

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### A. Background

Language is generally described as a system of conventional spoken, manual (signed), or written symbols using which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, express themselves.<sup>1</sup> The functions of language include communication, the expression of identity, play, imaginative expression, and emotional release.<sup>2</sup> These functions are often also called the external functions of language. While on the inside, language functions as a means of revealing meaning. Halliday calls this last function *a fundamental property of language*, which is the very first function of language.<sup>3</sup> The whole purpose of language, then, is basically to formulate and convey meaningful expressions.

As for *meaning*, as described by Ogden and Richards in *The Meaning of Meaning*, it has at least several important explanations, namely: (i) an intrinsic property; (ii) a unique unanalysable to other things; (iii) the other words annexed to a word in the dictionary; (iv) the connotation of a word; (v) an essence; (vi) an activity projected into an object; (vii) an event intended or a volition; (viii) the place

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<sup>1</sup> Robert H. Robins and David Crystal, "Language", *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2024), <https://www.britannica.com/topic/language>, accessed 18 Jul 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Malinowski classified the functions of language into two broad categories, namely pragmatic and magical (religious function); see Bronislaw Malinowski, "The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages", in *The Meaning of Meaning*, ed. by Charles K. Ogden and Ivor A. Richards (London: Kegan Paul, 1923); Buhler summarizes the three functions of language according to its orientation to three subjects, (i) expressive language, (ii) conative language, and (iii) representational language; expressive being language that is oriented towards oneself, the speaker; conative being language that is oriented towards the addressee; and representational being language that is oriented towards the rest of realities, that is anything other than the speaker or addressee; see Karl Buhler, *Sprachtheorie: die Darstellungsfunktion der Sprache* (Jena: Fischer, 1934); Buhler's scheme was developed by Britton, who proposed transactional, expressive, and poetic functions; see James Britton, *Language and Learning* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970); from an evolutionist perspective, Morris provides another classification of language functions, which he calls 'information talking', 'mood talking', 'exploratory talking', and 'grooming talking'; see Morris, *The Naked Ape* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967).

<sup>3</sup> M.A.K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan, *Language, Context, and Text: Aspects of Language in a Social-Semiotic Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 16-23.

of anything in a system; (ix) the practical consequences of a thing in our future experience; (x) the theoretical consequences involved in or implied by a statement.<sup>4</sup>

From this explanation, meaning can also be substitutively equated with *truth*. Truth, in metaphysics and philosophy of language, is the property of a sentence, belief, thought, or proposition that is said, corresponds to facts, or states what is the case.<sup>5</sup> This can be seen in harmony with explanations (i), (ii), (iv), and (v) above. In addition, the truth of each proposition is also seen from its coherence with several other sets of propositions (iii).<sup>6</sup> Truth is also related to actions or statements that have practical (ix) and theoretical (x) consequences.<sup>7</sup> Whether the truth is correspondence, coherence, or pragmatic, all three broadcast what is called meaningfulness.

In philosophical discourse, truth becomes the equivalent of knowledge. This is because, like truth, knowledge relates to a highly valued state in which a person is in cognitive contact with reality, either directly or indirectly.<sup>8</sup> According to Austin, “If you know, you cannot be wrong” and “If you are wrong, then you do not know!”.<sup>9</sup> Knowledge is nothing but knowing what is true, and what is true is

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<sup>4</sup> Charles K. Ogden and Ivor A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of the Influence of Language upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc, 1923), p. 185.

<sup>5</sup> This was first given by Aristotle (384-322 BCE): “To say of what is that it is, or of what is not that it is not, is true”. In other words, the world provides ‘what is’ or ‘what is not’, and true speech or thought corresponds to the facts provided. This idea is the seed of the so-called correspondence theory of truth; see Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. by Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 1597 (*Metaphysics*, p. 1011b, 25-28); see also Simon W. Blackburn, “Truth”, *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2023), <https://www.britannica.com/topic/truth-philosophy-and-logic>, accessed 19 Jul 2024.

<sup>6</sup> The coherence theory of truth gained a strong following in the nineteenth century, partly due to the influence of Kant and Hegel, and especially in the thinking of British philosophers influenced by them, known as the British Idealists; see Simon Blackburn, *On Truth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 25-36; According to coherence theory, the truth conditions of propositions consist in other propositions. Correspondence theory, by contrast, holds that the truth conditions of propositions are not (in general) propositions, but rather objective features of the world; see James O. Young, “The Coherence Theory of Truth”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2024), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2024/entries/truth-coherence/>, accessed 19 Jul 2024.

<sup>7</sup> William James, “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results”, in *Writings, 1879–1899*, ed. Gerald E. Myers (New York: The Library of America, 1992), p. 1080.

<sup>8</sup> Linda Zagzebski, “What is Knowledge?”, in *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, 1st edition, ed. John Greco and Ernest Sosa (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 1999), p. 92.

<sup>9</sup> John L. Austin, “Other Minds”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplement, vol. 20 (1946), p. 77-78, 84-103; also, John L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, ed. by G.J. Warnock (London, Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 104-131.

knowledge. To know is to grasp the truth. And to reject the truth is to reject knowledge. Thus, knowing is nothing but knowing what is true. Knowing what is false is not knowledge, and hence it is not the truth. As for false truth, it is impossible and improbable to exist.<sup>10</sup>

The relationship between language, meaning, knowledge, and truth can be depicted in the following simple scheme:



In the modern era, this thought, also known as the traditional view of language, began to be challenged. The *changes* that are now understood as the basic nature of life and reality, because of Western thinkers' acceptance of secularism and secularization, led philosophers to start doubting the stability of the intrinsic relationship between language and meaning. This is because if everything changes, including language, then no permanence can be ascribed to language in terms of its role in providing meaning and also knowledge or absolute truth. The formulation of a standardized language to ensure the integrity of meaning has consequently become one of the most important endeavors that mark the history of modern philosophy.

Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1671) is arguably the first philosophical examination of language that inspired later philosophers.<sup>11</sup> In the twentieth century, philosophers' studies led to the conclusion that language has two forms of nature, namely (i) the nature of language as a system (*ideal-language philosophy*) and (ii) the nature of language as everyday behavior (*ordinary language philosophy*).<sup>12</sup> In the former, understanding the logical rules underlying every appearance of language is considered inevitable when the meaning of a

<sup>10</sup> Syamsuddin Arif, *Ilmu, Kebenaran, dan Keraguan: Refleksi Filosofis-Historis* (Jakarta: Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought and Civilizations, 2016), p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Losonsky, *Linguistic Turns in Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. xii, 1-21.

<sup>12</sup> Language as a system is the concern of some philosophers such as Leibniz, Frege, and early Wittgenstein; while some philosophers who see language as everyday behavior include late Wittgenstein, Quine, Davidson, and including Derrida.

statement or expression of language is to be embraced. Meaning, which in this form seems unambiguous and non-psychological, in the second form can no longer be maintained, because meaning must be assessed based on how humans use the language accompanied by the behavior of its users.<sup>13</sup> As a result, these two properties give birth to a dualistic view of language that has always thwarted philosophers in formulating and conveying the relationship between language and meaning in a complete and coherent explanation.<sup>14</sup>

Although attempts to unify the two have been made by philosophers such as Humboldt, Mill, and Carnap, according to Losonsky, these efforts are far from successful.<sup>15</sup> Exactly because of this complexity, language became a theme that was discussed especially by philosophers in the 20th century, more than themes such as “consciousness”, “reason”, “Spirit”, or “experience” that filled the previous discourse.<sup>16</sup> The importance of examining language is explicitly recorded in the expressions of philosophers such as Dummett, Schlick, Copi, and Ryle.<sup>17</sup> For Bertrand Russell, it is only by improving the way language is used that problems in philosophy can be solved, or else it is a sign that the problem cannot be solved at all.<sup>18</sup>

Language dualism was radically articulated by Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) into nihilism. His role can be seen in his view of language that gave birth to a

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<sup>13</sup> Losonsky, *Linguistic Turns in Modern Philosophy*, p. xii.

<sup>14</sup> Dualism—along with secularism, humanism, and tragedy—has been the basic trait that projects the Western *worldview* to this day; see Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin* (Kuala Lumpur: Institut Antarabangsa Pemikiran dan Tamadun Islam, 2001), p. 20-21.

<sup>15</sup> Losonsky, *Linguistic Turns in Modern Philosophy*, p. xv.

<sup>16</sup> Ignatius Bambang Sugiharto, *Postmodernisme: Tantangan bagi Filsafat* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1996), p. 79.

<sup>17</sup> The urgency of studying language can be seen in the following statements by some philosophers: "the theory of [linguistic] meaning is the fundamental part of philosophy which underlies all others", see Michael Dummett, *Frege: Philosophy of Language* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 669; philosophy "should be defined ... as the 'pursuit of meaning'", i.e. the meaning of propositions, see Moritz Schlick, "The Future of Philosophy", *College of the Pacific Publications in Philosophy*, vol. 1 (1932), p. 48; "a careful study of language may lead to positive philosophical conclusions", see Irving M. Copi, "Language Analysis and Metaphysical Inquiry", *Philosophy of Science*, vol. 16 (1949), p. 65; "the preoccupation with the theory of meaning could be described as the occupational disease of twentieth-century Anglo-Saxon and Austrian philosophy", see Gilbert Ryle, "The Theory of Meaning", *Caton* (1963), p. 128.

<sup>18</sup> Bertrand Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), p. 830.

strategy of reading texts called *deconstruction*. He sees language in terms of a notion he borrowed from Heidegger, '*sous rature*' (under erasure). This term can be interpreted as writing a word, then crossing it out, and then displaying the result. The point is, since the word (language) is inadequate in displaying the wholeness of essence (meaning), the word must be crossed out; but on the other hand, since the human mind is also constantly dependent on language, the word or language must be retained. Language, in other words, is inadequate yet necessary.<sup>19</sup>

The shortcomings of language can be seen in the fact that linguistic *signifiers*, such as words, are not directly connected to *signifieds*, such as the ideas or objects they signify. Although influenced by a structuralist like Saussure, Derrida disagrees with Saussure who calls language as a *sign* a unity between signifier and signified.<sup>20</sup> This is because a sign, according to Derrida, is built on the structure of differentiation between signifiers, where meaning in the sign is produced by the distinction from one signifier to another, and not because of its correspondence with the signified, other than if the signified here is also understood as the result of the chain of differentiation between signifiers. Therefore, the distinction of signifier and signified also never emerges definitively. Linguistic signifiers are constantly transforming into signified, and vice versa so that we will never encounter a final signified that is not a signifier.

Derrida says that when we read a sign, the meaning does not always appear to us.<sup>21</sup> The sign points to something absent, and in this case, it is meaning. Meaning is always moving in a chain of signs, and we will never know where it is, because

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<sup>19</sup> Madan Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p. 33.

<sup>20</sup> Derrida, influenced by Saussure, sees language as containing a treasury of signs, each of which is arbitrary and conventional. Therefore, language (*langue*) is not just words, but also a universe of signs. Signs form codes that preserve the function of language. A sign consists of two components: (1) an acoustic image called the signifier (*signifiant*); and (2) a concept or mental image called the signified (*signifie*). The signifier is the sound impression that we can imagine from the speaker's mouth, while the signified is the concept that the signifier refers to, but the image can only be felt mentally in the speaker's mind. The signifier forms the material aspect of language, while the signified forms the meaning aspect of language. Both are interconnected in every language activity. A sound or voice that does not have mental imagery will sound like mere babble, because it does not provide meaning in the speaker. Likewise, a concept cannot be conveyed unless the speaker is able to express it materially in sound or acoustic imagery.

<sup>21</sup> Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, p. 33.



it is never tied to one specific sign. The structure of the sign, as Derrida explains, is ultimately determined by the traces of other signs that are always absent. These other signs, of course, can never be found in their entirety. The attempt to recognize a sign is likened to trying to understand a definition from a dictionary, where one explanation usually leads to an infinite number of others.<sup>22</sup>

The implication that Derrida wants to emphasize from all of this is that equating meaning or essence with language is an impossibility. There is no identical relationship between means (*the sign*) and ends (*meaning*). Signs will always lead to other signs, one replacing the other as a signifier and signified in turn. For Derrida, the sign cannot be considered a homogeneous unit that bridges origin (referent) and destination (meaning), as understood in semiology (the study of signs). The sign must be studied as a '*sous rature*', which is always inhabited by traces of other signs that are never present. If meaning is linked to language that aims to accurately represent reality, then Derrida doubts this ability of language.<sup>23</sup> Derrida considers meaning, truth, and knowledge, to be the result of a self-referential system of linguistic signifiers that no longer have authentic metaphysical, epistemological, or moral links.

Derrida's critical examination of language comes alongside his critique of a central feature and tendency of the Western tradition of thought that he calls 'logocentrism'. In this tradition, 'words' (*logos*) have been central to traditional theories of speech and writing as reliable means of meaning and truth. Words as signifiers are thought to point directly to realities beyond the symbolic devices of language. This extralinguistic reality serves as the foundation and final reference point for all meaning and truth achieved through the instrumentality of language. There is considerable trust in the human mind (generally traditional society) to

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<sup>22</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, ed. John D. Caputo (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), p. 100.

<sup>23</sup> As Walter Truett Anderson points out, deconstructionists like Derrida wanted to show "how difficult it is to tell the truth"; see Walter Truett Anderson, *Reality Isn't What It Used to Be: Theatrical Politics, Ready-to-Wear Religion, Global Myths, Primitive Chic, and Other Wonders of the Postmodern World* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990), p. 90.

ascertain the nature of essence and convey its essence through the medium of words.<sup>24</sup>

Western logocentrism, in other words, is linked to what Derrida calls “the metaphysics of presence”, i.e. the presence or actuality of something metaphysically considered real. According to Derrida, all metaphysical studies from pre-Socratic to Heidegger have always placed the origin of truth in general in the *logos*.<sup>25</sup> Derrida opposes all doctrines of logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence. He is not convinced that humans can access reality linguistically, or that knowledge of a pre-linguistic and pre-conceptual reality is possible. If there is no accessible center, no “God, Idea, Spirit, Self, substance, matter, and so on”, then everything is language and play free of signifiers or interpretations. All that is spoken is text, and for Derrida, “there is nothing outside the text (*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*)”.<sup>26</sup>

If language is unable to represent truth or ultimate reality, but only works within a self-referential system, then language is arbitrary. According to Derrida, since words do not have fixed or concrete definitions, “meaning” only comes to the surface in a way that symbolic signifiers *differ from* each other in the dynamics of the language system, so the possibility of a final meaning or interpretation must be endlessly suspended.<sup>27</sup> Derrida concludes that what philosophers think of as a metaphysically present, pre-linguistic primordial reality, does not exist. The belief system, which for Derrida makes its adherents relate to the real world, is nothing but fiction because it is born from a mere construction of language games. If there is no *transcendental signified* as the highest metaphysical reference point available, then only the endless manipulation of *transcendental signifiers* is possible.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), p. 175.

<sup>25</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 158.

<sup>27</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 52; juga Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982), p. 1-27.

<sup>28</sup> Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p. 280.

In contrast to Derrida, one of the great Islamic scholars of this era Prof. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas emphatically states, “...it is not the concern of Islam to be unduly involved in the semantics of languages in general that philosophers of language find problematic as to their adequacy to approximate or correspond with true reality”.<sup>29</sup> For al-Attas, since we affirm the Qur’ān as the word of God revealed in the form of a new Arabic language,<sup>30</sup> Then that language establishes, to a high degree, a picture of reality and truth.<sup>31</sup>

Language thus reflects ontology or reality as it is.<sup>32</sup> And this is also what makes language, especially Islamic-Arab language, scientific. What is meant by ‘scientific’ is the *definitive* aspect that characterizes science, for *science*, is *the definition*—both in the sense of *ḥadd* (restriction) and *rasm* (depiction)—of reality.<sup>33</sup> The scientific structure of Arabic is evidenced by the fact that Arabic is the language in which the Quran was revealed. When Allah says that the Qur’ān in Arabic contains no ‘crookedness’,<sup>34</sup> What is implied concerning language is that, since the Qur’ān is the source of true knowledge, the form of language through which that knowledge flows and by which it is made to flow, must also be such that it is not prone to ‘crookedness’—i.e. deviating from the straight path, from the true meaning that conveys the truth directly—without turning elsewhere, without distortion.

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<sup>29</sup> Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1995), p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> The new Arabic language referred to here, does not refer to the Arabic language of the jahiliyyah; or the language that originated from its use and development by the Arabs, but rather the Arabic language that has been Islamized by the *Tanzil* and which the Quran continues to preserve, both in terms of meaning and vocabulary; see Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin* (Kuala Lumpur: Institut Antarabangsa Pemikiran dan Tamadun Islam, 2001), p. 102.

<sup>31</sup> Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam*, p. 6; Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1999), p. 1-13.

<sup>32</sup> Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam*, p. 20.

<sup>33</sup> Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education*, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> Q.S. al-Zumar [39]: 28.



At the same time, al-Attas also does not deny the possibility of languages that deviate meaning in such a way, namely languages that are susceptible to semantic changes caused by changes in history and society; and relative and subjective interpretations in their linguistic symbols.<sup>35</sup> Such languages do not provide a guarantee of scientific precision concerning meaning; especially meaning that conveys absolute and objective truth (knowledge). In contrast to Arabic, al-Attas says that it does not belong to the same category as other languages as far as its meaning structure (semantics) is concerned. This is because (i) the linguistic structure of Arabic is established upon a firm system of ‘roots’; and (ii) its semantic structure is governed by a clearly defined system of semantic ‘fields’ that determine the conceptual structures inherent in its vocabulary, and that is also fixed permanently by (i) above; and that (iii) its words, meanings, grammar, and prosody have been scientifically recorded and established to maintain semantic permanence.<sup>36</sup>

The interpretation of certain themes in the Qur’ān, which has been and may continue to be done by true Islamic scholars from time to time, does not mean that the meaning of these themes also changes, no matter how small the change. In this regard Al-Attas states,

“The interpretation of a concept found in the al-Qur’ān al-Karim, which may appear to vary over time, does not signify a change within the concept itself. Rather, it reflects a deepening of understanding that remains consistent with the original concept and its subject of inquiry. It also indicates a multifaceted exploration of the concept, because human understanding and human nature themselves are graded and hierarchical. This exploration is not based on relative valuation because the value of such a concept is not determined by interpretation, examination, or deepening of understanding, but rather, the concept itself is what constitutes its intrinsic value.”<sup>37</sup>

However, the changes that languages undergo, including those that lead to changes in the form and meaning of Islamic languages, in some cases do occur. However, it does not necessarily affirm the views of most Western philosophers and scholars, regarding *changes* that are considered to be the absolute or basic

<sup>35</sup> Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education*, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education*, p. 2-3.

<sup>37</sup> Al-Attas, *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin*, p. 102.

nature of universal life, as well as the path that must be followed for the addition of knowledge in exploring the secrets of the nature of the universe.<sup>38</sup> Such change, as al-Attas writes, leads to the understanding: "...nothing is absolute but that all things must be viewed from their respective angles; all things must be judged by relative values that are valid according to the times and tendencies of each person according to his experience and awareness of life at a time in his history".<sup>39</sup> In essence, the semantic change in the Islamized concepts is not to be attributed to what is vaguely called 'social change', but to ignorance and error which is productive of the confusion that *causes* social change.<sup>40</sup>

The 'Islamic languages' referred to here are the native languages spoken by Muslims other than Arabic. For al-Attas, the non-Arabic native languages of Muslims, no matter how many, have been infused with Arabic vocabulary that projects the worldview of the Qur'ān and Islam. No language of Muslims is not Islamic, because all these languages contain Islamic vocabularies which are also the vocabularies of their respective languages. These Islamic vocabularies are the basis of the language of Muslims. And as long as the Muslim is aware and understands his religion, it is these vocabularies that ensure the establishment of the worldview or vision about true reality and truth that is projected by his language and thought, and by his literature and art, and by his culture at large, which has thus manifested Islamic culture.<sup>41</sup>

Derrida's influence in the fields of hermeneutics (interpretation of texts, especially religious texts), literary theory, and cultural analysis is immense.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, however, al-Attas's views, while essential for a critical reading of Derrida's philosophy, are less resonant, especially among scholars working in these fields. Derrida's deconstructive method has spread massively in humanities

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<sup>38</sup> Al-Attas, *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin*, p. 100.

<sup>39</sup> Al-Attas, *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin*, p. 100-101.

<sup>40</sup> Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education*, p. 36-37; Al-Attas, *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin*, p. 104.

<sup>41</sup> Al-Attas, *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin*, p. 103.

<sup>42</sup> Art Berman, *From the New Criticism to Structuralism and Post-structuralism* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p. 208.

departments in America,<sup>43</sup> posing a serious challenge to traditional social studies and humanities,<sup>44</sup> including in the Islamic world.<sup>45</sup> Since language is intertwined in reflecting and shaping the mind, a secularized philosophical examination of language as Derrida does, for al-Attas, can also end up in the secularization of knowledge that results in the *loss of Adab*.<sup>46</sup>

But despite its wide and extraordinary influence, Derrida's entire system of thought stems from his examination of the relationship between language and meaning, as well as language and knowledge. Thus, departing from this issue, this thesis aims to answer questions regarding (1) the relationship between language and meaning and (2) the relationship between language and knowledge in the thought of Derrida and al-Attas.

## B. Problem of Study

Departing from the above background, the researcher reduced the problem formulation into two questions which also limited the study to the following issues:

1. What is the relationship between language and meaning in Derrida and al-Attas' thought?

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<sup>43</sup> In anthropology, see for example George Marcus and Michael Fischer, *Anthropology as a Cultural Critique: an Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); in sociology, see Charles Lemert, *Sociology and the Twilight of Man: Homocentrism and Discourse in Sociological Theory* (Carbondale: University of Illinois Press, 1980); and Richard Brown, *Society as Text* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, John Crowe Ransom, *The New Criticism* (Norfolk: New Directions, 1941); John Fekete, *The Critical Twilight: Explorations in the Ideology of Anglo-American Literary Theory from Eliot to McLuhan* (London: RKP, 1978); and Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

<sup>45</sup> Derrida's influence in the Islamic intellectual world can be seen in the emergence of *avant-grande* Muslim deconstructionist such as Mohammed Arkoun and Mohammed Abid Jabiri. Other thinkers who share the same view are M. Bennis, Abdul Kebir Khetibi, Salim Yafut, Aziz Azmeh and Hashim Shaleh; see Siti Rohmah Soekarba, "The Critique of Arab Thought: Mohammed Arkoun's Deconstruction Method", *Makara Human Behavior Studies in Asia*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2006), p. 79; Mohammed Arkoun, who through his reading of the concept of "*ahl al-Kitab*", has led him to accept the notion of the pluralism of religion. Using a deconstructive approach, Arkoun proposes to revisit the position of Islamic orthodoxy including deconstructing the meaning of *ahl al-Kitab* without reference to history and standardized methods of interpretation; see Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, "Liberalism, Liberalization and Their Impacts of Muslim Education", *Tsaqafah*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2012), pp. 183–210, p. 196-197.

<sup>46</sup> Al-Attas, *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin*, p. 136-140.

2. What is the relationship between language and knowledge in Derrida and al-Attas' thought?
3. What are the similarities and differences in the relationship between language, meaning, and knowledge in Derrida and al-Attas' thought?

### **C. Objective of Study**

Based on the formulation of the problem, the objectives to be achieved by this research are:

1. To explain the relationship between language and meaning in Derrida and al-Attas' Thought.
2. To explain the relationship between language and knowledge in Derrida and al-Attas' Thought.
3. To expose the similarities and differences in the relationship between language, meaning, and knowledge in Derrida and al-Attas' thought.

### **D. Importance of Study**

Academically or theoretically, this research is expected to provide enrichment regarding the discussion of language in the study of Islamic philosophy. Through the analysis of Derrida's thought, which represents the latest period of Western philosophy, this research is expected to thoroughly illustrate how Derrida, as well as Western philosophy in general, understands language and meaning that leads to nihilistic and relativistic tendencies toward truth and knowledge. The subsequent analysis of Al-Attas' thoughts will make it clear how these views are wrong for several reasons. First, language, which then gives birth to meaning, is a tool created by God that allows humans to recognize Him. Second, the existence of reason (*'aql*) in humans allows them to know the truth and distinguish it from falsehood.

Practically, this research is expected to be a reference for understanding the nature of language, meaning, and knowledge according to *the worldview of Islam*. In this true worldview, which is diametrically different from the Western postmodernist such as Derrida, language reflects the ontology (meaning) and truth of the reality it points to precisely and permanently. The findings of this thesis are

expected to safeguard Islamic society in general from the arbitrary use of language, as well as provide provisions for critical empowerment in the face of various information that often obscures the meaning and essence that has been aired by the worldview of Islam derived from the Qur'ān dan Ḥadith.

### **E. Literature Review**

Apart from the reasons that have been presented in the background, the selection of topics in this thesis is also related to the absence of similar studies that bring together the thoughts of Derrida's philosophy of language with al-Attas. Some studies that the author considers relevant include:

1. "A Philosophical Analysis of Jacques Derrida's Contributions to Language and Meaning" by John Gabriel Mendie dan Stephen Nwanaokuo Udofia (2020).<sup>47</sup>

This study focuses on the contribution of Derrida's language thinking to the development of social sciences and humanities in the 20th century. However, the article does not offer much criticism of Derrida's thought, let alone confront Derrida's philosophy with other systems of thought, especially Islamic philosophy. In their final analysis, Mendie and Udofia state that a glimpse of Derrida's thought is enough to give an idea of his iconoclastic undermining of all traditional notions of truth, logic, rationality, objectivity, text, language, meaning, and interpretation. As a bona fide postmodern thinker, his deconstruction project has made a huge impact in the field of literature, where in the last few decades of the 20th century it has become one of the most important movements in literary theory.

2. "Jacques Derrida's Deconstruction of Western Metaphysics: The Early Years" by Gerasimos Kakoliris (2017).<sup>48</sup>

Because it focuses on deciphering the key concepts that shape Derrida's thought, while helpful, this Kakoliris study does not present an essential critique of

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<sup>47</sup> John Gabriel Mendie and Stephen Nwanaokuo Udofia, "A Philosophical Analysis of Jacques Derrida's Contributions to Language and Meaning", *Pinisi Discretion Review*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2020), pp. 43–62.

<sup>48</sup> Gerasimos Kakoliris, "Jacques Derrida's Deconstruction of Western Metaphysics: The Early Years", *Dia-noesis: A Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 4, October (2017), pp. 43–62.



Derrida at all. This article discusses Derrida's early thought with a discussion of the key concepts that make up his philosophy as a whole. Deconstruction is ultimately driven to produce several incompatible and "undecidable" meanings, in the sense that the reader has no solid basis for choosing between them.

3. "Al-Attas's Criticism on the Western Philosophy of Language" by Khayrurrijal (2015).<sup>49</sup>

Despite providing a wealth of knowledge about important literary sources regarding al-Attas' philosophy of language, Khayrurrijal's emphasis on modern Western philosophy and postmodernism in general as objects of critique means that Derrida is not given much prominence in the subject matter. This master's thesis concludes several important points about language; (i) that language is an incarnation of the nature of human speech; (ii) language points to other than itself; (iii) language binds essence and knowledge, then everything binds human will and choice so that there is no *arbitrary* in language; (iv) language as a journey to obtain and convey meaning is also understood as a spiritual conversation between human souls about the meaning of something that is determined by its readiness in the soul's arrival to meaning and the arrival of meaning to the soul from God.

4. "Language in The Islamic Intellectual Tradition: On Expression and Meaning" by Salina Ahmad (2015).<sup>50</sup>

Despite reviewing the important findings produced by scholars throughout the history of Islamic civilization regarding language, there is no significant link between the thoughts of these Islamic scholars, especially al-Attas, and the problems of language brought about by Western philosophy. Salina Ahmad says that the similarities seen in the way traditional Muslim scholars, from Ibn 'Abbās to Ibn Khaldūn in the seventh to fifteenth centuries CE, and then Ḥamzah Faṣṣūrī in the sixteenth century CE, looked at problems and offered solutions to them, stemmed from their shared conception of language and their methods, which were

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<sup>49</sup> Khayrurrijal, "Al-Attas's Criticism on the Western Philosophy of Language" (Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, 2015); also Khayrurrijal, "Filsafat Bahasa Kontemporer dan Kritik al-Attas", *Islamia: Jurnal Pemikiran dan Peradaban Islam*, vol. xi, no. 2 (2017), pp. 47–71.

<sup>50</sup> Salina Ahmad, "Language in the Islamic Intellectual Tradition: On Expression and Meaning", *E-Journal of Arabic Studies & Islamic Civilization*, vol. 2 (2015), pp. 15–27.

based on the Quran and ḥadīth. In the modern era, many Muslim (and non-Muslim) scholars tried to address the modern challenges posed by modernism. However, he decided to choose Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas. According to him, Al-Attas is worth studying because he is one of the few well-trained and great Muslim thinkers who systematically defended semantic analysis and consistently applied it in many of his intellectual works, which have not been widely studied.

5. “Pemikiran Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas Tentang Islamisasi Bahasa Sebagai Langkah Awal Islamisasi Sains” by A. Khudori Soleh (2011)<sup>51</sup> and “Al-Attas on Language and Thought: Its Relation to Worldview, Change and Translation” by Salina Ahmad (2019).<sup>52</sup>

Since these two articles emphasize the relation of language to mind and *worldview* specifically in al-Attas’ understanding, the explanation of how Western philosophy sees language, and how al-Attas’ philosophy of language reads it, does not receive attention. In this article, Salina Ahmad says that “the Islamic worldview must be properly projected through the proper use of language”. However, she observes that very little attention has been paid to explaining the method of semantic analysis. This method needs to be reintroduced and practiced in contemporary Islamic discourse instead of adopting sociological and hermeneutical methods of interpretation. One important step for that is to observe and re-examine the works of important scholars such as al-Attas to open the horizon of language studies in the social sciences-humanities, particularly in religious studies.

6. “Dekonstruksi dan Pemikiran Mohammed Arkoun” by Siti Rohmah Soekarba (2019).<sup>53</sup>

Although it provides important insights into Arkoun’s work in deconstructing Islamic religious discourse, Soekarba’s dissertation does not include any significant

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<sup>51</sup> A. Khudori Soleh, “Pemikiran Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas Tentang Islamisasi Bahasa Sebagai Langkah Awal Islamisasi Sains”, *LiNGUA: Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa dan Sastra*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2011), pp. 1–8.

<sup>52</sup> Salina Ahmad, “Al-Attas on Language and Thought: Its Relation To Worldview, Change and Translation”, *TAFHIM: IKIM Journal of Islam and the Contemporary World*, vol. 12, no. 2 (2019), pp. 83–97.

<sup>53</sup> Siti Rohmah Soekarba, *Dekonstruksi dan Pemikiran Mohammed Arkoun* (Depok: LSM Males Arts Studio, 2019).

criticism of Arkoun's work and includes Derrida's thoughts as a philosophical framework. The doctoral dissertation written by Soekarba reviews the epistemology and methodology used by Mohammed Arkoun in launching his criticism of what he calls "Islamic reason". In many of his French-language works, Arkoun borrows Derrida's deconstruction approach to read and simultaneously dismantle the texts of Islamic discourse that are considered established so far.

7. "Metaphor and Philosophy: An Encounter with Derrida" by Michael Morris (2000) and "Derrida and the Flesh of Metaphorical Language" by Shining Star Lyngdoh (2021).<sup>54</sup>

Morris and Lyngdoh in their respective articles further discuss the origins and consequences of Derrida's rejection in "*La Parole Soufflée*" of Antonin Artaud's attempt to get rid of metaphor and metaphorical language. Despite explaining one of the important concepts in Derrida's philosophy, neither of them presents any comparative concept of the concept of metaphorical language. Derrida argues that writing and metaphor cannot be separated because they are both aspects of the origin of language. Language is not only metaphorical but also writing (*arche-écriture*). Language is not about the referential character of the signifier-signified relationship, but a system of interrelated signifiers. The idea of "language" as a differential structure of signs means that it is a structure of signifiers that stand for other signifiers. No sign stands for its own thing or transcendental signified; rather, every sign is a signifier of a sign.

8. "Opening Philosophy to the World: Derrida and Education in Philosophy" by Steven Burik (2009).<sup>55</sup>

Although Burik in this article believes that it is important for philosophy departments in formal educational institutions to teach non-Western systems of thought, he does not elaborate on what alternative philosophies can be taught,

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<sup>54</sup> Michael Morris, "Metaphor and Philosophy: An Encounter with Derrida", *Philosophy*, vol. 75, no. 292 (2000), pp. 225–244; Shining Star Lyngdoh, "Derrida and the Flesh of Metaphorical Language", *Open Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 11, no. 04 (2021), pp. 466–481.

<sup>55</sup> Steven Burik, "Opening Philosophy to the World: Derrida and Education in Philosophy", *Educational Theory*, vol. 59, no. 3 (2009), pp. 297–312.

especially those that can serve as an equal comparison to the Western systems of thought that he considers too dominant.

## **F. Method of Research**

The research method is a scientific way to obtain data with specific purposes and uses.<sup>56</sup> Referring to the philosophical foundation, data, and analysis regarding the focus of the issues raised in this thesis, the author uses qualitative research methods with a library research model.<sup>57</sup>

### **1. Type of Research**

A qualitative research method was used in this study. The approach emphasizes the most essential things in the form of phenomena, events, and social symptoms, including the meaning behind these symptoms. The captured purpose is then used for developing and forming theories based on existing concepts. This study will use a descriptive analysis research model by examining objects based on a scientific background.

### **2. The Technique of Data Collection**

The researcher uses the data collected technique to obtain data sources from various research-related literature. This research falls under the heading of library research. This study looks at the data and literary sources before doing a comprehensive analysis of the data sources. It is essential to gather information from the sources for library research in phases. The information will be collected from books, journals, earlier research, articles, and other sources referencing other studies.

### **3. Data Sources**

The study utilized data from two different sources of data, primary data and secondary data.

#### **3.1. The Primary Data**

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<sup>56</sup> Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif dan Kombinasi*, ed. Sutopo (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2018), p. 3.

<sup>57</sup> Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif dan Kombinasi*, p. 9.

The data that is the primary reference in this research is Derrida's works, especially *Of Grammatology*, *Writing and Difference*, and *Margins of Philosophy*. Meanwhile, from Al-Attas, the main works include *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, *Islam and Secularism*, *The Concept of Education in Islam*, and *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin*.

### 3.2. The Secondary Data

Secondary data was obtained from various literature sources which are still related to discussions of language, meaning and knowledge. Secondary data comes from books, journals and articles written by scholars, especially regarding the thoughts of the two figures featured in this research.

## 4. Data Analysis Technique

### 4.1. The Technique of Discussion Method

The rules of analysis used by the author include the rules of descriptive analysis and comparative analysis. Descriptive analysis is used to describe Derrida and al-Attas' views on language and meaning in general. Then, the rules of comparative analysis are used to understand more clearly the basic issues faced by Derrida about language and meaning and Western philosophy itself. It is also used to understand and open up all the possible meanings in al-Attas' thoughts that can be found in his important works. Then, the results of the analysis will be presented in the form of a description of key views and answers to basic problems in Derrida's philosophy. The data reviewed includes the main works written by al-Attas and Derrida, especially those dealing with the issue of language, meaning, and knowledge.

The comparison begins by establishing Derrida's key ideas on language. Derrida's thoughts on language cannot be separated from several of his main philosophical concepts, such as *différance*, deconstruction, and the rejection of the metaphysics of presence. These three aspects significantly influence Derrida's perspective on the relationship between language, meaning, and knowledge. Concepts relevant to addressing these three issues become the primary focus of the author when introducing Al-Attas into the discussion. Al-Attas' formulation of language as a reflection of reality,



humans as the subjects of knowledge, and tafsir-ta'wil as methods of acquiring true knowledge serve as a crucial foundation for both comparison and critique of Derrida's thought.

#### **G. System of Study**

This thesis is organized through five chapters, namely:

**CHAPTER I, INTRODUCTION.** This chapter contains the background of the writing, problem formulation, research objectives, research methods, literature review, and writing systematics.

**CHAPTER II, INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY.** In addition to discussing life history, this chapter also explains the background of the thoughts of the two main figures in this thesis, namely Derrida and al-Attas, as well as their intellectual contributions, especially in the development of philosophy and language studies in the latest era.

**CHAPTER III, DERRIDA AND AL-ATTAS' PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE.** This chapter discusses the main ideas in Derrida's philosophy such as his rejection of the metaphysics of presence or logocentrism, differentiation, and deconstruction. While the main ideas of language, meaning, and knowledge of al-Attas are also explained in this chapter.

**CHAPTER IV, ANALYSIS AND COMPARISON.** This chapter contains an analysis and comparison of Derrida and al-Attas' thoughts. Al-Attas' main ideas regarding the nature of language, reason, meaning, and science, as well as the methodology of tafsir and ta'wil become the author's basic footing in assessing Derrida's philosophy of language.

Last, **CHAPTER V, CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION.** This chapter is the disclosure of answers to the problem formulation above and also contains critical notes given regarding the contextualization of al-Attas' thought in contemporary thought issues.