Schema Games - An Extension of Wittgenstein’s Language Games

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Methodological-epistemological Prologue

For more than three decades I developed a rather methodological philosophy of a comprehensive “schema-interpretationism” [1] including an epistemology, action theory as well as cognitive, social and cultural approaches. There is also a Kantian flavor involved - though more flexible than his categories and “schematism”.

Human beings do cognize and act only by schematizing, i.e. by activating or using schemes. They are essentially schematizing beings and even, characteristically, meta-schematizing creatures: they would not only use schemata but can and do also talk about such schemes, patterns, structures, frames, conceptual schemata, configurations, constructions etc. on higher meta-levels. Activating and using schemes may be understood as interpreting. Forming, activating, understanding and applying schemes in the widest possible sense, are processes, if structural or exploratory etc. These are interpretative activities (see diagram below) or even conscious goal-oriented or ritualized acts proper.

Thus, the human being is a (scheme) interpreting and the meta-interpreting being [2]. All actions are also schematized or structured by/in patterns, plans, rules, norms etc. Schema interpretations and interpretative constructs [3] are systematically connected and embedded in structured and interactive physical, biological, even physiological, networks and social environments. The approach is compatible with a perspectival realism [4] and with dynamic processes and procedures rather than static configurations. Cognition and actions are in general schema construction and scheme(s)-activations. Cognitive psychologists like Neisser [5] and Rumelhart [6] stress that “cognition is construction” and “Our schemata are our knowledge”; the schemes would be our “private theory” of (the “nature” of) “reality” - including normative patterning and action ‘know-how’. Schemata thus comprise all forms and possibilities of “grasping something” on any level of potential abstractions. They are and would be realized (even materialized) as/by active application - though with a realistic underpinning (see my Grasping Reality [7]). Without schematization and interpretative constructs no knowledge, no actions, no “grasping” (literally or figuratively)! That’s the basic methodological message or principle: All knowledge and action (or behavior) is shaped or impregnated by such processes of schematization and interpretative constructs. These “interpretative-schematizing activities” may be listed in a diagram - after [8] my 2000,2003,23. (There is also a diagram of the meta-levels of interpretations, ibid. 12, see Annex.)
Interpretive-schematizing Activities: Scheme-interpretations

constitutive
activating
constituting
inconscious triggering
forming
developing
differentiating
establishing
primary stabilizing

constructive or reconstructing activities
constructing

reconstructing activities

designing
attributing
projecting onto
varying
combining
organizing
and conscious
structuring

applying
(re-)projecting
carrying over
carrying out
explicit
structuring
and reconstructing
representing
imagining
cognizing
depicting

(re-)identifying
(re-)cognizing
reorganizing
and reattributing
instantiating
subsuming
sorting
classifying
understanding
reapplying

of and by schemata
by or according to schemata (structures or patterns etc.)

with regard to interpretation of texts
(hermeneutics):
reading, understanding (in the narrower sense)
re-identifying meanings
recognizing

Language games - life forms - schema Games

The later Ludwig Wittgenstein in his Philosophical Investigations (PI [9]) did not exactly define his concept of ‘language games’, but introduced it by describing examples (PI § 23) and circumscribing similar ones showing what he calls “family resemblances” without a thoroughgoing common essential trait (see, e.g., the general species concept of “games”, ib. § 67). He thus referred to language and “language games” in his notoriously wider perspective: that “das Sprechen einer Sprache ein Teil ist einer Tätigkeit, oder einer Lebensform” (“form of life”, ib. §23). He presented some rather diverse examples like “playing theatre”, “producing an object after a description (drawing)”, “representing results of an experiment by tables and diagrams” (all these and many others are examples of “language games”). Without needing an explanation such a “language game is (just, HL) played”: It is to be looked upon “as the primary!”
Wittgenstein’s concept of language games was/is indeed very useful to illustrate the general embedding of verbal representation in action contexts and “life forms”. But it does also invoke more general perspectives and philosophical problems referring to mental representations, scheme-interpretations, scheme-interpretive activities etc. (as listed above). Not only the traditional limitation of language to verbal speech is avoided but a general functionalistic approach or theory of procedures and means of representation can thereby be developed. To note, initially the proposal seemed to be limited itself to verbalism and behaviorism as well as external media and representation vehicles. However, it isn’t or at least shouldn’t be. It can and is to extended to virtual and imaginary and traditionally so-called “inner” or mental representations and references as well as social, institutionalized, normative, cultural and abstract, “higher”, reconstructions and focusing or identifying processes within a context or hierarchy of scheme-like networks. The more or even smooth or perfect attunement and gradually established coordination of physiological or even psychophysical learning processes etc. are characterized by playing-in and getting accustomed to or routinized with serial steps, rules and schema successions etc. in more or less systematic learning or self-organizing structures. There is also a socio-cultural fixing or developing process of finally well-coordinated schematic action and behavior patterns-even on neurophysiological and neurobiological sublevels in terms of adaptation, (at) tuning, controlling and getting into the “swing of things” by training, exercise and trying out - in short, by schema-learning. There is not only a “fixation of ideas” but also of scheme development and its well-functioning.

Schema games and the respective training and learning processes may in part be conceived of as some sort of “introjected” and socially attuned language games à la Wittgenstein within [10] deeply “socialized” (or societally impregnated) “life forms” and “institutionalized” “usages” (“Gebräuche”, “Gepflogenheiten”, “uses”, “customs”, PI § 198 f.).

Neuron assemblies and networks (as neuronal correlates of scheme-formations) are nowadays accessible by non-invasive procedures of checking and even control on the basis of the dynamic formation and stabilization of synapses and networks according to models [11,12].

In general, the wider concept of schema games may indeed, parallel to Wittgenstein’s language games, be useful and helpful for the pragmatic and use-oriented embedding and understanding of scheme activations in learning and behavior as well as action contexts and for the respective functional-dynamic explanation of the nonverbal forms of representation. Like the language games they show “family resemblances” and are related or involved in “life forms”, although they have a dynamic neuro-deep-structure on the micro-level and on the macro-level as patterns etc. They would also transcend the singularity of phenomena and single experiences towards a social anchoring and extension in a relatively flexible, but socially quasistabilized manner.

In and by schema games we construe (or unconsciously give) structure and relative stability plus re-identifiability to all our “grasplings” [13] - in our cognitions, perceptions, basic and social behavior as well as in our actions, in principle inseparable there from.

**Conclusion**

In summary, we can and should extend Wittgenstein’s concept of “games” from language games towards schema games - in order to integrate natural science and neuroscience results and hypotheses as well as transcend the terminologically too narrow “linguistic” model of language games. This is certainly along the lines that Wittgenstein had in mind when he identified language games with “small” “life forms”.

Humans are not only beings of descriptive and recursive language but in a more general sense they are also scheme-interpreting creatures, even the meta-interpreting beings always capable of ascending to an ever higher meta-level of conception, theory building and mental abstraction.
References


Annex

Diagram of the levels of interpretation

- **IS1**: Practically unchangeable productive primary interpretation ("Uninterpretation") (primary constitution or schematization, respectively)
- **IS2**: Habit-shaping, (equal) forms-constituting pattern or scheme-interpretation (ontogenetically habitualized form and schema categorization, i.e. preverbal concept-formation)
- **IS3**: Conventional concept formation transmitted by social, cultural and norm-regulated tradition
  - **IS3a**: by non-verbal cultural gestures, rules, norms, forms, conventions, implicit communicative symbols
  - **IS3b**: by verbal forms and explicitly representing communicative symbols, meta-symbols, meta-schemata etc.
- **IS4**: Applied, consciously shaped and accepted as well as transmitted classificatory (scheme-) interpretation (classification, subsumption, description by "sortals", generic formation of kinds, directed concept-formation)
- **IS5**: Explanatory and in the narrow sense "comprehending" ("verstehende"), justifying, theoretically or argumentatively substantiating interpretation, justificatory interpretation
- **IS6**: Epistemological (methodological) meta-interpretation (plus, cumulatively, meta-meta-interpretation etc.) of methods, results, instruments, conception of establishing and methodologically analysing interpretative constructs in turn

The different levels of interpretation are the following ones:
IS₁ comprises the practically unchangeable productive primary interpretations of primary constitution which might be represented by subconscious schema instantiation. They comprise the hereditarily fixed or genetically founded activation of selective schemata of sense perception (e. g. contrasts of dark and light etc.) as well as the interactive, selective activations of early ontogenetic developments like the stages of developmental psychology discussed by Piaget. Also comprised are the biologically hardwired primary theories which we cannot alter at will, but which we can (only) problematize in principle. For instance we have no magnetic sense or capacity to trace ultrasound like the bats. But we can conceive of conditions in which we could have these senses or at least devise technological means for substituting these.

On the second level we have the habitual, quality forming frame interpretations and schema categorisations as well as “categorizations” that are abstracted from pre-linguistic discriminatory activities, experiences of equality of shape, similarity of presentation and experience etc. Establishment and discriminatory capacity of pre-linguistic conceptualization and development of concepts about language is to be formed on this level.

On level IS₃ we have conventional concept formation, namely socially and cultural traditional conventions and norms for representation and forms of discriminatory activities like the explicit conceptualization of framing the world according to natural kinds etc. In so far as this is not related already to language differentiation we can think of a sublevel (IS₃a) on which pre-linguistic conventionalizations are characteristic. On the other hand (on IS₃b) we have the explicitly linguistic conventionalization or the differentiation of concepts by means of language.

Level 4 would comprise the consciously formed interpretations of embedding and subsuming as well as classifying and describing according to generic terms, kinds etc. It is the level of ordered concept formation and classification as well as ordering and subsumption.

Level IS₅ would go beyond that by rendering explanatory, or understanding and comprehending (“Verstehen”) interpretations as well as justifying theoretically argumentative interpretations in a sense of looking for reasons and grounds of justification. (These activities are certainly not only advanced in science and intellectual disciplines but in any case also in everyday life and common sense.) Any kind of a systematic comprehension within the compounds of theories, systems and overarching perspectives of integration is important here. Beyond that, however, we have also a level (IS₆) of the epistemological and philosophical as well as methodological interpretations of a meta-character, overarching and integrating the procedures of theory building and theory interpretation, methodology and the models of interpretation in the sense of methodological scheme-interpretationism itself. One could call this a meta-level of interpretation and explicitly speak of epistemological meta-interpretations. However, this level is cumulative and can be considered as being open towards further meta-levels. This model and approach of epistemological interpretationism is itself certainly an interpretable one and can be described and developed only on a certain respective meta-level which is to be seen within the level IS₆. Therefore, we have the possibility of a self-application of the interpretational method to interpretative procedures itself. The philosophy of schema interpretation is a philosophy of interpretative constructs as an epistemological model which admits of a certain kind of meta-theoretical and meta-semantical self-application in the form of a sort of “meta-interpretation”. This is certainly an asset and epistemological advantage compared to a few other epistemological approaches including critical rationalism after Popper, a theory which does not admit and conceive of the precise conditions of being falsified itself. The human being is indeed the “meta-interpreting being” (cf. my 1995), capable of ascending to ever higher meta-levels of (scheme-interpretation).

If we use these levels and meta-levels of interpretational constructs we can reinterpret many of the traditional philosophical problems and reformulate them with respect to the relationship between different interpretational levels as mentioned.

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