

# LISTENING AS EXISTENTIAL OPENNESS THAT ALLOWS THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE OTHER

## La escucha como apertura existencial que posibilita la comprensión del otro

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### Abstract

The article approaches the subject of listening as a central axis of an existential openness that promotes the understanding of the other. It is an relevant issue since that widely reflected about the language and its possibilities; however, the listening has been little addressed so it remains in a discreet silence that is important to clear. The main objective of this proposal is to highlight the value that listening has to reach the understanding of the other and the construction of dialogical relations between humans' beings. To do this, a descriptive journey is made about language and its characteristics, emphasizing its two components: speech and listening as an interrelated process to understand its role in the construction of linking narratives among human beings. An essential part of this process is the time for which some reflections on the subject are made to conclude with the question of listening that provides the possibility of an existential openness that facilitates the understanding of the other. The description is made in a descriptive, reflective and hermeneutic way, with the support of the ideas of the main authors of the Philosophy and of other disciplines. The ideas and their arguments have been organized into three essential themes: language, time and listening, to conclude by highlighting the main arguments of each of the aspects considered in the reflection.

### Keywords

Language, time, listening, understanding, communication.

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### Resumen

El artículo aborda el tema de la escucha como eje central de una apertura existencial que favorece la comprensión del otro. Se trata de un tema relevante puesto que se ha reflexionado ampliamente acerca del lenguaje y sus posibilidades; sin embargo, la escucha ha sido poco abordada por lo que permanece en un silencio discreto que es importante despejar. El objetivo principal de esta propuesta es resaltar el valor que la escucha tiene para alcanzar la comprensión del otro y la construcción de relaciones dialógicas entre seres humanos. Para ello se hace un recorrido descriptivo acerca del lenguaje y sus características, resaltando sus dos componentes: el habla y la escucha como un proceso interrelacionado para poder comprender su papel en la construcción de narrativas vinculares entre los seres humanos. Una parte esencial de este proceso es el tiempo por lo que se realizan algunas reflexiones sobre el tema para concluir con la cuestión de la escucha que brinda la posibilidad de una apertura existencial que facilita la comprensión del otro. La descripción se realiza en modo descriptivo, reflexivo y hermenéutico, con el apoyo de las ideas de autores principales de la Filosofía y de otras disciplinas. Las ideas y sus argumentos se han organizado en tres temas esenciales: el lenguaje, el tiempo y la escucha, para concluir resaltando los principales argumentos de cada uno de los aspectos considerados en la reflexión.

### Palabras clave

Lenguaje, tiempo, escucha, comprensión, comunicación.

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## Introduction

The present text deals with the theme of language, time and listening as a form of existential openness that favors the understanding of the other, a very important part of human interactions. The objective is to value listening as an essential aspect of language that has often been dismissed because verbal language has been given more value. In the same way, listening is considered as the essential basis of an existential openness through which the otherness sought among human beings is consolidated.

An essential basis of this process is language, as a basic condition of human existence, which makes him a being in the world, who is a speaker and who also listens, which fully founds him.

Nowadays, a big problem in society can be identified since people listen in a deficient manner. Often, it is difficult for them to listen to what others say and have difficulty making themselves heard in the way they would like. This phenomenon occurs in all domains of daily life. According to Nieto (2005) there is a hypothesis that the silence that occurs in the current context, probably, is linked to the fact that it is a world in which the visual is privileged over the auditory.

It is basically a visual world, in which a large number of messages are issued with attractive images, bright colors and seductive forms, so that our gaze is captured by these elements. The clearest proof of this situation is the impact of the 'virtual reality' that is perceived and experienced through sight. Thus, a world that is mostly explored through sight

prevents, to a certain extent, the development of the other senses, in this particular case, the auditory one.

From this situation, then, the importance of thinking about one of the components of human interaction, often used, misunderstood and even unknown, such as 'listening', arises as an eminently ethical process due to which it is possible to encounter the other. It is a current issue and of great relevance since people, by privileging more the visual than the auditory aspects, leave aside a range of information records that enriches the personal sensory world, but that also allows the encounter of the other, when it is heard.

Therefore, the subject is of great relevance because listening allows us to understand, as Gadamer (1993) has pointed out. The hypothesis from which we work is that 'listening' is a deep and invisible phenomenon that favors a condition of existential openness that allows the understanding of the other.

In order to do this review, an inductive, reflective and hermeneutic methodology will be followed, trying to understand, in the first place, the phenomenon of listening as an invisible part of language in order to arrive at its implications in relation to the other. The content is developed in three sections: language, time and listening. In the first case, it will be described in its various components and its importance in the individual and social development of the human being. Then, the question of the time involved in a narrative construction of a version about oneself and the history each one has will be addressed, to then conclude with the theme of listening as an essential aspect of the relationship with the other and the founder of an ethic of respect and openness.



## Language

Language is one of the most complex functions of the human being since it combines neurological, psychological and social aspects for its production and understanding. Due to this, it is important, in the first place, to describe it in a basic manner according to the biological structures involved in its production. Language, according to Lenneberg (1985), is made up of the interaction of three individual components linked to a social aspect.

The first of them has a biological basis, is made up of the anatomical structures located on the face and neck: the nose, the oral cavity, the larynx and the vocal cords, essential elements to pronounce the sounds.

Another component, linked to the previous one and already mentioned by Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson (1995) refers to the functions performed by the central nervous system, in particular the cerebral cortex, certain subcortical areas and the cerebral hemispheres, with its particular and defined specialization hemispheric in which, the left side uses the so-called digital language consisting of letters and numbers while the right, more holistic, uses the language of the images.

The third component involved in language is the ability of the human being to pronounce sounds that become words that, then, name the objects, the people and the phenomena associated with both. When a person mentions the word 'key', everyone understands the object to which he is referring, even if it is not the same for each one.

To this possibility, Lenneberg (1985) has called it: 'naming'. It is a capacity that appears in the human being, to name the information and data that it receives from the environment, from itself and from other people, in increasingly structured and hierarchical categories. Of course, the information is received through all the organs of the senses, however, it is more relevant to the topic of interest at this time, the sense of hearing, with its specialty to receive sound waves and transmit them to the brain.

The interaction of physical components, nervous connections in the human brain and ability to emit sounds facilitate the understanding and emission of sounds, whose development would be impossible without human interaction since language developed as a particular element of this process and, at the same time, it favors it.

Carrera and Mazzarella (2001) emphasize the role of language as a mediating element of human experience and thought, stressing that the meaning of the word becomes particularly interesting at the moment of speaking and listening since it is transmitted in the chosen words to express a certain thought.

Thus, the analysis of language, as seen so far, considers several elements that escape the objective of the present text; however, it is important to note them since they are part of the phenomenon and account for its complexity.

With this background, it is better understood the conformation of what Molina (2008) has called a code and is commonly known as 'language' and the elements involved in it; as well as the importance of listening to the sounds produced by human beings during interactions in which, both the emission of sounds and their reception (listening), are important to achieve a fruitful dialogue.



In the same vein, Campillo-Valero and García-Guixé (2005) point out that, in human history, language emerges as a need to communicate with another and transmit information; it is completely impossible to think of human development without this code or without a means of transmitting data; but, in the same way, the transmission of this information would become quite difficult, in the absence of the ability to receive them through listening.

Luria (2000) already pointed out the contribution of language to human development:

... thanks to language, the subject can penetrate into the depth of things, get out of the limits of immediate impression, organize their behavior aimed at an end, discover links and complex relationships that are unattainable for immediate perception, transmit the information to another man, which constitutes a powerful stimulus for mental development by the transmission of information accumulated over many generations. (p.222)

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Thus, language became a very powerful function of connection and exchange, since it determined the psychic and social development throughout the centuries of existence of the human being on earth. Watzlawick et al. (1995) have pointed out the importance of this function for the exchange to take place; however, they also clarify that the presence of two components is necessary: the sender and the receiver.

The first one emits data in the form of sounds organized in a particular language, accompanied by gestures, looks and bodily postures that give a meaning and qualify the information issued verbally. The second one receives the information, the emitted data, decodes it in the cerebral sectors constituted for it and emits answers in the form of sounds or behavioral reactions regarding what has been said.

Thus, language contributes to interconnection and interrelation in a process in which there is a person speaking; that is, the person emits sounds and another that “listens”; that is, he receives them, decodes them and reacts to them. These are the two poles of a binary exchange process, which becomes increasingly complex as the number of participants in it increases.

To better understand the basic communicational dyad, it will be divided, temporarily, into the two constituent elements and then focus on the second: the receiver who receives the message, through listening.

Watzlawick et al. (1995) highlight the characteristics of the sender, one of the parts of the communicational dyad. It is a person who expresses himself verbally, which is why he becomes the sender of a message; use a consensual code to communicate with another person and, as a conse-

quence, enter into an interaction that may involve (or not) the possible construction of a relationship in which it is important to communicate and for that, language is the main tool.

For the purposes of this article, following Echeverría (2003), consider that the sender can use a language, like the so-called “generative” language. It is a “language of action, which creates realities” (p.35), not only describes things, but takes place in this process, the role of the receiver, the listener, is particular, as it will contribute to consolidate or ratify the elaborated narrative.

Watzlawick et al. (1995) point out the importance of this process, in which two levels are involved. The first is made up of the language that transmits data and information. The second level, which accompanies the previous one, is constituted by the ‘form’ in which things are said and transmitted in the tone of voice, in the looks and in the gestures.

Thus, language can forge realities: the narrator organizes the information in a certain way and the receiver captures the story to confirm, reformulate or reject it outright, which will determine the evolution of the established relationship: consensus, dissent or the conflict will be the results of this process. Therefore, and following Gadamer (1993), it can be pointed out that language constructs different, new, creative realities. These realities can lead to important changes in the life of a person as well as building worlds, value ideas, establish productive, creative and generative dialogues, can also destroy them, erasing hopes, disqualifying ideas, denying realities and people or as indicated the author in 1992:

the sign has its being only in application, and so its “self” consists only in pointing to something “other.” It must be foregrounded from the context in which it is encountered and taken as a sign, in order for its own being as an object to be superseded and for it to dissolve (disappear) into its meaning. It is the abstraction of pointing to self (p. 256)

Criteria that can be supported by what was sustained by Carrera and Mazzarella (2001) when they point out that language (and the meaning assigned to it) activates mental processes that reproduce forms of social interaction that, subsequently, will contribute to the self-regulation of each person. And here, again, it highlights the role of listening and the benefit it brings in the interaction. Adding, in addition, that the meaning of the word springs, in a certain way, in a ludic fashion, from the situational value of the words, with which, it is considered again by Gadamer (1992) who explains that language is born in a interaction defined, also, by the context in which it is produced and which is marked to a large extent, from the moment of birth, or as he himself says:



The life of language consists in the uninterrupted continuation of the game that we started playing when we learned to speak [...] nobody fixes the meaning of a word and the linguistic capacity does not mean only having learned and knowing how to use the fixed meanings of words. (p. 130)

And this happens, since the meaning of words is intimately linked to the situation in which they sprout. Cabrera-González (2010) points out very well when he indicates that “the participants are able to adapt the production and the reception/interpretation of the speech to the interpersonal social communicative situation” (p.2). And so, the importance of listening in this process immediately arises, because in order to make such an adaptation, it is necessary in the first place, an understanding of the situation that is only possible when you have heard what is happening.

Gadamer (1992) points it out masterfully when he mentions that the word has a very important value and together with dialogue, they have a moment of play in themselves:

... have a word, keep the word, stop someone from speaking and getting an answer, the way to give it and how the word fits into the precise context in which it is pronounced and understood, all this points to a common structure between understanding and the game. The child knows the world in linguistic games, the words are not a game but they trap thought and integrate it into relationships that go beyond thought. (p. 129)

With which, one can easily distinguish the importance of listening in this game and in the construction of possible, feasible stories of scenarios that are unfolding in the day-to-day interactions and in which, following Balbi (2004), it is possible to distinguish two different scenarios but that occur simultaneously: consciousness and action.

In the first, the thoughts and feelings of the people who intervene in the narration stand out, which are expressed in the language and which reach the receiver to be heard and react to them. In the second, the acts and situations and instruments involved in the execution stand out; in which, the receiver can be involved, due, precisely, to the fact he heard the message.

Then, following Balbi (2004) we can affirm that “in the narrative, the psychic reality is always present and, with more precision, it can be said to predominate” (p. 314) and it acquires meaning in a given time, which allows the construction of the personal meaning, both of the event itself, and of the self of the person experiencing the event. Over time, feedback loops are created in which the language emitted, received and



heard plays an important role in the construction of human identities and realities.

Due to the importance that time has with respect to the narrative, it is always built in relation to it. It is important to make a small deviation towards the analysis of this physical magnitude that determines the evolution of a human being. For this, following Held (2009), taking into account the proposal of Husserl with respect to time, whose phenomenology is based on the analysis of the present awareness of time, which extends a certain stretch, depending on the level of attention that the person pays to the event.

## Time and its role in the narrative

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It should be noted, as Held (2009) mentions, that Husserl's conception distinguishes between every day or 'improper' time, also called 'objective time' and 'own time' or 'living present'. In the first case, the 'objective time' is taken in a fixed and immobile way and for that reason it becomes improper since it is a way in which the human being has tried to control this dimension, without realizing that it is unalterable and fluid. In the second case, the 'living present' called by Husserl (2002) is considered time as an event and is closely related to the consciousness that the human being has of this dimension and, which is also expressed in the time forms used in the language.

This distinction is not new as pointed out by Chernyakov (2002), since it was proposed in Greek civilization by Aristotle and Plato and gives an account of the importance of this dimension in human history because it is intimately linked to its future.

According to Reeder (2011), in the passage of time, the human being and his conscience, assign to each object a 'temporary position'; that is, object and time are integrated into a specific unit: 'in the morning', 'today', 'yesterday', 'five years ago', 'in my childhood', 'when I was young'; there are so many other forms of locate the object and the experience associated with it at a given moment.

As can be easily demonstrated, language is the instrument used for this positioning and listening to this description (object and time) also gives an account of the individual's history and its actual passing.

Therefore, the language allows the expression of this temporo-objectual unit placing it in three moments: the past, the present and the future. To the point that there are particular verb forms for each of them.



The human being is left with impressions that can last in the conscience during some moments; the perception of the here and now (of the present) is realized in a slight moment in which the conscience experiences the today that, quickly, becomes past and the future arrives. It is an eminently particular experience, due to which one becomes aware that something has happened.

Therefore, it is possible to distinguish two particular manifestations, already mentioned by Husserl (2002): time itself and the experience of it. In the first case, it is a physical magnitude that the human being perceives as a backward movement, while always immersed in an eternal present and moving or 'flowing' into the future. This 'displacement' that is not physical but temporal but which, apparently is related to a sensation of movement, is most likely linked to the sequence of light/darkness (in day to day) and seasons (spring, summer, autumn and winter) in the year.

Husserl (2002) considers this displacement as "sinking into time" (p.84). Here the physical magnitude is linked to the experience of time, since the consciousness of each person perceives it as a displacement, as something that continuously flows. At the same time, this sensation is part of the experience that is expressed in the language through different verb tenses that also help the listener to locate the description.

Therefore, it can be affirmed that consciousness, like time, flows and this flow is expressed in language. However, Searle (2008) states that it is possible it presents itself in the form of 'states', however, its primary manifestation is like a flow, in the form of a continuous river that does not stop.

The human being perceives its arrival, presence and departure; these are moments that are clearly identified in the language: 'is, was and will be' are the most basic verbs with which each person gives an account of himself and of the time elapsed in his narration. In addition, it also expresses the measure of this passing, in an 'accounting' series, since it is expressed in hours, minutes, seconds and other more common denominations such as 'yesterday', 'tomorrow', 'in the future' and many more.

Consequently, each object or experience is associated with temporary reference points (moments, hours, days, weeks, years) that remain fixed in the continuous flow of time; that is to say that a certain object, in a certain way, is 'fixed' at a given time and defined and kept in it, without modification.

Which inevitably leads to the fact that the human being learns both; that is to say, next to the object and the experience, the representatives of the places of time are also apprehended; that is, the units of



objective time that human beings have defined to measure it: days, hours, minutes, seconds, decades, etc., and which are described in the language used by each person when narrating or relating the experience with them. Concomitant with this process of 'temporo-objetal fixation' appear three related phenomena. In the first place, when the object and the experience become past; that is, they are placed in the 'yesterday' (whatever the period considered), they remain invariable, they are ascribed a given point in time and they 'fix' to it in such a way that they become history.

Secondly, the person describes the present moment as something immediate and slight since it passes fleetingly and without solution of continuity from the future to the past. The present is lived, and narrated, as something ephemeral that quickly dilutes in the flow of time. In third and last place, when the object and the experience are located in the future, they can be modified since the person cannot establish with absolute certainty that the event will "really" happen in the way it has been proposed in the language; with great probability, the person will wait for it to happen in such a way or will hope that it does not follow the course that is foreseen and, even if the object or experience is assigned to a certain point in the future time (tomorrow, next month, in the following year), what happens can only be known when the predicted point is reached.

For this, the person, in a certain way, is condemned to wait for the passage of time and that the experience be in a determined manner; however, once arrived at the precise moment, it can be something totally different and/or unexpected. Here lies the mystery of what the human being calls 'future' and the paradox of time since the past is known, however, it cannot be changed and, at the same time, the future is not known but it can be modified.

All these aspects, without a doubt, will be expressed and narrated through stories described in the language, in which each person will locate his past, present and future in such a way that he constructs a particular narrative, the same as It needs to be heard and understood so that it acquires a purpose and a vital meaning.

This is important, since the human being, as the possessor of a consciousness, experiences time as a 'continuum'; that is, as a flow and not as a state. Then, the experience of time, of the objects in it and the narration that is made of it, by means of language, is also a becoming in which the subject fixes the object in the past and realizes slight flashes of it, but it is also projected into the future even if it is unknown.

This movement is mental and is subject to other phenomena such as emotions, memory itself and possible accidents that will prevent this



remembrance from being clear and reliable. The human being can only move to where his memory leads and will also do so through the language through which he tells the story associated with a specific time point.

In addition, apart from the awareness of time and this passing that is also explained through language, we must consider that the experience refers to some basic principles already raised by the ontology of language and that will be explained below following Echeverría (2003).

One of the most basic principles states that “We do not know how things are. We only know how we observe them or how we interpret them. We live in interpretive worlds” (p. 40). Idea also considered by Bateson (1998) when pointing out that the categories that each one constructs about things and phenomena are constructions of each person, although they are linked to particular objects; however, each person has definite ideas about them. The description of objects and experiences as well as the interpretation that is made of them, is done through language. Papalia, Wendkos and Duskin (2007) explain very well that, in the first years of existence, when children observe an object and point it out, the people around it indicate the name of that object; that is, they name it.

The cognitive importance that this capacity has for the development of language has already been determined, following Lenneberg (1985). Like the learning of the denomination of things, it is in childhood where we learn the denomination of the units of time that discourse uses. Units that do not escape the process of interpretation closely linked to the ability to name the things that human beings use to organize the sensory experience.

A large part of the people have experienced situations in which certain ‘temporary locations’ provoke different experiences considering the contextual implications already mentioned above: ‘close’ for a farmer can mean an hour of travel time for a city dweller or, conversely, ‘tomorrow’ can be a very distant moment for an anxious waiting man for the result of a biopsy that will determine his future and that of his family.

We must also consider that Maturana (1984) affirmed that the perceptions result from the conditions inherent to the biological structure and not from the features of the agents that disrupt the environment. The senses do not provide a faithful representation of how things are, they only give us certain information about them: size, weight, color, shape and many more that are then assigned a certain name.

Each of these conditions generates, in each person, certain experiences linked to memories (past), sensations (present) or longings (future). Thus, interpretation is a key element in listening to a given situation and in the experience of it. Therefore, we must consider what Echeverría



(2003) points out with great certainty, when he affirms that human beings, when organizing things around them, try to give them a meaning, assign them a meaning. The human tendency to search for meaning is manifested in language through the invention and adoption of stories about oneself and the world.

Then, the internal world, constituted by ideas, thoughts, emotions, perceptions and many other aspects, is connected to the external environment conformed by objects and experiences that generate certain stimuli, in such a way that the human being constructs and organizes his experience so that have a sense for yourself and for others. Later, each one tells other people these 'meanings', in the form of stories and descriptions about the world and about oneself that are connected with those of other people, which leads to the second principle enunciated by Echeverría (2003): "we not only act according to how we are (and we do), we are also according to how we act. The action generates being. One becomes according to what one does" (p 46).

These actions, of course, are described through language, hence their interpretative function that manifests itself in the temporal thread in which each one lives and builds a valid and meaningful story for oneself and others. Echeverría (2003) emphasizes it by stating that "since being human is being in a permanent process of becoming" (p.37) and language contributes to the continuous re-construction that each one makes of himself in that process. This process is carried out in relation to others, since each person tells stories to the people around him.

Therefore, the language, generative as it has been designated, that constructs realities, when it is thought of as a possibility, is constructed in a relationship and, at the same time, maintains them; that is to say, that language is, in essence, relational; it is a means by which one person comes in contact with another, communicates with another or as Watzlawick et al. (1995) points out very well, language is the essential part of a process of information exchange called communication.

Language opens or closes certain possibilities depending on what is indicated or chosen as relevant or even indicated as important, since life is the space in which individuals invent themselves. It is a space of possibility towards the creation itself; it is a autopoietic space would say Maturana and Varela (1984) and would point out Echeverría (2003) in the ontology of language.

In addition, Gadamer (1993) contributes in the reflection, to indicate that this human experience is narrated in stories that become own memories about life, that are told or relate to other people:



But this does not imply, on the other hand, that the word precedes all experience and simply advenes to an experience in an external way, by subjecting itself to it. Experience is not wordless to begin with, subsequently becoming an object of reflection by being named, by being subsumed under the universality of the word. Rather, experience of itself seeks and finds words that express it. We seek the right word—i.e., the word that really belongs to the thing—so that in it the thing comes into language. (p. 258)

This modeling, this construction that the human being makes of the world in which he lives and of his identity is a process that takes place through language. When two people talk, they speak the same language, which is necessary to achieve a certain understanding of the topic they are dealing with and the actions and reactions of each one. As expressed by Joaqui and Ortiz (2016) “other worlds can be known when their particular language is accessed: when there is expression, communication and understanding are possible” (p.169).

However, each person also speaks his own language; reason why, it is necessary that an agreement is produced so that there is mutual understanding, since, in conversation, people move to the representative world of the other in such a way that there is an alternation, until the moment in which it begins the game of giving and taking, which is the real conversation. And in this interactional process of exchange in language, listening is an essential part since it favors encounter, communication and conversation. Without listening, there would be no interaction and language, perhaps it would die in a vacuum, which is why this element is going to be addressed.

## Listening

In addition to the act of sending messages, analyzed in the previous section, there is the complementary part, corresponding to the act of listening to them. This phenomenon, without a doubt, is essential for relationships to develop: a simple desire expressed through language needs to be listened to, attended to so that something unfolds and achieves the transcendence that, by nature, has the message in itself. The communication process.

The history of humanity also emphasizes, on many occasions, the impact of a word that indicates important revolutions in ideas and conceptions, even in ways of understanding the world. From the ‘eureka!’ of Archimedes who moved the world with a lever, going through the ‘And



yet moves!’ Of Galileo that took the Earth from its center, to the lapidary phrase of Mirror ‘My pen killed him ‘upon learning of the death of García Moreno, president of Ecuador, in his republican period, they all indicate key moments in the lives of human beings that have been marked by a word or a phrase that has been heard by other people and therefore, it is known about them and the events that have taken place.

All these words and millions more that are pronounced every day throughout the Earth, in different languages and with different accents, have reached other ears, have been heard and understood in a certain way; that is, there is someone, somewhere and at a certain moment, who receives the message and captures its meaning.

This process is also observed in the texts that resonate since ancient times and whose words reach the present moment. In a similar way it happens with the messages that are sent in social networks and that transmit with great ease what is happening, sometimes, in real time, to the other side of the world. Human beings also listen to these messages and they have an effect, precisely, because there are people who listen to them.

At this point, an interesting difference can be made between what is looked at and what is heard. Such a task could seem futile; nevertheless, it is something fundamental since the first, one sees, is captured through the gaze and the second does not, which undoubtedly would make the Little Prince (Saint-Exupéry, 2009) exclaim: “what essential is invisible to the eyes” (p. 26).

Sight, without any doubt is extremely important to know the world: its shapes, sizes and colors. However, Gadamer (1993, quoted in Nieto, 2005) points out that when the world is heard, then it is interpreted, “it is one of the gifts of hearing, of knowing how to hear that it is in harmony with listening” (p. 18).

It establishes a radical difference between what is seen and what is heard. The first reaches sight and is captured by it and, in the beginning, does not require any interpretation, only perception. On the other hand, what has been heard, especially in regard to language, is always accompanied by this second level of interpretation. For words and language to have an effect, they must be heard and understood, Linares (1996) points out that every narration is made by a person for someone else or as he says in his own message:

The dense plot of narrations in which the family of origin, the couple and the family of procreation are articulated with other multiple relational spaces, also significant although generally less important, constitutes the framework of the relational activity of the individual and,



therefore, of his psychic life. Admitting very diverse combinations of identity and narrative, in it fit enjoyment and suffering, ability to change but also redundant functioning. (p.53)

These communicational exchanges that take place in a determined time also determine the construction of the human psyche. The language is relational since it is the privileged vehicle to start a dialogue, but it is also the imperishable source of many misunderstandings, of literal interpretations that can lead to innumerable problems.

And for this to occur, the presence of someone who listens to the message is required, so we cannot fail to point out the importance of this process, which generates positive effects experienced by all those people who have told their story to an attentive and empathetic listener. In the same way, an endless number of difficulties appear due to the simple fact of not listening to the ideas and arguments of others. How many conflicts could be avoided with the simple exercise of listening attentively to what a person says. The positive or negative results arise, precisely, from the fact that the discourse has been listened to and understood or, on the contrary, has not been paid any attention. The discourse is always directed towards someone and human beings seek and want to find that other attentive person who listens to the narration of their experience, validates it and recognizes it, as much as possible, in such a way that the story is given value.

By doing this, Watzlawick et al. (1995) argues that the person who had the experience is also validated, by the fact of listening to it, or as indicated in his own words:

The basis of human coexistence is twofold and, nevertheless, only one: the desire of all human beings to be confirmed by others as to what they are or even as what they can become, and the innate capacity of men to confirm in this way his fellowmen [...] True humanity only occurs where this capacity develops. (p. 21)

Consequently, listening is not just the simple act of capturing a message and decoding its meaning. The act of listening entails a deeper and more powerful sense for human relationships, since it “recognizes” the other as a human being and validates him in its presence, narrative, identity and authenticity.

Following Echeverría (2003), it can be affirmed and coincided with the fact that listening constitutes the hidden side of language, since human communication has two facets: speaking and listening and much has been reflected on the first part of this process. However, listening is





something that is only recently being paid attention to. And this happens in such a way, since the act of listening takes each person out of his or her own thinking and rationality and returns it to the scope of what is shared as Cepeda (2012) points out.

Listening to something necessarily implies the establishment of a communication that can become a dialogue and then a relationship or as proposed by Cepeda (2012): “what will come out of a conversation cannot be known in advance” (p. 205). This introduces each person into an unknown environment, is an intermediate terrain in which both participants meet and in doing so (they) share, which necessarily implies the ethical condition as a contextual framework, in which communication and, therefore, communication, the relationship.

Nieto (2005) emphasizes the power of listening as an essential ethical component of human relationships:

... to give an outlet to the voice that is kept in the inner and particular world of each one, is to highlight its sound, generating meaning; but first, revealing the common territory between the own and the strange, which in turn delimits the value tension established between me and the other, and grants the act of speaking and listening an ethical content that cannot be postponed in the circumstantiality that links saying and listening in a certain moment. (pp. 17-18)

Echeverría (2003) also affirms the ethical component of listening, since it validates speaking: “When we listen, therefore, we listen to people’s concerns. We listen to why people perform the actions they perform” (p.157).

Ideas also shared by Cepeda (2012) when considering that listening is the most appropriate way to have access to the other in its entirety speaking and, not only in the sense that is literally manifested in spoken language, but in the most intimate and deep that is to understand the other in an integral way and in the depth of his being that, may not be expressed, but that can be heard. In this reflection, it should be emphasized that there is a fundamental difference between daily listening and listening comprehensively. The first is practiced many times when you are in front of the radio or television; it is a hearing without necessarily understanding what is said; It’s like listening to a song in another language. But what is dealt with in this article is the ‘true listening’ that Gadamer (2002) calls ‘understanding’:

Hearing and understanding are so closely linked that the entire articulation of language is at the service of the situation. Linguistic sounds are





not enough: gesticulation and everything else must come together in a convincing unity. If that unit is missing, it is not understood. (p. 69)

Thus, listening and understanding form an indissoluble unity: true listening leads to an authentic understanding and this amounts to an opening towards the other in most of his dimensions. At this point it is important to highlight what is called the 'hermeneutic circle' in philosophy, particularly from the perspective of Gadamer (1993), by which understanding transcends the very nature of what is commonly understood by listening.

The hermeneutic circle refers to a formal rule; that is, to a way of proceeding regarding the texts that can be or want to be understood and that could also be applicable to listening. This rule is translated, in the simplest way: to understand the whole from the parts and these from the whole.

In other words, it is necessary to listen to the narration, all of it, from the multiple episodes that comprise it, since a narrative is usually organized in a beginning, a development and an outcome. In the same way, it is important to listen to each part that gives meaning to the entire narrative.

This rule is not prescriptive; that is, it does not impose a 'must be'; it is rather a descriptive rule which implies that it says what it is and, in doing so, it is the closest way to the understanding that appears when a certain way of listening is established and not when it is imposed.

When a phrase is heard, it is usually understood in the context of the entire narrative, at the same time, that each of the words uttered is understood. The two directions of the comprehensive exercise (the whole and the part) are always conjugating each other. The same happens when you understand a text, a movie (another form of text), among other expressive forms; that is, that anything is understood from the description that is made.

Therefore, the hermeneutic circle refers to an ontological feature, it is a mode of presentation and conception of the human being; according to which, each one only understands what has already been understood and that has been expressed in the language. This leads to the fact that each person only understands and, consequently, only listens, what has already been understood, what has been bequeathed in the tradition to which it belongs. This is the 'way of being' in which, moreover, each one listens to what is part of this formal rule of understanding (what it is) and that, in this sense, ceases to be so to become the common way of expressing of the human being.

Therefore, the hermeneutic circle refers to the way of being of each person; according to which, one understands and our being is also mani-



fested in this process. In this complex situation, the historicity of human existence is captured and the fact that the human being is inscribed in a specific historical tradition is brought to light.

The ontological feature of the human being is the hermeneutical circle; according to which, the subject is a being that understands: to others, to himself and to what surrounds him, and can only do so from what has already been understood. This situation brings out the fact that the human being is historical, that is, determined by his belonging to a tradition.

In this way, Gadamer (1993) wants to question the idea according to which belonging to tradition makes each person a mere extension of what has already been. This is a way of listening and understanding tradition is supremely sterile and unproductive. Apparently, tradition is assumed as a kind of heavy burden that does not allow creating something new, opening other horizons.

However, there is another way of listening to the tradition that is not a burden, that slows the pace, that immobilizes. Rather, tradition is what contributes to what each one is, and that is the case, because each human being belongs to it and, for that reason, has an understanding of the world and has a world that can be heard and transmitted with language.

The tradition itself is not a burden; it is something that promotes a new understanding, as long as it is listened carefully and each one knows how to elaborate well the relationship between tradition and human being. If this link is sterile, conservative, too limited; the person is involved in a harmful relationship (also Nietzschean characteristic) that prevents understanding. However, when the relationship is dynamic, critical, active and permanently heard as such; then, it allows to understand new things, to open new horizons of understanding.

For the above, Gadamer (1993) also contributes saying that prejudices should not be considered as negative in themselves, as the enlightenment believed. It is in the prejudices where the belonging of each person to a determined tradition is sedimented, that not only has been heard, but has been assumed as truth.

Being aware of the determination imposed by the tradition to which one belongs and the impact it had on each one, the most characteristic aspects of this tradition, when it is listened to without any reflection; it is the fundamental issue that comes to light through personal prejudices and that are the clear expression of belonging to this tradition that has been heard and assumed at that.

For this reason, 'rehabilitating' the tradition implies modifying the prejudices that make possible a certain understanding, at the same time,



that limit a deeper understanding and true listening of the being of the other; it is thus treated, to be saved from a situation of misfortune with something that still has 'potential', by making each human being able to listen and properly understand the tradition and how it manifests itself in the discourse of the people.

According to Gadamer (1993), prejudices are the condition of possibility of understanding. Without them, nothing is understood. Only, thanks to them, everyone is able to understand. In prejudice it is condensed, membership becomes a tradition, and this makes understanding possible. How does it do it?

Prejudice can become something negative when it determines listening without the person knowing it; behind him, he is dominated by the prejudice that prevents him from understanding. On the other hand, Gadamer (1993) also affirms that it will not be possible to reveal a prejudice while acting constantly and behind each person's back without him knowing it, only when he is, so to speak, brought forward.

A prejudice can become positive when, in a certain way, each person listens to himself and gains a certain level of consciousness about the determination he has on the part of that prejudice, and how is that consciousness achieved? For a prejudice to stop determining a person behind his back and thus to dominate it and prevent it from understanding, one does not have to do anything else but to 'put it into practice'; that is, let the prejudice arise, appear. At this moment, it stops blindly determining who manifests it.

And how does the prejudice come to light, so that one becomes aware of it? This happens when something attracts our attention; there is no understanding without something drawing our attention and what is different usually does: it is something 'other', something different, something new that attracts attention and does so because it is different, not familiar, strange and this encourages listening and the search for understanding.

To stop our gaze and to direct the ears towards something, it is because that which draws attention, stands out in the midst of others and this happens, because, in the background of that something, there are certain new features, outside of what is already known, which makes it stand out, that needs to be heard and understood. And just because it appears as 'other' is that one seeks to understand it.

If it is confused with what is already known, if there is no contrast, there is no tension; if there is no longer something that stands out, then, simply, it is not even sought to understand and this does not depend on



the person, since there is something that comes from the event, which belongs to the plane of pure happening and, therefore, does not depend on the action of the person, but simply occurs.

The subject who listens and understands is not an individual who has control over what he understands; nor does he have complete control over the instrument he uses to understand what is happening and, in certain cases, he listens to the experience and its characteristics. The subject that understands is the result of a series of determinations that, beyond his own control, constitute him as such; it is a historical subject, determined by it and that continues to exert an effect that cannot be totally dominated, nor converted in any way into an object, neither of knowledge nor of methodological use.

When something is understood, a slight modification occurs in each person, which neither could be foreseen (anticipate) nor completely controlled; it is an 'event' that brings with it the possibility of understanding oneself better, insofar as, due to the event, what determines each person comes to light with what happens. And one stops being a simple extension of their power of determination.

When it is understood it is because something has attracted attention and the person has stopped to listen to it, it has not passed by, it has been retained because it excels in relation to something familiar, and judged and that does not depend on the person. What captures attention is that which exerts a partial power over us and is what we pay attention to and listening to.

You would never understand anything if that understanding does not go hand in hand with a self-understanding. When something is discerned, such understanding cannot occur without prejudices, it happens thanks to them since they are the ones that determine, not only what I understand (in their otherness), but also those ideas that, in essence, come to light. Therefore, we also understand ourselves.

This moment of self-understanding does not have to lead us to think that this understanding has a moment of full and absolute self-awareness. Gadamer (1992) expresses that this understanding of oneself is an endless task; there can always be new events that bring up determinations of which one is not fully aware and therefore cannot be fully mastered.

Here the infinite historical character of the human being is deeply reflected. It is always determined in a way that cannot be the object of full consciousness. There is always a historical effect that constitute everyone and that cannot be converted, in any way, into an object of objective knowledge.



History in the human being is a state of constant openness to the event, to what is not prescribed, is not predictable, is not controllable. There is no human existence that does not occur in a historically and culturally determined time. Human existence is pure historicity, it is pure finitude and what is all about here is to be 'faithful'; that is to say, to stay in the idea that there are these events that surpass every human being and that cannot, simply, dominate, as a sovereign subject capable of setting limits, to everything that happens and thus try to control it.

Here is a profound critique of hermeneutics to the notion of the modern subject. On the contrary, the hermeneutical subject is historical and finite; open to the event driven by what is different from him and that appears when it is incomprehensible. This attracts someone's attention and then becomes a reason for listening and for an attempt to understand.

The hermeneutical subject, as a historical being, is active, not passive, critical, but he does not deny his belonging to tradition, but he makes of that belonging the condition of possibility to be what he is. This hermeneutical circle experience is of an ontological nature (it describes the way of being of the human being, historical) and not methodological.

On the other hand, it is known that understanding as stated by Dilthey (1994) is an "ability to recognize an interiority considering external signs" (p. 322) but when this understanding assumes a hermeneutical task as posed by Gadamer (1992) always includes a reflexive dimension since "effective understanding requires the explicitness of the unconscious component of a knowledge operation" (p. 122). It is, therefore, to achieve an authentic understanding of oneself and others, Gadamer (1992) states that the real issue at stake is that "understanding cannot be conceived as an activity of comprehensive consciousness but as a way of happening of being itself" (p.125) and this concept acquires its historicity with Heidegger.

If understanding is a way in which the being happens, it is because it is a form of openness. Dasein understands the world both in its facts and in its meanings. It is a possibility of 'being able to be in the world', that is, it is essentially a project that corresponds to a certain vision that Dasein has about itself and its potential, which implies, necessarily, that Dasein has access to itself and possibilities of (re) discovering itself.

In this way, understanding develops in an explanation that Dasein makes of itself in the world and of its abilities to remain in it. According to Berciano (1991), this is an "explanation" that "explicitly places the entity, understanding it now" as something "within a world as a totality of relationships" (p.66).



Understanding, then, is determined by the relationships and context in which each person develops; adding further, as Heidegger (1953) puts it: “understanding is always an affectively tempered understanding” (p.146), which requires attentive listening to perceive and be attentive to the perception of the affections that arise accompanying certain experience, since with the understanding arise two other conditions mentioned by Berciano (1991) and that are concomitant with it: the meeting and the speech, due to which the existential opening of Dasein is manifested.

Understanding is expressed in speech, in which, Dasein expresses itself and also discovers how to be, how to express itself and how it can be. When the being has discovered the intramundane entity and understands it, it has reached a ‘meaning’. Berciano (1991) expresses it very well when affirming:

Meaning is that in which the comprehensibility of something stops [...] is where the project is structured by having, by seeing, by previous understanding, from which something becomes comprehensible as such. (p. 71)

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The other way that characterizes existential openness is to ‘meet’: here Dasein knows itself in its facticity and also in its temper or in its state of mind. This encounter, at the same time, indicates its responsibility to have to be. According to Berciano (1991), the characteristic way of this level is fear, especially by itself: “fear is something privative, which obfuscates and makes one lost our mind” (p. 65).

Thanks to the correlation between encounter, comprehension and speech, the possibility of ‘existential openness’ takes place, which according to Heidegger (1953) implies a ‘co-existence’; that is, a coexistence with others that facilitates mutual knowledge and makes it possible to open up or close oneself facing that same world and others; this mutual understanding:

This phenomenon, which is none too happily designated as ‘empathy’ [“Einführung”], is then supposed, as it were, to provide the first ontological bridge from one’s own subject, which is given proximally as alone, to the other subject, which is proximally quite closed off. (p. 128)

This reciprocal knowledge depends, to a large extent, on Dasein itself knowing itself and, as a being-in-the-world, finding its condition of possibility rather than its real character, of reaching existential openness; it is a constant becoming and transcending in itself and in front of the world; that is, the existential opening comes from the pure event, belongs to this plane and does not depend on the person.

According to Berciano (1991), Dasein is, in essence, openness, which is indicated in the prefix “Da” indicating that: “the opening that occurs in Dasein is the opening of being, which also belongs to Dasein” (p.65). Openness in the thrown state implies that states of mind simply occur as a basic condition of Dasein and of being in the world; then, the affective disposition is a characteristic mode of opening in which, the Dasein remains open to itself before all knowledge and will.

This implies that emotions are the most basic and primary mode of contact with oneself and with the world. Heidegger (1953) also states it in the same way, when he points out:

And only because the ‘senses’ [die “Sinne”] belong ontologically to an something in such a way that what touches them shows itself in an affect. 2 Under the strongest pressure and resistance, nothing like an affect would come about, and the resistance itself would remain essentially undiscovered, if Being-in-the-world, with its state-of-mind, had not already submitted itself [sich schon angewiesen] to having entities within-the world “matter” to it in a way which its moods have outlined in advance. (p. 141)

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From this reflection we understand that the being is in the world in affective disposition and that this is a form of existential openness that, as has been said above, is expressed through understanding, meeting and speaking. The opening of Dasein is in very close relation with the nature of the affective disposition that becomes its existential constituent. Thanks to this, the senses can be ‘touched’ and, consequently, the world, the others and being itself acquire a meaning, are understood and then expressed in speech.

For this to be possible, a meeting is necessary. The Dasein, which is an affective disposition, which is in the mode of existential openness is found in an existential encounter that has, as a fundamental requirement, otherness. This condition, according to Nieto (2005), creates the need to have:

Of an intersubjective territory for the subject, territory of dialogue and discourse; land established by the author as a pillar of the structure of being, possibility of permanent exchange, between what is and what is in the way of being. (p.20)

This territory of dialogue and discourse, on the one hand, is constructed in the language that expresses the emotions, which shows to the self and to the others what each one is, thinks and feels and, on the other hand; it is sustained in the comprehensive listening that one makes



of oneself, of the other, of the world in its smallest details and without which, the construction would not be possible.

Therefore, speech, listening and understanding are essential in the existential opening of Dasein and thus, the second element of the equation appears because that other is the world or, simply, the Other that also hears what one wants to say or who also listens to what you want to express. Echeverría (2003) points it out very well when he states:

To listen we must allow others to speak [...] Those who know how to listen are good builders of narratives, good producers of stories. Those who know how to listen do not immediately accept the stories they are told. They often challenge them. They are not satisfied with a single point of view. They are always asking for another opinion, looking at things from different angles. As weavers, they produce stories that, step by step, will allow us to distinguish more clearly the patterns of the event. (p. 158)

Since listening is hearing plus interpreting, as noted by Cabrera-González (2010), this becomes a continuous process of re-creation and re-formulation of what has been said for the construction of possible stories in which the ideas of one are intermingled with the thoughts of another.

History is not something that a person tells in the solitude of his speech; it is something that is constructed as a network of narratives, constituted by the stories of many people over time. It is for this reason that the act of listening has an ethical principle as pointed out by Echeverría (2003):

Mutual respect, in accepting that others are different from us, that in such a difference they are legitimate and in accepting their capacity to take actions autonomously from us. Mutual respect is essential to be able to listen. Without the acceptance of the other as different, legitimate and autonomous, listening cannot occur. If this is not present, we can only project our own way of being onto others. Instead of doing that, when we listen, we are willing to accept the possibility that there are other ways of being, different from ours. (p.170)

Then without the acceptance of the 'other' as different from oneself and having a narrative to do, the act of listening becomes totally impossible. It is, in this basic dialectical consideration, in this I-other tension, that listening becomes possible when the idea that the other has a different story to mine that can be told and, from which, emerges clearly and precisely the ethics of the relationship.

This is the essence of existential openness posed by Heidegger since it is the most basic and essential condition of the human being as





Dasein; that is, as being-in-the-world, for which it is essential to listen to it and to achieve an adequate understanding of this process, each one must show a condition of openness that facilitates the reception of the other as such, as different from oneself. The acceptance of the other as different and legitimate is a basic element of listening and exchanging between people through language. Echeverría (2003) emphasizes that, if a rejection occurs, the listening capacity is diminished and affected, considering that each person listens from two intermingled areas: the values, principles and ideals that each person has built on himself and that, in addition, intermingle with the socio-historical background.

This position is also supported by Nieto (2005) since the discourse of each person (and, also the listening he is able to do) will be the product of the particular synthesis that each individual has made of the particular historical moment he lives in and that facilitates a certain level of understanding about situations and problems and one's own individuality. This author adds that listening is a complex act and in ethical terms implies a 'want to hear the other' that implies a particular way of being and being together with the other.

Listening, being a complex act, is fully volitional and highly desiderative since someone must 'want to listen' to do so, requires an adequate context in which to carry it out. The big cities with the chaos of their traffic and the mixture of a thousand and one sounds that are broadcasted in all its extension, they seem to not offer the conditions for careful listening, which is why silence may be much better.

Similarly, to listen, is necessary to be in an emotional state of tranquility and acceptance, an essential requirement if one wants to listen and understand. When a person is obfuscated by rage or anguish, the act of listening becomes more difficult. In the same way, listening is an act of showing confidence because there is an original openness to the ideas of the other even when one does not agree with them. However, to stop listening closes the door of communication and it is not possible to engage in a fruitful dialogue.

Finally, listening is intimately related to the subject's own history. When in the life of a person there was someone who listened with affection and empathy, with great security we will demonstrate the same towards others.



## Conclusions

After presenting the reflection above, it is possible to establish the following conclusions:

Language is an important mediator of human relationships. Requires the conjunction of physical, cognitive and relational elements for its production and understanding and can only be understood in the socio-historical context in which it arises, so it is linked to the processes of each human group that uses it.

The human being builds stories that develop in a defined time. It is a fluid time that unfolds in the form of an experience in which the present quickly becomes a past and leads each person to an unknown future.

Listening is an important alterity effort; it is the complementary opposite of speech and requires an important existential opening that facilitates an approach to the other in its bio-psycho-socio-cultural and historical totality.

Listening is linked to understanding, in such a way that it is not possible to understand one without the other, if one wishes to refer to a true listening that facilitates the construction of productive dialogues between different human beings and recognized as such.

This capacity is intimately linked with the history of each human being that is linked with that of others, in an exchange of ideas and arguments that consolidate the relationship and the exchange that can be ethical when respect and awareness of alterity prevails and how it unfolds in the life of each one.

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