

## THE PRIMACY OF LANGUAGE IN PAUL RICOEUR'S HERMENEUTICS

**Yohanes Slamet Purwadi**

Gajah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

### Abstract

This paper intends to explore the philosophical foundation of Ricoeur's hermeneutics on meaning and truth. Husserl's phenomenology and Heidegger's existential phenomenology will be used as point of reference to disentangle the complexity of Ricoeur's hermeneutical project. Ricoeur proposes and develops a new hermeneutical method. He places an emphasis on "the primacy of language" as a reference point to grasp self-understanding. Ricoeur shifts the focus of phenomenology from "intuition" to "mediation"; from "essence seeking" to "symbol interpretation". It is equivalent to saying that in formulating his concept on self-understanding, Ricoeur historicizes the subject. Thus, subject is no longer understood in its essence, but rather, on how it creates itself through language.

### INTRODUCTION

The history of modern Western philosophy, to some extent, can be viewed as a battle of ideas concerning the search for truth. Yet there is one point often missing in this kind of philosophical debate: that philosophical activity is entirely linguistic. One may consider an idea "an idea" when it is already articulated into language. Thinking is not so much a mental process, or even a rational activity, but a linguistic matter. It is language that enables us to think.<sup>1</sup> As an Australian semiotician, Richard Harland, proposes rhetorical question: "How could ideas exist in the mind without words?"<sup>2</sup> This is to say that without language, there is no thinking.

This linguistic issue gained its popularity in philosophical discourse during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This so-called *linguistic turn*<sup>3</sup> marked the emergence of new sensibility and radical shift toward the appreciation of the

role of language in philosophical discourse. Language is repositioned from an instrumental function to constitutive function. Previously it was common to understand language as merely an instrument to reflect reality. The “linguistic turn” shed new light on language. Language is regarded now as a constitutive element of reality. The way we understand reality depends on the way we represent it. Reality exists as represented through language. That is to say, our relationship with reality is not direct. It is always mediated by language.

One prominent theorist who follows this “linguistic turn” project is Paul Ricoeur.<sup>4</sup> However, it is important to note that Ricoeur’s approach is quite different from structuralist approach. Structuralism formulates linguistic issue with radical anti-phenomenological approach, which considers meaning as independent from subject.<sup>5</sup> It claims meaning derives solely from a system of signs. Whereas, Ricoeur embraces a hermeneutical-phenomenological agenda that serves self-understanding.

Ricoeur’s interpretation theory sets out from his critique of Husserl’s more idealist mode of consciousness, through which he further radicalizes phenomenology to hermeneutics. He criticizes Heidegger’s phenomenological ontology, wherein meaning is conceived of as “concealing” itself. Taking this lead, Ricoeur moves away interpretation to symbolic field.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, language plays crucial role in Ricoeur’s hermeneutics. If hermeneutics is to be defined as a process of interpretation that aims at self-understanding, this process will take place in and through symbolic field, so to speak, through language.

Before commencing this discussion, a brief explanation about Husserl and Heidegger’s phenomenological project, particularly which gives insight to Ricoeur’s hermeneutic – will be of much help. Ricoeur begins to build his theory from his critique to Husserl and Heidegger’s phenomenological project.

## **CRITIQUE TO HUSSERL AND HEIDEGGER’S PHENOMENOLOGY**

Edmund Husserl is arguably the key figure in phenomenology tradition. He introduces Transcendental Phenomenology; a new theory about consciousness and mode of knowledge. Husserl’s main purpose is seeking for *eidōs* or the essence of knowledge. To some extent, his very attempt is similar to Descartes’s investigation.<sup>7</sup> Like Descartes’, Husserl

phenomenological project is based upon ‘consciousness’. Consciousness is determined as the foundation of knowledge. However, Husserl and Descartes’s project is somewhat different. Both of them differ in how they treat consciousness as *prima causa* in their philosophical foundation. Descartes’ philosophy considers consciousness as introspective, that is, as consciousness that recognizes itself. On the contrary, Husserl’s consciousness is “intentional”. This means, consciousness is always consciousness *about* something. It is always directed toward an object. In this manner, Husserl attempts to break down Cartesian dichotomy between subject and object and between consciousness and reality.

Husserl’s phenomenological project might be best summarized under the jargon “back to the thing in itself”.<sup>8</sup> Phenomenology, then, is an art to understand phenomena as self-manifestation of reality. Phenomena are the reality that shows itself in consciousness. For Husserl, phenomenology is not only about epistemology, but also ontology. To this degree, Kantian dichotomy between phenomena and *noumena* is collapsed. Intentionality of consciousness, in Husserl’s view, is the reality as it appears itself in consciousness. There is no reality without consciousness. Nevertheless, it does not refer to an idealistic standpoint which views reality as constructed by consciousness. But rather, reality derives “an objective world” and “genuine” knowledge is inherently inseparable from subjective consciousness.<sup>9</sup> In phenomenological perspective, ‘truth’ is understood as the reality which shows itself in subjective consciousness; the truth is discovered in “any attempt at relating the conditions of the appearance of things to the structure of human subjectivity”.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, understanding and authentic experience can only be grasped through intuitive mode, by allowing the phenomenon to show itself in consciousness without any mediation. Authenticity appears itself directly and transparent (intuitive) to subject’s consciousness. Intuition is kind of pure reflection which operates by directing itself toward an object in order to grasp *theoria*, or true knowledge. In Husserl’s phenomenology, intuitive knowledge is conceived as “a purification of the phenomenological field of consciousness from its spatio-temporal objectivity”.<sup>11</sup> Consciousness is understood as “self-contained system of being”.<sup>12</sup> Thought may reveal being directly and in transparent way. Based on this assumption, Husserl’s phenomenology insists that philosophy is not a concept or interpretation of reality, but more precisely, *reality in itself*.<sup>13</sup>

In his second period, Husserl proposes another key concept in his phenomenology, namely *Lebenswelt* or life-world. It refers to everyday

world which is experienced and comprehended by each individual. It is the horizon where primordial experience of individual and its daily life transpires. It is called 'primordial' because this experience has not been redefined by any scientific categories. *Lebenswelt* subscribes to the idea that one's encounter with the world is *prior* to any reflection to the world. It constitutes the world we live in and experience with, where there is no clear distinction between subject-object as suggested by science. It is prior to our scientific distinctions of subject and object. Thus, scientific-objective understanding is nothing but the interpretation of *Lebenswelt*.<sup>14</sup>

### HEIDEGGER'S EXISTENTIAL PHENOMENOLOGY

Existential phenomenology is proposed and developed by Heidegger as a critical response to Husserlian phenomenology and scientific understanding in general (read: the worldview which tends to objectify and instrumentalize). Heidegger's phenomenology is existential in a way that it is anchored on existence to explain *reality, meaning, and truth*. Heidegger argues that Husserlian phenomenology of knowledge and understanding is a-historical and its concept about self is trapped into pure transcendentalism, which he calls "immanent consciousness of truth".<sup>15</sup> Husserl urges one to set aside and to bracket or suspend any cultural prejudices, whether it is in the naive or scientific forms. This is necessary in order to gain understanding, or in this case, to be able to grasp the essence of "things in themselves", which is presumed to be universal and exceeds space and time. Heidegger, on the contrary, rejects Husserl's notions concerning the subject and the transcendental.

Indeed, Heidegger does not begin with transcendental subject as does Descartes or Husserl. His subject is, rather, *historical*, a kind of subject that inhabits and bound to its daily life. Herein lies his difference with his predecessor as well as tutor, Husserl. Husserl intends to transcend temporality and particularity in order to grasp what he believes as universal essence. In stark contrast to this, Heidegger situates temporality and particularity as conditions of existence which enable understanding and *truth*. Thus, understanding is not located outside the world, due to the very fact that subject is always already in the world (being-in-the-world). Another interesting contrast, Husserl insists on *detachment* as a key to knowledge and understanding. While, Heidegger stresses *engagement*. Knowledge and understanding bases itself upon *concern and inter-*

*est*. However, this is not *self-interest*. Interest here is a ‘horizon’ of meaning for an individual. To put it differently, reflection toward the world or reality is prior to and becomes possible due to the fact that we are part of it and have meaningful relationship with the world and reality that we try to represent.<sup>16</sup> Actually, Husserl had considered this but regarded it as a prejudice that has to be suspended.

Heidegger’s assumption becomes a crucial attack on science that holds objectivistic-positivistic paradigm. The scientific paradigm relies on dualism, such as dualism of subject-object and fact-value. To give an example, in our society date of birth is considered to be the most crucial fact of people’s biography. One’s birth date is recorded in exact manner, which consists of date, month, and year. Yet in another society, the question of date of birth might not be considered important. Rather than date of birth, perhaps the day of birth is more relevant to them. It may relate, for instance, to the belief of *good or bad fortune*. This instance shows that *fact* is oftentimes closely related to *value*; both are not considered contradictory. It cannot be fully separated from the horizon of meaning, and the differences are not as sharp as considered by the objectivistic-positivistic paradigm.

Heidegger’s project shares common concern with Western philosophy, which investigates the deepest meaning of reality, or as Heidegger calls it ‘Being’. But the novelty of Heidegger’s project, lies in his method. Through phenomenology, Husserl attempts to provide the new ground of philosophy as a rigorous science. Heidegger, instead, goes further by questioning such an ambitious and optimistic project. Broadly speaking, both Husserl and Heidegger agree upon basic principle of phenomenology, which states that reality shows itself. Yet Husserl starts from intuition, while Heidegger starts from existence. If phenomenology is to be defined as an event where the essence discloses itself, Husserl claims that the essence discloses itself intuitively when the subject puts aside his disposition. In contrast to that, Heidegger argues that the essence will never appear or disclose itself apart from its existence. To put it differently, Husserl conceives meaning as *transcendental*, whereas Heidegger assumes it as entirely *existential*.

Heidegger elaborates a new method concerning the meaning of Being in order to grasp the fundamental ontology of understanding.<sup>17</sup> Existence is the meaning of Being that conceals itself to us.<sup>18</sup> Understanding the essence of Being is impossible unless we analyze the basic existential condition that defines human (or *Dasein*, in Heidegger’s term).

From Heidegger point of view, the basic condition of human is constituted by two primary facts, namely: existence and *being-in-the-world*.<sup>19</sup> Through his existential analysis, Heidegger insists that human being always anchored in history, bound to its temporality, and always already inhabits a certain cultural milieu. We cannot talk about humans apart from the way they represent themselves and existence, which is mediated by language. One is able to talk about him/her self, and describes his deepest aspiration in so far as it is mediated by language. Language constitutes the existence of human being. Besides, it determines one's position in the world and even the way the reality discloses itself as meaningful to an individual. It is, so to speak, through language that *Being* reveals itself to subjectivity.

Existential analysis is about how to interpret human through language. From this point, self-understanding moves from *immediacy* to *interpretation*. Understanding human cannot be direct, but rather it has to be interpreted through the manner human existence reveals itself, that is through language. Heidegger argues that "life is about interpretation". The truth, or the disclosure of *Being* through language, is therefore a hermeneutical event. In this way, phenomenology becomes hermeneutical activity because it involves interpretation of the meaning of Being. Yet, Heidegger differentiates the ontological status between *Being* and *Dasein*. Being discloses itself within *Dasein*, but it does not suggest that both of them are identical. The position of Being is ambiguous though, as disclosure and closure. As Heidegger puts it, truth is *aletheia*.

## **RICOEUR AND PRIMACY OF LANGUAGE**

Following Heidegger, Ricoeur criticizes the concept of a transcendental-subject in Husserl's phenomenology as the foundation of knowledge and truth. The intentionality of consciousness is moved into a subjective transparency of understanding. Therefore, Ricoeur concludes that Husserl's phenomenology and intuitive method tends to become a mere idealism.<sup>20</sup> And subjectivity and knowledge become alienated from human existence.

This is similar to Heidegger's approach. Heidegger proposed an idea of human existence as being-in-the-world.<sup>21</sup> Through this concept, human being is not located in a position that transcends space and time, but on the contrary, it is viewed as already belong to particular horizon of

meaning, a certain time and space. All this, then, implies hermeneutics of “finitude”. Ontologically speaking, “finitude” is related to temporal dimension of Being. And, one representation of human finitude takes form of *historicity*. The idea of historicity affects interpretation and meaning as follows: *First*, subjectivity and meaning is constructed in intersubjective relations. *Second*, *Dasein* or human existence is developed and constructed through language in intersubjective dialogue with ‘others’. In short, being is being for *others*. *Third*, *Dasein* does not only disclose, but also conceals itself. Being constitutes a horizon of meaning that disclose and conceals itself, hence it is to be interpreted in and through language.

From the perspective of hermeneutics of finitude, Ricoeur’s existential phenomenology reveals “the expanding of subject’s horizon” through interpretation. Besides, interpretative horizon which is widely open to the hermeneutic existential-phenomenology, constitutes a new understanding of language as a process of interpretation and meaning construction. Hence, language becomes the new field for philosophical investigation and interpretation of Being and takes place in symbolic space.

In the perspective of hermeneutic existential-phenomenology, meaning relates to the capacity of Being in revealing the possibilities: “Being discloses itself through existence (*Dasein*) which understands itself through its own possibilities”.<sup>22</sup> Or, as formulated further by Richard Kearney:

“Ricoeur emphasized the primacy of signifying intentionality. This new emphasis leads him to advance a general hermeneutics where phenomenology confronts its own limit – that is, where the intuition of essences ends and the interpretation of symbols begins.”<sup>23</sup>

To sum up, human is no longer understood directly and transparently in terms of substance or essence, but through a “round about route” mediated through the symbol. The symbolic constitutes a field wherein humans “create” and reveal themselves. The answer to the very question of “What are we?” and “Who we are?” is to be pursued in and through language.

Taking his cue from Husserl’s phenomenology and Heidegger’s existential phenomenology, Ricoeur advances his hermeneutical project. He concentrates mostly on the relation between existence and hermeneutics which base itself on “interpretation as a mode of being”. For Ricoeur,

we are what we interpret to be. This idea is crucial indeed as a foundation to interpretation, that is, the project of meaning as “manifestation” and “projection”. If hermeneutics to be simplified as a matter of interpretation, as in phenomenology and existential phenomenology of Being, the root and the horizon of existence, or *Dasein*, will become the starting point to move into the most crucial issue in hermeneutics. The interpretation of “meaning” originates from the idea of finitude of human consciousness which is always in constant tension between the past and the future: “As Heidegger’s phenomenological ontology clearly showed, consciousness is bound by a relation of belonging to past sedimentations and future projects of meaning...”.<sup>24</sup>

Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of finitude, precisely, elaborates how meaning is contingent in the context of human existence. For him, the most fundamental hermeneutical problem lies in the fact that existence provides a mode of interpretation since, “life is the bearer of meanings so that understanding is made possible through interpretation of life”. Or, as the following hermeneutics maxim suggests: “life interprets itself”. This is equivalent to saying that interpretation is a mode of being. It is not one among many instrumental activities, but rather a fundamental activity which constitutes human existence.

To comprehend this concept, we have to analyze the relations between ‘subject’ and ‘the world’ and how it influences our mode of understanding, as well as our interpretation. Here, world and contingency take the role as horizon of meaning and understanding to the subject. Being-in-the-world implies that subject always already sees the world from certain ‘perspective’ and understanding. The world is never being as non-meaning. The term “world” in this context has specific meaning. Ricoeur himself formulates “the world” as “the most concrete horizon in our existence”.<sup>25</sup> Heideggerian concepts of temporality and “practical world of life” are reflected in his statement: “Before objectivity, there is the horizon of the world; before the subject of the theory of knowledge, there is operative life”.<sup>26</sup> The world initially exists as *Lebenswelt*, as a world of meaning, long before it is objectively defined in scientific term. In this sense, world becomes “the horizon” of all attitudes and understanding.

As a critique to objectivism, phenomenology introduces the term “world horizon” to hermeneutics, which is the pre-given world that represents retrospective dimension of interpretation. The referential point of this retrospective dimension of interpretation is Ricoeur’s critique to

Husserl's transcendental subject. In Husserl's transcendental subject, meaning and truth is conceived of as kind of self-transparency. In this sense, the subject is assumed to have the capability to grasp the appearance of essence of object intuitively with no mediation needed. Subjective consciousness constitutes the very foundation of meaning.<sup>27</sup> But, the idea of self-transparency and the immediacy of meaning is relativized by Ricoeur by embracing Husserl's idea of intersubjectivity. Meaning is no longer immanent in subjectivity, but rather situated in intersubjectivity and embedded into *Lebenswelt*. *Lebenswelt*, Ricoeur asserts, represents a pre-given world that denotes "the level of experience anterior to the subject-object relation".<sup>28</sup> In contrast to the principle of self-transparency, Ricoeur views the process of interpretation and meaning as indirect. It is indirect in a sense that it is mediated through others. Meaning originates and develops itself through 'the others'. The linguistic character of existential-phenomenology shows the intersubjective dimension of understanding to the extent that "we are constructed by language". It relates to the fact that we construct our world intersubjectively through the preexisting worlds of others. As Ricoeur puts it, the world: "... is always-already-before and I come too late to express it".<sup>29</sup>

Ricoeur goes on to argue that our existence is characterized by historical horizon of language wherein language precedes our subjective consciousness. Through language, nature transforms itself into culture, hence a "world of meaning". It transforms the unknown into the known. Culture, or say "the world", is simply an alternate name for nature (which is articulated and intelligible). Thus, language is the most explicit manifestation of historicity and subjectivity. Anthropologically speaking, we are indeed a *linguistic being*. Ricoeur remarks: "we belong to language that has been shaped and formed by others before we arrive on the existential scene".<sup>30</sup> This is what constitutes the horizon of hermeneutical activity.

Besides the historical horizon, language actually has another dimension, namely 'transcendental' horizon. The seeking for meaning is encouraged by the human facticity wherein language plays a central role as transcendental medium for interpretation. The concept of "hermeneutics of finitude" will be used to describe the process of meaning construction. "Hermeneutics of finitude" implies that the understanding process is not direct. This means, meaning does not originate from subjective consciousness, it instead, derives from "the others", which is produced through language. This mediation should be considered as social-historical text

which is linguistic in nature. As a hermeneutical discourse, this idea shows the crucial transition from pure phenomenology that starts from consciousness to hermeneutics that begins with interpretation of symbols.

The aforementioned concepts have several implications. *First*, the heart of understanding moves from consciousness to language. Human's interpretation and the process of understanding are not based on consciousness, but on language. To interpret humans is not to analyze their consciousness, but to interpret their *symbolic expression*. The question about self (about what are we and who we are) is to be answered through language. If Ortega Y. Gasset argued that human does not have any essence, but history,<sup>31</sup> the very same expression can be applied in Ricoeurian hermeneutics; We can say that human does not have an essence, but language. The historicity of human crystallizes itself in language. *Second*, truth is neither transcendental nor universal, it is purely existential. Truth is constructed through language, and language mediates between us and reality. Truth, however, is not a correspondence between mind and reality, but rather it constitutes our *existing*. Following this assumption, it would be better to understand the truth as an ongoing process of expressing and transforming the self. Meaning is not waiting somewhere "out there" to be found; it does not lie outside our articulation in language. Indeed, millions of possible meanings can be articulated. Thus, truth and meaning – thanks to the intervention of language – is the possibility as well as the potentiality of existence.<sup>32</sup> Interpretation is a creative and transformative event. It "creates itself" in and through language; meaning, we transform ourselves as well during the interpretation process.

### **Function of Language: Re-description**

In Existential-Phenomenological Hermeneutics' perspective, linguistic interpretation has its reference in the idea of the world. In the process of interpretation, language works by deciphering the hidden signs of *Lebenswelt* or life-world and human existence. This kind of hermeneutics challenges the semiologist's view which sees language as a closed system of signs, as believed by Ferdinand de Saussure.<sup>33</sup> More than self-sufficient within its own linguistic structure, in this process of understanding, language operates in dismantling symbolic power, and thereby it elevates existing situation and textual order toward new modes of existence.<sup>34</sup> That is to say that, the distinctive function of language is to *re-describe reality at the symbolic level*. Language, "as signifying milieu,

must be referred to existence”.<sup>35</sup> Language has a transcendental ability to create new meanings to the given and present situations, is to re-describe new awareness and experience that, in turn, brings new way of looking at things.

Language, therefore, brings epistemology to ontology in two senses. On the one hand, language brings interpretation to existence where our consciousness *reaches* the world, on the other, it discloses possible modes of being-in-the world as well. In this sense, for Ricoeur, “to interpret is to understand a double meaning”,<sup>36</sup> namely to move beyond existing reality (disclosure of meaning), which is symbolic, but without losing the reference. The Heideggerian idea that ‘Being discloses itself’ could not be placed in the immediacy of self-reflection but within and through linguistic mediation.<sup>37</sup> The basic nature of language is to say *about* something.

The deeper layers of meaning are then deciphered by language.<sup>38</sup> The profound and distinctive function of language to ‘disclose’ reality is actually not weakened by non-immediacy in constructing meaning: “...Language itself (in some sense almost intersubjective consensus) offers a more valid claim to constitute the bedrock uncovered by meta-critical exploration than ‘methods’ or ‘explanations’ which operate at a higher or more derivative level of abstraction”.<sup>39</sup> The intersubjective nature of language discloses ‘true knowledge’.<sup>40</sup> Also it demonstrates the ‘meta-critical exploration’ aspect of language, which highlights the imaginative and creative power of language which is overlooked in scientific abstraction. Through the analyses of metaphor and narrative, Ricoeur sees a ‘higher’ derivative level of linguistic capacity; language has ability to bring new possibilities for imagination and vision. In other words, language leads the openness of consciousness to new understandings of human life and the world.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, metaphor presents a *possibility* rather than *actuality*.<sup>42</sup> In such a way, metaphor provides ‘imaginative discourse’ which can “open new understanding more directly rather than descriptive and scientific statements”.<sup>43</sup>

Besides, from the phenomenology of imagination, Ricoeur reconsiders the living vitality of symbolic power of language. He observes that language articulates meaning not merely as an abstract mimesis of events in reality. Meaning is more than a ‘concept’, that is, “meaning is not event to be abstracted”.<sup>44</sup> To see the symbolic-interpretive power of language, Ricoeur points to ‘poetic language’. Metaphoric language works through poetic images. The poetic image contains insights that stimulate *the ways*

*of becoming* which are different than *the ways of existing*. The process of becoming in poetic imagination gives a potential for verbal expressions. Then, the verbal expressions exercise specific function to provide imaginative ‘catalyst’ for a ‘becoming’, namely *becoming of our being in our mind*. However, what is distinctive here is that language has also a capacity to correlate “verbal potentiality and non-verbal actuality”,<sup>45</sup> words and act. It is parallel with linguistic ability to break the rigid relations between words and the world. In other words, it presents an imperative description that is even beyond the description of ‘seeing as’, beyond what realized as it is. This is because poetic language follows the path of the ‘reverberation’ of the poetic image into the depths of existence”.<sup>46</sup> To understand this more clearly we can look to the formulation of Richard Kearney: “The poetic image thus points to the very ‘depths of existence’ where ‘a new being in language’ is synonymous with ‘a growth in being’ itself. It is because “there is poetical imagination that words dream being”.<sup>47</sup> Thus, in this sense, it is possible for language to incorporate productive connection between words and our being, imagination and the possibilities of transformation.

This linguistic vision of reality opens in us the possibilities to seek new possibilities in our being through the creative process of poetic imagination. It demonstrates that ‘becoming in language’ could also be becoming in the sense of ‘making possible’ in our mind. This shows the capacity of language to *express us by making us what it expresses*. Here “expression creates being”.<sup>48</sup> In such dialectical expression, language brings us to the depth of reality along with the growth of our own being. In the process of re-creation by language, “we discover reality itself in the process of being created”.<sup>49</sup> So, language serves as a creative instrument to interpret meanings from the texts of life in the process of becoming in existence. As Ricoeur puts it: “Language in the making celebrates reality in the making”.<sup>50</sup> It is in this sense that we can transform the world first as ‘ideality’ under poetic imagination, and then it leads us into the symbolic ‘increase’ of becoming in our being in the world.

One of Heidegger’s key philosophical concepts was that language is the “house of Being”. Language is the only way to understand our being and existence. Inspired by Heidegger, Ricoeur believed that the distinctive function of language is to disclose Being by *re-describing reality in new ways*<sup>51</sup> as a ‘potentiality-for-Being’.<sup>52</sup> Yet for Ricoeur, Heidegger’s ideas of ‘state-of-mind’, ‘Being-attuned’ and ‘mood’ in subjectivity are not merely ‘subjective’, but rather, considered as ontology,<sup>53</sup>

namely, as a certain way of existing, of *becoming*. The centrality of language can be seen here in that a *becoming in language* takes place first in such ontological reflection before *becoming in being*. Consequently, the human world is a creative construction of language. The words become the world. Therefore, the function of language can also be explained in Aristotelian term: to “present a creative poeiesis (making)”.<sup>54</sup>

In the perspective of hermeneutics, language provokes the awareness of our being and reality ‘in the making’, and this represents our modes of being. As a result, the re-description of reality by language signalizes a ‘reconstructive power’ of human understanding and action (praxis) in the world as well.<sup>55</sup> For Ricoeur, linguistics constitutes a key tool for hermeneutics, especially in correlation to textual model of interpretation. The nature of language, therefore, can not be portrayed simply as a ‘picture of reality’ as proposed by Wittgenstein where the only valid language is the ‘positive language’ representing its objective correspondence with reality.<sup>56</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The shift from “consciousness” to “language” marks the shift of phenomenology to hermeneutics. In Ricoeur’s hermeneutical stance, language plays a significant part in constructing meaning and self-understanding. Through the primacy of language, key issues in modern Western philosophy, such as subject and truth, are redefined. By insistence on language, the firm position of transcendental subject with its self-transparency is indeed historicized through language. Concrete subject is not the transcendental subject that transcends space and time, but rather, as a historical subject that expresses itself in and through language. And to talk about truth: truth is no longer ‘an equation’ between mind and reality, but rather, it is the process of expressing and transforming the self.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Richard Harland, 2006, *Superstrukturalisme: Pengantar Komprehensif kepada Semiotika, Strukturalisme, dan Postrukturalisme (Superstructuralism: A Comprehensive Introduction to Semiotics, Structuralism and Poststructuralism)*. Trans. Iwan Hendarmawan, Yogyakarta: Jalasutra, p. 14

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 14

<sup>3</sup>Bambang Sugiharto, 1996, *Posmodernisme: Tantangan Bagi Filsafat (Posmodernism: A Challenge to Philosophy)*. Yogyakarta: Kanisius, p. 79-80

<sup>4</sup>Paul Ricoeur was born in Valance, France in 1913. During his study in university, the dominant philosophical discourse was phenomenology and existentialism. His hermeneutical theory was elaborated when he positioned as Professor of Philosophy at the universities in Strasbourg, Paris, and Chicago. Besides, he served as director for Center of Hermeneutics and Phenomenology in Paris during 1970s to 1980s. See: Richard Kearney, 2004, *On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva*, Burlington: Ashgate, p. 1 and also: Clark, S.H., 1980, *Paul Ricoeur*, London and New York: Routledge, p. 2

<sup>5</sup>Structuralism bases itself upon linguistic principles endorsed by Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure remarks that meaning is not derived from individual, but rather locates on differences existing in the language system, or *langue* as he calls it. To illustrate language as a system, Saussure exemplifies with his well-known chess game analogy. In order to play this game properly, one has to understand its basic rules. Take for instance, knight is able to move two squares horizontally and one vertically (or vice versa). We can call it a knight simply because it moves in a different way with other chessman. Similarly with language, system of language precedes any actual speech. And meaning is determined by its position in a system. See: Richard Harland, *op.cit.*, p. 15-17

<sup>6</sup>Richard Kearney, *op.cit.*, p: 15-17

<sup>7</sup>Anton Baker, 1984, *Philosophical Methods*, Jakarta: Ghalia, p. 108

<sup>8</sup>Andre Edgar & Peter Sedgwick (Eds.), 2002, *Cultural Theory: The Key Concepts*, London and New York: Routledge, p. 271-273

<sup>9</sup>Theodore de Boer, 1978, *The Development of Husserl's Thought*, Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, p. 398

<sup>10</sup>Charles E. Reagan, 1978, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: An Anthology of His Work*, Boston: Beacon Press, p. 76

<sup>11</sup>Dermot Moran & Timothy Mooney. (Eds.), 2002, *The Phenomenology Reader*, Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, p. 129

<sup>12</sup>Theodore de Boer, *op.cit.*, p. 398

<sup>13</sup>Anton Baker, *op.cit.*, p. 108

<sup>14</sup>Bambang Sugiharto, *op.cit.*, p. 36-37

<sup>15</sup>Martin Heidegger, 1996, *Being and Time*, Albany: State University of New York Press, p. 259

<sup>16</sup>Bambang Sugiharto, *op.cit.*, p. 71

<sup>17</sup>John Richardson, 1986, *Existential Epistemology: A Clarendon Press*, p: viii

<sup>18</sup>Dermot Moran & Timothy Mooney, *op.cit.*, p. 18

<sup>19</sup>Kees Bertens, 1981, *Filsafat Barat dalam Abad XX*, Jakarta: Gramedia, p. 150

<sup>20</sup>Richard Kearney, *op.cit.*, p. 16

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 16

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 1

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 13

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 16

<sup>25</sup>Paul Ricoeur, 1965, *History and Truth*, Northwestern University Press: Evanston, p. 193

- <sup>26</sup>Don Ihde, 1974, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, p. 9
- <sup>27</sup>Richard Kearney, *op.cit.*, p. 16
- <sup>28</sup>Don Ihde, *op.cit.*, p. 8
- <sup>29</sup>Paul Ricoeur, *History and Truth. op.cit.*, p. 194
- <sup>30</sup>Paul Ricoeur, 1981, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 145
- <sup>31</sup>Quoted with slight modification from Ernst Cassirer, 1987, *Human and Culture: An Essay of Human (Manusia dan Kebudayaan: Sebuah Esai tentang Manusia)*, Jakarta: Gramedia, p. 260
- <sup>32</sup>Paul Rabinow and William Sullivan. (Eds.), 1979, *An Interpretative Social Science: A Reader*, Los Angeles: University California Press, p. 129
- <sup>33</sup>Charles E. Reagan, *op.cit.*, p. 87; 102
- <sup>34</sup>Richard Kearney, *op.cit.*, p. 25
- <sup>35</sup>Don Ihde, *op.cit.*, p. 16
- <sup>36</sup>Anthony C. Thiselton., 1992, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading*, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House p. 347
- <sup>37</sup>Don Ihde, *op.cit.*, p. 17
- <sup>38</sup>Charles E. Reagan, *op.cit.*, p. 91-92
- <sup>39</sup>Anthony C. Thiselton, *op.cit.*, p. 359
- <sup>40</sup>Paul Ricoeur, *History and Truth, op.cit.*, p. 159
- <sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 352
- <sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 352
- <sup>44</sup>Charles E. Reagan, *op.cit.*, p. 103
- <sup>45</sup>Paul Ricoeur, 1978, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, London: Routledge & Kegan, p. 215
- <sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 215
- <sup>47</sup>Richard Kearney, *op.cit.*, p. 53
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- <sup>49</sup>Richard Kearney, *op.cit.*, p. 53
- <sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 53
- <sup>51</sup>Charles E. Reagan, *op.cit.*, p. 104; 108
- <sup>52</sup>Anthony C. Thiselton, *op.cit.*, p. 351
- <sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 352
- <sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 352
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