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The significance of language for accounting theory and methodology

Ahmad Nasseri
University of Wollongong

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The Significance of Language for Accounting Theory and Methodology

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

From

University of Wollongong

By

Ahmad Nasseri

B.A. in Accounting (University of Mazandaran, Babolsar, Iran)

M.A. in Accounting (University of Tarbiat Modarres, Tehran, Iran)

School of Accounting and Finance

2007

In Memorial of

Imam Khomeini

Dedicated to Akram,

My Beloved Wife,

For Her Patience

Certification

I, Ahmad Nasseri, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the School of Accounting and Finance, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Ahmad Nasseri

1 February 2007

Abstract

The significance of language for accounting theory and methodology is investigated and discussed through three different approaches. First, linguistic analyses of accounting language declare that some difficulties and misunderstandings in accounting are grounded in language and linguistics. The relevance of linguistics to accounting is examined through analysing a number of Iranian accounting terminology cases (e.g. hesaabdaaree, sarghoflee, etc.). It is shown that improving accounting theory and practice necessitates considering its linguistics. The linguistic significance of language on accounting is that, without considering language and linguistic problems, misunderstandings and difficulties are drawn into accounting. Translation, ambiguity, and acronyms are introduced as the most effective linguistic problems that produce difficulties within accounting.

Secondly, philosophical investigations reveal that identifying accounting [as well as any other human knowledge] is entirely related to language. A philosophical foundation is established through criticising Frege's definition of thought, idea, truth, and falsity. It is argued that truth and falsity, contrary to what Frege argues, have different natures and thus different methods of inquiry. It is explained how the dangerous similarity of truth and falsity is a matter of language and how language trammels true meaning and false meaning into the same trap. The philosophical criticism results in a multidimensional explication of accounting. The three main dimensions of accounting are empirical, critical, and hermeneutical accounting. The singular definitions, generalisation, and boundary presumptions of accounting theory are consequently criticised.

Finally, hermeneutical accounting is studied historically to explore the presence of language in accounting. Hermeneutics has found several different readings through time. The implications of divergent readings of hermeneutics in accounting are examined through reviewing the accounting literature. It is revealed that very few accounting contributors have so far

considered the interpretive aspect of knowledge. The few hermeneutical explanations of accounting which do exist nevertheless, declare that accounting is a text which requires interpretation.

This thesis totally adds value of the existing body of accounting theory by introducing and examining linguistic problems that cause difficulties and misunderstandings within accounting, analysing two problematic cases of Iranian accounting terminology and thus evidencing the relevance of a linguistic approach to accounting, explaining the dangers and difficulties arising from acronyms within accounting, criticising Frege's philosophy and concluding that true thoughts are different in nature and method of inquiry with false thoughts and then discussing that accounting and all human knowledge as they are intended to be true thoughts but not false ones are to be discovered and not created, identifying accounting as a multidimensional knowledge, and finally explaining the hermeneutical dimension of accounting through an historical analysis. The thesis entirely approaches empirical, critical, and historical analyses to announce that language plays a crucial role in theorising and practicing accounting. It is evidentially emphasised that dismissing language and linguistic problems of accounting weakens accounting theory and methodology.

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At the time of submitting, I noticed that the editor of this thesis who has obscurely given the majority of my writings a readable shape in association with Professor Gaffikin is his respectful wife, Mrs. Angela Gaffikin. I can only imagine how boring and noisome my writing must have been to her. I cannot find words to express the depth of my gratitude to her. I hope one day that I will have an opportunity to return my gratitude to her in return for her selfless donation of time, effort and skill for me.

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