

Language is the House of Being”: A Phenomenological Exploration of Language in Heideggerian Hermeneutics

Dr. Vanlaltanpuia

Associate Professor, Pachhunga University College, Aizawl, Mizoram, India

Abstract

Phenomenology basically is described as the study of phenomena and of the ways things present themselves to us in and through the experience. It's a radical way of doing philosophy, a practice rather than a system, an enquiry into the phenomena of whatever appears in the manner in which it appears, that is as it manifests itself to consciousness. It is a metaphysical quest that explores the spontaneity and immediacy of experience in a way it is primordially given. Prioritizing the human's embeddedness to being, a being to pre-reflectively cope with the natural settings, what attracts the attention is to primarily deals with the 'lived-dimension of knowledge', meaning, the practical dimension of knowledge over theoretical speculations, matters the most in this context.

Language is not only natural for man but a distinctive trait of man, in fact, so distinctive that he is defined in terms of his capacity of speaking. Heidegger interprets that it is language which enables man to be precisely that living being which he is as man, not that man has only the capacity to speak in order to maintain his identity. However, against the notion of language as the audible activity of an external expression of human being, he holds the view that language is a primordial event by which man realized himself as a being to meaningfully engage with its transcendental aspect. Apart from the lexical semantic investigation, he enquires into the fundamental ontology of which makes language per se is possible at all.

Keywords: Phenomenology, Primordial, Being, *Dasein*, Language

1. Introduction: Language from a General Parlance

An attempt is made in this paper to explicate the idea that Martin Heidegger, the 20th Century phenomenologist understands language as a primordial event of being, over a mere human talk and communication mechanisms. In colloquial usage 'language' refers to nothing other than a human capacity of speaking and communicating with each other using certain systems of symbols, connotations, rules and conventions. It has a varied form of implications, of being a vehicle of communication, of possessing a dynamic nature of involving semantic, syntactical, and lexical meanings, a twist of the concept as wide encompassing phenomenon, the complexity of which is found in the works of Heidegger, Saussure, Chomsky, Wittgenstein, and post-structuralist like Derrida. More than anything of this sort, an intention is made however, to trace the foundational root of language to the level of where it acts as a subtle universal principle, the impetus of something primordially imbibed as the disclosing agent of ontology of being, not necessarily of human discourse. For the purpose of investigation in this regard, nothing will do better than

a phenomenological lens, for being concerned with the lived-engagement of human being-in-the-world (a technical way of referring to existence) including language.

2. A Phenomenological Interpretation of Language

Greeks defined man as an “animal who speaks,” which was later forgotten in a more focused definition of man as “rational animal” (Alackpally 166). Heidegger re-interprets the Greek definition of the essence of man as “*Zoon logon echon*” (Heidegger, Letter on Humanism 226) – “the living being” who has language, showing that language is not only natural for man but a distinctive trait of man, holding a crucial place in the being of man. But unfortunately, Heidegger regrets, that the traditional philosophy goes on interpreting man not as “the living being that has language,” or “the living being that speaks”, but as the “rational animal”, the interpretation, he thinks, is in a reversed way. Against the traditional view which told that language is the audible activity which gives external expression to human thought and feeling, Heidegger wanted to redeem language as a primordial event by which Being (ontological being but nothing other than human being) is raised to the level of *Logos* (Alackpally 166). Since the popular views failed to realize or ignored deliberately the oldest natural cast of language as language, Heidegger tries to re-claim it in order to restore the fundamental ontology of *Dasein* (human being-there in the world). In this turn, *Dasein* discovers the essence of Language in a new way that “Language is the house of Being” (Lysaker 202), since one can have a glimpse of the ‘unsaid’ and ‘undisclosed’ essence of Being through a phenomenological exploration of language since it is this house only in which Being resides. Language is fundamentally meaningful not as mechanical combination of words but as the fundamental and ontological disclosure of that meaningful dimension of Being in its natural participation of beings and of human beings as *Dasein*. We live in a world that is meaningful prior to the syntactic and semantic combination of sentences and words that convey a particular kind of meaning to us.

3. Language as a Horizon of Disclosure: A Heideggerian Approach

As Heidegger tries to explicate Being in the form of horizons of disclosures, Being in its broadest sense is conceived to have a number of horizons. And when Heidegger talks about “horizon of disclosure”, he incorporates certain essential disclosures of Being such as *Dasein*, temporality, time, language, care, etc. In this context, *Dasein* discovers the essence of Language as the house of Being and reaches out to Being by constantly re-visiting this house. In *Poetry, Language, Thought* Heidegger writes as –

“Whenever we go to the well, or walk through the wood, we are always already going through the ‘fountain’ and the word ‘wood’, even though we are not saying those words or thinking of anything linguistic” (Parkes 208).

Heidegger’s *Question Concerning Language* is a phenomenological exploration of how language involved in our daily human experience as an event or a happening. He clarifies this thus: “to explain something, whether a thing, a human, or a god, means that something befalls us, strikes us, comes over us, overwhelms and transforms us” (Heidegger, On the Way to Language 57). Heidegger says we are off track in accepting language as included in our daily experience and hence we take it for granted. Thus, the necessary and immediate task is to establish conditions steering our experiences particularly of what seems intimately at our disposal. Even though, we read and write sentences consisting of words and symbols with which communication goes smoothly without bias, yet we fail to pay heed to language itself on ‘how’ it serves as the ontological foundational meaningful communication tool, and we eventually fail to grasp its full dimensionality.

Heidegger's understanding of language has two distinct phases. The first of these two phases is found in his post *Being and Time* work or the later philosophy particularly. In general, the apparent difference between the first and the second phase is that the understanding of language attributed to or moving along with *Dasein's* (man) capacity in the earlier phase has shifted to *Sein* (Being) in the later phase. The active participation or capacity of *Dasein* in acknowledging and making use of language in the earlier phase is replaced by the passivity of *Dasein* in listening to the new language of Being in the later philosophy. To quote Timothy Clark: "The crucial issue for Heidegger after *Being and Time* becomes language, and the language of a tradition, what it covers over, the recourse it draws from, what it reveals unsaid" (Clark 72).

4. Language, Being, and Dasein: A Resonance of Heidegger

Heidegger's phenomenology, right from the beginning concerns with the disclosure of phenomena as what shows from themselves. His philosophical endeavor is the task of analysis of the phenomenological slogan – "Back to the things themselves" (Moran 9), in a more daily experience-oriented way that accords the praxis over theory. Within such context language plays a crucial and spontaneous role in the first phase of *Dasein's* intelligibility. In this sense, it appears that language is more closely allied to understanding than a mere activity of man or the state of mind. For understanding, Heidegger indicates that the world is "there" as that for the sake of which *Dasein* is. And "in the for-the-sake-of which, existing Being-in-the-world is discovered as such and this disclosed-ness we have called understanding...understanding thus defined, grounds "significance" as "that on the basis of which the world is disclosed as such" (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 182).

Traditionally, the crucial problem of the philosophy of language lies in the area of "semantics" (Alackpally 163), where intention is made to inter-relate language with the non-linguistic features of the world, with which its accessibility to us will be made known. Heidegger had no problem in accommodating this idea; however, for him there is an even more crucial problem, i.e., tracing out the essence or ground of language itself, as a result of which intelligibility will be apprehended. And in doing so he hoped to come to the ultimate concern of reality that language a priori nature has privileged *Dasein*, prior to any initiatives taken on the part of it. In order to explore the role of language in terms of the existential constitution of *Dasein's* disclosed-ness, there is a realization that it is no longer men who speaks, but language which speaks through us prior to our composition of our own language, the essence of language is understood in the utmost basic everyday existential context of *Dasein's* being-in-the-world. It appears that communicating with others is intelligible only when language first and foremost communicates with us. Language is what constitutes *Dasein's* existential existence, along with those other fundamental principles and modes of existence. "Heidegger indicates that the existential–ontological foundation of language is 'discourse' which is existentially equiprimordial with state-of-mind and understanding in *Dasein's* constitution" (Alackpally 172).

5. Language as Discourse: A Daily Mundane World of Existence

Discourse, is what is primarily expressed in terms of speech or talk in a normal consideration. However, as an essential constitutive element of 'Da', the openness of *Dasein*, discourse basically is not the formal articulation of words and making use of it by *Dasein* according to its wish, but because it is the articulation and meaningful ordering of *Dasein* only as the 'to-be-in-the-world'. The being of *Dasein* as of now is the result of what is already conditioned in its thrownness to the world as something to automatically follow and enjoy the things which per-conditioned its existence. Our 'to-be-in-the-world', the openness of Being

is revealed to us only by virtue of our meaningful thrownness to the world. Hence, language in terms of discourse, speech or talk in this sense constitutive of our existence primarily is the language of Being, the self-utterance of Being, and not of human speech. Humans began to speak only when they listened to discourse. Language is thus in every respect constitutive of his *ek-sistence* (existence).

As stated earlier, Heidegger's thematic investigation of language appears for the first time ever in section 34 of *Being and Time*, entitled as "being-there" and discourse. The main intention is to show that the phenomenon of language has its roots in the existential construction of *Dasein's* disclosed-ness (Alackpally 170). The task here nevertheless includes displaying the 'ontological locus' of language in the disclosed-ness of the 'there' (*Da*) of *Dasein*. He calls this existential ontological foundation of language '*Rede*' which is meant for "the articulation of intelligibility." The reason that Heidegger uses this word '*Rede*' – a normal everyday German usage which stands for 'talk', 'speech' or 'discourse' is to bring into the notice that language speaks to us or else playing a meaningful role in our everyday communication with others, finds itself always already rooted in an articulation of intelligibility. The intelligibility of being-in-the-world – an intelligibility which goes with state-of-mind expresses itself as *Rede* (Alackpally 171). What Heidegger means by language in this sense is a complex phenomenon, which is not merely a totality of words but a complex whole in which present totality of words along with all agencies through which '*Rede*' (idle talk) gets expressed in our human's everyday communications. And it seemed that Heidegger's choice of the term '*Rede*' points us towards everydayness rather than towards something abstract and scientific. And this point authenticates that his way of doing phenomenology concerns with finding out all agencies involved in the presencing of things or beings.

It is necessary to further state that *Dasein's* being-in-the-world involves being-with-others, wherein *Dasein's* connection with others resulted in exchanging daily conversation or communication, which again happened within the context of meaning-bound. Otherwise, the communication stands absurd, and rather useless. Hence *Dasein's* language after all leads to the connection with "*Logos*". A language in general presupposes certain interpretability a *Dasein* understands which is discourse, is modified in the later philosophy that discourse is the language of Being.

6. Language Speaks (*Die Sprache Spricht*) not Humans in Phenomenological Sense

Now if we analyze what is stated so far, we find that language is an essential existential structure of *Dasein* and of Being and that *Dasein* is first thrown into language over which he has no choice. In his everyday existence he just picks up language and its vocabulary as it is handed to him by tradition and his is engaged in usual mundane way of interacting with others or as inauthentic *Dasein*. By inauthentic Heidegger means engage in daily mundane world of mechanical way of encountering and fulfilling things (in this context 'Idle talk' is what defines it), without realizing the purpose behind as he stated thus: "Idle talk, which closes things off in the way we have designated, is the kind of Being which belongs to *Dasein's* understanding when that understanding has been uprooted ontologically...when *Dasein* maintains itself in idle talk, it is as Being-in-the-world cut off from its primary and primordially genuine relationships-of-Being towards the world, towards *Dasein*-with, and towards its very Being-in" (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 214)

7. Tracing the Genealogy of Language: A Phenomenological Justification of Essence

What Heidegger intended to expose was human beings, before reflectivity are already embedded in language by using it as a form of communication, but because of which left the essence of language un-

thought and forgotten. On the contrary or solution rather, he affirms that the essence of language should not be thought fundamentally in terms of human communication alone. More specifically is the claim that language does not originally occur as a medium whereby human beings express something through representations following the idea of what is already indicated (by Being). Our communication, which is a harmonious mixture of grammars, representative symbols, sentences, etc., does not necessarily connote our basic relation with language.

“Our basic relation to language is not the result of human decision to represent, express and / or address. Rather, most human decisions presume this relation, and thus Heidegger would prefer to say, it is less that we speak language than that “Language speaks” (Lysaker 199).

In a lucid expression of the above claim, Heidegger even articulates as – “Every spoken word is already a response – a reply, a saying that goes to encounter, and listens” (Lysaker 200). In the context of communication, words come to us already pregnant with signification. Language located at existential analytic of *Dasein* and is meaningful in terms of time bound Being context. That the being of *Dasein* is a structural unity constituted according to three fundamental modes of equal importance; under the mode of discourse, one is constitutive of the existence of individual human being. The essence of language is understood in the most basic everyday existential context of *Dasein*’s being-in-the-world, in terms of communicating others is intelligible only when language first and foremost communicates us. Here, our concern is not just narrowing down to a particular language or dialect but of a universal whole through which is possible *Dasein*’s communication among themselves.

8. Language as The House of Being

Thus far, we have explored how humans belong to language in the Heideggerian line of thought. According to it, language claims us in speech and even in thought, prior to any willingness on the part of us, in doing or acquiring it. Language is what already sets our beings (*Dasein*’s being in the technical / original way) in communicating others without bias and in understanding or to make ourselves intelligible in the sight of the phenomena. Re-iterating the treatment of language in *Being and Time* in the early philosophy of Heidegger would make it clear that the understanding of language is more closely allied to intelligibility. Because the understanding of *Dasein* about the phenomena, occur within the already given condition of language in the original sense. “The presencing of language needs and uses the speaking of mortals in order to sound as the peal of stillness for the hearing of mortals. Only as men belong within the peal of stillness are mortals able to speak in their own way in sounds” (Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought 205).

9. Conclusion: A Phenomenological Comment

In *Letter on Humanism*, he asserts that the thinking of the truth of Being elevates reflection on the essence of language to a new rank. By taking up the analysis of language, he is reflecting upon the *logos*, which after all culminates comprehensively in the Being. Understanding language as the defining characteristic of humanity, he rejects the traditional view of language that it is an instrument whereby, a sheer medium of communication. Heidegger is insistent that the essence of language should not be thought in terms of human communication. More specifically, the claim is that language itself speaks in a sense of letting happen, reveal themselves, showing indication which in tuned with it human understand as its own. Man speaks and communicated on what is already shown by language itself. It is evident that the analysis of *Being and Time* never directly confronts the problem of the nature of language as such. It came to the

essential issue on verifying what “is” there – a being that lies before our perception or attention. The Later Heidegger moves to resolve this difficulty, as he asserts in *Letter on Humanism*: “But the human being is not only a living creature who possesses language along with other capacities. Rather, language is the house of Being in which the human being exists by dwelling, in that he belongs to the truth of being, guarding it” (Lysaker 2002). Man, dwells in the language – the clearing of Being by being thoughtfully attending the call of Being. And the call of Being, insofar as it is silent, man’s response to it in return is equally wordless mode of listening. By responding thoughtfully in silence to the call of Being man becomes manifest as that being who thinks. The call of Being indicates that man’s thoughtful nature resides within the essence of language, which is the primal saying of Being. The difference here is the role of language is taken up within Being itself. Heidegger himself told in *Letter on Humanism* that “Language is the clearing and concealing advent of Being itself” (Heidegger, *On the Way to Language* 230).

Phenomenology being the ultimate metaphysical quest always addresses phenomena in a way that essentially constitutes the immediacy of our experiences, our being technically referred in this context as being-in-the-world. It addresses the ontological situation where we pre-reflectively encounter things as it is primordially designed, how things got intertwined in our existences, and how tools manifest to us as tools not the other way round. With this metaphysical lens, language is understood not as a human created stuff, a mechanism of communications as we ordinarily understood, but as a transcendently constituting reality of Being, a medium of universal language before it actually dispersed into different dialects. It communicates us before we actually generated our own grammar and rules. Humans are passive as they just correspond to this primordial universal language in terms of letting happen in the daily mundane world of existing. This passivity condition is clear when phenomenologists like Heidegger goes on claiming that, “in silence is the language clearer”. It talks about the non-representational situation of man which not only uses language for speaking and communicating with each other, but to understand and listen to the voice of Being.

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