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A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF JACQUES DERRIDA'S DECONSTRUCTION AND HERMENEUTICS

ABSTRACT

This article presents an essay about Jacques Derrida's deconstruction and hermeneutics. It is also intended to give information about Post-Structuralism and its contribution in literary theory since Derrida's opinion made an impact including literary theory. By the way, this article hopes to make clear about Derrida's influence on contemporary thought and giving feedback for those who are new beginners in the field of Literary Theory and Criticism.

Keywords: Jacques Derrida, Post-Structuralism, Literary Theory and Criticism, Deconstruction, Hermeneutics

JACQUES DERRIDA'NIN YAPISAL ÇÖZÜM VE YORUMLAMASINA KISA BIR BAKIŞ

ÖZET

Bu makalenin amacı Jacques Derrida'nin yapısal çözüm ve yorumlama ile ilgili görüşlerini açıklamaktır. Bu çalışma teorik bir çalışmadır. Derrida'nin edebi teoriyi kapsayan etkisinden dolayı, Post-Yapısalcılık ve edebi teoriye içeren bilgiler de ayni zamanda verilmeye çalışılmıştır. Bu makale özellikle Eleştiri ve Edebi Teori alanlarına yeni olan kişilere, Derrida'nin çağdaş düşünce ve dönüt verme gibi etkilerini açıklamayı umut etmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Jacques Derrida, Post-Yapısalcılık, Edebi Kuram ve Eleştiri, Yapısökümü, Yorumlama

1. INTRODUCTION: ABOUT JACQUES DERRIDA
(GİRİŞ: JACQUES DERRIDA HAKKINDA)

The French philosopher Jacques Derrida born in 1930 is surely one of the most influential and complex thinkers of the second half of the twentieth century. Although he published his first book in the late 1960s, he is still considered as a difficult philosopher. In his book *"Of Grammatology"* (1976:158) Jacques Derrida developed the literary theory which contributed a new breath in literary criticism. As he tells us in this book, we can only make use of language by allowing the system to control us in a certain way and to a certain extent. In studying literary theory, Derrida's thoughts suggest how our reading of literary texts should be done. According to Biesta (2001: 35), Derrida points to a certain complicity between writing and reading, in that a text needs to be read in order to be or become a text. This implies that writing and human communication more generally entail the risk of misunderstanding.

For Derrida, the difference between phonocentrism and logocentrism is that phonocentrism is the word spoken while logocentrism is the word written. According to Derrida (1976:145) when speech fails to protect presence, writing becomes necessary. In this case, writing then serves as a supplement which takes the place of speech (Derrida, 1976:144).

As Cohen (2002:59) expresses, *"Literature is for Derrida the possibility for any utterance, writing, or mark to be iterated in innumerable contexts and to function in the absence of identifiable speaker, context, reference, or hearer".*

In Derrida's viewpoint, any structure whether in social studies, science or literature needs re-thinking from new position to leave demonstrativeness to interpretation (Derrida, 1976: 81,158-159). Ultimately, Derrida's aim then is to undermine an independent thinking of the reader. By doing this, the reader can observe the text how he wishes, putting in it his own experiences and modifying his understanding. Likewise for Matthews (1996:142) human subjectivity does not exist apart from language, in that case from literature.

Gutting (2001:290) mentions that Derrida's issues require our constant attention. Therefore, Derrida's writings are a constant and explicit probing of traditional philosophical concepts. In that way Derrida presents himself not as a practitioner of traditional philosophy but as its most assiduous reader. According to Gutting, Derrida has devoted himself to reading and commenting on the writings of others more than any important philosophers since the middle Ages. Because of this, reading Derrida himself is frequently an intimidating and frustrating project.

By the mid twentieth century there were a number of literary thoughts. Marxist and psychoanalytic literary theories were two branches of structuralist literary theory. Harland (1987:2) claims that the structuralist, in general, is concerned to know the (human) world- to uncover it through detailed observational analysis. Marxism for example, made a connection between the surface structure and the deep structure. Marxist critics attempted to describe the analysis of economic structures. On the other hand, psychoanalysts tried to made criticism by searching the unconscious. For instance, Jacques Lacan emphasised that the unconscious is like a language and language is a social phenomenon

In the late1960s, Derrida developed deconstruction which claims that all texts have ambiguity. In brief, ambiguity means something which has more than one meaning. In 1967, Derrida published three books which are "Writing and Difference", "Of Grammatology", and "Speech and Phenomena". Hobson (1998:9-10) explains that Derrida's

arguments brought him notoriety by their power and innovation. The terms "writing" and "difference" were given specific stamps by these works but "deconstruction" was new. Here Hobson mentions that "Difference" is a term which, without being a logical operation, acts as a negative.

With the word "difference", Derrida brought the ontological difference between being and beings that we only know beings in their different modes of existence, never being. Difference is as Derrida maintains the condition for the possibility of any discourse; therefore difference becomes the condition for fullness and plenitude (Derrida, 1973:138).

2. RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE (ÇALIŞMANIN ÖNEMİ)

Reading Jacques Derrida himself is generally an appalling and futile process. The purpose of this study is to give plain information about Derrida's deconstruction and hermeneutics within literary theory. Derrida as a philosopher who is still difficult to be understood claims that all texts have ambiguity. Therefore, the significance of this research is to explain Derrida's viewpoints in a severe manner to those who are interested in literary theory.

3. POST-STRUCTURALISM (POST-YAPISALCILIK)

The first half of the twentieth century in literary studies was interested by the form and structure of literary texts. Those who were concerned with the form were formalists and following the formalists who were interested in the structure of texts were called structuralists. In general, Structuralism is a belief that reflects events which are explainable by structures, data, and other phenomena below the surface. For the structuralist, reality is a system of individual parts which are irreducible units where the parts are more 'real' than the whole matter. According to Piaget (1970: 5-16), Structuralism is whole, transformational and self-regulating. Therefore, it is obvious that structuralists search objective knowledge of their world.

On the other hand, Post-structuralism which deviates from Structuralism became a reaction to it. While structuralists sought a structure of the text, The Post-structuralist Derrida for example denies the possibility of such a structure. That is to say, Derrida's deconstruction, which is always called together with Post-structuralism, gives us new ways of thinking. Derrida has made great efforts in undermining the traditional understanding of truth. The Post-structuralists are claiming that the real truth is impossible to know. Ironically, the Post-Structuralist is pessimistic concerning the reader's ability to confirm belief and thereby say that he knows something.

Post-structuralism is a philosophical mode of thought which believes that in the world there is no reality, only "manufactured reality" constructed by words. In literary theory, structuralists analyze the narrative material by examining the underlying invariant structure. Structuralistic literary critics mention that the "value of a literary text" can lie only in new structure. For example, a literary structuralist would say that the author of "Heidi" did not write anything *"really" new*, because her work has the same structure as "Pollyanna". In both texts the characters "Heidi" and "Pollyanna" are orphans and continue their lives by a relative. As Tyson (1999:250) mentions, Post-structuralism follows structuralism as a "reaction against structuralism's orderly vision of language and human experience".

It would be beneficial to give a simple example for Post-structuralism and Derrida's thoughts. Think about a famous film director who has worked on a film for a long time with a great budget. But unfortunately this director suddenly dies before he has finished the film. To finish the film, several directors are asked to complete the job because it has been a great project, but only the best will be chosen. Now, here comes Derrida's claim into scene which is that each of these film directors will complete the film with a different ending. Therefore, Post-structuralism is to say that there is no one interpretation, every person would think in a different way. The best for one may be suggested the worst for another person. This is also the same in literary texts. According to Post-structuralists, during reading a text there will be infinite beliefs of thoughts by the readers. That is to say, we can not deny or claim another's feeling as false or true. Therefore, each element is true namely 'present' which is related to something other (Derrida, 1976: 142). Because of this, no critic can claim to define 'truth' or one meaning from a given text.

Mousley (2000:74) mentions that structuralism looks for systems of meaning but post-structuralism questions systematic thought. He adds that structuralism seeks to lay bare a text's or language's workings, but post-structuralism advances a sense of the text's mystery. According to Bertens (2001:120) Post-structuralism continues structuralism's preoccupation with language. But its view of language is wholly different from the structuralist view. In fact, language is at the heart of the differences between structuralism and post-structuralism. As we know, Structuralism takes language more seriously than Post-structuralism.

Bertens (2001:124-127) summarizes Derrida's main arguments as in the following:

- Derrida tells us that language is inherently unreliable.

This means, language operates on the basis of differentiation. What enables words to refer to whatever they refer to is their difference from other words, not a direct link to their so-called referents? However, those words function within a linguistic system (a language) that never touches the real world.

- There is no single word.

That is the way it is because it cannot be another way, because its shape is wholly determined by its referent. If we would have such a word, that word would then be wholly subservient to reality and would constitute an absolute fixed and "true" element within the linguistic system, so that we might then possibly build more and more words around it and in that way anchor language firmly in the real world.

- Reality determines the shape of our language.

This means we have to work with meanings that are produced with the help of "difference" and do not directly derive from the world they refer to. In language we find only differences without positive terms.

- Words are never stable and fixed in time.

First of all, because the meaning we see in words is the product of difference, that meaning is always contaminated. Moreover, since words are not determined by their relationship with what they refer to, they are always subject to change.

- Meaning is the product of difference and it is also always subject to a process of deferral.

In fact, a word's or sign's relations to other words and to words that will follow are a condition for meaning. Without those relations meaning would not be possible. Derrida destabilizes the relationship between signifier and signified. The signifier, the word we hear or

read, are of course stable enough, but what it signifies. The signified is according to Derrida subject to an inherent instability.

4. DECONSTRUCTION AND HERMENEUTICS (YAPISÖKÜMÜ VE YORUMLAMA)

Silverman (1989:4) defines deconstruction as the reading of texts in terms of their marks, traces, or indecidable features, in terms of their margins, limits, or frameworks, and in terms of their self-circumscriptions or self delimitations as texts. What does this mean for us? In his book, Silverman explains that deconstruction is interested in what is happening in a text. The questioning is not looking for its meaning or its component parts, or its systematic implications-but rather by marking off its relations to other texts, its contexts, its sub-texts. It means that deconstruction accounts for how a text's explicit formulations undermine its implicit or non-explicit aspects. It brings out what the text excludes by showing what it includes. It highlights what remains indecidable and what operates as an indecidable in the text itself. Indeed, Derrida believes and insists that deconstruction is always 'something else'. Thus each text will have to be considered in its own terms (Evans, 1991:180).

Leitch (1983:122) maintains that deconstruction works to deregulate controlled dissemination and celebrate misreading. Therefore, the theory of deconstruction seeks to liberate the text so that "it produces a language of its own" (Kearney:123).

Derrida, in an interview with Richard Kearney, expresses Deconstruction as "*Deconstruction is always deeply concerned with the 'other' of language. I never cease to be surprised by critics who see my work as a declaration that there is nothing beyond language, that we are imprisoned in language; it is, in fact, saying the exact opposite. The critique of logocentrism is above all else the search for the 'other' and the 'other of language'*", Winquist (2003:263). Derrida's claim about this explanation is that there is never only one meaning about something, always another meaning or thinking will surely emerge. Thus, deconstruction means to reverse logocentrism.

Winquist (2003:264) explains that Derrida reads philosophy and literature without denying their internal tensions, inconsistencies and constitutive complexities. Derrida is thereby able to locate and follow lines of force within the differential play of signifiers of the text to ruptures and gaps that witness to the originary trauma and undecidability of bringing force to textual experience. His readings resemble a transcendental interrogation of the conditions for the possibilities of discursive practices and textual productions. In that case Deconstruction is the transaction between the reader and text. As mentioned before, for each reader the meaning of the text is different. To sum up, deconstruction basically states that there is more to perceive from the book than what is first perceived.

Apart from deconstruction, there is no simple definition for hermeneutics. Broadly speaking, Hermeneutics is a philosophical mode of thought. In a more general definition, hermeneutics is regarded as the art of philosophy of interpretation and understanding. Likewise, Teevan (2005:14) describes the term hermeneutics as a reference to theories of interpretation. Dostal (2002: 81) defines hermeneutics as a historical circle in which our understanding is oriented by the effective history or history of influences of that which we are trying to understand. Wheeler (2000:73) expresses that Hermeneutics then claims that the meaning of a text is richer than the content the author intended, while deconstruction says meaning is indeterminate and beyond authorial control. An easy example for hermeneutics may be this: The Ancient Greek Philosopher Aristoteles in his "Poetica" explained the rules of 'Tragedies' how to be written. But most of the

pages about comedies in his book are lost. By applying hermeneutics here, we must think about Aristotle's personality and thoughts and subsequently write like Aristoteles in such a way that what he must have said about "comedy". Therefore, it would not be surprisingly to say that hermeneutics includes traces which give evidence of a former influence of something. Because of this, hermeneutics is a footprint which is left by the text to the reader.

5. CONCLUSION (SONUÇ)

In this paper it was aimed to explain the basic thoughts of the famous twentieth century French philosopher Jacques Derrida. The basis of Post-structuralist theories lie in the belief of the inadequacy of language. Derrida's theory of difference proposed that meaning of signs within language is changeable. Post-structuralism is more interested in the meaning and orders of texts than structuralism. Post-structuralism is a radical thing which rejects logic because logic is always dominated by illogic. Derrida's differance is the sameness which is not identical, because of this difference builds up the opposition between true and false.

Derrida's reading strategy which is called Derridean deconstruction has left its significance in literary studies. Significantly, 'texts' are not natural reflections of the world in Derrida's view-point. Texts build our interpretations of the world. By reading a text each reader can observe a different meaning and understanding. Derrida claims that all these different thought of the readers are true and none of them can be denied or called a false interpretation. At certain periods in our lives, the means by which we perceive and assimilate the things around us alter. Because of this fact, the reader is the supplement of the whole text. For Derrida all texts are ambiguous which is to have more than one meaning. So the analysing of texts, as structuralists do, is impossible. Furthermore, Derrida's 'differance' means to show multiple interpretations of readers. It is difficult to observe the variance between hermeneutics and deconstruction. Hermeneutics suggests that the meaning of a text is richer than the content the writer intended. Deconstruction, on the other hand, expresses that meaning is infinite and beyond the author of a text. According to Derrida the aim of deconstruction is 'to overthrow the hierarchy' of dualism which is at the foundation of philosophy (Derrida, 1981:41). And when someone asks what Post-structuralism in literary theory is, the short answer would be obviously "rejecting reader's subjectivity".

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