

# Hermeneutic Phenomenology in Supporting Research and Information Services: Contributions to Information Science

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## ABSTRACT

The diverse set of phenomena, concepts, and activities existing in academic disciplines could be studied from multiple perspectives. One of the promising approaches to explore phenomena is hermeneutics, especially in the form of hermeneutic phenomenology, which has been formed as a consequence of postmodern movements. Hermeneutic phenomenology has taken root in the original ideas of philosophers like Husserl, Heidegger, and Gadamer, and has become one of the fruitful research methodologies over time. After a brief review of the foundations of hermeneutic and phenomenological methodologies, the role of the hermeneutic phenomenology approach in supporting research and information services is discussed. The present article seeks to describe narratively the use of hermeneutic phenomenology in such issues as information technology, information behavior, knowledge organization, and librarians' roles as related to Information Science.

**Keywords:** hermeneutics, phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology, research services, information services, information science

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Information Science deals with a multitude of concepts, activities, and tools in its areas of research and practice. For example, qualitative phenomena like language, knowledge, meaning, and information search and evaluation are all regarded as basic in the field, which can be studied from different approaches. This bulk of significant concepts in Information Science has been among the concerns of many other sciences from philosophy and psychology to computer and information technology. Despite their significance, they have not been given adequate attention in research efforts and information services as discussed in Information Science.

Two important approaches in the study of phenomena are phenomenology and hermeneutics, considered by experts in numerous sciences for more than half a century. Hermeneutic phenomenology, which is the association of these two methodologies, is one of the promising approaches that can overcome some of the research and service challenges in many fields, including Information Science. Although there have been efforts to make hermeneutics meaningful in information-related professions like digital hermeneutics (Romele, Severo, & Furia, 2020) or information hermeneutics (Capurro, 2000), little attention has been given to hermeneutic phenomenology in Information Science. Among the few efforts made (e.g., Budd, 2005; Gorichanaz, 2017), the present article strives to introduce concisely the use of hermeneutic phenomenology in actual services under discussion in Information Science. In the sections below, a brief history is initially put forth for describing hermeneutics and phenomenology as two separately developed methods. Subsequently, hermeneutic phenomenology is discussed as a unifying method including two methods of hermeneutics and phenomenology, with an emphasis on issues related to Information Science, especially in supporting information and research services.

## 2. HERMENEUTICS AND PHENOMENOLOGY: A BRIEF HISTORY

### 2.1. Hermeneutic Methodology as a Research Practice

Many scholars believe that most research in the humanities is based on two paradigms, namely positivism and interpretivism (e.g., Koch, 1995; Madison, 1988; Talja, Tuominen, & Savolainen, 2005), which can be distinguished in terms of ontological, epistemological, and methodological points of view. In the positivist tradition, a dualism is created between the

researcher and the subject under research, and the researcher is described separately from the research object and apart from the values and assumptions existing. The positivist standpoint strives to eliminate the influence of the researcher and prejudices through the reliability and validity of the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Furner, 2010). In contrast, in interpretivism, there is not just one fact. In other words, the researcher can change multiple facts and the facts are not easily recognizable (Talja et al., 2005).

Specifically, positivism is an objective approach that is the philosophical basis of quantitative, survey, and experimental methods in natural sciences (von Herrmann, 2013). By contrast, interpretive paradigms like phenomenology and hermeneutics are subjective, which are the philosophical roots of some qualitative methods in social sciences. The positivism approach includes quantitative methods, whereas the interpretive approach includes qualitative research methods. As a methodology, hermeneutics falls under the interpretive paradigm that has been formed in opposition to the application of positivist approaches in the humanities and social sciences (Benediktsson, 1989).

Hermeneutics is the “classical discipline concerned with the art of interpreting texts” (Gadamer, 1983, p. 146). Broadly speaking, hermeneutics is related to the theory and practice of interpretation, the meaning of interpretation, understanding and interpretation (meanings behind everything), and the meaning hidden in everything. We can mention the most important hermeneutic principles here: the historicity of language and comprehension; understanding past works by translating content in new expressions; understanding the text as a form of cognition; the signification of the text on meaning (semantics) and the effectiveness of linguistic signification (interpretation); critical attitudes on interpretation; correct understanding of each text with interpretation; multiple interpretations for each text; and selecting and justifying the correct meaning from each text (Budd, 1995, 2005).

The hermeneutic methodology was a reaction to an empiricist trend that had previously been common in the humanities (Day, 1996). Historically, the increasing advancement of the natural sciences after the Renaissance formed a new thought school called positivism, postulating that the humanities and social sciences should also abandon storytelling and mental colloquialism to accomplish the same objective, testable, and explicable science as natural sciences. Specifically, hermeneutic methodologists believe that due to the differences in research topics, a distinction should be made between the methods used in the natural sciences and the humanities and social sciences (Hansson, 2005). They believed that it is possible to know

natural knowledge through external experience and objectivism, but human knowledge is realized by introspection and putting the researcher in place of the humans under study to guess their intentions and motivations (Hjørland, 2003). In other words, we explain nature, but we understand the human. Understanding is intended to immerse oneself in inner spirits and emotions while the explanation is causal and deals with objective issues.

Methodologists with a hermeneutic approach believe that knowledge of human phenomena is not possible except through considering the context, text, environment, and time in which those phenomena are formed (Benediktsson, 1989; Koch, 1995). In this way, the historical dimension of each phenomenon must be considered so that the sequence of phenomena shows a kind of continuum from the past to the time of the study. On the other hand, the researcher instead of the subject must meet the intentions, motivations, and desires that shape human and social phenomena.

## 2.2. Phenomenology in Research Methodology

Husserl has been called the father of phenomenology (Giorgi, 1985; Klein & Westcott, 1994). He shifted his formal education from philosophy to phenomenology as equality of objectivity and subjectivity, and ultimately the dominance of subjectivity. Principally, Husserl's phenomenology is the study of lived experience or the life world (Vamanu, 2012). Phenomenology is concerned with the world as it is lived and experienced by one person, not with the world or reality as something separate from the man (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). Specifically, it raises the question of what is the lived experience of a person. As emphasized by Budd (2005), phenomenology is not a method, but an attitude that is extra-methodological.

Phenomenology seeks to reveal meanings as they are lived in everyday life. Polkinghorne (1983) paid attention to lived experiences as an attempt to understand the meanings of human experience as it is lived. The lifeworld is the experience that is obtained without voluntary thinking and without resorting to classification or conceptualization (Husserl, 1970, p. 9). The purpose of studying the life world or lived experience is to review these experiences taken for granted and to reveal new or neglected meanings.

For Husserl, the appeal of the phenomenological method lies in its promise as a science of being. Husserl saw this method as a means of access in the true sense of the word, through deeper penetration into the reality (VanScoy & Evenstad, 2015). In this sense, phenomenology is seen as moving away from Cartesian dualism about the reality that is completely separate from human beings (Koch, 1995, p. 828). Husserl's focus was on the study of phenomena as they appear in consciousness. He argued

that the object and the mind are both acquired in experience and not outside of it leaving the duality of body-mind.

Husserl invoked the basic premise of phenomenology to things. Husserl sought to de-presuppose the mind, which he calls phenomenological reduction. It means that we must put all our presuppositions in parentheses and return to the phenomena themselves in their original experience (Sokolowski, 2000). According to Heidegger (1962), phenomenology can not be a method of discovering essences in the sense of Husserl, but is an existential method and therefore an ontology. It must be noted that ontology is possible only as phenomenology would be the original meaning of the word hermeneutics (Belkin & Robertson, 1976). Understanding is the key to Heidegger's hermeneutical discussions. For him, understanding does not mean a stage of cognition or a method, but a kind of living and an existential way of having a world. Understanding is Dasein's opening to the universe and the relationships one establishes with other beings in the realm of existence (Koch, 1995).

According to Husserl, phenomenology is a method that makes it possible to see the essence, truth, or meaning of any thing, event, or subject (Savolainen, 2008). Thus, in this sense, the essence is the sum of the properties according to which one thing is what it is, and with the change of those properties, the thing also changes. He believes that subjects should be trimmed and reduced to intrinsic features in the aforementioned sense. In other words, it is typical to put aside any judgments, opinions, and assumptions about the subject under study and describe away from any explanation and interpretation to reveal the essence of the subject (Boon, Johnston, & Webber, 2007). Therefore, all the previous teachings should be discarded and only the manifestations that have been revealed should be described. The steps that must be taken in the phenomenological research are as follows:

- identifying a subject;
- reduction;
- determining the intrinsic features against extrinsic ones; and finally
- describing intrinsic features (Bruce, 1998).

## 3. HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE

As a qualitative research approach, hermeneutic phenomenology was first used by Heidegger (1962), who tried to describe human existence. To this end, he combined Husserl's and Dilthey's as well as phenomenological ideas about understanding, thus transforming both phenomenology

and hermeneutics. Heidegger believed that Husserl's ideal, i.e. to abandon any context or doctrine is not possible. Accordingly, hermeneutic phenomenology is a modification of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. In hermeneutic phenomenology, the presuppositions and preconceptions of the researcher are considered the starting point and also the backgrounds and horizons of the research. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a common method of analyzing human social issues because it seeks to discover the meaning that cannot be described immediately.

Based on historical evidence, phenomenology became hermeneutic when it came to interpretation. This is why it has always been claimed that on the one hand, hermeneutics was based on phenomenology, where on the other hand, phenomenology was the essential presupposition of hermeneutics. However, phenomenology could not be established without hermeneutic presuppositions (Ihde, 1971). von Herrmann (2013) stated that phenomenology has two schools of thought: the Husserlian school of reflective phenomenology and the Heideggerian school of hermeneutic phenomenology. While both phenomenological approaches return "to the things themselves" (von Herrmann, 2013, p. 5), reflective phenomenology involves the analytical isolation of phenomena, while hermeneutic phenomenology involves analysis in situ, emphasizing the role of interpretation.

Hjørland (2003) argued that since "hermeneutics is about the interpretation of texts, it is in a way an obvious method for [library and information science] LIS." Moreover, Budd (1995, 2005) believes that Library and Information Science would benefit most from hermeneutic phenomenology as an epistemological and ontological foundation: "[a]ny serious examination of informing should take into account the interpretive ontology of Heidegger" (Budd, 2005, p. 49). In Budd's view, the interpretative nature of hermeneutics is ideal for Information Science because it is holistic, contextualized, and iterative, and essentially based on multiple interpretations.

In order to set a scene to fully understand the contributions of hermeneutic phenomenology in Information Science, there will be a need for a theoretical foundation of Information Science. As many scholars like Vakkari (1994) have said, it is of significance to consider Library Science and Information Science as a whole to avoid possible misconceptions. From the first definitions of Information Science suggested by pioneer scholars like Roberts (1976) and new ones mentioned by researchers like Robinson (2009) or Filbert and Ryan (2016), there has been a consensus regarding potential services in Information Science in general and in libraries in particular.

Zins (2007) explored 50 definitions of Information Science

from which he highlighted the definition mentioned by Hjørland (2003). Therefore, we consider Hjørland's conception of Information Science as

a field that aims at providing better library, documentation, and information service to various groups of people. Historically, IS developed out of special librarianship and documentation. People in the field were originally subject specialists who worked to improve scientific and scholarly communication in their respective fields, or in general. In schools of IS, many attempts have been made to construe a theoretical framework for practical-oriented information activities. (Zins, 2007, p. 338)

As could be seen, the emphasis has been put on service-oriented approaches to define Information Science more broadly.

Importantly, research support services in libraries are of high importance in the related literature (e.g., Mamtora, 2013; Nickels & Davis, 2020), which show the significance of reference and instructional services that librarians could deliver to researchers. As professionals in Information Science try to facilitate the research processes for researchers whether in the library or other research environments, there could be potentials for considering hermeneutic phenomenology as an underlying background for providing research and information services. In the sections below, some practical areas of hermeneutic phenomenology are discussed as related to research and information services supported by professionals in Information Science.

### 3.1. Supporting Research Services

#### 3.1.1. Data collection

In the hermeneutic phenomenological approach, data can encompass the researcher's feedback on a topic, collecting information from research participants, and identifying external and textual effects on the research project (Heller, 1989). Hermeneutic phenomenology recognizes the effect of the researcher on the direction and representation of the study (Hjørland, 2003). Although approaches such as ethnography have shown this effect, hermeneutic phenomenological research can describe and interpret these experiences as an integral part of the research process. Researchers cannot eliminate these experiences but interpret them.

The researcher should be aware of the potential impact of his/her individual and social personality on data collection. In the hermeneutic phenomenological approach, different methods for data collection might be chosen. This process involves reconstructing the data in which the participants are involved. Gadamer (1976) also believes that the act of understanding

is integrating horizons to establish a dialectical interaction between the researcher tradition and the meaning of the text. The horizons or preconceptions of each researcher are brought to the research and affect the research process. The horizon includes preconceptions and prejudices that enable us to make sense of events and people.

The researcher's horizon cannot be marginalized. Gadamer (1976) emphasizes that we must have a present horizon with which to look at the horizon of the past, and that understanding is constantly influenced by the semantic horizon and the hermeneutic position of the interpreter. The integration of horizons is the mutual questioning between the author and the work. The author converses with his/her horizon with the text horizon. The integration of horizons is based on the logic of dialogue in which the mutual questions and answers of the author affect and are affected by one another. For a better understanding, three horizons are described below:

- Interpreter (agent) horizon: In this perspective, the researcher recognizes his/her preconceptions and understanding as a perspective with which s/he looks at the text. The researcher has achieved this horizon with the studies that s/he lived with and studied before starting the research and the tradition in which s/he lived;
- Author (actor) horizon: This horizon consists of the desired text, which can be written or include research participants so that the participants' understanding regarding a text is explored;
- Reader (spectator-commentator) horizon: This horizon includes the study approach and research perspective, which can include theories of psychotherapy or various research interpretations of the topic (Gadamer, 1983, 1998).

### 3.1.2. Data interpretation

Like phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology deals with the life world or experience of humans as it is lived (Annells, 1996). In this view, the emphasis is on clarifying the details and seemingly obvious aspects of experience, which we may take for granted in order to create meaning and understanding. Husserl (1980/1952), on the other hand, focuses on the understanding of beings or phenomena, which is translated as "the way man came into being" or Heidegger's concept of the "human being" or the "Dasein" of the world. Husserl is interested in actions such as attending, perceiving, remembering, and thinking about the world and human beings as a preceptor. Heidegger, on the other hand, views man as being primarily concerned with creatures and emphasizes his realism in the world. According to Heidegger (1927/1962), consciousness and the world are not two separate things, but consciousness is the formation of

lived experience historically. He believes that understanding is a basic form of human existence in which understanding is not our way of knowing the world, but our way of being. Being historical, individual history or even background refers to what a culture conveys to a person from birth, which also includes the presentation of ways of understanding the world (Koch, 1995, p. 831).

For Heidegger (1962/1927), interpretation is an integral part of the process of understanding. By claiming that being human is an interpretation and that man is a hermeneutic being, he emphasizes that any encounter requires an interpretation that will be influenced by the historical or human background. Annells (1996) describes hermeneutic phenomenology as an interpretive process that seeks to understand and reveal the phenomenon through language. Annells believes that hermeneutic phenomenology is the study of human cultural activities (texts or what can be translated into text, even human behavior) with a view to interpretation in order to find intended or expressed meanings.

While Husserl focuses more on epistemological questions about the relationship between the perceiver and the subject under study, Heidegger (1962) moved on to the ontological question of the nature of reality and "being in the world." As noted earlier, both Husserl and Heidegger objected to the Cartesian gap between mind and body. Husserl (1970) believed that there is no such definite distinction between object and mind, that humans are able to obtain information directly, and that its basis could be seen in attention and parentheses (Polkinghorne, 1983). Heidegger further bridged the gap between the individual and experience, interpreting the two as building blocks of each other that could not exist without each other (Koch, 1995).

Phenomenological research is a descriptive study that relies not only on empirical evidence or logical reasoning (Lavery, 2003) but also on the structure of experience and organizing principles that give the life-world form and meaning (Van Manen, 1997). Such research seeks to elucidate the nature of these structures as they appear in consciousness. On the other hand, hermeneutic phenomenological research is interpretive and focuses on the historical meaning of experience and its cumulative effects on the individual and social levels. Allen (1995) argues that there is no clear distinction between a phenomenological and a hermeneutic approach, but he considers phenomenology as fundamentalist because it seeks to find a correct answer or a valid interpretation of the text that is not based on the interpreter's historical or social position. Conversely, the hermeneutic approach has been described as non-fundamentalist because it emphasizes the meaning that



results from the interpretive interaction between historical texts and the text reader (Allen, 1995, p. 175).

### 3.1.3. *Data analysis*

The hermeneutic methodology has a different approach to data analysis. In this process, the researcher creates information with the help of the participant in the research while entering the hermeneutic cycle of understanding (Laverty, 2003). The researcher and the participant try to create the desired experience together by using imagination, the hermeneutic cycle, and attention to language and writing. In this methodology, understanding occurs through the integration of horizons, which is a dialectic between preconceptions and sources of information (Koch, 1995, p. 835). The result of this process involves structures that have been interpreted by the researcher and each of the participants, thus reflecting multiple structures or facts. Interpretation arises from pre-understandings and the dialectical movement between the components and the whole of the texts involved in the interpretation process, for which any method helpful can be used (Day, 1996). What is needed here is to understand the context in which the text or dialogue has been created and given rise to different interpretations. These interpretations are created by integrating the text, its context, the participants' horizons, the researcher's horizons, and the context in which they are located. The key aspects of the interpretive process are the use of thinking, the hermeneutic cycle, and attention to language and writing-related processes (Laverty, 2003). This requires attention to how language is used. Thinking about a phenomenon in new ways means seeing it in ways other than how it has been seen before.

One of the commonalities of hermeneutic and phenomenological methodologies is the use of the personal experience of the participants in research and acquiring information about the individual's lived experience through introspection, which completely differentiates them from quantitative methodologies (Budd, 2005). However, in phenomenological research, it is an attempt to put aside these biases in order to obtain a correct description of the phenomenon in question, while from the hermeneutic methodological point of view, it is important to pay attention to one's biases because without them, it is impossible to understand them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Since an individual's biases change with the change of his/her historical position, in hermeneutic research, unlike in phenomenological research, it is not possible to achieve the final knowledge.

### 3.1.4. *Research procedure*

When research on a particular experience is to begin from a

hermeneutical or phenomenological introspection, this process is typically part of the introductory phase of the research and can involve writing and recording these thoughts for reference during the analytical process. In phenomenological research, the purpose of thinking is to be aware of one's biases and assumptions in parentheses or to put them aside so that one can enter the experience without having a prior idea of what is being achieved (Laverty, 2003). This awareness prevents the researcher from being influenced by assumptions or biases in the study. In the hermeneutic approach, the researcher is also expected to enter the process of introspection, but here the goal of the hermeneutic approach is completely different from that of the phenomenological approach (Van Manen, 1997). In this approach, not only are the researcher's biases and assumptions not bracketed or discarded, but they are part of the interpretive process. Here, the researcher is expected to reflect on his/her own experience and then clearly state the various gaps that the experience has with the subject matter (Furner, 2010). Therefore, the final result of the research process contains the personal assumptions of the researcher and the philosophical foundations from which the interpretation is derived.

In hermeneutic phenomenological research, information and data can include the researcher's thoughts on the subject under study, information obtained from research participants, and even descriptive descriptions such as poetry and textual experiences (Polkinghorne, 1989). In such studies, the criterion for selecting research participants is generally different from the criterion for selecting participants in studies that aim to access statistical data. The purpose of selecting a participant in phenomenological and hermeneutic research is to select the participants who have lived experiences that are the focus of a particular study, and these participants should want to talk about their experiences and be as different from each other as possible in order to have access to unique narratives (Van Manen, 1997). The number of participants required for such studies will vary depending on the nature of the study and the information gathered. For example, researchers may continue to interview participants until they believe that they have reached a point where they do not have any clearer an understanding of the experience in subsequent interviews.

The interview process in hermeneutic phenomenological research takes place in an environment of trust and security, which must be established from the beginning and maintained throughout the research (Giorgi, 1985). The interaction that occurs between the researcher and the participant during the research process has a profound effect on the results (Polkinghorne 1983). Participants are generally asked to describe their experiences in detail in the subject matter. The

specific question that is asked is usually open-ended, and the discussion that arises as a result of answering the question is led not by the researcher but by the participant. The reason behind this is that as far as this process is concerned, the research process may be close to the individual's lived experience (Koch, 1995; Van Manen, 1997).

### 3.2. Supporting Information Services

#### 3.2.1. Information technology

Technology has been the subject of many philosophical questions in recent decades, and one of the famous philosophers in this regard is Heidegger with his book entitled *The question concerning technology* (1949, trans. 1977). In clarifying the relationship between science and technology, he considered technological insight into the world as the basis for the emergence of new sciences, which in turn brings new technologies. According to him, it is a kind of philosophical insight that has led to the emergence of new science and technologies. Heidegger (1977) believes that throughout history, in response to what technology is, two definitions of technology have been proposed: the instrumental definition and the anthropological definition. In this sense, technology can be interpreted as pieces of equipment and tools or human activity and strategies to meet goals (Diamante, 2014). Inspired by Aristotle, he believes that how technology was manifested in the old is different from the new. At that time, how technology was revealed was the same as invention or procreation. However, in the modern era, how new technology is manifested is an invasion of nature, and this is the most fundamental difference between new technology and the archetype.

Heidegger believes that in the current technological conditions, certain values and criteria that are in line with the development of technology have been legitimized. Therefore, anything that goes against these values is suppressed. From Heidegger's point of view, new technology is, on the one hand, the last stage of the West's understanding of being, as if the Western man had consciously created and expanded it (Diamante, 2014). According to Heidegger (1977), with the establishment of the essence of new technologies, man has become the subject and the world has become the object. According to him, the way out of this situation is to be aware of the realm and limits of science and technology and to limit the technology to such a realm.

Along with the development of information technology, being is forgotten more and more, and instead, representation is expanded. By fixing events, a person produces a product that enables him/her to measure and master what s/he is (Capurro, 2000). Such insight into information technology is in line with

Heidegger's idea of the intrinsic properties of new technologies. Specifically, he believes that it is the intrinsic properties of new technologies that transform mankind into the subject and the world into the image before him/her, thus distancing him/her and the world around him/her.

In the use of information technology, due to easy and wide access to information, one of the bottlenecks can be equality of information and knowledge. Knowledge can be divided into different ways so that these forms are not just a collection of information. Knowledge is the result of a complex method of human perceptual experience. The role of information technology in Information Science is facilitative, not productive. Access to a wealth of information through information technology may be equated with access to knowledge. However, as noted, the different form of knowledge is more than just a set of information, and the production of knowledge involves the application of complex methods of perceptual experience.

#### 3.2.2. Information behavior

The hermeneutic phenomenological approach also affects information search (Keilty & Leazer, 2018). In the positivist view, searching may be regarded as technical and algorithmic, based on which information is related to which keyword without bias in the search, assuming that the behavior is based on evidence and experience (Fisher, Erdelez, & McKechnie, 2006). The hermeneutic approach is based on the assumption that there is a continuous reinterpretation of related texts and refers to the need for great flexibility in search criteria and a high level of repetition in the search process, and most importantly, expresses the understanding that is found during the searches (Hjørland, 2004).

In the digital environment, users with different levels of understanding and temporal, spatial, and cultural situations apply for a document in online databases. If Information Science specialists have categorized and organized the information close to the users' understanding and horizons, the users will be able to achieve the desired data. The closer the scientific, cultural, and social position of information professionals and users, the greater the possibility of complete and comprehensive retrieval of information for the users. For example, nowadays, when various interdisciplinary topics and issues are being developed in various branches of knowledge, categorizing a given text should be done in proportion to this growth so that it can be more horizontal with users (Keilty & Leazer, 2018).

Information producers and users are not separate individuals but belong to professional communities. They have common theoretical and practical interests that shape their horizons. This belongs to the human communication network in the specific

context of the professional community. Hence, the dilemma and the questions are interrelated in various ways within the whole existential structure and within the concrete personality system of the users, that is, the social, cultural, political, geographical, or linguistic reference system (Benediktsson, 1989). The primary objective of Information Science is to study users, not as individuals, but as members of the public or professional dynamic community.

The perception of utterances, for example, of someone who has formed the information or uses a database, requires the combination of horizons (Day, 1996). Each horizon is limited and based on a diverse set of assumptions and values at the same time. The combination of horizons through which other horizons have been expanded has been achieved through the playful movement of the hermeneutic circle. The historical awareness gained is a concrete recognition of the effective role of history in constructing the horizons from which we look at events. In effective historical awareness and cognition, we become aware of an object from a perspective that we have achieved as a result of our history; but this is not mere relativism. Rather, Gadamer (1976) states that the task of effective historical awareness is to clarify the knowledge of the historical proximity between the object under study and the researcher.

### **3.2.3. Knowledge organization**

Knowledge organization has strongly been influenced by empiricism and rational positivism, although other theoretical approaches like hermeneutics may be found in the related fields. Based on the basic notion of the situational nature of understanding, contemporary hermeneutics is potentially the theoretical basis on which a new form of knowledge organization systems would be perceived (Hjørland, 2015).

Information systems have been adapted from the frameworks of subject headings, classification schemes, thesauri, and the like from the very beginning of the heuristic model of organization, which has been profoundly influenced by rational positivism. This includes efforts to formulate reality in the form of formal definitions. Accordingly, current information systems seek to provide information as a fixed phenomenon and outside the display of text and individual situations. Besides this, moving from one language to another requires not only differences in the relationship between concepts and lexical expression, but also differences at the conceptual level, because the structures of concepts and meanings are always developed based on a specific culture-based language (VanScoy & Evenstad, 2015).

The information presented in the information systems with a hermeneutic approach does not merely contain data and information but reveals the truth through interpretation and

dialogue while producing meaning and text. Those who pursue a hermeneutic approach use conceptual frameworks, like heuristic patterns. However, this is not necessarily hierarchical and may instead be interdisciplinary, highlighting different structures simultaneously (Savolainen, 2008). The hermeneutic approach to knowledge organization includes practical forms of knowledge classification, textual aspects of application areas, new experiences of software engineering, an open system with active user participation, and a desire for an interactive knowledge structure (Hjørland, 2015). Contemporary hermeneutics perceives knowledge as something that has always taken place from within, that is, from a particular horizon. Therefore, the meaning is not considered as a fixed but as a social and cultural structure that can be interpreted and changed based on various texts.

When skilled users use online information retrieval systems consistently, the components of a given system are not images of this world (Vamanu, 2012). Rather, they are tools through which the user becomes aware of the intentions of those who formed the computing tools. They are useful tools that accurately leave the realm of theoretical representations and transmit through regular use. In a way, they make people see a certain aspect of the world, not something that is just like that aspect of the world. In this way, the system and the database become a kind of tool through which communications that represent it are seen.

For example, in designing an online ontology with a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, texts would also be ontological. All concepts and relations are first placed in a text and then extracted from the text, and then transferred from the concepts and relations between them to an ontology. In the first step, this process is performed by ontology engineers. However, studies are also underway to automate this transition. This interaction is obtained through the application of questions. As soon as a copy of the text is published, potential ontology users read the text and ask questions to clarify the text. Answering these questions will make a difference in the text (Budd, 1995). These changes, in turn, will lead to changes in concepts and relationships in ontology. Changes in the text and subsequent changes in an ontology may occur to varying degrees. Sometimes texts experience slight changes in ontology, and sometimes changes may be larger and involve adding or subtracting concepts.

A hermeneutic conceptualization of the structure of a given classification scheme and its use may create a space for communication between users with different conceptions in mind (Hjørland, 2004). The supply of different systems may be set among users with different conceptual structures, who can teach each other their understandings. If we design on



hermeneutic grounds, we achieve a space for users to learn from each other more fundamentally, beyond simply exchanging information within accepted dual patterns (Hansson, 2005). However, for doing so, we must first have a clear diagnosis of the hermeneutic context that is always present. When there is no disagreement about ontologies, it is mostly covered. Hence, it is in this context that opposition to judgment must be judged.

The ontology of the information system is the result of innovations gained in the face of suspension. The ontology of the information system should be predicted in the light of the suspension and designed to enable the user to avoid the suspension as much as possible (Hjørland, 2004). This framework of requirements and assumptions is called a horizon. The ontology should not be considered static and closed to issues that arise with new suspensions, but on the contrary, ontologies should be fundamentally flexible and open to progress.

#### **3.2.4. Librarian's roles**

Hermeneutic phenomenology places interpretation at the center of the five elements including existence, nature, perception, intention, and self (Belkin & Robertson, 1976; Bruce, 1998). These elements could provide the basis for fundamental reflection in services delivered at libraries and by librarians. In fact, hermeneutic phenomenology considers the ontology of the library as before the study of its functions and seeks to understand all the presuppositions that have been taken for granted in the work of the library. Library ontology means recognizing its inner nature and existential philosophy. When being in the world, according to Heidegger, is participating in the world, being a user of information will not be a passive phenomenon, but an experience of a part of the world. Information, on the other hand, is essentially manmade and not merely a material package, and facts cannot be judged as fixed, determinable, and testable events. We should pay more attention to the nature and specificity of users' responses than to the tools that are instrumental in information retrieval.

Also, perception is not an objective phenomenon and should be considered in the design of library systems. Another element is intentionality, which means the user's intention and awareness of something. Once we recognize this awareness deeply, we will not only avoid user intentionality, but we will see information retrieval as a dynamic process, not an action that has a beginning and an end. To think of human beings as intentional beings is related to another element of phenomenology, the relationship between oneself and another. Specifically, in the information environment of the library, the user, the librarian, and the library each find meaning concerning the other.

If this notion that communication in the library is a discourse and has a dialogue aspect is accepted, it will reduce the likelihood that we will treat the user as a person and give stereotyped answers to their questions in the design of systems (Hjørland, 2004). The most important element is interpretation, which is a process consisting of three elements: the interpreter, the creator of the text, and the text itself, and is consistent with the communication role of the discipline in which the librarian is the interpreter and is the link between the text and the user (Wersig, 1993).

The user may not be able to fully understand what s/he is referring to when referring to a librarian unless there is communication between him/her and the librarian. The fundamental issue in hermeneutics is how the librarian's horizon can be aligned with the user's horizon (Pollock, 2002). It is necessary to have some kind of intuition of basic information and reference work. Otherwise, no understanding will occur. In this sense, reference knowledge is not just a collection of discriminated facts. Rather, it is a kind of knowledge that is closely related to the truth. The method that the librarian considers for answering involves a qualitative concept and cognition that is different from theoretical knowledge. This qualitative knowledge requires librarians to enter the world of the user in order to succeed in guiding the user and meeting his/her needs, and to know that this mutual relationship is completely two-way and close during the response and reference work (Savolainen, 2008). As a result, in addition to knowledge of librarianship and reference work, they must also apply the knowledge they have gained empirically in their daily experiences.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

Hermeneutic phenomenology tries to provide a comprehensive view of the subjects under study by describing and interpreting differences. Furthermore, by counting and understanding phenomena from the perspective of specific groups of users, this method can provide a deeper, clearer, and more complete understanding of many questions raised in the field of Information Science. While describing users' perceptions of their experience in searching and retrieving information, hermeneutic phenomenology introduces an interesting approach to the field of end-user studies and introduces those involved in this field to a new approach to the subject, and creates a more accurate context for their activities and practices. Unique user experiences include ideas that have the potential to change the way information retrieval systems are designed.

Importantly, in this context, methods such as the qualitative method of hermeneutic phenomenology would reveal the experiences of users in understanding their needs, searches, and use patterns for information scientists.

Given that research on information retrieval and end-user behavior is extensive and complex, it is suggested that researchers try to consider interpretive and qualitative paradigms such as hermeneutic phenomenology to explore deep aspects as well as differences in unique user experiences. Subsequently, conducting studies with this approach could provide new results to the related research community, which can provide ideas specifically for training users as well as shaping the design of knowledge organization systems tailored to different needs and behaviors of the prospective users.

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