

Hermeneutics as an Approach in Teaching and Learning Literature

Glenn G. Pajares

University of San Jose-Recoletos

Abstract

In the Philippines, hermeneutics is not a familiar concept and approach of teaching and learning literature among literature teachers and students. Indeed, there is a shortage of studies on hermeneutics in the teaching and learning literature in senior high school and higher education in the said country. With content analysis, this paper discusses hermeneutics as an approach to teaching and learning literature that serves as an additional and alternative approach and an overarching approach of education and learning literature among Filipino literature teachers and students. This paper discusses that hermeneutics is the science, theory, and art of interpretation. Since all forms of literature need interpretation and understanding to be taught and learned, the teaching and learning of literature require hermeneutics. Likewise, the paper shows that there are different ways of doing hermeneutics depending on the framework used. Thus, this paper discusses the hermeneutics of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, Hans George Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, and Jacques Derrida as approaches in teaching and learning literature.

Keywords: Hermeneutics, Literature, Teaching, and Learning

Introduction

Sullivan (1991) and Capello (2011) claim that the goal of the teaching of literature is the learning of language or a new language. It helps students learn vocabulary, improve their writing skills and their critical thinking skills. Likewise, literature helps the student

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understand and appreciate their culture and the culture of others and develop intercultural competence.

Also, Carter and Long (1991) and Mustakim et al. (2018) postulate that literature teaching develops students' cognitive and affective competencies using language. According to them, there are several approaches in the education of literature that develop both competencies. Among them are: language-based approach, the paraphrastic approach, the information-based approach, and the personal-response approach, and the moral-philosophical approach. The language-based method employs literature as means to learn a particular target language. The paraphrastic process teaches literature by studying the apparent meaning of texts or literary pieces. The information-based approach focuses on the teaching literature concepts. The reader-response approach centers on the student's response to the text/s and the moral-philosophical approach focus on the teaching and learning of values found or expressed in the text/s.

Ikonne (2016) offers other approaches to teaching literature, such as thematic, stylistic, group, integrated, and problem-posing approaches. The thematic approach focuses on the central theme and sub-themes of a text. The stylistic approach looks at the author's style and in comparison with other authors. The group approach focuses on how a group can act out or dramatize the text. The Integrated approach focuses on the text and uses the text to teach both language and literature. The problem-posing method requires the students to unravel a given mystery in the text.

In the Philippines, the senior high school curriculum contains core courses in literature: the 21st Century Literature from the Philippines, offered in the Grade 11 and 21st Century Literature from the World offered in grade 12. These courses aim to engage students to critically appreciate and study the 21st-century literature of the Philippines and the World, covering their various dimensions, genres, elements, contexts, and traditions (CORE SUBJECT K to 12 Senior High School Core Curriculum).

The content standards of these courses indicate that the learners will be able to ‘understand’ the components and contexts of 21st-century Philippine literature and national boundaries. Also, their performance standards state that learners will be able to demonstrate ‘understanding’ and appreciation and appreciation of the 21st-century Philippine literature from the regions and 21st-century literary texts and the literature of the World. Likewise, their learning competencies stipulate the writing of a close analysis and “critical interpretation” of literary texts (CORE SUBJECT K to 12 Senior High School Core Curriculum). The use of the key terms: ‘understand’ and “critical interpretation” in the content standards, the performance standards, and learning competencies of the said courses require hermeneutics: the science, art, theory of interpretation, and understanding. Unfortunately, the term and concept hermeneutics is not mentioned or found in the curriculum or the course guide.

Higher education institutions in the Philippines offer literature as a degree program or bachelor’s degree. Ironically, hermeneutics does not exist in the curricula of the Bachelor of Arts in Literature, Bachelor of Arts in Literary and Cultural Studies (CHED CMO No. 21 series of 2017), and the Bachelor of Science in Education Major in English (CHED CMO No. 75 series of 2017). Moreover, based on observation, hermeneutics is not found in the curricula of graduate programs in literature. It explains why hermeneutics does not exist as an approach to teaching and learning literature in the said country. In Addition, Simene (2014) postulates that literature teachers in the Philippines prefer two common approaches: the personal-response approach and the paraphrastic approach.

The absence of hermeneutics in the curricula of literature programs and courses in the Philippines necessitates this paper. Ironically, the science, art, and theory of interpretation and

understanding are not mentioned, discussed, and taught in the country's literature study.

Thus, this paper aims to advocate and introduce hermeneutics to teach and learn literature in literature classes in senior high school and higher education in the Philippines. Hermeneutics serves not just as an alternative approach or different approach but an overarching approach that will help, complement, enrich, and subsume existing approaches for a deeper, broader, and more holistic and developmental understanding, interpretation, and appreciation of the works of literature of the Philippines and the World. In this paper, approach means a set of general principles, beliefs, ideas, or theories on how literature can be taught or learned. It is not a method or technique that provides specific or detailed activities in the classroom.

Wilhelm Dilthey, a leading figure of modern hermeneutics, emphasized interpretation as the approach proper to studying human sciences/humanities/life sciences/social sciences. Hermeneutics is the interpretative-exploratory way of understanding the lived experience/s, the historical context/s, and the life nexus of human beings who are subjects. Thus, the human sciences are distinct from the natural sciences because natural sciences seek the causal explanation of things as objects. On the other hand, human beings who are subjects cannot be reified or studied as objects devoid of consciousness and lived experience. For this reason, the works of human beings are products of subjective and intersubjective experience/s. Therefore, hermeneutics is proper to literature, for it belongs to the human sciences being a product of human intersubjective experience (Nelson 2019).

Method

This paper utilizes the qualitative research design, particularly content analysis, where key concepts and ideas on hermeneutics from reading published literature are summarized,

paraphrased, and explained as an approach to teaching and learning literature. The study presents the definition of hermeneutics, its short history, and the ideas of selected thinkers such as Fredrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, Hans George Gadamer, and Paul Ricoeur. However, it does not include all philosophers of hermeneutics.

Results and Discussions

What is Hermeneutics?

The term hermeneutics originates from the name of the Greek god Hermes, son of Zeus. He was responsible for communicating the messages of the gods from Olympus so that human beings may understand their meaning. Communicating these messages from the gods went beyond transliteration or the word for word interpretation. Hermes needs to recreate and reproduce a sense that would relate to the listener's history, culture, and ideas to be comprehensible (Porter & Robinson (2011).

Hermeneutics is the English word for the Greek term *Hermeneus* which means the interpreter or the expounder or explains things (Jasper 2004), or from the Greek word *hermeneuein*, which means to interpret from the another Greek word *Hermeneia* which means interpretation (Demeterio 2001). Hence, hermeneutics is interpretation, translation, explanation(Jasper 2004). generally, it is the science, the theory, and art, methodology/method of interpretation (Crusius 1991).

A Very Short History of Hermeneutics

Early on, hermeneutics was a fragmented method of interpretation of texts. There is one for legal texts (legal hermeneutics), another for understanding the Bible (biblical

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hermeneutics), and another for literary texts, classic texts, or philological hermeneutics. Each method is distinct and separate from the other (Ormiston & Schrift 1990).

Primarily, hermeneutics started as a discipline for interpreting and analyzing the Bible, technically known as exegesis or specific grammatical-historical exegesis. It is the analysis of the Bible as a text emphasizing its language, the historical, cultural, or social context. In the case of the Bible, one has to study the original languages the Bible is written and the Hebrew society and historical and cultural backgrounds of both the new and the Old Testament (Kaiser Jr. & Silva 2009). Aside from the grammatical-historical interpretation, one understands the Bible through its existential meaning, which centers on its relevance to its readers or the message that personally affects the reader in their present context (Bulhof 2012).

Later, hermeneutics as an art of interpretation went beyond just the Bible or as a fragmented interpretation of texts. In the past two centuries, it has expanded and integrated the interpretation of any text or the universal or general interpretation of texts-not just written words but also spoken, conversations, signs, and symbols, etc. (Rutt 2006).

Hermeneutics is not static and terminal but changing and progressive. How people understand and interpret texts are always in a state of flux, just like self-understanding, which continues to change and grow, so does the reader's interpretation and understanding of the text and its context (Jasper 2004). It means that it does not guarantee a fixed and absolute meaning and interpretation of texts, experiments, or works of art. Instead, hermeneutics renders the enterprise of interpreting, translating, and understanding the texts open (Porter & Robinson 2011). It does not claim any truth which is eternal and inflexible, neither does it claim any scientific certainty or final determinacy (Crusius 1991 and Malpas 2003).

FDE Schleiermacher on Hermeneutics as an Approach of Teaching and Learning Literature

Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher is the father of modern hermeneutics. He introduced hermeneutics as a science and art applicable to all texts in any field or discipline. This approach consists primarily of grammatical interpretation that focuses on the analysis of the language of the author and its audience, and secondly of psychological interpretation or technical interpretation, which focuses on the study of the author's original intention or his psychology, thoughts, ideas, life, and lived experience. With this procedure, he believes in arriving at an objective goal of interpretation to capture the author's authentic or original intent or meaning of any given text (Dilthey & Jameson 1972, Ormiston & Schrift 1990, Nelson 2013, Agrey 2014, and Warnke 2016).

For Schleiermacher, thought and language are identical. To understand the language is to understand the thought of people, the author of the text, or any given piece of literature. Meaning is equivalent to word usage and the linguistic or grammar rules that govern them. Thus, Hermeneutics is the theory of understanding linguistic communication. one needs to analyze the text's historical context and its author to understand the author's language and psychology (Forster 2002).

In addition, this linguistic and psychological analysis of the text requires a comparative method. On the linguistic level, words and their meaning have to be related or compared with other words, with sentences and then a sentence with paragraphs and paragraphs with different sections and the entire texts. On the level of psychological interpretation, the reader or interpreter looks for a psychological commonality with the author, or the interpreter puts oneself in the author's shoes, which is known as empathic interpretation (Foster 2002 and Rutt 2006).

Furthermore, Schleiermacher advocates for a holistic approach to interpretation which requires that a text should be interpreted or compared in relation with the broader language in which they are written and with the broader historical context of which a text belongs, which includes the author's entire works and the author's overall psychology. The interpretation follows a progressive circular movement known as the hermeneutic circle where parts are analyzed or understood only in relation to the whole and vice versa, which is an iterative process towards greater/broader and deeper understanding. In this manner, the goal of interpretation is understanding the author more than they know or (Forster 2002 and Agrey 2014).

Therefore, Schleiermacher's holistic approach to interpretation means that the grammatical interpretation is only a means to achieve the ultimate goal of understanding which to know or capture the author's original meaning and intention or his initial thoughts (the psychological). Still, one cannot separate the internal (grammatical) and external (psychological/technical) texts because both are substantially united. To know the author's mind is to see the author's language and their milieu and vice versa. In other words, both are equally and essentially important in interpretation (Ormiston & Schrift 1990 and Nelson 2013).

Based on observation, many teachers and students of literature analyze the text either internally or externally but rarely as a unified process. Schleiermacher shows that the internal and external analysis of the texts is an essential element of a suitable method of understanding or interpretation. one cannot do without the other. Therefore, in the teaching and learning of literature, the grammatical and psychological analysis of the text should be pursued altogether and not done separately.

Schleiermacher's grammatical-psychological analysis of texts develops the literature competencies mentioned by Sullivan (1991) and Capello (2011), such linguistic competence that allows

both teachers and students to learn new vocabularies, the linguistic rules, a new language/s and understand their languages better. Likewise, understating the broader context of the language and the author's milieu and the broader milieu of which the text belongs makes both teachers and students learn more about the author's culture, the culture of the text, and in turn, develop intercultural competence.

The approaches in the teaching of literature mentioned by Carter and Long (1991), and Mustakim et al., and Ikonne (2016) like the language approach, the stylistic approach, the integrative approach are subsumed in Schleiermacher's grammatical-psychological analysis because the language of the text and the author, its rules and usage are analyzed. It uses vocabulary and its domains in the study of literature. Likewise, the paraphrastic approach, which deals with the apparent meaning of texts, is also covered in the grammatical-psychological analysis, which captures the essence of the text, not just any sense but the original meaning of the text thought of by the author. Schleiermacher's goal is even to understand the author more than how the author understands. In this process, both the apparent and hidden meanings arise.

Moreover, the thematic approach that focuses on themes and subthemes subsumes in the hermeneutic circle, the comparative method, and the holistic approach to interpretation (internal and external analysis of the text). By studying the relation of parts and whole and vice versa, the themes and sub-themes emerged. In this process, the questions about the text are revealed, which is the focus of the problem-solving approach. The moral-philosophical system is part of Schleiermacher's grammatical-psychological analysis because, in the study of language and the author's psychology, the values and philosophies of the author and his milieu will surface.

In this way, Schleiermacher's approach to hermeneutics not only complements and supports the goals, objectives, and other

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approaches in the teaching and learning literature but also usurps all of them.

Wilhelm Dilthey on Hermeneutics as an Approach of Teaching and Learning Literature.

Wilhelm Dilthey distinguishes human sciences from natural sciences. He claims that the proper method and task of the social sciences, which includes history, the humanities, and literature, in particular, is hermeneutics (interpretation) which is distinct from the method of natural sciences, which causal explanation. Natural sciences study the World as objects which focus on external qualities and characteristics. On the contrary, human beings are not objects, but subjects with consciousness, lived experience, and inner life capable of self-interpretation and self-evaluation. Thus as mentioned previously, explaining is proper to the natural sciences, and the task of understanding or interpretation is appropriate to the life sciences (social sciences and humanities). For this reason, Dilthey considers hermeneutics as an art and not as science though it still can claim objectivity of knowledge based on the lived experience/s of people (Forster 2007 and Agrey 2014).

Dilthey's hermeneutics went beyond the interpretation of texts. It focused on the interpretation or understanding of human action and experience, particularly on the experience of others by reliving the experience/s or by trying to put oneself in the situation or condition of others. It is possible because we have the exact human nature. One can relive or re-experience the experience of others by putting oneself in the shoes of others through their expressions (Dilthey & Jameson 1972 and James & Komnenich 2021).

Dilthey's emphasis on understanding human experience develops the cognitive competence of both teachers and students and all their affective competence. Reliving or re-experiencing the author's lived experience and the character of the text allows the

teacher and student to feel what the author feels and the characters felt. Still, it develops their sensitivity and empathy towards others.

Developing sensitivity and empathy towards other people's lived experiences, particularly that of the author and characters, enables both students and teachers to act out better and dramatize the content of the text, which is one of the literary approaches mentioned by Ikonne.

Understanding the lived experience of people also brings oneself into contexts of the actors, characters of the text, and other people into their history and culture, which promotes intercultural competence. Likewise, it enables one to unravel their moral values and philosophical ideas, focusing on the ethical-philosophical approach in teaching and learning literature.

Hans George Gadamer on Hermeneutics as an Approach of Teaching and Learning of Literature.

For Gadamer, hermeneutics is a unitary process consisting of three intimate moments: understanding the text, expressing or interpreting what the text says, and applying one's present situation to what the text from the past is saying. These moments as a unitary process are not a sequence and final step by step method like what modern science uses (Suominen & Tuomi 2015).

Understanding and interpreting the text and what it says requires linguistic analysis of texts that cover the language-based approach, the stylistic approach, and the integrated approach; all focused on incorporating and analyzing language in the study of literature. Applying one's present situation to what the text from the past says includes the reader-response approach, which seeks to determine what the reader says about the text.

Both the reader and the text belong to history, tradition, and culture. Hence, both reader and the text have inherent prejudice of what is to be interpreted or understood. It means that there is no such thing as a fresh start in reading a text because the text and the reader have their own biases, historical, cultural context, or situatedness. These biases or prejudice are necessary and inevitable in all forms of understanding (Mueller-Volmer 1985, Gadamer 2004, Regan 2012, Agrey 2014, and Suominen & Tuomi 2015). Thus, to understand and interpret a text, one looks into the commonalities between history, tradition, culture, and text. Therefore, reading is participating in what is familiar, that is, participating in history, practice, and culture (Suominen & Tuomi 2015).

Understanding and interpreting the text does not mean the reader dominates the text by appropriating meaning into it, but rather one has to subordinate oneself to the text that is open to what the text says. Also, openness to the text does not mean merely seeking information that may solve problems. Still, openness implies asking questions about the text, history, tradition, and culture and being open to the questions the text itself reveals. It is the critical characteristic of hermeneutics (Suominen & Tuomi 2015).

It implies that in the teaching and learning of literature, teachers and students should develop questions about the texts. It provides cognitive development and hones critical thinking skills among students. Still, the more questions asked about the text, the more the students explore and discover about culture, history, life, and the World, which develops their intercultural competence. Thus, teachers should give credit to students' answers, and the questions and the kind of questions students ask about the text. Asking questions about the texts covers the problem solving-approach in the teaching and learning of literature which focuses on the mysteries in the text. As the students ask questions about the text, the text's unknown and hidden or implied meaning emerges.

Gadamer postulates that interpretation is always dialogical between interlocutors- the text and the reader. Meaning arises in the encounter or dialogue of the text and reader. There is no such thing as an original meaning of a text that requires recapturing. In this interaction between the text and reader, their horizons (historical/cultural contexts, temporal situatedness, vantage points) meet or fuse (fusion of horizons). It is the fusion of past and present and the familiar and the alien. As these two different horizons meet, the horizon of the reader and text expands and grows into a new and broader horizon/s. Old knowledge, biases, and prejudices subsume into new knowledge. Thus, every understanding and interpretation is growth. It is always developmental. It does not arrive at a definite endpoint or absolute knowledge, meaning, or truth. Hence, there is no exact or specific step or method in arriving at the meaning or truth of texts, but it comes as a free play or open dialogue between the reader and the text. Each act of interpretation and understanding or conversation with a text, whether it is oral, written, or a lived experience, exposes one to a whole new world, a whole new experience, a new bias or prejudice, a wider perspective, a broader truth and meaning (Ricoeur 1981, Gadamer 2004, Forster 2007, Regan 2012, and Tan et al. 2009).

Gadamer explains that the very reason why hermeneutics does not arrive at an absolute and universal meaning and the truth are that prejudice or bias, which is an essential condition of understanding or interpretation, is always limited (Gallagher 1992).

It implies that students and teachers seek to determine their pre-understanding of the text. After engaging the text, both should seek the changes, developments, or growth in their knowledge and views of the text, life, culture, history, and the World. The expansion of the learner's horizon should be a performance or success indicator of literature classes. Let it be part of the assessment of learning.

Paul Ricoeur on Hermeneutics as a Means to Teach and Learn Literature

Ricoeur abnegates the author's intent as the goal of textual interpretation. For him, meaning does not reside only with the author. The meaning of a text is not only one but multiple. Hence, Ricoeur introduces the idea of distanciation. He frees the text from the author's intent and meaning by giving it a life of its own, subjecting it to multiple and unlimited reading and interpretation. Distanciation also means taking out the text from its socio, cultural and historical context and audience for further understanding in different socio-cultural, historical, and political contexts (Ricoeur 1981 and Geanellos 2000).

Aside from distanciation, Ricoeur introduced the idea of Appropriation, which is about owning the text after liberating it from its author, context, and audience. It brings the text into the horizon or the world of the reader or interpreter (Ricoeur 1981 and Geanellos 2000).

Moreover, he introduced the ideas of explanation and understanding. An explanation is to determine what the text says. It focuses on the internal relations of the text or the connection of parts or details of the text. While understanding seeks what the text says and towards the link of the whole to the elements. It goes beyond the details of the text. It is to pursue what the unfamiliar and the uncertain that is its implications. Relating parts to whole and whole to parts is also what Ricoeur calls the hermeneutic circle, which opens to more and more profound meanings and understanding of the text (Ricoeur 1981 and Geanellos 2000).

Furthermore, Ricoeur introduces the idea of suspicion in hermeneutics. A text has several layers of meaning. There are surface meanings and apparent and more profound meanings or hidden meanings. The interpreter's role is to suspect every layer of meaning to seek deeper or hidden or underlying and implied meanings (Forster 2007).

In the teaching and learning of literature, this implies that teachers and learners should not simply seek one absolute and universal meaning of the texts but develop the competency to pursue and unravel the text's multiple layers of meanings by encouraging students to seek varied implications of the text/s. Thus, teachers should give credit to those students who painstakingly seek more meaning and impact of the text. Seeking implications and the deeper meanings of the text should likewise be a performance or success indicator of literature classes.

Distanciation brings the teacher and student to different historical, cultural, and political contexts, developing critical thinking and intercultural competence. With Appropriation, the reader can respond to the text, which usurps the personal-response approach. With interpretation, which seeks the parts or details of what the text says, includes the language-based approach, the stylistic approach, and integrated because interpretation analyzes the components of words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs, the pragmatics, and semantics, and stylistics of language. Interpretation also includes the paraphrastic approach because the study of details of what the text says covers the apparent meaning of the text. It likewise consists of the thematic approach because as it seeks to study the details, one draws the sub-themes found in the parts of the text.

Moreover, the interpretation also covers the information approach because as it seeks what the text says, it includes literature concepts expressed by the parts of the texts. Furthermore, understanding which looks into the relationship of the whole text and its components and seeks the implications of the text draws the text's central theme. Both interpretation and understanding include the moral-philosophical approach because they unravel the philosophical ideas and values of the text and the reader. Finally, suspicion consists of the problem-solving approach because as one seeks the more profound and hidden meaning of the texts, it unravels

the mysteries behind the text, which is the focus of the problem-solving approach. Ricoeur's hermeneutics subsumes most if not all approaches in teaching and learning literature.

Conclusion

All texts or pieces of literature need to be understood and interpreted. If the goal of teaching and learning literature is to understand literature, that is to know its meaning and truth. Hence hermeneutics as the art, science, and theory interpretation is necessary and inevitable in the teaching and learning of literature. It means that any process, approach, or method of interpreting, analyzing, understanding, education, and learning texts, be it scientific or non-scientific, is hermeneutics. This study also shows that there is no single means, approach, or method of interpreting and understanding texts, but there are multiple and varied ways. It means also that no method, approach of interpretation, understanding, teaching, and learning of literature is superior or inferior to each other. These multiple and varied means, approaches, and methods of interpretation may be used independently or inter-dependently where they can complement and supplement one another. Finally, the study reveals that hermeneutics is an open and progressive process that does not arrive at a single, universal, absolute meaning, truth, wisdom, and understanding of texts. Every act of interpretation opens one to a broader understanding of the text, exposing one to the more comprehensive or ever-expanding revelation of truth, meaning, and wisdom. There is no such thing as the monopoly of interpretation and understanding. Any given text can be interpreted and understood many times over. Therefore, the teaching and learning of literature should also aim to be open to an ever-expanding revelation of truth, meaning, and wisdom about oneself, language, history, culture, community, humanity, life, the World, and God.

Recommendations

This paper recommends the inclusion of hermeneutics in the curricula of literature degree programs in the Philippines both at the senior high school and higher education levels. It should also be an approach to teaching and learning literature in senior high school and higher education. This paper recommends writing another article using the hermeneutic ideas of other philosophers and thinkers not discussed

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