hermeneutical dialogue theory
(a method for reading the political text)

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Abstract

Reading the political thoughts throughout the twentieth century, have been accompanied less with the new theoretical achievement about dialogue. Subjectivism is dominant tradition to encounter the political thoughts. This research raises a hermeneutical theory of dialogue as a method and new experience to study of contemporary political thought. Hermeneutical theory of dialogue believes to declare rationality, emancipation, freedom and democracy totally at social interaction in reality everyday communication and we should not declare them like Descartes and other Rationalists as consequence of single mind of men. This article presents a progression and blending of different hermeneutics from the fusion of horizons approach of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, through the Gadamer-Habermas debate to explore the interface between interpretive and critical approaches to text interpretations, to arrive at a research strategy that was created out of this debate. This strategy, hermeneutical dialogue, emphasises a) a deep understanding of the phenomenon being researched as well as b) a sceptical stance to this newly found deep understanding and c) the value of dialogue in transcending a fusion of understandings to achieve transformative action.

Key words: Dialogue, Deep Hermeneutical, Hermeneutical Dialogue, Habermas, Gadamer.

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Introduction

This research is about deep Hermeneutic, Dialogue and reading the political text. It means that this article is going to make a theory for reading of any political text As a case study. The theory will be made with Habermas and Gadamer"s analysis of the dialogue. These thinkers either have many views about the dialogue.

Reading the political thoughts throughout the twentieth century, have been accompanied less with the new theoretical achievement about dialogue. Subjectivism is dominant tradition to encounter the political thoughts. This research raises a hermeneutical theory of dialogue as a method and new experience to study of contemporary political thought. Hermeneutical theory of dialogue believes to declare rationality, emancipation, freedom and democracy totally at social interaction in reality everyday communication and we should not declare them like "Descartes" and other Rationalists as consequence of single mind of men. Thus Dialogue and emancipation shape the theme of hermeneutical theory. In the way, dialogue is the base of rationality is cause of emancipation. It should be noted In hermeneutical dialogue each conversation is not dialogue because existing some of indexes is necessary.

This study with attention to the close relationship between dialogue and emancipation analyses connection of this two categories in any political text. Because dialogue is the important criterion for assessment of condition of thought at this time (because of important of dialogue in daily lives), evaluation of these categories according to ratio have very importance. Therefore articulation the hermeneutical theory of dialogue and application it for investigation of ratio of dialogue and emancipation at any political thought are aims of this study. In articulation of the hermeneutical theory of dialogue will pay attention to Gadamer's hermeneutics of philosophy and Habermas's theory of communication and critical hermeneutics. This article presents a progression and blending of different hermeneutics from the fusion of horizons approach of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, through the Gadamer-Habermas debate to explore the interface between interpretive and critical approaches to text interpretations, to arrive at a research strategy that was created out of this debate.

This strategy, hermeneutical dialogue, emphasizes **a)** a deep understanding of the phenomenon being researched as well as **b)** a sceptical stance to this newly found deep understanding and **c)** the value of dialogue in transcending a fusion of understandings to achieve transformative action. This strategy is explored in a project in the health sector in which the phenomenon being investigated, as well as the research approach, created emancipator dialogues in practice.

Hermeneutics is the science and art of interpreting texts. The origins of hermeneutics lay in the interpretation of biblical texts (FERRARIS, 1996). In the 21st century texts include a range of media and just as the media have changed over time, the methods of hermeneutics have also evolved from procedural processes to a range of strategies with a greater emphasis on interpretation through the particular historical and cultural contextual frameworks of the researcher.

This paper contend there is an important place in current research that seeks to interpret and transform 21st century human practices for the use of 21st century understandings and strategies of human interaction. In such research the idea of dialogues implies both text author (the source of the text) and text interpreter (the researcher) being engaged in a critical conversation. The word critical we use in the sense of the critical social sciences to mean challenging the status quo, its influences and assumptions, and seeking to positively change these, hence we use the term transformative. As presented below, the model of critical transformative dialogues is a strategy for today that seeks understanding, shared knowledge construction and transformation through dialogue. This strategy has been created from a research project (TREDE, 2008) that required a way of blending philosophical and critical hermeneutics and saw the debates between Gadamer and Habermas as a starting point for this creative process.

Text and Hermeneutic Inquiry

A text is essentially a medium for conveying a message. It is an intention to communicate, more than mere information; it embodies meaning intentions of the author and can evoke meaning interpretations in the reader. Beyond written texts the concept of texts has been expanded to include notions of conversations, interviews and dialogues (SVENAEUS, 2000). Texts can also be pictures, films, music or other means of expression (WILLIS, SMITH & COLLINS, 2000). Texts can include existing texts as well as texts that are purposefully constructed during the research process (KINSELLA, 2006). Many of these texts are ephemeral, embodied, experiential as well as the more traditional literary, scholarly and enduring written formats Readers have the capacity to make texts relevant to current situations. They can interpret texts in ways which may not be envisaged by the authors (DENZIN & LINCOLN, 2000). A useful analogy is to consider interpersonal communication as a form of dialogue in which each party brings their own background to bear on the interpretation of the "text" of the conversation. Such a dialogue occurs when the researcher interprets texts within his/her own context; a dialogue occurs between the text (i.e. the absent author) and the researcher. A similar process

occurs when a researcher creates qualitative research designs based on an interpretation of an existing research approach or an interpretation of the philosophical stance (e.g. idealism). The researcher engages in a dialogue with existing research approaches to create a tailor-made strategy that suits the research goals, scope and context.

Hermeneutic inquiry is enjoying attention in these post-positivistic times where increasing emphasis is placed on sense-making and meaningful knowledge rather than declarative technical knowledge (KINSELLA, 2006). It has been suggested that hermeneutic inquiry is the basis of all qualitative research (SCHWANDT, 2001) but it can be specifically used as a research approach to expose and clarify assumptions and interests that inform interpretations. "Hermeneutics has to do with a theoretical attitude towards the practice of interpretation, the interpretations of texts, but also in relation to the experiences interpreted in them and in our communicatively unfolded orientations in the world" (GADAMER, 1996, p.112). Hermeneutic inquiry is mindful of relationships and contexts and how these shape dialogues and interpretations.

Fusion of Horizons: Gadamer's method for reading the text

In his theorising of *philosophical hermeneutics* Gadamer (1996) challenged the universal truth claims inherent in the scientific methods of the empirico-analytical paradigm. He asserted that the way we interpret phenomena reveal our sense making perspective which in turn is influenced by our life experiences including cultural, personal and professional dimensions. Gadamer called these perspectives our horizons. He asserted that we all have limited horizons and preconceived ideas and we bring pre-judgements (i.e. expectations, bias, anticipations) to our interpretations. By engaging in dialogues with texts we can gain a deeper understanding and a fusion of our horizons with the text.

Gadamer (1996) asserted that we live within traditions and cannot escape from them. They are our past and inform our way forward. Tradition, historicity and our situatedness inform the limits of our interpretive possibilities. Gadamer affirmed that there is a finitude to understanding which means that we cannot understand outside of our situatedness. It is important to remain genuine in searching for shared meaning. This suggests a self-limiting character to reflection and dialogue (CAPUTO, 2000). Paradoxically when we know our limits of understanding we also know that there is understanding beyond our own horizons. Knowing these limits can enhance our understanding of the status quo. The focus of interpretation remains on reflection and understanding without necessarily incorporating transformation beyond the status quo

although this may be an unintended outcome. These limits of philosophical hermeneutics are located in the interpretive intent whereas critical hermeneutics aims to progress this enhanced understanding towards change and emancipation from previous horizons.

deep Hermeneutics: another method for reading the text

Habermas developed his theorising of critical hermeneutics from a critical social science perspective (HABERMAS, 1972). critical social science emerged from Critical Theory and philosophical hermeneutics (AGGER, 1998). In his influential book *Knowledge and Human Interest* Habermas (1972) drew explicit connections between interest and knowledge. He claimed that all knowledge is implicated by interests. Each domain develops knowledge that is valid and important. Technical interests produce factual knowledge and are best placed in empirico-analytical paradigm; historical-hermeneutics interests produce shared meaning and are best placed in hermeneutics of the social science paradigm; and emancipatory-cognitive interests produce transformative knowledge and are best placed in critical hermeneutics and action learning of the critical social science paradigm.

A critical perspective describes a position of scepticism and critical reflection regarding the status quo. At the centre of critical dialogues is liberation from unnecessary and unreflected constraints, including the constraints incurred by knowledge limitations. By exposing the interests, reasoning and questioning of interpretations researchers create new understanding and this newly gained knowledge can result in emancipation. A critical perspective intentionally attempts to shed more light on the ontological and epistemological stance that guides the researcher's knowledge generation.

Habermas (1984) argued that dialogues that are conducted with dialogue partners who do not explore beyond their horizons are stifling and are merely *transactions of information* because such dialogues remain within existing value frameworks, traditions and horizons. The importance of critical dialogues is that they focus on freeing speech partners from their limited horizons by exposing their unreflected prejudices and the preconceived ideas that they bring to the dialogue. Dialogues lead to emancipatory knowledge when they are free of domination, coercion and unnecessary constraints. Such conditions have been described by Habermas (1984) as ideal speech situation and they require sophisticated skills of introspection, curiosity of otherness and a willingness to uphold reason over power.

Enhancing Interpretations through a Debate of Philosophical and Critical Hermeneutics Both, philosophical and critical hermeneutics, subscribe to

openness to self, to the other, and to the subject matter. Openness can lead to rethinking self and thinking with the other to find new common understanding. However, the philosophical hermeneutics perspective describes interpretations as consensual engagement whereas a critical perspective describes them as a self-critical, sceptical engagement. Unconditional openness and willingness to cooperate indialogues to reach mutual understanding can be misused. The differences inthese dialogues in purpose and aim are illustrated in Table 1.

Hermeneutic interpretations	Philosophical	Critical
Interest and motivation	Pragmatic	Ideal
Purpose	Consensus	Emancipation
Ontology	Maintaining ontology	Constantly transforming Ontology
Aim of interpretations	Understanding	Transforming
Reason is linked to	Tradition and historicity	Emancipation
Tradition and prejudgement	Acknowledgement of tradition	Critique and resistance to tradition
Understanding	Deeper	Sceptical

Table 1: Distinctions between philosophical and critical hermeneutics interpretations(Quoted by Franziska Trede And others,2009).

In philosophical hermeneutics dialogue partners are free to engage with otherness to as deep a level as each partner wishes to take it. Otherness implies a curious engagement with interests, values and difference beyond one's own horizon. The fragility of such thinking together is open to distortion and dominance. The aim of finding common ground and shared meaning may conceal hidden intentions and dominance. Deeper dialogues that explore the interests and values that underpin otherness may produce shared understanding but such dialogues could be distorted when based on uncritical or even coerced conversations. Deeper dialogues could compromise the desire for emancipation. A critical hermeneutics perspective on dialogues also focuses on this openness and makes it a prerequisite yet a problematic one. Habermas asserted that the quality of openness between dialogue partners is not discussed by Gadamer. Habermas argued that the key to critical interpretations is an acute awareness of the role of power, authority and dominance and a clear intention to honour reason over power. A coercion-free situation is a precondition for critical interpretation. When dialogue partners sense unreflected arguments based on authority rather than reason then caution to openness might be warranted. A critical dialogue partner balances the level of critical distance and engaged involvement.

Gadamer (1991) rejected the critical hermeneutics notion of a critical outsider stance to dialogue. He asserted that we cannot think beyond our horizons, we can only expand it. He declared that our understanding is limited (CAPUTO, 2000) and that Habermas proposes unrealistic dialogue conditions. GADAMER (1992a) qualified his notion of tradition and authority asserting that authority is inevitable and there is no need for a discussion whether authority exists or not. He rejected a notion of authority that is rigid and that can typically be described as *just because someone important is saying something does not mean it is right*. Instead he described the notion of authority as guidance, mentorship and as a desirable role model. Gadamer advocated for an authority that enables learners to develop their own identity and their own freedom how to think and practice. Authority does, however, reflect the relations of power that may exist between dialogue partners. Gadamer critiqued that in our current professional world and industrial society productivity appears to be the most important criteria to judge practice. Creativity and individuality might be of secondary focus because they are the engines to transform the current power orders, democratise the way we relate to each other and expand knowledge. A critical stance nurtures creative and other than technical ways of thinking and being in practice. Gadamer agrees with this argument and he carefully stated that deeper understanding does not mean that *the dominant ways* should remain but rather that change and freedom needs to come from within. Gadamer (1992b) claimed that if the progressive left such as critical theorists and Habermas in particular allege deeper dialogues as reactionary and stifling then they were misusing his thoughts for their political gain. Gadamer cautioned that everything could be used politically. HEIT (2006) asserted that Habermas had political intentions when he developed the theory of communicative action and advocated for public dialogues. Habermas confirmed his political motif of his work in his Kyoto speech (2004) where he stated that "… [professors], too, are participating citizens. And on occasions they also take active part in political life as intellectuals".

In contrast to philosophical hermeneutics, critique and resistance are in the foreground in critical hermeneutics. Acceptability is ensured through critical collective agreement and not through the limits of interpretive capacities. Gadamer (1992b) claimed that his book Truth and Method helped Habermas to fine-tune his notion of reflexivity. Habermas moved towards a paradigm of critical consciousness raising and public discourse. Dialogues and their interpretations were located within the political arena. Habermas (1992) described the ideal dialogue situation with an acute awareness of power influences to real-life situations. He leaves it up to the individual to move

inbetween the real and ideal, the insider and outsider stances, in order to develop capacity towards the ideal. And Gadamer reasserted that he was talking about insights (*Erkenntnis*) and if we have real insights they can lead to liberation and freedom. Harrington (1999, pp.381-2) suggested that Gadamer's and Habermasian dialogue models should be seen as a concept "characterizing the moral and political responsibilities of researchers in relation to civil society and the public sphere of institutional accountabilities".

As a response to these political dimensions, Habermas (1992) made explicit distinctions between different contexts of dialogues. There are public discourses, political dialogues, and academic research dialogues. Habermas asserted that as academics we should be able to
• use our rational expert knowledge to inform and work in public,
• consciously take sides and be aware of own bias,
• respond to relevant themes by providing factual knowledge and good arguments.

Critics of Habermas dismissed his theory of communicative action and ideal speech situation as idealistic and utopian because such dialogue requires not only highly developed communication skills but also a constant sceptical and critical stance towards self and others. Critics also argued that somehow the ideal speech situation assumed the possibility of ideal objectivity. HABERMAS acknowledged his critics but insisted that these sophisticated conditions are needed to create ideal speech situations. They are not utopian or moral but they are the conditions for reciprocal dialogue, critical knowing and reflected rational action. Mutual understanding is only mutual when it is free of coercion and provides opportunities to not only hear the voices of marginalised or even silenced groups but to integrate them.

Habermas maintained that deeper interpretations can lead to naïve understandings of interpretations and to distorted knowledge. Critical dialogues provide opportunities to illuminate difference in tradition, cultural background and ways of reasoning. A critical perspective allows dialogue partners to expose assumptions and tensions within a tradition from an outsider detached stance even if it is only temporarily. Such critique resists pseudo-consensus, manipulated dialogues and making assertions based on distorted (naïve or superficial) knowledge.

This debate between philosophical and critical approaches to interpretation points to a need to find a way of using both positions. Hermeneutic research is contextual inquiry and contexts should include the moral-political as well as the pragmatic-cultural dimensions. The philosophical perspective points to the importance of a situated, transparent insider role in interpretation in order to

produce practical, realistic knowledge. The critical perspective adds critical reflection and scepticism to interpretative endeavours. It points to the importance of an outsider role of interpretation in research in order to produce critical knowledge. Each perspective has the potential to inform the other and when blended produce better quality interpretations (KINSELLA, 2006).

Formulating hermeneutical dialogue theory

Informed by the philosophical literature on hermeneutics Franziska Trede (2008) conducted doctoral research supervised by Joy Higgs and Rodd Rothwell. This involved the design of a blended approach informed by philosophical and critical hermeneutics plus an action learning component which this article coined "hermeneutical dialogue theory".

One of the key aspects of this theory is to describe, interpret and then critique the status quo of research topic in collaboration with research participants and to develop an emancipator people-centred model. A critical analysis of power relations, values and subjectivity are necessary and intentionally included in this research.

Critical interpretations are underpinned by aspirations towards people-centred, emancipator research framework based on social justice and emancipation whereas the majority of research approaches are still predominantly based on unequal researcher-research participant relations. The researcher assumes the role of interpreter whereas participants take on the passive role of compliance and information source. Adopting a critical dialogue approach in research implies a transformation of the role of the prime researcher as well as that of research participants. This theory accepts a blend between the interpretive and critical paradigm approaches. Interpretive approaches are used to describe current practice and critical approaches are used to promote critical understanding and change in practice by the participants.

Principles of hermeneutical dialogue theory

From the blended design of philosophical and deep hermeneutics provided in this research five themes were identified that inform hermeneutical dialogue theory and these are discussed below.

a) Dialogues with different dialogue partners: A key characteristic of hermeneutical dialogue theory is to engage with various dialogue partners.

b) Differentiating between deeper/interpretive and critical dialogues: The difference between deeper (philosophical hermeneutic) and critical (hermeneutic) dialogues is that *deeper* has the aim of understanding whereas *critical* has the aim of emancipation. The latter approach focuses on pursuing

and creating uncoerced spaces for dialogue and reasoning whereas the former focuses on deepening understanding within specific historical horizons. Deeper understanding and shared interpretations located in philosophical hermeneutics appear to be a promising strategy to describe a phenomenon and construct a text. In-depth interviews, especially when they are one-off interviews, lend themselves to a question-answer dialogue methodology.

C) Blending deeper and critical dialogues: The basis of hermeneutical dialogue theory is conversing with others without unquestioningly accepting their position and without forcing one's own values onto the other, but instead focusing on emancipation from unreflected constraints and assumptions. To be open is a prerequisite for dialogue, However, openness can also lead to losing self and creating tensions and unhappiness. Hermeneutical dialogue theory can be described as a spiral where deeper understanding informs critical understanding which in turn informs deeper understanding and so on.

d) The researcher as dialogue partner and critical interpreter: Hermeneutical dialogue theory method provided opportunities for both shared understanding and common values as well as for scepticism, exposing pre-judgement, interest and assumptions.

e) Credible interpretations: Hermeneutical dialogue theory provide credibility that the research products represent a collective critical voice rather than simply the voice of the prime researcher.

Conclusion

this paper has contributed to the dialogue concerning philosophical and critical hermeneutics and drawn attention to the need to conduct text interpretations with critique and scepticism. Text interpretations based on philosophical hermeneutics alone are problematic as they do not necessarily acknowledge power relations, knowledge distortions and the importance of critique and scepticism. Text interpretations based on critical hermeneutics alone are problematic as they do not necessarily acknowledge the power of tradition and a basic human desire to find consensus rather than being sceptical about self and others. this paper has presented a hermeneutic approach to research that integrates both critical and philosophical perspectives in order to blend their dualities and foster credible text interpretations. This article adopted abstract and concrete blending via dialogue and transformation. It is important to have ideals when conducting research and it is crucial to know short-comings and to acknowledge powerful influences because they maintain the researcher's dignity and authenticity, and preserve some kind of control over text interpretations without compromising credibility and rigour. This article

advocate "hermeneutical dialogue theory" as a useful tool when choosing to work within transformative paradigms and change processes where the underpinning values consist of inclusiveness, critique of status quo, transformation and emancipation.

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