

**BABEŞ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY
CLUJ NAPOCA
FACULTY OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY**

Sensation and Linguality

*Insights into the Relations between Sensation and Linguality
at the Meeting Points of the Thinking of M. M. Bakhtin,
M. Merleau-Ponty and H.-G. Gadamer*

DOCTORAL THESIS

ABSTRACT

**Scientific Coordonator:
Prof. univ. dr. Carol Veress**

**PhD Candidate:
Zsolt Lázár**

2018

Table of content

Introduction	5
The aim of the research.....	5
The core problem.....	6
Historical overview	8
Introduction to the analysed authors' thinking	10
Methodology	16
1. The relation of sensation and linguality in M. M. Bakhtin's thinking	20
1.1. The problem of linguality at Bakhtin.....	20
1.1.1. <i>The concept of utterance at Bakhtin</i>	20
1.1.2. <i>Speach and action</i>	22
1.2. Bakhtin views of language sociology.....	24
1.2.1. <i>Sociological poetics</i>	24
1.2.2. <i>The word in life</i>	27
1.2.3. <i>The exemple of „Well, yes!“</i>	28
1.2.4. <i>The social dimension of the utterance</i>	30
1.3. The extra linguistic situation.....	33
1.3.1. <i>The sensory dimension at Bakhtin</i>	33
1.3.2. <i>The sensation of the self and the experience of the self in The author and hero</i>	34
1.3.3. <i>The other's here-and-now-being</i>	37
1.3.4. <i>The integration of the extra-linguistic and the linguistic</i>	39
1.4. The act of aestheticising in understanding	41
1.4.1. <i>Sensation and linguistic formulation</i>	41
1.4.2. <i>Formulation and aesthetics</i>	43
1.4.3. <i>Aesthetic view and action</i>	46
1.4.4. <i>Reality and fiction</i>	48
1.4.5. <i>Fiction and imagination</i>	50
1.4.6. <i>Aesthetic view and understanding</i>	52
2. The relationship of perception and linguality in M. Merleau-Ponty's conception	55
2.1. Merleau-Ponty's concept of experience	55

2.1.1. <i>The effect of the new</i>	55
2.1.2. <i>Sensation and perception</i>	57
2.1.3. <i>Perception as foundation</i>	58
2.1.4. <i>Perception and openness to being</i>	61
2.2. The bodily experience	63
2.2.1. <i>The primordial experience</i>	63
2.2.2. <i>An outlook on philosophical hermeneutics</i>	65
2.2.3. <i>Bodily sensation and the creative process</i>	67
2.3. The play of directness and indirectness	71
2.3.1. <i>Interpretive attitudes</i>	71
2.3.2. <i>The arbitrariness of the hermeneutical experience</i>	73
2.3.3. <i>Relation of closeness and distance</i>	76
2.4. Sensuality and linguality	80
2.4.1. <i>Digressions of sensuality and expression</i>	80
2.4.2. <i>Speech and expression</i>	82
2.4.3. <i>Limits of expressibility</i>	84
2.4.4. <i>Silence and the inexpressible</i>	87
3. The relationship of sensuality and linguality in the horizon of philosophical hermeneutics	90
3.1. The validity of the hermeneutical approach.....	90
3.1.1. <i>Characteristics of the hermeneutical approach</i>	90
3.1.2. <i>The linguistic activity</i>	92
3.1.3. <i>Situation and happening</i>	94
3.1.4. <i>Actualisation of the concept of formation</i>	95
3.1.5. <i>The aesthetic consciousness as a sense</i>	98
3.2. The hermeneutical problem of linguality	102
3.2.1. <i>Universal aspects of language</i>	102
3.2.2. <i>The negative experience and the question</i>	104
3.2.3. <i>Language-based understanding</i>	106
3.2.4. <i>The common language</i>	109
3.3. The expressibility of the hermeneutical experience.....	110
3.3.1. <i>The circularity of understanding</i>	110
3.3.2. <i>The fusion of horizons</i>	113

3.3.3. <i>The hermeneutical problem of expression</i>	114
3.3.4. <i>The unutterable experience</i>	117
3.3.5. <i>The endless circularity</i>	119
Conclusions	120
The hermeneutical orientation of Bakhtin’s concept of language	120
The phenomenological rehabilitation of sensation	125
The sensory openness of the hermeneutical experience.....	128
My contributions to the research	131
Bibliography	135

Keywords: sensation, perception, sense, sense of touching, primordial, phenomenology, interiorisation, experience, creation of meaning, the

unspeakable/unutterable, linguality, fusion of horizons, hermeneutics, hermeneutical experience, understanding, interpretation, utterance, speech, linguistic understanding,

Abstract

The problem of actions that occur in the process of understanding is an important element of the study of understanding. *Linguistic understanding*, or the linguality of understanding is one of the fundamental issues of philosophical hermeneutics. It is a starting point which, apparently, leaves few questions behind. It dissolves the object of experience in itself and centres the problem of understanding around the creation of meaning. The philosophical elaboration of the hermeneutical approach has implied the idea of linguistic universality. This concept claims that understanding unfolds in the medium of language, and it seems that, through this idea, hermeneutics has comprehensively established the view that experience has a linguistic dimension and articulation.

The purpose of my dissertation is to explore in comparison *Mihail Bahtyin's*, *Maurice Merleau-Ponty's* and *Hans-Georg Gadamer's approach to the philosophy of language and hermeneutics* as outlined in their works. I will focus primarily on two important elements. One is the problem of *linguality*, which has an outstanding role in the works of all three authors, extending from expression to the idea of the comprehensive linguistic universe of the experience. The other, which is the starting point of my own questions, is the problem of *sensation* and the exploration of the sensory dimension of experience, in connection with the processes of hermeneutical cognition, understanding, and meaning-creation.

The relation between *sensation* and the linguistic processes of understanding raises a series of questions. Is the hermeneutical approach able to account for all the actions of understanding that create meaning? If experience is conceived of as expanding in the medium of language, do sensation and corporeal experiences get any kind of role in the process of understanding? If so, what kind of role? What kinds of tensions can possibly occur in the relationship of sensation and linguality? Is hermeneutics capable of dissolving these? What are the questions that philosophical hermeneutics leaves unanswered for the exploration of experience?

All these can be contracted into two questions which mark the horizon of the present research: Can the process of experience in its complexity be grasped and described merely by the structures of linguistic experience? Or, in addition to the linguality of experience, to expression, and to the power of the utterance to create meaning and construct reality, does experience contain other dimensions as well which fall outside the universality of language and have other functions of meaning creation?

My *research hypothesis* is that the concept of linguistic experience does not exhaust the concept of experience at large. This is merely one form of experience, which offers the possibility of grasping the idea, shaping it by language, and going on towards new contexts of meaning. However, experience also incorporates the dimensions which are constituted by the sensation and experience of the material being and quality of things, and they also participate in the creation of meaning-contexts that inform understanding.

Last but not least, the assumption that the problem of understanding always changes according to various historical periods and experiences also underlies this research. The perceptive and linguistic abilities of people of today, and their possibilities to understand the world based on these abilities are radically different from the abilities and possibilities of people living in other ages. Therefore the analysis of the problem of understanding can always yield new discoveries for philosophy.

The *methodological procedures* and particularities of the research are defined by my attempt to follow up the experiential and conceptual connections of sensuality and linguality in the process of meaning creation and understanding. In this process, I will take into account the differences, meeting points and effects of the horizons of analysis within which the three chosen authors discuss these issues.

Due to the nature of the research subject, my analysis is *problem centred* rather than author-centred, although the efforts of understanding the three authors' train of thought also shape a kind of successive discussion, consistently maintained throughout the whole work.

The primary methodological approach of the research subject is what we could call *intermethodological* and *interconceptional*. It attempts to reveal the connections of sensuality and linguality in processes of meaning construction and understanding at the meeting points and effects of Bakhtin's semiotic, formalist, structuralist approach, Merleau Ponty's phenomenological views and Gadamer's hermeneutic attitude, without preferring any of these methodological options over the rest.

The dissertation is divided into three main chapters, which display the conceptual framework of the three philosophical systems in such a way that they refer each one to the other two, while also mark the meeting points created by their hermeneutical openness.

1. The relation of sensuality and linguality in M. M. Bakhtin's thinking

The first chapter discusses the problem of linguality at Bakhtin, in an attempt to understand its connection to sensuality from the direction of experience and interiorisation. In this chapter I expand on the concept of language which can be understood as the expression of the thinking of the world and the mobility of society.

The linguistic formulation, the exposed meaning gains its subject from the social life situation of the speaker. The *utterance* thus always comprises the whole which means the world of the speaker. The utterance is supported by a plurality of meaning relations, a kind of fulfilment of meaning. This is the world in which the speaker lives, upon which their knowledge is built, and from which they draw the meaning of their uttered words. This is the reference of the utterance. The social phenomenon that the listener's value judgments pervade the meaning of the utterance is also part of the whole subject. Bakhtin's concept of language strives for wholeness in such a way that it conceives the unitary world of the speaker within the complicated structures of the society.

I present the acts of sensuality in Bakhtin's work through the discussion of the concepts of *interiorisation* and *situation*. These two concepts, following Bakhtin, were discussed as carriers outside language, connecting them to the idea of sensation. Interiorisation is actually a possibility of the *self* that allows for the life-like unfolding of the event. The *event* is the concrete happening that the individual interiorises *there and then*. It seems that the event, the *fragment* that we can interiorise at the moment of the present, is an element of experience which forces the individual to interiorise it regardless of the thoughts and speech of the experiencing individual. Interiorisation depends on the situation, as the self experiences the life situation in which it finds itself *there and then*. This form of experience is always fragmentary and referential, it

does not contain the fullness of the individual's world, as the self cannot experience/interiorise its own fullness, only conceive of it. This idea leads on to the discussion of the possibilities of *imagination*. With help of the imagination, the individual lifts itself out of the happening and imagines as a unity that what had been fragmentary in the moment of the subjective experience. Fiction and imagination make it possible to shape the experience.

2. The relationship of perception and linguality in M. Merleau-Ponty's conception

Chapter two outlines the concept of sensory experience in the works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Here I will deal with a concept of linguality whose meaning creation is defined by the *there and then* of sensation.

Compared to the thinking-centred German spiritual tradition, Merleau-Ponty built up a much looser and more direct relation in order to understand the process of experience. His concept of experience is outlined as a more profound *presence* and *being-there*. This view makes it possible to understand the concrete presence of the thing in sensory experience. One can speak here about the creation of an unanticipated meaning which is difficult for philosophical hermeneutics to conceive.

Perception places the experience within the context of the present. The world is reflected here in a concrete and detailed way, which is the result of a meeting within a situation, *there and then*. This approach lets us see this experience not just as the meaning creating possibilities of preliminary knowledge, skills or norms, but the *concrete reflection* of things which connects the experience to the reality of the *present*.

One fundamental element of direct experience is the *body* which is present in the element of experience and perceives, receives the surrounding world. It is by the body that the things of the world exert their influence on the experiencing individual, forcing them to open their senses to experience. The senses receive the surrounding world *there and then, without judgment*, and know its tactile, visible, smellable and audible qualities. The direct experience opens up a possibility for knowledge which the experiencing individual can only recall from memory later on, but never re-live.

The movements of concepts and language no longer comprise the same directness which happened *there and then* between the concrete thing and the experiencing individual.

Linguality for Merleau-Ponty is clearly distinct from the experience of the senses, and by this difference it carries a new possibility for meaning creation. The act of expression grasps the experience of the body in such a way that it can never be linguistically expressed in its entirety. This gap is filled by the surplus of meaning created in the expression, which proves the meaning creation possibility of the linguistic expression.

The linguistic rendering is actually a real creative process through which the language shapes the experience of the body in such a way that it falls as close as possible to the *there and then* in which it was created, but it can never overlap with it completely. The productivity of linguistic movement derives precisely from this difference. The meaning possibilities of *inexpressibility* also appear in every linguistic formulation which is connected to sensory experience.

3. The relationship of sensuality and linguality in the horizon of philosophical hermeneutics

The focus of chapter three is the language concept of philosophical hermeneutics, which also greatly defines the methodological and conceptual approach of the entire research. Philosophical hermeneutics, elaborated by H.-G. Gadamer, endlessly extends the limits of linguistic interpretation and understanding. The problem of the relationship of linguality and sensuality is embedded here in a framework in which interpretation is not merely defined as a method, but as a mode of being, as the accomplishment of understanding, conceived and revealed in the dimensions of ontology.

The concept of hermeneutical experience is connected to the concept of *linguistic universality*. Philosophical hermeneutics treats the universality of language almost as an axiom, as it regards the language as the fundamental *medium* of meaning creation and understanding. The world has a linguistic character, therefore language in itself is capable of grasping and expressing the truth. It places perception and the

directions of meaning opening from it within the framework of the fore-structures of understanding. Hermeneutical *openness* does not lie in the opening of senses, the direct meeting of the world and the experience, but in the endless, yet delimited possibilities of meaning-relations, and it unfolds as the movement of meaning-horizons.

At the same time, the hermeneutic approach can also reveal how the *sense* connects to the aesthetic consciousness and how perception becomes a constitutive element of interpretation, and how the unique element of the experience partakes in the continuity of hermeneutical interpretation. The sense is defined here as something that always refers the givenness to something general. To know the general is only possible through the contemplation of the particular. However, in the process of the experience of the work of art, the sensing of the form always reveals a meaning content.

In what follows, I will discuss the concept of hermeneutical linguality, revealing the working of understanding through language, how the fore-structures come into play, and how the fusion of horizons happens within the dialectical movement of understanding. By the encompassing idea of understanding through language, it seems that the problem of sensation merges into the process of hermeneutic experience. The horizon of sensation-perception appears precisely as an *antecedence*, just like the meaning-horizon of a text we read, and gains its concrete linguistic form in the process of interpretation.

At the discussion of the linguistic nature of experience and understanding, one also comes across the problem of expressibility in Gadamer's case. The ability to express inner feelings and personal emotions does not dissolve in the hermeneutical process, in a certain sense it rests outside it. This remark leads to the topical problem and hermeneutical productivity of the *unutterable*. The experience interiorised as the uniqueness of the sensory structures of *there and then* proves to be unutterable from a hermeneutical point of view as well. In the process of linguistic formulation and expression, the vocabulary is moved precisely by the experience that wants to gain voice. The speech of the speaker will lack, willingly or not, those perceptions which had an important role in meaning creation at the moment of the experience. It actually derives from the historicity of meaning creation that the meaning of the experiential whole is expressed, and the text undergoes interpretation. From the perspective of the universality of language this seems like a productive element, as the interpretation

makes the experience comprehensible. The unuttered however has a constitutive power. The feelings and moods surrounding the object of experience – if they do not represent the object of experience for instance in the case of the interpretation of a self-knowledge experience – also define the horizon of interpretation. The primary form of experience is always sensation and perception, in whose horizon we learn to *see* the objects. The linguistic creation of meaning is an indirect form of experience, which mediates between the present moment and the experiences of the past. This mediated meaning is the entirety of meaning constituted by language that hermeneutics speaks about.

The unutterable is an important meaning-constitutive element of experience, as this is the element which offers a horizon for any kind of interpretation, and rests all along at the boundary of interpretation. Although hermeneutics dissolves this problem by the concept of linguistic understanding, it keeps it still at hand by the *structure of belonging*.

The most important result of the hermeneutical approach for my research is that it makes apparent and emphasises the meeting points where the problem of sensation and linguality, differently emphasised in various approaches, actually becomes valid.

Conclusions

In the concluding part of the dissertation, I draw up the connections and mutual references of the approaches and conceptions analysed, keeping in mind their hermeneutical openness in their thinking of the relationship of sensation and linguality. At the same time, I also mark my own contributions to the research of this subject and highlight the findings of my work.

Bakhtin's structuralist, formalist view of language reveals a fuller horizon of meaning creation, as it takes into account the social determinedness of the utterance, and thus the whole world of the experiencing individual and the comprehensive horizon of meaning in which the individual places himself. This dissolution of sensory subjectivity by making a connection between the social dimension of language and the extra-linguistic determinations of experience seems to create a productive case both for linguistic expression and formulation and the definition of

the place of sensuality in the process of a linguistically conceived creation of meaning. This approach that defines the traditional structuralist frameworks lends a hermeneutical orientation and openness to Bakhtin's conception of language.

The critical approach to the concept of language in hermeneutics and the attempt to rehabilitate sensation was grounded on phenomenology, with the inclusion of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's explorations on sensation, perception and linguality. Here I establish a view on sensation which defines the concept of experience from the direction of the feeling. This way it enables the analysis of pre-lingual *raw experience*, the exploration of how the things of the world are directly *present* in experience and can be sensed without any antecedence. This idea, even if it proves open towards the hermeneutic approach in regard of linguality, still creates a tension in the relationship of the senses and the language, which renders inevitable to take into account the role of sensation and perception in the process of linguistic meaning creation. In fact, it grounds a critical question: shouldn't philosophical hermeneutics pay more attention to the moment of the birth or creation of sensory meaning?

The analysis of the differences and connections of sensuality and linguality is productive in several ways, deriving on the one hand from the possibilities of philosophical hermeneutics itself, on the other hand from its confrontation with the other examined approaches. The emphasis on the sensory element leads to finding a *recursive movement* in the process of the hermeneutic experience and understanding which always turns back the experience to the point where the *present time* of the meeting between the thing and the experiencing individual establishes the direction of meaning creation. This recursive movement mostly falls outside the interests of philosophical hermeneutics. However, during the rehabilitation of the phenomenological concept of sensation, one seems to find the moment when this *present* can be grasped.

I consider the necessity to rehabilitate sensuality with regard to linguistic meaning creation and understanding a current, contemporary problem of sensory experience. As regards the experiences of daily life, the need to be aware of the sensory element and the philosophical understanding of this process is triggered by the increasing use and dominance of visual, tactile and auditive instruments that exert their influence on sensory and perceptive processes.