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Linguistics

THE IDEA OF DECONSTRUCTION: AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The concept of 'Deconstruction' by Derrida in "Of Grammatology" is against logo-centric semantic interpretation of a text. He believes in the idea of the exteriority of meaning which brings out many possibilities of meaning of the text by means of deconstruction of the text. Meaning cannot be defined as a static reality; it evolves from the negotiation an interrogation among competing constituents and has several shadows of meaning being termed as 'Difference'. Derrida was under influence of structuralist semantic idea of Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Derrida takes texts as being construed of elemental oppositions. They are to be articulate for making out meaning. So identity is to be taken a non-essentialist one being termed as a construct and construct produces meaning through the interplay of difference inside a "system of distinct signs".

INTRODUCTION:

The concept of deconstruction was first used by Derrida in "Of Grammatology". The word "deconstruction" was a translation of "Destruktion" that is a concept from the work of Martin Heidegger. Derrida made it apply to textual reading. He is concerned with the interplay between language and the construction of meaning in his above cited book. We find three key features emerging from Derrida's work about deconstruction. They are the inherent desire to have a centre, or focal point, to structure understanding that is known as logo-centrism. Secondly, we make the reduction of meaning to set definitions and finally we make the reduction of meaning to writing to capture opposition within that concept itself being known as *différance*. Derrida starts from his assertion that modern Western philosophy consists of feature to place meaning at the centre of presence. It is otherwise known as the search for the certainty of the existence of an absolute truth from which an objective meaning is to be derived about the world which he terms search for 'logo-centrism'. He opens the possibility of deconstruction between logo-centrism and the idea of the exteriority of meaning that opens up the possibility of deconstruction. He thinks that nature say law itself is constructed only with reference to the institution. For example, justice is nature and law is institution. Law is not a direct embodiment of justice. We should understand that both justice and law are determined by the interplay between the two. We can say that this is a rejection of the rigid separation or there is no direct separation between justice and law. We may think that it promotes the quest for certainty. When we think that law reflects or embodies the natural origin of justice, we ignore or conceal other possible interpretations of justice. We can say that the idea that 'There is nothing outside of the text' is substantive point of Derrida's work. To Derrida the origin does not exist independently of its institution, rather it exists only 'through its functioning within a classification and therefore within a system of differences...' Derrida terms this phenomenon 'différance'.

Idea of 'différance':

Différance is the basis of deconstruction which refers to the fact that meaning cannot be regarded as fixed or static; meaning is constantly evolving. It arises from the constant process of negotiation between competing concepts. Deconstruction is the interrogation of these competing interpretations that combine to produce meaning. In this regard, meaning is defined equally by what is included in the institution and what is not. At any one time, one concept will be dominant over the other, thus excluding the other. However the idea of exclusion suggests the absence of any presence or what is excluded. In fact, what is instituted depends for its existence on what has been excluded. The two exist in a

relationship of hierarchy in which one will always be dominant over the other. The dominant concept is the one that manages to legitimate itself as the reflection of the natural order thereby squeezing out competing interpretations that remain trapped as the excluded trace within the dominant meaning. Derrida explains how the first task of deconstruction is to overturn the hierarchy. This is necessary to take into account the 'conflictual and subordinating structure of opposition'.¹

Derrida does not believe in the idea of fixed meaning, overturns and therefore exposes fixed idea of meaning. He believes in the existence of the opposition of meaning. Derrida emphasizes to remain within the oppositional structure, allowing the hierarchy to re-establish itself. If deconstruction is limited to the simple inversion of binaries, then inquiry remains trapped 'within the closed field of these oppositions'.

Influence on Derrida:

We can now deduce the fact that deconstruction of the philosopher named Jacques Derrida is a critique of the relationship between text and meaning. He believes that intended counter meaning of the text within structural unity of a particular text. The purpose of deconstruction is to expose that the object of language on which a text is founded. Derrida hoped to show deconstruction at work throughout reading. From the work of Ferdinand de Saussure language is a system of signs and words only has meaning because of the contrast between these signs.³

It is worth mentioning point that Derrida's idea on deconstruction is itself influenced by the work of linguists like Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure is considered one of the fathers of structuralism. He explained that terms get their meaning in reciprocal determination with other terms inside language. As we know that Saussure's writings on semiotics have been cornerstones of structuralist theory in the mid-20th century. We should mention literary theorists like Roland Barthes whose works have been investigations of the logical ends of structuralist thought. Despite being the fact that Derrida has been influenced by structuralists, his views on deconstruction stood in opposition to the theories of structuralists such as psychoanalytic theorist Jacques Lacan, and linguist Claude Lévi-Strauss. However, it is to be pointed out that Derrida resisted attempts to label his work as "post-structuralist".

Derrida approaches all texts as constructed around elemental oppositions which all discourse has to articulate if it intends to make any sense. This is so because identity is viewed in non-essentialist terms as a construct, and because

constructs only produce meaning through the interplay of difference inside a "system of distinct signs". We can say it in another word that this approach to text is influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure's semiology. In language there are only differences. It is found that in language there are only differences without positive terms. A linguistic system is a series of differences of sound combined with a series of differences of ideas. Saussure explicitly suggested that linguistics was only a branch of a more general semiology that is a science of signs. Derrida pointed out Saussure made linguistics "the regulatory model", and for essential, and essentially metaphysical.

Metaphysical Overview:

Derrida describes the task of deconstruction as the identification of metaphysics of presence, or logocentrism in western philosophy. Metaphysics of presence is the desire for immediate access to meaning, the privileging of presence over absence. This means that there is an assumed bias in certain binary oppositions where one side is placed in a position over another, such as good over bad, speech over the written word, male over female. Derrida writes, "Without a doubt, Aristotle thinks of time on the basis of *ousia* as *parousia*, on the basis of the now, the point, etc. And yet an entire reading could be organized that would repeat in Aristotle's text both this limitation and its opposite".⁴

Derrida states that deconstruction is not an analysis. There are no self-sufficient units of meaning in a text, because individual words or sentences in a text can only be properly understood in terms of how they fit into the larger structure of the text and language itself.

Anti-structuralist Overview:

Deconstruction's meaning is within this context. Derrida states that deconstruction is an "anti-structuralist gesture" because "structures were to be undone, decomposed, desedimented". At the same time, deconstruction is also a "structuralist gesture" because it is concerned with the structure of texts. So, deconstruction involves "a certain attention to structures" and tries to "understand how an 'ensemble' was constituted". As both a structuralist and an anti-structuralist gesture, deconstruction is tied up with what Derrida calls the "structural problematic". The structural problematic for Derrida is the tension between genesis, that which is "in the essential mode of creation or movement", and structure: "systems, or complexes, or static configurations". An example of genesis would be the sensory ideas from which knowledge is then derived in the empirical epistemology. An example of structure would be a binary opposition such as good and evil where the meaning of each element is established, at least partly, through its relationship to the other element.

Derrida distances his use of the term deconstruction from post-structuralism, a term that would suggest that philosophy could simply go beyond structuralism. Derrida states that "the motif of deconstruction has been associated with 'post-structuralism'", but that this term was "a word unknown in France until its 'return' from the United States". In his deconstruction of Husserl, Derrida actually argues for the contamination of pure origins by the structures of language and temporality. Manfred Frank has even referred to Derrida's work as "Neostructuralism".

CONCLUSION:

Deconstruction generally tries to demonstrate that any text is not a discrete whole but contains several irreconcilable and contradictory meanings; that any text therefore has more than one interpretation; that the text itself links these interpretations inextricably; that the incompatibility of these interpretations is irreducible; and thus that an interpretative reading cannot go beyond a certain point. Derrida refers to this point as an "aporia" in the text; thus, deconstructive

reading is termed "aporetic." [38] He insists that meaning is made possible by the relations of a word to other words within the network of structures that language is.⁵

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