The Complexity of Freedom of Speech: Wittgenstein's Language Game and Gadamer's Hermeneutics

Chenxi Ma

School of Humanities, Xidian University, Xi'an, China

*Corresponding author: 21089100036@stu.xidian.edu.cn

Abstract:

Freedom of speech is filled in various facets of daily life, which has long been the focus of people's attention and debate. The concept has multiple layers, including mode, content, and timing of speech. It is worth noting that in different cultural, political and legal contexts, different groups of people interpret and apply freedom of speech in various ways. The purpose of this paper is to compare and analyze Austin's Speech Act Theory, Ludwig Wittgenstein's Language Game Theory and Hans-Georg Gadamer's Hermeneutics. Also it aims to demonstrate and summarize three philosophers' views on freedom of speech from multiple perspectives. By examining these philosophical frameworks, this paper attempts to guide people to further understand the factors that influence freedom of speech and clarify its inherent complexity. This paper not only provides a detailed analysis of the role of language in different contexts, but also provides a relatively complete model for understanding the dynamic interaction between language and society. In the era of globalization, the contradiction between the basic principle and practice of freedom of expression has become increasingly prominent. The results of the paper are intended to provide a reference for future efforts to strengthen intercultural dialogue to guarantee freedom of speech in pluralistic societies.

Keywords: Freedom of Speech; Speech Act Theory; Language Game Theory; Hermeneutics

1. Introduction

Freedom of speech has been widely concerned by many philosophers, especially in the field of philosophy of language. To reveal the complexity of freedom of speech, it is necessary to examine the theoretical foundations provided by such important philosophers as Austin, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Hans-Georg Gadamer.

The linguistic turn experienced by Western philosophy in the 20th century makes the philosophy of language no longer a branch of philosophy, but philosophy itself. Austin reconstructed his own discourse theory system based on the relationship between "saying things" and "doing things [1]." His Speech Act Theory puts forward a multidimensional view of language in the pragmatic approach of philosophy of language, focusing on those sentences that do not have to be either true or false - imperative sentences, exclamations, etc [1]. Wittgenstein's later philosophy of language pays attention to the context and specific use of language. Language Game Theory emphasizes the variability and sociality of language, which provides inspiration for the different meanings and applications of freedom of speech in different contexts. Gadamer inherited Husserl's phenomenology and Heideg-

ger's existentialism philosophy and its basic viewpoint of ontological hermeneutics. The historical and cultural dimensions of his hermeneutics are deeply embedded in the analysis of freedom of expression. The concept of "fusion of horizons" encompasses multiple historical and cultural perspectives and forms a deeper understanding through exchange and integration.

Through combining structural analysis, contextual approach and from historical perspective, this paper attempts to provide a relatively comprehensive approach to understanding freedom of speech. This overall framework not only enhances the theoretical grasp of the concept, but also provides practical inspiration for solving the problem of freedom of speech in different social backgrounds. Therefore, this paper aims to contribute to the dialogue on the protection and promotion of freedom of expression through a comprehensive philosophical analysis, while trying the best to balance the relationship between freedom of expression and social stability and cultural sensitivity.

2. Related Theories

2.1 Austin's Speech Act Theory

Austin's speech act theory emphasizes the revelation of the characteristics of language act that can cause specific effects, rather than merely using it as a tool to convey information. It distinguishes speech acts as three types: locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act. Locutionary act refers to the literal meaning of speech; illocutionary act refers to the behavior realized through speech, and perlocutionary act refers to the effect produced by speech. Austin's speech act theory reveals that speech act is not only a means of conveying information, but also a kind of actual action. The "non-relational view of expression" extends the concept of mental states beyond locutionary actions (e.g., language) to illocutionary acts (e.g., inner speech) by directly treating them as a component of the expressive act rather than as internal states existing independently of it [2]. Speech act theory provides a unique perspective for understanding the complexity of freedom of speech. Also, it is necessary to consider the multiple levels of speech act and its social impact. Freedom of speech is not only freedom of content, but also freedom to achieve intent and produce effect, which requires a balance between individual freedom of expression and social stability. For example, a politician giving a speech at a public meeting before an election and mentions negative information about his opponent. Such statements is are locutionary act, and the intention to blame the opponent and improve one's image are illocutionary acts, while the audience's reaction such as losing trust in the opponent is perlocutionary acts, showing the actual effect of speech acts.

2.2 Wittgenstein's Language Game

In Wittgenstein's later philosophical system, he put forward the concept of "language game." He believed that the meaning of language lies in its use and the usage and rules of language vary in different situations. In this theory, language does not have a common, specific and unique essence, but its forms are diverse. It is not determined by stimulus response, nor presented in a fixed essence. For example, the behavior of children learning their native language, calling something, repeating other people's words, and other behaviors are language games. In these activities, the word itself is not the end, but the means of the activity is the tool [3]. The meaning of words and statements is variable and uncertain, depending on their usage and rules in a particular context. Therefore, the use of language, including the use of the rules of the game, depends on the environment and changes. At the same time, Wittgenstein also emphasizes the sociality of language.

The usages and rules of language are not determined subjectively by a certain group of people but are shaped from the practice of daily life. Wittgenstein even proposed to refute the idea of private language and further emphasize the social nature of language [3]. For instance, in drama and performance, "break a leg" is an expression to wish a good luck. This is because in this particular language game, with simply saying "good luck" is considered as bad luck. While in everyday life it may be literally interpreted as "break a leg". Language game is influenced not only by specific situations, but also by culture and context. Understanding the rules of language use in different cultures and contexts allows for a fuller understanding of the complexity of free speech and the way that it operates in different social contexts.

2.3 Gadamer's Hermeneutics

Gadamer's hermeneutics emphasizes the historical and cultural nature of understanding. He pointed out that the one who understand is in a specific historical environment, historical condition and historical position different from the object of understanding, which will inevitably affect and restrict the understanding of text [4]. Instead of being negative, people's historical biases are an integral part of the process of understanding. Thus, not only does this pre-understanding constitute history, but also truth is gradually formed in this process. Gadamer possesses a very representative hermeneutic approach to poetic language. He takes a different strategy when it comes to poetic words, viewing their component parts as linguistic happenings. This is how the conception of poetic words both parallels and deviates from the common interpretation of modern lyricism's radical turn to language [4]. In Truth and Method, Gadamer reinterprets the occurrence of historical cognition and develops the notion of influenced historical consciousness [5].Gadamer proposes that understanding is a fusion of horizons. He believes that this is the interaction between subject and object, which means the fusion of horizon is the unity of the relationship between subject and object in consciousness [6]. This process is mainly focused on creating new and deeper understandings by preserving and respecting them.

In cross-cultural communication, fusion of horizons can help people find common ground and promote mutual understanding. For example, people from different countries intermingle their historical and cultural perspectives in discussions to reach a deeper understanding. Each person enters the communication with his or her own preconceptions and prejudices, which are not negative obstacles but rather starting points to the act of understanding. Through fusion of horizons, people can better understand these differences and thus facilitate more effective communication.

2.4 Analyzing Political Speech Through Three Theories

Taking political speech on social media as an example, during an important election in a country, a public figure made a comment on immigration policy on social media, which quickly triggered widespread discussion and controversy.

According to Austin's speech act theory, first of all, the speaker's remarks literally state some opinions about immigration policy, which is a locutionary act. For example, the speaker argued that "immigration policy will make the society more diverse." Second, by making the statement, the speaker will perform some kind of illocutionary act, such as a promise, a call, or a threat. The same phrase may be interpreted as a call to action in the pro-immigration community, and as a threat in the anti-immigration community. Finally, the widespread discussion and controversy caused by this statement is prelocutionary act. For example, supporters may be strengthened by this statement, and opponents may be more dramatically opposed. According to Austin's idea, a few prerequisites must be met for relating acts to be successful. The ability to communicate inner speech effectively must be in direct alignment with one's mental state, as opposed to via a relationship of middleman. This candor highlights how important expressive behavior—including inner speech—is to cognition and communication [2].

Wittgenstein's language game theory holds that the meaning of language lies in its use. Different user groups participated in discussions about immigration policy. Different rules show the diversity of language games. For example, groups that support immigration and groups that oppose immigration may use different words, giving them different meanings in different contexts. Also, the meaning of a language depends on the context in which it is used.Additionally, meaning is a standard for word use [7]. Therefore, examining the political motives and context of speech made in different occasions is a key factor in understanding the speech. In other words, even if a speaker makes the same speech at a pro-immigration rally and an anti-immigration rally, it can have different effects.

Gadamer's hermeneutics emphasizes that understand such a statement, it is necessary to place it in a specific historical and cultural context. If the comments were made at a time when immigration policy is highly sensitive, the impact and interpretation would be more complicated. As for the fusion of horizons, it is only when the listeners combines their own visions with that of the speaker, considering about speaker's background, intent, and social background, that they can truly understand what the speaker said. It means that a pro-immigrant audience and an anti-immigrant audience can interpret the same statement in completely different ways.

3. The Comparisons between Three Philosophers

The three philosophers share a common understanding of the critical role of context in the interpretation and application of freedom of speech, and all emphasize the role of context in understanding and practicing freedom of speech. All of them believe that both the speaker and the listener are actively involved in the communication process, influencing and shaping the meaning of the words. Specifically, Austin conducted a thorough investigation of the various forms, purposes, and outcomes of speech actions, stressing that speech is an act that has practical implications in addition to its function as a means of information transmission [8]. Wittgenstein uses "language games" to emphasize the inherent diversity of language use to illustrate how specific rules of language are applied in different cultural contexts [9]. Gadamer emphasizes the importance of the interpretive process, focuses on how historical and cultural contexts influence people's understanding of language, and has a deep understanding of the interpretive nature of communication.

An in-depth examination of these theories reveals that each offers unique insights while also facing specific limitations. Austen's speech act theory ignores the social background, resulting in a lack of discussion on the social history and cultural influence in the process of speech shaping. Wittgenstein's linguistic game theory ignores the challenges brought about by cross-cultural communication, especially the conflicts and integration difficulties that may arise when different languages converge. Gadamer's hermeneutics lacks the study of specific details of speech acts and is not clear enough in discussing the direct consequences of speech and the actual actions that speech may cause [10].

To sum up, these theories provide a multifaceted framework for understanding freedom of expression, while also revealing areas that require further exploration and integration to fully grasp the complexity of linguistic diversity and communication in an evolving social context.

4. Conclusion

The combination of these three concepts can effectively guide people to construct a more mature concept of freedom of speech. First of all, people can understand language in multiple dimensions by using the analytical framework of speech act theory, as well as in terms of direct influence and concrete actions. This division guarantees both freedom of expression in content and prac-

ticality and effectiveness. Secondly, the emphasis on the importance of cross-cultural language in language game theory ensures the flexibility of the freedom of expression of language in diverse situations. Finally, hermeneutics emphasizes the need to understand freedom of speech in terms of historical and cultural realities. In a multicultural society, these perspectives help to understand society in different cultures and contexts and to exercise freedom of expression.

By synthesizing the theories of Austin, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Hans-Georg Gadamer, this paper shapes a more comprehensive and flexible view towards freedom of speech. This will not only help to deal with the complexity of freedom of expression in the current era but will also promote dialogue and understanding between different cultures and perspectives, along with the cultural exchange based on freedom of expression. This contribution thus provides a comprehensive and effective framework for guaranteeing freedom of expression in a multicultural and complex social environment.

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