LANGUAGE AND CONTEXTUALISM: A BALANCE RATIONALE FOR KNOWLEDGE –CLAIM

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at comparing the two concepts – Language and contextualism by investigating the interrelationship between them. It starts by analyzing Timo Airaksinen and David Annis version of contextualism and the nature of language as it affects human cognition. Thus, the central argument of this paper is that this contextualism which upholds that what we know is relative to a context is also found within the content of language. Language is contextual just as epistemic justification is context dependent as acclaimed by the contextualists. As knowledge according to them is ultimately dependent on some human and social factors rather than being objective as it is the case of the traditional western thought, so also, language is for human and for social purpose instead of being objective which is so common with the traditional theories of meaning. This paper further proclaims that language and justification have things in common as one cannot do without the other in knowledge –claim. Hence, epistemic –justification is absolutely limited with language.

Keywords: *Language, Contextualism, Justification, Knowledge, Meaning.*

INTRODUCTION
It all started with the problem of knowledge which has been a universal one in philosophy. The demand for what man can say about the certitude of human knowledge therefore brought the question of justification to the forefront. The traditional epistemology has been dominated by two theories of justification, foundationalism and coherentism. Foundationalism affirms that beliefs can be justified on the basis of self justifying beliefs. It is of the view that if any beliefs are to be justified, there must be some intuitive beliefs. Intuitive beliefs refer to such beliefs whose truth or credibility is not inferred from some other belief or beliefs. It is

true that some other beliefs are certainly justified by inference to others; this however is only if these other beliefs are themselves established or well confirmed. Every belief cannot, in any case, be dependent on others; otherwise no belief would be justified since it would require an infinite series of beliefs. Thus, for any belief to be justified, a class of basic, non – inferential beliefs is required to terminate the regress of justification. While coherentism considers justification as being a matter of investigating whether a belief is consistent with the system to which it belongs. It is the traditional alternative to the doctrine of foundations. The theory of coherence argues that self –justification does not make sense in the process of acquiring knowledge. There is no belief that can stand alone without some propositions: beliefs always work holistically as a system. Holistic justification extricates the regress problem, so for coherentism regress problem does not arise. Therefore, all justification, in a sense, is inferential and systematic.

Contextualism however denies that there are basic statements in the foundationalists sense and that Coherence is sufficient for justification. Contextualism is the view that what we know is relative to a context. It refers to certain futures like intensions and presupposition of the members of a conventional situation. This future determines under what standards, claims are taken to count as knowledge[1]. According to contextualism, both theories overlook contextual parameters essential to justification. They see knowledge as something holistic which has made their theory of justification a problematic. Knowledge is not holistic and should not have a particular rule or means of acquiring nor arriving at reality. Consequently, in this paper, Timo Airaksinen and David Annis version of contextualism[2] are to be analyzed and juxtaposed with language –context as they relate to epistemic justification.

David Annis' Contextualism
In his theory of epistemic justification, he is of the view that there is no basic statement as against the foundationalists. He affirms that knowledge is not holistic and as such, it is always open in every situation for doubt. What is knowledge for Mr**. A** may not necessary be the same with Mr. B. Each of any epistemic justification has a certain goal to establish. One must not be a hindrance to the other in achieving its proper goal. He maintains that one epistemic goal can be considered reasonably for accepting some statement but in a related case it may be different. "Two of our epistemic goals are having true beliefs and avoiding having false

beliefs"[3]. Every other epistemic goal is assured to be subsidiary to the goals of truth and the avoidance of error. If after a verification of one's belief and it occurred to be true then the knowledge is said to be justified. But in contrary to it, it is said to be false beliefs and as a result should be declared non –justification of knowledge. Giving some instances, he has it that:

> If a person S claims that some statement h is true, we may object (A) that S is not in a position to know that h or (B) that he is false. Consider (A). Suppose we ask S how he knows that h and he responds by giving us various reasons ei, ez...., en for the truth of h. We may object that one of his reasons ei –en is false, ei –en does not provide adequate support for h, S's specific reasoning from ei –en to h is fallacious, or that there is evidence i such that the conjunction of ei –en and i does not provide adequate support for h. These objections may be raised to his reasons for ei –en as well as to his responses to our objections[4].

There are in some cases also where the person is not expected to state reasons for his claim. But then, objection can still be raised knowing too well that there is no knowledge acclamation that is beyond objection. At times one may not meet any objection at the moment but in subsequent time new evidence may be discovered possibly as a result of advances in scientific knowledge. As such, both the person and the objector/s would be in a better epistemic position to tackle the problem. The person will have a new evidence to respond to the objections while the objector will as well be in a better position to the objection (or his argument). Knowledge is always in a developing stage. So is epistemic justification is not forever bound in it. Any objective and answers to be raised should always base on the current evidence available. The future ones will take care of themselves.

Objections are prone to occur in various situations. An objection can occur as a result of real life situation. But if the objection is coming from one local situation, it must not be opposed to global. This is because "global objections call into question the totality of beliefs held at a certain time or a whole realm of beliefs. Whereas local objections call into question a specific belief"[5]. In other words, it is not strictly per say that a real situation may not occur that will prompt a global objection, but that the give and take is based on the real objections and responses.

Moreso, Annis proclaims that the justificatory status of a person's belief depends on certain social practices and norms of justification. Therefore, epistemic justification is relative to issue –context simply because a person may be justified in believing a given proposition, but not justified in believing this proposition in another context. As an instance, he states:

> When asking whether S is justified in believing h, this has to be considered relative to an issue –context. Suppose we are interested in whether Jones, an ordinary non –medically trained person, has the general information about Polio is caused by a virus. If his response to our question is that he remembers the paper reporting that Salk said it was, then this is good enough. He has performed adequately given the issue –context. But suppose the context is an examination for M.D. degree. Here we expect a lot more. If the candidate simply said what Jones did, we would take him as being very deficient in knowledge. Thus relative to one issue –context a person may be justified in believing h but not justified relative to another context[6].

Epistemic justification according to Annis should therefore depend on the exact context and situation that led to the knowledge. The justification you give to an epistemic claim cannot be said to be the same in every situation. Instead the social nature of justification permits a diverse justification depending on the context or situation that is calling for the justification of the particular knowledge. From the example stated above, it is obvious that Jones needs a weak justification for his knowledge of Polio in the first situation, whereas the same Jones needs stronger justification of his knowledge of Polio when he is being examined for the "degree of doctor of medicine". Therefore the situation of Jones has changed from being an ordinary person to that of an expert who needs to justify more convincingly his knowledge claim.

He affirms further that man is a social animal of which is a fact. But "when it comes to the justification of beliefs philosophers tend to ignore this fact". He suggests that philosophers should rather consider the justification of beliefs in accordance with the specific issue –context. He is also of the view that justification theory should be naturalized by considering the justification of beliefs via the actual social practices and norms that led to the knowledge. Annis makes a reference that the need to naturalize justification theory is not only of his own voice, it has been recognized in recent philosophy of science like the positivists. But despite

all these, it is still not a criterion for accepting every epistemic justification objectively. It can be criticized at any point in time provided it could not meet up to the epistemic goals. Hence:

> From the fact that justification is relative to the social practices and norms of a group, it does not follow that they cannot be criticized nor that justification is somehow subjective. The practices and norms are epistemic and hence have as their goals truth and the avoidance of error. In so far as they fail to achieve these goals they can be criticized[7].

In effect, Annis proclaims that contextualism is different from foundationalism and coherentism. The two theories accused each other of the infinite regress argument and the denial of basic statement respectively. But in the case of contextualism, the regress and the basic statements are not criteria for epistemic justification. There is no specific or a constituted rule for having epistemic justification in contextualism unlike foundationalism and coherentism. Contextualism is interested on the situation that is calling for the knowledge. There will be no infinite regress of reasons or arguments provided the objector –group is satisfied. It is either the objector –group does not require the person to have reasons for his belief in order to be in a position to have knowledge and accept his claim (i.e., basic statement) or that he required reasons and eventually accepted his claim (i.e., coherentism). Any of the above situations can give knowledge in as much as the person is able to meet up to the standard. Thus, he concludes, "if an appropriate objector-group, the members of which are critical truth seekers, have no real doubts in the specific issue –context, then the person's belief is justified. The belief has withstood the test of verifically motivated objectors"[8].

Timo Airaksinen's Contextualism

In his article titled *Five Types of Knowledge,* Timo Airaksinen is also in support of a contextual theory of knowledge. His position is that knowledge is multidimensional. His implicit assumption is that since the world is diverse, the knowledge of it will also be diverse. He argues therefore that there are many types of knowledge and goes on to name five. The five types of knowledge are only to indicate that there are many approaches to knowledge, many criteria for justifying the diverse epistemic claims. No single criterion or any type of knowledge can ever be adequate for justifying the multifarious knowledge claims that people can make. Hence, he asserts that:

> We have mutually independent criteria we can prove really apply in their respective situations. It is important to see that in these situations they succeed in their common task equally well. If one were more successful than the other (i.e., reached a higher level of certainty) then we would say that one alone would lead to knowledge at all. All this should become much clear once we have a concrete model of an epistemic situation in front of us and when we have an opportunity to try out its applicability with respect to some examples[9].

An assessment of the above justification will have to depend heavily on the account that both the source of knowledge, vary from one type of knowledge to another. In respect of this, he gives the types of knowledge as: (1)   Perceptual   knowledge (2)   Coherence   knowledge(3)   Accepted   knowledge (4)   Learned   knowledge (5)   Ecological knowledge None of the knowledge so far can be suitable for justifying one another. Each of the criteria is independent of its linage. Thus, he says:

> A perceptual criterion – *gives* Perceptual knowledge;
> A coherence criterion – *gives* Coherence knowledge;
> An acceptance criterion – *gives* Accepted knowledge;
> A learning criterion – *gives* Leaned knowledge;
> An ecological criterion – *gives* Ecological knowledge[10].

Meanwhile, knowledge should always be seen as different in nature, origin and justification. The way a knowledge 'A' would be justified will be different from the way a knowledge of 'B' that is different in nature from 'A' would be justified. Every knowledge claim should be seen as unique and the justification of it should respect the independence and the contextual nature of this knowledge in the light of the context that gave birth to it.

Presenting the importance of using one type of knowledge to justify the same parameter of knowledge –kind, Airaksinen clarifies the nature of each type of knowledge. He maintains that perceptual knowledge is a kind of knowledge in which the knowledge –claim is based on sense perception. It involves the five sensory organs. Its knowledge can either be from seeing, feeling, hearing smelling or testing. The background of information within this type of knowledge "contains information derived from memory and learning, and also knowledge of one's own intentions and actions"[11]. The criterion for a perfect or a higher certainty of

knowledge –claim here is simply by perception. For the second or third person to intermediate and give epistemic justification of this type of knowledge is where the proposition itself is perceptual and the person epistemically accepts it just for that reason. Self-warranting knowledge (one man's knowledge) can as well be accepted as a justified belief if there is no person objecting the knowledge claim. Such knowledge can come when the person is alone. Yet it can be rejected because it looks too empty to justify a self –existing knowledge. In his own words:

> We might indeed think of a self warranting proposition as being certain because there is no error –including middle term mediating in the process of construction and subsequent justification of datum; but we might as well regard a perceptual truth –claim as uncertain because it sounds circular and vacuous to say that P is justified because of the existence of P itself[12].

It is only in this issue –context that such knowledge can be admitted as true. Even though, one may deny the possibility of the knowledge claim. But it is not proper to assume that nobody can know anything if he is alone somewhere, whereby, his perception is the only data source available. So, perceptual knowledge is obtainable but not in another type of knowledge. Coherence knowledge on the other side is a knowledge based on a certain system of statement. A statement is justified if and only if it coheres with a certain kind of system of statements. Here the epistemic situation has changed from that of perceptual knowledge. A new type of truth –criterion is used. The data source becomes the most reliable or relevant "information" concerning his target –propositions. In this case the person applies some special reasoning methods to his data to enable him arrive at knowledge –claim. The criterion for epistemic justification in this knowledge is more of having maximal consistent information. So the coherence knowledge is saying that one can know even if no direct perceptions are available to him in the situation. But then:

> The feeling of threatening error which seems to follow the application of coherence –criterion arises perhaps from our instinctive tendency to construe merely as a modified perceptual one: we imagine that in place of (say) verbal reports we would have egocentric perceptions[13].

This indicates that if one really forgets the context of the problem to be studied he is bound to get a result that coherence is inferior to perception. This happens because in a coherence –context, the element of knowledge claim can also be imagined to be dependent on some immediate, self – warranting perceptions, whereas in a perceptual context no such alternative, essentially simplifying knowledge –claim seem to be available. And if coherence knowledge should posses an imaginary return to perception then it must be a failure because "too much of our knowledge will be unavailable and I cannot be shown that even perception would be always and it cannot everywhere an ideally reliable"[14] knowledge claim. In spite of the above problem there is still a strong belief for achieving coherence knowledge.

Accepted knowledge according to Airaksinen is centered on a belief gotten from a data –source that has no opposing information at that particular point in time. The data source/s can either be from persons or written documents. Unlike the coherence knowledge where a variety of data may arise for the person to reason about and draw the necessary epistemic justification, accepted knowledge appears to be dogmatic; a situation where the criterion of truth is just that the person believes his data –sources. Airaksinen gives an illustration like, if someone who does not know anything about astronomy decided to know whether the sun is larger than the earth. Eventually he finds a text book which states that the sun is larger. The person will have to accept really that the data –source is true. Provided the background of the information must say something about the overall situation where the target –proposition is embedded, the person has every right to accept the knowledge –claim as truth. In other words, "in Accepted knowledge a simple acceptance is to be used as a knowledge –constituting criterion of truth"[15]. But it is still not true or a guarantee that all the written documents do really convey a true message (knowledge). Besides, not all scientific view is true, therefore one cannot adopt a strict view.

However, in the case of learned knowledge, one has to undergo a certain process of learning before he will claim to have knowledge. This is what makes a difference between learned knowledge and other types of knowledge. He introduces the following examples thus:

> (E₁) My telephone number is xxx, where xxx is a unit – segment larger than the human immediate memory span, i.e., more than six or seven units. (E₂) "The road from the

> university to my home is shaped like this ~" (No map is available to S)[16].

The statements above demonstrate that the other types of knowledge (perceptual, coherence, and accepted knowledge) cannot go by the above examples. Going by example one (E_1), one cannot know a series of numbers like that of telephone numbers which may not be less than eleven digits through the use of perceptual knowledge. As a matter of fact, the use of perceptual knowledge and accepted knowledge is blocked. Even coherence knowledge is out of the knowledge in question. This implies that for one to say "I know that my number is xxx" implying that he has *learned* his number, he remembers it, and he therefore knows that it is xxx"[17]. This is an epistemic situation where the person has undergone a process of learning and has a certain knowledge of it.

Likewise, the second example shows fully that the person has a knowledge claim. In (E_2), for one to say: **"*the road from the university to my home is shaped like this ~"*** means that the person drives on the same road to and fro on daily basis. For Airaksinen therefore:

> What we have here are both an epistemically justifying criterion of knowledge and an independent sign of knowledge whose mutual relationship can be expressed, roughly, by saying that the criterion justifies S's belief to the effect that he really can produce, at will, the situationally relevant sign of knowledge[18].

Justification of knowledge though not only of this present type, does come up naturally from the various considerations. The criterion for learned knowledge stands so certain to justify any knowledge claim within the issue –context. Ecological theory of knowledge according to Airaksinen happens to man in his ordinary real –life epistemic situations. It is the type at which one experiences confusion in attempt to make an epistemic justification. He maintains that one can be in a situation where he has used his cognition correctly, still his knowledge –claim is in danger of turning out to be false, viz., if the meeting – objection or problem is suitably extended. At times issues are being contradicted to the fact that one hardly affirms the reality of the event. Just as one who is directly involved in occasion of an event may be confused to accept that which was originally true to become false. Giving an instance of the peculiar case, Airaksinen writes:

> S sees a pen on the table but then somebody comes in and says that it was only a trick affected by means of mirror. S now allegedly knows that there is not a pen on the table. But then it occurs to S that perhaps the conjurer himself is wrong and the trick was not in fact successful; that would mean that the pen is there and S's original proposition is true[19].

The above example directs man's attention to the role of refutation of truth –claims in his epistemic life. However, the person in question first believes that the pen on the table is true because he sees it but then somebody presents information that contradicts his original belief. Airaksinen is saying that why the person in question could not withstand his claim is because he did not make use of any justifying criteria of truth. The person accepted the new refutation as a mistake unconditionally (without any use of criteria). Yet, for Airaksinen, the very person is still entitled to suspect the validity of the refutation since it is a question of proposition which he has already accepted as a truth and of a new, merely suggested alternative to it. He does not need to conclude within himself that the alteration is the final truth and as such becomes certain knowledge.

He further states that some attempted refutations of original knowledge –claim should be accepted if there is a change in the epistemic situation in which the person is located as such will make him to evaluate the new proposition by a new application of a criterion of truth. But a situation whereby the person is strictly adhered to his original knowledge claim just because he is quite sure that the criterion he applied is correct, then he cannot be refuted. He affirms it thus;

> As I see it, the main problem which emerges here is that if S maintains his original P because it satisfied a correctly applied criterion he actually knows P and if he knows no further information or truth –claim can harm him, i.e., refute P[20].

Yet one might ask, since knowledge is always tied to an epistemic context does it mean that such issue context is so rigidly determined that no epistemic relativity of knowledge claims can possibly exist? But Airaksinen has it that "the set of data *D* which *S* possesses in the context cannot be fixed once and for all but allows for a certain flexibility in the original selection –process and complementation of its items[21]. After all, in ordinary –life situations, it is sometimes impossible to fix the individual

propositions either which a coherence should be established or whatsoever. And in ecological view, there is no special criterion or rule for epistemic justification. Therefore, the idea behind this ecological theory of knowledge is to explicate that an ordinary real –life epistemic situation is not bound in any formidable criterion of truth. But when objections, refutations or problems arise, they can only disappear when one noticed that an epistemic situation is firmly anchored to the moment of time at which the criterion is originally used. Above all, "it is indeed possible to reach epistemic certainty, in a strictly limited sense, by using one of the several existing epistemic method of justification"[22]. Any of the methods can be used to acquire knowledge in any situation at a particular point in time. But where the validity of already established knowledge – claim is to be extended to a new situation, Airaksinen suggests that ecological criterion should be used (since ecological knowledge has no specific criterion or rule for epistemic justification). This means that no epistemic element will be able to conform to the totality of knowledge – claims. Therefore all knowledge –claims should be ready to meet one refutation or the other.

NATURE AND THE MENTAL PHENOMENA OF LANGUAGE

Language is so much a part of our everyday life that we usually take it for granted and seldom stop to think what remarkable skills are involved in its use. When we are faced with the problem of justification and expression of thought, language becomes the catalyst for freeing from the obscurity. It can be said that language is the vehicle through which one express the relationship between his thought and reality. According to Alston in P. Edwards (ed), the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* Language is essentially seen as "an instrument for the communication of thought, and thought consists of a succession of ideas in consciousness"[23]. In the ordinary day to day life, language is applied to observe what the case is, make general statements about what is observed and frame hypotheses to help man deduce yet other ramifications of the issue in question. Chambers 20th century Dictionary in respect of this has the definition of language as:

> Human speech: a variety of speech or body of words and idioms, especially of a nation: mode of expression: dictum: any manner of expressing thought or feeling: an artificial system of signs and symbols, with rule for forming intelligible communications, for use in e.g. a computer[24].

The definition above implies that language comprises a lot of things about human cognition. Since the meaning of a statement or speech depends on the structure of the language in which it functions.

Language has the following characteristic among others. First, language is universal in the sense that every man has one language or the other to speak. Even the deaf and dumb uses 'sign –language' for their communication. More so, the meaning of language depends upon the cultural background of the language. For instance, the idioms and proverbs are always peculiar to every language speaking. And thirdly, language is contextual. There are some words –utterance, noise etc, that have meaning in some language and do not in others. It can be said therefore that sounds, signs and meaning depends on issue –context.

Before going in details the crux of this write up, the question to be examined should be: What has language got to do with epistemic – justification? What is the possibility of proving one's belief without the use of language? Does language and justification (of knowledge) have things in common? Can one do without the other in terms of knowledge –claim? If justification requires language, it must be psychologically realistic to think that even when one is alone, one is thinking and thinking involves language. Therefore, it is obvious that language and thought are but one and the same mental activity. Just as justification which is synonymously a reason (a rational thinking) is inseparable from language. However, to an inner silent speech, thought is reduced to language. The ancient Greeks, for instance use the same *noyoc* (Logos) to refer both the language and thought. The term *Logos* signifies both word (speech, language, statement, discussion, discourse) and thought (concept, reason, sense, science). Every scientific study or discourse about the nature and laws of the universe is called *Logos*. Although the term *logos* is contextual since its use is diverse and has undergone some changes, this term always retains the unity (if not identity) of language and thought. But (in philosophy), *logos* is used in contrast to *mythos* (myth), for in *logos* word and reason go together. *Logos* is science, it is study. Commenting on this particular type of usage of the term *Logos* among the ancient Greeks, Thomas Hobbes has it that "the Greeks have but one word *noyoc* for both speech and reason, not that they thought there was no speech without reason, but no reasoning without speech"[25]. The use of the term *logos* among the Greeks, therefore, implies that for them there is a very narrow relationship between language and thought. This relationship is so narrow for them that they almost identify the two mental activities. If

the position of Hobbes on the use of *logos* among the Greeks is correct (of which it is), it means then that for the Greeks thought is not possible without language and vice versa. In short, the two are one and the same thing.

Plato carries the identity of language and thought to its final conclusion. He describes thinking as a *discussion* which the mind conducts with itself, a discussion in which the mind asks itself questions and answers them, in which the mind asserts and denies. Thinking for Plato is nothing but discussing, only that it is a silent discussion in the mind[26]. In another dialogue, Plato says that thought is "the same thing as speech except that is the mind's inner silent talking to itself"[27]. In this sense, we not only think in language, thinking itself is but internal speech (a sotto voice). It is speech minus sound. Even belief, for Plato, is done in language. Why we have philosophy is simply because we have language for "if we were without it (language) we would be without philosophy"[28]. Plato thus reduces thought to language.

However, the above analysis has averred that language is a mental phenomenon. It is essentially seen as an instrument for communication of thought, trying to express the reality by observing what the case is, making judgments about what is observed and framing hypotheses to help deduce yet other ramifications of the issue in question. Language comprises a lot of things about human cognition including the justification of knowledge –claim. Besides, part of justification is found within the philosophy of language. In philosophy of language, there are different theories about the nature and criteria of meaning. When a person says that he knows the meaning of a symbol, or a word, what is it that he claims to know? Or rather, what does a person know when he knows the meaning of a word? In other side, under what conditions do two linguistic expressions (two words) have the same meaning –the problem of synonyms? Under what conditions are we justified in saying that a word has two different senses in two different contexts? Due to the problems associated to the use of "meaning", philosophy have proposed to address some theories of meaning like referential theory, ideational theory, behavioral theory (which mainly are the traditional theories of meaning) and the use theory. But the problem of each of the three traditional theories of meaning is that of oversimplification. (1) The referential theory is the view that each meaningful unit is connected with something distinct and concrete in the extra –linguistic world. (2) Ideational theory

is a supposition that each meaningful unit has a fixed association with a particular "idea" or "sensory image". (3) Behavioral theory seems to be a search for a regular stimulus –response association in which words figure. The last two theories seem to suggest that the meaning of word is to be identified with something that happens every time it is used. Thus, we have to look for what Roger Brown calls "click of comprehension". This "click of comprehension" is to be found either in the mind (ideational theory) or in the overt behavior (behavioral theory) of he who understands the meaning of the word. The common problem of the traditional theories of meaning is that they seem generally to believe that a meaning is a sort of entity; an object, an idea or a definite overt behavioral, as the case may be. It is not word with any entity not already specified within the language as a meaning.

However, we have from the traditional theories of meaning, gained some insight into the nature of language and meaning. Referential theory teaches that language is used to talk about the extra –linguistic world. Ideational theory brings to our awareness that language somehow expresses our thoughts and ideas. While the behavioral theory makes us know that words have meaning by virtue of the way they figure in a human behavior. Thus far, among the traditional theories, emphasis is on the use theory of meaning because of the interrelationships between language and contextualism. The use theory of meaning was popularized by Ludwig Wittgenstein. The theory implies that meaning is context – dependent because a word derives its meaning from how it is used, given a speaker –hearer situation. According to Wittgenstein, the meaning of a word or a linguistic expression is its use, "the meaning of a word is its use in language"[29]. From this stand of Wittgenstein comes the general saying as we have it today: "meaning is use", or "Don't look for the meaning, look at the use". For him, therefore, "look at the sentence as an instrument and at its sense (meaning) as its employment (use)"[30].

Wittgenstein is against any view that suggests that the meaning of a word is an entity. Such a view is a misunderstanding of the term 'meaning'. On this Wittgenstein writes:

> It is important to note that "meaning" is being used illicitly if it is used to signify the thing that 'corresponds' the meaning of a name with the bearer of the name[31].

The meaning of a word according to him, therefore, is to be sought and found in its use. Thus, he rejects ostensive definition - defining a word by pointing to the object the word refers to. He rejects ostensive definition on two major grounds. In the first place, ostensive definition is misleading to the person who has not got the meaning of the word within a language game. For example, if 1 point to a black book in order to explain the word "black", means, the person could understand from my pointing the following: "book", "book cover", "thick object", "colour", "coluored object", "black", "flat surface", etc. Therefore, although ostensive definition works in some cases, it is not a definitive method of defining because "ostensive definition can be variously interpreted"[32].

By ostensive definition, the learner can sometimes guess the meaning right and sometimes wrong[33]. The second reason why Wittgenstein rejects ostensive definition is that it is not applicable in all cases, like in the following words: "time", "meaning", "foresight", "therefore", etc. Another way people try to explain the meaning of a word is by verbal definition. This however, gets us no further for, simply because it takes us from verbal expression to another, leading us either to a vicious circle or to infinite regress.

How then do we get at the meaning of a word: it is according to Wittgenstein, by getting at its use: "if we had no name anything which is the life of a sign, we should have to say that it is its use" (Blue Book, P.1). Pointing out in what consist the meaning of a word, Wittgenstein rhetorically asks: "But doesn't the fact that sentences have the same sense consist in their having the same use?"[34]. Hence, it should be noted here that Wittgenstein is not saying that the term "meaning" is synonymous with the term "use". By the use of a word he means the special circumstance, the surroundings, in which the word is used. The meaning of a word is to be determined in the language –game in which it plays a part. Hence the meaning of word is its use or its employment or its application.

Above all the contextual nature of language simply entails that the meaning of a word is determined mainly by the way the word is normally used in a linguistic community. Words are public property, just as language itself. It is a fundamental mistake to say that one gives certain intention or purpose or that the words one uses lose their meaning if one misuses them. A word is a common possession of the linguistic

community, and it has by virtue of some general facts about what goes on in that community, and the way the community members normally use the word. It is in this sense that Wittgenstein denies the possibility of private language[35].

LANGUAGE AND CONTEXTUALISM: A JUXTAPOSITION

Language and contextualism are two different concepts that are not in any way categorical in nature in terms of lexical definition. But from the foregoing, it is observed that language and contextualism are of the same coin in giving epistemic justification. They have a common character and perform a common role for knowledge –claim. It is believed here that language has some influence on contextualism as the contextualists cannot talk about justification of knowledge without the use of language, while language has some certain implicit ideas that support the idea of contextualism. In the first place, the theory of contextualism emphasizes that whatever we know is relative to a context and that epistemic justification should be dependent on issue –context. It implies that if *justification* is seen from a contextualized standpoint, more attention to the actual process of epistemic justification might be in order.

Just as epistemic justification is claimed to be contextual, language is also contextual. The contextual nature of language remains that every language has meaning. Without meaning, language will be useless. Meaningfulness must meet some criteria, and the plausibility of the criteria depends on the context of the language uses that is why some words have meaning in some language and do not in others. Given a speaker –hearer situation meaning is context –dependent because a word derives its meanings from how it is used.

What is obvious is that language (or words) can only be meaningful when it is drawn from a particular context, just as epistemic justification is claimed to be based on issue –context by the contextualists. Both language and contextualism is interconnected. For example when one says that he knows something, his belief should be justified based on the "language –context". What is meant by *language –context* is the way or how a word is being used. The word "know" could be used in various ways, and the justification of what a person claimed to know should be coming from the angle (context) of his usage. In the words of A.J. Ayer:

> The argument therefore depends upon considerations of
> language; in the present instance upon the ways in which we

> use or propose to use, the verb "to know". But this does not mean that it is an argument about words, in a trivial sense, or that it especially tied to the English language. We are concerned with the work that the word "know" does, not with the fact that it is this particular word that does it. It is for this reason that we can spare ourselves a sociological investigation into the ways in which people actually do use words[36].

In addition, Wittgenstein is not out of the range when he says that understanding the meaning of any word means understanding how it is used in a *language game* and doing this also requires understanding the rules of the language in question. For instance:

> We can think of the whole process of using words... as one of those games by means of which children learn their native language. I will call these games "Language games" and will sometimes speak of primitive language as a language game. And the process of naming the stones and repeating words after someone might also be called language games. Think of much of the use of words in games like ring –a- ring a rose, I shall also call the whole, consisting of language and actions into which it is woven, the language games[37].

Bertrand Russell also holds the same view about the meaning of words. Words are used in many ways: in narrative, in request, in command, in imaginative function, and so on"[38]. Words do not mean any specific thing, but have many meanings depending on the way and the circumstances (Contexts) they are used. The language game or the universe of discourse in which a word is used plays some role in determining the meaning of the word. In line with this view, Russell writes:

> In the meaning of a sentence, there are three psychological elements: the environmental causes of uttering it, the effects of hearing it, and..... the effects which the speaker expects it to have on the hearer[39].

On the surface, however, the relationship between language and contextualism seems perfect clear. Language is used for clarification of thought and justification of beliefs. Language is indispensible in giving epistemic justification. To pass judgment even within oneself cannot take place without the use of language. The possibility of acquiring knowledge is not there without the use of language. In the words of Omoregbe,

"Language is the matrix within which thoughts are formed and knowledge acquired. Without language we can neither form thoughts nor acquire knowledge"[40]. Since it is not possible for one to live without language, it implies that one must belong to any community –language where he should be able to use and understand the standard of epistemic justification in a given context. According to Timo Airaksinen:

> It is also possible to maintain that since S is supposed to be able to use and understand the epistemic language, he is also able to use the proper criteria of knowledge in a given context. That is, epistemic justification and the use, or the pragmatics of the epistemic language are tied together[41].

Taken together, the contextualism of this version (i.e., David Annis and Timo Airaksinen) has advocated that knowledge is ultimately depends on some human and social factors rather than being objective as it is the case in the traditional western thought. For them therefore, the justification status of a person's belief depends on certain social practices and norms of justification. Meanwhile, language is at the same time restricted to human beings which is the chief distinguishing feature of the human species, since all normal human infants acquire language at an early stage in life. While the social aspects of language are primarily concerned with its social function, in the sense that, the speaker and the listener must operate on the basis of a shared meaning. Language is for social purposes. It is because man is a social being that God has endowed him with language as a means of communicating with his fellow men. In the social context however, language is not only a means of communication but also it is a means of creating and maintaining social relationship among speakers of the language. In effect, language has many functions and classifications which in all depend on its ways of use. It is a system of discrete signs that serve to communicate and express the totality of person's ideas of the surrounding reality including the justification of knowledge –claim.

Furthermore, the contextualists reject the traditional theories of epistemic justification –foundationalism and coherentism, simply because they see knowledge as something holistic which has made their theory of justification a problematic. But for them, knowledge is not holistic and should not have a particular rule or means of acquiring nor arriving at reality. Similarly, language as a mental and social phenomenon outweighs the traditional theory of meaning in language. The common problem of

the traditional theories of meaning is that they seem generally to believe that a meaning is a sort of entity, an object, an idea or definite overt behavior, as the case may be. It is not possible to identify the meaning of a word with any entity not already specified within the language as a meaning. Rather, the plausibility of the criteria depends on the context of the language uses that is why some words have meaning in some language and do not in others.

David Annis affirms that epistemic justification cannot be said outside a particular or specific community of people. Epistemic justification according to him is context dependent on the social practices and norms of justification in accordance with the life standard with the life standard of different communities. Different communities have their way of living and their standards of justifying a knowledge –claim. This happens simply because every community of people gives justification of knowledge as a result of their real life situation. It is not realistic however, to have a global standard of living, a totality of beliefs, and the global uniformity of norms of justification. Every justification should therefore be given within the community of people where individuals belong. This will help to give a satisfactory explanation to whatever objections one is likely going to meet. According to him:

> To determine whether S is justified in believing h we must consider the actual standards of justification of the community of people to which he belongs. More specifically we determine whether S is justified in believing h by specifying an issue – context raised within a community of people G with certain social practices and norms of justification. This determines the level of understanding and knowledge S is expected to have and the standard he is to satisfy. The appropriate objector – group is a subject of G. to be justified in believing h, S must be able to meet their objections in a way that satisfies their practices and norms[42].

In line with the above notion, it is still obvious that words or language are concerned with knowledge –claim and they are being used by human community. It is human community that determines their meanings and these meanings change when necessary due to certain exigencies in the human community. Language used by any speech community changes in many ways, including the location of new words, abandonment of old words, changed word meanings developed by segments of community

(society), and the influx of words from the mixing of culture. As a matter of fact, the meaning of a word is created and controlled by the way a word is used in a linguistic community. The meaning of words is in people, not in the words themselves. And so, language is context dependent by the virtue of some general facts about what goes on in the community, and the way the community members normally use the word.

Moreover, Timo Airaksinen has testified that epistemic justification depends heavily on the account that both the source of knowledge, as well as the method of justification of knowledge vary from one type of knowledge to another. For him, knowledge appears different in nature, origin and justification. As such, every knowledge claim should be seen as unique and the justification of it should respect the independence and the contextual nature of this knowledge in the light of the context that gave birth to it. Consequently, this is applicable to language. Language (or speech) community also vary in the words that they use, and they also vary in how words are put together to form communications. The structure a communication takes depends on the rules of grammar and syntax that have evolved in a particular language community. For example, in English a sentence must have at least a subject (a noun or pronoun) and a predicate (a verb). To make a statement in English, the subject is placed before the predicate.

In another development, contextualism has emphasized also that absolutely certain knowledge is unattainable to man, that at best what man can have is a knowledge, the certainty of which is temporary and limited to the exact situation that generates it. That is to say, for example, that the uses of this very concept "know" varies based on the context that is generating the knowledge. Thus, the contextualist thesis implies that knowledge claims are indexical (just like some words in English language) since the standard of knowledge claim varies based on the context. And so, the interconnectivity of language and contextualism is so obvious. Knowledge claim is indexical in the sense that an expression whose semantic context (or meaning) depends on the context of its use. For instance, the word 'here' is an indexical. When one says, "Jude is here", and what he meant depends on where he is when says it. If he is in the Church, then all things being equal, that Jude is in the Church. 'I' is also an indexical –its meaning depends on the context of its use and in particular, on who is using it. When Jude says, "I am in the Church", then he means, all other things being equal, that Jude is in the Church. Yet

when Ify uses 'I', she means something different; Ify's 'I' means Ify. For more emphasis and clarification, Elke Brendel and Christopher Jager put it thus:

> The semantics of other indexical expression –like "flat" –can serve as a model for understanding the indexicality of knowledge claims. Whether the assertion "X is flat" is true depends on the standards of flatness determined by the context of utterance. Similarly, whether or not the ascription "S knows that P" is true depends on the epistemic standards put in place by the knowledge –as scriber's context[43].

In consonant with this proclamation, Derose Keith further explains that:

> The truth –condition of knowledge ascribing and knowledge denying sentences (sentences of the form 'S knows that P' and 'S doesn't know that P' and related various of such sentences) vary in certain ways according to the contexts in which they uttered. What so varies is the epistemic standards that S must meet (or, in the case of a denial of knowledge, fail to meet) in order for such a statement to be true[44].

Justification of knowledge claim has no universal standard as to which one must meet but varies on issue –context and the group of people involved. This follows the context dependent of language as well, in the sense that different rule, pattern, order and convention which does not agree with having a universality of language. Language is just an aspect of reality that goes not have a uniformity of communication and a particular rule for expressing reality. In fact,

> The "real world" is to a large extent unconsciously built upon the language habit of the group. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct word, not merely the same world, with different labels attained. We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation[45].

Therefore, it is well understood that whether specific knowledge claims are true or false depends on what the human society allows it be through her linguistic –conceptual medium of communication. This is a notion that is built on the general observation that both the language and the mode of conception that enables a given society to comprehend the reality around here ultimately determine the society's peculiar perceptual

experience of reality. Language determines how man construes his experience and it is the means by which he comprehends and evaluates truth and reality. It means therefore that human linguistic conventions and thought –forms condition and reality. In sum, language is indispensible not only to the role of man's social activities but also to knowledge –claim. Language is used to prove what is claimed to be known. This linguistic thesis has however exposed us to the social dimension of language as human creation for justification of human knowledge.

CONCLUSION

The function of language in terms of human cognition and justification of knowledge claims is at the rate of equilibrium with the position of contextualism. Both the contextualists theory for epistemic justification and the meanings and uses of language are typically based on context – dependent. In addition, justification of knowledge claim is not possible without language. We have justification of knowledge only because we have language for if we were without language we wouldn't have prove or justify what we claim to know. Epistemic justification is absolutely limited with language.

Endnotes

1. Anselm K. Jimoh, *Certitude and Doubt: A Study Guide in Epistemology*, Ibadan: Ebony Book and Kreations press, 2003, P. 222 -223.

2. They are American philosophers and contextualists who seek to avoid all the fundamental mistakes of the earlier theories –foundationalism and coheretism. According to them, both theories overlook contextual parameters essential to justification. Thus, they claim to put knowledge on its natural setting by making it a human and social phenomenon.

3. David Annis, *A Contextualist Theory of Epistemic Justification,* in American Philosophical Quarterly Vol.15, No. 3, July 1978, P. 213.

4. Ibid., P. 214.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid., P. 215.

7. Ibid., P. 216.

8. Ibid.

9. Timo Airaksinen, *Five Types of Knowledge*, in American philosophical Quarterly, Vol. 15, No. 4 Oct. 1978, P. 263.

10. Ibid., P. 264.

11. Ibid., P. 265.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., P.266.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid., P. 267

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., P. 268.

18. Ibid., P. 269.

19. Ibid., P. 270.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid., P. 274.

23. Paul Edwards, *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 5, New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. & The free Press, 1967, P. 235.

24. Thomas Davidson (ed), *Chambers 20th Century Dictionary*, Edinburg: W & R. Chamber 1983, P. 709.

25. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, part one, Chapter IV.

26. Plato, *Theatetus*, 189c – 190a.

27. Plato, *Sophists*, 263c cc also 264a.

28. Ibid., 260a

29. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigation*, Oxford: Oxford University press, 1953, P.43.

30. Ibid., P. 421.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid., P. 28.

33. Ibid., P. 32.

34. Ibid., P. 20

35. *See* Ibid, P. 199 and 243.

36. A. J. Ayer, *The Problem of Knowledge*, London: Penguin Books, 1956, P. 28.

37. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Op. Cit.*, P. 246 – 247.

38. Bertrand Russell, *An Inquiring into Meaning and Truth*, London: Union paperbacks, 1940, P. 26.

39. Ibid., P. 27.

40. Joseph Omoregbe, *Epistemology*, Nigeria: Joja press, 1998, P. 21.

41. Timo Airaksinen, *Op. Cit.*, P. 272.

42. David Annis *Op. Cit.*, P. 216.

43. Elke Brendel and Christopher Jager, "*Contextualist Approaches to Epistemology: Problems and Prospects*", in contextualisms in Epistemology, Vol. 61, No. 2/3, Nov. 2004. P.148.

44. Derose Keith, "*Contextualism: A Explanation and Defense*", in the Blackwell Guide to Epistemology, J. Greco and Sosa, eds., Malden MA, 1999, P. 187.

45. Edward Sapir, "*Ethnography of Speaking*". http://www.Uiowa.edu/zc036001e