[repost] Language as a City

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From §18 to §22, Wittgenstein discusses the function of sentence parts. This discussion concerns the possible objection that he predicts in §18, namely that the examples he gives in §2 and §8 consists only of simple orders, hence incomplete and insufficient in drawing a whole picture of language. To this doubt, Wittgenstein answers that our language is like an ancient city, constantly being renovated and expanded. The renovation and expansion does not imply that the original city is not a complete, sufficient one. What we could say, though, is that the original city may not be as sophisticated, or as beautiful, as the innovated one.

"[T]o imagine a language means to imagine a form of life." (§19) The metaphor of a city ingeniously conveys both a set of material construction and an organic complex of human activities. Thinking of words as signifiers of meanings is like thinking of buildings as the product of some legendary ancient architect, whereas the theory of language as use implies a material, historical development.

For the doubt whether the difference between elliptical sentences and full sentences matters, Wittgenstein suggests that we look at how their uses are differentiated. For §20 and §21, Wittgenstein shows that, though their use might be the same, it is still different in how they *might* be used. When we think that the full sentence may mean something more, like, it is "Bring me a slab" instead of "Throw me a slab", we make a full sentence out of other similar full sentences because our language contains the possibility of those other variations. "Slab!" is not able to mean the something more, becuase these other possibilities, possibilities of other activities, do not exist in this form of life.

We can now see how grammar and the structure of a sentence comes into play. We say that the full sentence has a different grammar from the "Slab!" in the primodial scene, because the full sentence finds its place in a language game with more complex set of rules.

Reading several posts on the blog, I've found two classmates finding "the phrase has no grammar" (Moi p.42) confusing, a confusion I also registered. So, I revisit the sections and write this post, trying to explain what "grammar" means. In Moi's example, "bububu" as a phrase has no grammar because we do not know its place in a language game. It cannot mean "if it doesn't rain, I shall go for a walk" because the use of this full sentence is grammatical in English. Simply assigning "bububu" to mean this sentence would not work, because it is not cohesive with the language-game that has developed to be called English.
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