THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN THE EVENT OF UNDERSTANDING
ACCORDING TO HANS-GEORG GADAMER’S PHILOSOPHICAL
HERMENEUTICS

by:
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In Hans-Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutics, he focuses on the linguistic features of human understanding. That is why he puts much of his emphasis in the concept and the very nature of language by labeling it as the “medium of hermeneutic experience.” He conceives of it as dialectical by nature since the whole process of understanding is verbal. Hence, “to understand what a person says is to come to an understanding about the subject-matter, not to get inside another person and relive his experiences.”

The linguistic features of understanding signifies the very nature of man as possessing language and man as possessed by language. To say that would mean we can never attain understanding or gain knowledge without the use of language—may it be in words or not. But no matter what process language comes, its essentiality would always connote verbal processes. That is why understanding comes through dialogue or the dialectic. This would not only mean that a person must be talking to another person in order for it to be dialectical. Rather, even in approaching or understanding a text or any signs would also mean dialectical since both presents the meaning that they project with each other.
In Gadamer’s essay “Man and Language,” he started with Aristotle’s classical definition of the nature of man “according to which man is the living being who has logos.” Hence, this starting point will establish the difference of man from animals since as rational animals, we humans have the capacity for thought, unlike the animals that are only driven by their instincts. More so, “to men alone is the logos given as well, so that they can make manifest to each other what is useful and harmful, and also what is right and wrong.” This speaks of the fact that the very nature of man lingers to the very nature of language which is to be established by thought as well as to be spoken either by words or symbols. Thus, man possessing logos makes him able to communicate wherein, no matter how different persons with each other are, there is still some sort of universality among men because of language, and not only of the very nature of man as man. Likewise, “all this is involved in the simple assertion that man is a being who possesses language.”

Hence, in the event of understanding, the role of language must be seen as essential since understanding is impossible without the use of language. Thus, “language is the universal medium in which understanding occurs.” Likewise, the concept of language is universal in scope when it comes to the event of understanding. As man possesses language, language too possesses man insofar as no understanding is possible without the use of language, may it be verbal or non-verbal.
Reference:
