

UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE IN HEIDEGGER'S ON THE WAY TO LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Martin Heidegger's conception of language as presented in On the Way to Language. Heidegger challenges the traditional understanding of language as a mere instrument of communication and proposes an ontological interpretation in which language constitutes the medium through which Being is disclosed. The study aims to analyze the essence of language in Heidegger's later philosophy and evaluate its implications for contemporary philosophical discourse. Using qualitative textual analysis, the article investigates key passages from On the Way to Language and related secondary literature. The findings demonstrate that Heidegger regards language as the “house of Being,” emphasizing its role in shaping human existence, thought, and understanding. The article concludes that Heidegger's philosophy of language provides a significant alternative to instrumental and representational theories of language and continues to influence modern hermeneutics, phenomenology, and linguistic philosophy.

Keywords: Heidegger, language, Being, ontology, philosophy of language, hermeneutics, phenomenology.

INTRODUCTION

Language has traditionally been understood as a system of signs employed for communication, representation, and the transmission of information. Classical and modern linguistic theories generally consider language a human-created tool that enables individuals to express thoughts and exchange ideas. Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), however, offers a fundamentally different perspective. In his later philosophical works, particularly On the Way to Language, Heidegger investigates the essence of language beyond its communicative function and argues that language is intimately connected to the disclosure of Being. As Heidegger states, “Language is the house of Being. In its home man dwells” [Heidegger, 1971, p. 63]. The

significance of Heidegger's philosophy of language lies in its attempt to overcome the limitations of instrumental conceptions of language. Rather than viewing language as an object controlled by human subjects, Heidegger proposes that language itself plays a constitutive role in shaping human understanding and existence. His famous assertion that "language is the house of Being" reflects the idea that human beings inhabit a world structured by language and encounter reality through linguistic disclosure.

METHODS

This research employs a qualitative philosophical methodology based on textual and conceptual analysis. The primary source for the study is Martin Heidegger's *On the Way to Language*. Additional support is drawn from Heidegger's related writings and scholarly interpretations of his philosophy.

The methodological framework consists of three stages. First, key concepts associated with language and Being are identified within Heidegger's text. Second, these concepts are analyzed within the broader context of Heidegger's later philosophy. Third, the findings are interpreted through comparative engagement with contemporary theories of language and hermeneutics.

The study adopts a hermeneutic approach because Heidegger himself emphasizes interpretation as a fundamental mode of understanding. Rather than treating language as an empirical phenomenon, the analysis focuses on its ontological and philosophical dimensions. This method enables a deeper examination of the relationship between language, thought, and existence.

RESULTS

The analysis of *On the Way to Language* reveals several interconnected dimensions of Heidegger's understanding of language. A central finding is Heidegger's assertion that language is the "house of Being," a metaphor that fundamentally redefines the conventional understanding of language. Rather than viewing language as a simple instrument of communication employed by human beings, Heidegger presents it as the domain within which existence becomes meaningful. Human beings do not merely use language; they inhabit it, and through it they encounter and understand the world. In this framework, Being is not an object that can be empirically observed or scientifically measured. Instead, Being discloses itself through language, which provides the horizon within which reality appears and acquires meaning [Heidegger, 1971, p. 63; Inwood, 1999, p. 112].

The analysis further demonstrates that Heidegger establishes an inseparable relationship between language and human existence. Human beings are essentially linguistic beings whose self-understanding and interpretation of the world are

mediated by language. Through language, individuals construct meaning, establish relationships, and engage with reality, making language an essential dimension of existence rather than an external tool. This understanding is closely related to Heidegger's broader ontological analysis of human existence developed in *Being and Time* [Heidegger, 1962, p. 208].

Another significant finding concerns the intimate connection between language and thought. Heidegger challenges the traditional assumption that thoughts exist independently before being expressed through language. Instead, he argues that language and thought emerge together and continuously shape one another. Language is not merely a medium for transmitting completed ideas; it actively participates in the formation of understanding and opens new possibilities for thinking. As Richardson notes, Heidegger's later philosophy increasingly views language as the event through which thought comes into presence [2003, p. 395].

Furthermore, the study highlights Heidegger's special emphasis on poetic language. Poetry, in his view, possesses a unique capacity to reveal aspects of reality that remain hidden within ordinary discourse. Through poetic expression, language fulfills its highest function by disclosing truth in an original and authentic manner. Heidegger therefore regards poets as guardians of language, since they preserve its ability to reveal Being and maintain its profound connection with human existence. This perspective explains the central role that poetry occupies in Heidegger's later philosophical reflections and underscores the ontological significance of language throughout his work [Young, 2001, p. 87; Gadamer, 2004, p. 447].

DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that Heidegger's conception of language differs significantly from conventional linguistic theories. Traditional approaches often emphasize communication, representation, or syntax, whereas Heidegger focuses on the ontological function of language. From Heidegger's perspective, language is not merely an instrument controlled by human subjects. Instead, language itself possesses a formative power that shapes human understanding. This position challenges modern assumptions regarding subjectivity and the autonomy of rational thought. The idea that language discloses Being has important implications for contemporary philosophy. In hermeneutics, Heidegger's insights influenced the work of philosophers such as Hans-Georg Gadamer, who emphasized the role of language in interpretation and understanding. Similarly, phenomenological approaches to language have drawn upon Heidegger's view that meaning emerges through lived experience rather than abstract representation.

The emphasis on poetic language also remains relevant in contemporary discussions of literature and culture. Heidegger's philosophy suggests that artistic expression can reveal dimensions of reality inaccessible through scientific or technical discourse. In an era characterized by technological communication and information overload, this perspective encourages a more reflective engagement with language.

Furthermore, Heidegger's critique of instrumental language resonates with current concerns about digital communication. Modern technologies often reduce language to a mechanism for transmitting information efficiently. Heidegger's philosophy reminds us that language possesses deeper existential and cultural functions that cannot be reduced to technical utility. Despite its significance, Heidegger's philosophy of language has faced criticism. Some scholars argue that his language is excessively abstract and difficult to apply to empirical linguistic research. Others contend that his emphasis on Being lacks conceptual clarity. Nevertheless, the enduring influence of *On the Way to Language* demonstrates its importance as a foundational contribution to twentieth-century philosophy. As Wrathall observes, Heidegger's later reflections on language shifted philosophical attention from language as a representational system to language as the event through which meaning and understanding come into being. [2011, p. 312]

CONCLUSION

This study examined Martin Heidegger's conception of the essence of language as presented in *On the Way to Language*. The analysis demonstrated that Heidegger rejects instrumental theories of language and develops an ontological interpretation in which language serves as the medium through which Being is disclosed. The findings indicate that language functions as the house of Being, shapes human existence, enables thought, and reveals truth through poetic expression. Heidegger's philosophy emphasizes that human beings do not simply use language but dwell within it. Consequently, language becomes a fundamental condition for understanding reality and existence.

The study concludes that Heidegger's reflections on language continue to offer valuable insights for contemporary philosophy, hermeneutics, and linguistic theory. By highlighting the ontological significance of language, Heidegger provides an alternative framework for understanding the relationship between language, thought, and human existence in the modern world.

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