

A Performative View of Language—Methodological Considerations and Consequences for the Study of Culture

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Abstract: Although researchers across the social sciences speak of a linguistic turn, most research exploring culture still assumes a traditional perspective on language, which conceives meaning as representation. Yet, WITTGENSTEIN convincingly criticized the epistemological basis of such a perspective, offering an alternative view on language. The paper begins by explaining the central points of a performative perspective of language: first, words do things; second, the meaning of an utterance is not directly given by the utterance; and third, meaning is in use. The change in perspective has direct consequences for the way we conceptualize and study our research phenomena. The second part of the paper deals with how social phenomena can be re-conceptualized and studied, putting a special emphasis on the phenomenon of culture. Finally, drawing from my own empirical material, the paper describes the consequences for the study of culture applying a performative view of language. Methodological considerations of the change in perspective are also discussed.

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1. Introduction

It is broadly acknowledged that the assumptions we explicitly or implicitly hold influence how we conceive our research phenomena and how we go about studying them. Yet, implicit assumptions are not always easy to unveil and hence these influence our research without us suspecting it. One such assumption concerns the nature of language and its relationship to reality. However far to our research phenomena language may appear to us, the view we held about it determines how we conceptualize and study many of the phenomena we are interested in. [1]

The most commonly held perspective of language takes the meaning of a word to be the object to which the particular word refers. Words become mere labels of an independent reality. This perspective splits language from an outside world, placing words on the one side and objects on the other, the relationship among both being one of reference. A performative perspective of language, however, dismisses such separation and looks at language as inseparable from reality. The meaning of a word becomes the particular use of the word in the specific situation. Talk and action are here indistinguishably woven together. [2]

Both views differ radically in the way language and its relationship to reality is conceived. While the first view is widely held and assumed in most research about culture, the second one has been rarely acknowledged in that field. Hence, there is no guidance on how to proceed in case a performative view of language is preferred for the study of national cultures. The aim of this paper is to discuss a few methodological considerations to take into account when assuming a performative language as well as to look into the consequences of such an assumption for the study of culture. I will start by unveiling the initial assumption of a performative perspective on language. Only if its main characteristics are understood can we move on to considerations of method. A practical example from my own research on international project groups will then help me to point to the consequences for the study of culture. [3]

2. A Performative View of Language

The most common view of language accepts what Bruno LATOUR (1993) ironically calls the "big divide." The big divide is the division of reality into objective and subjective, nature and society/culture, material and mental, observable and invisible—a duality characteristic of the modernist approach. The nature pole is transcendent, universal, objective and general. The society/culture pole is immanent, contingent, subjective and specific. Between these two poles there is a no-man's land. Every phenomenon, every fact is analyzed and classified in either one of these poles. This is, says LATOUR, the work of purification, where observed phenomena are "cleaned" and classified either in the pole of nature or in the pole of society, but never a mixture of the two. Language, according to this perspective, is placed on the side of culture, and the objects words are referring to, are placed on the side of nature. In this way, words point towards an outside objective reality. The relationship between language and reality is conceived as one of univocal reference. [4]

WITTGENSTEIN (1953) convincingly did away with such a view of language and offered an alternative perspective. For the sake of clarity, I condense this view in three main points. First, *words do things*. The utterance "I declare the meeting open" opens up the meeting and not only describes a state of affairs (this examples is taken from CZARNIAWSKA-JOERGES, 1988). Second, *the meaning of an utterance is not directly given by the literal utterance*. To understand what is meant with "I'll see you" we need to put those words into a specific context. Depending on the situation, we could give that utterance a

friendly sense or a confrontational one. And third, *meaning is in use*. The phrase "I'll see you" is dependent on the context of use for its particular meaning. [5]

2.1 Words do things—The performative nature of language

A performative view of language does not take the meaning of words or of signs to be those objects existing in an external world of outside reality. Meaning is not a one to one relationship where words lie on the side of humans and language, and what they stand for lies on the side of artifacts and non-humans. It is not objects versus subjects, nature versus society, causal explanation versus interpretation. It was WITTGENSTEIN who revolted against the previous AUGUSTINUS view of language, where words were the mere labels of things (WITTGENSTEIN, 1953, §1). Whoever defends a referential view of language "(...) has in mind the way in which a child learns such words as 'man', 'sugar', 'table', etc. He does not primarily think of such words as 'today', 'not', 'but', 'perhaps'" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1958, p.77). That is like describing a game of chess without mentioning the existence and operations of the pawns. Such a description of the game would be incomplete. [6]

WITTGENSTEIN's criticism of the traditional view of language goes further. Do words just name and designate? Think of statements such as "Fire!," "Out," "Very good" or "I love you." "Are you inclined still to call these words 'names of objects'?" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1953, §27). In fact, as AUSTIN would reply, these words are *doing* very heterogeneous things: warning, ordering, praising or declaring a beautiful feeling. *How To Do Things With Words*, the title of AUSTIN's book, very well illuminates the performative function of language (AUSTIN, 1975), a function which is beautifully illustrated in *El Sí De Las Niñas* (MORATIN, 1945), a theatrical play from Spanish literature. Written in the dawn of the 19th century, the "yes" pronounced by the girls on occasion of their imposed weddings with much older men, involved renouncing their biological families for the sake of adopting and being accepted into the families of their husbands, changing deeds and often even friends, social circles and lifestyles. That "yes" performed a very different act than the "yes" given in response to "Do you want a cup of coffee?" or "Do you live in Stockholm?" Each "yes" might sound the same, but it *does* different things, *paves the path* to different consequences and *defines* different actors. The meaning of a word is not, as AUGUSTINUS thought, an outside reality. [7]

2.2 Meaning and understanding

If meaning is not the referent of the outside world, what is the meaning of a word? Not yet content with simply discarding the view of a referential meaning, WITTGENSTEIN goes on rejecting the question itself, "What is meaning?" as he maintains that it produces a form of "mental cramp" within the questioner. Even if we feel we ought to point to something in reply to the question, we are indeed unable to point to anything (WITTGENSTEIN, 1958, p.1). A common temptation is to answer the question by pointing to the mind, as if meaning, and the understanding of it, were some sort of mental processes, or hidden mechanisms.

However, WITTGENSTEIN opposes the idea of a private meaning; a meaning only known by the person who utters the word or sentence. That would be, he compares, as if the person he is playing chess with gives the white king a paper crown, leaving the use of the piece unaltered, but telling WITTGENSTEIN that the crown has a meaning to him which he cannot explain by rules. WITTGENSTEIN replies, "As long as it doesn't alter the use of the piece, it hasn't what I call a meaning" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1958, p.65). We see here that meaning has to do with use, but also with rules for that use. Aren't the pawns governed by rules for their movements? Change the rules and you would have a different game. [8]

Many of us, however, may be prone to argue that the signs of our language—sounds if spoken, lines if read—seem somehow "hollow" without reference to accompanying mental processes. If asked about the relationship between a name and what it names, we are inclined to answer that the relationship is a psychological one, maybe recalling the mechanism of association. It seems that the action of language consists of two parts: an inorganic and observable part, the handling of signs; and an organic and hidden part, understanding these signs, meaning and interpreting them, thinking. These organic activities seem to take place in the mysterious medium of the mind. To avoid the partly occult appearance of the processes we believe occur in the mind—thinking, imagining, interpreting, meaning, or understanding—, WITTGENSTEIN replaces those processes with a process of looking at an object—by painting, drawing or modeling it. As soon as we do this, as soon as we read or hear the sign along with the painted image and as soon as the image therefore loses its occult character, the mysticism of its previous invisibility dissolves. "Why," asks WITTGENSTEIN (1958, p.5), "should the written sign plus this painted image be alive if the written sign alone was dead?" Suddenly, the hidden meaning we thought of ceases to impart any life to the sentence at all. [9]

The meaning of a word is not inside the head, no matter how strongly it may feel that way; nor is understanding a mental process. [10]

2.3 Meaning is in use

So far we have looked at the argument that the belief in meaning as an object existing in an outside reality, and the belief in meaning as some sort of image existing in our heads are both misplaced. Both beliefs are fruits of the same mistake: "We are looking for the use of a sign, but we look for it as though it were an object *co-existing* with the sign. One of the reasons for this mistake is that we are looking for a 'thing corresponding to a substantive'" (KENNY, 1994, p.61). [11]

Still, the question remains unanswered. If it is neither an external referent nor an internal image, what then makes the sign alive? In fact, in the hands of WITTGENSTEIN, the question "What is the meaning of a word?" transforms into the question "What is an explanation of meaning?" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1958, p.1) The transformation has at least two advantages. First, it enables avoidance of speculations about meaning and all the confusion adhered to it. Instead,

explanations are *concrete* and nearer to us; they don't mislead us to chase shadows, as meanings did (BAKER & HACKER, 1983, p.35). "Roughly: let's ask what the explanation of meaning is, for whatever that explains will be the meaning" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1958, p.1). The second advantage of the transformation is that it takes us back to ordinary linguistic practices, such as explanations. Explanations are not best thought of as discoveries, but as descriptions. The provision of description involves the use of examples to demonstrate what is meant by a word or phrase. This renders meaning *public* (shared by all speakers of a language) and *immanent* (accessible to us and surveyable¹ by us) (BAKER & HACKER, 1983, p.36). "If I need a justification for using a word, it must also be one for someone else" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1953, §378). This is a point worth emphasizing since (1) it rules out the appeal to subjective perceptions as grounds for affirmations, "interpretations by themselves do not determine meaning" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1953, §198) and (2) it gives way to consensual action, since where an explanation ends shared meaning is constituted in shared linguistic practice (WITTGENSTEIN, 1953, §241). [12]

Having transformed the question, the answer indeed sounds trivial. "The meaning of a word is what is explained by the explanation of the meaning" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1953, §560). To state this raises another question: What is explained when we explain the meaning of a word? Its use (WITTGENSTEIN, 1953, §432), explains WITTGENSTEIN, the rules governing the use of the explained word (WITTGENSTEIN, 1953, §81-82). More often than not, we explain the meaning of a word or of an expression by giving examples of various cases where the word is used (WITTGENSTEIN, 1953, §71-75). For instance, to explain the meaning of the term "game," we can talk of board games, card games, ball games, Olympic Games and so on; we can present a wide variety of instances where the word "game" is used correctly. We would, however, be unable to put into words what is common to all those uses, because, WITTGENSTEIN notes, there is no single characteristic that is shared by all of them². He thoroughly examines the various examples given to explain the word "game," with the result of his examination being "a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail." He calls this net of similarities "family resemblances" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1953, §65-67). [13]

In summary, WITTGENSTEIN's advice that if someone wants to understand the meaning of a word or expression, he or she has to *look and see* how it is used. To study how the meaning of a particular word is understood, WITTGENSTEIN observes how the word is performed, explores the praxis of its use, analyses the circumstances under which the word is applied and describes its immediate experience surrounding it. This is how he proceeds when investigating such

1 That can be carefully examined. With "surveyable" WITTGENSTEIN means that can be reproduced.

2 In fact, he gives this reason for not offering any proper definition of "language game." Even if he, in §7 of *Philosophical Investigations*, explicitly points to a performative view of language when he indicates that when talking about "language game," he refers to both the language and the actions into which it is woven.

philosophically contentious terms like "time" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1958, p.26), "knowledge" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1953, §148-151), or "intention" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1953, §641-648), to mention a few. Some have argued that WITTGENSTEIN is thus not offering a theory of meaning, but simply giving a piece of methodological advice: "Don't think, but look!" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1953, §66) Nevertheless, that methodological indication could not be understood without a certain understanding of the concept of meaning (GLOCK, 1996, p.377), because what would we look at if we still understood meaning as something hidden in our heads? [14]

Adopting a performative view of language involves assuming a certain relationship between language and the world and, consequently, between language and the phenomena under study. Hence, a performative view of language pushes us to re-conceptualize the phenomenon of our interest and re-think how to go about its study. Macro phenomena, such as culture or social structures, are often conceptualized assuming a traditional view of language: culture or social structures are separated from everyday life. Yet, how can we look at culture so that the performative nature of language is acknowledged? And how should we proceed to study culture if we assume a performative perspective on language? [15]

3. Dimensionless Reality—Conceptualizing our Research Phenomena

Adam KUPER (1999) claims that culture has often been used as a macro explanatory factor when it is actually culture in itself that should be explained. His complaint is pertinent, especially in the last few years when culture has been used to explain everything, from civil wars to financial crises and divorce rates. It is also in line with the argument in this paper. Studying culture as a macro variable is separating it from language and from everyday life. Yet, how do you study culture without treating it as separate from the group and distinct from group members? That is, as I see it, the core of the micro-macro debate. Empirical data, from which macro variables are added, are constituted in concrete micro situations. Hence, one cannot directly observe culture or any other macro structure, but is instead confronted with a myriad of particular locals. How is the macro level then to be considered and studied? Two articles, CALLON and LATOUR's (1981) *Unscrewing the Big Leviathan; or How Actors Macrostructure Reality, and How Sociologists Help Them to Do So?* and KNORR-CETINA's (1988) *The Micro-Social Order—Towards a Reconception*, might help answering that question. [16]

3.1 The micro-macro debate

Michel CALLON and Bruno LATOUR (1981, p.279) reformulate the question to "How does a micro-actor become a macro-actor?" They find the answer in HOBBS' social contract. The sovereign has taken onto his person the authority to represent his people's wishes and desires. He is not a tyrant, as he says and does nothing without first having been authorized by his people. The sovereign thus is not above his people, but "is the people itself in another state" (CALLON &

LATOUR, 1981, p.279). Such political representation is a specific instance of the more general phenomenon which CALLON and LATOUR call *translation*, with which they understand all sorts of means by which an actor accepts the authority to be a spokesman for another actor. Through translation micro-actors transform into macro-actors, people into States. Macro is not above; there are no different levels of social structures; society is dimensionless. What traditional sociology (in PARSONS' spirit) takes to be macro structures actually consist of the translation of micro-situations and micro-actors. [17]

I agree with CALLON and LATOUR in that macro-notions ultimately refer to micro-scale interactions, and that the chain of interrelations among micro-situations translates into a macro-actor. However, their notion of macro leaves the question of how to study culture (or any other macro-phenomena) unanswered. Culture is not a State or nation in whose name collective actions and policies are undertaken. Translation (or representation in its political sense) explains what macro-actors consist of and how they behave, but it does not explain how micro-actors act, feel and perceive. The question of how to consider culture when studying the local interaction remains open. [18]

KNORR-CETINA's representational hypothesis of the macro comes to our rescue (KNORR-CETINA, 1988). Like the previous authors she starts conceding the chain of micro-episodes, which interrelations lead the immediate situation to transcend beyond. For CALLON and LATOUR the links of the chain consist of "all the negotiations, intrigues, calculations, acts of persuasion and violence, thanks to which an actor or force takes, or causes to be conferred on itself authority to speak or act on behalf of another actor or force" (CALLON & LATOUR, 1981, p.279). However, for KNORR-CETINA those links are formed by "participants' concrete projects, by mutual expectations, imputations of interest, fears, grudges or misread communications" (KNORR-CETINA, 1988, p.38). Here resides the origin of the difference between these authors. When focusing on the interrelationships among locals, CALLON and LATOUR put the emphasis on the interactions of the actors; KNORR-CETINA on the representations by which participants construe such relationships. [19]

Consequently, in KNORR-CETINA's view the macro is a:

"... summary representation actively constructed and pursued within micro-situations ... [I]t is seen to be part of these micro-episodes where it results from the structuring practices of participants. The outcome of these practices is typifications of various degrees of abstraction which 'stand for' the events they typify. Participants work out and employ these typifications to represent and interpret their situation-transcending involvements and other aspects of the more global circumstances of their life. I shall call Representation Hypothesis the view that the macro-order is first and foremost an order of representation, that is, of summary references pursued within micro-situations." (KNORR-CETINA, 1988, pp.39-40) [20]

The macro is thus constructed in the concrete interactions between participants, resulting in typifications. Typifications, which are the macro-variables, are then used by participants to interpret and make sense of their immediate situation. [21]

All three authors have often been misinterpreted, which LATOUR himself acknowledges and tries to correct (LATOUR, 1997). Not one of them maintains that the macro does not exist. On the contrary, CALLON and LATOUR, as well as KNORR-CETINA, recognize the existence of the macro. What they put into question is the traditional nature of the micro-macro relationship, dismissing the micro-macro dichotomy as one of different levels and ontologies. They argue that micro and macro have a similar nature, and thus make the point that neither concept should be studied distinctly. [22]

The arguments they use, however, differ. The substance of their differing ideas is their conception of the interrelationships between micro-episodes. Whereas the first two authors think of them as translations, the other sees them as the participants' definition of the concrete situation; in other words: interaction vs. representation. The distinction is summarized in the two uses of the term *representation*: political for the first, pictorial for the second. Together they give a complete view of the reciprocal relationships between micro and macro. [23]

4. Importance of the Surface—Methodological Considerations

But how does all this discussion translate into a method for considering culture? KNORR-CETINA calls it "methodological situationalism," LATOUR and his colleagues "Actor-Network Theory"³. Both stress the analytical primacy of the concrete situation (in KNORR-CETINA's terms) or the local (in LATOUR's terms). This is to say that all actions, behaviors, utterances and environments are important in themselves. What is open to the eye, the surface, is acknowledged. [24]

For the generation of research material the surface calls for ethnography. LATOUR and KNORR-CETINA prompt sociologists to go into the field, treating the micro and the macro in the same manner, with equal respect. Participation in the activities of the actors is as much a way of generating research material as it is getting access to the meaning that situations have for the actors studied (BASZANGER & DODIER, 1997). The ethnographical approach elevates the micro-situation, facilitating the researcher in tracing the chain of events. [25]

WITTGENSTEIN's advice, "look and see," is in this way put into practice. "Look and see" involves observing the local situation, looking at the here and now, acknowledging what participants do and say, following the game of intrigues or regarding participants' use of various typifications. [26]

3 LATOUR makes clear the misunderstandings introduced by the term "theory" in Actor-Network-Theory (ANT). ANT is not a theory, he maintains, but a research method consisting of following the links among micro-situations (LATOUR, 1997).

4.1 Generating empirical material

The study presented in this article began in a hotel room in Uppsala, January 1999. A group of researchers coming from various countries—Sweden, The Netherlands, United Kingdom, Spain and United States—and with a background in varied disciplines—sociology, organizational studies and law—met to discuss contingent employment. SALTSA,⁴ a collaboration between the Swedish National Institute for Working Life and Sweden's central trade unions, had joined them there to talk about the state of the art concerning the working life in Europe. For some of the persons in the hotel room (including myself) it was the first time they met. For others, it was the second time. After that workshop in Uppsala, other followed: Marstrand, April 1999; Bath, September that same year; Seville, April 2000. My study ended in Bath. [27]

At the workshop in Uppsala the nature of their future co-operation was still unclear. SALTSA only financed their travel and hotel expenses for more or less a year. If they wanted to carry out a long-term international research project, employ research assistants and Ph.D. students, organize conferences, going to other research forums, and get their salary for the coming years, they needed extra funding. It is in Uppsala where this need was evidenced, and where they decided to apply for EU research grants. This is the time span of the study: from the moment they decide to collaborate in a long-term joint research project and apply for EU funds, till the day they were awarded those funds. Although I have had contact with the group since to the EU acceptance of their research proposal, the study ended with that acceptance. They had agreed on the aim of their collaboration as well as on how they were to interact. [28]

To reach that agreement the group could not refer to a common reality. The diversity of the group meant that they brought to their discussions a variety of expectations and perspectives. Contingent employment looked slightly different in their home countries, and the way to approach the phenomenon varied according to their research disciplines. The realities of group members differed and so did the tools to negotiate their differences (BRUNER, 1990). When discrepancies arose, they did not dispose of a common past to refer to. They could not look back and do what they once did together. Neither did they have a structure of authority, a formal leader or a developed set of rules to guide their interaction. Leaderless and unstructured situations, as in this study, present an excellent opportunity to study the emerging principles of organization (SMIRCICH & MORGAN, 1982). How does the organizing process develop in such conditions? How is agreement about the meaning of "contingent employment" reached? What role does cultural diversity play in the organizing process? Those were the questions I was set to study. [29]

To answer these questions, I participated in every work meeting and social event of the group. I recorded all meetings and videotaped some of them, talked with each group member, frantically took notes and collected every single document

4 The abbreviation SALTSA stands for Saco, LO, TCO and Arbetslivsinstitutet, four Swedish organizations that founded the very first meetings of the group.

that was written by or distributed in the group. To have an insight of the group while its members were apart I got access to the e-mails exchanged among them in between workshops. Furthermore, following each workshop I sent an e-mail to every group member asking them to describe their impressions about the recent workshop. *If they thought of the workshop as a trip, how would they describe their trip?* In such a way I got their personal experiences, their interpretations and ideas, giving space to the plurality of voices and accounts coming from the field (SALZER-MÖRLING, 1998). [30]

In sum, I followed the chain of micro-situations involved in this study, participated in all occasions in which group members met, and took part in their e-mail exchange when group members were apart. Furthermore, conversations with each group member, e-mails asking about each one's view from home and a visit to most of the group members' homes gave me an insight of the local circumstances of each group member at home. This gave me an immense amount of material. The three characteristics that I outlined above related to the performative view of language helped me to prioritize and interpret it. [31]

4.2 Interpreting field material

Returning to the arguments provided in the first section: First, words *do* things. I focused on how group members, in their discussions, *did* things with words. KNORR-CETINA's representational hypothesis of the macro advocates studying how the participants themselves use their idea/typification of culture to make sense of the situation. In practice, this means looking at how participants use the term "culture" in the particular situation. Confronted with the field material I went back and forth between questions like "What do they do when they use the term 'culture' here?" "What are they doing when they say this or that in this situation?" "What do they talk about and what do they avoid talking about?" "How does their saying 'X' construct the situation?" or "What needs to be emphasized again and again?" In such a way, "culture," "cultural diversity" and other terms are treated as typifications (in KNORR-CETINA's sense) or sense-making devices used by the participants in the concrete situation. [32]

Second, meaning is in *use*. Meaning is not a mental image, nor is understanding a mental process. Meaning is the linguistic practices and actions around the use of words. While WITTGENSTEIN observes a word and follows its various uses in differing circumstances, LATOUR observes the "circulating reference" and follows its various applications in varied milieus. [33]

"Circulating reference" is the series of translations of the referent⁵; that is, of the specific natural phenomenon studied by LATOUR's scientists. Bruno LATOUR (1999, Chapter 2) trails that process by tracing the transformation of a crumb of earth in the Amazon to a scientific journal in France, or by tracking the transformations of rats and chemicals into a scientific article (LATOUR &

5 Note that LATOUR uses "translation" in two ways: "transformation" and "translocation" (LATOUR 1997). Both meanings arise from the double *use* of the term, corroborating what WITTGENSTEIN taught us, that meaning is in use.

WOOLGAR, 1979). He turns his eyes towards the place indicated by the finger tip; he follows the tiny gesture pointing at the referred thing; he sees the differences, acknowledging the nuances of their use, the circumstances of term-giving and the varying shapes it takes along the process of mutations. "Acts of reference ... rely not so much on resemblance as on a regulated series of transformations, transmutations and translations" (LATOURE, 1999, p.58). [34]

By following a "circulating reference," LATOURE is able to study the process by which natural scientists construct their own versions of reality. He follows both the transformations suffered by a crumb of earth and the discussions around it. Witnessing how a group of natural scientists develop a certain understanding of the world, LATOURE is present in their process of knowledge creation, where rules for the use of terms and expressions are developed (LATOURE, 1999, Chapter 2). In other words, LATOURE witnesses how language is generated. [35]

My scientists, however, were not natural scientists. There was no tangible circulating reference to follow. Still, I could follow the conceptual development of their research phenomenon, "contingent employment." I could, as WITTGENSTEIN suggested, look at how they used the expression, and in what circumstances. I could follow the process by which they developed rules for the use of the term "contingent employment." I witnessed how they arrived at a tacit agreement about what was and what was not a correct use of "contingent employment." I saw how the researchers developed language and, inherent to it, a certain understanding of the reality that language referred to. With this merge of WITTGENSTEIN and LATOURE, not only was I able to watch how a common use (or a shared understanding) of "contingent employment" was developed. I was also able to study the organizing process of the international project revolving around that term. [36]

Moreover, following the expression "contingent employment," the phenomenon that my researchers tried to understand, helped me select and prioritize among the immense amount of empirical material. More importantly, "contingent employment" became the link across micro-episodes. By following it, and looking at the circumstances of its use, I was able to see the organizing process of an international project group (BARINAGA, 2002). I was able to see how the micro is translated into the macro. [37]

5. Conclusions

WITTGENSTEIN talks about all philosophical problems as confusions rooted in a misleading use of language (WITTGENSTEIN, 1953, §109). We search, without success, for a reality that the word seems to point to and come up with descriptions of what we believe that reality to be. Yet, WITTGENSTEIN taught us that the meaning of a word is neither an external reality corresponding to that word, nor is it an image found in our heads. Rather, "The meaning of a phrase for us is characterised by the use we make of it. The meaning is not a mental accompaniment to the expression" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1958, p.65). Meaning is

found in the context and circumstances of the use of that word, phrase or expression, in the rules governing its use, in the way we use it. [38]

When we accept that words are not univocally connected to an outside world nor to a subjective image, our research is bound to proceed differently. WITTGENSTEIN's advice is that, if we want to understand the meaning of certain expression, is to look and see, follow the use of the expression and look at its use. Culture, therefore, and the ontological and epistemological problems it poses, must be reconsidered. When studying interaction across cultures in general and an international project group in particular, culture ceases to be an objective and external entity that can be measured. Instead we may look at all conversations where the word "culture" is used; contemplate the situations in which people recur to that term; reflect on the concrete circumstances where "culture" is used and on the consequences that follow that specific use. What do group members do with the word "culture"? Why do they need to apply it? The problems raised around the concept of culture become confusing in the use of the term culture. [39]

In LATOUR's studies I saw the empirical implementation of many of WITTGENSTEIN's ideas. Another way of saying that all philosophical problems are grounded in language confusion is to say that reality is flat. LATOUR considers the difference between macro- and micro-variables not to be a matter of level. Rather, he brings all macro structures back to micro-situations and micro-scale interactions. It is the chain of micro-situations that ultimately becomes a macro actor. Attention is brought back to the local, concrete interaction and thus culture ceases to exist as an independent macro variable to become a word used in the *here and now* and the images imbued to that word. Reality becomes dimensionless, and macro structures can suddenly be treated as the result of language confusion. [40]

Dismissing the idea of the micro-macro distinction as being one of levels involves, for KNORR-CETINA, acknowledging the way our typifications of macro-phenomena influence participant actions and interactions in the micro-situation. For CALLON and LATOUR it involves following the chain of micro-situations until they translate into the macro. All of these authors advocate the here and now. They focus on the local; on the micro-episodes. They do not search for hidden structures—a strategy coherent with the performative view of language. WITTGENSTEIN's view of language, condensed in the formula "meaning = use," advocates for the importance of the surface, of the concrete here and now, of the circumstances of use. His advice "look and see" reproves every attempt to search for hidden structures and occult dimensions⁶. [41]

If assuming a performative nature of language, culture cannot be considered a transcendent macro-structure telling those in the field how to act, feel and perceive. Instead, I observed group members and listened to what they said, noting their arguments and justifications. In the analysis, I used culture only to the

6 *Nothing is Hidden* is the title of a book about WITTGENSTEIN's philosophy written by one of his students, Norman MALCOLM (1986).

extent they used it themselves to make plans, legitimate their actions, justify their doings, etc. Acknowledging the performative nature of language dissolves the micro and macro distinction by treating both alike. [42]

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