Ricoeur’s Theory of Interpretation: A Method for Understanding Text (Course Text)

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Abstract: Hermeneutics, or the science of interpretation, is well accepted in the humanities. In the field of education, hermeneutics has played a relatively important role in understanding text. It is the task of this essay to introduce the theory and findings of Paul ricoeur's hermeneutics. Specifically, the essay interprets the usefulness of ricoeur’s philosophy in understanding text (course text). With respect to the ricoeur’s hermeneutic method, understanding text (course texts) accomplish in the three level: 1-explanation 2-understanding 3- appropriation, which ricoeur called it “hermeneutic arc.” In the first level, explanation, interpreter explores about this question which text (courses text) tells something? And examine the text inside nature. In the second level (understanding), interpreter explores about this question which text (course text) speaks about something? and do all the endeavors to restore text out ingredient at a relation to live and reach for deeper understanding. In the third level (appropriation), interpreter appropriate text (course text) world for themselves. Thus, expanded interpreter horizon (knowledge and perception).

Key words: Hermeneutics · Education · Understanding · Text (course text) · Paul ricoeur

INTRODUCTION

The connection between education and interpretation is an ancient one. In the education practice of the ancient Greeks, for example, the central place of the interpretation of poetry attests to an essential relation summarized in Wilhelm Dilthey’s observation that “systematic exegesis (hermeneia) of the poet’ developed out of the demands of the education system. The relationship between the interpretation of poetry and the acquisition of knowledge in ancient Greek sources shows that the education value of poetry did not hinge on learning to author it, but on learning to take wisdom from it, that is, on the process of interpretation. According to Plato, for example, not only did poetry require interpretation, but poets themselves provided educational value only by being the “interpreters of the god’s. At the beginning of the development of the modern discipline of textual hermeneutics, the connections between education and interpretation, if blurred, were not entirely lost. Johann Martin Chladenius (1710-1759), in his systematic treatise on interpretation theory, followed Joganne's von Feld’s pedagogical definition of interpretation: “An interpretation is nothing other than teaching someone the concepts which are necessary to learn to understand or to fully understand a speech or a written work. “In the article, the first section the key concepts as such distanciation, appropriation, explanations are discussed in more detail. Next, in the second section, the application of Ricoeur’s theory of interpretation is explained in understanding text (courses text).

Paul Ricoeur’s Theory of Interpretation: In order to appreciate Ricoeur’s contributions, it is appropriate to set the intellectual and historical context of hermeneutics. Originally, the word “hermeneutics” came from the Greek mythological figure, Hermes. As a messenger, Hermes was responsible for interpreting Zeus’ messages for the other gods and goddesses [1]. For the purposes of this paper, we may define hermeneutics as the site of what Ricoeur calls the “conflict interpretation and the problem of domination of interpretations.” Ricoeur starts with the claim that interpretation is possible because of the
Ricoeur’s Theory of Interpretation: a Framework for Analysis: A simplified description of the overall process of interpretation, proposed by Ricoeur, is presented in diagrammatic form in Figure 1. The key concepts of distanciation, appropriation, explanation and interpretation, which are shown in this diagram, are discussed in more detail.

Text of Distanciation: Philosophically, distanciation (putting something at a distance) has its roots in Gadamer’s principle of (i) historically effected consciousness, that understanding is situated in history and influenced by history and (ii) fusion of horizons; that understanding occurs through a fusion of the text’s and interpreter’s horizon. Fundamental to Ricoeur’s theory is his understanding of text and, in particular, his concept of distanciation, a standing separate from or being objective in relation to the text. Ricoeur begins his argument by stating that “text is discourse fixed in writing” [7]. In an essay, Ricoeur stressed that, in his view, text displays “a fundamental characteristic of the historicity of human experience, namely that it is communication in and through distance” [4]. He organized his discussion of this concept around four themes: (a) text as a relation of speech to writing, (b) text as a structured work, (c) text as

necessary cleavage between subjective intentions (authorial) and objective significance (what the statements mean). Interpretation fills the gap between what a speaker meant in saying something and what her statements mean outside of her intentions. The hermeneutical process begins when dialogue ends because with dialogue comes further clarification. Without dialogue, one is forced to interpret without the benefit of the other [2]. Ricoeur sought to explicate an epistemology of interpretation [3]. He focused on textual interpretation as the primary aim of hermeneutics and developed a theory of interpretation, which took into account language, reflection, understanding and the self [4]. Rather than ask, as Heidegger did, ‘what kind of being is it who’s being consisted of understanding?’ [5] or as Gadamer did, ‘how is understanding possible in being?’ he asked, ‘through what means is textual understanding possible?’ In this endeavor he sought to reunite truth, the characteristic of understanding, with the method, the operation through which understanding occurs. He also attempted to graft the traditional function of hermeneutics, that of textual interpretation, onto its contemporary ontological insights. He said, for example, that interpretation was caught inside the circle formed by the conjunction of interpretation and interpreter [5].
the projection of a world and (d) text as the mediation of self-understanding [6]. Ricoeur’s discussion of the nature of the relationship between speech and writing and the role of the writer and the reader compared to that of the relationship between participants of a spoken discourse, leads to the conclusion that the distancing of text from the oral situation causes a change in the relationship between language and the subjective concerns of both the author and reader. He pointed out that in the case of speech, those who are involved in the discourse are present both with (in the psychosocial circumstances of the dialogue) and to each other (conscious of the nonverbal aspects of the dialogue). This is no longer achieved when text takes the place of “live” discourse [7]. Ricoeur endeavored to make clear which traits of discourse are altered by the passage from speech to writing. He argued that discourse, being an event occurring at a particular point of time, is not preserved entirely unchanged when committed to written form such as interview transcripts. He also pointed out that discourse refers back to its speaker; it has a world (the world of discourse, a particular context) and an “other,” a hearer to whom it is addressed. A discourse committed to text no longer necessarily coincides with what the author wanted to say; the language they use even in live dialogue does not necessarily convey to the listener what they intended to say. This is even more likely when the discourse has become text. Ricoeur also argued that live “text” converted to writing now has a different audience (potentially anyone who can read), so the audience is also now distanced from the social and psychological context of the original intended audience. It is important. However, not to confuse distanciation with objective knowledge because Ricoeur’s theory, although acknowledging the distance between the self and the other also affirms that the knower and the known are linked [9]. The second theme of Ricoeur’s discussion of distanciation is that of discourse as a work. He identified three distinctive traits of the notion of a work: (a) a work is a sequence longer than a sentence, (b) a work is submitted to a form of codification that is applied to its composition, or we can say it has a literary genre and (c) a work has a unique style that relates it to the individual. Ricoeur is adamant that distanciation of discourse in the structure of a work does not obscure the fundamental purpose of the discourse, which is, “someone saying something to someone about something” [7]. This, then, leads our discussion to Ricoeur’s third modality of distanciation, text as the projection of a world, which he calls “the world of text” [7]. Live discourse expresses the world, but it does this in the context of a reference or a reality that is common to the speaker and his or her audience. Ricoeur argued that if hermeneutics can no longer be defined as a search for another person and their psychological intentions, which are hidden behind the text and neither, is it understanding merely reduced to identification of language structures, then “to interpret is to explicate a sort of being-in-the-world which unfolds in front of the text” [7]. Here, his theory joins with Heidegger’s [8], which suggests that understanding is not understanding of others but, instead, becomes a structure of being-in-the-world. This is closely connected to Heidegger’s hermeneutical circle in that the interpreter’s inner world meets the unique world of each text to create a new picture or understanding of a possible world in the consciousness of the interpreter.

The fourth and what Ricoeur described as the most fundamental distanciation, is what he called the “distanciation of the subject (the receiver of the discourse) from himself” [4]. If we are to take seriously the distanciation by writing and by the structure of the work, as discussed above, then we can no longer, as Ricoeur has suggested, hold to the notion that understanding is a grasping of an alien life expressing itself through writing. Ricoeur’s conclusion is that “in the last analysis the text is the mediation by which we understand ourselves” [4]. This leads to his concept of appropriation.

Explanation (What the Text Says) and Understanding (What the Text Talks About): Texts, through their foundation in language as discourse, stand on the boundary between the expressed and unexpressed. For understanding to occur, both the expressed and unexpressed require interpretation. Interpretation begins in a naive way when the interpreter (student) grasps the meaning of the text as a whole, after which the interpreter proceeds to a deeper understanding through recognition of the relationship of the parts to the whole. Any naive understanding means the interpreter has already constructed some schema or expectation of meaning, which may or may not be confirmed as interpretation proceeds. In this way, interpretive understanding goes forward in stages with continual movement between the parts and the whole (the hermeneutic circle), allowing understanding to be enlarged and deepened. For students, appreciation of the dialectic between understanding and interpretation allows them to see that repeated engagement with a text is necessary if premature interpretive closure is to be forestalled. Deeper understanding of a text requires time if the naive
interpretation is to receive an opportunity for enlightenment (of self and text). In the following section, processes of textual interpretation are expanded through discussion of Ricoeur’s [2], concepts of explanation and understanding.

Interpreting a text means moving beyond understanding what it says to understand what it talks about’ [2]. Embodied in this quote are the two stages of Ricoeur’s theory of interpretation: (i) explanation, or what the text says; and (ii) understanding, or what the text talks about. Explanation is directed toward analysis of the internal relations of the text (the parts), while understanding is directed toward grasping the meanings; the text discloses (the whole in relation to its parts).

Text of Appropriation: Philosophically, appropriation (making something one’s own) has its foundations in Gadamer’s [12] concept of tradition (the world of shared history, language and culture, which prefigures understanding). Through participation in the tradition in which we live, we gain a sense of the familiar and of belonging. Tradition is not alien; it is something into which we have grown, something we have appropriated through engaged living. Appropriation of textual meaning is the same. When interpreters appropriate the meaning of a text, it is no longer alien, it becomes familiar. Accordingly, appropriation and distanciation provide dialectic of interpretation, between the near and far, the familiar and unfamiliar, between the known or foreign. This conceptualization relates well to the view that interpretive research strives to reveal the hidden, unknown, alien or fragmented within a tradition and thus appropriately meets the needs of interpretive researchers. Methodologically, interpretation allows actualization of the meanings of a text and for Ricoeur this occurs through appropriation; making one’s own. What was initially alien [7] ? What is made one’s own is the world of the text and as a result, the horizon of the interpreter (their knowledge or consciousness) is expanded. Thus, ‘interpretation is the process by which disclosure of new modes of being … gives to the interpreter a new capacity of knowing him [or her] self’ [4]. In this way, interpretive understanding opens up the possibility of seeing things differently and of orienting oneself in other ways in the world. This link between experience, understanding and self-understanding grounds Ricoeur’s theory of interpretation in existence. It takes account of being and the relation of being with others so that ‘every hermeneutics is thus, explicitly or implicitly, self-understanding by means of understanding others’ (such as a text) [5]. For students, this renewed understanding of self allows a return to the text with an expanded horizon from which to understand it. It also highlights the intersubjective nature of interpretive findings and the need for interpreters not to project themselves onto the text. Indeed, appropriation is not an act of possession of the text but rather a moment of dispossesion of narcissistic ego [7]. And, in the space created by this dispossesion of ego, resides at the opportunity for interpretation; for the text to reveal its world.

Explanation, Interpretation and Understanding: Together, the concepts discussed so far from the paradigm of text interpretation. Most significant is that this is a fresh approach to the relationship between explanation and understanding, the unfolding of which involves the movement back and forth between the parts of the text and a view of the whole, during the process of interpretation. Ricoeur used the term hermeneutic arc to describe this movement back and forth between a naïve and an in-depth interpretation. In relation to Figure 1, this arc is represented by movement back and forth between the world of text and a new understanding of the world of discourse. In coining the term hermeneutic arc, Ricoeur did not discount the hermeneutic circle as proposed by Heidegger On the contrary, he claimed, “ultimately the correlation between explanation and understanding [which incorporates the process of appropriation], between understanding and explanation, is the hermeneutic circle”’ [9]. Ricoeur indicated that there are two ways of looking at text. The first for these he described as considering only the internal nature of the text. From this perspective, it has no context, no external world and there is no consideration of its having an author or an audience: “based on this choice, the text has no outside, but only an inside; it has no transcendent aim” [7]. What arises from it in this case is the explanation, which is possible because of the objectivity of the text (distanciation), which has been discussed above. At this level understanding is relatively immature. It takes into account, for example, the meaning of the words as the reader understands those, which, of course, might not be the exact meaning intended by the writer or the interviewee. The second way of looking at text proposed by Ricoeur is to restore it to a living communication. Through interpretation, the world of text combines with the world of the reader to form something new. At first, this interpretation, although adding to the interpreter’s understanding, is still fairly superficial. However, as
readers continue to explore the text, they begin to take into account a number of other factors. The first is what they know of the author, or in this case, the interviewee as they are informed by the field notes about the context of the interview and the interviewee and by what the interviewees reveal of themselves in the interview text. Therefore, interpretation moves from immature understanding to deeper understanding. Ricoeur summarized the relationship between explaining and interpreting in this way: To explain is to bring out the structure, that is, the internal relations of dependence, which constitute the statics of the text; to interpret is to follow the path of thought opened up by the text, to place oneself en route towards the orient of the text [7]. [Hence, Ricoeur’s theory of interpretation acknowledges the interrelationship between the assumptions made from the interpretation and that which is already known, possibly by the interpreter (student.).]

The Application of Ricoeur’s Theory of Interpretation: With respect to primary traits is discussed Ricoeur theory, Hermeneutical Arc. Reading a text (Courses Text) means moving forward understanding themselves. However, different have between reader (student) and text (courses text) as two face dialogue, but the concepts, hermeneutical arc, give specific meaning in the text [4, 5].

In the reading text, two specific faces exist: on the one hand, author is that writing the text provides responds for life aspect. On the other hand, reader (student) exists that reading a text with specific questions, prospects and interests is arisen of its history position. With related between reader (student) and text (courses text) comes the hermeneutical circle. In this cycle, both sides are a sustained interaction over time [4, 5]. In this cycle reader with its own assumptions that has text read the text and according to their questions is gain a specific interpretation of the text. So this is it that the reader as someone who is a member of a particular social, cultural background, language, symbolic and based on a certain assumption associated with them [4, 5].

On the other hand, by reading the text, the author and objectives are revealed for a reader, in turn, will transform the reader’s assumptions and initial conditions. And regard the impact of the mutual hermeneutical circle between the two is that exist understanding text. The interaction between text and reader is led understanding means. In other words, it means to not only focus on the author’s and it cannot be hidden in the text that is the interaction between the reader and text [4, 5].

According to an understanding of text, hermeneutical arc, you can imagine, but author is not against the reader whom a personal conversation between them must be done. However, a form of dialogue can be established between reader and text as well as reading the text out of current sweep questions and answers occurs the reader with text. Reading, on this basis, an activity is not that the reader with an empathy attempt to achieve the author’s thoughts and feelings, but the two worlds of text and the reader, in exchange with each other, creates the meaning [4, 5].

Level 1 Analysis: Explanation (What the Text Says): Ricoeur boldly states, “The choice in favors of meaning is the most presupposition of any hermeneutics” [5, 7]. To choose meaning necessitates interpretation [12]. However, words are polysemic because they invoke as many meanings as there are to use them. This is an impossible situation for the human scientist and one that we make amenable by using concepts, or the temporary “pinning down” of meaning. Discourse allows us to demarcate the endless possibilities of meaning by setting the context wherein words are used and by doing so, momentarily truncate the “play of meaning.” The process of reading is constitutive of the production of meaning as the two poles dialectically play into the structure of a text [13].

At this stage, students faced with the text (course text) need to follow an answer to a question-what the text says. In the explanation process, students understand only naive meaning of words and part of text for fully understanding. From this perspective, the text does not establish any connection between author and reader world and only external nature is not but the internal aspects. The important issue about the question is that the teacher or other students not to answer this question together, but is favorable than the student will think about it and try to focus on his thoughts to extract apparent meaning of words and basic meaning from the text. The primary meaning, the meaning of the final is not, but an important role is appropriate understanding of the text. At this stage, the main emphasis on text internal communication is with the student world [5, 7].

Level 2 Analysis: Understanding (What the Text Talk About): We exteriorize our being-in-the-world through our work. That is, we objectify ourselves, but our work structures how we see ourselves as subjects. We look around and see ourselves in our work, our discourse as work. Educators are no strangers to this notion, for
many classroom walls are decorated with student work. Our students’ self-objectification represents their attempt to understand the world. However, even before working-on-the-world we must reckon with belonging-in-the-world which foregrounds our comprehension of it. This belonging-in-the-world precedes our reflection upon the world. It excludes the possibility for total and complete reflection because we must first understand the meaning of being before we can transform it through language as a social practice [13].

In the second stage, students spend the first step should be facing the text with this question what does the text is taking about. At this stage, riecoeur suggests understanding text to restore the text with the reader’s world. In the second stage, the reader with a basic understanding that has acquired start to discover more of the text to reach an understanding of reflection slowly. Ricoeur of this process that links the world of author with the world of a reader is called understanding process. Ricoeur believes that learning process is central to hermeneutic approach. According to this view, data are imposed, but understanding cannot be imposed because understanding must be achieved within a person [4, 5].

**Level 3 Analysis: Appropriate:** Following Martin Heidegger, Riecoeur explains that we are alone and inauthentic for most of our lives. We are thrown into a world as beings, a project which puts the responsibility of understanding our situation squarely on our individual shoulders and promotes distance from others. However, we also exist in the world with others that we are “condemned to interpret” [14] and appropriate (making something one’s own). As a dialogical structure, appropriation or being-together overcomes our fundamental distance or being-alone [15]. Thus, we always exist in a world-with-others and the challenge is to acknowledge this pre-condition. This is accomplished partly through discourse with other human beings, which is why hermeneutics is first the understanding of a world projected by a discourse, the kind of life world it offers. It is also what ultimately differentiates humans from animals: “Only man has a world and not just a situation [7]. Through interpretations, we not only understand a psychological subject, but an existential project, in Heidegger’s sense of it. Discourse, at least, for the moment, struggles against the alienation brought about by our existential condition. Likewise, even before teachers can reflect on their conditions, they must understand their being-in-the-world, a belonging which precedes any thought about itself: in Riecoeur’s words, the “power to be” [7]. In the third stage, they gained understanding is used for reality life. For a student, clearly is related to the way of interpreting text world and social life when knows that it will consider in a rational way. Ricoeur words, our social life in the reading and interpretation of texts are identified. He believes that world of students is limited before interpreting text, but next interpreting text student can expand their world. However, when students start to interpret the text during the interpretation process is faced with many worlds that opened to can be inner there and allocated to their world. So, riecoeur states that students gain many experiences in school and deal with texts [16].

**CONCLUSION**

In the article, we have summarized recoeur’s (1981) theory of interpretation. We have affirmed the basic insights of Paul riecoeur's method and philosophy. With respect to the riecoeur's hermeneutic method, understanding texts (course texts) accomplish in the 3 level: 1-explanation 2-understanding 3- appropriation, which riecoeur called it “hermeneutic arc.” In the first level, explanation, interpreter explores about this question which text (courses text) tells something? And examine the text inside nature. In the second level (understanding), interpreter explores about this question which text (course text) speaks about something? and do all the endeavors to restore text out ingredient at a relation to live and reach for deeper understanding. In the third level (appropriation), interpreter, appropriate text (course text) world for themselves. Thus, expanded interpreter horizon (knowledge and perception).

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