness”, “sensation-blindness” and “aspect-blindness”. In Wittgenstein’s work, all these forms of blindness are associated with the experiencing, moment of change and meaning. All these forms of blindness are “semantic blindness”, which compromise or, at least, obstruct the communication processes and the meaning understanding between people using ordinary language. The forms of blindness does not allow normal linguistic behaviours.

Regarding the “aspect-blindness”, this form of blindness would affect the meaning of a word and the understanding of the language-use. An “aspect-blind person” would not be able to see the aspect of a word and experiencing the right meaning. Wittgenstein admits the possibility of one “might say of someone that he was blind to the expression of a face”. A person who had seen only one facial expression couldn’t have the concept facial expression. A so-called “aspect-blindness” person would observe in different way; he would see different things and would be someone with something similar to the inability to see (to perceive empirically) things as they are.

According to Wittgenstein, the importance of the concept “aspect-blindness” lies in the kinship of seeing an aspect and experiencing the meaning of a word. What

are one missing if one does not experience the meaning of a word? If one cannot utter the word “bank” by itself, now with one meaning, then with the other, or if one does not find that when one utter a word ten times in a row it loses its meaning, as it were, and becomes a mere sound, points out Wittgenstein.

An “aspect-blind man” would not perceive the aspect changes of things, but he could see a facial expression in the same way that any other person. In this case, Wittgenstein says that the word “sense” continues not to be irreproachable. Our understanding through senses still unknown. If some words are, *per se*, unobjectionable, what do I perceive by means of sensation that can be called sadness of a facial feature and notice one sad state of mind? What certainly do I have to say I see it just as you? If his facial feature and behaviour look sad, is he also sad?

The word “sense” is also equivocal. The expression of sadness in a face cannot be univocal and explicit, cannot allow the perception of an inwardness experience, i.e. a sadness feeling. Through someone’s face expression (including his behaviours) I do not perceive a sadness feeling in the same way and with identical easiness and certainty I perceive my sadness. Therefore, the “aspect-blindness” experience is particular and affects the understanding of words, things, and other persons’ faces.

When we express verbally our inwardness, there can be deviances in the language-use. These deviances affect the intended meaning. A “pathological communication” is all sort of language-uses that figures as deviance to the logical syntax, i.e. regulates the language-use and support the understanding in a communicative process. The communicative pathologies are cognitive disturbance translated by incorrect and confused language-uses caused by the disrespect for grammatical rules (semantics, syntax, and available lexicon).

Interlocutors misunderstand what is intend and expressed or communicated. The pathological communication frequently discloses semantic anomalies. It’s not a “regular” communication, but an “agramatic” communication. This sort of communication and language-use may be associated to the “meaning-blindness”. Wittgenstein last writings also demonstrate the diverse communicative pathologies (related to the senseless, nameless, ineffableness, madness, inexistence of linguistic meanings for poetical language, etc.) which negatively influence the success of any linguistic expression or communication process.

Any language-use implies the following of rules which govern the use of words and the composition of sentences and utterances to make sense and produce intended meanings. If a language does not follow this normative and grammatical principle, it is a deviance like a “semantic-blindness” or “grammar-blindness”. Current pathologies are associated to the ordinary language and communication processes. These pathologies obstruct the interaction and the understanding of meanings, but they are not “meaning-blind-

ness”. They are just “semantic-blindness” as it happens when the receiver does not know the meaning of a word.

What does “meaning-blindness” have to do with linguistic expression or meaning experience? According to Schulte (2003, p. 73), anything we say about experiences, either to ourselves or to others, will be intelligible. Our utterances involve characteristic forms of expression. These characteristic forms of expression are a peculiar or stylistic idealism belonging to a linguistic relativism or subjectivism, which is represented by Wittgenstein’s philosophy of psychology, namely the meaning experience and the “meaning-blindness” concept. A rule fulfils its function (the use of a sensation particular expression) if it provides a model to the correct use in normal circumstances. Wittgenstein’s stylistic idealism can be interpreted in several remarks concerning grammar in his *Philosophical Investigations*. G. E. M. Anscombe also recognizes this in her book *From Parmenides to Wittgenstein* (cf. 1981, p. 112). Wittgenstein’s describes concepts in terms of language practices by what might be called a “linguistic idealism”, taking into account that he says “*essence* is expressed by grammar” (Wittgenstein, 1996, § 371) and express reality depends on the language and language-use. Anscombe justifies Wittgenstein’s “linguistic idealism” with an analogy, mentioning Plato’s *Cratylus*, according to which the words referring the same thing in different languages (e.g. *equus*, *cheval*, *horse*, *ἵππος*) are like the same tool made of different materials (e.g. iron, steel, bronze, brass).

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