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## **Semantic Autonomy of the Text: Towards the Infinity of Meanings**

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*Abstract:* The historicist and Romanticist tradition gives a strict demarcation between explanation and understanding as well considers interpretation as one of the provinces of understanding. This demarcation was strictly opposed by Ricœur. The Phenomenological Hermeneutics proposed by Ricœur gives due importance to interpretation which is the epicentre of the Hermeneutical arc. The dynamicity of the interpretation gives way to the possibilities of infinite references which discloses by the very notion of distanciation and appropriation. The non-ostensive character of the text paves way for the world opened by the semantics lead to them not to focus on the hidden meanings of the text rather the text discloses itself towards an infinite meaning's dimensions. This article mainly focuses on the functional disclosing of the text to a subject with infinite references.

*Keywords:* Semantic Autonomy, Text, Distanciation, Appropriation, Explanation and Understanding.

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## Introduction

This paper mainly deals with the understanding of the text, how we make meaning in the text. The dilemma of authorial meaning and semantic autonomy has pervaded throughout history. Ricœur comes up with certain formulas to present the relationship with the understanding and explanation in terms of reading.

- Understanding is to reading = Event of discourse is to the utterance of discourse
- The explanation is to reading = Verbal meaning and objective meaning of the text
- Dialectical structure of reading = Dialectical structure of discourse.

This paper follows the phenomenological process of attaining semantic autonomy of the Text proposed by Paul Ricœur. The method followed is the dialectical relation of Explanation and Understanding which shows the instant recovery of text from the romanticist clutches. This paper also deals with and tries to find the solutions for solving the paradoxes of authorial meaning and semantic autonomy which leads to infinite meanings. This semantic autonomy and the dynamic nature of interpretations paves a new mode of being in the world which transforms one's ego into the self.

## The interplay of Explanation and Understanding

It is exceptionally hard to delineate the division between understanding and explanation in utterance or conversation. We explain something to another person to understand. And what he has understood, he can additionally disclose to somebody who is an outsider. We can see the overlapping of explanation and understanding, thus understanding and explanation will play a crucial role in comprehending. In this way, in

explanation, we explicate or unpack the scope of propositions and meanings, while in understanding we comprehend the subject that was explained, by the process of synthesis. Therefore, understanding deals with synthesis whereas explanation occupies the notion of analysis. This demarcation will lead to the further solving of authorial meaning and semantic autonomy of the text. This is a realisation as well as it is a genesis where Ricœur comes up with the deconstructed mode of reading the text. We had seen the strict demarcation between the explanation and understanding of the romanticist Hermeneutics.

### **Human Sciences and Natural Sciences**

As we know, Dilthey as the founder of Romantic tradition makes the distinction between human sciences and natural sciences. In fact, natural sciences are concerned with explaining the outer experience whereas human sciences deal with understanding inner experience and its relation to the outer experience, “designate two spheres of reality.” (Ricœur, 2016: 112). Natural science is the circumference contained with objects confined to ‘mathematization, ‘scientific observation’ as well as filled with “canons of inductive logic.” (Ricœur, 2016: 112). This is not the case with the human mind. The human mind has no specific rules, the study of other minds is brought by the notion of understanding. He considered interpretation as one of the notions of Understanding. Ricœur vehemently opposed the semi-role of interpretation in the realm of understanding.

### **Experience as the Starting Point**

If discourse is produced as an event, it is understood as meaning. This is the starting point where Ricœur diverges from the thought of Romantic tradition. Mutual understanding depends on the sharing of the same meaning. Ricœur emphasis that in this sharing the dialectic of explanation and understanding has begun. Understanding, utterers meaning and utterance meaning is a circular process. Utterers meaning further constitutes understanding

whereas utterance meaning constitutes an explanation. The explanation as a process initiates when the externalisation or objectification of event through meaning through inscriptions like signs, letters etc. Understanding constitutes an intentional unity, that is to say, all understanding is the understanding of something. At any rate, we cannot cancel this dialectic and we cannot strictly demarcate the dialectic in reading. But at this juncture, Ricœur places the role of interpretation. He says,

Then the term interpretation may be applied, not to a particular case of understanding, that of the written expressions of life, but to the whole process that encompasses explanation and understanding. Interpretation as the dialectic of explanation and understanding or comprehension may then be traced back to the initial stages of interpretative behaviour already at work in conversation. And while it is true that only writing and literary composition provide a full development of this dialectic, the interpretation must not be referred to as a province of understanding. It is not defined by a kind of object-“inscribed signs” in the most general sense of the term but by a kind of process: the dynamic of interpretative reading. (Ricœur, 1976: 74).

Ricœur in this way establishes an advancement in widening the scope of interpretation not as the ‘province’ of interpretation in the romanticist version rather he asserts the fundamental character of interpretation in the dynamicity of reading.

### Interpretation as Dynamicity

Ricœur proposes two stages of understanding in the dynamic process of understanding and it is mediated by the explanation. The initial understanding as a guess, as he asserts that “naive grasping of the meaning of the text as a whole.” (Ricœur, 1976: 74) Then sophisticated understanding aided by the explanatory methods leads to the liveliness of the language and meaning extension towards infinity. Finally, the text is appropriated which is distanciated.

## Why Guess?

The guess is strongly linked with the semantic autonomy of the text. It is a naïve understanding of the text preceding reading. With writing, the psychological intention of the author blurs. Since this intention is satisfied or annulled by the text. His intention is obscure to us. The verbal intention in the text has an amazing element that the verbal importance itself. It implies that understanding happens in a non-mental and semantic circle wherein text escapes from the psychological intention of the author. This is the beginning stage of understanding and explanation. In this understanding it is not a recreating of an old event rather the reader's initiation into the reading itself is the new event starting from the objectification of the event manifested in the text. "To interpret the unexpressed within a text, the true hermeneutic endeavour requires interpretation drawing on the interpreter's preunderstandings (their foreknowledge and situatedness within the tradition) which gives them a horizon through which to engage with the horizon of the text." (Geanellos, 2001: 115).

It is more away from the Romanticist version of understanding in which interpretation concentrated on the verbal meaning to find the intention of the author. The objective meaning of the text surpasses the mental intention of the author. So, the mental intention of the author cannot be sieve by the verbal meanings. "The surpassing of the intention by the meaning signifies precisely that understanding takes place in a non-psychological and properly semantical space, which the text has carved out by severing itself from the mental intention of its author." (Ricœur, 1976: 76). So, the initial understanding of the text is a guess.

## Elements in Guessing

We were dealing with the phenomenological aspect of interpretation in which interpretation is not one of the provinces of understanding rather it pervades in the whole stages of the understanding of the text. In this way, he tries to regain the lost position of interpretation

in understanding. He says that understanding of a text can be initially moulded as a guess, which is the crucial element for the explanation. We are discussing the elements of the guess in understanding.

### **Text as a Whole**

The reading of the text instigates a prior understanding of treating text as a whole. The totality of text is not a linear collection of sentences rather its meaning is intertwined and interlinked with each other. Text is treated as a work of discourse. According to Hirsch “an individual trait will be rootless and meaningless unless it is perceived as the component in a whole must be a more or less explicit guess about the kind of utterance being interpreted.” (Hirsch, 1967: 78). The plurivocity of text does not depend on the polysemy of words, rather it is attained by taking the text as a totality. This is a presupposition engaged in dealing with the parts and parts can further modify the whole by assembling specifics making a circular process. This sphere violates the logical validities because “There is no necessity, no evidence, concerning what is important and what is unimportant. The judgment of importance is itself a guess” (Ricœur, 1976: 74).

### **Text as an Individual**

Individuality attains through narrowing down from the whole. This the one way of localisation and the text attains its individuality in its uniqueness and the differences which demarcate the text from other categories, class, figures, and facts. This localisation and individualisation itself is a guess. The implication by constituting text as an individual always attains a perspectival look as that of text. The same sentence can be modified and further modified for the whole understanding according to the perspectival presuppositions. This perspectival notion constituting the text itself as a guess.

## Actualisation of Potential Horizons

This aspect is more concerned with the secondary aspects of the meaning. The secondary meaning can broaden the actual meanings. It cannot be limited to metaphors and symbols rather it pervades in every reading. This secondary meaning has the potentiality to generate much meaning in accords with the perspectival guess which we discussed above.

## Validation of Guessing

He borrows the distinction made by Schleiermacher's Divinatory and Grammatical. The divinatory aspect is methodical. They relate to guessing. Validation is the Grammatical aspect. They are closer to the logic of probability than verifiability. Validation is the essential task of interpretation as a discipline. "It is the logic of uncertainty and qualitative probability." (Ricœur, 1991: 213). In this way, the text attains a scientific character. "Certainty is not attainable, such guesses can be more or less probable based on historical evidence." (Rogers, 1986: 6). There are many ways one can interpret the text. Every interpretation is different according to the outlook, context, and pre-understanding. Validation of the text relieves us from extremities of interpretations.

This is the position where Ricœur distances himself from Heidegger and Gadamer. They were trying to establish a non-methodical understanding. Ricœur argued that this amethodical way of understanding will cause great issues of validity and foundational structures of the original way of interpretation. This validation is not verification but an argumentative practice, he connects it to juridical procedures used in legal interpretation. It used the thought pattern of subjective probability which is more attuned to the notion of falsification proposed by Karl Popper. In this way he tries to situate himself from the barriers of Romanticist fashion and the intention of the author.

## Explanation to Comprehension

This process is mainly concentrated on the dialectical relation between sense and reference. It is a deep level of understanding in which meaning is exteriorized. It is a transition from the epistemological realm to the ontological realm. It is the regaining of the ideal meaning to the actual meaning. The differences in the situation (of both writer and reader) affects the referential dimension. The ostensive devices used in writing goes beyond the actual reference failing pointing the actual reference intended by the author. This dilemma can be solved by the attribution of dialectics of explanation and comprehension. There are two responses relating in the process of understanding (Pre-understanding) to the comprehension which involves the structuralist way of interpretation which is the initial understanding of the semantic autonomy disclosed by the text concerning the reader.

## From Structuralist Way of Interpretation: Naïve Interpretation

The first response is the way of structuralist way of interpretation and then, understanding. It is initiated by the total suspending of the ostensive reference. This way of apprehension is more connected with structuralist schools. In this understanding ostensive reference is completely suspended which is the “total *epoche* of the referential function” (Thompson, 1981: 54) This will lead to the total escapement of worldly dimension in that way escapes the mental intention of the author too. “This is a suspension, the abstraction from reference to turn without an external” (Bourgeois, 1975: 136). In this case, the text is considered as the worldless entity concerned only with the interior of the text. “Working thus at the interior of a closed system of signs, linguistics can consider that the system that it analyses has no outside but only interior relations” (Thompson, 1981: 83). It is mainly based on the



closed system of semiotics. In this mode of reading the reference to the world, the inclination of the subject or intersubjective relations are bracketed or cut-offed. He connects the text with internal relations or “an interplay of relations” (Ricœur, 2016: 112). He says that,

Similarly, a mytheme is not one of the sentences of the myth but an oppositive value which is shared by several particular sentences, constituting, in the language of Lévi-Strauss, a ‘bundle of relations’. ‘Only in the form of combinations of such bundles do the constituent units acquire a signifying function.’ What is called here the ‘signifying function’ is not at all what the myth means, its philosophical or existential import, but rather the arrangement or disposition of mythemes, in short, the structure of the myth (Ricœur, 2016: 117).

Structurally a text follows a sequence of relations and opposites, by sequence Ricœur means that “A sequence is a succession of action kernels, each one closing off an alternative opened up by the preceding one” (Ricœur, 1976: 85). This type of reading and analysis only explains the text rather not interpreting it. He means that there is a suspense or complete bracketing of the meanings within the text. This bracketing makes the text isolated from any situation of discourse and its meaning “remains in suspense, together with any realisation in present speech” (Ricœur, 2016: 118). Therefore he reconstructs the mode of explanation which was confined only to natural sciences to the field of linguistics in that way to the Human sciences too.

The explanation is no longer a concept borrowed from the natural sciences and transferred to the alien domain of written artefacts; rather, it stems from the very sphere of language, by analogical transference from the small units of language (phonemes and lexemes) to the units larger than the sentence, such as narratives, folklore and myth. Henceforth, interpretation – if it is still possible to give a sense to this notion – will no longer be confronted by a model external to the human sciences. It will, instead, be confronted by a model of intelligibility which belongs, from birth so to speak, to the domain of the human sciences, and indeed to a leading science in this domain: linguistics (Ricœur, 1976: 86)

This comes from the semiological field, so it is possible to treat text according to the explanatory signs. Concentrated on signs not on sentences as its primal foundation. This can be treated as one of the possible approaches to interpretation. In this way, the realm of understanding is not only concerned with natural sciences. Although Ricœur is not completely denying the explanatory role in understanding, rather it also serves as the tool for deep understanding.

### To Depth Semantics

The non-ostensive character of the text paves way for the world opened by the semantics lead to them not to focus on the hidden meanings of the text rather the text discloses itself towards an infinite meaning's dimensions. Discovery of the possible references which were internally confined in sense cross the shore of finiteness (already existing (the) meaning). Not something behind the text rather the text discloses. Therefore, to understand a text is a movement from sense to the reference of the text.

What we have said about the depth semantics that structural analysis yields rather invites us to think of the sense of the text as an injunction coming from the text, as a new way of looking at things, as an injunction to think in a certain manner. This is the reference borne by the depth semantics. The text speaks of a possible world and of a possible way of orientating oneself within it. The dimensions of this world are properly opened by and disclosed by the text.

Creating a new ostensive reference which not pointing out what there exists rather extend to the possibilities. We already saw that the structural analysis of the text is static and dead. It will end up in some mathematical abstraction and solving of scientific puzzles by certain formulas. Without delving into the functions of depth analysis, the structural analysis would be condensed to the pure game as the mere algebraic expression of deriving and solving the equation. Naïve interpretation is

analysed into depth interpretation and the depth hermeneutics and deep semantics constitute a genuine understanding of a unique hermeneutic arc and requires the reader to understand which the text is about then the non-ostensive reference of the text. The depth semantics of the text signifies that “text communicates to a subject is a possible mode of being-in-the-world.” (Dimitrov, 2019: 6) The depth semantics has also an epistemological fashion. The world opened by the deep semantics of the texts discloses the infinite possibilities of semantic innovation. To be closer the text reveals immense possibilities of the horizon without a limit opened towards infinity.

### **Distanciation and Appropriation**

Distanciation and Appropriation function within the process of reading and are mutually connected by the very nature. Ricœur attributes an existential overtone to this dialectic. Distanciation in the literal sense, denotes estrangement, alienation but this alienation is not something totality demarcates oneself from the psychological motives, context as well as semantic autonomy rather it is the essential feature of the text. this is not an imposed or manipulated idea. The estrangement of the distanciation is rescued by the notion of appropriation. It is the process of making a text one own, attaching oneself to the reference of the text. Then, this yields distanciation constructive and productive treatment. It is a deconstructive way of drawing close to Derrida words “destruct to construct.” Ricœur considers appropriation as the epistemological instrument of knowing oneself through the way of a cultural detour.

### **Productive Distanciation to “Making One’s Own”**

The notion as we above saw that it is not literally as a separation rather Ricœur moves towards the concept of productive distanciation. This is against the traditional-romanticist traditions which were linked to the contents of literary works, cultural background, as well as social conditions. This productive distanciation takes place by way of appropriation. He uses the

German word ‘*Aneignung*’ which means ‘to make one’s own’ which was formerly alien. He says that,

According to the intention of the word (*Aneignung*), the aim of all hermeneutics is to struggle against cultural distance and historical alienation. Interpretation brings together, equalises, renders contemporary and similar. This goal is attained only as far as interpretation actualises the meaning of the text for the present reader. Appropriation is the concept which is suitable for the actualisation of meaning as addressed to someone. It takes place of the answer in the dialogical situation, in the same way, that ‘revelation’ or ‘disclosure’ takes the place of ostensive reference in the dialogical situation. (Ricœur, 1982: 185)

The history and culture thus suspended to attain something novel within the situations. Thus it ‘brings together,’ equalises, ‘renders the similar’ to transform oneself. Therefore, the meaning is not historical rather meaning is disclosed by the text, the ‘presencing’ of the meaning when one starts to discourse with the text. Ricœur claims that “reading a text explodes the circular movement of discourse into an arc” (Ricœur, 1982: 161). Rather than making us continually circle back onto our understanding reading radically discloses us to the other shore that free us from our original context and appropriate to our existential concerns. By analysing the objective structures of a text, furthermore, we can expand our understanding beyond our initial interpretation.

### **Flourishing of Oneself**

By making the text ‘my own’ the staticity of the text fades. It diffuses to the new form of life with infinite potentialities in interpreting and understanding. The self is attaining new possibilities of knowing himself by receiving a new mode of being. The formation of the ego is not because of a particular moment rather it is evolved in and through conversing and clarifying and “subsuming alien meaning into one's own scheme of things” (Kearney, 2007:150). Appropriation takes

place as a possession ‘taking holding of’ in this way, text grabs oneself from his narcissist ego. It gives a new self-understanding. “it is the text, with its universal power of unveiling, which gives a self an ego” (Ricoeur, 1991:193).

## Conclusion

The problematics of sematic autonomy, authorial meaning, the historical background which was the pillars of the traditional-romanticist Hermeneutics was overthrown by the Phenomenological Hermeneutics proposed by Ricoeur. The dialectical relation of explanation and understanding in which, how explanation aids as the co-joiner of pre-understanding and comprehension (deep understanding). The importance of guess (naïve understanding) in the field of understanding is very crucial. He blended the living subjectivity of the phenomenology of the language and the semiological structural analysis. We saw the notion of distanciation and appropriation. The notion of distanciation along with appropriation gives the infinite meaning dimension. How distanciation trespasses the semantic barriers and discloses to a new possible world via appropriation. The seductive quality of the appropriation transforms one from a self to the ego.

With the interior dynamic of the text, the text presents a real and phenomenological happening that affects the reader (Pandikattu, 1999). The inner dynamic of the text is not logged by the Romanticist or Historicist fashions rather the text flows oneself to the sea where no boundaries are there to restrict. This is not in a negative fashion rather this is an entry in which man finds his authentic self. The potency and dynamicity of language create a much more suitable and adaptable world.

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