

Textology: Derrida's Deconstruction of Epistemology

Mehdi Khabbazikenari¹

Abstract

For many years, philosophers have studied methods of epistemology through different approaches. The challenges in this area mainly focus on the question of the nature of the subject and object as well as their relation. These issues have led to two general but diverse movements: Idealism and Realism. Deconstruction, like its predecessor, Structuralism, is essentially epistemological. Structuralists conceptualised 'structure' in such a way as to go beyond the subject and object duality. Deconstruction, positively and negatively, established deep bonds with structuralism. This study interprets this relation and argues that structure in structuralism is transformed into textuality in deconstruction. The difference is that the text is not as rigid as a "structure" and continues to exist as a flux. The constant evolution of the text as a whole eliminates the subject and object duality. In this way, the concept of text acts as a bridge between linguistics and ontology. When Derrida discusses the text, he means any kind of being. This kind of being includes both concepts and objects. Derrida's interpretation of language can be linked to the epistemological and ontological functions of language.

Keywords: Structuralism, Deconstruction, Derrida, Cognition, Text

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

For many years, philosophers have studied methods of epistemology through different approaches. The challenges in this area mainly focus on the question of the nature of the subject and object as well as their relation. These issues have led to two general but diverse movements: Idealism and Realism. Deconstruction, like its predecessor, Structuralism, is essentially epistemological. Structuralists conceptualised 'structure' in such a way as to go beyond the subject and object duality. Deconstruction, positively and

¹ Associate Professor of New and Contemporary Western Philosophies, University of Mazandaran, Babolsar, Iran. (Corresponding Author: m.kenary@umz.ac.ir)

negatively, established deep bonds with structuralism. This study interprets this relation and argues that structure in structuralism is transformed into textuality in deconstruction. The difference is that the text is not as rigid as a "structure" and continues to exist as a flux. The constant evolution of the text as a whole eliminates the subject and object duality.

2. Theoretical Framework

Derrida is a key figure in Poststructuralism – a movement proposed by philosophers such as Foucault, Lacan, Deleuze, Derrida, and others in the second half of the twentieth century. An essential component of poststructuralism is its critical approach to diverse fields and concepts such as ontology, aesthetics, linguistics, ethics, politics, and especially epistemology. Philosophers' epistemology views fall within an expansive spectrum of divergent and convergent ideas. The question here is what is the role of poststructuralism, in general, and Derrida, in particular, in epistemology? Some poststructuralists regard Derrida as anti-epistemological; this seems to be a hastily conclusion in describing the relation between poststructuralism and epistemology. Poststructuralism studies epistemology at a deeper level and poses a number of fundamental questions.

3. Methodology

The present article is a phenomenological-deconstructive study. It is phenomenological because of its debates on the essence of the phenomena. It refers to the origins of concepts and describes natural phenomena. This is a retrospective process which describes the formation of the phenomena rather than discussing their nature. On the other hand, deconstruction does not follow a predetermined structure. It expands itself and the text in accordance with the host text. It moves beyond Husserlian phenomenology to restate the untold narratives of the text.

4. Discussion and Analysis

Poststructuralism, before anything else, is an answer to its preceding epistemological approaches. Through a complicated dialogical relation, it borrows from its preceding approaches and simultaneously negates them. We can categorise all of the epistemological approaches before Derrida into two general categories of idealism and realism. Not only did idealist and realist approaches fail to solve the problems in epistemology, but they also added new ones, among which is their inability to explain the relation as well as the differences between the subject and object. This article claims that Derrida's concept of the text and his notion of deconstruction answer to a number of

complicated epistemological questions. The present research argues that the origin of the text is epistemological in essence. Deconstruction drives the text into a flexible context and undermines structures. The text is an all-encompassing integrated identity. Of note here is the fact that even this totality has its own limitations. Towering on the binaries, the text questions the structuralist signification and interpretation of language. It reveals itself as a being at lingo-cognitive horizons. The deconstructive approach to the text shakes the foundations of structuralist linguistics, ontologies, and epistemologies as it tries to interpret texts in endless processes. The text, therefore, is a context which perpetually deconstructs and constructs itself. Deconstruction challenges the fundamental premises of epistemology while acknowledging the complexity of the process of interpretation. It seeks to modify the traditional epistemological relations among the subject, object, and language and de-centralise texts in an attempt to make way for new and infinite semantic possibilities.

5. Conclusion

The present research has tried to interpret deconstruction as a means through which epistemology can redefine itself and look at the subject and the object in new ways. The primary aim of this article is to give an inclusive re-reading of the concept of the text and explore notions that are not explicitly treated in Derrida's works. This can lead to a new understanding of epistemology in linguistics and semiotics. Also, this article discussed the issue of an epistemological reading of structuralism and the philosophical reasons behind its emergence. Generally, structuralism is a familiar term in epistemology and linguistic theories. Discussing the development of structuralism to deconstruction and poststructuralism and an epistemological reading of the development of structure to text have been among the main objectives of this article. These subtle but significant discussions can pave the way for a deeper understanding of literature and philosophy. Literature, in general, and literary theory, in particular, must always re-interpret themselves in fresh philosophical and epistemological paradigms to avoid reduction to simply verbal and rhetorical issues.

Select Bibliography

- Brogan, W. 1989. "Plato's Pharmakon: Between Two Repetitions". In *Derrida and Deconstruction*. New York and London: Routledge. PP. 6-22.
- Derrida, J. 1981. *Dissemination*. Barbara, Johnson (trans.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Derrida, J. 1982. *Positions*. Alan, Bass (trans.). London: Athlone.

- Derrida, J. 1983. "The principle of reason: The university in the eyes of its pupils". *Diacritics*. Vol. 13, No. 3. (Autumn, 1983). PP. 2-20.
- Derrida, J. 1988. "Letter To a Japanese Friend". *Derrida and Differance*. David Wood and Robert Bernasconi (eds.). England: Northwestern University Press. PP. 1-5.
- Derrida, J. 1989. *Memoirs for Paul De Man*. Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler, Eduardo Cadava, and Peggy Kamuf (trans.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Derrida, J. 1994. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning & the New International*. Peggy Kamuf (trans.). New York and London: Routledge.
- Derrida, J. 1997. *Of Grammatology*. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (trans.). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Khabbazikenari, M. 1398 [2019]. *Differance: Sakhtarzodayi Mafahim-e Derrida*. Tehran: Siahrood.
(*Differance: Deconstructing Derrida*)
- Khabbazikenari, M. Safa, S. 1398 [2019]. *Revayat-e Falsafi-e Sakhtargerayi va Pasa-sakhtargerayi*. Tehran: Siahrood.
(*A Philosophical Narrative of Structuralism and Poststructuralism*)

How to cite:

Khabbazikenari, Mehdi. 2023. "Textology: Derrida's Deconstruction of Epistemology", *Naqd va Nazaryeh Adabi*, 14(2): 243-258. DOI:10.22124/naqd.2023.22953.2405

Copyright:

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to *Naqd va Nazaryeh Adabi (Literary Theory and Criticism)*.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided that the original work is properly cited.

