



## Heidegger on Language and the Formation of Cultural Identity

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper was to analyze Heidegger's conceptualization of language in the formation of cultural identity. The study aimed at finding a Heideggerian solution to how language would play an important role in formation of a cultural identity, since Heidegger perceived language as the disclosure of being unlike the traditional attitude that observed language as a mere tool for communication. The study employed a phenomenological-analytical method which was used to break down concepts by analyzing them, seeking the nature of the concepts (being, language and culture) and hence finding the distinctive relationship between language and being and how culture becomes the mode of man's existence. In line with this methodology, the study employed the pragmatic-existential theory in assessing the role of language in man's being and how language discloses his being and the being of culture. From a Heideggerian perspective, being-in-the-world reflects a marriage of the human being's language and culture in which one exists as language plays an important role in the social construction of self. It was revealed to the study that finding out that being, language and culture are viewed as inseparable, and as in this perspective meaning represents the constituted ideal of being with others in the world, in shared humanness and in shared interactions in the world which are made possible by language as a mode of being. It was concluded that man is incapable of anything without a language, he knows nothing of his world, he has no culture, and he thus has no mode of existence and therefore has no knowledge of his world.

**Keywords:** Heidegger, language, culture, being, identity, Dasein, house of being.

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### INTRODUCTION

When we think of a language, we think of a tool used by a people to represent themselves, so behind it there is a culture in support of language. It can also be said that culture does not exist or is not spoken of without considering the language. A culture is described through it. Moreover, we can affirm that language and culture influence each other as a certain variety of words is used to describe a certain phenomenon; and a certain cultural phenomenon has a linguistic variety as an answer to describe it. Language performs both a cognitive function and a communicative function; the fundamental operations of thought in which the cognitive function is expressed, as all find correspondence in the structures of language [1]. Thus, members of the same cultural group, in order to understand each other, must use a language whose meaning is shared by all. With this in mind, the history of a language is therefore an irreplaceable key to access the cultural history of the nation.

The study on Heidegger's language and the formation of cultural identity concentrates on six concerns discussed in the following manner; language-culture relationship; Heidegger on *Dasein* and culture; the authenticity of being in a cultural context; man, and culture in the 'house of being'; language as the formation of a cultural identity; and lastly Heidegger's critique of traditional philosophies of language.

### The Language-Culture Relationship

The relationship between culture and language is among the most evident, starting from the fact that every form of culture is transmitted through language, and language itself is the primary tool of philosophical reflection, or even an uninterrupted creative activity that nourishes thought [2]. In many phases of a country's cultural history it is precisely the theory of language that reinforces national sentiment, or provides the aesthetic foundations on which literary schools and movements of thought develop. It should be added that the language, in its historical dimension, presents itself as the seat of the successive stratifications deposited during the various cultural phases [3]. The history of a language is therefore an irreplaceable key to access to the cultural history of the nation.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Peter Carruthers, "The Cognitive Functions of Language" in *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, Vol. 25, (2003: 657-726), 674.

<sup>2</sup> Wenying Jiang. "The Relationship between Culture and Language" in *ELT Journal*, 54(4), (2000: 328-334), 328.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. David Crystal, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 89

As for the relationship between language and culture, it should be noted that it was particularly deepened by idealistic linguistics, which almost shifted the focus from the study of the language itself to its cultural outline. Edward Sapir, in his studies with Benjamin Lee Whorf, recognized the close relationship between language and culture, concluding that it was not possible to understand or appreciate one without knowledge of the other [4]. The culture of a people finds reflection in the language they employ: because they value certain things and do them in a certain way, they come to use their language in ways that reflect what they value and what they do [5]. If we then attribute to the term culture, a more modern meaning, in the light of the acquisitions of anthropology then we must bear in mind that the knowledge and representation of the real characteristic of a community is organized in the language of the community itself [6]. The theory can be taken to the extreme, assuming for example, that a people whose language ignores temporal categories lives in an eternal present [7]. In one way or another, language contains a description of the world, and as such expresses the culture of the community.

It is commonly accepted that language is a part of culture, and that it plays a very important role in it. Some social scientists consider that without language, culture would not be possible. Language simultaneously reflects culture, and is influenced and shaped by it. In the broadest sense, it is also the symbolic representation of a people, since it comprises their historical and cultural backgrounds, as well as their approach to life and their ways of living and thinking. A language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture [8]. In a word, culture and language are inseparable.

### **Heidegger on *Dasein* and Culture**

Heidegger understands culture as man's mode of existing and of understanding the world [9]. In Heidegger's *Being and Time*, culture discloses *Dasein* as it exists in the manner of its formation according to formative aims [10], that is, modes or manners of *Dasein*'s existing according to future projections of possibilities of its being. This section of this study illustrates why for Heidegger, man is more a product of culture than of nature.

Heidegger's concept of being involved reformulating the question of being that had proved a challenge for earlier philosophers by challenging the concept of being as a dualism. His challenge of Cartesian dualism is especially evident in his critique of Husserl's phenomenology rejecting the notion of the human being (subject) as a spectator of objects espousing that both subject and object are inseparable [11]. In presenting being as inseparable, Heidegger introduced the concept of *Dasein*. He introduced the concept of *Dasein* reflecting the notion of a "living being" through their activity of "being there" and being in the world. *Dasein*'s central activity is their enquiry into being and in particular their ability to question and focus on personal existence. Thus, Heidegger put forth the thesis that "understanding of *Being* is itself a definitive characteristic of *Dasein*'s *Being*" presenting *Dasein* as "ontically distinctive in that it is ontological" [12].

In making this ontological distinction, Heidegger depicts *Dasein* as an entity that understands their own *Being* and possibilities. Thus, Heidegger advocated laying "bare a fundamental structure of *Dasein*" as being in the world by exploring "average everydayness" [13]. In exploring *Dasein*'s fundamental structure of *Being*, that is, being in the world, Heidegger highlighted that this phenomenon (being-in-the-world) is unitary and must be seen as a whole [14]. Heidegger argued that *Dasein*'s understanding of their being and the being of other entities encountered through concerned average everyday interactions is what serves as the point of departure in investigating *Dasein*'s being.

Heidegger at this point had revealed that *Dasein*'s encounters with entities as 'ready to hand' in the world. The project now was to reveal the 'who' of being in the world revealing the analytic of *Dasein* through encounters with 'others', these 'others' being other *Dasein*. In exploring the entity that is the 'who' in the world, Heidegger explored 'the

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<sup>4</sup> R. Wardhaugh, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (Fourth Ed.). (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 220 (Henceforth, Wardhaugh, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Wardhaugh, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, 219

<sup>6</sup> Paul Kay & Willett Kempton. *What Is the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis?* *American Anthropologist*, 86(1), (1984: 65–79), 77.

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Lee Whorf, "The Relation of Habitual Thought and Behavior to Language" in *Language, Thought and Reality*. John B. Carroll, ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T, 1956).

<sup>8</sup> H. D. Brown, *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition). (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents, 1994), 165

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 338(Henceforth, Heidegger,*Being and Time*).

<sup>10</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 167

<sup>11</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 39

<sup>12</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 32

<sup>13</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 65

<sup>14</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 79

self' with regard to average everyday existence through interaction with others. Thus, Heidegger contended that to continue the analytic of *Dasein* one must explore being in the world in the context of 'being with others' [15].

Within this everyday existence Heidegger put forth the structure of 'being-with' that is, *Dasein*'s existence is not one of 'being alone' but of 'with world', that is, being with others [16]. Heidegger depicted *Dasein*'s existence of being with influenced and shaped by the 'they' (das Man), of which Heidegger is presenting an impersonal entity that reflects what *Dasein* views as their social reality understood by encounters with equipment (ready to hand useful things), nature, and others (other *Dasein*) [17]. Heidegger argued that in investigating the 'who' in the world what must be initially explored is *Dasein*'s existence with others [18]. However, in using the term 'others', Heidegger does not mean every other human except *Dasein* but reflects the identification of *Dasein* with others of similar characteristics, beliefs, norms, and values, hence the development of culture. Heidegger put forth the argument that *Dasein* in being with others assumed a passive role in accepting without question the collective norms and value of the 'they' (das Man). This existence he posited absolved *Dasein* of personal responsibility, decision-making, and choice [19].

With the use of existential phenomenology, Heidegger showed that being has a mode of existence which it uses to relate with the world [20]; this underscores the interaction between culture and being. Man, therefore is a cultural being because from birth he forms himself and progresses through and within the confines of society and culture. Man is a product of history and nature but primarily, man is a product of culture, and hence man is a cultural being. As Heidegger says of culture as man's mode of existence and of understanding the world [21], it thus, forms part of the constituent element of man's essence. In this sense man is a phenomenon of culture, not only of nature. Man is an artifice of culture and remains the greatest effect of culture. Without man, culture cannot pride itself because man is its prime receiver. It also helps in the distinction between what man is and what he has, between 'being and having.' *Dasein*, therefore remains at the center of all the activities, from culture in dialogue with language through hermeneutics, man takes the central stage. But, within culture, would man's existence be authentic or inauthentic? Heidegger presented *Dasein* as an entity that conforms unquestioningly to societal norms and values, thus losing selfhood. In presenting the alternative to an inauthentic existence, Heidegger presents authentic existence by revealing *Dasein*'s authentic self[22]. The next section answers the question to how man can live authentically within a cultural context.

### **The Authenticity of Being in a Cultural Context**

In his book, *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger explores the meaning of authentic existence and how to avoid inauthenticity. In order to live an authentic lifestyle, Heidegger stresses that one must accept her temporality; listen to her own conscience; and act with resoluteness while straying from idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity, which constitute inauthenticity [23]. By presenting *Dasein*'s existence as having two modes, that is authenticity and inauthenticity, Heidegger was drawing distinctions between the concept of the 'they self' that is (that which is not mine but is part of the 'they' (das Man) and 'selfhood' or 'self-understanding' that which is mine). It is important to understand that while Heidegger made these distinctions, he was keen to acknowledge that one mode of existence did not take preference over the other, rather, both modes of existence revealed existence in the context of being-in-the-world through encounters with entities, nature, and others. Thus, at this point, Heidegger has revealed *Dasein*'s being in the world as represented by the relational processes of 'Being alongside the world' (*Dasein*'s circumspective concern toward entities), *Being* with others (*Dasein* manner of being with others solicitude), and 'Being one's self' (the who in the world) [24]. Heidegger continued to explicate a more primordial understanding of being in the world from the perspective of *Dasein*'s being there in the world. Heidegger highlighted that only by *Dasein*'s *existential existence* in the world can 'the being of the there' be exposed. In explicating the 'there' of being in the world, *Dasein* was presented as an entity located in the world by individual personal 'there' as opposed to an objective place or space in the world. Heidegger demonstrated that *Dasein* was directional, that is, the person's concern was always directed toward the entity brought proximally closest through circumspective concern and actions [25].

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 37, 117

<sup>16</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 152

<sup>17</sup> Marcella Horrigan-Kelly - Michelle Millar - Maura Dowling, "Understanding the Key Tenets of Heidegger's Philosophy for Interpretive Phenomenological Research" in *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* Volume: 15 Issue: 1, (January-December 2016: 1-8), 3 (Henceforth, Horrigan-Kelly, Millar and Dowling, "Understanding the Key Tenets of Heidegger's").

<sup>18</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 155

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 230

<sup>20</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 12

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Liqun Ding, "The Basic Nature of Cultural Philosophy" in *Social Sciences in China*, 29(4), (2008): 143-152, 146 (Henceforth, Ding, "The Basic Nature of Cultural Philosophy").

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 258

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 280

<sup>24</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 169

<sup>25</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 144

However, what mattered most for Heidegger was the authentic existence which for him meant being true to oneself. Thus, the distinct and exceptional period of time in *Dasein*'s existence when there is knowledge of oneself is referred to by Heidegger as the moment of vision [26]. In conjunction with this moment of clear vision, Heidegger uses the concept of 'resoluteness' to capture what it means for *Dasein* to heed this call of conscience and act accordingly and consistently, over time. For Heidegger, resoluteness means "allowing oneself to be called up" from a forlorn, mindless conformity to the group (the they), because being resolute means "being authentically oneself". It is not to be confused with mere independence from social conventions [27]. Hence, resoluteness or resolve means "letting oneself be summoned out of one's lostness in the 'they'" [28] and carving out one's unique and authentic place in and approach to the world, doing one's work with this special intent and self-knowledge. Thus, within a cultural context there can still be authentic existence by the fact that individuals have a resolution to live authentically through the call of language that discloses being, reality. With the vision that Heidegger speaks of, to live authentically *Dasein* can do away with whatever that is not conforming with authenticity, since language discloses being; and culture is man's mode of existence and of understanding the world, man can live authentically through this mode of existence as he is capable of understanding world.

### **Man and Culture in the 'House of Being'**

Based on the understanding of language as the house of being it becomes reasonable to explore the relationship between man and culture in language. In so far as we intend to take account of how the human being lives through culture, we cannot lose sight of the question of the meaning of the *Being* of the human being [29]. Heidegger is investigating 'the human being insofar as he is comprehended in terms of 'what he is and how he is', what determines his sense of *Being*'. The meaning of being is disclosed through language. For Heidegger, language is a kind of *Dasein*'s being-in-the-world; language is man's mode of being [30].

Heidegger tells us that in language, (a) beings always appear to us within a world, within a context of meanings that wash over things, and (b) a world, while more than the sum of its parts, nevertheless only exists in and through the interrelation of things [31]. We already saw that according to Heidegger, culture is man's mode of existing and of understanding the world [32], and the world is understood through the interrelation of things and as beings appear in the world, thus, through the context in which they are understood through language. Language as 'the house of Being' elucidates thinking, understood as the recollection of *Being* in its most primordial form. Language, in its primary function of saying, has the function of bringing about a healing transformation of human being. *Dasein*, freed into its inherent possibilities by that meditative poetic thinking, which is basically a thinking, enters onto a path of creative self-transformation.

In this context we do not talk of a world without beings, a world without culture, neither a world without language, it is an interplay of the three. Language is the house of being, which is man's mode of being while culture is man's mode of existing within this house of being. Language is the house of being because, if we attend to its originary speaking, it preserves for us the truth of being, that is, the un-concealment of beings, as the fundamental scene of our existence. It is thus, language that demarcates the parameters of a realm wherein humans can meaningfully dwell. Language domesticates being: it makes the world livable for us [33].

### **Language and the Formation of a Cultural Identity**

Heidegger elaborates on the accepted understanding of the principle of identity, echoing how this formulation is generally understood. What is said is that everything is itself the same as itself. Every object identifies with itself; this is a constant, consistent, and predictable law of reality which we see stated explicitly as far back as Aristotle's *Metaphysics* though we find the first actual formulation of this principle, in the way Heidegger depicts it, in the work of Leibniz [34]. To every being belongs identity, the unity of the thing with itself. Thus, all beings share *Being*; all beings are grounded

<sup>26</sup>Cf. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 319

<sup>27</sup>Daniel O. Dahlstrom, *The Heidegger Dictionary*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013) 184 (Henceforth, Dahlstrom, *The Heidegger Dictionary*).

<sup>28</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 345

<sup>29</sup> Scott M. Campbell. *The early Heidegger's Philosophy of Life: Facticity, Being, and Language*. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 68

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 82

<sup>31</sup> John T. Lysaker, "Language and Poetry" in Bret W. Davis (ed.), *Martin Heidegger: Key Concepts*, (Durham: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2010) 195-207), 202

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 338

<sup>33</sup> Bret W. Davis, "Introduction: Key Concepts in Heidegger's Thinking of Being" in Bret W. Davis (ed.), *Martin Heidegger: Key Concepts*, (Durham: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2010: 1-16), 10

<sup>34</sup> Gottfried W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, translated by R. Ariew and D. Garber. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989), 30

by their being in *Being* [35]. Even if there are many diverse real and imagined items all around us, we may identify one principle that connects them all. Thus, the law of identity, the “highest principle of thought”, directs us to the meaning of *Being* itself, and the primordial relationship between beings and *Being*. When Heidegger writes this in “The Principle of Identity”, he is echoing the claim made in *Being and Time* that “Being is always the being of a being” [36]. From the ‘many’ can always be discerned the ‘one’. The law of identity is that the unity of a thing with itself is also its unity with *Being*. To this, Heidegger speaks of the term *Ereignis* which is translated as ‘appropriation’ but also as the ‘appropriating event’. The appropriating event appropriates being (the presence of beings) and *Dasein* to one another, by opening up a clearing for particular beings to be present to *Dasein* [37].

*Ereignis* understood here, to give it a recent more technical formulation, is the “ever-operative yet intrinsically hidden thrown-openness that is the appropriated clearing” [38]. It is this ‘clearing’ that we ourselves are, as temporal, dynamic, thinking beings who create meaning by revealing and bringing forth the world through language. But we are also appropriated by and belong together with the meaning we disclose. Thus *Ereignis* “shines forth, as something to which the subject of knowledge also belongs” [39]. It is a “universal structure” which articulates the source of intelligibility itself, how it is that meaning and worlding are possible [40]. This is how the claim that thinking and *Being* are the same is possible, but it requires a re-imagining of what we are and how we understand reality.

*Ereignis* attempts to articulate the “this” of our existence, which human beings are able to be in a way that allows them to both disclose and marvel at *Being* and its possibilities, which they themselves are [41]. Heidegger writes that the “relation between humankind and *Being* is not a bond stretched between the clearing and man...The relation is the clearing itself, and man’s essence is that same relation” [42]. Through the term he wants us to “see” and experience this “owning in which man and *Being* are delivered over to each other” [43]. Thus, *Ereignis* gives us the world and ourselves: it describes the appropriation of self through our disclosure of the world, and also accounts for the event that makes this possible (which we always already are).

Language plays an important role in the social construction of self. It provides the epistemological medium for human social interaction. Berger and Luckmann have provided a model of how the personal self is modified through language into a social self [44]. They contend that three processes are involved in the construction of the social self. The first is externalization and it occurs when a person attempts to share his thoughts, feelings, and emotions with others. He finds that they must be put into a social code (language, art, music, dance, etc.) [45]. The second process comes from society itself. It existed before the individual existed and will continue to exist long after the individual has departed from it. In society, language is institutionalized. Its codes, patterns, and models have been legitimated. They have been codified. It is not a neutral code and it incorporates all kinds of social values, epistemological frameworks, and semantic domains. The individual involved in the transition from primary to secondary socialization has much to learn. Socialization is a lifelong process [46]. Finally, because the individual is thrown into a society that already exists, he must incorporate that knowledge [47]. Now, what is significant about this model is that all three processes go on simultaneously. Thus, self-knowing is grounded in the knowing-awareness of identities. Hence this knowing-awareness constitutes the own most of reason. Thereupon reason is the receiving of beingness in the sense of ‘identity’ as the constancy of presencing [48].

Heidegger claims that the self is reflected, and thus rendered epistemologically self-conscious, by others, and so it must already be ontologically constituted in relation to these others who it therefore always already reflects in its very

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<sup>35</sup> Dominic Griffiths. “Martin Heidegger’s Principle of Identity: On Belonging and Ereignis” in *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 36(3), (2017: 326–336), 331.

<sup>36</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 7

<sup>37</sup> Dahlstrom, *The Heidegger Dictionary*, 17

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Sheehan. *Making Sense of Heidegger: A Paradigm Shift*. (London: Rowan & Littlefield, 2015), xix

<sup>39</sup> Hans Ruin. “Contributions to Philosophy” in *A Companion to Heidegger*, edited by H. L. Dreyfus and M. A. Wrathall, 358–375. (Malden: Blackwell. 2007), 366

<sup>40</sup> Richard Polt. “Ereignis” in *A Companion to Heidegger*, edited by H. L. Dreyfus and M. A. Wrathall, 375–391. (Malden: Blackwell.2007), 389

<sup>41</sup> Griffiths. “Martin Heidegger’s Principle of Identity,” 334.

<sup>42</sup> Sheehan. *Making Sense of Heidegger*, 240

<sup>43</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*. Trans. Joan Stambaugh. (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 36

<sup>44</sup> Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1966), 90 (Henceforth, Berger and Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality*).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Berger and Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality*, 150

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Berger and Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality*, 151

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Berger and Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality*, 151

<sup>48</sup> Martin Heidegger. *Mindfulness*, Translated by Parvis Emad and Thomas Kalary, (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 352

being through the medium of language [49]. For instance, it seems that the values, attitudes, beliefs, feelings, aspirations, and projects etc. by which we constitute and define ourselves, are initially derived upon the basis of, our contact with others. The existence and the very nature of individual identities is intimately dependent upon their relations to the world and to others through language and within the ranges of culture. Heidegger explains in detail how our present-at-hand conceptions and associated perceptions of the world etc., are grounded in, and arise out of, our practical or ready-to-hand involvement with it [50]. Heidegger's existential analytic of *Dasein* focused on the human being's existence in their world as an individual and within their social context. Thus, from this stance being-in-the-world as understood from a Heideggerian stance reflects a marriage of the human being's language and culture in which one exists [51]. In this position, being, language and culture are viewed as inseparable, thus, in this perspective meaning represents the constituted ideal of being with others in the world, in shared humanness and in shared interactions in the world [52].

### Heidegger's Critique of Traditional Philosophy of Being

Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, emphasizes the primary importance of being. He introduces and justifies the notion of *Dasein* as a replacement for all previous conceptions of human existence, of which for Heidegger *Dasein* is the means through which being can be understood that is by first analyzing the human being [53]. All attempts at philosophical anthropology have suffered under the weight of traditional ontology, treating the human being simply as one sort of being among others, one kind of substance or *hypokeimenon* [54]. The question has then been: what essential properties distinguish this being from others? Having reason or language? Having been separately created by God? [55] The concept of *Dasein* is supposed to avoid this tradition and propose a different approach altogether to human existence [56]. This brings Heidegger to propose an ontological analysis of the human being as the means to understand being. For Heidegger, disclosing the truth about the human being requires that the being of the human being be disclosed thus by language which Heidegger calls the 'house of being' [57].

Heidegger claims that traditional philosophical accounts of the human being cannot think of being because their thinking is constrained within a logic of binary oppositions, such as that between essence and existence [58]. For Heidegger, the human being has traditionally been thought to possess a fixed defining essence that either determines human being or that exists as a potential to be made actual. The problem with this conception of the human being is, according to Heidegger, that it fails to understand that the human being is defined by 'existential possibility' [59]. Its existential possibility means that the truth of the human being that is, the open-ended nature of the human being is defined by its existence [60]. It is this existence that one finds in culture, which is man's mode of existence and of understanding the world [61].

However, the problem with defining the human being in terms of its existence was that it appeared to many that Heidegger was simply reversing the privileging of essence constitutive of traditional conceptions of the human being [62]. Such thinking assumes that Heidegger's notion of existence is the existence that has been thought to exist in opposition to essence, which is wrong [63]. For Heidegger, defining the human being by its existence does not mean that the human being is simply defined by its actions; by existence, Heidegger means something very specific. Defining the human being by its existence means, for Heidegger, not that the human being is what it does, but that the human being exists in such a relation to being that it, and it alone amongst beings, is able to disclose being [64]. Because only the human being ek-sists in "the clearing that grants nearness to *Being*" [65], only the human being is able to disclose being. This is because, as Heidegger notes in *Being and Time*, out of all beings only the human being is interested in its

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<sup>49</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 155

<sup>50</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 99

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 157

<sup>52</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 157

<sup>53</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 27

<sup>54</sup> David Carr. *The Paradox of Subjectivity: The Self in the Transcendental Tradition*. (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc. 1999), 17 (Henceforth, Carr. *The Paradox of Subjectivity*).

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 45

<sup>56</sup> Carr. *The Paradox of Subjectivity*, 17

<sup>57</sup> Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," 236

<sup>58</sup> Gavin Rae "Re-Thinking the Human: Heidegger, Fundamental Ontology, and Humanism" in *Human Studies*, 33(1), (2010: 23–39), 24 (Henceforth, Rae "Re-Thinking the Human").

<sup>59</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 33

<sup>60</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 32, 68

<sup>61</sup> Ding, "The Basic Nature of Cultural Philosophy," 146.

<sup>62</sup> Rae "Re-Thinking the Human," 24

<sup>63</sup> Rae "Re-Thinking the Human," 24

<sup>64</sup> Rae "Re-Thinking the Human," 25

<sup>65</sup> Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," 241

being[66]. Other beings, most notably animals, remain ignorant or uninterested in being or are simply unable to disclose being because “they lack language” [67]. Because being is above all else [68], only an inquiry into being can disclose the ontological truth of the human being. But, only the human being, not animals, can inquire into and hence disclose being. Thus, while being is that which is highest in importance, the human being’s ek-sistence means that Heidegger’s ontology privileges it over other entities.

Heidegger understands that humans disclose being through both thinking and language. Thought enables being to be understood [69]. Indeed, thinking is always accompanied by being and indeed always concerns being; “thinking is the thinking of Being” [70]. Because thinking discloses being to the human being, thinking is also capable of disclosing “the relation of *Being* to the essence of man” [71]. But Heidegger warns that it is not the technical thinking of calculation and instrumental rationality that discloses being, rather, “we must free ourselves from the technical interpretation of thinking” [72] because such thinking is metaphysical in so far as it limits itself to beings and maintains a predetermined ground of inquiry; it is, therefore, incapable of thinking of being. For Heidegger, true thinking thinks of being not beings and, by going beyond the binary oppositions of metaphysics, “is a thinking more rigorous than the conceptual” [73].

But thought is intimately linked to language. While thinking thinks of being, the disclosure of being occurs through language [74]. Language thus plays a crucial role in disclosing to humans the status and nature of being, thus, without language’s disclosure of being, being would remain concealed. But Heidegger’s conception of language is not that of an instrument that the human being uses to disclose its thought. Rather Heidegger holds that “we are within language” [75] and that as we reside within language it is not us that speaks but “language that speaks” [76], and thus, it is in language that we attain our mode of existence. As the means through which being discloses itself, “language is the house of *Being*” [77], as the house within which being resides, the importance of language to the disclosure of being cannot be over-estimated.

## CONCLUSION

Generally, Heidegger’s philosophy of language and philosophy of culture offer a harmony between *Dasein* and his cultural world. *Dasein*’s mode of existing aims at understanding the world through the disclosure power of language. Heidegger’s experience with language was the opening to his philosophy of language that he shared in his works. We have seen that for Heidegger, it is not possible to talk about being in isolation of language, for ‘language is the house of being’, as it reveals or discloses something about being. It has been clear that Heidegger’s philosophy of language was his experience with language, and not a theory of, not a speculative or ideational construct about, language; it transcends, breaks out of, the instrumentalization and objectification of language, and opens the way to the discovery of the ontological status and origin of language. Thus, Heidegger has taught us that to rethink of being, and to rediscover language for a disclosive experience with language, we need to be mindful of the ‘word’ and ‘being’. Heidegger was bold enough to claim that only the human being has language, because it is part of him solely and destined to exist as being-in-the-world, i.e., to human being as the place of the illumined open clearing through which being reveals itself. As Heidegger understood culture as man’s mode of existing and of understanding the world, his *Being and Time*, discussed the concept of culture that discloses *Dasein* as it exists in the manner of its formation according to formative aims, therefore, language has been understood to play an important role in the social construction of self as it provides the epistemological medium for human social interaction.

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<sup>66</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 32

<sup>67</sup> Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 230

<sup>68</sup> Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 217

<sup>69</sup> Rae “Re-Thinking the Human,” 34

<sup>70</sup> Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 220

<sup>71</sup> Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 217

<sup>72</sup> Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 218

<sup>73</sup> Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 258

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Rae “Re-Thinking the Human,” 35

<sup>75</sup> Heidegger, “The Way to Language,” 398

<sup>76</sup> Heidegger, “The Way to Language,” 411

<sup>77</sup> Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 217