

Transforming the Language: Translation as Exile And Hermeneutic Dialogue

The issue of translation has been accessed from various theoretical frameworks and the problematic of translatability has a long tradition of being addressed by intellectual tradition. While the concept of translation is grounded in the deepest level of language theory and comparative literature, the nature of translation goes far beyond mere transmission of meanings from one foreign language into another – it is at center stage of every process of understanding and communication. Such being the case, the process of translation should not be accessed solely from the viewpoint of translatability and the results of translation cannot be judged merely according to the criteria of “adequacy” and “correctness.” It could be argued that the relation of translated version to “original” text, the options and difficulties of translation, and the goals of translator can be treated as a boundary situation, as a test case and as an avenue through which other modes of communication should be viewed. If, as Roman Jakobson argues, “the meaning of a word is nothing but its translation by another sign which can be substituted for it,” then interlingual translation – the conversion of signs by means of signs in another language – is just one variant in a larger field that includes other forms of ‘translation’ encompassing all communication, interpretation and understanding. All of these processes involve code switching, transferal of meanings from one paradigm to another, i.e. they can be viewed as translation in an essential sense.

In what follows, the problematic of translation is addressed, as reflected in the works of Walter Benjamin and Paul de Man. First, however, the notion of “translatability” is discussed, a move that involves arguments on language by Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer. After exploring their methodological framework concerning language, the discussion of translation is conducted through the context of a hermeneutic perspective on language and understanding.

The departing standpoint is that while there is more to translation than just a transfer of words from one language to another, the individuality of different languages should not evolve into an emphasis on the unbridgeable gulf between them. Translation is not a distorted version of the original, nor can it be identical with it. The difference and *untranslatability* are valuable aspects of foreignness which exist between languages, people, cultures. The difficulty of

attaining an identity between the original and translation provides it with a unique power while these irresolvable differences prove to be fruitful, bringing to light what was not seen before – it is in translation that we come to terms with our own language, animate it and our approach toward employing it.

Not only does translation clarify relationship to our own language but its *untranslatability* also allows one to establish a dialogical medium necessary for any act of communication to take place. This vast amplitude of differences is a perfect condition for dialogue, for it is possible only when there is difference. Moreover, since one can understand oneself only when involved with the Other – because that's when the meaning opens itself, in counteraction with another meaning, during a mediated experience – we must situate translation not only in every dialogue but also in every monologue (which also happens to be dialogical).

Considering this context, the concluding argument is that *untranslatability* must be situated at the core not only of translation but of language itself and it is precisely these disjunctions (between different languages, and between signifier and signified) that bring the possibility of a multiplicity of interpretations, allowing new and fruitful approaches to translation, reading, understanding and communication. Lying at the core of language, *untranslatability* should be seen as a constant provocation to creative ways of accessing it, where 'error' constitutes an essential element of the process, where linguistic rupture proves to be fruitful and allows for the unfolding of language. Thus, translation establishes a dialogical medium 'between' – a hermeneutic no-man's land – that allows one to reach "otherness" and establish effective communication.

“Das Übersetzen ist überhaupt das eigentliche Ziel des Geistes.”

Franz Rosenzweig

There exist different views on the process of translation, with the majority of them attesting to the inevitable incongruity between the original and the new text. Ultimately, it all comes down to the impossibility of translation and the inevitable gap that forever remains to be bridged. Many ways out have been suggested, from refusal to read texts other than in original to producing translations that were literary masterpieces rightfully taking their place alongside the original.¹ Nevertheless, as a French saying goes, “translations are like women, homely when faithful and unfaithful when lovely,” and if we turn to poetry as the acknowledged more difficult case of translation, we might recollect Hebrew author Chaim Bialik, who considered reading poetry in translation “like kissing your sweetheart through a handkerchief.” A less romantic but more radical metaphor (and this opinion is shared by most) is that the choice is simply between different ways of murdering the original.

The major problem that occupies a central place in the long history of reflection on translation is the issue of equivalency. The conventional approach to translation preoccupies itself solely with the question whether the translation is an accurate and reliable version of the original so that it could replace it in another linguistic system. As a result, the prevailing concept of translation theories has always been the notion of “resemblance,” that translation would have to be like the original and remain faithful to it. Thus the notions of “faithfulness” and “resemblance” came to be regarded as most important measure in judging the process and results of translation. The task of the translator, then, remains contradictory: he is forced to adapt his own language to a foreign text, using resources of a distinctly different linguistic system while on the other hand, he has to replace the original text with the new one that would answer the “faithfulness” expectations. However, when such measure is involved in approaching translation,

¹ One also has the third alternative – supplementing translation with testifying to the *untranslatability* of the original. A good example would be Nabokov’s literal translation of “Eugene Onegin” that he supplied with copious explicatory footnotes. He adhered to the point of view that “the clumsiest literal translation is a thousand times more useful than the prettiest paraphrase.”

we judge the result from the point of view of translatability. Instead, we must pose a question whether the resemblance (a goal certainly not to be relinquished) and translatability should be the measures of translation's value and success.

In his essay "The Task of the Translator," Walter Benjamin deconstructs the most common expectations such as "faithfulness," "adequacy," and "resemblance" to the original. Benjamin calls into question these traditional theories that tend to restrict the translation process to the communication of meanings and intentions of an original text. Thus arises the possibility for redefining or even rejecting the task of the translator. Interestingly enough, the German word *Aufgabe* means not only task, but also "renunciation" or "rejection," as Paul de Man underlined in his article "'Conclusions' on Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator.'" To follow this interpretation, Benjamin adheres to the point of view that the text of the translation is marked by an inevitable failure.

After Paul de Man's interpretation of Benjamin's essay one might be tempted to stop at the dead end: "The translator, per definition, fails. The translator can never do what the original text did. Any translation is always second in relation to the original, and the translator as such is lost from the very beginning." (de Man 12) However, is it only the translator who is lost from the very beginning? Following his argument further, we see that this failure is not a translator's failure but a function of language:

We think we are at ease in our own language, we feel a coziness, a familiarity, a shelter in the language we call our own, in which we think that we are not alienated. What the translation reveals is that this alienation is at its strongest in our relation to our own original language, that the original language within which we are engaged is disarticulated in a way which imposes upon us a particular alienation, a particular suffering. (24)

Here we see that for Benjamin translation does not transform a foreign language into one we may call our own, but rather renders radically foreign that language we believe to be ours, and it is our own language that is violently moved by the foreign (Jacobs 76). So what is at issue in translation is not the problem of differences between two languages, but the problem of our relation to our own. Thus, not only the translator but also every speaker is lost from the very beginning as expressed through de Man's concepts of 'exile,' 'suffering' and 'alienation' suggesting that this failure and being lost is not the translator's failure but derives from the disjunction in language between signifier and referent, between what is said and what is meant.

Hence, I will start from this stance, exploring the problem of our relation to language, and arriving at the conclusion that this radical transformation and ‘violent unfolding’ of the original language **is** precisely the valuable gain of translation. Moreover, when Paul de Man concludes that translation only highlights the perpetual “wandering, an errance, a kind of permanent exile” in our own language (de Man 25), I will explore the curative dialogical possibilities exile offers via being lost, wandering and ‘erring’.

To begin with, one has to acknowledge the universal linguistic character of any act of interpretation and understanding. All human experience is embedded within our ‘linguisticity’, and all our addressing of the problem of language takes place already within being embedded in what we are addressing. It is language that accounts for the way we understand the world. The fact that language is a universal medium and that linguistic understanding characterizes the understanding of any object was explored by Hans-Georg Gadamer in his work “Truth and Method” (*Wahrheit und Methode*). In part three, Gadamer describes how language is not only the object of interpretation, but also that through which interpretation takes place. He rests his claim that understanding has a fundamental connection with language, being language-bound, on the recognition that all understanding is interpretation: when we interpret we have already understood the matter in some way and the interpretation is the working out of this understanding. Gadamer’s point is that language affects the very “process” of interpretation. He argues that verbal interpretation is the form of all interpretation, at every instance in the process of understanding there is language. For Gadamer “Being that can be understood is language,” (“*Sein, das verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache*”) as his most often cited maxim puts it in expressing this universality.² Here Gadamer formulates his hermeneutic circle: to understand a language is to understand a tradition. And each understanding derives from belonging to this tradition. To have a tradition, a language, then, is to have a certain way of looking at the world. While this means that different languages have different worldviews, the underlying fact is that

² At the same time, Jean Grondin in *Sources of Hermeneutics* turns our attention at another Gadamer’s statement: “Naturally, we cannot mean by the fundamental linguisticity of understanding that all experience of the world is carried out as speaking and in speech.” (120) He thus maintains that understanding is *in principle* linguistic, and it is because language embodies the sole means for carrying out the conversation that we are and that we hope to convey to each other. It is for this reason that Gadamer’s hermeneutics permits itself an aphorism such as “Being that can be understood is language” where the weight should be placed on the “can.”

without a language at all one cannot interpret the world. In order to have a view of the world, it is necessary to experience the world, yet we experience the world from the point of view of our language. This indicates language as the medium used in interpretation and every act of understanding.

What is more significant, language is recognized as the realm within which every mode of thinking and saying takes place. Being always within it in many far-reaching ways, the human thought is entangled within language profoundly, as was emphatically stated by Friedrich Nietzsche in *Der Wille zur Macht*: „Wir hören auf zu denken, wenn wir es nicht in dem sprachlichen Zwange thun wollen.“(522) In other words, we do not first have a thought and then look for the word to express it; rather the shape of our thoughts is patterned according to our language. As we see, Nietzsche places all thinking not outside but **in** language, which shows that word is not an arbitrary linguistic sign available for our use and the speaking of a language is not picking up a tool when we need it in order to designate the pre-given world: „So ist auch die Vernunft nicht *vor* der Sprache, sondern einzig und allein *mit* ihr und mehr noch *durch* sie. Überhaupt ist die Vernunft keine fertige Gegebenheit, die der Sprache autonom gegenüber treten könnte, sondern sie *konstituiert* sich erst durch die Sprache.“ (cited in Thurner 43) Therefore, not only our understanding and every act of interpretation are linguistically conditioned, but thinking itself is in language. More importantly, it is not just one of many abilities or tools at our disposal. We, as speakers, are subordinate to the language we speak and we cannot set it in view before us the way an object can be handled. As a consequence, our relationship to language cannot be that of subject to object, for we find ourselves **within** it, not employing it but rather conforming to it (while this state of affairs, as we will see later, harbors the first translator's failure).

Having established that language is the dimension in which thinking and all understanding take place, we have to acknowledge that in the history of the European intellectual tradition (up until the insights of Vico, Hamann and Herder) the dominant perception of language was of something that is instrumental and available for use and in the end presents a system of arbitrary signs.³ Such philosophical consideration of language has tended to take the form of an analysis that breaks language into its components with significative functions.

³ This conception of language as an instrument reaches its peak in the modern view of language in the age of information and Martin Heidegger laments this state of affairs in our

The tradition of the analytical approach to the phenomenon of language should not be neglected, as it contributes to the valuable analysis of structures of thinking and the nature of languages. In this conception of language there is without a doubt something right that cannot be abandoned. However, the dominance of the significative function in language theory should be doubted. In this conception of language the word counts merely as a sign for a certain thing, which reduces language to a cipher designated to name pre-charted reality. Yet we must remember that such approach and all the possibilities contained in it not only diminish the very richness of language but do not give us the key to its essence.

In the third part of *Truth and Method* one finds a critique of the Western “forgetfulness of language” (*Sprachvergeessenheit*), a forgetfulness that, claims Gadamer, had already set in with Plato as language, understood instrumentally, fell into a completely secondary relationship to self-certifying thought.⁴ As Jean Grondin notes in his book “Sources of Hermeneutics,” the general horizon of this traditional approach to language that Gadamer describes in terms of *Sprachvergeessenheit* is determined by the question of language’s correctness. Beginning with the *Cratylus*, the presumption has typically been that language stands always in need of legitimization, which it can however receive only by virtue of an appeal to what is not language, viz., the thing itself. According to Gadamer, this question of correctness fundamentally determines Plato’s experience of language and, subsequently, the vast majority of Western thought about language. In Gadamer’s view, language is thereby deprived of its ability to speak for itself: in being subordinated to a non-linguistic original, the word suffers an ontological devaluation that disregards what is of value in the word as such (Grondin 108).

This conception of language has derived from reliance on academic reason and our ability and need to construct schemes, leading us into delusion that language and world it shapes are consequences of our conscious act. This theory is understandable, since it promises a control and with it a command of things. But there is a point beyond which we can not rely exclusively upon the scientific method or ‘abstract thought’ and ‘objective reflection.’ They move us away

Sprachverwendung in his letter to Imma von Bodmershof on September 6, 1964: „Die Frage nach der Sprache, nach ihrer Rettung wird immer bedrängender, weil die kybernetische Denkweise, die kaum noch ein Denken genannt werden kann, überall sich Geltung verschafft.” (Martin Heidegger, Imma von Bodmershof. “Briefwechsel: 1959-1976”)

⁴ *Sprachvergeessenheit*, which construes the word as a mere sign, is thus opposed by Gadamer’s insistence to *Spracherinnerung*, the remembrance of language and its own originary power.

from the personal, individual subject, in the direction of impersonal laws and statements of determined fact. If one's life (as well as one's thinking and linguistic activity) were analyzed solely through the prism of such requirements, attempting to ground knowledge on mathematical certainty, life would be reduced to nothing more than scientific predictability. Yet exactly that always proves to be impossible and even if objective reflection were possible, the task of scientific inquiry will inevitably fail in matters of human conduct, since in philosophy and in language one cannot lay down clear and distinct edifice of methodical thought. Hence, before bringing to light the issue of translator's failure or success, one needs to turn attention to the question of 'correctness' and 'adequacy' of our knowledge and ability to express.

Within the framework of his radicalizing the counter-Enlightenment, Nietzsche is known for concerning himself with the problem of thought no longer conceiving life as it really is, but contenting itself with ordering and classifying pure abstract data under the dominance of reason. This approach is not productive because it projects false universality on the certain unfinalizability of life, human nature and its singularities. It only confines us to 'illusory consciousness' and can not describe and express the truth about the human subject, which is not a complete reality but is involved in a constant process of growth, becoming, change. Considering this problem, Nietzsche addresses the problematic of language, outlining its fallibility in his early essay "On Truth and Lying in a Non-moral Sense" where he declares that the creators of language do not aim at any existential truth, but rather use abstract thought to overlook singularities of life as a living organism:

Sie [Menschen] sind tief eingetaucht in Illusionen und Traumbilder, ihr Auge gleitet nur auf der Oberfläche der Dinge herum und sieht "Formen", ihre Empfindung führt nirgends in die Wahrheit, sondern begnügt sich, Reize zu empfangen und gleichsam ein tastendes Spiel auf dem Rücken der Dinge zu spielen. Was weiß der Mensch eigentlich von sich selbst! Ja, vermöchte er auch nur sich einmal vollständig, hingelegt wie in einen erleuchteten Glaskasten, zu percipieren? ... Das Übersehen des Individuellen und Wirklichen gibt uns den Begriff, wie es uns auch die Form gibt, wohingegen die Natur keine Formen und Begriffe, also auch keine Gattungen kennt, sondern nur ein für uns unzugängliches und undefinierbares X. ... Jeder Begriff entsteht durch Gleichsetzen des Nichtgleichen... durch ein Vergessen des Unterscheidenden. (Nietzsche 370)

Such thinking and language use can not come to grips with the uniqueness of individual experience because they inevitably impoverish the real complexity of life, obliterating the unique and stifling the creative "*eventness*" of events. In limiting itself to seeing objects as a strange multiplicity, as chaos, reason becomes a kind of adding machine that manipulates analytical

judgments. In the face of such leveling, the proper being of the object is no longer taken into account: „Erkenntnis: die Ermöglichung der Erfahrung, dadurch, daß das wirkliche Geschehen ... ungeheuer vereinfacht ist: so daß es ähnliche und gleiche Dinge zu geben scheint. Erkenntnis ist Fälschung des Vielartigen und Unzählbaren zum Gleichen, Ähnlichen, Abzählbaren.“ (cited in Thurner 44)

If our reason and knowledge remain far from things and events themselves but content with operating academic concepts, our language also lags behind. Words are created arbitrarily and our understanding of this or that concept is one-sided (since everything is named by us according to our knowledge that is certainly subjective and limited). Therefore we create words so that we could access reality, although it will never be reality itself. Friedrich Nietzsche emphasizes this in saying that where words are concerned, what matters is never truth, never the full and adequate expression of things themselves:

Die verschiedenen Sprachen, neben einander gestellt, zeigen, daß es bei den Worten nie auf die Wahrheit, nie auf einen adäquaten Ausdruck ankommt: denn sonst gäbe es nicht so viele Sprachen. Das "Ding an sich" (das würde eben die reine folgenlose Wahrheit sein) ist auch dem Sprachbildner ganz unfaßlich und ganz und gar nicht erstrebenswert. Er bezeichnet nur die Relationen der Dinge zu den Menschen und nimmt zu deren Ausdrücke die kühnsten Metaphern zu Hilfe. ... Wir glauben Etwas von den Dingen selbst zu wissen, wenn wir von Bäumen, Farben, Schnee und Blumen reden, und besitzen doch Nichts als Metaphern der Dinge, die den ursprünglichen Wesenheiten ganz und gar nicht entsprechen. ... Logisch geht es also jedenfalls nicht bei der Entstehung der Sprache zu, und das ganze Material, worin und womit später der Mensch der Wahrheit, der Forscher, der Philosoph arbeitet und baut, stammt, wenn nicht aus Wolkenkuckuksheim, so doch jedenfalls nicht aus dem Wesen der Dinge. (Nietzsche 372)

In other words, creators of language do not aim at pure truth, at things themselves (*Ding an sich*). Our abstract language and our reason deal only in the relations of relations, a procedure which can only result in operating with naked concepts and mere signs. Finally, Nietzsche arrives at the conclusion that truth is nothing but a metaphor which has become worn by frequent use and has lost all sensuous vigor, an illusion of which we have forgotten that it is an illusion. In what respect, then, can we speak of “faithfulness,” “adequacy,” and “resemblance” in our discourse on translation if these are absent from language itself, if truth (*das Wesen der Dinge*) remains out of reach and often is not even sought after? It seems, a particular sense of alienation and exile is necessarily with us from the very beginning, from the moment we attempt to express ourselves in words.

One is dealing here with an abstraction, an abstraction of human aspect that causes “permanent exile,” which cannot be sufficiently explained on the basis of the significative function of language. To exist means always being born anew, always growing, modifying, rebuilding new worlds out of one’s own creativity – such existence is always exceeding itself and its limits. It involves transcending borders because all true life (as all creativity) begins with rupturing the membrane, crossing the border, where we always find ourselves ‘in exile’.⁵

Since human existence and its potentialities can never be treated as being in a state of equilibrium and rounded-off completion, so the thought itself is not a closed system but in perpetual movement and evolving into various forms. The fallibility of language derives from the inexhaustibility of thought, emotion, and all that pertains to human nature, which does not succumb to the limiting frame of language. The richness and complexity of any self, of any identity in the world, makes every expression vague, indefinite. The very shifting and multifaceted personality of a human being, this kaleidoscope through which reality is reflected, gives birth to the indefiniteness of interpretations and expressions – and truths. This also has been emphasized by Nietzsche, whose belief rests on the pre-Socratic foundation of “becoming” rather than Being. Opposing philosophical opinions that rely on Being and the presence of static forms, Nietzschean thought follows that truth should not be treated along speculative and metaphysical lines. Rather, existential truth is always unfinished because the human subject is not a completed reality but one involved in a constant process of becoming, being always on the way. Such existential truth will always remain contestable, for it is not a mathematical calculation but rather counterposition of many truths which always remain inconclusive.

How, then, can language grasp this permanent flux, pin it down and express a multifaceted open-ended perpetual evolving? How can language not only express our *unfinalizability*, but also establish dialogue and communication so that understanding may take place? If one could claim that all understanding and communication must happen in crossing the phenomenological boundaries, are these processes not the most essential task of the translator we all face? We see that not only the translator between languages faces failure, but while speaking

⁵ The recognition of each person’s “unfinalizability” and that “a man never coincides with himself” is also central to Mikhail Bakhtin who contends that “nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future.” (Bakhtin, M.M. “From Notes Made in 1970-71” Trans. Vern McGee. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986.)

our own language we already enter the “exile” of alienation and suffering. As soon as we open our mouth or put pencil to paper, we necessarily are involved in the process of translation and have to confront the translator’s task. In fact, only there lies the primal task of the translator – in our attempts to communicate, since we, as speakers, are all translators. However, the question remains: if reason and language fail, what and how, then, succeeds? In view of the failure of the translator/speaker, how is communication (of existential truth first of all) still possible?

Jean Grondin in his book “Sources of Hermeneutics” considers the question whether we can, then, conceive of a discourse that would legitimately be able to speak of the “things themselves.” He reminds us that one can encounter in earlier Heidegger one of the first motivations of what he understands phenomenology to be – a “return to the things themselves.” For Heidegger, to hold oneself to the things themselves is to fight against the seduction and the ease of commonly received “discourses” which relieve us from the necessity of a direct recourse to the things themselves. Blindly following the Sophist’s art of the *logoi* that circulate around us without taking upon oneself the effort of a direct vision of the things themselves is to cease to be “there,” to cease to be *Da-sein*. In his 1929/30 course, and then again in *Beiträge*, Heidegger spoke of a *Wegsein* – of a *Da-sein* which is not there, but “away,” elsewhere, that is, in the *logoi*. The surrounding *logoi* obstruct the access of *Da-sein* to itself since such discourse amounts only to chatter, idle talk. It is precisely that what, in the being of man, obstructs the possibility of seeing the things themselves; the *logos* has precisely this tendency, to the extent that it simply floats in the air, to spread a presumed knowledge favoring a simple repetition of what is said and which itself no longer has anything to do with the things (Grondin 145).

Heidegger’s aim was to attack the widespread tendency that consists, in philosophy as in other modes of discourse, in holding idly to jargon, to “what people say”. It is this “deficient” mode of language use where we “fall prey,” in Heidegger’s words, to the *logos*. One “falls,” one descends into received discourses, as one falls into a snare. As Grondin concludes, one cedes to the easiness of jargon which procures a vague and general orientation, evidently convenient but which does not result from a direct encounter with things themselves. In abandoning oneself to jargon which is in current use, *Da-sein* closes itself off to a certain extent to itself. It no longer assumes the responsibility of revealing its being to itself, rather it prefers to let it be dictated by commonly accepted discourses those of the “everyone (*das Man*)” (Grondin 148). Often they

replace the truth. In fact, for Heidegger, *Da-sein* is from the start and indeed most often closed to itself, to the extent that it orients itself exclusively according to such common discourses.

At the same time, it is also true that we cannot re-create language each time we speak. Rather, being always already social, we say something to another always already making a reference to the meanings constituting this or that particular linguistic system. Heidegger admits in *Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung*, „Ja das wesentliche Wort muss sogar, um verstanden und so für alle ein gemeinsamer Besitz zu werden, sich gemein machen.“ (*Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung* 72) Thus, to communicate something successfully, the appeal to common significations is presupposed. So in each communicative act the identification presupposes prior identifications; in other words, meanings are dependent for their meaningfulness as communicative upon a certain universality, so that we could participate in a “universal” system of meanings. This can account for the Heideggerian claim that we do not so much speak language as language speaks us – *die Sprache spricht*. His emphasis lies in the fact that language has the special peculiarity that we live in it, are at home in it – however usually without turning our attention to it thus receding in the background and language coming to the forefront.⁶

In this situation, language is not an article to use, not merely a means of communication – it is us who appear to be mastered by it. Thus we are always in danger of slipping back into customary ways of representing and expressing ourselves, and language can degenerate into a chatter that reveals nothing but repetition of the same. How, then, can we be creative within this mode of employing language? How is the search for original and transcendental structures possible, how can we express the singularity and uniqueness of *unfinalizability*? How can the Self, incapable of staying still in its identity, find expression in this monotony multiplying and extending through infinite variations and establish communication?⁷

In concerning ourselves with such questions, we might resort to possible linguistic ways to be creative, employing language consciously and without facing the failure-*Aufgabe*.

⁶ Perhaps from here stems Heidegger’s idiosyncratic vocabulary when he, using the elasticity of the German language, loaded the terms with unique and specific meanings (*es weltet*, *Eigentlichkeit*, *Er-eignis*, *Da-sein*, *Mit-Dasein*, *Jeweiligkeit*, etc). Apparently, Heidegger felt the need for this vocabulary, it was his intentional turning away from articulate tradition.

⁷ In his essay “The Servant and Her Master,” Emmanuel Levinas says: “Our world lost the use of speech – we can no longer speak because of the tautological rhythm which punctuates dialogue itself, because of the monotonous droning which immediately closes off the avenues of communication. As if everything was, from time immemorial, finished.”

Whenever we speak we already dwell in language but to come to grips with this sojourn is the difficulty. It is precisely in translation and in poetry where language undergoes fruitful rupture where our relation to language is transformed. Translation and poetry wake up our sensibility towards language and that is perhaps where not language speaks us but we speak the language, being creative and originary. However, before we turn our attention to these two ways of creative linguisticity, we can observe how thought manages to be at its strongest and closest to expression, shaking us away from customary and vague expression.

What is at issue here is the transformation of our relation to language, transforming the common discourse through ‘exile’ and ‘wandering’. This wandering and the exile of language do not lead just anywhere away, but take us toward the truth because it is always there – *on the way*. Only exile opens the way, invites us there and only when we allow ourselves to be lost, when we walk the way, this movement allows us to reach the other shore. As Heidegger stated in *What is Called Thinking*, “we respond to the way only by remaining underway” which is the opposite of taking a position

... somewhere along the road, and there make conversation about whether, and how, earlier and later stretches of the way may be different, and in their difference might be even incompatible – incompatible, that is, for those who never walk the way, nor ever set out on it, but merely take up a position outside it, there forever to formulate ideas and make talk about the way. (169)

Movement itself, not making “talk about the way,” is the only condition for the way to exist – the way does not come to existence unless we make steps which create it. Thus, only wandering and exile can create the necessary precondition to reach the goal. Hence the question to be answered: what are ways of transforming our relation to language, how can we set out on the way of wandering and how does this exile prove to be fruitful?

First of all, one could suggest that the calculative mode of using words, speaking in “provable” propositions, being able to give a definite answer to the demands of immediate intelligibility, is a speaking that says nothing. The demand for immediate intelligibility, for certainty, sees the concealed, the undisclosed, that which does not succumb easily to expression as negative, something to be done away with. But exactly this tension provokes us to thinking, setting ourselves on the way towards interpretation, understanding. The demands for full disclosure, easy intelligibility, complete and full expressibility and translatability are impossible

to fulfill, stifling the provocation that lies at the heart of thinking, poetry (which, to follow Heidegger, belong together)⁸ – and translation. Hence it is important to see how radical transformation, violent unfolding of our language and communication of essential meanings, creative linguisticity take place in these three events.

Absence of a system and an indirect form of expressing existential truth is one way to avoid translator and speaker's failure. The very nature of investigation and thought do not conform to any single direction, they always compels us to travel over a wide field in many directions. There we are free to wander (as well as err⁹) and only such long journeying may bring us to the goal. It could be that the nature of existential thought searching for expression can only be reflected via pure discontinuity and self-contradictoriness of spoken and written word. Attempts to systematize may distort the authenticity and radical originality of expression. Vagueness and imprecision could be testament to the infinitude of human life and our attempts to express it in words. Vagueness and ambiguity, then, are significant as an indication of our actual relationship to language.

Therefore, concern with something other than logic – concern with expressing the existential truth – shares a tendency to aphoristic, unsystematic and fragmental formulation. Such formulations show the way but do not explain, which makes it difficult to reduce such meditations to the simplicity of a single philosophical doctrine or explanation. The nature of such discourse stems from the disjunction between common knowledge and original observation. In opposition to universality that obliterates uniqueness, it includes every particular and fragmentary point. Such discourse finds itself in a space between the universal and the particular, totality and fragment, objective reality and subjective consciousness.

Only this space **between** and **beyond** creates and allows for the true meaningful communication and understanding. When we are not given arguments of determined fact but are

⁸ „All reflective thinking is poetic, and all poetry in turn is a kind of thinking.“ (*On the Way to Language* 136)

⁹ We have to accept that we are fated to err and perhaps these are not errors at all. In fact, *error* today means only “mistake,” yet in its Latin root *errare* has the ambiguity of error and freedom, since it means both “to be in error” and “to wander.” Whether this or that vision is correct or true, can only be seen in comparison with other truths – because the truth lies on the way, in the process of discovering it. Therefore, there are a lot of „truths,” and each one can be addressed as „error.” The real error, however, is more likely to be the not-truth exactly when it looks perfectly like it, i.e. is not seen as error.

shaken loose from what we take for granted, we set ourselves wandering into the space beyond what we already know. Allusion is undoubtedly more interesting than definition and since the *a priori* exists only for people of a direct nature, we are more prone to be blind when we accept ready-made truths. If existential truth in itself is not clear but rather vague and obscure, *im Hintergrund*, then the form of its representation should guide us through a labyrinth because, to attain it we must walk a tortuous and obscure path. When we divert the course, when we allow ourselves to wander and err, be in exile, we are more likely to find something new, while accessing the unexplored space hermeneutically.¹⁰

A brilliant example of attempts to express the existential truth is to be found in texts of Johann Georg Hamann, whose writings were notorious for the challenges they threw down to the reader. Every analysis of Hamann's work must come to terms with the question of his style, for it presents a massive problem for the reader. A comprehensive analysis of Hamann's cryptic style was carried out by James O'Flaherty in his book on Hamann's *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten* where he describes Hamann's style as something he deliberately adopted as an antidote to abstraction, as the only way to attempt to convey the fullness of the inexhaustible particulars of which the world was composed: "He was intent upon creating a sense of unplumbed depths, of unlimited vistas, and stopping efforts to define, delimit,¹¹ close in tidy formulae; he applauds irregularity, luxuriance, the inexhaustible and indescribable, the astonishing, the miraculous, the strokes of lightning, the sudden momentary illumination of the dark." (78) Hamann's aim was to blow up established values, both those of tradition and those of philosophy, and to organize a counter-revolution against established conventions and dogmas. This was the justification, in his own eyes, for his hermetic style, with which he hoped to puzzle, intrigue and awaken the reader.

¹⁰ Hermes, who will be important for our discussion later, is believed to be not only the messenger between gods and people, but also the god of hidden roads, the ones that are less traveled. There he used to find treasures nobody had discovered before.

¹¹ All definition strives for determining and delimiting. The Russian for "definition" is *opredelenie*. The root of the word is *predel*, which is a noun meaning "a limit, boundary." Terms and terminology can be considered, then, as violation of language as living event, since they set artificial limits to the infinite open-ended range of meanings. The same connotations can be traced in English: "to determine" comes from Latin *determinare*, which means "to set limits to, mark the end, boundary," from *terminus* "end, limit." Thus, all deFINing and deTERMining will always mean to a certain extent deLIMITing. The question would be whether we ever should or can deFINE ourselves.

Puzzle and intrigue were meant to stop the reader in his tracks, astonish, open windows to new vistas and cause deliberate wandering and exile where one is exempt from the normal train of association.

In his dedication of *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten* to Kant and Berens, (“To the Two”) Hamann calls attention immediately to the fact that, although his work will appear as “mold” to the ordinary reader, he hopes that they will discover in his pages the “microscopic forest” which they contain (Hamann 13). In other words, Hamann is saying that his work contains a significant and complex structure, which will emerge clearly for those who scrutinize it closely. In comparing his treatise to a “microscopic forest,” Hamann utilizes an organic analogy – the concealed worth of the treatise is the life it contains. The growth hidden in the microscopic forest is very much alive and is more significant than the mold it appears to be to the naked eye.

On another occasion, Hamann refers to the covert nature of his work in his discussion of Socrates’ early life where he stated that Socrates had created sculptures of the three Graces but, following an earlier custom, he had clothed them, though the contemporary style was to portray them nude. For this, Hamann assumes, Socrates was criticized by his contemporaries. Hamann then likens his work to the clothed Graces of Socrates, indicating that “diese neugekleideten Gratien” will also evoke opposition (31). As O’Flaherty concludes, the value implied is obscured for the casual observer, appearing in the first instance as mold and in the second as a concealment of beauty. However, a full appreciation requires the discovery of any underlying balance or harmony that it may possess. The reader’s task may be viewed, then, either as the application of the lens of the microscope to the tiny forest or as the unveiling of the Graces. In either case, we shall find the beauty of a living organism, rather than a lifeless artifact (O’Flaherty 75).

Should all real communication of the truth be only indirect, it could surely be expressed in aphorisms, riddles. Yet from here stems the problem of the communicability of truth. To what extent does it remain a truth if it is not appropriated by the receiver and is communicability, then, the criteria? So that it will be considered truth, must it be understood in another *Verstehungshorizont*? Since truth, as we have established, cannot be communicated directly, will the *Unmittelbarkeit* take place on the hermetic level that can only be accessed hermeneutically? How to communicate truth that is flux, which no language can express adequately? Because the truth is nothing fixed and the compressed form opens the way for broader interpretation,

unsystematic and aphoristic nature of hermetic language opens the possibilities of expressing the truth in a hermeneutical way.

To consider the implications of some of the above stated questions, we again turn to Hamann, whose stance on language identifies all speech as translation and compares this process to poetry. In his *Aesthetica in Nuce* he says, “Reden ist übersetzen – aus einer Engelsprache in eine Menschensprache, das heisst, Gedanken in Worte, – Sachen in Namen, – Bilder in Zeichen; die poetisch oder kyriologisch seyn können.” (87) Speech, according to him, is translation – from angel-language into human language, that is, thoughts into words, and things into names. Therefore, besides kyriological writing of allusion and obscurity, we can turn to translation of images into signs (that is, speech) which can be not only kyriological but also poetic.

If language is “eine Übersetzung aus einer Engelsprache in die Menschensprache,” then it seems that through the imprisoning grid of language we translate illimitability into finite form, the form of our speech. That our speech during this translation withdraws the essence from articulation, has been illuminated in Augustinian theory of the word. According to Augustine, the essential sameness between thought and the concrete word almost never occurs for human beings. This we find only with God: the manifestation of the divine Word in the historical world was essentially the same as God’s *sapientia*, so that God could be thought to have been fully present in the utterance of his Word. While the Word of God means the complete self-knowledge of God, the human word, on the other hand, does not have a comparable self-possession at its disposal (*Sources of Hermeneutics* 156). Only very seldom is our word a reflection of knowledge that is certain. There is much we say without possessing final clarity about the knowledge we are using and in contrast to God’s Word, our word is allotted no final self-evidence, which comes from the fact that our being is not bound up with a pure and true self-knowledge.

To follow this pattern of thought, to speak is to articulate, thus bringing predication and changing what is to be named. One can affirm that language obfuscates and perverts because we do not possess the creative language of God, ours being only an instrumental language. Unlike God, we do not speak words that are themselves the things they name. In the biblical account of creation, God said “Let there be light,” and there was light. He named all things “according to their kind,” i.e. as they are, according to their essence, thus creating by naming. We, on the other hand, instead of naming things in concordance with their being, introduce predication and only enhance the difference between word and object. Therefore lie comes into being only with

speech: we do not create words and objects by naming them, they are already there and we fail, missing the target with our arsenal of obfuscating metaphors. Hence, it would seem that only by using language creatively we would not have to face the speaker's (and translator's) failure.

This process with a special clarity was identified in Heidegger's lectures on Stefan George. An experience the poet undergoes with language he described in his lectures given in 1958, "The Essence of Language" and "Words." Both take as their starting point a poem by Stefan George, *Das Wort*. In Heidegger's reading, there the poet describes an experience that he undergoes with language in which his relation to language is transformed. First he describes his previous relation to language, which seems to correspond to an instrumentalist view of language. We are given an indication of how he previously conceived poetry but this view of language is disturbed by an experience in which the poet, failing to discover an appropriate word for what he has in hand, finds that what he ought to name fades away. The poet thereby gains an insight both into the relation between word and thing and that between word and poet, which causes him at the end of the poem to learn renunciation. He renounces his former view of the relation between word and thing, and he also renounces having words under his control (*On the Way to Language* 147). The poet affirms that where the word is lacking there can be no thing. This means that the word alone gives Being to the thing and Heidegger would later recognize that the loss of the thing arises from the lack of the word (Bernasconi 58). Moreover, Heidegger came to understand his own experience of thinking as the experience of the lack of a word for Being.

More importantly, after learning renunciation, the poet still writes the poem and in it he tells us that he learned something from what had happened. Heidegger proceeds through an interpretation of the poet's renunciation to the conclusion that "it is not mere lapse into silence" and that "it is no way a negation, but rather an affirmation" (*On the Way to Language* 151). The poet's relation to language is transformed: "Because the word is shown in a different, higher rule, the relation to the word must also undergo a transformation." (147) In other words, the new relation to language is learned by the poet, and the name for this different way with language is "renunciation." However, renouncing is not something negative, rejecting the hope and the task of the speaker. Rather, this renunciation is fruitful: the speaker learns a different relation to language.

This different relation is what we learn from poetic language. First, we should remember that we are not dealing here with existing language with its vocabulary and fixed

grammatical structures; it is rather the challenging task of bestowing upon the commonly accepted usage of language with vital meanings, primordial energy that initiates creative cognition of things as they are.¹² Poetry is creative originary speaking where poetic naming accomplishes what mundane language fails because it is the language of singularity, subjectivity, not abstract and generic signs and clichés. Martin Heidegger highlights the dichotomy between these two modes of using language in *What is Called Thinking*:

Language admits of two things: one, that it be reduced to a mere system of signs, uniformly available to everybody, and in this form be enforced as binding; and two, that language at one great moment says one unique thing, for one time only, which remains inexhaustible because it is always originary, and thus beyond the reach of any kind of leveling. These two possibilities of language are so far removed from each other that we should not be doing justice to their disparity even if we were to call them extreme opposites. (191)

To borrow a famous image from the poet Paul Valéry, the distinction between these ‘extreme opposites’ – poetic language and everyday language of the “life world” – can be likened to types of currency. Valéry contrasted the poetic word with the everyday use of language in a striking comparison to gold: everyday language resembles small change which, like our own paper money, does not actually possess the value that it symbolizes. The gold coins, on the other hand, actually possessed as metal the value that was imprinted upon them. In a similar way, whereas ordinary language resembles a coin that we pass round among ourselves in place of something else, poetic language is like gold itself. In ordinary language, Valéry stresses, words seem to disappear into their function, they vanish in the face of the matters at issue and lose their originary expressive power. While in ordinary language we are more attentive to the message than to the medium, in poetic language words take on a life of their own and there we do pay attention to language, speaking it.

It is the poet who, according to Heidegger, possesses such privileged relationship to language. In poetry we give utterance to and accounts for relationship to language: “Common speech merely employs language. This relation to language is just what constitutes its commonness. But because ... poetry does not employ terms but speaks words, therefore we are compelled ... to give specific attention to what the word says.” (*What is Called Thinking* 128) As

¹² “Cognate” originates from Latin *co+gnatus, natus*, past participle of *nasci*, anciently *gnasci*, to be born.

we know, one can speak, talk but not necessarily simply say and convey the message, communicating essential meaning. When we regard the activity of speaking as self-evident, taking it for granted, we close off avenues to conscious, creative, and expressive communication. The idea is to purify us of misuses of language so that we can use language properly, not invalidly – only this way we can be ensured that we have power over language and not it over us. The poetic word disrupts our situatedness within everyday speech, shaking us awake from its mechanicity and dulled expression. It causes the unfolding of our language, bringing us to the new, transformed relation to language – where we do pay attention to it and where we do **speak** words. As we will see later, a similar process of fruitful rupture happens to language in translation.

Poetic language transforms the one-dimensional everyday speech, providing an extension of its boundaries thus making up for the failure of language. The poetic act is itself the original event: it establishes new roads, new ways of expression instead of following the trodden path. Thus it extricates us from our *Sprachvergessenheit*, sets us in exile, shaking away from customary, abused, overused and hackneyed speech and taking us towards the language where all singularity and precision of expression are not worn out, because it speaks in originary speaking mode.¹³

Because poetry turns towards the structures in which the creative speaking prevails, speaking that is clear of the conventions of mundane language, language ceases to be a subordinate tool for expression and displays its essence – that originary saying¹⁴ which makes it possible, in Heidegger's words, to found a world, and, in Hölderlin's phrase, to name the gods: "Der Dichter nennt die Götter und nennt alle Dinge in dem, was sie sind. Dieses Nennen besteht

¹³ Although even in everyday life ordinary language there is also invariably an element of inventiveness present. Gadamer demonstrates in his "hermeneutic circle" how meaning is never static but always generates itself in the dialogue that we are. But this inventive, transformative quality is heightened and intensified in a poetic utterance.

¹⁴ Heidegger introduces a distinction between "saying" and "speaking" (*On the Way to Language* 122) where *Die Sage* (Saying) is Heidegger's word for that originary language through which the destiny of Being happens, and, to that extent it goes beyond what in *Being and Time* was named as *Rede* (Speech). In this context, Saying (the German word *Sage* has a distinct character over speaking and talking) means much more than speaking.

nicht darin, dass ein vordem schon Bekanntes nur mit einem Namen **versehen** (emphasis mine) wird, sondern indem der Dichter das wesentliche Wort spricht, wird durch diese Nennung das Seiende erst zu dem ernannt, was es ist.“ (*Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung* 80)

A such, the poet's creativity resembles that of God, because she calls things forth into existence by naming them, and only thus Being is named as that what it is. The poet's task can be compared to making an Orphic journey, transcending the limits of the mundane wor(l)d (or the limits of what common language can express), going into the debris of language and transforming our *Gerede*, expressing what we cannot express through our instrumental and rationalized language.

As hermetic and unsystematic expression shakes us away from the customary train of thought, so does the poet. When we use language pragmatically, functionally, we avoid the recourse to the thing itself. The poet (and translator), in order to bring to expression in language, has to see it from beyond,¹⁵ to unlearn the language, set himself in permanent wandering and exile:

Poetry is the unforgetting of language, in which we are reminded, first of all, that language is not a formal system; it is what philosophers call natural language – but perhaps one should use the older philological expression, *living* language: language whose mode of existence is the event, a language of *Erfahrung* that lives through or undergoes the experiences of all those who speak and hear it, and which is therefore never self-identical but always on the way, *unterwegs*. (Bruns 16)

While common language defines and determines, thus delimiting, the poetic language, opposing to that, is not interested in stability, fixed definition, but is all about movement: its goal is not the order and conventionalized language use, but breaking through what became to us habitual. Poetic language is language **of** and **in** transformation, where language opens up its possibilities, strains all its powers, stretching the word out of its limits, transcending the threshold

¹⁵ In esoteric technique of Zen there is a system of “koan” (paradoxical themes for meditation) that teaches one to think beyond the customary patterns and clichés. A student is offered a *koan*, which at first glance seems to be an absurd question, to which he should find, however, a non-traditional, unexpected answer with an unusual twist of reasoning. They seem absurd to the common, rational approach, while they are directed at other dimensions and ways of thinking, and only there a solution can be found. For example, here is one of them: “You are looking at the bamboo walking stick and contemplate. If you name it ‘it’s a bamboo walking stick,’ you make an assertion; if you name it ‘it’s not a bamboo walking stick,’ you also make an assertion (by negating). How would you name it on the other side of asserting and negating?”

between the delimiting frame of the word and that which we strive to express. At the same time, poetic language does not always respond to the demand for immediate intelligibility,¹⁶ but provokes us to thought, giving the stimulus for condensed (*ge-dichtet*), at times hermetic expression. Thus it creates common space of linguistic otherness, where we are transforming the customary and where we *can* communicate the truth – between the hermetic and the profane language modes.

Therefore, instead of failing the task of the speaker, we might solve the problem through the task of the poet – seeking the true word, the one that arrives from beyond, from renouncing our former instrumental attitude towards language. And of course it is not only the poet for whom the expressive word remains unattainable, it is rather the experience of all of us to be always on the way in search for an essential originary meaningful word – the one that could establish communication. To continue the discussion of this universal experience, however, I should stress that such essential character of speaking can originate precisely at the point of us being shaken away from the dulled sense of communication, i.e. in those cases where ‘alienation’ in our own language is felt in most acute way – in translation or communicating with the other (especially when communication does not succeed).

Being particularly aware of the power of our native tongue over our thoughts, one can adhere to the opinion that we cannot hold the language up for scrutiny without being immersed within it. Indeed, we cannot interrogate it, like any object, which we may contemplate so to speak from outside because we can take no external perspective, being inescapably located within. Nevertheless, as Gadamer asserts in *The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem*, this denial of the independent standpoint is valid, unless we involve ourselves in a possibility of creative linguisticality – translation:

Understanding is language-bound. But this assertion does not lead us into any kind of linguistic relativism. It is indeed true that we live within a language, but language is not a system of signals that we send off with the aid of a telegraphic key when we enter the

¹⁶ That is also why it is impossible to offer criticism to explain poetry, to try to understand it as object of analysis. When one attempts analysis or textual explication of a poem, this dissection sterilizes it because poetry eludes pinning down as it also does not succumb to any theoretical framework. What is possible is to bring to light the peculiar logic and syntax of fundamental paradox and singularity of expression. Perhaps that is why Heidegger called his work on Hölderlin not *Anmerkungen* (comments) or *Erklärungen* (explanations) but *Erläuterungen* (elucidations), for it is the only approach to making the poem a bit more lucid, throwing light on *Dichtung*.

office or transmission station. That is not speaking, for it does not have the infinity of the act that is linguistically creative and world experiencing. While we live wholly within a language, there is absolutely no captivity within a language – not even within our native language. We all experience this when we learn a foreign language, especially on journeys insofar as we master the foreign language to some extent. (15)

When we speak a foreign language, we strain our efforts to find words, while our own language is being put into relief. This process induces our conscious and attentive relation to language, thus inviting to active and creative speaking. Remembering Benjamin's stance on the duty (*Aufgabe*) of the translator to give up in relation to the task of refinding what was there in the original (although even if we understand translation only in interlingual mode, then one should mention that there is no "original" which is not also a translation, an original without failure), one may note that this giving up of language and of the translator actually might be a very fruitful tension of translation. It allows us to access our language from the outside, to look at it with another's eyes, from the point of view of a different language. We need translation to perform the radical transformation and unfolding of our own language.

If translation, according to Benjamin, is "the leading over of one language into the other through a continuum of transformations. ... It passes through continuums of transformation, not abstract areas of identity and similarity," (*On Language as Such* 325) then it cannot consist in substituting a signifier in one language with a signifier in the other language. It involves movement *across* the differences, not getting entangled in them, but creating a continuum of transformations, where the creative word is born. This process can take place only in dialogic hermeneutic medium, where criteria of identity and similarity (and translatability) are irrelevant, being in fact abstract notions. Translation merely puts this incomparability into sharp focus by bringing two languages into unmediated contact where any criteria of faithfulness or correctness do not apply.

The word surely harbors ambiguity and contains a priori possibilities for misunderstanding, because it is only a metaphorical sign and every person when speaking, finds herself in this medium: between the word and the world that is to be named. There we always encounter ambiguity, which stems from the fallibility of words, because they fail to define, inevitably delimiting any thought and concept. While we are translating our thoughts into words – we betray them, for the word itself is a frame, which we try to impose upon the intangible, the process eventually turning out to be a Procrustes dilemma. Thus, words make the act of defining

already an act of interpretation and we can attribute certain *untranslatability* not only to translation from one language into another but to the language in general.

Since every translation is like a betrayal, the translator will always face renunciation, *Aufgabe*, because, however faithful his translation may be, he cannot overcome the gulf between the two languages. Therefore, this process cannot be judged from the point of view of un/translatability: the measure of translation is not translatability, i.e. to which degree it conforms to the original. The problems arise when we adhere to the assumption of translatability of languages, we see them as structures that actually can be compared and brought to a point of convergence which the translator is responsible to find. The classical determination of translation must be questioned, then, and the theme of the discussion must be not so much translatability as untranslatability, basing translation not on resemblance but on difference.

So distancing himself and adopting a more flexible attitude toward the word, freeing himself of the notion that words are entities of fixed meanings appears to be the translator's task. The translator, in his desire to recreate a text, must step out of either linguistic medium, become displaced. After all, how should we begin to know and communicate with the Other otherwise than by becoming acquainted with dislocation, outside language first of all? *Untranslatability* and 'permanent exile' may prove to be necessary for the act of communication to take place. As opposed to being involved in *idle talk (Gerede)*, it may be that only as a translator every supposed speaker originates meaningful and conscious linguisticity.

Translation offers a sort of parallel universe (to that of the original work), another space and time in which the text reveals other, extraordinary possible meanings. For these meanings, however, there are no *error*-free ways, since they exist in the no man's land between the language of the original and the language of the translator. Translator's task is, thus, to find this dialogic space where translation has the hope of succeeding; where tension, displacement, outsideness to oneself and constant crossing borders causes fruitful ruptures to our own language, bringing new horizons. In this respect our need to set ourselves in wandering, submitting to a necessary 'errance' is of heightened importance. The positive potential of wandering, errance, and exile of language and of the inevitable failure of translation is a mission to which we all are destined and, as such, translation is our responsibility, forever task, and the nature of all our discourse.

The process of communication, of transferal of meaning takes place on the way in the medium between languages. The gap between the original and the translated version creates space for interpretation that underlies all process of communication. Only there all transformation takes place and the task of the translator is to find and explore this creative “between.” In fact, translation is essentially a hermeneutic process, freeing itself from the original and taking its own course. And because hermeneutics concerns itself not merely with carrying the message across and interpreting it, but with fulfilling this task in the most difficult cases, such as when a barrier needs to be overcome and an additional effort undertaken, translation is the most essential hermeneutic act.

What happens on the way, while text is being transferred, or, better, carried over to the other side, is the process of interpretation. In fact, translation is situated at the very core of interpretation, as well as interpretation is part and parcel of translation. (There always will be a variety of interpretations, simply due to the fact that the consciousness, the reading mind can not be eliminated and we must not forget that translation takes place first of all within our own language.) The meaning is not only preserved in translation but also must be *interpreted* while being set in the context of the other language, a new language world; thus the translation of a text is a text formed anew. In his hermeneutical discussion of translation, Gadamer stresses that translation, in preserving the meaning, transposes it into a different context. According to his formulation in *Wahrheit und Methode*,

Here the translator must carry the meaning to be understood over into the context in which the interlocutor lives. This is not of course to say that he is at liberty to falsify the meaning intended by the speaker. Rather, the meaning must be preserved, but since it must be understood within a new language world, it must establish its validity within it in a new way. Thus every translation is already an interpretation. (387)¹⁷

In this context one should remember the much discussed derivational history of the word “hermeneutics.” It derived from a Greek word connected with the name of Hermes, the reputed messenger and interpreter of the gods. Crossing the gap, sending a message across the distance, is the essential process of communication, translation and interpretation; also was the main duty of Hermes the messenger of the gods, whose mediating skill enabled him to explore

¹⁷ In linking translation to interpretation, Gadamer echoes Heidegger, who writes: “But every translation is already interpretation” (*What is Called Thinking?* 174)

every level of the universe, effortlessly crossing the boundaries and being the mediator between heaven, earth, and the Underworld. Hermes, being the god of roads, travels the unknown paths and discovers hidden treasures (which is why one could say hermeneutics is about discovering hidden treasures of a text/word).

In fact, Plato's „Cratylus” considers the name „Hermes” to derive from the Greek word for „interpreter” who is also the messenger, accomplished thief, the deceiver with words and eloquence:

I should imagine that the name Hermes has to do with speech, and signifies that he is the interpreter (*ermeneus*), or messenger, or thief, or liar, or bargainer; all that sort of thing has a great deal to do with language; as I was telling you the word *eirein* is expressive of the use of speech, and there is an often-recurring Homeric word *emesato*, which means „he contrived” – out of these two words, *eirein* and *mesasthai*, the legislator formed the name of the God who invented language and speech ... calling him *Eirhemes*. And this has been improved by us, as we think, into Hermes. ¹⁸ (Plato 197)

The German *übersetzen* would be an excellent example because it is more eloquent than the English word “translate.” It is known that German poet and author of a number of outstanding translations Paul Celan defined translation as “ferrying across,” as the ferry “puts” something “across” the river – “*setzt über*.” Indeed, among the first definitions of the word *übersetzen* in English is to “ferry across.” This parallel can be used as the following paradigm: there are two sides of the river. The emotional and cultural landscapes on both sides are built on different premises and cultural traditions. In order for any communication to take place, one should build the bridge. However, there is a better term in German – *Übertragung*, which also is a formal word for literary translation. *Übertragen* is literally “to carry across.” Indeed, it seems closer to translation than “to put across” of *übersetzen*. There is more of a process in **carrying** than in simply **putting** across. This “carrying across” corresponds to the modern English “transfer.” Thus regarded, to translate is to transfer, to carry across some interval.

In other words, translation is about communication and transfer of meaning. However, the most important carrying across the interval happens in communication since „carrying

¹⁸ Boundaries and their crossing provide the key to Hermes' nature. In classical times, the ithyphallic Hermes figures appeared everywhere throughout Greece, guarding gates and doorways, the literal starting point of journeys. He also guides souls of the recently dead on their final journey across the river of oblivion, Lethe, to Hades. Hermes is a special guardian of travelers, merchants, thieves, gamblers, inventors, vagabonds (everywhere crossing of a boundary is involved).

across” or „carrying over” is what a good deal of communication amounts to when we translate every day, each time we interact with others. Therefore, the discussion of translation should always be conducted in terms of the analysis of dialogue. In *Wahrheit und Methode*, Gadamer deals with the back and forth, the to and fro (*Hin und Her*), that is characteristic of conversation and then indicates how this character pertains also to translation: “And, as in conversation, when there are such unbridgeable differences, a compromise can sometimes be achieved in the to and fro of dialogue, so the translator will seek the best solution in the to and fro of weighing and considering – a solution that can never be more than a compromise.” (*Wahrheit und Methode* 390) Hence, translation serves as the paradigm of each act of communication.

Finally, as I have established, the impossibility of expression which we always encounter, this ‘particular alienation’ and ‘exile’ in original language, stems from the ambiguity of language, from its being ‘disarticulated.’ We always have to question the possibility and effectiveness of communication, whether we can share anything at all, and without being misunderstood. Thus, before translation takes the direction between two languages, it already occurs within our own language. Words may flow freely, but thought always seems to remain entangled in itself and keeps striving for adequate expression. When we speak, we are always involved in translation: do we really know what we mean to say, and are we in fact saying it? Do we succeed in communicating what we mean, without saying something more as well which we do not intend and of which we may not even be aware? The presumption of translator’s failure is true also of any person who opens his mouth or puts pencil to paper, with the implication that he is going to say what he means. The way we express our thoughts in this or that language (let it be our own or foreign) inevitably will leave out some aspects (if not the essential one) because we have to make concessions, giving way to language loopholes that cause the multiplicity of interpretations.

In fact, this is the uniquely hermeneutic dimension of language that Gadamer proposes to trace from the theory of *verbum interius*. According to him, the universal aspect of hermeneutics consists in that one cannot say everything, one cannot express everything that one has in mind and this experience is universal. The spoken discourse always lags behind what one wants or has to say, the inner word. We are always enmeshed in never-ending process of searching for words, for what can never be entirely communicated or comprehended. It is because language never succeeds in exhausting everything that wants to be said and understood

that our understanding always remains in a permanent quest of appropriate language. As Jean Grondin suggests, the hermeneutical experience is therefore less that of language than that of the limits of language. It is less constitutive that understanding is expressed in language – which is true but trivial – than that it lives in the unending process of “summoning the word” and the search for a sharable language that would be adequate to the task (*Sources of Hermeneutics* 173).

In other words, this universal experience of permanent quest for words and expression is the eternal and primal task of the translator we all face in attempts to express ourselves. In describing this human experience, Gadamer speaks of “uncomfortable and tortuous feeling” we encounter in this universal experience of translating:

We are all acquainted with this, for instance, in the attempt to translate, in practical life or in literature or wherever; that is, we are familiar with the strange, uncomfortable, and tortuous feeling we have as long as we do not have the right word. It is the mode of the whole human experience of the world. I call this experience hermeneutical. (*The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem* 15)

Gadamer’s invoking of ‘uncomfortable and tortuous feeling’ is quite similar to those of ‘suffering’ and ‘alienation’ of Paul de Man, as well as to Benjamin’s *Aufgabe* and Heideggers ‘renunciation.’ All of these are the gain of translation, the translator’s success – for they all invite transformation of our language, causing the necessary exile.

This transformation and exile offer the way towards seeking new ways of expressing ourselves and establishing communication. It is true that the word is by virtue untranslatable and we always will face the risk of the translator’s failure since it is impossible to translate one language, world, person into another. The emphasis lies simply in the most important hermeneutic task – the hope that our word can reach the other. We should seek this essential word because only such *wesentliche Wort* makes possible the authentic dialogue:

Wir – die Menschen – sind ein Gespräch. Das Sein des Menschen gründet in der Sprache; aber diese geschieht erst eigentlich im Gespräch. Dieses ist jedoch nicht nur eine Weise, wie Sprache sich vollzieht, sondern als Gespräch nur ist Sprache wesentlich. Was wir sonst mit „Sprache“ meinen, nämlich einen Bestand von Wörtern und Regeln der Wortfügung, ist nur ein Vordergrund der Sprache. Aber was heisst nun ein „Gespräch“? Dabei vermittelt das Sprechen das Zueinanderkommen. Die Einheit eines Gesprächs besteht aber darin, dass jeweils im wesentlichen Wort das Eine und Selbe offenbar ist, worauf wir uns einigen, auf Grund dessen wir einig und so eigentlich wir selbst sind. (*Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung* 76)

To be sure, the words we use cannot themselves exhaust what we have in mind – that is, the dialogue that we are. Conversation and dialogue is the essence of our nature (and of language). We are involved from the very beginning in dialogue and conversation – translation in essential sense. This process was illuminated by John Sallis in his book “On Translation.” In this context he reminds us how Kant attested to the bond of thinking to discourse, outlining a circulation of speech in which and as which thinking comes to pass: “thinking is speaking with ourselves.”¹⁹ Kant thus attests that thinking is speaking to oneself and inwardly listening, to what one says to oneself. Sallis concludes that there will always have commenced a translation, not between words within the same language or in different languages, but rather the translation, the circulation between thought and speech, between meaning and word (Sallis 2). If thinking is speaking with oneself, then this dialogue will always involve translation.

More importantly, the essence of language, according to Heidegger, is revealed through the fact that all live language is dialogue – that which makes possible our coming to each other, our understanding one another. Therefore, whoever truly wishes to understand linguistic utterances should not restrict her attention to the linguistic sign as such, but must rather be open to the incomplete translation, interpretation – the hermeneutic dialogue. Translation is an essentially hermeneutic process that happens in each act of communication and interpretation, everywhere where we perform code switching. This dialogical paradigm of translation-communication is addressed against our *Sprachvergesenheit* and curtailment of language of its decisive dimension – i.e. the embeddedness of each and every discourse in a dialogue.

Only when both linguistic consciousnesses (as it happens in translation) interact outside their usual verbal and cultural orbits, the only cooperative way to establish communication and understanding arises. In his philosophical hermeneutics, Gadamer follows his teacher Heidegger in recognizing that the ties to one’s present horizons, one’s knowledge and experience, are the productive grounds of understanding. However, Gadamer argues that these limits can be transcended through exposure to other’s discourse and linguistically encoded cultural traditions because their horizons convey views that place one’s own horizons in relief. Only in

¹⁹ Here Sallis remarks that Kant could hardly have echoed more clearly – whether intentionally or not – Socrates’ celebrated declaration to Theaetetus: thinking is “discourse [λόγος] that the soul itself goes through with itself about whatever it is examining... The soul, as it appears to me, in thinking does nothing other than converse with itself, asking and answering itself, and affirming and denying.” (Plato, Theaetetus)

conversation, only in confrontation with another's thought, can we hope to get beyond the limits of our present horizon.

Discussion, where both sides are partners, offers a unique possibility for the "merging of horizons", for a merging of foreign frames of thinking. In a productive dialogue both partners acknowledge the relativity and finitude of their viewpoints and the possibility of idiosyncrasy. Both sides should be willing to detach themselves from the accustomed view and submit themselves and their views to the ongoing conversation, being on the way. In order to reach any understanding we must overcome self-centeredness since all understanding takes place within this medium between, where partners are willing to lose the firm grip of their shore in order to be able to wander on this no-man's land, the common ground of difference.

The same process happens to languages in translation: the translator places himself in the "between," in the space of difference which belongs to neither side. That is what the task of the translator amounts to – to establish this dialogical space. As true dialogue means our willingness to submit to alienation from one's own embeddedness, so in translation we are submitting to the "gambling game of language" that shakes us loose and sets us on the way to the true originary word.²⁰

This direction of thought is followed by Mikhail Bakhtin's insight that understanding is possible only in dialogue. In *Dialogic Imagination* he argues that all words or utterances are directed toward an answer, a response (a clear echo of Gadamer's attack against propositions in his theory of *verbum interius*). The understanding of an utterance is thus inseparable from the listener's response to it and Bakhtin concludes that "discourse lives on the boundary between its own context and another, alien, context." (*Dialogic Imagination* 673b) To go further, as Bakhtin suggested, one can assert that when a reader/translator approaches the text – only then the text is born.

Language establishes understanding in a dialogical medium and meaning is created and understood only on this dialogue field. Understanding is possible only when we are displaced, not embedded in our framework but also not succumbing to the foreign perspective. Therefore, being dislocated and placed in the medium *between* the two worlds is a necessary step that

²⁰ In *What is Called Thinking?* Heidegger referred to language as "the gambling game where our nature is at stake" (128) and asserted that "we are moving within language, which means moving on shifting ground or, still better, on the billowing waters of an ocean" (192).

allows us to avoid the tendency toward reducing everything to a single consciousness and admit the principle advantages of exile – spatial, temporal, cultural, linguistic. This outsidership is possible only in translation because it offers dialogical medium of transformations. This dialogue is conducted beyond the borderline, or, better, in the realm of border zones – hermeneutically appropriated medium where true understanding may take place.

One might wonder after all, if it is possible to translate the text of one language into another effectively and how are we able to understand each other when we speak and write in different languages. If translation necessarily fails according to the prescribed norm, there arises the question whether the norm is appropriate, whether translation ought to be measured by the demand for restitution of meaning. After all, in many cases the differences between languages can prove that no translation is ‘adequate’ and looking for comparability is a futile job. The concluding argument would be that one certainly cannot totally translate one language into another, just as one cannot totally translate one person into another. After all, language, as speech, is always rooted in a place, within a people, who are pulsing flesh and blood. Moreover, life itself is a communicative, creating experience; hence, all life is translation, as well as all communication is a constant creative act.

For Gadamer there is simply no encounter with the text unless we find ourselves claimed by what is said there. Being claimed, i.e. the process of understanding occurs as an encounter with something that addresses us in a striking manner. Gadamer insists that a text only addresses us once it has struck us by its strangeness. According to him, the greatest obstacle to a thoughtful reading of a text is not that complexity which cannot be penetrated without a great deal of effort; it is the apparent self-evidence of what is too familiar to the point of seeming obvious.

The hermeneutical experience is situated **between** familiarity and strangeness. When a problem arises, when we feel alienated, estranged. If hermeneutics is defined as the art of avoiding misunderstanding, then this misunderstanding is always and everywhere – distance of time, change of linguistic system or modes of thinking. Such misunderstanding, strangeness, shock, being alienated from one’s own embeddedness invites to transformation, induces to seek new ways of approach. This imposed exile calls for stretching the limits of patterned action and habit of attitude, when experience is not blocked in the routine, but awakens us to seek and open ourselves to the emerging prospects and horizons.

In translation we face this otherness, we are left wandering in the unknown territory trying to build a bridge to cross, in order to carry across (*über setzen*) the message from one side to another. The translator can cross over – literally, translate – between one language-culture-mind and another. If the Procrustes bed of language is the cause of all our failure, then subjects who speak and texts that are spoken by at least two different languages are subjects who are never enclosed in the single consciousness, these subjects speak both the different languages, different cultures, different texts.

Thus, hermeneutical discussion of translation centers on translation as communication of meaning across the interval (between two languages, sing systems, patterns of thinking). Situations in which understanding is disrupted or made exceptionally difficult, (as, for instance, in the case of linguistic difference) and the example of the translator, who has to bridge the gulf, correspond to the process of understanding in every event of communication, in each conversation.

The movement towards the truth involves taking paths that lead one astray, and that error is the condition of all wandering. This strangeness arises always between one human being and another, always causing confusion. But precisely in this fact lies the possibility of overcoming confusion. For we and language are conversation (*Gespräch*). One must look for the word that can reach another person, and strangeness is necessary for dialogue to function. As the experience of lack of words compels thinking (as we saw for Heidegger who contends that “it is more salutary for thinking to wander in estrangement than to establish itself in the comprehensible”), so the experience of untranslatability compels the translator/speaker to creative *linguaging*.

Demands for translatability cast aside, we are free to be creative, not pressed by the prism of equivalence with inevitable violation and imperfection causing the translator’s *Aufgabe*. Since no satisfactory equivalence can be found for the unique sense that is embedded in each text, the act of translation should be preceded by interpretation. Interpreting, the Hermes’ task to carry the message across, is always at the core of every process, be it understanding, reading, translation, communication. Wandering in exile, we may escape from the spell of our own frame, acquire a new vision, access other horizon and this is where the mutual basis for understanding starts to emerge. Only when each of the consciousnesses experiences their *outsidedness* (not only to the foreign language world but also to their own language), can they step out of the

environment in which they are embedded and find themselves in the hermeneutic process of the dialogic medium. Moving between languages and across their transformations, we are not inescapably located within, and neither should we give up the hope and renounce translatability. In this respect, the hermeneutic oriented approach towards translation and communication has potential for bridging the gap between dislocated and alienated linguistic systems. Such a dialogical approach presupposes the hermeneutic nature of translation that is bridging different times and worlds, through a continuum of transformations where there can be no definite or objective translation, where translation is never finished but will always remain open into the infinity of further interpretative dialogues.

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