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Language and the Problems of Understanding and Interpretation

اللغة وإشكالات الفهم والتأويل

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Article abstract:

This study seeks to highlight the importance of language in philosophy, as an ontological component, and to reveal the contribution of contemporary hermeneutics to establishing a different understanding of language. Based on that, we ask: What are the most prominent statements by hermeneutic philosophers regarding language, the limits of understanding, and the dimensions of interpretation? This study adopted an interpretive approach to uncover the conceptions of philosophical texts, concluding that language is a form of being and the foundation for understanding textual and human experience, Interpretation, in turn, is an open reading that attempts to demonstrate the reader's effectiveness in reproducing alternative discourses.

Key words: *Existence; Interpretation; Language; Meaning; Reading; Signification; Text; Understanding.*

ملخص المقال :

تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى تبيان أهمية اللغة في الفلسفة، بوصفها مكونا وجوديا، والكشف عن إسهام الهرمينوطيقا المعاصرة في تأسيس فهم مغاير للغة يمنح الخطابات أفقا أرحب للقراءة والتأويل. من هذا المنطلق نتساءل: كيف نظرت الهرمينوطيقا المعاصرة لمفهوم اللغة؟ ما هي أبرز مقولات فلاسفة التأويل (هايدغر، غادامار، ريكور ودريدا) حول اللغة وحدود الفهم وأبعاد التأويل؟. اعتمدت الدراسة المقاربة التأويلية لتحليل النصوص الفلسفية والكشف عن تصوراتها والنظر في تطور مفاهيم اللغة والتأويل، لتخلص إلى أن اللغة تعدّ شكلا من أشكال الوجود وأساسا لفهم التجربة النصيّة والإنسانية، فالتأويل بعدّه قراءة انفتاحية على التعدّد يسعى إلى تجسيد فكرة المابعد ويروم إثبات فاعلية القارئ في إعادة إنتاج الخطابات المغايرة.

كلمات مفتاحية: التفسير؛ الدلالة؛ الوجود؛ القراءة؛ اللغة؛ المعنى؛ النص؛ الفهم.

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Introduction

There is no doubt that venturing into the worlds of philosophy clearly confirms the complementary relationships that bind it to language, as demonstrated by the various theses of contemporary philosophers such as Georg Hans Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, Martin Heidegger, Theodor Adorno, Jacques Derrida, Merleau-Ponty, giannivattimo, Richard Rorty, and Jürgen Habermas, etc. In this way, complementary relationships and dialogue have developed between literature, criticism, and philosophy. Philosophical texts are not devoid of literary poetry, just as criticism does not depart from philosophical references and theories. Literature remains the bearer of existential and humanistic philosophical issues.

Philosophy and listening to language

If philosophy is linked to all sciences and knowledge, and more specifically to metaphysics or the study of the supernatural, it also represents "a reflection on existence and on every means by which this existence can be understood." (Wood & al, 1999, p. 78)On this basis, philosophy becomes a human endeavor that transcends all cultural boundaries, science, and knowledge. It is "the creation of concepts, the exploration of systems of knowledge, the establishment of a strategy of questioning, and the quest to understand beings in this existence. It remains, always and forever, a questioning dialogue between beings and existence through the medium of language, which is the home and homeland of beings in this existence." (Barah, 2008, p. 11)Thus, from Paul Ricoeur's perspective, the act of philosophizing "is the very act of living, not an obstacle or an antithesis to it, as some imagine or delude themselves into believing, because it is an act of continuous exploration and development of human existence... (Al-Bukhari, 2014, p. 19)."

Thus, contemporary philosophy descended to understand reality critically and work toward revolution, as philosophical work is usually centered between knowing reality and working to change it. Furthermore, according to Eric Weil, philosophy is "not willing to accept meaningless discourse; what seems meaningless at first glance becomes meaningful discourse as soon as we question it, and perhaps this is what opens the path of philosophy before us, a path that leads to understanding the meaning of the world and its laws." (Bahawi, 2012, p. 7). Hence, it was imperative for philosophy to concern itself with human existence as represented in literature and criticism, as both are acts inherent to human and existential experience, through the medium of language, which is the world we inhabit and that inhabits us. For Heidegger (1889-1976), language and speech are the home of existence inhabited by beings; they are their homeland and home. Since language is a form of this existence, it transforms humans from human beings into verbal/creative beings, and it does the same for objects. Within the world of language/existence, objects abandon their original meanings in the world of things and become linguistic beings that do not refer to anything outside this linguistic existence. In fact, they constantly search for their own meanings, transforming themselves into signifiers that refer only to others in the process of coming into being (Barah, 2008).

This extends the conflict of interpretations that constantly seek language in order to search for existence, or rather to search for the self, that active self that inhabited Paul Ricoeur and wrote "The Story of the Self Narrated in Philosophical Language" (Amara & al, 2013, p. 71).This means that there is no text without language, no action without language, and no reading without language, for language alone gives texts their value and gives selves their existence. Thus, philosophy is closely linked to language, for everything happens through language and via it. "There is no interpretation without language, and the self cannot be recognized ontologically or epistemologically except through the linguistic medium, which we can consider the vital

medium of the process of understanding and its field of action. From this, understanding is seen in its projection outside the self, in its otherness and its discursive connections." (Ama ra, n.d., p. 22).

Heidegger...Language as the basis for understanding existence

Heidegger returns to language as the mold for all our concepts about it. According to him, language is no longer a medium of communication, and humans no longer define its essence. Rather, it is language that defines our essence: "We do not speak language; language speaks through us." (Tawfiq, 2015, p. 31)Do things have an essence before language gives them their names? In this sense, language is what reveals existence to us and brings it to us.

Heidegger focuses on poetry and poetic thinking in his search for the truth of language, where its presence is concentrated and we are satisfied with listening to it as it speaks. "This cannot happen when we speak the language of everyday life, but rather when language brings itself into language. In everyday speech, we talk about things through language (...) meaning that the nature of language cannot be revealed to us as an entity with its own presence" (Tawfiq, 2015, pp. 41-42). But what does it mean for language to bring itself into itself? Bringing language into language as language is achieved with authentic language/the language of poetry, when we are caught in the trap of language and are unable to confront it, when language ceases to be a subject for us, and when it reveals its essence and reality.

Heidegger focuses on understanding the nature of language as the supposed path to understanding text, as hermeneutics preoccupied him with "the nature or meaning of human existence in its intimate connection with the phenomena of existence itself." Among the human phenomena that preoccupied Heidegger were art and poetry, He found their meaning through understanding the essence of language itself" (Tawfiq, 2015, p. 109).

Philosophy is thus a game of ever-renewed questions, questions about language, the self, humanity, and knowledge. This is why Paul Ricoeur asks: "Is it not one of the tasks of philosophy to enter into the realm of this great philosophy of language, through which we come to realize that the speaker is always the human being himself?" (Bahadi, n.d., p. 248).

Gadamer/Language as the basis for understanding textual and human experience

Hermeneutics Gadamer hardly deviates from the general lines of his teacher Heidegger in their opposition to classical, objectivist thinking in the interpretation of texts, as Gadamer also starts from an understanding of the nature of language itself in order to understand and interpret literary texts.

Gadamer linked language and philosophy through their relationship with existence, saying: "Language is the fundamental mode of our existence in the world and the form that encompasses the wholeness of the establishment and formation of the world" (Gadamer, 2006, pp. 99–100). Thus, his interpretation of language begins as a way to understand and interpret human experiences that transcend the boundaries of methodology to encompass all details of life by raising questions, posing ontological and epistemological problematic issues, and opening up to others.

"Meaning does not go beyond the phonetics of language to designate a certain existence, because language here brings the outside in, and this is achieved in the highest form in the language of poetry, which brings existence into the world of language" (Tawf iq, 2017, p. 77). Based on this, Gadamer rejects viewing the text in its formal structure, that is, as a set of relationships and rules, as structuralism did before, where hermeneutics called for untying the text and freeing it from the shackles of the narrow formal view that claims to be methodological and scientific. Hermeneutics has built its edifice from the very beginning on an attempt to understand existence and interpret human phenomena, thereby contradicting the modernist conception of the text and establishing a postmodernist conception, which believes in the existence of a hidden meaning that language conceals behind apparent and intentional meanings. What applies to language also applies to literary text, for "literary text—in which the essence of language is realized—always conceals meaning or always says

something. It is a way of knowing the world, people, and things, that is, a way of revealing truth or existence" (Tawfiq, 2015, p. 121). Going beyond the formal view of the text alerts us to the need to understand and not overlook what the text says, as the being—with what exists in the world with others—attempts to realize its existence through understanding. Understanding "is not a finite state that the being reaches its limits or boundaries, but rather a continuous movement in time, always evolving and in a state of review and reconstruction" (Barah, 2008, p. 218).In short, understanding is historical, and any attempt to read the text in its formality will negate its historicity.

The idea that meaning is historical was developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer from his predecessor Heidegger, whereby the present can only be understood through the past, and the act of understanding occurs when our own horizon of meaning merges with the horizon in which the work is situated. "In Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy, there is no understanding/interpretation in isolation from previous assumptions, as they are the basis of our ability to understand history" (Barah, 2008, p. 300). Every interpretation of a work from the past constitutes a dialogue between the past and the present. What the work tells us depends in turn on the kind of questions we are able to ask from our position in history. When Gadamer applied this approach to literary theory, "he concluded that a literary work does not come into the world as a complete package with a fixed meaning, but rather that meaning depends on the historical position of the person interpreting the work" (Seldan, 1998, p. 171).

Thus, according to Gadamer, understanding can only be achieved through the fusion of horizons, i.e., the horizon of the text's discourse with the horizon of the reader's discourse, in order to embody understanding. "When I say I understand, it is equivalent to saying 'I can' or 'I have seen.' This is the source of hermeneutic truth" (Grandin, 2006, p. 146).

To understand means to give different readings to the text based on it, and to create a kind of mutual understanding between us and it through the logic of dialogue and within the dialectic of question and answer. Understanding, then, is a continuous journey with no end in the world of challenging questions of knowledge. What this understanding calls for is the achievement of an ideal model of dialogue, which led him to say: "Change what you are, be a questioning self that cares only about adjusting its opinions and changing its positions so that it can understand the other and attain understanding through dialogue and communication, diverse and different, and the birth of a dialogical human being, Homme dialogique" (Barah, 2008, p. 318). On this basis, Gadamer believes that the beginning of understanding is contingent upon the existence of something that calls us and invites us to understand; it is the first hermeneutic condition (Gadamer, 2006, p. 248).

In Self-Interpretation through Symbols by Paul Ricœur

Paul Ricoeur raises the question of understanding as the basis of his hermeneutic project, since interpretive activity "is a special case of understanding, namely understanding as it applies to written expressions of life and in a theory of signs that ignores the difference between speech and writing and, above all, does not emphasize the dialectic between fact and meaning. Interpretation can be expected to appear as a mere appendage to the empire of comprehension or understanding" (Ricoeur, 2006, p. 120). As such, discourse can only be understood through understanding these symbols, which represent keys, gateways, and portals to penetrate its underlying worlds, so that the symbol becomes a path for the emergence of double meanings or multiple meanings. The task of hermeneutics is "to prove that existence does not reach speech, meaning, and thought except through continuous interpretation of all the connotations of the world of culture, and that existence does not become a conscious human self except by possessing this meaning that dwells outside in the writings, institutions, and monuments of culture" (Ama ra, n.d., p. 29).

It is as if Ricœur stipulates that understanding and interpreting the self requires passing through and transcending a series of symbolic intermediaries. From this perspective, the self relies on texts, signs, symbols, and meanings. The self does not rely on the principle of absolute certainty, as is the case with Kojima, or the principle of transcendence, as is the case with the Kantian self, or the transcendental/transcendent self in

Husserl. The self acquires its value, existence, and effectiveness through intermediaries. The self is not sufficient unto itself in order to achieve its existence, nor can it invent its own meanings, for meanings do not exist with it but are embedded in those signs, hidden behind its language, which in turn needs to be understood and interpreted.

In this way, Ricœur takes a different path, complex and long in his hermeneutic approach, which celebrates the text as a carrier of multiple meanings and varying interpretations that transcend the closed structure, allowing the text to say what it wants and how it wants, rejecting all claims in search of new meanings that penetrate the silence of the texts. and to say other texts that it considers to be a new opening for other conflicting interpretations, interpretations that do not believe in agreement, do not acknowledge unity, and do not recognize the existence of equal interpretations, but rather whose slogan is conflict as a symbol of birth, and discord as the basis of inequality and distinction.

This is the game of texts, which clash and compete, overlap and repel each other, and interpret each other to announce a new birth each time, confirming that human existence must be interpreted because it can only be interpreted through symbols and signs that reshape our view of the world and realize the principle of understanding, since “Understanding is nothing but what is called hermeneutics, which is philosophically linked to texts as a model in which language is spoken, and in which the self sees itself and discovers its hidden aspects and different states” (Ama ra, n.d., p. 17). Hence, Ricœur's interpretation is “the field of symbolic thought open to all horizons and methodological boundaries by revealing the hidden meanings from the folds of socially and historically lived experience” (Ricœ ur, 2006, p. 8). The interpretation of the text gives it the opportunity to exist and be liberated from nothingness, drawing for it a new life far from censorship, materialism, and existing nothingness. This interpretation emerges through a set of symbols that are transcendent, deviant, displaced, outside the boundaries of the familiar, escaping the author's control. The task of hermeneutics is then “to search within the text itself, on the one hand, for the internal dynamics hidden behind the structure of the literary work, and, on the other hand, for the ability of this work to project itself outside itself and generate a world that is truly the ‘thing’ of the text. The internal dynamics and external projection constitute what can be called the activity of the text, and it is the task of hermeneutics to reconstruct this dual activity of the text” (Barah, 2008, pp. 353-354) and, through it, to reconstruct the self/world/existence.

When Ricœur speaks of these mediators as a set of symbols and signs, he gives them great importance, making the meaning of symbolic expressions intertwined with interpretation, as is the case with the symbolism of dreams in Freud. Based on this, we say: Interpretation is a process of thought that consists of the meaning hidden in the apparent meaning, and is based on the disclosure of the levels of meaning contained in the literal meaning. In saying this, I retain the initial reference for interpretation, that is, for the interpretation of hidden meanings. Thus, symbols and interpretation become intertwined, for where there is interpretation, there is multiple meanings, because the multiplicity of meanings becomes apparent in interpretation” (Ric œur, 2005, p. 44). The task of interpretation is not to stop at a single meaning, but to open the text to diversity and difference.

Based on the above, Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics unfolds, combining stages of understanding and stages of interpretation that aim to reach the self through itself and through the other, and to reveal the secrets of texts and interpret them based on a set of symbols, signs, and intermediaries. In this regard, Ricœur speaks of his own concept of interpretation, saying: "For me, interpretation is, strictly speaking, the deliberation of stages of understanding and stages of interpretation within a single interpretive arc. Have I gone beyond the fragmented nature of practical contemplation? Not at all, because I still believe that we must always examine, within the relevant epistemological field, the specific method of deliberation between explanation and interpretation" (Mahjoub, n.d., p. 15).

Language and Text by Jacques Derrida

There is no doubt that Heidegger was one of the first to open the door wide to multiple interpretations and infinite meanings, thereby laying the foundations for the postmodern era. He even preceded Derrida in coining the term deconstruction/demolition, but the latter's connection to deconstruction was stronger through his use of terms such as: deferred difference, trace, and original writing... which expressed his "overwhelming admiration for everything that divides, evades, or hides, and is constantly reconstructed contextually" (Derrida, de Man, & al, 2013, p. 371).

The novelty brought about by deconstruction is that it gives readers the freedom to open up the semantic process and observe the signified as it slips away, evades, and delays at every turn. "If bourgeois ideology never ceases to regard the signifier as a fixed counterpart to an unchanging signified, suppressing all discourse into a single meaning, avant-garde writers allow the language of the unconscious to rise to the surface and liberate signifiers so that they can generate meaning at will and destroy the control of the signified and its oppressive insistence on a single meaning" (Seldan, 1998, p. 120).

In other words, Derrida believes that meaning is not directly present in the sign, as the sign is always imbued with the influence of another sign. While Saussure viewed the sign as a precise symmetrical unit between a single signifier and a single signified, post-structuralist thought separated the signifier from the signified. All of this shows that language is a matter of "much less stability than classical structuralists considered it to be. Instead of being a clearly defined structure with clear boundaries (...), it now seems much closer to an infinite spider's web in which there is a continuous exchange and circulation of elements, none of which can be fully defined" (Eagleton, 1991, pp. 157-158).

There is no doubt that deconstruction was originally directed against the simplicity, immediacy, and singularity of meaning that characterized the course of Western philosophy.

Next, as we discuss language, text, and meaning among interpretivists and deconstructionists, it is important to note a crucial issue, namely that translation is an interpretive practice and a reproduction of texts, as well as an attempt at communication between the self and the other. In this context, "translation scholars in general, and philosopher Jacques Derrida in particular, see the branching of languages as a moment of great deconstruction in ancient times, with language exploding into jumbled languages, which is an explosion of the original and a fragmentation of unity. For this reason, Derrida and many translation theorists refer to this stage as the post-Babel stage, where there is difference and deferral, and where the duality of necessity and impossibility, which Derrida focused on extensively, are characteristics of translation work. Because of punishment, communication between humans is impossible, so meaning remains deferred. Because of the search for communication between fragmented humans who have forgotten their first language, translation becomes necessary" (Ben Bouaziz, 2023, pp. 100-101). Translation indicates the amount of difference and confusion that surrounds languages and the impossibility of monism, which serves deconstructive statements. Where translation seeks to bring languages closer together, it simultaneously reveals difference, multiplicity, and deferral.

Conclusion:

Based on the foregoing, this study concludes that philosophy is closely linked to language; Heidegger considered it a form of being—for everything happens through and by means of it—and because the nature and truth of language are revealed only through poetry and poetic thinking, Heidegger focused on it.

As for Gadamer, he continued his teacher's line of thought by considering language the foundation for understanding textual and human experience; a text is not complete in meaning but depends on the historical context of its reader, and thus understanding becomes historical and a continuous movement in time.

As for Ricoeur, he regarded interpretive activity as a special case of understanding; no discourse can be understood, nor its secrets revealed, except through the interpretation of its symbols. It is as if Ricoeur makes

the understanding and interpretation of the self contingent upon traversing and moving beyond a series of mediators, for, in his view, the self does not rely on the principle of absolute certainty but rather opens the text to possible and multiple readings.

As for Derrida, he opened the door to interpretation wide when he opposed literalism and the singularity of meaning, granting readers the freedom to open up the semantic process; for there is no definitive meaning, but rather deferral and difference.

We therefore conclude that these theses agree that the interpretation of language—a means of understanding and, consequently, of living—can only be achieved through a dialogue between the world of the text and the world of the reader.

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