A WITTGENSTEINIAN DEFENSE OF ORDINARY LANGUAGE PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

Ordinary language philosophy is concerned with producing a philosophical insight and sometimes dissolving a pseudo-philosophical problem by looking at ordinary uses of language. There are numerous philosophers in the ordinary language philosophy tradition, notably Wittgenstein, Ryle, Austin. They each offered their respective versions of ordinary language philosophy. Ordinary language philosophy was fashionable during the thirties and forties in Britain, but it mysteriously lost its popularity after the fifties. Perhaps objections against ordinary language philosophy, notably by philosophers such as Fodor and Katz, Russell, Gellner and so on, have led to its demise. In this paper, I present a Wittgensteinian reconstruction of ordinary language philosophy. I argue that such a reconstruction can deal with all of the aforementioned objections. Moreover, a Wittgensteinian ordinary language philosophy offers a viable methodology for philosophy.

Keywords: Family resemblance, language game, thought experiment, form of life

GÜNDELİK DİL FELSEFESİNİN WİTTGENSTEİNCI BİR SAVUNMASI

ÖZ

Gündelik dil felsefesi bir felsefi öngörü üretmeye ve bazen de bir felsefi problemi çözümlemeye çalışır. Aralarında Wittgenstein, Ryle, Austin gibi ünlü isimlerinde bulunduğu bir çok felsefeci gündelik dil felsefesi geleneğinde yer almıştır. Her biri kendi gündelik dil felsefesi versiyonunu sunmuştur. Gündelik dil felsefesi İngiltere'de özellikle otuzlar ve kırklarda popüler olmuş ama daha sonra ellilerde gizemli bir şekilde popülaritesini kaybetmiştir. Fodor ve Katz, Russell, Gellner ve benzeri felsefecilerin dile getirdiği itirazlar gündelik dil felsefesinin yok olmasında etkili olmuştur diyebiliriz. Bu makalede gündelik dil felsefesini Wittgensteinci bir

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versiyonu sunuyorum. Bu Wittgensteincı versiyonun adı geçen itirazların hepsine cevap verebileceğini savunuyorum. Ayrıca Wittgensteincı bir dil felsefesinin felsefenin geneli için de uygun bir metodoloji önerdiğini iddaa ediyorum.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Aile benzerliği, Dil Oyunları, Yaşam Biçimi, Wittgenstein, Düşünce deneyi

1. INTRODUCTION

We can distinguish ordinary language philosophers roughly into two types: systematic and non-systematic ones. Whereas the systematic ones try to extract generalizations from everyday language, the non-systematic ones use OLP therapeutically to cure philosophers and make philosophical investigations by looking at specific language uses. Wittgenstein belongs to the latter case. In what follows, I will argue for two claims. Firstly, I will argue that in Wittgensteinian OLP, the aim is not to develop generalizations about a language but instead to map a family tree of different uses of a term or concept. Wittgenstein uses the notion of language games for this purpose. Secondly, I argue that using language games in this way is similar to using thought experiments in theoretical science. With these two claims in place, I will then proceed to the common objections against OLP and show how Wittgensteinian OLP construed as such can successfully deal with these objections.

2.Wittgensteinian Ordinary Language Philosophy

2.1. Family Resemblance Instead of Generalization

Wittgenstein thinks that any generalization attempt about language is futile. He conceives language "as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses." (Wittgenstein, 1999, §18). Language is not constructed in a day by an architect; instead, it has evolved through time and continues to grow, new streets and houses are added to it every day while others are removed. In this picture, it is essential to see that we cannot expect to find a general structure from such an organically evolving formation like language, as we cannot expect to find a general design in a city like Istanbul, London, and so forth.

Languages have enormous variability as there are many different linguistic devices and many different uses of these devices. When we consider a word, we can see that there are many ways it can be used. For instance, let us look at the word "description." There are many different uses of "description". It can be the description of a body's physical location, description of some mood or feeling, description of a mathematical concept, description of a facial expression, description of a color. Similarly, for any other word, there are numerous different ways it can be used. What about

sentences, or grammatical structures, or additional actions that we can perform with language, like making a joke, play-acting, giving orders, reporting or speculating about an event, and so on? There are countless different uses for any element of language.

One might wonder how these different uses for the elements of a language are related? Language cannot be the totality of unrelated formations, as an ancient city is not the totality of different unrelated streets and houses. They somehow blend into bigger and bigger holes, like a neighborhood, district, and so forth, and in the end, form what we call a city. Wittgenstein thinks that although many different relations exist between them, there is no common thread that binds them together. According to Wittgenstein, a family resemblance would be the best approximation to characterize similarities between language elements (Wittgenstein, 1999, §67). There are various similarities between family members, like physical features, the color of eyes, temperament, etc. Despite these resemblances, however, there is no common thread that binds all family members. While one member can be very similar to another, s/he can also show different traits from other family members. Still, despite their differences, they form a family by these intersecting patterns of similarities. The components of a language are also related, like a family resemblance.

In Wittgenstein's OLP, generality is replaced with the idea of family resemblance. OLP never claims generality since it is aware that it is dealing with a large family. It is not possible to capture all, as it acknowledges from the very beginning that there are countless different ways that an element of a language might function. Instead of generalizing from instances, OLP is concerned with grasping a concept or a term by mapping out a family tree from its different uses. Our grasp of the family-tree in question can be used to dissolve a philosophical problem or to get an insight into it. Getting a reasonably good understanding of a language-family is philosophically much more helpful than an allegedly bulletproof generalization that could only survive until the first counterexample. Even though the inferences that you can draw from a language-family are much more limited, precisely because of that, they are immune to counterexamples. It is challenging to give counterexamples to a language family because each counterexample would be a new use that has been overlooked so far. So, one cannot refute a language-family with a counterexample but can only expand it by introducing a new use. However, the expansion of the language-family can hardly contradict your limited inferences.

2.2. Language Games and Forms of Life

We can rely on our use of a language by looking from different angles of using a word, an expression, etc., or observing or speculating other people's uses to get a grasp of the language-family in question. Wittgenstein utilizes a notion called "language games" for the job. Language games offer a way to get a hold

of a language family and emphases the critical social and contextual character of using language.

"Language game" is one of those notions that can hardly be defined or explained but can only be shown. Not surprisingly, Wittgenstein does not offer a satisfying explanation or description but just gives examples of language games and remarks on them. Still, to get a rough idea, we can say that a language game is a minuscule rule-governed social interaction for communication. Here "minuscule" is used as a relative term and is meant to express language games' function as building blocks of our linguistic analysis. Language games are rule-governed, as language itself is a rule-governed enterprise like a game. However, the rules of a language are much more flexible and complex compared to an ordinary game. Yet, on the one hand, we can consider "minuscule" language games to minimize rules' complexity. On the other hand, we can keep an eye on language flexibility by family resemblances and avoid making any normative claims.

A language game is also a social interaction for communication that requires at least two players. It is a social practice rather than a formal exchange. Wittgenstein calls this crucial social aspect of language games "forms of life" (Wittgenstein, 1999, §19, §23). It is possible to liken forms of life to ceremonial practices of a society. For instance, if you consider a Japanese tea ceremony, you will see that there are well-defined, mostly unwritten rules to prepare tea, calligraphy, kimono, incense, flower arranging, etc., to serve and how to behave during the ceremony. Furthermore, different phrases and gestures would communicate additional messages. Since there are so many unwritten rules and phrases, and gestures could be interpreted differently, both parties must know the ritualistic game rules to be able to participate. The Japanese tea ceremony is a ritualistic game, and yet it is a form of life that is so different from many western cultures. In this sense, when we describe a language game, what we describe is a form of life.

One other crucial element of a language game is being consistent with the empirical presuppositions of the game. For instance, if we consider measuring with a unit game, in which player's measure length according to a certain standard, the empirical presupposition for playing the game is that there should not be undecidable length cases given the game rules for measuring. Otherwise, it would be meaningless to play the measuring with a unit game. In other words, certain empirical conditions make playing a language game viable (Gale, 1991, p. 299). If we cannot decide most of the lengths of objects accurately with the game rules, then there is no point in accepting those rules and engaging in the game of measuring with a unit. Wittgenstein is especially concerned about the game's empirical presuppositions in the considerations of language games in possible worlds. If the ordinary circumstances in which we play a language game change, the term's application should also change. In these cases, we need to reconsider

our language-game and see whether it is still a viable game to play. (Wittgenstein, 1965, p. 62)

Wittgenstein provides various language game examples. To list some of them: ostensive definition, inventing a name for something (Wittgenstein 1999, §27), "giving orders and obeying them, describing the appearance of an object, or giving its measurements, constructing an object from a description(a drawing), reporting an event, speculating about an event, forming and testing a hypothesis, presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams, making up a story and reading it, play-acting, singing catches, guessing riddles, making a joke and telling it, solving a problem in practical arithmetic, translating from one language into another, asking, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying" (Wittgenstein, 1999, §23). The procedure to employ language games is asking the reader to imagine a situation where two players act on something or learn something. For instance, take the language game of ostensive definition. Imagine a child learning names of things from his parents. So, in this language-game, the child is taught to ask, "What is that called?" to which parents answer, "This is ….."

2.3. Language Games as Thought Experiments

Language games can be considered as thought experiments on language use. Wittgenstein's employment of language-games and thought experiments is not distinct, and in most cases, they blend. In many cases, either the language game itself is presented as a thought experiment, or a thought experiment follows up the language game itself. This is not a coincidence. A bare description of a language game is not a thought experiment, as there is nothing experimental, to say the least; however, using a language game to argue for a philosophical point is akin to a thought experiment by its very nature. Like a thought experiment, a language game has an imaginary context on a subject, it has actors and moves, and you can draw inferences from it.

Classification of the types of thought experiments is debated, but Tamar Gendler (2000) offers a useful tripartite taxonomy of thought experiments. According to Gendler, the first type, factive thought experiments, concerns what we think a situation would be like in reality. A paradigmatic example of a factive thought experiment is Galileo's refutation of the Aristotelian theory that heavier objects fall faster than lighter ones.[1] The

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[1] The thought experiment goes as follows: "Imagine that a heavy and a light body are strapped together and dropped from a significant height. What would the Aristotelian expect to be the natural speed of their combination? On the one hand, the lighter body should slow down the heavier one while the heavier body speeds up the lighter one, so their combination should fall with a speed that lies between the natural speeds of its components. On the other hand, since the weight of the two bodies combined is greater than the heavy body's weight alone, their combination should fall with a natural speed greater than that of the heavy body. But then the combined body is

second type, conceptual thought experiments, concerns whether a concept can be applied in a situation according to our intuitions. Searle's Chinese room thought experiment is a paradigmatic example of this type. The third type is valuational; it concerns what would be the proper moral or aesthetic response to a situation. (Gendler, 2000, p. 25) I shall argue that using language games is more akin to the first type rather than the second.

What distinguishes factive thought experiments from conceptual ones is their empirical verifiability. A thought experiment is empirically verifiable, either practically or in principle, if we know what observations under which conditions would lead us to accept the thought experiment's conclusion as true or reject it as false. (Ayer, 1952, p. 36) While conceptual thought experiments draw inferences either from conceivability of a case to its possibility or from inconceivability of a case to its impossibility, they are empirically unverifiable since they rely on a conceptual schema. On the other hand, factive thought experiments are empirically verifiable as they are about the nature of objects under a particular experimental setup.

What distinguishes language games from conceptual thought experiments and likens them to factive ones is that language games are about the actual use of a language in a community. Hence, they are empirically verifiable. When a scientist devises a factive thought experiment, actual objects out there in the world are imagined. In a similar vein, when a philosopher devises a language game, actual usages of a language out there in the world is imagined. Anybody can go out and check the usage in question in a language game, as any scientist can go out and check a factive thought experiment. When devising a factive thought experiment, a scientist relies on his grasp of the physical phenomena and his mental simulation capacity of how objects would behave in such-and-such conditions. Similarly, when a philosopher devises a language game in his native language, he relies on his grasp of the language and his mental simulation capacity of how a conversion would occur in his native language in such-and-such conditions.

To give a straightforward example, recall the language game of ostensive definition. In this language game, we are supposed to imagine a child learning names of things from his parents by asking, "What is that called?" to which the parents answer, "This is …..". This imaginary scenario is empirically verifiable. We can go out there in the world to observe that young children do in fact, ask these kinds of questions, and their parents do, in fact, explain to them what those objects are called. So, the language game of ostensive definition refers to the actual use of language that can be verified.

Recognizing the similarities between language games and factive thought experiments is especially important for the questions about the utility

predicted to fall both more quickly, and more slowly, than the heavy body alone." (Gendler, 2000, p. 41)

of OLP and the epistemic status of OLP statements. I will return to this point when I discuss the objections against OLP below.

3. Arguments against Ordinary Language Philosophy and Replies

3.1. Fodor and Katz's Objections

Fodor and Katz (1972) present various objections to OLP. Their objections are directed to Cavell (1972) in particular but have effects over OLP in general. The main issue in their discussion is the epistemic status of the statements that one makes about his own language, and whether empirical evidence is needed for such statements. Cavell defends that ordinary language philosophers can make claims about their language without leaving their armchairs. However, Fodor and Katz argue that there is a distinction between a native speaker's claims about how he uses his language and a native speaker's metalinguistic claims about how other native speakers use their language. Cavell fails to consider this distinction. While the former can be done from the armchair, the latter requires empirical evidence. According to Fodor and Katz, Cavell owes us an account of how an empirical description of natural language can be derived from its speakers' mere metalinguistic claims. Due to space constraints, I can't address all of their objections. However, I think Henson (1972) replies to them appropriately from an OLP point of view in detail. Here I shall only consider the most important objections that they raise.

Objection 1: A good deal of Cavell's discussion relies on two types of statements. Type 1 statements provide token instances of what can be said in a language. In contrast, type 2 statements explain what is said in a language, especially when there is an implicature. Cavell holds that we are not often wrong in what we say about our language. Fodor and Katz grant this for type 1 statements, but not for type 2 statements. In their view, a type 2 statement is a kind of a theory about in what contexts a word can be appropriately used. Even among ordinary language philosophers, Fodor and Katz argue, there are disagreements about type 2 statements. For instance, Ryle and Austin infamously disagreed on how the word 'voluntary' is used. Such disputes cannot be solved on type 1 statements because the same kind of conflict can arise there too.

Henson gives a convincing reply to this objection from a Wittgensteinian point of view. I will explain his reply before I present my own. Henson argues that rules govern language use, and expressions are meaningful when they conform to these rules. A competent player of a moderately complex and highly organized game must know the rules of the game and different strategies and tactics. There can be some rules that the player is not acquainted with and some situations that are not covered by the rules. Still, it must be sporadic that a player does not know whether a rule applies to a position. Otherwise, he would not be able to play the game. An experienced player knows the game well, can explain how it is played, and

does not need to take surveys or consult the rule-book (except especially out-of-the-way cases). (Henson, 1972, p. 215)

After our discussion of the similarities between factive thought experiments and language games, we are now able to give another reply to this objection. It must be noted that Wittgenstein does not draw Type 2 statements in the way that Cavell does, as he does not believe in generalizations about language use. Suppose we reformulate the objection in terms of language games. In that case, empirical evidence can be provided for language games as much as empirical evidence can be provided for factive thought experiments. Most of the factive thought experiments do not require any empirical evidence for confirmation, as they are self-evident. However, Wittgenstein does not have any concern or hesitation about empirical evidence as Cavell does. If the language game does not convince one, or if there is a dispute about usage in a language game, we are free to check it empirically, as language games are empirically verifiable. In most cases, it would turn out that both usages are empirically founded, which would not refute the language game but would just expand the language-family in question.

Objection 2: Suppose someone uses the words 'inadvertently' and 'automatically' interchangeably. Cavell claims that a professor could still say that we mean two different things when we use these words. The professor is also entitled to argue for the distinction and argue further that the speaker's language is impoverished by neglecting it. In this case, there is something about the world that the speaker fails to notice. Fodor and Katz, however, argue that one cannot derive a philosophically significant error just because someone has been unable to draw a distinction coded in English. The way native speakers talk cannot be a basis for why one ought to draw a distinction. One cannot infer 'ought' statements about certain distinctions from 'is' statements about how speakers talk. Fodor and Katz argue further that, once natural language fallacy is recognized, it becomes necessary to question the utility of appealing to ordinary language as a means to resolve philosophical disagreements.

Henson gives a plausible reply to this objection from a Wittgensteinian point of view. He argues that there can be no reason to deny that one ought to notice the distinctions drawn in one's language. If these distinctions are coded in the language, they are marked in the day-to-day linguistic practice of those who speak the language. To correctly use a natural language, we must learn the distinctions coded by it. However, this objection does not even apply to Wittgensteinian OLP, since Wittgenstein does not draw ought statements from ordinary usage as Cavell does. According to Wittgenstein, as there are many different ways for the elements of a language to be used, normative statements about language use could be misleading.

Henson deals with the ought part of the objection, but for Wittgenstein the interesting part is the utility of OLP, if it can be raised without the ought claim, as ought part does not apply. I shall return this point below.

3.2. Russell's Objections

Russell (1953) takes OLP as consisting "in maintaining that the language of daily life, with words used in their ordinary meanings, suffices for philosophy, which has no need of technical terms or changes in the signification of common terms." (Russell 1953 p. 303) He gives five objections against OLP understood as such.

(1) OLP is insincere. Russell claims that what ordinary language philosophers say on common usage does not depend on mass observation, statistics, medians, standard deviations, etc., but only depends on people who have their amount of education.

As we have seen in our discussion of Wittgenstein's OLP and Fodor and Katz's objections above, what ordinary language philosophers say on common usage does not need to depend on mass observation, statistics, medians, etc. As a player of the game, he has a pretty good grasp of the rules. Also, language games are like factive thought experiments that are self-evident. However, they can be empirically verified if needed. Similarly, his claim that what ordinary language philosophers say on common usage depends on highly educated poeple's use does not apply to Wittgenstein's OLP. If it were to apply, language games would not be empirically verifiable for a language in general, but only verifiable in a small group of people with Wittgenstein's amount of education.

(2) It is an excuse for ignorance. Russell argues that common usages of words are vague, and consequently, equal truth may be attached to different statements depending on different interpretations of this vagueness. This vagueness caused problems for mathematics and science in general, and consequently, they abandoned common usage and defined more technical and precise definitions for the terms they employ.

This objection is reminiscent of Russell's logical atomism or perhaps logical positivist project in general. The underlying claim is that it is possible to achieve the formality and precision of science in philosophy, especially in language study. It is beyond the scope of this paper to argue against logical positivism. For OLP, the study of ordinary language is not an excuse for ignorance, but it is an acceptance of our ignorance in understanding the nature of language. It is a step taken forward in terms of abandoning the mistaken idea of a complete formalization or generalization of an idealized language. Instead, it starts looking at the natural languages out there with their vagueness, flexibility, and diversity.

(3) Common sense has been mistaken in many instances in past centuries; hence grounding any philosophy on common sense is highly suspicious.

Russell is right to argue that common sense has been mistaken about the nature of facts in the past; however, philosophers, especially ordinary language philosophers, are not dealing with the nature of facts. The philosophical investigation is on the nature of language, and there is no absolute objective ideal language out there that we can investigate as science investigates nature. What we have out there are natural languages that native speakers use. And here, there is a critical difference between what common sense says about language and how native speakers use language. The former can be mistaken; however, the latter is the only thing that we have to study a language. Ordinary language philosophers do not take what common sense thinks about language to ground their theories, instead, they look at how native speakers use their language.

(4) It trivializes philosophy. Endlessly discussing what ordinary people mean when they say everyday things may be amusing, but it is not essential.

This objection boils down to the question: What is the utility of OLP? We have seen that language games are like factive thought experiments. Factive thought experiments play a critical role in science, especially in theoretical science. Language games considered as factive thought experiments can play a similar role in philosophical methodology. Consideration of language games helps us grasp a concept's language family. With a clearer understanding of the concept, we can further analyze the issue by supplementing thought experiments or philosophical argumentation. Another utility of OLP is dissolving pseudo-problems that trap philosophers into dead-ends. OLP can dissolve these problems therapeutically by looking at ordinary usage. I do not think that Russell has a question about the importance of the study of language. So, another utility of OLP is that it studies natural languages out there from a philosophical point of view instead of thinking about an idealized language, which does not exist.

(5) Common sense can be well suited for everyday purposes, but it can quickly get confused even in the most basic questions like "What is meant by the word 'word'?" We can not deal with these kinds of questions without technical vocabulary and theories.

This is an ironic objection in the sense that it is not clear whether common sense or philosopher is confused by the question "What is meant by the word 'word'?" Russell argues that common sense is confused, whereas Wittgenstein argues that actually the philosopher is confused. According to Wittgenstein, these types of questions lead to pseudo-philosophical problems. We do not need technical vocabulary or theories to solve it. All we need is to

look at the everyday use of the word to see that it has no other meaning than its numerous different uses to dissolve the problem.

3.3. Gellner's Objections

Gellner (1968) made a sensationalist attack on OLP. He claims to identify four pillars that are absolutely essential to OLP and argues that all thesepillars are ill-founded. As I will discuss below, except the last one, these are not pillars of OLP in any way. Gellner's alleged pillars are as follows:

1) Argument from a Paradigm Case (APC): In this argument form, an answer to a philosophical problem is found from the actual use of the words, or a philosophical problem is falsified based on a conflict between actual uses of words. For instance, giving proof for the material objects' existence based on how material-object-words are used in our language. Or asserting the existence of free will based on its meaningful usage in language

As Uschanov (2002) argues, Gellner misrepresents paradigm case arguments in a way that Wittgenstein does not use, and this is not a pillar of OLP at all. Wittgenstein's book *On Certainty* (1972) criticizes and expands on the so-called existence proof of material objects. Uschanov cites and analyzes Wittgenstein's lectures on the freedom of the will and argues that the paradigm case argument is not used in any of them. This also shows that APC is not as common as Gellner claims.

2) The generalized version of naturalistic fallacy: The habit of inferring normative statements from the ordinary use of words. This objection is in the same line with Fodor and Katz's objection that I have considered in detail above.

3) The contrast theory of meaning: For a term to be meaningful, it must allow at least the possibility of something not covered by it. Gellner thinks that this is very similar to APC. While APC asserts that a term must have cases where it applies, the contrast theory of meaning asserts that a term must have cases where it does not apply.

What Gellner calls contrast theory of meaning is an empirical presupposition of our language games. Language is a social activity, and playing language games requires us to make particular distinctions and get discernable things to play with. If a word did not have a contrasting word to discern it, that language game would not be viable to play because we would not be able to discern it. If we give an example from chess, to play chess, there must be some discernible move space and pieces. If a chess board were just a whiteboard without any lines, and all the pieces were in the same color and shape, then there would not be anything discernable to construct chess rules to play it. In other words, it would be impossible to build a game like chess in such a condition. It might be argued that we can still construct a game but not chess in such a situation. It may be true, but this shows that there are still some discernible elements, like whiteboard and pieces. Suppose further we just have

both two-dimensionally and three-dimensionally irregularly shaped white things. Would you be able to construct a game out of it? Unless you find or produce some discernible features in that thing, which is very unlikely, it is not possible to build a game. This is also empirically confirmed by fact that all words in all languages have some sort of contrasting word corresponding to it as well.

4) Polymorphism: It is the doctrine that word use has a great variety, and consequently, it is not possible to make general assertions about the uses of words.

This is the only place that I agree with Gellner; what he calls polymorphism and what Wittgenstein calls family resemblance is a true pillar of OLP. In my discussion of family resemblances above, I have already argued that OLP is concerned with getting a grasp of the family tree of different uses of a concept or term. So, a Wittgensteinian OLP is not in the business of making generalizations. But this does not mean that a Wittgensteinian OLP without generalizations is a futile endeavor. As I argued above, getting a firm grip on the language family in question can help dissolve philosophical problems.

4. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I defended a Wittgensteinian reconstruction of ordinary language philosophy against the objections of Fodor and Katz, Russell, Gellner. In a nutshell, I argued that language games could be considered empirically verifiable factive thought experiments on language use. When we see language games in this new light, it becomes possible to reply to all main objections against ordinary language philosophy. Moreover, I argued further that language games taken as factive thought experiments could play a role in a philosophical methodology similar to the critical role that factive thought experiments play in theoretical science.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding this research.

ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL / PARTICIPANT CONSENT

Ethics committee approval is not required for this study. There are no participants in this study.

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