

## EDMUND HUSSERL'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE HUMANITIES: THE CASE OF TRANSLATION STUDIES

Alexander Kozin\*

### Abstract

This article examines Edmund Husserl's a particular contribution to the humanities in general and to translation studies in particular. The author argues that the influence exerted by Husserl on the human sciences should be considered in a combination with the Saussurean semiology which introduced the basic prolegomena for the phenomenon of translation, subsequently prompting its emergence as an independent discipline. Two positions on translation illustrate Husserl's influence: Roman Jakobson's structuralist model and Jacques Derrida's deconstructive argument against that model. Derrida's critique of structuralism is taken as the sign of advancement for translation theory, showing at the same time the persistent influence of Husserl's phenomenology on the human sciences.

**Keywords:** phenomenology, translation studies, sign, equivocality, voice, difference.

### 1. Introduction

The influence of Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) on the human sciences is pervasive: many a discipline based its methodological tenets on the Husserlian insights (e. g., hermeneutics, ethnomethodology, communication studies, conversation analysis). However, his influence is most noticeable in the case of translation studies, which emerged in the 1950s as a formal sub-discipline of linguistics. We can trace this emergence to Roman Jakobson and his dialectical opposite, Jacques Derrida. By way of Derrida's response to Jakobson, the linguist and the philosopher entered into a dialogue. The common ground for this dialogue was provided by the Saussurean linguistics and Husserlian phenomenology. As for Husserl himself, although he did not write on translation per se, his earlier work on language at the time of *Logical Investigations* (1900/1901[1970]) as well as his later work on interculturality (1924–1932) are sufficiently suggestive to first presume and then attempt to reconstruct if not a full-bodied theory of translation then at least its basic coordinates. Recovering these coordinates is the key objective of this paper, which begins by engaging Husserl vis-à-vis Ferdinand de Saussure, Husserl's contemporary and as strong an influence on human sciences in general and transla-

\* Alexander Kozin – Ph. D., Freie Universität Berlin, Fachbereich Philosophie und Geisteswissenschaften; alex.kozin@gmx.net.

tion in particular. It continues by recapturing the results of this parallel development in the two theories of translation: Roman Jakobson's claim of mutual substitutability and Jacques Derrida's rejection of that thesis in favor of the *aporia* of translation. The two positions reflect the joint Husserl-Saussure effects, showing at the same time the potential for phenomenology to advance the humanities.

## 2. Building the Foundation

Both Ferdinand de Saussure and Edmund Husserl revolutionized the 20<sup>th</sup> century understanding of language by embarking on the same project: uncovering the invisible logic of meaning production. Although different in origin and direction, their thoughts developed in a parallel fashion and made a co-equal contribution to the emerging sub-discipline of translation studies through the semiotic approach. It is this approach that I would like to investigate next in order to assess precise points of Husserl's influence on its subsequent evolution. In my exposition I focus on the similarities and differences that outline the two positions reduced to the concepts of sign and sign-system. My purpose here is to show the very parallelism that made someone like Roman Jakobson to borrow from both Husserl and Saussure for his theory of translation, while someone like Derrida would employ Husserl, albeit in a somewhat unorthodox fashion, to argue for a deconstructive move against both Saussure and Jakobson. Revisiting these juxtapositions would be helpful for a precise understanding of the potential hidden in Husserl's early phenomenology.

In his first major publication, *Logical Investigations* (1900/1901[1970]), Husserl clearly identifies language as the container of pure logical grammar. This grammar is based on *a priori* laws «that must more or less clearly exhibit themselves in the theory of grammatical forms and in a corresponding class of grammatical incompatibilities in any developed language»<sup>1</sup>. The *a priori* laws make meaningfulness transpire by connecting dependent constituent elements into the independent whole. If and only if the parts are integrated into a whole according to a correct use of linguistic rules, a sentence can be considered meaningful. For example, the words 'the,' 'on,' 'cat,' 'tree,' 'is,' and 'the' in the English language would mean nothing by themselves unless they are combined in a particular way, e. g., 'the cat is on the tree.' Following the rules of some elementary combinatorics, Husserl takes the sentence or proposition as the basic meaningful form of a higher categorical unity. He calls this basic form *syntagma*, «a self-sufficient predicational whole»<sup>2</sup>. The *a priori* laws that govern the production of meaning are, therefore, the laws of syntagmatic combination. Therefore, for Husserl, the study of language begins as the study of syntax.

In *The Course of General Linguistics* (1959), Saussure also contends that a natural language is founded on certain *a priori* structures, which make us perceive some sounds as meaningful, while others are ignored as devoid of meaning. For Saussure, a word is distinguished from a noise

by a particular combination of sounds, which are only meaningful in contrast to other sounds. This emphasis establishes a cardinal similarity to the earlier Husserlian account: language is not possible without a combination of some elemental units. However, in the case of Saussure, these units were phonemic, not syntagmatic. For example, sound 'd' in the word 'dart' acquires meaningfulness against sound 't' in the word 'tart.' In turn, the word 'part' becomes meaningful against the word 'tart.' Although contemporary linguistics much refined the notion of inter-vocal binarism, the original idea of the phonemic juxtaposition is considered to be irrefutable. Meaningfulness is thus defined by the operation of opposition in a series of related terms. By singling out phoneme as the smallest unit that participates in the production of meaningfulness, Saussure begins his study of language with the study of phonemics.

Starting from two different areas of language, both Saussure and Husserl complement each other in at least in two ways. First both presume the existence of a deep relational structure, whether this structure designates logical or analogical relations is not important. Most important is the order that makes experience possible. Both locate this order in the natural language. They meet at the point of the linguistic sign, taken, by both as a meaningful product that rises from the relationship between parts and wholes and between opposite terms. For this reason, for Saussure, the sign is a relationship between the signified and the signifier, or between «a concept and a sound-image»<sup>3</sup>. Roughly speaking, the signified is the meaning-content while the signifier is the meaning-form. The relationship between the two terms is arbitrary: There is no connection between the composition of the word 'c-a-t' and its idea. Saussure states that the psychological character of the sound images makes the spoken word secondary to the concept it seeks to evoke. In his example, a person may speak to him/herself without uttering a single word. The primacy of the signified is further reinforced by endowing the conceptual pole with the stability that the signifier does not have by definition, due to it being constantly combined and re-combined. For example, a slight change in the pronunciation of the word 'cat' as 'kät' can render the combination of the sounds meaningless, while the concept 'cat' is always meaningful in itself. Clearly, for Saussure, it is only through the signified that the signifier exists. One can also say that, in this model, the signifier is founded on the signified.

For his definition of the sign, Husserl employs the structure of intentionality: «Every sign is a sign of something ... but not every sign has a meaning, a sense that a sign expresses»<sup>4</sup>. The intentional structure is formed by indicative and expressive signs. These signs are predicated on two corresponding acts. The indicative act points to something that exists outside of itself. This absent something becomes meaningful when it is intended by consciousness. The indicating act and the indicated content are separate. The separation allows the indicating sign to be devoid of meaning-content drawn from the objective world. In Saussure's terms, it is a signified without a signifier. In Husserl's terms, the indicating sign is a species of inference. One of the key interpreters of

Husserl, Sokolowski calls indication a «paradigmatic case»<sup>5</sup>. In order for the paradigm to become concretized in the fulfilled meaning, it must be supplanted with expression. Unlike the indicating intention, the expressive intention always has a meaning-content. At the same time, although founded on indication, expression is not directly linked to it. Moreover, in itself, expression does not express acts or objects. For Husserl, it is the signitive act that constitutes meaning in an expression. Its fulfillment animates expression with meaning-intention drawn from indication. The engagement between indication and expression allows the sign to achieve its full presence to become the sign for something.

The similarity between Saussure's and Husserl's treatments of the sign is stronger than it appears from within the respective positions. First, both scholars find it necessary to bifurcate the sign. Another similarity lies in the undetermined origin of the sign: both Husserl and Saussure consider the relationship between the signifier and the signified and between indication and expression arbitrary. The separation of expression from the expressed and the arbitrary nature of the sign make it a pure idealization. By placing the signified prior to the signifier and indication prior to expression, both Saussure and Husserl grant precedence to the transcendental pole over the empirical expressive pole. This becomes possible because of the following two assumptions. First, they conceive of the signifying concept as a stable (Saussure) and originally (Husserl) embodied whole. The expression, on the other hand, is always a combination of its parts. Secondly, the relationship between the signifier and the signified is determined as regressive, that is, as developing in the movement from the signifier to the signified. This makes the signifier simply a delivery vehicle for some conceptual meaning. As a result, speaking, i.e., the executive side of language, becomes founded on language as a system of meaning forms. Culler notes that Saussure's treatment of *parole* connects it to a concrete individual act of speaking founded on an abstract system of rules.<sup>6</sup> Mohanty finds a similar dynamics with Husserl: due to their anteriority, «all expressions exhibit a real, transitory, and an ideal abiding aspect»<sup>7</sup>.

The idealization of the expressive pole is further reinforced by complementary differences between Saussure and Husserl. For instance, at the time of *Logical Investigations* Husserl did not consider sociality essential for the production of meaning. For Husserl, meaningful forms are stabilized through their continuous repetition. The repetition in question is not of an intersubjective origin. An emphasis on perception as the predominant mode of phenomenological investigation makes Husserl focus on an individual ego. Saussure, on the other hand, considers language to be held in the social sphere by its users from the very beginning. According to Saussure, «language never exists apart from the social fact»<sup>8</sup>. Ultimately, it is in their social exchange that the signs can and will come completely to life. At the same time, from the phenomenological perspective, it would be improper to call Saussure's approach to language intersubjective. Although he approaches sociality as communication, he consistently sides with his original position: in order to

be understood, language must be idealized. In addition, for the locus of language, much in line with the scientific preferences of his times, Saussure chose the mental sphere.

Following the discoveries of the emerging cognitive sciences, Saussure imagined that the signs are exchanged through the «speaking-circuit»<sup>9</sup>. When the speaking-circuit is engaged, the brain of the first interlocutor creates mental facts associated with the representations of the linguistic sounds. After mental facts come to expression, they «unlock» a corresponding «sound image» in the brain of the other interlocutor. As a communication process, Saussure's speaking circuit is a verbalized exchange of mental products, namely signs, constituted by individual speakers in «willful and intellectual acts of speaking»<sup>10</sup>. This view of communication is unacceptable to Husserl because of its psychologism that separates consciousness from the world. Yet, at the time of his *Logical Investigations*, it is still the individual consciousness that matters most for Husserl, something that would, in turn, be unacceptable for Saussure who is interested in what holds language together rather than how it helps experience to emerge.

By idealizing language and by seeking universal laws of meaning production in the sign's structure, both Saussure's *The Course* and Husserl's *Logical Investigations* separated speech from language and, subsequently, from the search for the invisible logic of meaning production. At the same time, the similarities between Saussurean linguistics and Husserlian phenomenology turned out to be sufficiently strong as to not only co-influence each other, but spawn a synthetic method, which became known as semiotic phenomenological method, an ideal instrumentarium for the study of translation. Roman Jakobson designed such a method from the linguistic side. It might be worth mentioning that Maurice Merleau-Ponty developed a similar method from the phenomenological side.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, Jakobson applied it to his theory of translation. In the next section, I present the manner in which he synthesized phenomenology and linguistics. Our understanding of how he carried out this synthesis will help explain how and why the original Husserlian phenomenological method continues to exert such a pervasive effect on translation studies.

### 3. The Phenomenological Structuralism of Roman Jakobson

In developing his theory and method, Jakobson begins with Saussure and not Husserl. He also approaches Saussure as someone to be amended. Before his encounter with phenomenology, his corrections to the general linguistic theory come in two ways. First, he no longer conceives of the sign as a product of a single relationship between the signifier and the signified. Instead, with Charles Sanders Peirce, Jakobson recognizes the possibility that far more intricate relationships could govern the process of meaning production. As a result, he comes to define the sign as a product of the difference between the series of related signifiers and signifieds. According to Jakobson, «Peirce casts light

upon the ability of every sign to be translatable into an infinite series of other signs which, in some regards, are always mutually equivalent»<sup>12</sup>. The multiplicity of inter-related signs moves Jakobson to the idea of the universe of signs organized in accordance with the universal laws of selection and combination. According to these laws, the signifier is characterized by distinctive features (opposition of sounds), while the signified is characterized by redundancy features (exclusion of irrelevant concepts). For example, when uttered, the sound image 'cat,' which stands in close phonemic relationship to the sound images 'cad,' 'cot,' 'cod' and others evoked at the same time, evokes related concepts such as 'purr,' 'fluffy,' 'hunt mice,' etc. At the same time, the same sound image typically excludes such concepts as 'revolution,' 'mumps,' and 'fire' unless they are demanded by a specific context.

This means that in order for the signifier to reach its intended signified, it has to travel a long way through multiple concepts associated with each of them within a certain paradigm. What does then guarantee that the signifier reaches its destination, that is, becomes understood? Jakobson identifies two moments that will guarantee understanding of the sign. The first moment is the intracultural intralingual unity of experience. The sign does not exist on its own or for one person. Its life is in exchange by the members of the same culture, who speak the same language. The other moment is «the convertible code» which, according to Jakobson, controls the production of the semiotic meaning.<sup>13</sup> In order for the sign to propagate itself among the users of a particular language, they must, as the minimum requirement, possess the convertible code.

Jakobson's focus on this code directly affected his theory of communication. On the one hand, Jakobson corrected Saussure's view of communication by pointing out that the latter was not just «language in use», or an exchange of messages, but a complex interpretative system that involves a number of functions, from context to contact, and a variety of semiotic systems indispensable for the understanding of the sign. Also, in contrast to the work of a linguist, who deals with the analysis of language from either the hearer's or the speaker's point of view, Jakobson urged the researcher to approach language from both perspectives simultaneously. He stated that language would become an integral part of a semiotic universe only when perceived from «within the communication system»<sup>14</sup>.

Second, Jakobson expanded Saussure's notion of language community by recognizing that for the linguistic perception of an object, it was not sufficient to have two individual brains and their respective speech mechanisms. What is needed for the linguistic product to become meaningful is intersubjective validation on the part of other people, who confirm, disconfirm, and sanction language usage. For Jakobson, the process of intersubjective constitution is a historical process as it requires generations of subjects who endow linguistic units with meaning before, during, and after a specific communicative event. The latter point made Jakobson reject Saussure's methodological prejudice about the synchronic validity of language study. Jakobson wrote:

«An insight into the dynamic synchrony of language, involving the space-time coordinates, must replace the traditional pattern of arbitrarily restricted static descriptions».<sup>15</sup>

By combining the static and the dynamic poles, synchrony and diachrony, Jakobson arrived at presenting language in communication as a complex network of transformations and stratifications of «the optimal, explicit, kernel code»<sup>16</sup>.

Jakobson's expansion of Saussure's semiology combined with his rejection of Saussure's psychologism provides a 'natural' transition to Husserlian phenomenology. The idealism of Husserl's *Logical Investigations* confirmed Jakobson's supposition that linguistic givenness is a sign that emerges out of an experience interpreted according to some immanent laws. The idea of Husserl's pure or transcendental grammar encountered by Jakobson during Husserl's presentation in Prague makes him begin his search for the most basic linguistic relationships that would hold the entire system together. For such a network of relations, Jakobson selects syntax. According to Holenstein:

«Beginning from Husserl's formal definition of syntagmatic relationships that are constitutive of a whole, Jakobson has sought to uncover universal laws underlying the constitution of language».<sup>17</sup>

He thus chooses Husserl over Saussure. With Husserl, the relationship between the signifier system and the signified system acquired a degree of structural complexity. By focusing on the Husserlian concept of the indicative sign, Jakobson expanded the Saussurean notion of the signified into a semantic concept. The signified was no longer defined as a single concept but rather as a conceptual paradigm. This phenomenological perspective allowed Jakobson to include intersubjective experience in his model of meaning production: it is through the intuiting experience that the empty indication becomes filled with the socially constructed meaning.

#### 4. Roman Jakobson: Thesis of Translatability

For his theory of translation, Jakobson suggests that translation should remain a linguistic problem, or, to be more precise, a problem of signification: for him, «the meaning of all words is definitely linguistic – or to be more precise or to be more narrow – a semiotic fact»<sup>18</sup>. Therefore, concluded Jakobson, translation should rest at the heart of generating linguistic meaning as we mundanely transform some signs (e. g., verbal) into others (e. g., non-verbal). Depending on what signs are substituted by what signs and if other languages are involved, Jakobson differentiates among: a) intralinguistic translation, or the translation as a mental transformation of the experience into language; b) interlinguistic translation, or translation proper; and c) intersemiotic translation, or translation of one sign system (e. g., writing) into another (e. g., film). Multiple levels of sign substitution within language presumed a particular kind of an economy of signs, namely, the one that allows for

interlinguistic substitutability. Hence, the thesis of translatability that rests on the claim that «all cognitive experience and its classification are conveyable in any existing language»<sup>19</sup>. At the same time, the phenomenological interest made Jakobson come up with a disclaimer did not insist that all cognitive experience was meaningful, i. e. expressible: «the grammatical pattern of language determines those aspects of each experience that must be and must not be expressed in the given language»<sup>20</sup>. For translation, this statement presents an apparent difficulty as no one language is organized or used similarly to another. Jakobson chose to overcome this problem by emphasizing a tremendous flexibility of sign substitution. In other words, where one level (verbal or non-verbal, lexical or syntactic) appears to be inadequate, another level compensates.

From the thesis of translatability, Jakobson moves to the problem of the practical execution of translation, or the problem of adequacy. He points out that the translator never translates just signs as information bits or code units but rather their combinations, or propositional statements that he calls messages: «Translation, as a process, involves two equivalent messages in two different codes»<sup>21</sup>. Messages then serve to contain selected signs. At the same time, messages are also signs. They compose even larger semiotic systems. However, although signification is separated from its expression on three levels (signifier-sign-message), it can be accessed directly and immediately through intuition. By engaging signification through intuition from a sign in one language, the translator finds its equivalent in another language and thus synchronizes the exchange of signs.

The latter point acquires particular significance when one considers how radical was Jakobson's extension of Saussure's theory into the Husserlian phenomenology. For Saussure, all the members of a speech community shared the same signs as they refer to the same concepts. However, Saussure did not perceive a community of speakers beyond one language. It is with Jakobson, who turned the intuited sign into the sign subject to substitution that this community becomes a universal community. In turn, by equating accuracy with adequacy, Jakobson proclaimed to have created a way for overcoming linguistic difference. As soon as difference was thematized as an obstacle on the way to an accurate meaning transfer, the mechanism of this transfer became the focal point of translation research. The presumption of universal rules of language, as well as the universal experience adopted from Husserl in the light of Saussure, created an unquestioned assumption about accessibility of the original meaning in the sign. The living person was reduced to the user of language and his/her interaction to an exchange of complex signs that became the main focus of translation research. By default, accuracy began to define translation ethics: a translation was deemed good if it was conducted in as neutral manner as possible.



## 5. Jacques Derrida: A Response

This is how Jacques Derrida read Jakobson:

«He [Jakobson] supposes that everyone is expected to know what a language is and the relation of one language to another and, especially, identity or difference in fact of language».<sup>22</sup>

This quote might as well sum up Derrida's critique of Jakobson's theory of translation. By asking *Who knows what language is?*, Derrida focuses precisely on the linguistic orientation of Jakobson's phenomenological structuralism and its ontology. According to Derrida, the problem with Jakobson's understanding of language is a problem of its peculiar kind of idealism that combines Saussurean linguistics and Husserlian essentialism. In *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida notes that Husserl does not define the sign or, to be more exact, there is a lack of a precise definition. Derrida also notes that Saussure is ambiguous about his definition of the sign:

«As for sign, if we retain it, it is because we find nothing else to replace it, everyday language suggesting no other».<sup>23</sup>

One can attempt to close this ambiguity by conceiving of it as a lack. One can also extend it by thematizing it as a surplus.

According to Derrida, Jakobson does exactly the former as he attempts to replenish the lack by systematizing invisible relations in terms of a priori laws. He thus suggests that signification originates on the border of linguistic experience and comes to life through mental processes that represent. Derrida also observes that Jakobson's synthesis of two concepts—intentional givenness and differential oppositions—makes him think of the sign in both phenomenological and structural terms, a combination that is possible only if language is taken as foundational for experience. As a linguist, Jakobson naturally limits his inquiry to language. A phenomenological extension taken through Husserl who, in his *Logical Investigations*, sees language as a gateway to experience, confirms the linguistic nature of the hidden system of meaning production. Derrida writes:

«Husserl draws a boundary which passes not between language and the nonlinguistic but within language in general, between the explicit and nonexplicit».<sup>24</sup>

For Husserl, only the nonexplicit is that which produces truth or ideality rather than that which simply records it. In other words, Husserl assigns a functionally superior status to indication. Derrida sums up the Husserlian prejudice as follows:

«All speech inasmuch as it is engaged in communication and manifests lived experience operates as indication».<sup>25</sup>

This means that the body and its sensual side make every expression pass through the indicative sphere. Since the other person is inaccessible, only the inner meaning can be «present to itself» in the life of a present that has not gone out in the world of speech. Therefore, concludes Derrida, for Husserl, only the solitary mental life restores pure expression. In order to reach it, one has to turn inward. What remains as a result of this inversion is indication, which becomes the sign proper. In the same manner, by dichotomizing the sign into elements supported by the idea of differential and formal characteristics of language, Saussure was led to think of a «concept signified in and of itself»<sup>26</sup>. By agreeing with Husserl and Saussure on these premises, Jakobson commits himself to linguistic idealism, which largely determines his methodological procedures.

Derrida claims that by taking speech as separate from language, Jakobson repeats the mistake of Saussure who, although starting his investigation of language with speech, considered speech devoid of meaningfulness in itself; it functions only as a medium for the signified. Husserl's focus on syntax distracts Jakobson from speech as speaking even further. As a result, Jakobson's conception of speech acquires the same structural backbone as language. Jakobson recognizes the closed fixed nature of speech as a system and develops a theory of communication, in which multiple functions (contact, context, person, etc.) make the exchange of signs a dynamic event. However, founded on horizontal differences between sound and sound, and supported by contextual, relational, and other factors, the functions serve to 'stabilize' a particular meaning on the surface of linguistic expression. Derrida traces the need to fix the sign to its presumed equivocality:

«This equivocality, which weighs upon the model of the sign, marks the semiological project itself and the organic totality of its concepts, in particular that of communication, which in effect implies a transmission charged with making pass, from one subject to another, the identity of a signified object, of a meaning or of a concept rightfully separable from the process of passage and from the signifying operation».<sup>27</sup>

Derrida counters Jakobson's concepts of the sign as ideal, language as foundational, and speech as «expressionless» with two concepts of his own: *voix* (voix) and *différance*. According to Derrida, *voix* hears itself; it is tangible and material. However, the materiality of *voix* is different from the actual speech evoked to meet actual circumstances. According to Derrida, speech is born in a context and out of that context. It is indeed social and material. At the same time, no context can make meaning fully present; signification comes from a distance, which can never be traced completely as we can never walk outside language. Unlike speech, *voix* defies a possibility for language to be taken in abstraction. *Voix* is, therefore, the primordial condition for meaningfulness. Similarly to language, speech is an abstraction from *voix* once it is endowed with structure. What allows Saussure and Jakobson to consider speech on its own is the structure of the phonemic difference. According

to Derrida, Saussure considers phonemes to be essential for the *voice* to be heard; thus, he equates the *voice* that can never be heard in full with phonemic opposition. It is at this point that Derrida draws the line between the structure of phonemic opposition and his concept of *differ-ance*. If the former can be described and classified in formal oppositional taxonomies, the latter can be only glimpsed and striven for. Its evocation is the preoriginary experience that is always already separated from its origin by its continuously changing environment.

In this model, the original meaning of the sign can only be retrieved if *differ-ance* gets fixed as signification by either vertical or horizontal signifier-signified relations that form on the surface of the primordial experience. To recognize *differ-ance* means to recognize the absence of these relations; it also means to acknowledge the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the spacing by means of which elements are related to each other: «*Differ-ance* is the becoming-space of the spoken chain»<sup>28</sup>. The movement of *differ-ance* is neither unilateral nor bi-lateral. It is generative. As such, it demands a historical dimension that would be incompatible with «the static, synchronic, taxonomic motifs in the concept of structure»<sup>29</sup>. The transition from understanding meaning as grounded in linguistic experience and thus attainable, to the understanding of meaning as grounded in preoriginary experience and thus unattainable, is the transition from structural phenomenology to quasi-transcendental phenomenology.

Quasi-transcendental phenomenology is a phenomenology that takes *differ-ance* as the condition for the possibility of specific differences, e. g. for the difference between speech and writing.<sup>30</sup> *Differ-ance* is then *quasi-a priori*: It is not *a priori* in the same sense in which space and time are *a priori* in Kant, who defines time and space as the conditions for the possibility of all experience. The reduction to *differ-ance* does not lead to the phenomenon's constitutive core. In other words, *differ-ance* is transcendental but without being constitutive of differences in itself. Its constitutive in-between therefore rejects both the stability of the signified and the instability of the signifier. At the same time, *differ-ance* that exists as if separately from being provides for a foundation-less phenomenology. This quasi-transcendental phenomenological position allows Derrida to retain metaphysical terms without defining the ontological status of these structures. In order to avoid being identified with the traditional metaphysics, Derrida emphasizes that, in his use, the terms *differ-ance*, or *supplementation*, or *dissemination*, or *hymen*, or *trace* oscillate. By making them tremble, Derrida claims, we can reinscribe them into a different discourse and, therefore, avoid the trap of metaphysics.

When later Derrida replaces the *voice* as spoken with the *voice* as written, *differ-ance* ensures the transition. Like phonemes, grams or texts function as aspects of difference, elusive in their pre-separated multiplicity. Writing is then essentially the same as speech, except for its precedence over it as a mode of symbolic and subconscious expression of the self. As a product of *voice* and *differ-ance*, the Derridian sign loses both its universality and ideality. For Derrida,

«the sign is impure ideality, a membrane between the world and subject that remains entangled in the web of worldliness while inhabiting the zone of ideality – worldliness not in its simple materiality, which is always capable of being allied to the project of presence or of being reduced, but in its essential non-self-identity, its incapacity to be teleologically defined by reference to the actual or in-principle possibility of fulfillment»<sup>31</sup>.

*Voice* and *differánce* inform Derrida's understanding of translation as impossible. Translation is impossible as it can never translate the original word because that word is uttered in the voice that belongs to no particular language. One can call it the First Word, the Word of God. It is also the First Sign. The First Sign arises from the primordial experience that is perpetually concealed in the play of *differánce*. It thus defies accessibility. In this interpretation of translation, Derrida finds affinity with Walter Benjamin, who defined the model of all translation as «the intralinear translation into one's own language of the sacred text»<sup>32</sup>. From this perspective, Jakobson's classification of three types of translation appears Cartesian as it clearly features a mind/world split. For example, intralingual translation is an explicitly mentalist operation. Interlingual translation is already more than a cognitive process and that should not be reduced to two mental operations, but involves separate cultures and languages that communicate on the basis of some universal experience of the world. Last, the intersemiotic translation is a completely idealized operation that does not even involve the psychology of the participants.

«When it is a question of translation 'proper,' the other uses of the word translation would be in a position of intralingual or inadequate translation, like metaphors, in short, like twists or turns of translation in the proper sense».<sup>33</sup>

But how can we speak about translation as proper or improper? The word 'Babel' provides an example: can we say where this name belongs «properly and simply»? What is this sphere of universal rules and operations that generated the first signification? If we are not bale of making an originary attribution, how can we translate at all?

Yet, urges Derrida, we ought to translate. Striving for translation is not simply the desire for the unknown; it is an ethical imperative. The ethics of translation as accurate meaning transfer is only possible if language provides an ideal foundation for such an operation. For Derrida, there will be a different understanding of ethics if we begin not from the pre-given order of language but from beyond languages in the order of their relation to each other. This order is concealed by *differánce*. Translation resides in *differánce*. An investigation of linguistic rules within one language or many will not shed light on their co-existence. Languages do not stand in abatement waiting to be explored. Nor do they exist independently, one from another. They are always next to each other influencing and being influenced by each other. Yet, to find an origin amidst many languages speaking at the same time is impossible: multiplicity

turns into polyphony. The origin drowns in the generality of meaning. As a guide to the origin, translation points to its inaccessibility.

Moreover, Derrida asks, *Is it not for the sake of a mystery of human existence that this origin is forever concealed?* It is futile and dangerous to conceive of language as a system built on pure structures with all its sign elements orderly and available to a scientist's scrutiny. Language that spits out recognizable signs is a transparent language. When brought to reason, such language demands universality; it becomes a container of universal truth and, finally, an instrument of colonial domination. The relationship between language and translation is not reversible. By striving to understand translation, we do not necessarily understand language and vice versa. It is in striving, however, that we discover the ethical dimension of communication across totalities of languages. This dimension requires a new element, – an embodied encounter of differences. Borrowing from Levinas, Derrida suggests that this intermediate structure is *face* or that which «stands for the beginning that invites forbidden transparency, impossible univocity»<sup>34</sup>. The plurivocity of translation makes the encounter the first imperative: «the original is the first debtor, the first petitioner; it begins by lacking and by pleading for translation»<sup>35</sup>.

By refocusing translation problematics from the ideal sphere of language to the sphere of originary experiential givenness, Derrida brought translation into the properly phenomenological Husserlian realm. On the strength of voice and *differánce*, which function as a quasi-transcendental conditions for experience, Derrida's degramatized and language, presenting it in an empirically-friendly configuration. *Differánce* functioned as the primary condition for the language before grammar and *voice* gave itself as the originary condition for expression before phonetics. With this reformulation, Derrida introduced a new structure of the sign: the co-determinate relation between the actual and the virtual, or empirical and transcendental; hence, quasi-phenomenological approach. The two concepts put the primacy of the written translation in question and, at the same time, introduced the possibility for approaching translation as a face-to-face phenomenon. Together with the pre-established phenomenality of *voice* and *differánce*, the phenomenon of interpreting brought about a methodological extension to the general phenomenological procedure.

In his analysis Derrida is convincing in showing that instead of starting with the eidetic analysis of relational and hierarchical essential features of what is being given (phonemes, morphemes, sememes, etc.), one should begin with the givenness itself. This quasi-transcendental turn reverses the structural phenomenological understanding of the world as a sign given to the ego's semiotic apprehension and constructs it as a non-contingent play of differences that allows for an alternative reading of translation as an opening-space for the originating meaning. At the same time, by placing translation in the sphere of the original givenness, Derrida turns the problem of translation into an *aporia*; as something that rests on a threshold of some sorts, in a place «where it

would be no longer possible to constitute a problem because there is no longer any problem»<sup>36</sup>. Approached as *aporetic*, translation discourages an inquiry that seeks to understand its phenomenality as either an empirical or a transcendental phenomenon. It rather positions translation in the liminal sphere, between an expressed content and the underlying conditions for this expression, giving primacy to such concepts as ambiguity, plurivocity, intertextuality, or the kind of complexity that can only be accessed through the actual experience of encountering the alien.

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