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THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO

الجامعة الأمريكية بالقاهرة

MA Thesis Title
Translation in and of Philosophy

Submitted by
Hussein Barrada

Acknowledgments

To my mother, the translator, for her support of my passion towards pursuing philosophy at an unusual time in my life. To the philosophy department at AUC for their patience in the long period it took me to work out the subject of my thesis. To Professor Stelzer, my advisor, for keeping with the spirit of philosophy in his teaching. To my colleague, Wafaa Wali for her interest in my topic of study and for her help in putting my thoughts into clear writing. To my friend and neighbor, Aly Badran, for the conversations we had over the differences between literature and philosophy. To Heidegger for combining rigor with novelty and for helping me realize the need to study philosophy academically. To philosophy, for keeping us from becoming world-weary and for reminding us to stay awake like children. Last but not least to my wife, the cornerstone of my life.

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“Even words with fixed meaning can undergo a maturing process” (256)

Walter Benjamin, *The Task of the Translator*

Abstract

Paul Ricoeur in his essay *The Paradigm of Translation*, presents an understanding of translation that is found between two positions that are irreconcilable. These two positions represent on the one hand, the difference that exists between languages and on the other hand, the common ground that languages must have for them to be translatable into one another. Following Ricoeur's paradigm, the thesis will aim to unpack an understanding of translation as a tension that occurs between its theoretical impossibility and the reality of its everyday practice. The theoretical impossibility of translation lies in the fact that for one language to be translatable into another, there needs to be an a priori common ground, which cannot be clearly established. The everyday practice of it, on the other hand, suggests that translations are made all the time without the need for a theoretical framework. I will begin by establishing what is meant by translation by drawing on Walter Benjamin's description of translation as a life form and as a work of art. I will then draw on Jacques Derrida's quasi-concept of differance at the origin to explain translation in theory.

On the Subject

Before we begin an introduction to the subject, a few words on the choice of the subject are warranted given the questionable relevance of translation to philosophical inquiry. My concern with the subject of translation stems from a reading of Heidegger's *Introduction to Metaphysics*, which raises questions about how the meaning of philosophy could be misconstrued given its translation from Greek into Latin. Heidegger argued that certain key terms in philosophy such as *ousia* lost their original meaning upon translation into Latin. These claims have grave implications on our access to philosophy and also raise more fundamental questions on the privileging and status of origin in our access to truth. The concept of origin maybe understood as a source text in translation practice or it can be understood more broadly as the root, the source or the reference that moderates and confirms our closeness to truth. I arrive at the subject of translation, having realized that although the concept of origin is necessary in our access to philosophy, what we are left with, to examine, are translations. My investigations into the nature of translation will be guided by Derrida's quasi concept of differance at the origin¹ which is also concerned with origin and translation.

¹ Refer to Chapter 2, *Theory and Practice*

Introduction

Translation is not a common philosophical concern yet it is hard to think of a philosophical inquiry that does not require reading translated philosophical texts or interpreting texts that are read in their original language. Paul Ricoeur in his essay *The Paradigm of Translation*, found in his short book *On Translation*, starts by explaining that translation can be understood in the strict sense of the transfer of a message from one language into another or in the broad sense where translation becomes synonymous with interpretation. (11) The strict sense of translation is its primary denotation and it indicates where the common consensus of translation's basic function lies. The broad sense, however may be regarded as a secondary denotation and could be controversial since while it might be generally accepted that there is a degree of interpretational effort involved in any translation, a discussion will surely be stirred up about the interpretative degree allowed in any given translation. George Steiner, in his book *After Babel*, with regards to the broad sense of translation, goes so far as claiming that, not only is it a matter of a degree of interpretation present in any translation, but that translation itself is an act of interpretation. Steiner, speaking from a hermeneutical background, regarding interpretation as the way in which we understand things, starts his book with a first chapter entitled *Understanding as Translation*. (32)

Ricoeur then states two facts about translation, which are the existence of the multiplicity of languages and the human capacity to learn more than one language (11-13) These two facts give rise to the theoretical problem of translation which oscillates between two alternatives. Ricoeur writes,

“These paralyzing alternatives are the following: either the diversity of languages gives expression to a radical heterogeneity – and in that case translation is theoretically impossible; one language is untranslatable *a priori* into another. Or else, taken as a fact, translation is explained by a common fund that renders the fact of translation possible; but then we must be able either to find this common fund, and this is the original language track, or reconstruct it logically, and this is the universal language track... I repeat the theoretical alternatives: either the diversity of languages is radical, and then translation is impossible by right, or else translation is a fact, and we must establish its rightful possibility through an inquiry into the origin or through a reconstruction of the *a priori* conditions of the noted fact.” (13-14)

Ricoeur in this short paragraph is able to succinctly capture the dilemma surrounding the theory of translation and the impetus behind attempts to account for it. The first alternative argues for linguistic relativity and is often referred to as the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis. This hypothesis, argues that languages, have a degree of particularity, on a lexical and grammatical level, that would not make translation theoretically possible. (Whorf, 246) Although this extreme position is attributed to Whorf, it should be clarified that although on a lexical and grammatical level this argument is made, what is proposed instead in his essay *Language, Mind and Reality* is that languages have instead “patterned relations” or what Whorf calls *patterment* (Whorf, 246) These patterned relations that Whorf describes are not only part of linguistic patterned constructions but extend to the patterned relations of musical language and even the arrangement of magnetic components to produce electric current. (Whorf, 249) He adds “we do not think of the designing of a radio station or a power plant as a linguistic process, but it is one nonetheless (Whorf, 250) Although it might appear that Whorf’s argument for linguistic relativity is an abandonment of any commonalities that act as a ground across languages, what he does instead is that he expands the definition of language beyond the linguistic domain of words and tries to bridge the gap with less tangible entities, that he describes as cosmic patterns. (247) Whorf accounts for the theoretical possibility of translation by describing it as a patterned relation.

Ricoeur nevertheless places the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis to represent the pole of extreme language relativism and consequently the theoretical impossibility of translation. Following Ricoeur’s paradigm, language relativism stands for the differences between languages, this position if taken to its extreme cannot account for the theoretical possibility of translation. Ricoeur, then suggests routes that account for the theoretical possibility of translation, which he calls the “*original language route*” and the “*universal language route*”. One of the philosophers, representing the original language track is Walter Benjamin’s in his famous essay *The Task of the Translator*. Benjamin speaking of translation writes,

“It consists in the fact that languages are not alien to each other, but a priori, and independently of all historical connections, related to each other in what they want to say.” (154 -155)

Benjamin raises an important point about what would constitute the a priori which is not any historical connection demonstrable by language trees or by identifying common grammatical structures but rather in what they want to say, that is in their intention. The intention is what propels speakers to express themselves in words and writing. This intention also presents the a priori condition that allows for the translatability of one language into another, possible. It must be noted however that explaining this intention in language already becomes an interpretation or representation even if one may understand this intention as an expression of hope, fear, anger or a plea, request, order or a reference to appearances or reality². This description then becomes similar to language as a representation of reality or appearances. The route to the theoretical possibility will not be found empirically as Humboldt had done in founding the field of linguistics but will be found a priori. The route to the a priori for Benjamin is to be found in what he calls the *true language*. Benjamin, takes the a priori to be an original language representing the origin of all languages. Benjamin writes,

“If there is nevertheless a language of truth, in which the ultimate secrets toward which all thinking strives are stored up, at peace and even silent, then this language of truth is — "the true language." And in fact, this language, in the anticipation and description of which lies the only perfection philosophy can hope to achieve, is concealed intensively in translations.” (159)

Finally, the universal track, accounts for the common fund by reconstructing an artificial language to circumvent the problem of the multiplicity of languages and replace it with one universal language. Noam Chomsky’s transformational generative grammar is one example of the universal track, in the sense that it aims to describe a common mental structure that can account for the ability of human beings to learn languages. Chomsky’s route is not triggered by the need to answer the question concerning the theoretical possibility of translation but stem from naturalistic investigations in the study of language and mind. In *New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind* Chomsky describes this mental structure as a “language acquisition device” (4) that represents an initial state of the human mind. Chomsky adds that “furthermore, there is strong reason to believe that the initial state is common to the species: if my children had grown up in Tokyo, they would speak

² We decide to represent a certain phrase or sentence as an order or plea or as an expression of hope when we describe it as such. Such denotation is nuanced with degrees of force and determined by a changing context.

Japanese, like other children there. That means that evidence about Japanese bears directly on the assumptions concerning the initial state for English.” (5) In his analysis of this “initial state” which is generative in its ability to generate the expression of languages, Chomsky, in providing an answer to his investigations, would also have provided an answer to the theoretical problem of translation of accounting for the a priori conditions of translation.³

Whichever track philosophers or linguists decide to pursue, Paul Ricoeur insightfully remarks that this tension between the theoretical possibility and theoretical impossibility remains lurking in the background posing a kind of aporia. We are reminded of this tension whenever one translates, and has to determine how the message will come across from the source language into the target language. This irreconcilable polarity has led Paul Ricoeur to replace the theoretical alternative of translatability against untranslatability by a practical and ethical alternative, faithfulness against betrayal. (18) Ricoeur drawing from the myth of Babel in the book of Genesis, suggests that perhaps the situation we find ourselves in as human beings with multiple languages is a description of how things are. In his words “Starting from this fact of life, let us translate!” (20) This replacement of a theoretical problem, of accounting for an a priori common fund, with a practical problem, of having to account for the degree of fidelity a translation pays homage to its source text, or even replacing the practical problem for an ethical problem of “Bringing the reader to the author, bringing the author to the reader” (23), which Ricoeur terms “*linguistic hospitality*”, are just different ways of working with an enduring problem. I will also work with this problem in its theoretical form, of having to account for an a priori common fund, by proposing the alternative of resistance against transfer, while keeping in mind the irreconcilability of the situation.

³ Ricoeur is not dismissing the original or universal tracks, what he is arguing is that we are still left with the fact of the existence of a multiplicity of languages on the one hand and the need for translation on the other, regardless of how successful a venture into the conditions of possibility of translation. A Ricoeurian approach to that problem would be, how can a theoretical solution be provided given this enduring dichotomy or tension?

Chapter 1 - Translation and Interpretation

The following chapter will introduce the tension between the theoretical impossibility and everyday practice by another more immediate tension we all encounter with translation which is the tension between translation in the strict sense and translation in the broad sense (interpretation). (Ricoeur, 11) This will be explained by showing the difficulty of accounting for a source text in translation by giving an example from the history of philosophy. This will be followed by Walter Benjamin's conception of a source text as an original language and how difficult it is to account for it as well. These two examples, one historical and another theoretical will reinforce the need to understand translation as a tension between its theoretical impossibility and its everyday practice. Lastly Walter Benjamin's notion of translation as a work of art will lead us to look into the subject for the source text since translation will be assessed based on the authenticity of the subject rather its closeness to the source text. This step will lead us to the next chapter where Jacques Derrida's notion of a subjective quasi-concept will aid in the understanding of the nature of the a priori condition of translation.

In defining translation, the first straightforward definition would be the strict sense, as Ricoeur calls it. It is the exercise of trying to be exact in finding equivalence, word for word, of the source text into the target text. This strict sense, if taken too strictly, as the name suggests, ends with what is commonly called literal translation. This description of a translation being literal holds negative connotations, accusing a translation of translating word for word in an attempt to achieve some image of a perfect copy but in the process fails to grasp the entirety of the message or what Benjamin describes as "*translating the inessential*" (Benjamin, 253).

The literal translation which is faithful in its intention to the source text, can be contrasted with the figurative, which takes us to the broad sense of translation. The broad sense is characterized by viewing translation as an interpretative act which can also be in danger of being tangential or even losing sight of the source text, which it is meant to translate. Furthermore, an interpretation of a text is not a translation of it while

a translation of a text may be called an interpretation of it. This point stresses the unequal relation between the two terms, in terms of their synonymy and interchangeability. While it is possible that translation can be synonymous with interpretation, the opposite is not true. Both the literal or the figurative, translation in the strict sense or interpretation, different as they seem, have a few things in common. One commonality is that they both need a source text to operate on. The source text may represent the text that will be translated or it may represent the source that enables the possibility of translation. For Benjamín, it would be an original language, or as Ricoeur describes it the original track. In both cases, identifying the source text is difficult.

First let's demonstrate this difficulty with a historical example from philosophical translations. One of the most significant moments in the translation of philosophy is the Baghdad translation movement occurring in the 9th century which is an example of the passing over of Greek philosophy into Arabic. Below is an example of how the opening lines of Aristotle's *Peri Hermeneias* gets passed over through translation into Arabic.

πρωτον δετ θεσθαι τι ονμα και τι ρημα, επειτα τι εστιν αποφασις και καταφασις και αποφανσις και λογος ⁴

The Greek excerpt above gives the first sentences in Aristotle's *Peri Hermeneias*, translated into Latin as "*De Interpretatione*", into Arabic as "*Al Ebara*"⁵. The three titles have slight differences; the Greek title has esoteric connotations of reference to Hermes (Thoth), an Egyptian God of writing favored by the Greeks⁶. Also derivatives of the word *Hermeneias* is the term *Hermeneutics* that has connotations with the term interpretation⁷. *Al Ebara* in Arabic, if translated into English, would literally translate into "the saying" denoting both a sentence and a saying. The title *Peri Hermeneias* is sometimes transliterated alongside being translated,

⁴ First we must define the terms "noun" and "verb," then the terms "denial" and "affirmation," then "proposition" and "sentence."

⁵ العبارة (طبقاً للعنون في الفهرست للنديم المتوفي 438 هـ)

⁶ Hermes appears as Thoth in Plato's *Phaedrus* which Derrida then takes up and interprets in *Pharmakon*. Also, during the Hellenistic period, Hermeticism becomes one of the central schools of thought, alongside Neo Platonism. Check bibliography for sources.

⁷ Contemporary Hermeneutics, an established discipline in philosophy in the 19th century focusing on the art of the interpretation of texts. Key figures are Gadamer, Dilthey, Heidegger and Ricoeur amongst others.

preserving the original Greek in the foreign language's letters⁸ However even when this occurs, the remainder of the text is translated into the target language and this is how it comes to be known to the receiving culture. The above excerpt is from a Persian text which is comparing an early Persian translation with the original Greek.⁹ The writer references the original Greek from Thomas Aquinas. However, Thomas Aquinas's writings in the 13th century, is already taking place 1,400 years after Aristotle's death. *Peri Hermeneias* appears earlier though in Arabic around 1000 AD in *Al Fehrist* which was translated from Syriac and Greek to Arabic by Ibn Ishaq. The translated text by Issac, part of the Baghdad translation movement, was documented to be translated from Alexander of Aphrodisias during the late second and early third century.¹⁰ Also Gaius Marius Victorinus (4th century), of African origin, also known as Victorinus Afer translated *Peri Hermeneias* from Greek to Latin. However, it is unclear whether there remains Aphrodisias nor Victorinus Greek source texts which they worked from. The larger point here is that trying to account for a sequence of translations in search for the original manuscript written by Aristotle himself is not a straight forward task. While some older manuscripts are preserved such as the Paris manuscript¹¹, a search for the original source only benefits the realization of how interpretation plays a part in the way we come to access philosophy and that a fixed one true original meaning is a fool's hope.

Tracing a lineage of Aristotle's *Peri Hermeneias*, can be accounted for from the Hellenic to the Hellenistic without the need for translations, since both cultures speak and write in Greek. However as soon as the Ancient Greek language diminishes in its status as an imperial language¹² and slowly becomes a dead

⁸ Refer to Ibn El Nadim, *El Fehrist*, first published 4th century, entry *بري هرمنييس*

⁹ https://www.academia.edu/39600988/Peri_hermeneias_text (Citation provided in Bibliography)

¹⁰ Refer to *El Fehrist*

¹¹ Paris manuscript is found in the *Bibliothèque National De France*

¹² What I mean by an imperial language is a language that is forced to develop to respond to the needs of a growing empire. The process of language maturity involves the establishment of grammar to relay the language to another language community, the adoption of new jargon from other languages such as administrative, bureaucratic, legal terminology to be able to manage the empire. The adoption of new jargon of logic, rhetoric and argumentation to create an arsenal of soft power skills also necessary to run an empire. The example in mind is the development of the Arabic Language as the Muslim empire grows and specifically the Abbasid Period of "Tadween" also known as the "translation movement" where Persian, Greek and Syriac knowledge get translated and add to the Arabic Language and the establishment of "Nahj", "Elm El Kalam", "Fiqh" etc takes place. (See El Gabri, *The Formation of the Arab Mind*) I am extending this argument to be the case with any language that becomes an "imperial language" that is the official

language, the Greek texts inevitably get translated into the languages of the new powers. From Hellenistic Alexandria, Aristotle's *Peri Hermeneias* moves to Abbasid Baghdad (Arabic) through Syriac (Watt 47-71)

The difficulty of accounting for the source text poses a problem of not being able to measure the degree of which a text is translation in the strict sense or in the broad sense. The difficulty of determining the source, as author, is also an issue for translation and interpretation. Let us look at how the identity of Aristotle as standing for the source of the text also undergoes degrees of interpretation. Abdel Rahman Badawi in his book *ارسطو عند العرب* translated as *Aristotle to the Arabs*, contains a study of unpublished manuscripts of the earlier translations and commentaries (lemmas) in Baghdad, Badawy writes in the introduction,

"فلارسطو - وان قل في هذا شيء عن أفلاطون- صور متعددة بقدر الحيوانات التي قادها في ضمائر الشعوب بل الأفراد الذين مر بهم. فارسطو عند الرومان غيره عند العرب وهو عند الأخيرين مختلف عنه عند الغربيين في العصور الوسطى بل هو في داخل الحضارة الواحدة يتلون وفق لأدوارها في الحضارة العربية نري صورة أرسطو في مدرسة الاسكندرية في القرون الخمسة والسبعة الأولى للمسيح غيرها في العصر العباسي في بغداد و إيران و في الحضارة الأوروبية تختلف صورته في العصر الاسكلائي عنه في عصر النهضة حتى القرن التاسع عشر و هذه تختلف كذلك عنها في النصف الأول من قرننا هذا مضافاً إليه النصف الثاني من القرن الماضي و لهذا يخلق بالباحثين أن يتتبعوا هذه الصور المتعددة المتباينة و أن يقدروها وفقاً للعوامل المولدة لها فلهذا أخطر الأثر في بيان كلا الجانبين، جانب المؤثر ارسطو مثلاً و جانب المتأثر من افراد او شعوب مما يسمح بدقة التقدير بكليهما الأول في فاعليته و الثاني في قابليته و كلاهما معاً في الفهم الإنساني العام" (ارسطو عند العرب، عبدالرحمن بدوي ص ٦) ¹³

Badaway, in the above excerpt explains that Aristotle has different images not only for every culture but for every period and within every period. That is not to say that Aristotle's writing changes upon translations and interpretations to the extent that we can no longer identify it as belonging to Aristotle, since there must be a limit to the degree of interpretative agency ensuring certain common characteristics across translations. Badawy is merely saying that given the difference in how the understanding of Aristotle is different in every

language that is used to run the empire, be it Latin and Greek for the Roman and Hellenistic empires, Persian before that for the Achaemenid Empire, or English for the British Empire.

¹³ There are several conceptions of Aristotle, and to a lesser extent Plato, in the consciousness of people and even individuals that he has passed through. Aristotle for the Romans differs from Aristotle for the Arabs. For medieval Europeans he was different than what he is for present Europeans. He is even different within one civilization. In the Arab civilization, we see the image of Aristotle in the Alexandria School in the first five and seven centuries of Christ other than in the Abbasid era in Baghdad, Iran and in European civilization he differs from his image in the Iscrian era from the Renaissance until the nineteenth century, and this also differs from it in the first half of this century, plus the second half of the last century, and for this allows for researchers to trace these various disparate images and to estimate them according to the factors generating them This has the most serious impact in the statement of both sides, the side of the influential Aristotle, for example, and the side of the affected individuals or peoples, which allows accurate assessment of both, the first in its agency and the second in its receptivity, and both of them together in general human understanding. (personal translation)

culture/language, identifying who Aristotle is for a certain language community is an important task for scholars. It is important to be able to draw distinctions between Aristotle as an effective force and persons or people as receptive, and both together in the quest for human understanding (Badawy 14) The larger point here, however, is that irrespective of how far we are able to make this distinction, which is needless to say critical for reaching an understanding of *Aristotle for the Arabs*, one can't truly say that one can understand Aristotle as Aristotle. There will always remain an interpretive distance, either due to the lack of the original manuscript or to the historical moment that we are destined to understand things through. Although at first, this may seem like a problem of representation, it will be argued that the way in which representation operates makes it a problem of translation in its broad sense.

It seems, given the difficulty to account for any fixed identity of the source text or author, that we are inevitably drawn to the question of translation and interpretation and its impact on the passing of philosophy. The first task given the immediacy of translation as our first epistemic encounter is to understand the relationship between translation and interpretation and if we are in a sense dealing with the same phenomenon and more importantly how the inability to account for the source text drives this tension. In other words, translation in the strict sense and translation in the broad sense need ultimately to revert to a primary source to validate their outcomes. This tendency of reverting to a primary text to validate the translation is only a surface phenomenon that is a manifestation of a natural tendency to revert to a primary source of knowledge. This tendency is not foreign to philosophy as an academic discipline since more than any other discipline, philosophy values its primary philosophical accounts as eternal wells of knowledge. The inability to account for a clear identity of the source text, puts more emphasis on the degree of interpretation needed in translation.

Let us now represent through a timeline, the situation so far, the line below shows the source text in Greek, in this example *Peri Hermeneias* going through translation into the Arabic translation. The identity of the source text as shown is difficult to pin down either as text or author, which leads to the inevitable role of

interpretation in the way in which we come to understand a text or author. However, let us now move towards a more theoretical and less historical demonstration of this problem. The line below represents what occurs within translation as a concept, that is the tension between the strict sense and the broad sense (interpretation). The third line demonstrates the two impossible extremes which characterize the limits of translation. On one extreme, the translated text is an exact replica or copy of the source text, that is, it achieves exact equivalence. On the other extreme, the translated text has no resemblance whatsoever to the source, which in that case it would not be its translation.

Source Text (Greek) -----Translation----- Target Text (Arabic)

Strict sense ----- Broad sense

Target Text = Source Text ----- Target Text ≠ Source Text

1) Translation as a life form

Benjamin's contribution to our understanding of translation has been largely due to his essay *The Task of the Translator* in *Illuminations*, which has become arguably the most famous essay written on translation in Continental Philosophy. George Steiner writes, in reference to the work,

“The discovery of Walter Benjamin's paper the task of the translation originally published in 1923, together with the influence of Heidegger and George Gadamar has caused a reversion to hermeneutic almost metaphysical inquiries into translation and interpretation.” (*After Babel*, 150)

However, it is not Benjamin's sole contribution to translation. His essay “*One language as such and the language of man*” also provides great insight into the nature of translation. We will be concerned with a couple of key notions from Benjamin on language and translation. The first is the idea that language is a kind of life form and translations contribute to the longevity of this life form. This idea which already runs in Early German Romanticism in Goethe and also in Humboldt becomes mature in Benjamin's work. However, the concept of the life form, Benjamin advises must “The concept of life is given its due only if everything that has

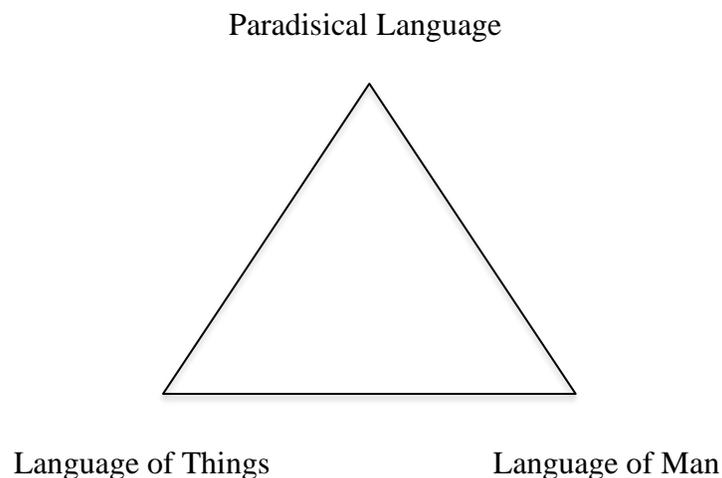
a history, is credited with life. In the final analysis, the range of life must be determined by the standpoint of history rather than nature,..” (255) This life form will come to characterize the historic and vital constituent of translation.

Let us begin with a quote from Benjamin's essay “*One Language as such and the Language of Man*”, Benjamin writes, “There is a reason for the multiplicity of languages. The language of things can pass into the language of knowledge and name only through translation” (70-71) The quote is addressing the fact that there is a multiplicity of languages, which represent the theoretical problem of translation, that is it’s a priori possibility. Benjamin accounts for that by saying that there is a language of things and a language of knowledge and name. The latter is easy to account for since it is the language of man, that is language as we know it. However, the language of things is an uncommon phrase and its meaning is difficult to account for since it can only be given to us as a translation in the language of knowledge and name. This marks an important distinction between the language of things and the language of man, with regards to translation, which is that in the case of the language of things, we do not have a source text. At least not open to analysis since it is not materially manifest.

Language of things -----Translation----- Language of man
Source Text ----- Translation----- Target Text

It also raises difficult questions like if there is one language of all things and the language of knowledge (man) or are there multiple languages of different things? Such as a language of plants, a language of animals, a language of stones? Do things speak to us in a language and what we do is translate or interpret this language into our own language which in turn would make our language a translation in and of itself? And on a more speculative note, which Benjamin does not raise, is if there is a multiplicity of languages in things, do these languages undergo translation as it is with the case in the multiplicity of languages of men. These questions problematize the question of the identity of the source text on a theoretical level because it expanded the notion

of translation to include nonlinguistic entities. Benjamin then writes, “The paradisiacal language of man must have been one of perfect knowledge, whereas later all knowledge is again infinitely differentiated in the multiplicity of language, was indeed forced to differentiate itself on a lower level as creation in name.” (71) There is already a statement regarding a paradisiacal language, which in a way, already accounts for the theoretical problem of translation. However, what is interesting here is the fact that when the paradisiacal language or the Adamic language was differentiated in a multiplicity of languages, amongst these languages was the language of things. This language is not a representation in itself for it can only be represented in the language of men but has certain characteristics in common with the language of men since they both have the paradisiacal language as the a priori referential language.



Needless to say, that accounting for the identity of the paradisiacal language as, language as such, will be more difficult than accounting for a language of things. What can be said is that the concept of an original language is needed to justify the possibility of translation. That is the translation of the language of things into the language of man and on a lower level the translation of the languages of men into and from each other. Benjamin suggests that what all these languages have in common is a life form. This life form analogy of language at the simplest level of characterization describes language as moving through a historical chronology of life and death. That is what allows us to describe languages as dead language such as Latin, Ancient Greek, Sanskrit or

Demotic and also to describe translations as providing an after-life by extending a text's life when translating it into a more widely spoken language. Benjamin writes, "Just as the manifestations of life are intimately connected with the phenomenon of life without being important to it, a translation issues from the original – not so much from its life as from its afterlife." (254) We also speak of a dying language when there are only a few people left who speak it. There are languages that are at their prime of life, which are the languages of the growing empire of the time and there are texts that reach their point of fame. At this historic point, the text gets translated or on the level of the language, knowledge production takes place, a growing number of people learn it and also a growing number of translations are made into and from it. A second level of characterization is that language has a vitality, that is it does not only have birth, growth, decay and death as part of its life cycle but is itself a non-static moving thing. Finally, it has a material manifestation or its materiality represented in it as the body or skeleton of words as written or verbal and a spiritual dimension which is 'represented' in its vitality and life cycle. The concept of translation as a life form forces us to think of the concept as an intrinsically dynamic concept.

The analogy of language as a life form is a very strong analogy in its descriptive potential and in turn helps us understand translation as a kind of integral ingredient for the longevity and vitality of language.

Benjamin writes,

"It is necessary to found the concept of translation at the deepest level of linguistic theory, for it is much too far-reaching and powerful to be treated in any way as an afterthought, as has happened occasionally. Translation attains its full meaning in the realization that every evolved language (with the exception of the word of God) can be considered a translation of all the others. By the fact that, as mentioned earlier, languages relate to one another, as do media of varying densities, the translatability of languages into one another is established. Translation is removal from one language into another through a continuum of transformations. Translation passes through continua of transformation, not abstract areas of identity and similarity." (72)

Benjamin by broadening the concept of translation beyond linguistic human languages has taken the concept to metaphysical speculation. In doing so, more insight has been brought to the concept of translation. Firstly, the recurrent difficulty to account for a source text has led to interpretation being an inevitability in the conception of translation. Also, the life form attribute of translation has forced us to think of it as a vital dynamic entity

undergoing transformation within itself. This transformation is in constant revising of the theoretical difficulty of identifying a source language or referential language and the everyday translation as a fact of life.

1.2 - Translation as a work of art

The second idea that Benjamin brings forth gives an insight into the *telos* of translation as a work of art. The idea is presented in his famous essay “The Task of the Translator”. Perhaps a good point of entry into Benjamin’s text “The Task of the Translator” is to look at two works on translation that Benjamin remarks as “... rank ... as the best comment on the theory of translation that has been published in Germany.” (261) These works are “Die Krisis der europaischen Kultur” by Rudolf Pannwitz and Goethe’s “Westostlicher Divan”. Benjamin chooses a quote from Pannwitz’s text and mentions Goethe’s work as a benchmark when praising Pannwitz. First let's take a look at the quote Benjamin uses from Pannwitz.

“Our translations, even the best ones, proceed from a mistaken premise. They want to turn Hindu, Greek, English into German instead of turning German into Hindu, Greek, English. Our translators have a far greater reverence for the usage of their own language than for the spirit of the foreign works... The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue.” (261- 262)

The premise is driven by a practical approach to translation, which is the consideration of an audience. In this case the German audience who will be the readers of the translated text. This audience has a different language and if one is to address them, then common-sense dictates that “one speaks in their language” or in that case “write in their language”. This is achieved by a consideration of the moment of translation and the status of the language in order to appropriate meaning into the cultural idioms, manners, linguistic phrasing of the present receptor language. After all a translator translates ‘from’ the source language ‘into’ the receptor/target language. The translator’s task is to intuitively capture a worldview in which the German language functions, in its totality, at the time of the translation and accordingly translates the text with that in mind. That would be, in Pannwitz’s view, the mistaken premise.

The reason why Benjamin chose this quote from Pannwitz “Die Krisis der europäischen Kultur” is that he wants to highlight the point of disagreement with him and is offering another premise, which is the theme of his essay. Benjamin’s alternative premise is the opposite of this one, and is stated clearly at the onset of his essay, I quote

“In the appreciation of a work of art or an art form, consideration of the receiver never proves fruitful... No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the audience.” (253)

The task of the translator according to Benjamin is to be analogous to an artist who is creating an art form and in doing so must remain *true to himself*. It is perhaps useful to point out the historical context in which Benjamin writes and this can clearly and simply be represented by the title of another essay in his book “Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”. Benjamin’s conception of the work of art is one that is critical and anticipatory to what the age of mechanical reproduction is about to do to the art form by creating art for a “public” or a “market”.

What we are seeing here is another kind of tension represented in the self/other. The self represents the source text and the other represents the target text. In translation, you try to preserve the integrity of the source text in its foreignness and novelty and at the same time consider the receiving audience. This tension remains, however what Benjamin is suggesting is that since translation is a work of art, then what follows is that all the translator needs to do is be true to himself. What needs be remarked, however, is that the translator as an artist harbors both languages and therefore this tension is only internalized as the mediation shifts from out/in. Benjamin shifts the examination of the concept of translation to the subject but first let us examine Benjamin’s claim.

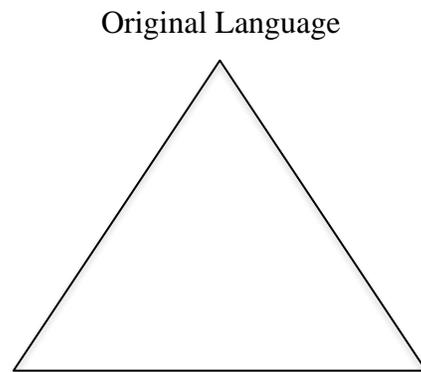
Certain assumptions lie behind this argument that need to be ascertained. One is that translation is a work of art. Another is that translations are not intended for the reader. The two assumptions are questionable.

First, it is perhaps understandable to consider translations as works of art¹⁴ because they are results interpretative acts and art works can be regarded as results of interpretative acts. However, how far can this argument be extended? Can one say that translated works are art pieces or that a translated text can be compared to an artwork? Can a translator be compared to a painter or a sculptor or a conceptual artist? It seems unlikely and one is tempted to conclude that translation seems secondary compared to works of art. It is a kind of an imitation, a replica, a copy of a source text or at least a striving towards that. Perhaps the source or primary text can be considered a work of art but its translation is only a tribute or extension. This line of thinking misses the point in the sense that the translator, if he is to bring in a foreign spirit into the receptor language, needs to have the ability to transform the receptor language in a new way so that the foreign spirit maintains its integrity and thus produce new meaning in the receptor language. In that sense, the translator can be regarded as an artist and this points us in the direction of where to take the analysis of translation and that is within the translator himself as the place where this creative act takes place.

This line of thinking opens another inquiry that was covered which is the translator as actor. The translator for the most part is an invisible part of the translation process. The components of the translation process are the source text, the translated text and the audience. Benjamin takes out the audience from the equation and replaces it with the translator, a move that can be regarded as antithetical to Roland Barthes's *The Death of the Author*. In *The Task of the Translator*, The translator is a special type of artist, one that "... consists in finding intention towards the target language which produces in that language the echo of the original" (159) In Benjamin's gnosticism the notion of a lost paradisiacal language as the source of languages or as an original common tongue, is necessary for him to be able to shift the measure or compass internally. Even

¹⁴ Benjamin's concept of a work of art can be understood from his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". An art work is characterized by its uniqueness or authenticity, what Benjamin calls its aura as opposed to a mechanical reproduction of a work of art which aims at replication and in the process loses these unique qualities. Analogously, translation can be seen as a replica of a source text in another language or as an authentic work of art in its own right.

though the reference now has shifted internally and the original language has now become an internal reference within the translator as artist, the necessity of the concept of origin as a mediating principle remains.



Source Text ----- Translation----- Target Text
Artist ----- Audience
Self ----- Other

Chapter 2 – Theory and Practice

We are left in the last chapter with an indication to treat translation as a work of art and to look for its significance not in an external manifestation as a source text and a target text but internally in the subject. The search for the nature of translation in the subject will be the subject of analysis, however the historic element, that is translation's everyday practice will be needed to validate, disprove or fine tune any subjective findings in the nature of translation. The analysis of translation internally, becomes a phenomenological pursuit because of its turn to the subject and we will take Derrida's philosophy of differance at the origin to characterize the nature of translation. Translation will be first considered as the translation of speech into writing within the same language, where speech acts as the source text and writing as the target text. This will lead to a 'metaphysical'¹⁵ understanding of translation as a tension between presence and absence. Derrida writes,

"I would like to demonstrate that the recognizable traits of the classical and narrowly defined concept of writing are generalizable. They would be valid not only for all the orders of "signs" and for all languages in general, but even, beyond semiolinguistic communication, for the entire field of what philosophy would call experience, that is, the experience of Being: so called presence." (Signature Event Context 92)

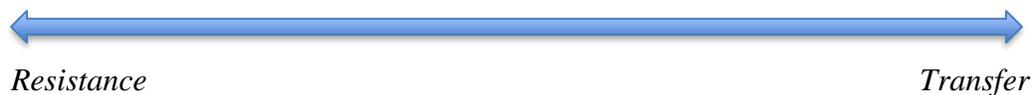
Derrida in the above passage is refereeing to the problems arising in a more immediate translation which is the translation of speech into writing where the translation takes place in the concept of the "sign". Derrida describes the result of that translation is the experience of Being as presence or as he later terms "logocentrism" meaning the privileging of presence over absence. Let us first begin by showing how similar Derrida's quasi-concepts are to the theory of translation developed so far. Two essays here are relevant, *A Letter to a Japanese Friend* and *Des Tours De Babel*. The first apparent similarities between translation and deconstruction are that Derrida's concern with speech and writing is also the concern of translation studies as consecutive interpretation

¹⁵ Metaphysics here is in between quotation marks because Derrida views metaphysics as logocentric, meaning that it always privileged presence over absence. His critique of Metaphysics, in his view, cannot stand outside of it but must be from within.

and translation.¹⁶ The only difference, which admittedly, is not a slight one, is that Derrida is referring to speech and writing in the same language while in translation studies always involves two languages. Let us first explain how translation can be viewed phenomenologically by examining the tension between resistance and transfer within translation.

1.6 – Resistance and Transfer in Translation

Let us now examine the understanding of translation as a tension between resistance and transfer. First let any transfer of meaning be denoted as T and any resistance be denoted as R. In the case of transliteration, we have more resistance, since the term in the source text resists finding an equivalent such as the Heideggerian term Dasein. While in the case of interpretation such as the example of coining a new term, we have more transfer that is because the translator has taken the interpretational liberty of creating a new term in the target language where no equivalent is found. In both situations complete resistance or complete transfer is not achieved in translation because of the impossibility of exact equivalence. The diagram below shows that the closer we are to the situation where the target text = source text, the more resistant the translated term. This is evident in the transliterated term Dasein where Dasein = Dasein from German to English. On the other extreme, the further away we move towards the situation where the target text \neq source text, such as the example of coined term, the more transfer and less resistance is achieved. The reason being is that the new coined term opens up new possibilities and vitality in the target language.



Target Text = Source Text ----- Target Text \neq Source Text

¹⁶ In translation studies, consecutive interpretation means the verbal translation of speech into writing while translation denotes the textual translation, that is writing into writing.

Translation is the explicit manifestation of a phenomenon which is already at work implicitly, in the primary act of referring. It is explicit because through the process of textual translation, the translator configures a correspondence of meaning and makes the act materially manifest in its outcome, and thus open to examination. However, the phenomenon of translation is at work implicitly prior to this explicit act of the embodiment of the concept as such in the primary act of referring. This concept which can only be called a quasi-concept is explained in Derrida's analysis of the concept *communication*,

“I already had to anticipate the meaning of the word communication: I have had to predetermine communication as the vehicle, transport, or site of passage of a meaning, and a meaning that is one.”
(Signature Event Context, 82)

Derrida in defining communication, a word that merely describes a transfer of meaning, shows that the term as signifier assumes that there is no loss between signifier and signified and that the meaning is transferred as whole, as one. Considering the inability to determine the object signified which would be the source text in translation then the function of interpretation will ensure loss upon translation and render the result composite, not one. In translation, we do not have this luxury of primary signification, rather in translation we are already in the world of words, synonyms and languages. In translation, one can say that we are in a Saussurean world¹⁷ and how this directly relates to translation of languages as objects of study that carry meaning and are relating to other languages as objects that also carry meaning in a negative sense. (63) In some cases, the primary referent is present in the background as a signified memory to both translator and reader, allowing the possibility of a common understanding of meaning to take place. This case of a common signified memory works only in common worlds, that is only where the common referents are present in both the writer and the reader's world which represents the case in everyday translation. However, in the cases where primary referents are missing in the reader's world/language and therefore no suitable equivalent is found in the target language,

¹⁷ Refer to Ferdinand De Saussure's concept of the sign as consisting of the signifier and the signified. Derrida suggests a difference between the signified and the signified which disrupts the concept of the sign and allows for his critique of metaphysics.

the translation process becomes theoretically impossible unless one assumes a common referential paradigm, which is clearly not phenomenologically possible due to the unavailability of the object for perception.

To make my point clearer, take for example the translation of a word that signifies an animal or plant that is not present in the reader's world/language which is common given the natural diversity of the earth's flora and fauna, or a feeling such as the German word *Wunderliste* which is particular to a culture or a concept that is heavily embedded in a historical discourse such as पुनर्जन्म (reincarnation) in India. Let us not forget that at first, Nature as well as culture is different everywhere before attempts of theoretical unification or before the world is made similar through global economy and cultural imperialism. It can now be argued that it is not uncommon for there to be a complete lack of equivalence in translation. Especially within the scope of philosophy and language, translation of philosophical meaning needs to be accounted for. Following that thread, the theoretical possibility of the transfer of meaning from one language to another especially with regards to philosophical ideas becomes the closer to the relationship of speech and writing in the absence of a common reference.

2) Ricoeur and Derrida's Complementing Insights on Translation

Both Derrida and Ricoeur, not only have contributed to the understanding of translation as a concept, but have also translated important philosophical works themselves. Ricoeur began a translation of Husserl's *Ideas* during his captivity in a German prisoner-of-war camp in the early 1940's, which was published in 1950, and Derrida translated Husserl's *The Origin of Geometry* with an extended introduction. Both of them are grouped here because Ricoeur's distinction between equivalence and identity, claiming that translation is equivalence without identity is remarkable but incomplete. It requires Derrida's concept of 'asymmetry' represented in Derridian terms such as the lack, the trace, supplementary and his insistence not to give in to any kind of

totalizing. These quasi Derridian concepts give rise to ‘asymmetry’ which replaces equivalence in identity with an asymmetric composite identity that will characterize the structural elements of translation.

2.1 Ricoeur on Equivalence and Identity

Ricoeur in attempting to solve translation’s theoretical problem of a necessity for a common fund has instead decided to treat translation through an ethical dichotomy. He writes,

“The faithfulness/betrayal dilemma claims to be a practical dilemma because there is no absolute criterion that would be the same meaning, written somewhere, on top of and between the original text and target text. This third text would be the bearer of the identical meaning, supposed to move from the first to the second. Hence the paradox, concealed behind the practical dilemma between faithfulness and betrayal: a good translation can aim only at a supposed equivalence, not founded on a demonstrable identity of meaning, equivalence without identity.” (34)

Ricoeur’s distinction between equivalence and identity in translation opens up the possibility of treating each (equivalence and identity) separately before bringing them together. Ricoeur’s argument is that since the referential languages or as he calls it the common fund cannot be found then it must be with no identity. That is, it cannot be named and is not a language in the common sense of the word such as the Arabic Language or the German Language which denotes an identity, assuming a certain purity and wholeness. The absence of identity in the referential language/ common fund/ paradisiacal language makes more sense if we think about this language as a language where translation takes place in the translator as subject. First the translator by virtue of being a translator has more than one language and in that sense his identity is made out of two languages. Moreover, the referential a priori ‘language’ must also consist of two languages since this is the necessary condition for an ontology of translation. We now arrive at a new kind of identity which is composite in structure containing both the source and the receptor language. This notion of composite structure is where the mediation and creation of meaning occurs and can be made to describe the referential a priori language. Ricoeur, by removing identity has allowed us to reevaluate the notion of identity itself and how it can be possible to rethink it to allow for the possibility of translation.

Although this artificial distinction of equivalence and identity in translation is useful at first, I will show that it is not possible to remove one without removing the other. First, identity has a certain equivalence in itself, that is apparent when we say **A** is **A** or **A = A**. If we abandon the notion of identity, we will not be able to say **A** is **A**, however if the notion of identity is replaced by the notion of composite identity then we can say **AB = AB**, where **AB** denotes the composite identity of the referential language. There is a double signification here, first there is the composite structure of the referential language as containing the source language (**A**) and the receptor language (**B**) so when we say (**AB = AB**), what lies between the brackets denotes the composite identity of the referential language assuming equivalence. The other signification is within each language itself either the source or the receptor and denoting the composite structure of meaning, in a given semantic unit, here the semantic unit being language. In this structure the **A** stands for *transfer* and the **B** stands for *resistance* so the formula may read **TR = TR**, where the first **TR** stands for the transfer and resistance in the source language upon translation and the second **TR** stands for the transfer and resistance in the receptor language upon translation, assuming equivalence. The first signification is completely formal in the sense that it does not have any semantic content while the second signification has a semantic content namely transfer and resistance. The term *transfer* signifying the part of meaning that is transferred from the source language into the target language and the term *resistance* signifying the part of meaning that is also carried across but remains dormant, implicit and resistant to translation, yet translated.

After we have analyzed the identity of translation separately, the next step is to analyze the notion of equivalence in translation. As we have shown the notion of equivalence is already implicit in identity, however it too needs to be reconsidered in order to satisfy the possibility of translation. Equivalence is never completely achieved in translation, that is no two translated counterparts be it words or concepts have the exact same equivalence in both languages. Even in philosophical languages, when it is argued that some morphemes are universal such as walking or standing, there still remains certain nuances, synonyms and uses, that belong to the

connotations of the word in the source language and do not belong to the connotations of the word in the receptor language and vice versa. In other words, we are affirming that it is only a matter of degree of equivalence. All that can be ascertained is that some words have more in common with their counterparts in the receptor language than others. Given that fact about translation, the a priori structure will be represented by saying **AB approaches AB instead of AB = AB or TR approaches TR instead of TR = TR.** signifying that equivalence is never achieved in any translation and that there will always be an asymmetry. In the first formal formulation the asymmetry exists in the semantic unit itself. That is language itself is asymmetrical where the relation between **A** and **B** as a composite unit is asymmetrical. In the second formulation, the asymmetry exists between **T** and **R** as a composite semantic unit where the degree of transfer is never equivalent to the degree of resistance.

2.2 Derrida's Quasi- Concept

"A Letter to a Japanese friend" is surprisingly telling of the Derridean take on philosophy even though it is quite short. The reason why it is so, more than other longer and more famous texts of Derrida is because he is trying to translate deconstruction to a Japanese friend who does not know French and through that process more of the resistance that the term deconstruction consists of, becomes a little more transferable. To start with, the text is written in French and does not have one Japanese word nor does it have any Greek terms, given this feature it cannot be considered translation proper but more towards a textual interpretation in the translation spectrum definition. Derrida writes, "Naturally it will be necessary to translate all of this into Japanese but that only postpones the problem." (271) The problem that Derrida is referring to is the problem in translation beginning with the translatability of terms and the discourse in which they are embedded. Derrida emphasizes intralinguistic translation as telling of the nature of deconstruction. A philosophical treatise, a poetic work or a literary piece is foreign to the language it appears in, and in that sense is an intralinguistic translation. Deconstruction seems to point to how language de-objectifies itself as a fixed entity or structure and rearranges

itself in such a way to open up to the possibility of renewed meaning. The reason being that de-construction takes its meaning in-between languages, on the borders, that is, in translation.

Any concept of identity in language is challenged in Derrida when he writes, “This obviously presupposes that one can know in the final analysis how to determine rigorously the unity and identity of a language, the decidable form of its limits” (252) Derrida explains his search for a term in the French language and explains how his choice of deconstruction has different connotations in the French and German language based on their previous use in the philosophical corpus ((270 – 271) However the word has not been overused and therefore does not carry a lot of baggage so it becomes a suitable candidate to assign new meaning to it. Derrida in that respect is similar to a translator trying to coin a new term in the receptor language to match the one in the source language but the difference is, that the source language is the same as the target language. Derrida is actually coining a term that is descriptive or characteristic of the nature of translation itself. That is, the meaning of the word deconstruction does not exist in a source language and hence cannot be interchangeable or synonymous with other terms. It is only synonyms with other Derridean quasi- concepts such as the trace, supplementary, differance etc. These are not terms in the formal sense, they rather represent the vitality of meaning in the structure of translation and suggest an asymmetry between presence and absence within a discernable unit. It also points to the locality of deconstruction that exists not only on the borders of languages but in-between language itself. That is the natural place of deconstruction is the same as translation, only in-transition.

Derrida tackles the notion of proper names in grammar through his analysis of the word Babel¹⁸. Proper names as opposed to nouns, verbs and adjectives are within a language the most grammatical forms that are fixed in their denotation and are not translated. A person’s name will remain the same in a translation of a text

¹⁸ Refer to Derrida’s *Des Tours de Babel* for Derrida’s analysis of proper names. Also, for the source refer to the *New Testament*

while all other terms in the text will be ‘translated’ is an example of such a case. The proper name therefore becomes the grammatical form that is most interesting with regards to translation because of its untranslatability. It is only when the word Babel, a proper name that is made into a noun to denote confusion, does its meaning become more accessible, that is have more presence. What is more interesting is that proper names in their genealogy do not start as proper names since Babel comes from the word بلبله which is a word that is used till today in contemporary Arabic language and means to create confusion or create havoc Let’s take¹⁹ a look at Derrida’s opening passage in “Des Tours de Babel”,

“ “Babel”: first a proper name, granted. But when we say “Babel” today, do we know what we are naming? Do we know whom? If we consider the sur-vival of a text that is a legacy, the narrative or the myth of the tower of Babel, it does not constitute just one figure among others. Telling at least of the in adequation of one tongue to another, of one place in the encyclopedia to another, of language to itself and to meaning, and so forth, it also tells... for translation inadequate to compensate for that which multiplicity denies us. In this sense it would be the myth of the origin of myth, the metaphor of metaphor, the narrative of narrative, the translation of translation, and so on.” (Des Tours de Babel, 65)

At first it would appear that an untranslatable term such as a proper name would serve as a cornerstone or a stable unchangeable entity to hold on to in the midst of the flux of shifting meaning. However, Derrida shows that this is not the case, for it is not clear whose proper name Babel refers to and it has come to mean *confusion*. The confusion brought about with the multiplicity of tongues. Babel seems to exemplify what Derrida means by deconstruction since Babel refers to the name of the tower, which unified people for building the tower, and also refers to what will divide them into people of different tongues. Derrida answers that translation is a possibility and impossibility which at first, appears like an antithetical statement characteristic of esoteric writing; however, it is only expressive of the inescapability of the tension between difference and commonality, translation and interpretation, and ultimately presence and absence describing difference at the origin. In Kantian language, Derrida would say that one needs not only the condition of possibility but also the condition of impossibility and therefore turns the Kantian notion of an a priori as a deconstructive notion. Since

¹⁹ <https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%A9/>

it is not only that there needs to be a common fund as Ricoeur puts it for there to be an a priori possibility for translation but there also needs to be difference between both languages for translation to be possible and in that sense Derrida's notion escapes antithetical argumentation and points us alternatively to a notion of quasi-identity within each language. The source language and the target languages have something in common but also have differences and it is these two conditions that represent the apriori possibility of translation.

Let us unpack the theoretical structure by giving examples of Greek philosophy being translated into Arabic. During the Baghdad Translation movement, scholars such as Al Kindi and others had to translate many Greek and Syriac terms that had no clear equivalent in the budding Arabic language. The historical context required that the Arabic language grow in its intellectual, administrative, bureaucratic and legal jargon in face of an expansive future. The choice of translating new terms was limited to three possibilities available for a translator. With respect to the translation of words, the first task of the translator is to find an 'equivalent' term in the receptor language, in the case that there is no clear equivalent the translator had to resort to either transliterating the term or coining a new one.

There are semantic problems with each scenario, the first scenario is to find an equivalent term, an example of that was the translation of the word *διαλεκτική* which was translated as *جدلية* the problem is that every word comes with an etymology that is particular to the cultural development of the civilization that the language embodies. In the case of *جدلية* the term historically denoted the process of poetic rivalry between tribes and an important function of the term was to establish tribal supremacy which was denoted by an important term in Arab culture *الشعوبية*. This affiliated term which is characteristic of Arab civilization also meant a bias towards one's own tribe, language or culture and was used to describe Persian attitude towards Arabs.²⁰ The term *جدلية* although has distinct denominations, still has commonalities with *διαλεκτική* in the sense that even in

²⁰ Refer to Taha Hussein's *في الشعر الجاهلي* and Badawy's *تاريخ الالحاد في الإسلام* and Ibn Khaldoun's *مقدمة ابن خلدون* for a more thorough analysis of the usage of the term *الشعوبية*

poetic rivalry, truth emerges and also a dialogue is taking place. The point nevertheless remains which is that translation never achieves equivalence but what occurs is that a degree of commonality and a degree of difference takes place in the translation of terms.

The second option that the translator may choose is to transliterate the term when the lack of an acceptable equivalent is present. An example of such a scenario is the term φιλοσοφία which was transliterated into فلسفة. The problem with that option is that although it preserves the identity, it has the problem of not being fully appropriated and remains a stranger in the culture in which it is present. The entry in لسان العرب, Tongue of the Arabs by the famous Egyptian Lexicographer Ibn Manzour written in the late 13th century, for فلسفة is

فلسفة: الفلسفة: الحكمة، أعجمي، و هو الفيلسوف و قد تَفَلَّسَفَ.²¹

The entry is shorter than usual and only states two words و wisdom and أعجمي, which refers to non-Arabs, this term was commonly designated to Persians but came to encompass any non-Arab. The other two words are derivatives of philosophy, which is philosopher and the verb “He philosophized” a word that remains till today in contemporary Arabic use to denote a person who engages in non-essential discussions. The striking thing in the definition is that although the term made it in the lexicon Tongue of the Arabs, it is defined as a foreign word, associated with the other (العجمي) and somehow remains both part and not part of the lexicon. There is no root term مصدر and therefore becomes also limited in its conjugation. This example of a *resistant* word remains foreign in the language and unable to take new forms and develop with the grammatical development of the language.

The third and last option for the translator is to coin a new term in the language. This is usually done by finding a common root word that resembles an equivalent in the source language, this option is usually the best

²¹ Philosophy: The Philosophy: Wisdom, non-Arab, He is a philosopher and he philosophized.

of the three options. An example of such a word οὐσία which was coined the word الماهية this term can be broken down into two words in Arabic “The what” and “It is”. This translation is by far the best example since it remained true to the Greek origin of the word, which was translated into Latin as *essentia* or *substantia* and was revised only recently in a new translation of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* by Joe Sachs in 1999 as *thinghood*.
(xlviii)

The three translations of philosophical terms οὐσία, φιλοσοφία, διαλεκτική, illustrated above show the difficulty of finding equivalence and the inevitability of tension between the Greek term and its translated term in Arabic. With all three possibilities, nuances are added and others removed, a new presence introduced within the target language while an absence of certain characteristics of the source text is covered up in the target text. These examples are indicative of a more originary phenomenon of translation, that is the translation of speech into writing. Derrida, explains that this position we find ourselves in of having to translate lies within the problematics of signification. Derrida, in *Grammatology*, writes,

“The order of the signified is never contemporary, is at best the subtly discrepant inverse or parallel – discrepant by the time of breath - from the order of the signifier, a trace: in any case is not constituted in its sense by its relationship with a possible trace.... “What is a sign?,” that is to say, when one submits the sign to the question of essence, to the “ti esti” The “formal essence” of the sign can only be determined in terms of presence. One cannot get around that response, except by challenging the very form of the question and beginning to think that the sign is that ill-named thing, the only one, that escapes the instituting question of philosophy: “What is ...?” (34)

Although the above passage may seem to have little to do with translation in a conventional sense. What is in question is the tension that is intrinsic to the concept of the sign, which Derrida introduces. This tension of presence and absence existing within the sign is originary because of the temporal component involved between the breath and the order of the signifier. This temporal component of displacement of presence or differed presence appeared in the translation of the Greek philosophical terms into Arabic. In Derrida’s example we are talking about the tension belonging to the sign as difference at the origin, manifesting again as a tension between speech and writing.

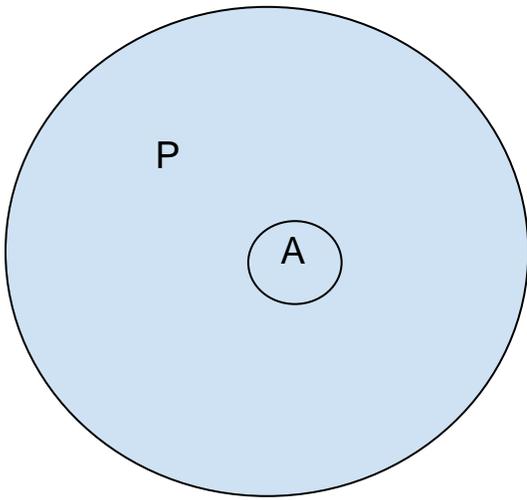


Diagram B

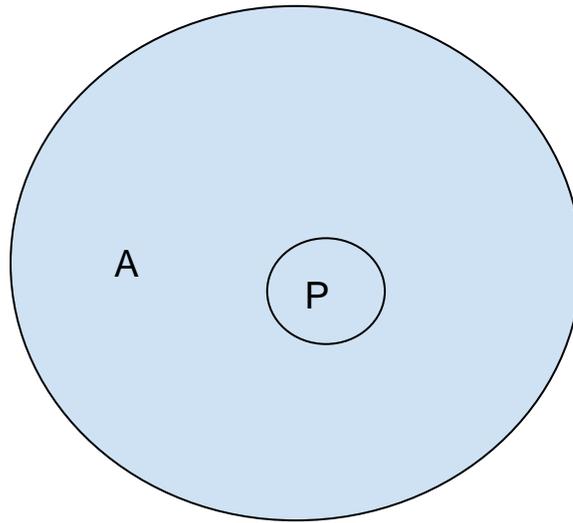


Diagram C

Diagram's B and C represent the quasi-structure of translation where in diagram B, the degree of P (presence) within a translation takes the larger part while the degree of absence the lesser. In diagram C, it is the opposite. These two diagrams illustrate how in any given translation an ongoing negotiation constitute its structure, where on one hand the tension of writing to be identical to speech drives a certain fidelity to a source text and at the same time, the tension of writing to have difference as medium, as representation, as an interpretative act, drives a certain commitment to the creative act and to a vitality that ensures reinterpretation.

Finally, perhaps a distinction is called for between Derrida's concept of differance and the concept of translation formulated in this thesis. Since, it is clear that the Derrida's critique of metaphysics from within in his analysis of speech and writing and the deconstruction of the sign has allowed us to take the investigation of translation into its most fundamental representation. Derrida writes "Let us start, since we are already there, from the problematic of the sign and writing, the sign is usually said to be put in the place of the thing itself, the present thing, "thing" here standing equally for meaning or referent. The sign represents the present in its absence." (Difference, 60) This quasi representation of "present in its absence" allows for the formulation of translation as consisting of two irreducible alternatives taking the form of theoretical impossibility/practice,

similarity/difference, fidelity/betrayal, resistance/transfer and ultimately presence/absence. However Derrida's concept of differance differs in that it cannot harbor these terms in their content but rather acts as the condition for their irreducibility. "Such a play, differance, is thus no longer simply a concept, but rather the possibility of conceptuality, of a conceptual process and system in general" (Difference, 63) Derrida also writes,

"... such a *difference* has no name in our language, But we "already know" that if it is unnamable, it is not provincially so, not because our language has not yet found or received its name, or because we would have to seek it in another language, outside the finite system of our own. It is rather because there is no name for it at all, not even the name of essence or of Being, not even that of "difference" which is not a name, which is not a pure nominal unity, and unceasingly dislocates itself in a chain of differing and deferring substitution" (Difference, 76)

In the above passage, it is clear that one cannot attribute the idea of a composite structure to differance but that differance can help explain the dynamism within the composite structure. It is because translation's structure is irreducible that it requires differance to account for it. Once again, we are left with an irreconcilable tension that is descriptive of both the nature of translation theoretically and its everyday practice.

Chapter 4 – Conclusion

Paul Ricoeur's Paradigm of translation was succinctly phrased in his essay when he quoted the title of Donald Davidson's lecture 'Theoretically Difficult, Hard and Practically Simply, Easy' (14) referring to the difficulty of accounting for the theoretical justification for the possibility of translation on one hand and the fact of the everyday practice of translation. The previous chapters have shown how this tension embedded in translation manifests in the act of translation historically and again on a theoretical level depicting translations limits as a concept. At first it appears as a tension between the strict sense of translation and the broad sense of translation due to the difficulty of accounting for a source text. It then reappears again on a theoretical level as a tension between the language of things and the language of man also because of the unavailability of the language of things for open investigation as a source text. Then Benjamin's introduction of the original language as the common ground for both the language of things and the language of man, pushes our conception of language further beyond any linguistic, grammatical forms and into a conception of language as a life form. This conception is what allows the analysis of translation historically and theoretically under a common theme.

In the last analysis, we look into the subject for an analysis of translation following Benjamin's suggestion to understand translation as an art form and not take the audience into account in investigating its nature. This analysis of the self is shown that it must have a quasi-identity if it is able to account for translation, historically or theoretically. Derrida's deconstructive notion recurrent in the critique of the sign, the most originary notion of translation possible, produces the same tension again in similarity/difference, speech/writing, presence/absence and finally resistance and transfer. In conclusion, our understanding of translation can be best described as a quasi-structure that has a vital life form, which has a more primary function in the way in which we come to understand not only texts but things.

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