



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Private Language in Wittgenstein and the Igbo-African Worldview

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ABSTRACT

Private Language has been described as the language in which words refer to sensation. Some philosophers have defended the notion of private language simply because there are private sensations. One of Wittgenstein's great philosophical achievements is that he at least insisted that the meaning of human language is its use, that is to say: communication! And that this communication is a rather public affair, a cultural presupposition, and the bedrock of human interaction. Communication and Social interaction define the world of an Igbo-African. And so, his world can only be gravely affected and thrown into crisis with the adoption of a private language as a viable, sustainable and legitimate means of communicative tool. This paper distinguishes itself given that it draws from available textual evidence and observation and in line with the postulations of Ludwig Wittgenstein addresses these issues. It will do this by insisting that language is a human social instrument. And being social and public it involves rule-following, and to depart from this rule-following is to inaugurate crisis within the socio-cosmic world of an Igbo-African in particular and of every human being in general. For the purpose of this paper, the hermeneutic, analytical and critical methods of inquiry will be employed. The paper submits that if, ordinarily, the human interpersonal relationship is governed by following or breaking a rule, this can make sense only if there is a social interaction or better still, an active human interaction, and in this sense there can be no such thing as solitary rule-following. There cannot be a private language.

INTRODUCTION

Language is considered as the type of behaviour that is peculiar to man and which he shares with no other living creature. Man as different from plants and animals is the living being capable of words. Man is by nature a speaker, that is to say that the language capacity is given to man's nature, and of course it is exactly language that makes man that being that he is. In response to this very fact, Akwanya (1999) avers that "language is understood as the property of human-kind." (p. 15)

This fact can be ascertained in two ways, namely: that language on the one hand, is a possession of a kind, and all humans are possessors of at least one language. This means that only what is properly determined as human language is strictly language; all other beings that perform one or another of the known linguistic functions do so by means of a system which falls outside of what is defined as language. However, human language has remained enigmatic over ages in its articulative understanding, as there are many contentious issues bordering on its disciplinary domains (Jam et al., 2012). One of such issues is the question of the possibility of a private language. Another is the consequence of the acceptance of the workability of a private language, especially in human activity.

The big question remains: is such a language possible? Does its possibility evoke some consequences? If this language is conceptually conceivable, can it be adequately instantiated? Will its instantiation not create a rupture in human interaction? How does the African mind, especially the Igbo person conceive it and live it? What implications has that to do with his worldview (*Weltanschauung*), when its possibility is legitimized, of what impact will its tenability be to the family setting and living (*ezinaulo*), which forms his tangibly perceptual world and living?

Among those who accept that there is a reasonably self-contained and straight forward private language argument to be discussed, there has been fundamental and widespread disagreement over its details, its significance and even its intended conclusion and much more than that, a re-examination of the proper goal and function of language, let alone its soundness. The result is that every reading of the argument is controversial. Human language as a study is a wide topic and Private Language although narrower still occupies a large space (Jarrah et al., 2022; Tashtoush et al., 2023; Wardatet al., 2021).

Man is not a being for himself alone, but equally a being for others. Fundamentally, man cannot fully understand himself unless in a reciprocal cooperation with others. The Cartesian “*cogito ergo sum*” is not a complete truth. This is so because man is a social being, man lives with others, relates with other beings like himself, other incarnate spirits. This relatedness points to an openness to others in order to share his love, his work, and even his thoughts. This openness to the other constitutes the communicative dimension of his being through work, affectivity, political relationship and also through language which is man’s most favourable mode of communication (Gningue et al., 2022; Kanval et al., 2024; Tashtoush et al., 2022).

The insertion, therefore, of private language in Philosophical Anthropology and Linguistics brings into question the fundamental reason for the existence of language in the very first instance. If such a language is accepted, the damage it will do to the constitution of man as a person, socially endowed for interpersonal engagements would be grossly devastating. This paper, therefore, attempts a coherent account of the Wittgensteinian argument against private language, maintaining with him its impossibility and drawing out lucidly its bizarre crisis in human social interaction in general and especially as it affects the social aspect of the Igbo-African in particular.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The two dominating and operative terms in this discourse border on that which is considered to be private and an investigation into the constitutive meaning of language. For a better understanding of the choice of the terms in use, a clarification of these terminologies and other associated issues are inevitable.

An object could be said to be private when it is possessed or known exclusively by the subject such that others do not in any way share or participate in such knowledge. ‘Privacy’ is the noun derivative from the adjective ‘private’ and refers to a state of being. Meanwhile, with regards to the claim that our states of mind are private to us and indeed necessarily private to us, there is more than one thesis involved. One’s state of mind may be certainly private in the sense that since they are his no one can have them. To this claim, Hamlyn (1980) makes some exceptions in the following manner:

This is not true of a number of other things that are private to me; my private property or even my private beliefs, for example. Other people could come to have things that are now my private property, and other people can have or come to have beliefs that are private to me, in a sense that they can have identically the same beliefs. (p. 15)

Thus, not all private objects possess the character of exclusiveness. In the latter sense, too, there are many other states of mind that one has that other people could also have. Nevertheless, there is equally a sense in which those states of mind are mine, in such a way that they could not be others’.

This is not merely in the sense that those states of mind are to be identified only by reference to their owner, although that is true enough (Strawson, 1958). For Hamlyn (1981), "It is impossible that anyone else should have my pains in the way that I do; they could not feel my pains" (p. 218). Granted one can feel another's pain, but it cannot be in the same degree and intensity with which the bearer of the pain feels it. It is only a move towards identification and solidarity, but not in the sense of exactitude and sameness. The private language argument of Wittgenstein represents a major attempt to clarify the notion of privacy in relation to understanding and speaking a language for "philosophy aims at the logical clarification of thoughts." (Wittgenstein, 1951, p.122) This brings us to the issue of language.

Language may be commonly understood as a rational social phenomenon, a sphere of human action, wherein people make enunciations (verbal, written gestures, symbolic mimetic, choreographic) and expect to be responded to. It is an intentional enunciation (done for a certain reason), where the producer intends and trusts that someone else, upon acquaintance with the enunciation(s) would respond or react in a certain way, either by forming beliefs or behaving in a certain way because he is able to infer a certain purpose in the enunciator's mind. In language, therefore, not only does the enunciator and the interlocutor have reasons for thinking and acting as they do; they know something about each other, so each is in a position to replicate the other's reasons. Each one's replication of the other's reasons forms part of his/her own reason for thinking and acting as he/she does, and each is in a position to replicate the others replication of his/her own reasons (Lewis, 1985). The reason for this mutual replication is the belongingness to a single population, a social group, a community, a single forum of what Wittgenstein calls 'forms of life. It is to such a group that it belongs to furnish public rules for language and thus also assert or deny that any individual is making sense by following the regularities common to the conventions of language used in it.

It has to be noted that man is a symbolic being and by so doing creates symbolic instruments to communicate with the human beings who co-exist with him (Gusdorf, 1965). Thus, language is a symbolic dimension of man. According to Mondin (1958), "Language, thus, can be defined as: ... that activity with which man, through vocal or written signs, puts himself in communication with his own peers (or with some other intelligent being, for instance God) to express his own sentiments, desires or knowledge." (133)

Language is and remains an exquisitely human activity. As a well-developed, complicated fabric of articulated sounds, language gives rise to different tongues wherein infinity of ideas and sentiments are represented in most varied ways. There is a general way in which animal signals and non-linguistic signs are called knowledge and that is language understood in this broad sense of mode of communication. But language in its proper sense refers to the historically and socially conditioned forms of human speech. This means that each language is socially and historically conditioned – and the universal human activity of shaping a system of signs (symbols) according to definite, generally accepted rules of association that produce meaning both to the speaker and to the listener.

The question of meaning is pertinent as far as this discourse on private language is concerned, and much more than that, as far as it involves an interactive activity among humans in the general sense and Igbo-Africans in its particular dimension, because, one sees it recurring, as when Wittgenstein (1968) asks "How do words refer to my sensations." (244) One could say that the entire argument appeals to meaning. This meaning is contrary to the correspondence theory of meaning upon which the doctrine of the *Tractatus* was erected. To this effect therefore, Wittgenstein has this admonition to give: "look at the sentence as an instrument, and at its sense (meaning) as its employment (use)." (421) And by the use of word, he means the special circumstances, the surroundings in which the word is applied. The meaning of a word is thus to be determined in the language game in which it plays a part. Hence, the meaning of a word is its use (*Gebrauch*), or its employment (*Verwendung*), or its application (*Anwendung*).

The private language argument

In a general sense, one may have to understand private language argument as any assemblage of logically connected facts or ideas, aimed at either defending or refuting the possibility of private languages. The idea of private language was made famous by Wittgenstein's refutation of it. Wittgenstein identified it as language whose words refer to private sensations, known and understood by only the speaker of the language. So another person cannot in this description understand the language and by so doing is barred from any participatory interactive engagement. It is, therefore, strictly exclusive and does not entertain the participation of others outside of it and would thus create deep crisis in human interaction (Wittgenstein, 1968).

Ayer (1996) contends that in a quite ordinary sense, private language exists because there are private sensations. In his explanation he says: "A language may be said to be private when it is devised to enable a limited number of persons to communicate with one another in a way that is not intelligible to anyone outside the group." (251) By this criterion which involves our ordinary or everyday usage, thieves' slang and family jargons are thus considered private languages. This, however, does not fit into the strict philosophical understanding of private language, since this exclusive language is at least understandable to the members of that group, and in that sense it is no longer private. Ayer (1996) being aware of this reality had to clarify his position in the highlight that followed: "What philosophers usually seem to have in mind when they speak of a private language is one that is in their view necessarily private, inasmuch as it is used by some particular person to refer to his own private experiences." (252) This suggests that a person could limit himself or herself to describing his own sensations or feelings, then strictly speaking, only him would understand what he is saying; his utterance might indirectly convey some information to others, but it could not mean to them exactly what it meant to him. It is against the possibility of a language that is supposedly private, that Wittgenstein presents his arguments.

Wittgenstein argues that a private language is not simply a language that has not yet been translated. For a language to count as a private language in Wittgenstein's sense, it must be in principle incapable of translation into an ordinary language – if for example it were to describe those inner experiences supposed to be inaccessible to others. The private language being considered is not simply a language such that there is only one speaker, but a language that in principle can only be understood by one person. For instance the last speaker of a dying language would not be speaking a private language, since the language remains in principle learnable. A private language must be unlearnable and untranslatable, and yet it must appear that the speaker is able to make sense of it, although that may not always be the case. The argument is, apparently, readily summarized (Wittgenstein 1968).

The conclusion is that, a language in principle unintelligible to anyone but its originating user is impossible. The reason for this, Wittgenstein insists is that, such a so-called language would, necessarily, be unintelligible to its supposed originator, for he would be unable to establish meanings for its putative signs. Wittgenstein (1968) thus argues: "But we could also imagine a language in which a person could write down or give vocal expression to his inner experiences – his feelings, moods, and the rest – for his private use? ... Well, can't we do so in our ordinary language? – But that is not what I mean. The individual words of this language are to refer to what can only be known to the person speaking; to his immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language." (243)

Meanwhile, only a few commentators have questioned the very existence in the relevant passages of Wittgenstein's text, of a unified structure properly identified as a sustained argument (Cranfiel, 2001). Although this claim depends for its plausibility on the tendentiously narrow notion of argument – roughly, as a kind of proof, with identifiable premises and a firm conclusion, rather than the more general sense which accompanied their activities by talking to themselves. In the above reference from Wittgenstein, two brands of people are of course noticeable in this excerpt; the

Soliloquist and the Private Linguist. Although the two could be said to share some factors but they should not be understood to mean the same thing.

The Soliloquist could be said to share with the private linguist the fact that their languages are not meant i.e. intended for communication. However, the soliloquist's language is rather meant for monologue – it only happens to be heard and made sense of by a casual listener; and it is understood by him, because of the very fact that it follows its rules – privately. In this case therefore, it is clear that the soliloquist, the socially isolated individual (a Robinson Crusoe) differs essentially from the private linguists because the latter is deemed to be capable of 'evolving his private rules' (Igboanusi, 1994). Evidently, Wittgenstein uses the metaphors of the 'private diary', 'pain language', 'beetle in the box', etc, to bring out facts of relevance in this context.

The idea of the Diary of experience as contained in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigation* were borrowed from Edmund Schlick. Examining the case of someone keeping such a diary, Wittgenstein in par. 243 of the *Philosophical Investigation* lampoons it and laid bare his arguments thus: "A human being can encourage himself, give himself orders, obey, blame and punish himself; he can ask himself a question and answer it. We could even imagine human beings who spoke only in monologue; the confusions involved require him to use certain words when it is just the right time to use these words which is in question." Thus he is forced to mention in section 258 of *Philosophical Investigation* examples like ostensive definition, putting the attention, speaking, writing, remembering, believing and so on, on the very process of suggesting that none of these can really occur in the situation under consideration.

More still, Wittgenstein (1968) elaborates in greater detail the internal inconsistency that renders this argument also relevant for psychological issues – sensations and solipsistic manoeuvres. To further illustrate his point, Wittgenstein introduced the Beetle in a Box. This is a famous thought experiment that he introduced in the context of his investigation of pains which one can adopt to establish the possibility of private language stemming from the possibility of private sensation. By analogy, Wittgenstein maintains that it does not matter that one cannot experience another's subjective sensations, for to communicate and or even to interpret that which is experienced, the rule based grammatical expressions are employed and by so doing establishing the social public nature of linguistic usage which fundamentally contradicts private language instantiation.

The foundations for the argument on private language

Wittgenstein considered that the very notion of a private language rested on two fundamental mistakes, or rather misconceptions; one, about the nature of experience, and another about the nature of language (Kenny, 1973). The mistake about experience was the belief that experience is private; it is the individual person that experiences and thus, the question of shareability is completely ruled out. On the other hand, the mistake about language was the belief that words can acquire meaning by bare ostensive definition. Thus Wittgenstein argues against these positions which he considered erroneous, hence the ascriptions, 'mistakes' with his elucidations on ostentation and language game theory.

Ostensive definition and private language

An ostensive definition of an expression explains the meaning of the expression by pointing to that which the expression denotes (Moutner, 2000). The phrase was introduced by the Cambridge logician, William Ernest Johnson (1858-1931) in his *LOGIC* (1921), to describe the way a proper name may be explained, but the idea is older: Wittgenstein, who discussed it in depth, traced it to St. Augustine and elaborated his understanding of ostentation as linguistic 'indication' that emerges from an already existing language community. He goes further to argue against the primacy of ostensive definition, against the idea that mere ostensive without training in the use of words could constitute the teaching of a language. His argument concerns both public and private ostensive

definition; they apply to the naming of pains and moods. He contends that no one can ostensively define a proper name, the name of a colour, the name of a material, a numeral, the name of a point of the compass and so on. Or even to fashion out the definition of the number two by pointing to two nuts, because two can never be defined in such manner.

The above argument exposes the confusion which would emerge if ostensive definition were to be employed in learning a language. But, if the arguments are accepted, then the private language theory is refuted before it is stated; at least if it supposes that the meaning of names for sensations could be learnt simply by acquaintance with the names' bearers, that is, simply by having and attending to the sensations. Kenny (1973), while commenting on Wittgenstein's text states that: "... a defender of private languages might suggest the possibility of a language which was private in that its words referred to private sensations without necessarily being private in that the words were learnt from private sensations by bare ostension" (180) Such a defender of a private language might maintain its possibility, in that; it could be learnt from private sensations not by bare ostension, by some private analogue of training in the use of words. This suggestion shows that the critique of the privacy of ostensive definition does not render superfluous the later explicit discussions of private languages. What that later discussion does in effect, is to show that in the case of the private ostensive definition, there cannot be any analogue of the background which is necessary if the public ostensive definition is to convey meaning. Pitifully, such connections cannot be remembered in a state of 'strict isolation'. So, the case of private ostensive definition in defence of private language does not stand.

Rules and games

The concept of 'rule-following' and its discourse pervades all of the *Philosophical Investigation*, and is related to games and meaning. The concept is indeed another tool employed by Wittgenstein in his attack on private language. In order to be clear about the social nature of language, Wittgenstein (1968) suggests that we ask ourselves: What is it for someone to follow a rule? What does the activity called 'following a rule' consist in? He further asks; "is what we call 'following a rule' something that it would be possible for only one man to do, and to do only once in his life?" (199)

The question is a conceptual one that does not call for empirical investigation, but demands a logical analysis of the concept of following a rule. According to Fann (1971) "Following a rule is an activity which is involved in every important activity we human beings engage in. Hence, the importance of understanding the concept of rule." (94) With regard to language, the question which Wittgenstein poses is; is it possible to follow a rule in private language? this question was answered in the negative by its author. His point is that we cannot privately follow a rule, because rule-following itself implies the possibility of being wrong. Contrarily, in private rule-following, there is no possibility of being wrong since there are no independent objective criteria for ascertaining in the mind of the individual, whether the rules are correctly followed. Thus Wittgenstein (1968) declares: "... to think one is following a rule is not to follow a rule. Hence, it is not possible to follow a rule 'privately', otherwise thinking one was following a rule would be the same thing as following it." (202) This suggests therefore, that to follow a rule is not just a conceptual possibility.

The central point in this argument is that language is only possible as a social instrument of communication, and much more extensively for social activity among humans. And, since in a world of his own (a Robinson Crusoe), will not be able to set up public, criteria for differentiating between a correct and an incorrect use of words. Ozumba (2004) suggests that in doing this, the individual will need to fall back either to memory, instinct, or his consciousness which are all private and subjective. On this he said: "What is private and subjective cannot correct itself, since what it produces is only the options open to it. Instinct and consciousness cannot exercise an objective judge of themselves. It is indeed nonsensical for an individual to have a private language." (80-81)

Man: A person and a social being

As a substance, the person has both the material and psychological or spiritual predicates, and to insist that the mind thinks or the body walks may be described in the words of G. Ryle as a category mistake. Rather, it is the person who thinks and the person who walks; man should not be departmentalized unnecessarily. Again, man is not an island unto himself. For his survival and belongingness to a social group already endows him with special qualities. He is not simply a mere member of a socio-cultural group – a mere individual – but he cooperates with the members of that group and becomes as it were an integral member of the community of humans and constitutively positioned to occupy a point in the societal space that cannot easily be neglected without grave consequences. In short, he is simply a social being and ordinarily engages and would like to be engaged in social activities of multivariant forms. The person is equally a historical being in that he develops a personality as he grows up and circulates within the members of his family, his peer group, his neighbours, his school, his church, and eventually within the society at large (Dondogne, 1964). Man lives in a spatio-temporal setting, wherein he develops habits or identifiable traits characteristically unique to his particular nature and constitution.

In line with the above, man is equally and quite certainly a cultural being. Culture is rather an encompassing concept as it includes everything in any given society. It represents the summation of what mankind did in the past, is currently doing, and will be doing in the future. It includes religion, philosophy, science, technology, art, education, politics, etc. Man is a cultural being in two senses, namely: he is “the artifice of culture” and equally he is “the prime receiver and the greatest effect of culture” (Mondin 1958, 148). In its two principal accepted meanings – of formation of the individual (subjective sense) and of society’s spiritual form (objective sense) – culture has “the goal of the realization of the individual in all his dimensions, in all his capacities” (Mondin 1958, 148). This capacity cannot be realized in isolation from the community of other persons, thus imperatively, a person develops socio-cultural relations within the society.

Man is an individual and not a gourd. Certainly, a crowd is composed of individuals, but each of them loses his individuality in the crowd. The individuality of man points to his unique character which is unrepresented in each person. This could be seen in the definition of Guardini (1938), which explains that being a person means:

... that I, in my being, definitely cannot be inhabited by any other, but that in relation to me, I am only with myself; I cannot be represented by any other, but I am guaranteed to myself; I cannot be substituted by any other, but I am unique – this remains closed even if my sphere of reserve is strongly damaged by intrusions and exteriorizations (122-123).

This individuality and uniqueness of man is even evident in the DNA signature in man’s biological system. But then, this is not the only truth about a person, for though his personality is incommunicable, yet he remains a being that communicates, hence a social being. This is so because, the person “through his movement that makes him exist, expresses himself, he is by nature communicable, and is even the only one who can be himself (Maunier 1964). The dialogical concept of man defines him as a being with others (*sein mit anderen*) as a man of (and in) the community of other men; as a social being: “The community of persons”, according to Mondin (1958), “is the community of the neighbour, of the ‘I’, and of others capable of realizing a ‘we’. One arrives at this through a cultural revolution which finds its most direct adversary in impersonalizing individuality” (254-255). So even though man is unique in himself, he is not an island and so will have to relate to the society. Language remains the most effective means of doing so, and this explains why the idea of a private language, in its ideal sense, remains absurd and untenable. Ontologically, every individual is born into a community, already pre-inhabited by at least the parents and in some cases by only the mother. He lives and grows within such setting, and from there to the larger society. The idea of a “Robinson Crusoe” from birth is only but a hypothetical construct.

The fact of interpersonal communication

Since speech communication is considered as an activity involving language in the maintenance of society's continual existence, then the concept of interpersonal communication remains indispensable and as a form of social inter-activity. This level of social interaction which is only operative in the face of language (and non-operative in the incidence of private language), is fraught with some difficulties. Sieburg (1971) in analysing these problems distinguishes between confirming and disconfirming responses in speech communication behaviour of individuals. Sieburg's comprehensive review of theoretical and clinical literature related to the qualities of human interaction, analyses of "live" interaction in group and interpersonal contacts, and subsequent refinement of her conclusions through a survey of members of the International Communication Association led to the identification of 12 basic categories of confirming and disconfirming responses: 7 of them describe disconfirming responses and 5 categories describe confirming responses (Dance and Larson, 1972).

These forms of conforming responses aim at resolving the crisis of language in the area of social inter-activity. Even though, this could be seen at the person-to-person level, but one discourse that the picture created at this interpersonal level is but a microcosm of the macrocosmic portrait of the society at large. Thus, one can get either of these responses at an advanced form within any of the existing setting for social interaction, be they religious, political, recreational, educational, organizational etc. In any of these instances, the question of private language is totally ruled out because of its incompatibility.

The basis for a Wittgensteinian approach

Culture and Value, a collection of Ludwig Wittgenstein's aphorism, contains a puzzling comment that demonstrates an absence of a harmonization of understanding when an operating rule does not guide the performance of a game. The resultant effect of such a situation is certainly a seeming sense of uncertainty and unclarity in relation to the what and how the participants in the supposed game are expected to be and behave. Wittgenstein presents this with a concrete demonstrative example as follows: "In a conversation; one person throws a ball; the other does not know whether he is supposed to throw it back or throw it to the third person, or leave it on the ground or pick it up and put it in his pocket, etc." (Wittgenstein 1984, 74)

In line with Wittgenstein, the analysis of meaning in the context of social discourse must be addressed not through attention to the influence of cultural and social factors on the use and interpretation of language across contexts. His appeal to ordinary language leads him to abandon the tendency to attribute the meaning of a word to the object it names, offering instead a non-reductionist principle that forms the background to his analysis of conversation. Thus a participant in a conversation interprets the meaning of any word according to its use. Words are used as much to do things as to make statements. That is why to talk of social interaction in relation to language is to acknowledge that words can be used to perform actions.

That words are used to do things is also the central tenet of John L. Austin's speech act theory. According to Austin (1962) "the issuing of an utterance is the performing of action" (6). Earlier, Wittgenstein (1984) had already made a similar remark: "words are deeds". Wittgenstein rejoins, "countless kinds: countless different kinds of use of what we call 'symbols', 'words', 'sentences'. And this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence and others become obsolete and get forgotten." (23) He goes on to link this multiplicity with activity, and activity in turn with a form of life: "Here the term language-game is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life". (Wittgenstein 1984, 23) In so doing, Wittgenstein, makes a connection

between life and language: speaking is an activity, a form of life. And being an activity, it is open to multivariant engagements of which Wittgenstein is not ignorant of.

In any case, Wittgenstein's remark demonstrates that in conversation, meaning may in fact be at times unrecoverable, both to the conversational analyst and to the interlocutor. As such, a Wittgensteinian approach to discourse recognizes the ultimate indeterminacy of meaning, a position that agrees well with what may be a fact of language. And in respect to this, some linguists, postmodern theorists, and analytic philosophers, including Wittgenstein, seem to be in agreement. Brown and Yule (1983), both of whom are linguists, write that "the perception and interpretation of each text is essentially subjective" (11). The postmodern theorists, in the meantime, hold that every decoding is another encoding. Jacques Derrida for example, maintains that the possibility of interpretation and reinterpretation is endless, with meaning getting any provisional significance only from speaker, hearer, or observer.

According to Bakhtin (1986), "the interpretation of symbolic structures is forced into an infinity of symbolic contextual meanings and therefore it cannot be scientific in the way precise sciences are scientific" (160). Both Bakhtin's and Derrida's views are surprisingly not unlike those of Willard Van Orman Quine's in "The Indeterminacy of Translation", where Quine argued that "the totality of subjects" behaviour leaves it indeterminate whether one translation of their sayings or another is correct (Blackburn, 1994). Interestingly, Wittgenstein (1984) is not left out in this discussion. According to him, "any interpretation still hangs in the air along with what it interprets, and cannot give it any support. Interpretations by themselves do not determine meaning." (198) His appeal to the notion of use in a context as establishing meaning can be seen as similar to Derrida's view that meaning is established only provisionally by speaker or hearer. That meaning may in fact be indeterminate could be seen in further analysis of Wittgenstein's perspective on the issue of conversation.

Wittgenstein's focus on moves that speakers make in conversation can be sifted not only from his metaphor of the game in general and of chess in particular, but also from such typical entreaties as to consider "the part which uttering these words play in the language-game" (21). In fact, the notion of a move in language-game becomes explicit when one ruminates over Frege's contention that every assertion contains an assumption, which Wittgenstein says rests on the possibility of writing every statement as "it is asserted that such and such is the case" (22). To this, Wittgenstein (1968) retorts; "But 'that such – and such is the case' is not a sentence in our Language – so far as it is not a move in a language-game." (22) The construct of a move closely mirrors the notion of footing that Erving Goffman employs in his interactional sociolinguistics approach to conversation. And according to Goffman (1981), the concept of footing concerns "the alignments we make up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production and reception of an utterance." (128) Goffman's focus on alignment is quite similar to Wittgenstein's notion of communication as moves in a game. In line with this, Harris (1988) while writing about Wittgenstein's language-game metaphor, states that, "in terms of the chess analogy, communication is a matter of the player's appropriate responses to each other's moves in accordance with the rules of the game." (97)

It must be said that the issue of private language has generated a wide ranging stretch of controversies ever since the question of its impossibility was raised and defended by Wittgenstein. These controversies do not only lie in the debate of possibility or impossibility of the subject matter, but also (and importantly too) on the correct-sense of impossibility as meant by Wittgenstein himself, the real meaning of private language as well as the correct identity of the supposed private linguist. On the identity of the private linguist, the question has been on whether such a person should be considered as one who co-exists with others within the socio-cultural environs, or the legendary Crusoe who is only but temporarily separated from the community of other persons or even someone who has never experienced (at any time and in any form) what it means to live within a society.

Wittgenstein's thesis is that private language is not possible and this has generated varied reactions and interpretations with their accompanying criticisms and objections basically arising from the fact of meaning as such (Pitcher, 1968). Wittgenstein must be seen as talking about communal language, that is, language spoken and understood within a community. In this case, a speaker of a language cannot be seen as capable of having concepts which cannot be understood by other members of the community. And for language to have meaning in the community, "the members must not only be capable of sharing in the same concepts, but must indeed share in them for mutual understanding to be." (Ozumba 2004, 82) Thus, if there arises a disarticulation in the interpretation of language, the concerned parties in the language will not comprehend each other. The paradoxical question therefore is: How can somebody be able to make meaning in an intimately personal way and at the same time be required to meet the requirements of mutuality in communal discourse? That is, can private and public languages mount the same epistemic-language platform synchronically? Is it possible for one to be speaking a private language and the communal language simultaneously?

Now, whether the issue of rule following is either social or public, its necessity in resolving social interaction remains indispensable. The practice of rule following in the case of social interaction need not be merely public but at the same time social. This suggests that if there exists any negligible space for the possibility of private language that manifests some intra rule-following publicly, such private language cannot feature socially, for to adopt a social character is to automatically lose its private nature. This suggests that to force the issue of private language (if at all it exists in any form, whether in a strict or narrow sense) into the ambience of the social, is to create crisis within the circle of social inter-activity. This is so because, it would create gaps, thereby breaking the chain of communication and obliterating the 'inter' that bridges social activities.

For a sign to be consistently and utterly private means that it must not refer to anything outside of itself; it must not be derived from anything known outside of itself and that the 'private' semiotician must have nothing outside it in mind while assigning the meaning. Such sign (if possible) rules out the question of social approval, acceptance, meaning, and connection. It creates crisis in social inter-activity since the signification has no social or public character. Following from the above discussion, and in agreement with Wittgenstein's disapproval of the possibility of private language, because of the crisis that such will inaugurate in the communicative social interaction in the human family in general, a particular case of the Igbo-African worldview though not so different from the general consequence may all the same be considered here as a concrete example especially in relation to the bizarre effect the private language project holds on its worldview. It is on this that an application of the discussion so far to an Igbo-African perspective and consideration derives its importance and legitimacy.

Private language and the Igbo-African worldview

The private language conjecture is in a total dissonance with the Igbo-African worldview. The person of the Igbo-African extraction sees the world and the realities in it as engaging with one another in a never-ending process of communicative interaction. His or her perception of the composition of his worldview informs his attitudinal convictions towards it. Ufearoh and Onebunne in their discussion on the eco-communitarianism of the Igbo-African explains the composition and meaning of the worldview from the point of view of the Igbo concept of the family "ezi na ulo", by tracing its Greek etymological root to a house or a home. The family, forming a minute cell of the entire cosmic order and arrangement becomes in this wise a centre of theatre of communicative actions in all its aspects (Kanu 2013 & 2014).

The Igbo-African idea of the family stretches to wider horizons with an enlarged scope and occupying an unimaginable expansive space involving both the living and the dead in which all are necessarily and inevitably in communication with one another and thus excluding as it were the possibility of a

private linguist. This notion of the family has already been emphasized by Mbiti (1969) in his wider or more general explanatory notes on the constitution of the African family. According to him:

For African peoples the family has much wider circle of members than the words suggest in Europe or North America ... the family includes children, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters who may have their own children and other immediate relatives ... the departed relatives whom we have designated as the living dead ... the unborn who are still in the loins of the living. (10)

Mbiti's understanding of the worldview of the African comprises every reality in the cosmic order which he presented in a thematic arrangement under six categories to include: God, spirits, man (living and yet-unborn), animals, plants, and other phenomena and objects. His presentation is majorly anthropocentric in outlook, but with a heavy colouration of a religious characteristics. In his presentation, Mbiti (1969) observes the presence of "force, power or energy permeating the whole universe." (16) And in this cosmic order and arrangement, "Mbiti underscores the significance of interdependence and the need for balance in a community." (Ufeorah and Onebunne, 2020) Mbiti concludes that, "one mode of existence presupposes all the others and a balance must be maintained." (106)

A further point on the note of independence existent in this eco-communitarianism plays itself out according to Mbiti in the very fact that "the community must make, create or produce the individual; for the individual depends on the corporate group," (106) which according to him is captured in the very simple but deep aphorism that "I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am." (106) This of course drives home deeper the note of inevitable relationality that must exist between the individual and his or her community. Ufeorah and Onebunne (2020) see in this a very clear manifestation of the depth and strength attached to the bond of kinship or to the communal living in the Igbo-African worldview, which is very large in scope and may not be easily understood by a stranger. According to them, "it may baffle a stranger in Igbo land to observe how some families or communities are strongly attached to certain non-human realities such as ancestral land, plants or animals with whom the family or community shares some cosmic or even historical affiliations." (4)

In the hermeneutic exposition of the word "Ezi na ulo" (which means family in the Igbo language and is ordinarily spelt as ezinaulo), the relational quality of the Igbo-African displays itself in the most sublime and concrete manner. *Ezi na ulo* embodies a relationality that is directly connected to the spatio-cosmic reality of the Igbo-African. *Ezi* which means the community and *ulo* which means the house or home are so bonded together that one cannot be spoken of without an implicatory consequence of the other. For a better understanding of this Igbo word, the explanation given by Ufeorah and Onebunne appears to be most tenable and germane in buttressing its etymological constitution as well as coming to terms with the meaning implicated in it. According Ufeorah and Onebunne (2020):

The two component words that make up the term ezi-na-ulo (that is ezi and ulo) are polar complementary binominals and near antonyms. Ezi is exterior oriented and connotes publicity, volatile and viability, whereas ulo is not just physical structure but also interior oriented and connotes domiciliation/homeliness and privacy. These seemingly polar concepts complement each other thereby giving rise to a particular concept- the family. It entails the harmonization of diverse opposites and complementarity of functions within a spatial unit. Ecologically, *ezi-na-ulo* stands for the ecosystem or eco-community, which is an eco-household with diverse memberships that have interrelated and reciprocal functions. One can easily infer that the family or communal model ecology serves as a home to varieties of organisms or species nay place of concordance for their discordant idiosyncrasies. (4)

In what he calls the Metaphysics of the Igbo-African family, Ufearoh (2010) reiterates the above point by noting that “the Igbo family like the Igbo worldview comprises of both visible and invisible members.” (100) Adding stress to the above, Uchendu (1995) avers:

First the Igbo world is an integrated one in which all created beings, the living and the dead, are in communion through symbolic interactions and other communication channels. In Igbo view, the world of man is not strictly divorced from the world of the spirits. Lineage continuity is a cooperative enterprise between the world of man and the world of the spirits. Existence in the world involves interaction between the visible and the invisible, and the living and the dead, each honouring a contract based on mutual interest and reciprocity. (15)

So there is a very strong bond of interconnectedness of relationship among the individual members of the community, in the first place, and equally between the individuals and the community at large. Membership to this eco-communitarian habitat is all-embracing and includes in every sense both the living and the dead as well as human and non-human realities. The members of the community are always engaged with one another in a never-ending communicative interactive relationship of which the tool of language becomes an inevitable prerequisite of engagement in this web of interaction (Kanu 2017 & 2018). Language in this wise, becomes both a public and social means of engagement and can never be construed to be private in any form or shape (Kanu 2010 & 2012). To therefore uphold a private language module would be to distort the eco-communitarian ordering and to initiate a terrible damage and rupture of the spatio-cosmic order of arrangement upon which the society is established and so to unleash unimaginable harm with grave consequences in the entire cosmic world of the Igbo-African, some of which would include; the loss of family cohesion, a distortion of the eco-communitarian order of the Igbo-African, an erosion of cultural sensitivity and consciousness, a gradual but unfortunate emergence of ‘I-alonism’ and a disappearance of community spirit, the suffocation of the spirit of sacrifice and the enthronement of selfishness, to mention but a few.

CONCLUSION

The question of the crisis of social interaction by a deliberate assumption of the tenability of a private language is such that faces one not only at the academic, theoretical, analytical or philosophical realm but equally at the pragmatic or practical fora of every human existence in its general sense and much more concrete when brought home to the spatio-cosmic worldview of the Igbo-African. Therefore, Wittgenstein’s impossibility of private language is clearly demonstrative of the dangers a hold on private language portends to the issue of social interaction in the societal build, growth and development. The imagined forcible compatibility between private language and social interaction would only but create crisis within the field of social interaction. Language is essentially social in nature given its common function of communication, and so, any attempt to deny it of this essential character is to create problem within the society wherein human activities are governed by this social-oriented language.

Equally one cannot deny that within the society, even at the full functioning of the communicative trait of language, there still exists some crisis in social interaction. This is often caused by individual traits, dispositions and the exigencies occasioned by each man’s struggle to survive within the spatio-temporal world. Private language does not and cannot bring about any enrichment to social interaction, rather it will cause, create, inflame, and propitiate the crisis in social interaction. Understandably, the very idea of private language is incompatible with the notion of social interaction, since language is the primary vehicle for such social interaction. And whereby this activating language ceases to be a socially-oriented one, becoming private instead, then the crisis of social interaction perdures through some form of stagnation of social life, and so of the society.

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