

Language Games in Digital Communication: An Analysis of Wittgenstein's Theory on the Twitter Platform

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Abstrak

Ludwig Wittgenstein dalam *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) berpendapat bahwa makna bahasa hanya dapat dipahami dalam konteks penggunaannya dalam praktik sosial tertentu. Di era digital, Twitter telah menjadi salah satu platform utama untuk berbagi aforisme dan kata-kata motivasi guna memberikan inspirasi, membangun koneksi emosional, atau mengekspresikan nilai-nilai tertentu. Format pendek Twitter, dengan batas 280 karakter, menciptakan tantangan sekaligus peluang bagi pengguna untuk menyampaikan pesan yang bermakna secara ringkas dan kreatif. Artikel ini menganalisis bagaimana konsep Wittgenstein tentang language games relevan dalam memahami fenomena aforisme di Twitter. Dengan menganalisis 10 tweet populer bertema kehidupan, kesuksesan, dan kebahagiaan, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana pengguna Twitter membentuk makna kata-kata motivasi melalui konteks sosial, visualisasi, dan gaya bahasa. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa aforisme di Twitter sering menggunakan metafora, struktur repetitif, dan gaya bahasa puitis untuk menciptakan kesan mendalam. Selain itu, makna tweet bergantung pada pengalaman subjektif pembaca, yang menunjukkan relevansi teori Wittgenstein bahwa bahasa tidak memiliki makna tetap di luar praktik sosialnya. Penelitian ini juga menemukan bahwa meskipun aforisme di Twitter dapat memotivasi dan menginspirasi, seringkali terdapat ambiguitas makna karena minimnya konteks atau penggunaan bahasa yang terlalu universal. Hal ini dapat menghasilkan interpretasi yang berbeda, tergantung pada latar belakang pembaca. Dengan pendekatan analisis kualitatif terhadap 10 tweet, artikel ini memberikan wawasan tentang bagaimana bahasa di era digital terus berkembang sebagai alat komunikasi sosial dan refleksi budaya. Penelitian ini diharapkan dapat menjadi dasar bagi studi lebih lanjut tentang hubungan antara komunikasi digital, teori bahasa, dan kesejahteraan psikologis dalam masyarakat modern.

Abstract

Key Word:

Language games, Twitter, Digital communication, Social Trends, Language evolution.

Ludwig Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) argued that the meaning of language can only be understood in the context of its use in certain social practices. In the digital age, Twitter has become one of the main platforms where aphorisms and motivational words are shared to provide inspiration, build emotional connections, or express certain values. Twitter's short format, with a 280-character limit, creates both challenges and opportunities for users to convey meaningful messages in a concise and creative manner. This article analyzes how Wittgenstein's concept of language games is relevant in understanding the phenomenon of aphorisms on Twitter. By analyzing 10 popular tweets on themes such as life, success, and happiness, this study explores how Twitter users shape the meaning of motivational words through social context, visualization, and language style. The results show that aphorisms on Twitter often utilize metaphors, repetitive structures, and poetic language styles to create a deep impression. In addition, the meaning of the tweets depends on the subjective experience of the reader, which shows the relevance of Wittgenstein's theory that language has no fixed meaning outside of its social practice. The study also found that while Twitter aphorisms can be motivating and inspiring, there is often ambiguity of meaning due to minimal context or the use of overly universal language. This can lead to different interpretations, depending on the reader's background. Using a qualitative analysis approach of 10 tweets, this article provides insight into how language in the digital age continues to evolve as a tool of social communication and cultural reflection. This research is expected to serve as a foundation for further studies on the relationship between digital communication, language theory, and psychological well-being in modern society.

INTRODUCTION

Language is the main element that distinguishes humans from other creatures. Through language, humans can convey ideas, express emotions, and build social relationships. Ludwig Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) introduced the concept of language-games to explain that the meaning of language is not static, but depends on the context of its use in social practice. Language games cover all situations where language is used, from everyday conversations to communication on social media. In the modern context, platforms such as Twitter have become a new medium for expressing language in various forms, including aphorisms or motivation.

Twitter, known for its character limit of 280 characters, forces users to express ideas briefly but effectively. Aphorisms, such as "Do your best today to get the best results in the future," are a popular form of communication on this platform. Such phrases are often used to uplift, inspire, or provide a new perspective for the reader. McCulloch (2019) mentions that social media, particularly Twitter, creates a new style of communication, where brevity does not diminish impact, but rather amplifies meaning through the use of dense, emotive language (p. 45). For example, motivational tweets such as "Failure is not the opposite of success; it's part of success" often get thousands of retweets and likes because they evoke emotion in their readers. These words have different meanings depending on who is reading them. For a student who just failed an exam, this tweet might encourage them to keep trying. However, for an entrepreneur, it could be a reminder that failure is part of the process towards success.

This is in line with Wittgenstein's view that the meaning of language cannot be separated from the social context and life experiences of the user (*Philosophical Investigations*, 1953, §19). In addition, Twitter also enables the rapid spread of aphorisms through the retweet mechanism. For example, the tweet "Your only limit is your mind" can quickly spread across communities because it is universal and relevant to many people. However, as Boyd (2007) notes, while social media such as Twitter offers opportunities for broad sharing of inspiration, language that is too universal often loses its specific meaning as different readers have different contexts of experience (p. 13). Another example is a tweet such as "The secret to getting ahead is getting started." On the surface, this is simple advice, but in practice, the meaning of this tweet will change depending on the reader's situation. For someone who is starting a new venture, these words might be an encouragement to take action. However, for someone else, it may feel clichéd and irrelevant. This kind of ambiguity suggests that language on Twitter is often a language game arena where rules, context and social experience determine its meaning.

The aim of this study is to explore how Wittgenstein's theory of language games can be applied to understand the phenomenon of aphorisms on Twitter. This study uses a qualitative approach by analyzing 10 popular tweets that contain motivational words. This research will also discuss how social context influences the meaning of tweets, as well as how aphorisms on Twitter create emotional connections and social identities among its users. With Wittgenstein's theoretical foundation as well as the opinions of experts such as McCulloch and Boyd, this research is expected to contribute to understanding the evolution of language in the digital era. In addition, this article opens room for further discussion on how aphorisms on social media serve not only as a means of communication, but also as a reflection of changing culture and social dynamics.

METHODOLOGY

The research method used in this study is qualitative method with a content analysis approach. This approach is seen from the use of textual data, such as theories from Ludwig Wittgenstein, Kripke, Austin, and McCulloch, which are analyzed in modern contexts, including social media. The research also focuses on an in-depth exploration of the meaning of language through symbolism, metaphor, and social rules. Data analysis is done descriptively-interpretatively to understand how language meaning is formed in various contexts, both traditional and digital.

The use of 10 Twitter posts as data shows that this research prioritizes contextual analysis, where the meaning of each message is understood through the social and cultural rules of the platform. This research not only describes but also interprets how language in digital media reflects the theory of language games. By combining philosophical concepts and modern communication phenomena, this method provides deep insights into the dynamics of language use in the digital era.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

The concept of language-games introduced by Ludwig Wittgenstein has become one of the important foundations in modern philosophy of language. The term describes how language functions not only as a means of communication, but also as a social activity governed by certain contexts and rules. According to Wittgenstein, the meaning of a word is not absolute but depends on how it is used in everyday life.

In this paper, various expert opinions on language games will be examined, by linking them to Wittgenstein's theory. Thinkers such as Kripke, Austin, and Searle explain the importance of social rules in understanding language. In addition, the role of language in digital media, as analyzed by McCulloch and Boyd, shows how language game theory remains relevant in an increasingly connected world.

This paper also includes a critique of the application of language games in modern communication, as expressed by Turkle. By presenting various perspectives, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the relevance of Wittgenstein's theory of language games in understanding the dynamics of language in both the traditional and digital eras.

Ludwig Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) introduced the concept of language games as a way to understand how the meaning of a word is determined by its use in everyday life. He states, "The meaning of a word is its use in language" (§43). Language games reflect linguistic activities that are subject to certain rules in various social contexts, similar to the rules present in a game. This approach emphasizes that language is not universal, but rather strongly tied to the situation and purpose of its use. This is confirmed by Kripke (1982) in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (pp. 15-25), who explains that understanding of language can only be realized through social agreement. Kripke argues that without agreed social rules, language loses its meaning and communicative function.

Austin (1962), in his book *How to Do Things with Words*, introduced the theory of speech acts, which illustrates that language not only conveys information but also performs actions. He divides linguistic acts into three main dimensions: locutionary (the act of speaking), illocutionary (the purpose of the utterance), and perlocutionary (the effect of the utterance on the listener). This theory is in line with Wittgenstein's concept of language games, which places language as a social activity subject to certain rules. Austin highlights that understanding linguistic acts requires knowledge of the underlying social rules. Thus, like language games, utterances can only be understood in their social context.

In *Because Internet: Understanding the New Rules of Language* (McCulloch, 2019, pp. 58-72), digital media is identified as a new space for language games. McCulloch notes that social media, such as Twitter and Instagram, create new contexts for language, with rules that are constantly evolving and highly dependent on the community of users. This approach supports Wittgenstein's theory that the meaning of words depends on their use in a particular context. In digital spaces, language play occurs through user interactions, such as the use of memes, emoticons, or new terms that emerge from online communities. Understanding digital language requires knowledge of the social rules that apply on the platform.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980), in *Metaphors We Live By* (pp. 3-14), highlight the role of metaphor as an element in language games. They argue that metaphors not only serve as rhetorical tools, but also shape the way we think and act. According to Wittgenstein, language is a reflection of human life. Metaphors, in this context, are part of the "rules" of the language game, allowing individuals to convey complex ideas in a way that is easier to understand. Lakoff and Johnson point out that the understanding of metaphors is highly dependent on specific cultural and social contexts, in keeping with Wittgenstein's view of language.

Boyd and Ellison (2007), in their article *Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship* (*Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13(1), pp. 210-220), state that social media is a space where language is rapidly evolving. They note that language on social media has unique characteristics, such as the use of abbreviations, symbols, and flexibility of rules. This concept is in line with Wittgenstein's theory that language games involve rules that are dynamic and often change depending on the context. On social media, language use is heavily influenced by the norms and trends prevailing in the online community.

In *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (Turkle, 2015, pp. 189-205), Sherry Turkle criticizes the use of language on social media as superficial and lacking depth. According to her, digital communication tends to encourage quick interactions at the expense of deep reflection. In the context of Wittgenstein's language games, this critique suggests that the flexibility of rules in digital communication can lead to fragmentation of meaning. However, social media remains an important space for language expression, despite its different nature from traditional communication.

Expert opinion suggests that Wittgenstein's theory of language games is highly relevant to understanding the dynamics of language in various social contexts, both traditional and modern. The theory highlights the importance of social rules in determining meaning, which also applies in the digital world.

Despite criticisms of language use in social media, Wittgenstein's approach still provides a powerful framework for understanding the complexities of human communication in the modern era.

The following are 10 Twitter posts analyzed using Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory of language games:

1. **"Do not run away from sadness, O soul. Seek medicine in pain, for the rose comes from thorns and rubies come from stones."** (quoted by T.R. via Twitter). In this quote, the metaphors "rose" and "rubies" are used to illustrate that suffering can bring valuable results. This shows how language games use symbolism to convey a deeper and more emotional meaning.
2. **"Prolonged sadness will not bring back what is lost. Excessive fear will not fix the future. Excessive anxiety will not lead to success. However, a sincere soul and a content heart will be the two wings to reach happiness."** (quoted by M.A. via Twitter). This message creates the rules of a language game about the importance of inner calm and honesty in facing life's challenges. The comparison with "wings" illustrates the happiness that can be achieved through inner peace.
3. **"Be like a pearl. A person of quality will be sought. A pearl does not need to appear on the surface; people will dive to find it. Unlike trash, which is abundant on the surface, no one is interested in it."** (quoted by R.G. via Twitter). In this language game, "pearls" symbolize sought-after qualities, while "rubbish" shows that true value is not always obvious. This reflects the social rules of how self-worth is valued in society.
4. **"I am not a good person, let alone a noble-hearted one, but I still try not to be someone with a black heart."** (quoted by B.4213f3. via Twitter). This quote depicts a reflective language game in which the author acknowledges her shortcomings but tries to be better. The discussion of a "black heart" symbolizes the evil or badness that the author wants to avoid.
5. **"This world is itself a wilderness of exile. Where else will you exile yourself? Exile yourself by being a stranger in the midst of the crowd. Until the time comes to return."** (quoted by M.H. via Twitter). This quote uses the concept of "exile" to describe the human condition that often feels alienated. It creates meaning through thought-provoking symbolism about existence and self-discovery.
6. **"You may not be able to water a withered flower and expect it to bloom again, but you can plant a new flower with the hope of something better than before."** (quoted by R.M. via Twitter). In this quote, "withered flower" and "new flower" are used to describe the hope for change and improvement. This creates the rules of a language game about optimism and renewal in life.
7. **"Life is like a game of chess. Whoever thinks long will win."** (quoted by M.I. via Twitter). Here, life is likened to a game of chess, with an emphasis on the strategic thinking required to achieve victory. This quote creates the rules of the game that invites the audience to think long-term in life.
8. **"Life is a dream for the wise, a game for the foolish, a comedy for the rich, and a tragedy for the poor."** (quoted by K.B. via Twitter). By dividing life into four categories, this quote shows the variety of life experiences according to social status and personal perspective. This creates the rules of a language game that invites the reader to consider different points of view.
9. **"Challenges are a game, and motivational words are the tactics. When motivational words live strong within you, challenges will become opportunities for you."** (quoted by H.A. via Twitter). In this quote, "challenges" are seen as a game, and motivational words are considered the tactics to deal with them. This creates a meaning that is relevant to the culture of productivity and achievement in the digital world.
10. **"If life is a journey, then choose the right path. If life is a game, then play well. And if life is a struggle, then fight with full conviction."** (quoted by P.I. via Twitter). This quote offers three different metaphors to describe life: journey, game, and struggle. Each of these metaphors creates the rules of a language game that describes a different approach to life's challenges.

From the 10 Twitter posts above, it is clear how Wittgenstein's theory of language games is applied in modern communication. Each quote uses symbolism, metaphor or self-reflection to convey a deeper message that is relevant to the audience's lived experience. The meaning in each post can only be understood through the social and cultural context of Twitter, which creates specific rules for language games. The use of symbols such as "pearl", "flower" and "game" became a way to describe abstract ideas in a way that the audience could understand emotionally and quickly.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion from the analysis of Wittgenstein's theory of language-games, both in traditional and modern contexts, is that language is not a static and universal tool. Instead, language is a complex social

activity, where the meaning of a word or sentence depends entirely on the manner and context in which it is used. Wittgenstein taught that language has specific rules, like a game, and can only be understood if one understands those rules. In various forms of communication, especially in social media, this theory remains relevant as it shows how these rules are adopted, changed and reinvented.

Social media, as a new arena of language games, offers a unique context involving rapid interaction, symbolism and collective creativity. On platforms like Twitter, messages are often designed to inspire, motivate or reflect on personal experiences in a concise yet meaningful way. An analysis of Twitter quotes shows that digital language relies on metaphor, analogy and symbolism as key tools to create emotional connections with audiences. This is in line with Wittgenstein's view that the meaning of language is not absolute, but rather shaped by the use and purpose of communication in a given situation.

Moreover, this analysis also underscores the relevance of Wittgenstein's theory in understanding the relationship between social rules and meaning. Thinkers such as Kripke and Austin reinforce this argument by pointing out that human communication, including in digital form, can only function when there is social agreement on the underlying rules. In social media, these rules are often fluid, flexible and evolve over time. For example, the use of certain terms or symbols may only be understood by certain online communities, creating unique new contexts.

However, while Wittgenstein's theory still provides a relevant framework, there are challenges that arise in its application to the digital age. Critiques such as those raised by Turkle highlight that digital communication, while dynamic, often lacks depth and richer reflection. Fragmentation of meaning can occur when the rules of language are not understood consistently, either between individuals or between communities. In this case, Wittgenstein's theory provides a warning that understanding language requires attention to context, culture and deep social interaction.

The overall analysis confirms that Wittgenstein's theory of language games remains an important foundation in modern philosophy of language. In social media, this theory helps explain how meaning is created, negotiated and interpreted. By understanding that language is an integral part of social activity, Wittgenstein's theory can be used to assess the dynamics of human communication in the digital age. While the flexibility of language on social media presents challenges, the theory's ability to adapt to various contexts demonstrates its power in understanding the evolution of language. In an increasingly connected era, understanding the rules of the language game is becoming increasingly important for maintaining meaning and human connection.

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