Whether Language is an Imperfect Instrument in Locke’s Philosophy of Language

Khanh Trinh¹

¹De La Salle University

February 05, 2024

Abstract

In the opening of Book III of his Essay, Locke states that God provided men with language, which was intended to serve as the primary tool and universal communication medium within society. This paper aims to examine the effectiveness of language as a tool in Locke’s philosophy of language. The article is divided into three sections. The initial segment will examine the overall depiction of Locke’s language theory, with a closer examination of the importance of words in relation to the purpose of language. In the following section, I will examine objections raised by contemporary philosophers regarding the role of language. In the preceding part, I endeavor to address these objections by examining Locke’s perspective on language abuses and remedies and scrutinizing relevant passages pertaining to these issues. The paper’s conclusion asserts that language is an indispensable tool for communication.

Introduction

God made men sociable and equipped them with language, a great communication instrument. However, many modern philosophers argue that language cannot be a good instrument since it fails to fulfill its function – communication. This paper will investigate whether language is a good instrument in Locke’s philosophy of language. In what follows, I will give a more detailed explanation of Locke’s account of language in which the origin and the function of language will be analyzed (section one). This section includes two subsections. The first one will look for what is the origin or nature of language. The second subsection will examine the functions or significances of language and how language fulfills its functions on Locke’s account. Then, following the two deficiencies – objections were raised against Locke’s account of language (section two), which argues that language fails to exercise its function. Finally, in section three, I will argue that Locke’s own abuses and remedies gave him a more straightforward and unique account to respond to these objections. In conclusion, from Locke’s perspective, I assert that language is a good instrument that helps men communicate and convey their thoughts to others.

Locke’s Account of Language

This section will take an investigation into language in Locke’s account. The investigation will include two smaller parts: the first one will discuss the origin of language, and the second part will consider the functions of language from Locke’s point of view.

The Origin of Language

What makes humans clearly different from animals and the rest of creation is the presence of words. No other beings in the animal kingdom have it. Locke posits in many places that the basis of language is rooted not solely in the divine realm, but also in the realm of social interactions as follows: "having designed man for a sociable creature, made him not only with an inclination, and under a necessity to have fellowship with those of his own kind, but furnished him also with language." (Essay III, 1, 1)¹¹

---

¹¹Locke, J. (1975), An Essay...
Concerning Human Understanding, ed. by Peter H. Nidditch, Clarendon Press. (Hereafter referred to as Essay). In the same sense, Locke asserted the divine origin of language in Two Treatises on Government, emphasizing that language came from God, "God, having made such a creature that in his own Judgment it was not good for him to be alone . . . fitted him with understanding and language..." (Locke 1946: 159).

Locke, J. (1946), Two Treatises of Government, ed. by Thomas I. Cook, Hafner Publishing. (Hereafter referred to as Treatises).

Indeed, language or word is what humans receive from God, which gives humans the capability to communicate because God created them with the capacity to do so.

More than that, Locke believed that language had its roots in social contexts. Men were driven by a social need to express their ideas to others, which led to the creation of sounds as outward symbols for their internal ideas. Indeed, men require a society, and in society, men need to communicate with each other. Communication means expressing our thoughts to another. Without communication, other people cannot understand individual inner thoughts immediately. It follows that:

The comfort and advantage of society not being to be had without communication of thoughts, it was necessary that man should find out some external sensible signs, whereof those invisible ideas which his thoughts are made up of, might be made known to others. For this purpose nothing was so fit, either for plenty or quickness, as those articulate sounds, which with so much ease and variety he found himself able to make. Thus we may conceive how Words, which were by nature so well adapted to that purpose, came to be made use of by men as the signs of their ideas (Essay III, 2, 1).

In this paragraph, it is asserted that Locke presents an alternative viewpoint suggesting that the emergence and evolution of language can be credited to the social demands and requirements of human beings. This perspective appears to demonstrate a contradiction to the initial viewpoint that posits the origin of language as divine in nature.

According to Locke, there is no incompatibility between the two points of view because each is adapted to the other. The idea that language is a product of both divine and social influences is central to the study of the origins and history of language.

God having designed Man for a sociable Creature, made him not only with an inclination, and under a necessity to have fellowship with those of his own kind... Man therefore had by Nature his Organs so fashioned as to be fit to frame articulate Sounds, which we call Words. But this was not enough to produce Language (Essay III, 1, 1). Besides articulate Sounds therefore, it was farther necessary, that he should be able to use these Sounds, as Signs of internal Conceptions; and to make them stand as marks for the Ideas within his own Mind, whereby they might be made known to others, and the Thoughts of Men’s Minds be conveyed from one to another (ibid. III, 1, 2).

These passages, for Locke, made it sound like God did not give people language itself, but the ability to make sounds – this is not enough to produce language and understand words as symbols for ideas inside them. To produce language, humans need something more than the ability to articulate sounds. Language or word appears as a sign that signifies the internal conceptions or ideas in one’s mind to transfer ideas to another. Therefore, humans inherently equipped for the formulation of language, were motivated by "the comfort and advantage of society" to develop a system of linguistic communication. Indeed, according to Locke, language is a divine endowment bestowed upon humanity, facilitated by the inherent development of organs capable of producing articulation of sounds. Consequently, humans have harnessed this capacity to fulfill a fundamental necessity - the need for communication (Wortham 1967: 13).

The Functions of Language in Locke’s Account

As mentioned above, Locke claimed that God created men with the ability to articulate sounds. In other words, men were created with language in themselves as a great instrument (Essay III, 1, 1). However, elsewhere, Locke also contended that in order to examine the perfection of words or languages – a great instrument, it is important to think about what they are used for and why. It means that we need to know the functions and the ends or the goals of language on account. Because words are more or less perfect for
getting things done, they are also more or less perfect for society (Essay III. 9. 1). What are the uses of language? How can words exercise their functions?

Locke believed that words (languages) are necessary for recording and communicating our thoughts or ideas. Words can be used to record thoughts. "One – function - for the recording of our own Thoughts" (Essay III, 9, 1). This implies that language has the capacity to establish a connection between the past experiences and the present moment. Man also uses language to communicate his thoughts to others, "The other (function) for the communicating of our Thoughts to others" (ibid.). Indeed, when men think or have thoughts, they are only for them and inside their minds – private ideas. In order to communicate with other people, those thoughts need to be externalized through signs. Communication means sending thoughts from one mind to another, usually done with words. Thus, by putting ideas into words, men make their ideas public and allow others to see them. Words also help people form ideas into propositions that are easy to remember. Words also help people form ideas into propositions that are easy to remember. Indeed, when men think or have thoughts, they are only for them and inside their minds – private ideas. In order to communicate with other people, those thoughts need to be externalized through signs. Communication means sending thoughts from one mind to another, usually done with words. Thus, by putting ideas into words, men make their ideas public and allow others to see them. Words also help people form ideas into propositions that are easy to remember.

Communication occurs on two levels. The first level depicts the civil function of words which constitutes everyday conversation, which relates to everyday affairs. The second level is the philosophical use of words, in which words are used to convey a precise meaning when truth is expressed or looked for (Essay III.9.3). Locke distinguished between these two levels based on the goal and content of the communication as well as the level of precision required for each (Ibid.:3-4). Communication is based on the principle that the listener must understand the signs of the speaker.

To communicate, Locke said, the other person must know what the speaker is saying and understand what they are saying. "Whatever other men have. . . can be communicated to me but by making me alike knowing. . . " (Philosophical Works II, 6-7). In another place, Locke asserted that when both the speaker and the listener do not understand the same meaning of the same word, communication fails (The Life and Letters of John Locke, 93-94). Indeed, communication is unsuccessful when the listener and the speaker cannot recognize the same meaning for the same word.

How does communication occur on Locke’s account? How does one determine that ideas correspond in different minds, that one uses a word to stand for the same idea as another uses it?

According to Locke, words must "excite in the Hearer, the same Idea which it stands for in the Mind of the Speaker" in order for this dual function of language to be fulfilled. This means that the speaker’s and the hearer’s definitions of a word must be the same (Essay III.9.4). With the same meaning in other words, he states:

To make Words serviceable to the end of communication, it is necessary, (as has been said) that they excite, in the Hearer, exactly the sameidea, they stand for in the Mind of the Speaker. Without this, Men fill one another’s Heads with noise and sounds; but convey not thereby their Thoughts, and lay not before one another theirIdeas, which is the end of Discourse and Language. (Essay III.9.6)

According to Ashworth (2014), we can find the answer from Locke’s point of view in the following statements: (1) "Words . . . come to be made use of by Men, as the Signs of their Ideas" (Essay III. 2.1); (2) "The use then of Words, is to be sensible Marks of Ideas; and the Ideas they stand for, are their proper and immediate Signification" (ibid.); (3) "Words in their primary or immediate Signification, stand for nothing, but the Ideas in the Mind of him that uses them" (Essay III. 2. 2); (4) "That then which Words are the Marks of, are the Ideas of the Speaker" (ibid.); (5) "Words, as they are used by Men, can properly and immediately signify nothing but the Ideas, that are in the Mind of the Speaker" (Essay III.2.4).

In these words, Locke showed that in communication, one (speaker) uses his words as a sign, which stands for his ideas. A word is merely an empty sound if it does not stand for any idea. Words that do not go with any ideas "would be perfectly insignificant Sounds" (Essay III.1.4) or "bare Sounds, and nothing else" (Essay III.10.26). This is the significance of words that make a distinction between the "articulate sounds" and a word in a language. In other words, the possibility of knowing what words mean33In many passages we find
the terms ‘meaning’ and ‘signification’ in close proximity (Essay III.4.15; III.9.8; III.10.6; III.11.25-27). (cf. Losonsky, 1994: 125; Yolton, 1970: 199). indicates the difference between humans – who can use words with meaning, and animals, who can make articulate sounds like parrots (Pritchard 2013: 3).

Locke claimed that meaning can be understood from two different points of view: the listener’s or hearer’s point of view and the speaker’s point of view. Locke discussed the latter point of view in the following statements:

When a man speaks to another, it is that he may be understood and the end of speech is, that those sounds, as marks, may make known his ideas to the hearer. That then which words are the marks of the ideas of the speakers nor can anyone apply them as marks, immediately, to anything else but the ideas that he himself hath: for this would be to make them signs of his own conceptions, and yet apply them to other ideas: which would be to make them signs and not signs of his ideas at the same time; and so effect to have no signification at all (Essay III.2.2).

According to this passage, in order to understand, a person must speak, and the purpose of speech is for those sounds to convey his thoughts to the listener/hearer. It follows that words are signs of the speakers' ideas. Language cannot be used to describe anything else right away because that would make them signs of other people's ideas as well, which would make them signs of his ideas and not signs of his ideas at the same time, making them meaningless. Overall, the ideas of the speaker give meaning to signs.

Indeed, in communication, according to Locke, it is very clear that the speaker’s words must make the listener think of the exact ideas that the speaker is meant to convey. In line with the idea that words have primary meanings, this makes sense. "Suppose their words to be marks of the ideas in the minds also of other men, with whom they communicate" (III.2.4). In reality, though, the ideas that some people (listeners) have are different from the speakers’ ideas. In other words, making sure that your thoughts or the way you use words are the same as someone else’s has been brought up as a big issue. Locke pointed out this problem as follows: "They (words) often fail to excite in others" (Essay III.2.8).

The Deficiencies of Language in Locke’s Account

According to Locke, people often think and see things in the world differently from others because we are affected by different emotions. Language does not depict a reality separate from human experience; rather, it represents man’s understanding and conception. Meaning is inseparable from man’s experience (Wortham 1967: 48). Therefore, we do have objective ideas because they only exist in the speaker’s mind, "all within his own breast, invisible and hidden from others" (Essay III.2.1). So, it is possible that one names things differently than other people because the words he uses reflect his own ideas. That is why the same words can mean different things to different people—not because of careless language use, but because of how people think and perceive things.

If that was the case, Locke’s theory of meaning would not work perfectly because different people would not always get the same ideas from the same words. The idea that the same words can normally mean different things to different people because of how they are perceived contradicts Locke’s theory, or if we accept his theory, it means that we cannot communicate. This is what Locke called the deficiencies of language.

To conclude this Consideration of the Imperfection, and Abuse of Language; the ends of language in our Discourse with others, being chiefly these three: First, To make known one Man’s Thoughts or Ideas to another. Secondly, To do it with as much ease and quickness, as is possible; and Thirdly, Thereby to convey the Knowledge of Things. Language is either abused, or deficient, when it fails in any of these Three. (Essay III.10.23)

In this passage, Locke claims that the act of conveying one’s ideas to others is likely to fail when language is imperfect or we abuse language. In other words, language fails to convey thoughts from one to another. Here, Locke's critics say that there are two mistakes: Others cannot know what I mean if the meaning of my words is subjective (language is subjective), and communication seems impossible (no shared language) (Dawson 2003: 609). The following section will examine these two language deficiencies on Locke’s account.
Language is Subjective

Locke spent the whole of chapter 9 of Book III discussing the imperfection of language. In this chapter, Locke seemed to contradict himself when he said that language is not the perfect way for ideas to communicate between people, as double conformity (words-ideas and words-realities (things)) suggests. As mentioned above, Locke asserted that communication happens when ideas are sent from the speaker’s mind to another (the listener). This could be possible since words stand for what the speaker wants to say. However, language can fail to do its job because the connection between words and ideas is not natural; instead, it is totally arbitrary, voluntary, private and individual. "Not by any natural connexion, that there is between particular articulate Sounds and certain Ideas, for then there would be but one Language amongst all Men; but by a voluntary Imposition" (Essay III.2.1). It means that any word can be used to show what the speaker means because it has its nature of arbitrariness. In addition, speaking or using words to express one’s ideas is also a voluntary act, meaning that the speaker does it on his own will (Taylor 1988:6). It can be said differently that words do not have meanings without the speaker since each word’s meaning depends on the choice of the speaker. Locke asserted that everyone is free to impose "external sensible signs" on their "invisible ideas." When we use words to express our ideas, we impose them on our ideas.

And every Man has so inviolable a Liberty, to make Words stand for what Ideas he pleases, that no one hath the Power to make others have the same Ideas in their Minds, that he has, when they use the same Words, that he does. (Essay III.2.8)

These "arbitrary" pairs of words and ideas are made possible by the speaker’s "inviolable" freedom. This arbitrariness ties to subjective experience. This is the problem – the deficiency of language in Locke’s account. According to Brykman, Locke seemed to have said that the main problem with words is that they mean private matters that other people do not know about. In other words, when we speak, we cannot be sure that what we say will match up with what the other person thinks (listener) (1992). Since we do not all have the same ideas and do not all use the same words to talk about them, we cannot say that we share the same language. Instead, the truth will depend on the person speaking it. It seems that the two speakers do not share the same set of complex ideas. Consequently, they do not use the same words to mean the same things. This leads us to the second deficiency of language: there is no shared language (private language).

No Shared Language: A private language

In chapter two of Book III, Locke asserted that "words in their primary or immediate signification, stand for nothing, but the Ideas in the mind of him that uses them" (Essay III.2.1). Following this statement, many philosophers of language accused that Locke’s account of language does not propose a public language. Locke’s account of language is a private language. "The fact that there is a broad consensus about what different words mean strongly suggests that meaning is a function of aspects of the communication system that are open to public inspection," says William Alston (1964: 25-26). Because of this, Locke’s theory does not seem to be able to explain anything. Without access to Lockean ideas, one cannot understand what someone is saying, as Bennett states (1971: 5). The privacy charge is made stronger by the claim that Lockean ideas do not connect to the real world in a clear way. This means that our words cannot refer to public things that we can talk about with other people. In the same line, another objection is summed up by Karl-Otto Apel’s statement that "Locke’s epistemological approach, strictly speaking, accounts only for private languages" (1976: 42). According to Dawson, this view is the most common one in textbooks (2003:611). At this point, it seems that Locke’s analysis is often given as "the classic example" of the school of thought that proposes subjective ideas that are wrong because "meaning is a public, intersubjective social phenomenon" (Lycan 1999: 78). These two objections raised by contemporary philosophers question the validity of Locke’s explanation of language. In other words, it seems that language is not a good instrument in Locke’s account. The following part will discuss Locke’s responses to these objections.

Language’s Abuses and Remedies

In order to find satisfaction in the response to the initial objection and explore Locke’s rebuttal to these objections, according to Powell, it is necessary to examine Locke’s conception of the purpose of language
in relation to language abuses and their solutions (2021: 184). Locke asserted that there are two kinds of deficiencies: the imperfection of language and the abuses of language. The first type highlights that it is almost inevitable for many words to be doubtful and uncertain in what they mean, according to Chapter 9 of Book III. This is because of "the very nature of words"—their arbitrary connections to subjective experience. There are defects in language that cannot be avoided, but "wilful faults and neglects, which men are guilty of... whereby they render these signs less clear and distinct" (Essay III.9.1) make things even worse when people talk. This kind of imperfection can be redeemed, according to Locke.

Locke designated seven ways we abuse language: using words that do not mean what they are used for (Essay III.10.2). In this case, speakers use words without any clear and distinct meaning. Locke said these words are insignificant. Second, using words to make things unclear purposely (Ibid.:10.5). Words that normally describe clear ideas are used a lot of the time without any clear meaning. People can get confused when they hear words that do not have a clear meaning to them. Third, another abuse of language is affected obscurity - using words in a way that does not make sense. Applying old words to new and strange meanings or using new and vague words without defining them is another form of language abuse (Ibid.:10.6). Fourth, using words as if they were real (Ibid.:10.14). Fifth, using words to mean something they cannot. Locke asserted that if we use a word to represent that it cannot signify, we abuse language (Ibid.:10.17). Sixth, assuming that words are naturally linked to ideas is not what communication is for. (Ibid.:10.22). Finally, language is often abused in a figurative way (Ibid.:10.34). The four cases of abuse (first, second, third, and sixth ways) involve circumstances in which our speech will inherently deceive the audience about our intentions (Powell 2021: 186).

Following these weaknesses and abuses of language, Locke proposed numerous remedies to correct language deficiencies. First, use words with clear and distinct meanings- not use words without signifying something (Ibid.:11.8). Second, use words to communicate only clear and distinct ideas (Ibid.:11.9–10). Third, using words in the way they are normally used (Ibid.:11.11). Fourth, to declare the meaning in which we use them - explaining what words mean that are unclear (Ibid.:11.12, 13-25). Keep the meanings of words the same (Ibid.:11.26). In the next section, I will show how the set of abuses and remedies can be used to respond to these objections.

Solutions to These Challenges

In this section, I will examine two replies to critiques of Locke's language based on his text and explanations of the abuses and remedies. The first response will offer a solution to the first critique of Locke's about the subjective language. In Locke's view, there are two ways to respond to the second objection to private language: by applying a set of abuses and their remedies to prove that there is a public language. Another solution is to examine whether Locke discussed the public language throughout his book.

According to Locke, these two objections mentioned above are not imperfect by nature (Essay III.9). They belong to the other types of language deficiencies related to the abuses of language. The solution to these objections depends on what Locke called the remedies of language.

One of the prominent responses proposed by Lewis Powell is based on his analysis of the language of abuses and remedies. In his paper, *Locke on the Uses and Abuses of Language*, Powell contended that two problems that many modern philosophers raised against Locke's language cannot stand in Locke's account. "It is easy to see how this set of abuses and the recommended remedies flow from the afore-mentioned communicative goal (two objections on language)” (2021: 186).

The first objection contends that it is impossible for us to share the same language because we do not all have the same ideas or use the same words to describe them. The truth will depend on the person speaking it. Powell claimed that Locke's answer to the first of these objections depends on how we understand the phrase "speak correctly" (2021: 183). According to Locke, truth is the "affirming or denying of Words one of another, as the Ideas they stand for agree or disagree" (Essay IV.5.6). Powell gave an example to illustrate the problem and his solution to it. (1) If Locke’s account is correct, then someone can speak correctly when uttering "Bats are avians" even though bats are not avian. (2) One cannot speak correctly by uttering,
"Bats are avians." (3) So, Locke’s account is incorrect (Powell 2021: 183).

Following Locke’s definition of truth, Powell contended that if a speaker uses the word ‘avian’ to mean a ‘winged animal,’ then his statement "Bats are avians" is true. On the other hand, if another person uses the word ‘avian’ to mean ‘feather-laying egg animal,’ then his utterance of "Bats are not avian" is also true. Locke’s account says that both are telling the truth, but because their meanings are different, they are just arguing verbally. Powell asserted that when two people say different things, they disagree only verbally. The first speaker represents the belief that Bats are animals with wings, and the second speaker represents the belief that Bats are not feathered animals that lay eggs. These two beliefs are not different from each other. There is only the appearance of different beliefs because of the way they use words differently (2021: 183-184). Powell contended that the set of abuses and the recommended remedies could be used to reply to the first objection. As we saw above, in this case, if a speaker used ‘avian’ to signify ‘winged animal,’ the goal of communicating one’s thought will be hindered and deliberately confused. This is because the listeners will consistently come to incorrect conclusions about the speaker’s intended thoughts (2021: 186). The recommended remedy will correct this problem - affect speak in accordance with common use (Essay III.11.11), which serves as a constraint against any form of obscurity.

In the second objection, we can articulate the critique of Locke raised by many contemporary philosophers as follows: (1) If Locke’s account of language is correct, then no two speakers speak the same language. (2) There are several languages spoken by many people, such as English, Mandarin. (3) Locke’s account of language is incorrect (Powell 2021: 187).

According to the statement (1), Locke’s account of language is incorrect as it assumes that a language is composed of word-idea pairings and that any two speakers will exhibit non-trivial variation in the ideas they pair with those words. This is supported by the assumption that a language is composed of a set of words and that the standard implicit in Locke’s account for speaking the same language is one that we all seem to fail with respect to one another. Locke has to say that we are not speaking the same language (Ibid.). The problem in the first statement (1) is that the speaker abuses language: by either applying old words to new and unusual meanings or introducing new and ambiguous terms without defining them – an affected obscurity or to presume that your meaning is clear.

The second statement (2) contends that a common language is essential for standards of correctness and clarity in communication. There is agreement that a common language gives us a way to explain why certain ways of using words are right or wrong, and it is necessary to say whether language use is right or wrong. So, without a shared language, it may be difficult to attribute incorrectness to someone who speaks his own language (Ibid.). Following these two statements, Locke’s opponent asserted that there was no shared language in his account (statement 3).

Up to this point, this argument seems solid, and it is difficult to offer an objection or reply. However, a solution to this argument can be provided by using the set of abuses and remedies in Locke’s account.

As mentioned above, there are many reasons (abuses language) why someone uses or speaks language incorrectly. According to Locke, most reasons (five abuses) are intrinsic to the spoken language. He also identified two cases of abuse as extrinsic: the abuse of affected obscurity and the abuse of presumed transparency. These two outside abuses depend on the group the person is with. The former happens when someone uses a word in a way that is different from how the word is usually used in their community; it is said in a way that is not clear (Essay III.10.14). Presuming transparency is more nuanced, as it involves imagining a connection between names and their significations, causing the audience to understand their meaning (Ibid.10.34). This abuse depends on the community’s usage of words and the clarity and regularity of the community’s use (Powell 2021:188).

In order to address these two abuses, the speaker who employs a word with an ambiguous meaning must clarify the meaning he gives to the term (Essay III.11.12). When these two abuses and their remedies work together, they can fix the problem – replace the lack of public language. The former (affected obscurity) encourages community members to have more similarities in their individual speech patterns, while the latter
(presumed transparency) offers a way to resolve situations where conversation involves elements of speech that are not shared by everyone (Powell 2021:188). Now, the problem of no shared language is no longer a problem, and the objection to a private language cannot stand.

Another way to reply to the critique of Locke’s view on public language is to examine his ideas on this problem. I assert that several passages in his book show that Locke proposed public language. First, throughout his writings, Locke made it clear that it is not reasonable to think that words refer to ideas. In chapter 11 of Book III, Locke discussed the end of language as follows: "First, to make known one man’s thoughts or ideas to another; Secondly, to do it with as much ease and quickness as possible; and, Thirdly, thereby to convey the knowledge of things” (Essay III.10.23). In other places, Locke said that men "should be able to use these Sounds, as Signs of internal Conceptions; and to make them stand as marks for the Ideas within his own Mind, whereby they might be made known to others, and the Thoughts of Men’s Minds be conveyed from one to another” (Ibid.1.2). With the same idea, in chapter 11 of Book III, Locke said that words are the necessary "common conduit" through which men’s thoughts are "conveyed" from one to another (Essay III.11.1). These words show that in Locke’s account, words serve as a means for men to communicate and interact within the community.

In this section, I attempted to propose some responses to the critiques of Locke’s account of subjective language and no shared language by examining the set of abuses and remedies. I contend that these two objections to Locke’s account are not reasonable since these objections are only the abuses of language, and we can fix them with the recommended remedies. Reviewing Locke’s ideas on these problems throughout his work, we can conclude that the problem of no shared language does not exist in his account.

**Conclusion**

In this paper, I showed that, in Locke’s view, language is a good instrument to communicate and convey thoughts from one to others. I study what is the origin of language and its function in Locke’s account. Section two discussed two major objections raised against Locke’s account of language. These two majors contended that Locke’s view has no public language. In the third section, I proposed some limited replies to these two objections by analyzing Locke’s view on abuses of language and possible remedies. My argument was that these two objections can be solved by applying a set of abuses and their remedies. In addition, I contended that it is wrong to suppose there is no shared language in Locke’s account based on his ideas about communication throughout his Essay. My conclusion is that language is an essential instrument for communicating in society and community from Locke’s perspective, even though it still has some limitations.

**References**


