Translation Beyond Empire: On the Equiprimordiality of Original and Translation

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Abstract

The article attempts to reply to two main questions: Does the original text have ontological and/or epistemological primacy over its translation? Is the relation between the original text and its translation best depicted as the relation between a primary and a secondary entity? Examining these questions, I claim that the original text and the translation are equally primordial. My argument is that the prerogative to primordiality of the original is based in the relation of meaning to text, whether the meaning is transcendent or immanent to text. I show, however, that this prerogative is not justified in the transcendence or the immanence theory. Having shown its inconsistency, the article explores the reasons why this view of the relation between original and translation has been so influential. My contention is that this view has served translations conducted under the guise of imperialist goals. Translation under the premise of the equiprimordiality takes the form of a circulation of texts, whose workings go beyond the politics of Empire.

Keywords: *translation, politics, Enlightenment, empire, postcolonialism, post-1989, Nietzsche, Heiner Müller, Spivak*

Introduction[1]

While holding to the distinction between the original text and its translation, I question the claim to primacy of the original over the translation. I examine whether meaning is transcendent or imminent to an original text. My argument is that the claim to primacy of the original is not justified either from the viewpoint of a transcendence theory or from an immanence theory of sense. Therefore, my suggestion is that the original has equal ontological status and equal epistemological value as its translation.

In the last part of the article, I approach the consequences of the equiprimordiality of original text and translation by first exploring the reasons why the primacy claim has been so influential, and secondly, by exploring translation as a form of cultural circulation. The two aspects are interrelated, because the cultural premises underlying the primacy claim can be traced to the Enlightenment project to create a hierarchical structure of sense, or as Heiner Müller puts it metaphorically, 'to rebuild the tower of Babel.' Therefore, I frame the discussion about translation in the context by consulting Müller's observations that this project came to an end with the world-historical event of 1989 when languages were set free (*freigesetzt*) to generate meaning without a relation to the hierarchical structure. The function of translation accounts for a multi-lingual world. Its praxis is not to negotiate sense, but rather, it becomes a form of cultural

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[1] I wish to thank Professor William L. McBride and Professor Leonard Harris for making valuable suggestions and posing challenging questions regarding different parts of this paper.

circulation, whereby it generates new possibilities.

In my view, it is only possible to speak fully of translation as cultural circulation, when we clarified the claim of primacy, which is the purpose of this paper. It opens then the way for thinking about cultural transfer and translation without having to worry about the dependency of one text from the other, one language on the other, or one culture on the other.

The Distinction between Original and Translation

In contemporary translation theories, the distinction between original texts and translation passes almost as an axiom. The primacy of the original text over the translated text is another basic presumption, which rarely is questioned. Many theoretical and practical discussions in translation are derivative of these premises, and basic concepts in translation theories are grounded in these premises. I will first survey conceptually the scope of discussions in which the primacy claim is assumed, and then demonstrate more concretely what this concept of primacy really means. There are five major discussions in contemporary translation theory that can demonstrate the scope of the primacy claim.

1. The discussion about foreignization or domestication asks the question, whether the translation should be close to the original literal meaning and in effect appear 'foreign' to the reader, or whether it should be close to the 'spirit' of the text and to use the target language in a natural way (i.e., domesticating the text).[2] Both methods presume the authority of the original text. While the first claims to be loyal to the words and expressions of text, the other claims to be loyal to its spirit.

2. The discussion about accuracy as a criterion for translation asks the following questions: How literal should a translation be? How faithful should it be to the original text? What is allowed and where is it allowed to betray the original? How much accuracy should be sacrificed for clarity? All these questions presume that the original text is ideal for the translation, which will always be deficient because it cannot be completely accurate and completely clear or naturally formulated. Any deviation from the original is considered a sort of aberration.

3. The distinction between source and target language corresponds with that of the original text and the translation. Translators would not embrace the idea that the origin's language has a primacy over the target language per se. However, translation is viewed as a unidirectional operation;[3] that is, it is the transfer of meaning from one language to the other, an inscription of meaning in the target language, or decoding meaning in one language and recoding it in another.[4] In the process of translation, the source language

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[2] For more about the foreignization and domestication discussion, see Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London: Routledge, 2008). Venuti is a proponent of the foreignization position in this discussion.

[3] The one who put forward the notion of translation as unidirectional operation was Annie Brisset. See Annie Brisset, 'The Search for a Native Language: Translation and Cultural Identity', in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London: Routledge, 2000), 343.

[4] For the view of translation as an operation of coding, decoding and recoding, see William Frawley, 'Prolegomenon to a Theory of Translation', in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti, (London: Routledge, 2000), 252f. 'Translation is a unidirectional operation between two given languages. The target language is thus, every bit as much as the source language, a sine qua non of the translative operation.' See Brisset, 343. Brisset argues further that if the target language remains elusive, translation is rendered impossible. Simon Gikandi critiques this account for translation, because it assumes that both

functions as a standard against which the target language is measured, whether it has an equivalent or just a similar word, expression, idiom, or grammatical structure to the text in the original. In total, the process transfers a text unidirectionally from one language to another and/or from one culture to another.

4. The aesthetics of a text and the aesthetic experience of the reader/receiver refer to the original text and audience.

5. The original text is the reference point concerning meaning for the translation. It is assumed that meaning is located in the text and coded in the source language. Translation under the criteria of accuracy and equivalence is possible, though, because meaning and thought are separate from language. If they were not separate, changing language would generate different meanings automatically. That would make the demand for finding equivalent coding absurd. Identifying the meaning and taking freedom at formulating the translation would make the demand for faithful translation unattainable. Subsequently, different translations of the same text should carry the same meaning.

As it can be seen from this conceptual survey, the primacy claim is at work in different discussions in and basic concepts of translation theory. It is not accidental that the name 'original text' refers already to primacy. Not only because it is referred to as the 'primary text', but also because the name 'origin' (i.e., *arche*, *principum*, *Ursprung*) in Western metaphysics refers to epistemological and ontological primacy. My claim is that the primacy claim derives its meaning from metaphysical conception of 'origin', particularly origin qua source and origin qua cause.

Origin qua source is taken to have ontological primacy over what emanates from it. The original text has ontological precedence or primacy in the described debate about translation, because it is accepted that without the original text, there is no translation. So the translation emanates from the original, i.e., it is secondary to it. This is a typical dependency relation between primary and secondary entities. Paradigmatic in Ancient Greek metaphysics for this relation was parents-child-relation.[5] Parents are the origin of the child. The latter is contingent upon the former, which equally means, the existence of parents is necessary for the existence or the coming-to-being of the child. The necessary has ontological primacy before the contingent.

Origin qua cause or explanation has epistemological primacy over the caused or explained. The original text's relation to the translation has an equivalent status of the Aristotelian *arche* in the sense that it makes it possible. The original text is the locus of meaning, and the translation is – ideally – the inscription of this meaning in a different language. The translation does not change the meaning of the original text in the source language. In this way, the original text is slightly different from the Aristotelian *arche*,

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languages, i.e. source and target, are stable and static entities. However, languages are dynamic and changing. See also Simon Gikandi, 'Contested Grammars: Comparative Literature, Translation, and the Challenge of Locality', in *A Companion to Comparative Literature*, eds Ali Behdad and Thomas Dominic (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 262.

[5] Jean-Pierre Vernant shows, how different concepts of metaphysics are abstractions of social-political reality in Ancient Greece. Familial relations and their juridical status are among the most important institutions for the development of metaphysical concepts. For more about this, see Jean-Pierre Vernant, *The Origins of Greek Thought* (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1982); for an exemplary work of Vernant, which makes clear his approach to investigating the anthropological and historical background of the genesis of philosophical concepts, see Jean-Pierre Vernant, 'The Individual in the City-State', in Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Mortals and Immortals: Collected Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 318-35.

because for Aristotle the *arche* and what it makes possible are inseparable. More importantly, the original text is understood here as self-sufficient when it comes to questions of meaning. The translation is dependent for its meaning on the original.

The primacy claim rests on the relation between text and meaning. The epistemological primacy is based on meaning, because the translation is measured against the original in terms of the adequacy and accuracy of inscribing meaning in the other language. Meaning is first identified in the original. It remains also the reference point for meaning; hence, it is unacceptable or it is considered a weakness in modern translation practice and theory to translate second-handedly (i.e., translation from a translation). The ontological primacy of the original is based on the view that the translation has access to meaning only through the original. In other words, the translation cannot begin without the original, which contains the meaning. So, there is no translation without original.

It is worth noting that the primacy claim does not distinguish between translations as to how good or bad they are. When we say the original has ontological primacy and higher epistemological value, then no matter how good or poor a translation is the original retains this primacy. After we established the equiprimordiality of original text and translation, we can discuss the question, what counts as a 'good' translation.

On the Flaws of the Primacy Claim: The Example of Aristoteles Arabus

Before proceeding to pursue the transcendence/immanence relation of text and meaning, I will take a standard example of translation, namely the translation of Aristotle's works into Arabic, and examine, whether the claim to primacy of the original over translation depicts best the relation between the original text and translation. This example challenges in my view the claim to primacy.

The School of Hunayn bin Ishaq (known in Latin as *Iohannitius*, d. 873) and the Circle of Al-Kindi (d. 870) translated the bulk of the Aristotelian oeuvre at the height of the translation movement in the 8th -10th century.[6] Notably the translation movement develops against the background of material conditions created by uniting Egypt and the Fertile Crescent with Persia and India administratively and economically: 'This allowed for the free flow of raw materials and manufactured goods, agricultural products and luxury items, people and services, techniques and skills, ideas, methods, and modes of thought.'[7] Thus, the translation of Aristotle comes in the midst of a culture of circulation and of intense cultural circulation across geographies and times.

The *aristoteles arabus* – as it is referred to the systematized collection of these translations – raises several issues with the claim to primacy of the original.
1. The autarchy of the original vis-à-vis the translation proves to be problematic. The Arabic translation changed the way of reading Aristotle, not only in the Arabic speaking 'medieval' philosophy, but also Aristotle of the Latin-speaking philosophy as well as theology. From this perspective, the translation has the capacity to influence the

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[6] For more about the translation movement and especially of philosophical works, see Dimitri Gutas. G*reek Thought, Arabic Culture* (London: Routledge, 1998); Gerhard Endreß, 'The Circle of al-Kindi. Early Arabic Translations from the Greek and the Rise of Islamic Philosophy', in *The Ancient Tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism*, eds Gerhard Endress and Remke Kruk (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 43-76.
[7] Gutas, 11-12.

meaning of the original.

2. The ontological primacy of the original is also problematic, because as it has often been argued, the Arabic translation was a major factor in the survival of many works of Aristotle, in the light of the declining interest in philosophy in late antiquity and early medieval times in Europe. Works of other authors did, in fact, survive only in translation—for example, *De Caelo* or *al-mabadi'* by Alexander of Aphrodisias (d. ca. 200AD), the main Aristotle commentator of late antiquity.[8] So, without translation there could be no knowledge of the original.

3. These translations call into question the authority of the original over meaning. From Hunayn ibn Ishaq's 'Epistle on the Translations of Galen', we learn that it was accepted in the translation praxis of his School to translate the Greek text into Syriac, which was the main language of the Levantine Christians, and then into Arabic.[9] The Toledo School of Translation under Alfonso X of Castile then translated Aristotle mostly from Arabic into Latin.

4. In his Epistle Hunayn bin Ishaq discusses theoretical issues related to translation, e.g., whether translations should transfer meaning or remain faithful to the original words of the text. Hunayn is an advocate of non-literal and rather holistic translation that focuses on the total meaning of the text, while the main concern of al-Kindi's Circle was words and concepts (i.e., a literal approach). We see that contemporary questions in translation theory are centuries old, e.g., whether the text should be interpreted according to its spirit or whether it should be taken literally. The same questions were discussed by early exegetics and interpreters of the Koran in the Arabic tradition.

Regardless of the intentions and theorizing of the Arabic translators, whether the literal or the non-literal school, the development of their translations took a different path in the reception. The *aristoteles arabus* became an independent set of texts from the *aristoteles graecus*. Questions of accuracy, adequacy, or faithfulness to the original become obsolete when we consider the digestion and organic integration of certain Aristotelian works in the Arabo-Islamic culture.

This is why we need to complicate our ways of thinking about translation. We need to question simplistic *prima facie* assumptions about what we do when we translate. I am sympathetic to the theorizing about translation of post-colonial scholars, e.g., G. Spivak and S. Gikandi or the reflections of K. A. Appiah about the issue. That is the case because they happen to translate from languages coming from different cultures and cultures bound by relations of power, which makes their theorizing rather complicated. In developing my position, I will consult and discuss some of their positions.

Appiah resists the idea that translation has anything to do with meaning. I will discuss his position first, because he complicates the way of thinking about translation and second, because I will question the primacy claim by way of evaluating the meaning-centrism in the current translation debate. Appiah takes issue with the prima facie perception that translation 'is an attempt to find ways of saying in one language something that means the same as what has been said in another.'[10] Appiah adds a qualification then to his approach when he says that translation has nothing to do with

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[8]   See Genequand, Charles, ed. *Alexander of Aphrodisias On the Cosmos* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

[9]   See Bergsträsser, Gotthelf (Hg.), *Hunain Ibn Ishaq. Über die Syrischen und Arabischen Galen Übersetzungen* (Leipzig: DMG. 1925).

[10]   Kwame Anthony Appiah, 'Thick Translation', in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London: Routledge, 2000), 418.

meaning if what we understand under meaning is what analytical philosophers mean with it. At the core of this philosophical semantics, meaning is the intention of an actor towards or within an action. The purposefulness is the meaning of the deed. In Appiah's rendering of their theory, he refers to utterance as the basic unit of language. His argument is that if meaning of an utterance is the intention or the purpose implied by the intention of the actor who uttered it in a certain situation, then to translate it according to the prima facie perception is to reproduce the intention and purposefulness in the same way but in a different language. However, this reproduction does not work, because the situation cannot be possibly reproduced.

The argument is elegant and well stated. Nevertheless, the added qualification is important, because it is possible to imagine a different definition of meaning. Most literary translators would not see novels or dramas as a collection of utterances, but rather as units of sense built within a certain cultural and linguistic tradition and context. If we change the way we understand meaning, then we will need to readjust the argument against meaning centrism.

Whilst I do agree on point of questioning meaning-centrism in translation theory, I do not believe reducing meaning to what analytic semantics takes it to be serves the purpose for two main reasons. First, they are concerned with basic forms of speech in ordinary (i.e., everyday life) situations. Moving to highly complex formulations in fiction (not in natural speech situations) does not work well normally. We should state once more that a novel is not a collection of utterances. Secondly, Appiah does not discuss one of the central aspects of analytic semantics, namely its concern with speech situations, which attempts (among other things) to reconstruct criteria for sense (What can we say meaningfully? What utterances are logically senseless?). This aspect of analytic semantics is elementary to its theory of meaning.

However, I think analytic semantics is central to the philosophical theory of sense. Fiction books, in contrast, are full of 'senseless' utterances, expressions, and words. Religious texts, like fictional works, are also replete with 'senseless' utterances.

The word of the Hebrew bible, בראשית (*be-rashit*), for instance, refers to 'In the Beginning'. The Beginning is a metaphysical condition that exceeds rational cognition. Hence, the word itself is senseless according to these sense-criteria. But this does not make it untranslatable. When Habermas calls on religious faith-groups to translate their religious language to a publicly accessible language, he implies that the communication within that closed system or network of reference is meaningful, and it is possible to change that framework to a secular post-metaphysical frame of reference, since even a metaphysical expression like 'The Beginning' can be rendered semantically meaningful. Therefore, it is true and yet uncontroversial that meaning as used in the analytic tradition is not acceptable because its concept of meaning is relatively narrow.

If we want to read a translation of the Bible, we want to find the word בראשית translated too, whether it is a metaphysical expression or not. In the Septuaginta, the Hellenistic translation, the name of the first book's title is called Γένεσις. This indicates that the translator created the meaning out of the context of the first book. Ancient Greek lacks a word for בראשית, and the Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ Λόγος means something completely different. The word Genesis does not negotiate meaning insofar as the translator tried to identify the Greek word with the most similar extension to that of the Hebrew word; that is rather unlikely. The word Genesis fits the context of the book when narrated into Hellenistic ears. They hear the story, the emergence, of the world.

Meaning is central for the claim to primacy of the original, and I suggest

questioning it by looking at the relation between text and meaning. I do not give a definition of meaning because I am interested in the formal relation between text and meaning, which could be described as either transcendence or immanence, to which I would like to turn now.

Transcendence and Immanence of Meaning to Text

Benjamin's essay on 'The Task of the Translator' can shed light on the transcendence relation of meaning to text.[11] From my point view, Benjamin s a Janus-Head in this essay. He holds to the centrality of meaning and makes a strong claim to transcendent meaning, but at the same time he breaks from the primacy claim in that he questions the autarchy of the original.

Benjamin quotes Mallarmé and concedes that 'the supreme language' is lacking, while the plurality of languages creates imperfections that prevent the materialization of truth through the uttering of words. For Benjamin, this supreme language—or as he calls it the one true language—manifests itself in translations rather than in the original, because 'das große Motiv einer Integration der vielen Sprachen zur einen wahren erfüllt seine Arbeit.'[12] The translation of a text confronts it with the plurality of languages and thereby measures its quality against the universal language. He evokes the concept of Romantic irony in the essay, and he thinks of translation along its lines. Translation moves the original to a 'definitive linguistic realm', and from that moment on it raises (*erheben*) with every translation in total or in parts. The original approximates the unattainable ideal of the 'supreme language' through translation.

For Benjamin, the truth and meaning of the text are not to be found in its words. The 'one true language' guarantees meaning and truth, and only in its relation to this language does the text have meaning. Meaning is separate from the original text, and this separation corresponds to the separation of the language of the original and the true one language of truth. This is why the meaning is not only separate, it is also transcendent. This is an illustration of what I call a transcendent theory of meaning. Meaning is transcendent insofar as it is stable, while the text is historical and changing. For Benjamin, translation establishes the relation between the 'true language' and transfers the text to a *definitive* (*endgültig*) realm. In other words, translation moves the text from the realm of historical changing meanings to the realm of stable meaning.

Benjamin argues here against the autarchy of the original, because it is the translation, in fact, that makes the original survive. It is by its power of 'elevating' or 'raising' the original 'like air into the ether' that the text becomes eternal. Because the meaning is separate and transcendent, the text does not correspond to the original. The text is the interplay between all translations and the original. The original is just one instantiation of that transcendent meaning among other translations. The true meaning of the original can be discovered only in the interplay between translations and the original.

The claim to ontological primacy is not justified, because the translation is equally responsible for the survival of the original. There is no sufficient justification for

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[11] Walter Benjamin, 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers', in *Gesammelte Schriften. Bd. IV/1* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972).

[12] Benjamin, 16. Because 'the great motivation of integrating many languages into the one true language fulfills [the translator's] work.' All translation hereafter are mine, if not stated otherwise.

ontological primacy when meaning is separate from and transcendent to the original, because original and translation are equal instantiations of the same text. The ideal meaning and text have epistemological primacy before all instantiations, but there is no primacy of one instantiation before the other.

The transcendence theory makes strong ontological claims about the status of meaning, language, and text. It is not the place to evaluate these claims but to mention that the immanence theory was developed against the backdrop of these claims. Particularly, it questions the claim of an ideal meaning attainable by speech. The claim that sense is immanent to text says meaning is separate from speech but immanent to text. All meanings can be reconstructed from the text. However, I contend that text is not a separate solipsist unit that has all meanings. It exists in relation to other texts, to the intentions of the author, to the interpretations and its reception. All these relations belong to the meanings, which are immanent to the text. What this meaning does not have is the ontological status distinguishing it from the local and historical meanings of the text. This is the difference between transcendence and immanence in this question. The immanence theory says that all meanings are historical and changing. In order to find these meanings, they should be reconstructed time and again. Hence, immanent meanings are – over periods of time – unstable.

Prima facie, it seems that the original would be the source for meaning, and thereby seems to have the primacy before the translation. However, a translation does not reproduce meanings if we depart from an immanence theory. It introduces new meanings within the linguistic realm of the specific language, because the translation utilizes the resources of the language to digest the foreign text. In this way, the translated text creates new meanings in the language that are not necessarily in direct relation to the original.

Furthermore, the translation exists in relation to other texts and traditions of the target language as well as the practices of the cultural environment taking place in the target language. The original text is not the main reference point for the translation. If language and the cultural environment were successful in digesting the foreign text, the translation becomes independent from the original. Its reception within the new environment is also independent from the reception of the original. The translation begins – as it were – a new cultural life.

A translation creates immanent meanings in the linguistic and cultural realms of the new environment through which it organizes its relation to the original, just like how the original organizes its relations to the translations. Insofar as this reciprocity exists, there is equiprimordiality of the original and the translation. Because we reconstruct the meanings of a text from within the text and its intertextual relations, and the relation of the translation to the original is secondary, if the translation was absorbed in the new environment, the original has no epistemological primacy. And because the translation organizes its relation to the original, the latter has no ontological primacy.

The transcendence theory posits an ideal meaning that has an epistemological primacy before all its instantiations. The immanence theory resists the ideal meaning, and hence all meanings have equiprimordiality. Yet, whether transcendent or immanent meaning, the original and the translation have equiprimordiality.

Translation beyond Empire: The Circulation of Texts

In this part, I will attempt to answer the question why the claim of primacy (of the

original) has been so influential. Exploring the reasons requires looking at translation as a genuinely cultural praxis and also taking into account the politics of translation. I believe that the primacy claim served the cultural project of creating a pure language of reason that organizes hierarchically texts and languages. Furthermore, the primacy claim serves a certain politics of translation taking place within the framework of imperialist projects. However, translation under the premise of equiprimordiality takes the form of the *circulation* of texts, rather than that of a unidirectional movement from origin to target, which is normally associated with the term 'transfer'. I will show towards the end of this section that translation is better seen as the free movement and circulation of texts and cultural products between local contexts.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the East-German dramatist and intellectual, Heiner Müller, delivered a cultural analysis of that historical moment that carries reverberations until our day that is a quarter century after the fall. The urgency of translation as cultural praxis emerges from the premises of this analysis:

> Aufklärung war der Versuch, den Turm zu Babel wiederaufzubauen. Man glaubte, in der Vernunft die gemeinsame Sprache wiederentdeckt zu haben. Das war die Unterdrückung aller anderen Sprachen durch die Rationalität. Das Ur-Trauma unserer Zivilisation ist die Sprachverwirrung, der Verlust einer gemeinsamen Verständigungsbasis. Jetzt ist der Turm, das Projekt Aufklärung, eingestürzt. Man kann den Turm nicht wieder aufbauen, aber man kann ihn in Bewegung übersetzen. Mit dem Tod der Reflexion als konstituierender Macht sind alle anderen Sprachen freigesetzt. Die können jetzt wieder gesprochen werden.[13]

The metaphor of the tower to Babel stands for many things; most notably, it stands for the hierarchical structure of rationality. The communication can take place perfectly only if all other languages get subjugated to the examination of rationality. Rationality is the measure for what makes sense and what does not, what should be said and what can be said. The pure and perfect language of Reason guarantees the common grounds for communication at the expense and sacrifice of natural languages. We can see also that the demand for accuracy and equivalence between original and translation, whereby the former should be set as the standard for the latter, is well founded in the fear of linguistic confusion (*Sprachverwirrung*).

The humanist dream of establishing one canon of world literature fits into this project. It follows the logic that the canon is the common ground for aesthetic education and experience as well as for understanding and communicating about the totality of human life and existence. The different texts of the canon are formulations of the same idea. All other texts should be compared to and evaluated in relation to the standard canon. Thereby it creates both hierarchies and borders. The humanist project would create hierarchies of texts and languages according to the representability of certain ideas and images of the human. It draws limits and borders that separate the texts belonging to what is rational and human from those which do not. These are two of the

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[13] Heiner Müller and Frank Raddatz, 'Die Reflexion ist am Ende, die Zukunft gehört der Kunst', in *Gespräche 3*, ed. Frank Hörnigk (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008), 14. 'Enlightenment was the attempt to rebuild the tower to Babel. It was the conviction that a common language was discovered in Reason. It was the repression of all other languages through rationality. The high trauma of our civilization is the linguistic confusion: The loss of a common basis for understanding and communication. Now, the tower, the project Enlightenment, has collapsed. One cannot rebuild the tower, but one can set it in motion. With the death of reflection as constituting force, all other languages are liberated. They can be spoken now.'

techniques to repress languages and to create a stable ground for communication. However, the collapse of the Enlightenment project means that the common ground was instable and not sustainable.

Translation has two functions in the humanist project. One is to make canonical texts available and interchangeable in 'civilized' languages, since the assumption is meaning and aesthetics are universal, and they need to be translated in different languages to affirm this idea. The accuracy standard satisfies not only the primacy claim of the original canonical text, but also the creation of the common ground of communication. The other function of the translation is related to the other project of standardization by means of diminishing local differences. All that does not conform to the universal canon should be subjugated to change. If it resists change, then it is inferior, deficient, irrational, and less human. The original in imperialist politics of translation is not only a technical term for the text to be translated. The original is first and foremost the text, which is worthy of translation, since it has the universal and ideal quality to be translated into all 'civilized' languages. The universal quality of a text is imagined to be founded and based in the human experience per se. This gives it the justification to 'civilize the uncivilized,' and to repress all languages that do not conform to this standard or norm.

The mode of translation is offensive, transgressive, and out for conquest with the purpose of making the self-comfortable in the foreign by negating it. As Benjamin observes, 'alle Übersetzung [ist] nur eine irgendwie vorläufige Art […], sich mit der Fremdheit der Sprachen auseinanderzusetzen.'[14] Perhaps, we should stress the 'provisional' in this statement. It is provisional until the self becomes foreign or it negates the foreign to the degree that the foreign becomes self.

Nietzsche describes the imperialist mode and the politics of translation in his typical brutal way, which is not-free from admiration for the *imperium*. But at the core of it, he is about distinguishing between translations motivated by a sense of historicity and translations motivated by the desire to conquer:

> Sie kannten den Genuß des historischen Sinns nicht; das Vergangene und Fremde war ihnen peinlich, und als Römern ein Anreiz zu einer römischen Eroberung. In der Tat, man eroberte damals, wenn man übersetzte – nicht nur so, daß man das Historische wegließ: nein, man fügte die Anspielung auf das Gegenwärtige hinzu, man strich vor allem den Namen des Dichters hinweg und setzte den eignen an seine Stelle – nicht im Gefühl des Diebstahls, sondern mit dem allerbesten Gewissen des *imperium Romanum*.[15]

Nietzsche actually brings together three essential moments of translation:

1. Translation is genuinely a cultural praxis that fits into the broader cultural context. Probably, Nietzsche himself did not have the 'historical sense' in this passage, and we

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[14] '...all translation is only a provisional way to come to terms with the foreignness of languages.' (Benjamin, 14).

[15] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft', in *Kritische Studienausgabe,* vol. 3, ed. Giorgio Colli and Montinari Mahzzino (München: De Gruyter, 1980), 439. 'They did not know the pleasure of the historical sense; the bygone and the foreign were an embarrassment for them, and as Romans they were a stimulus for a Roman conquest. Indeed, they conquered back then, when they translated – not only in the way of omitting the historical: no, in the way of adding references to the present. Above all, one struck out the name of the poet and put one's name in its place – not with the sensation of theft, rather with the very best conscience of the *imperium Romanum*.'

might critique his essentialization of the Roman way of translation. More important is the mode of translation he is describing, which is offensive and conquering.

2. The discussion about 'domestication vs. foreignization' has its roots in these modes of translation. In fact, I would argue that the distinction is founded in the metaphysical categories of 'passivity' and 'activity'. Whereas the mode of historical translation is passive, receptive, and theoretical (in the sense of observing) and therefore the result is the foreignizing effect of the translated text on the reader, the offensive mode of translation is active, creative, and practical and hence the domestic effect of the text on reader.

3. Since it is a metaphysical distinction, Nietzsche is unmasking the basic sentiments upon which these cultural institutions and norms are constructed. And the basic sentiment is aversion to, and embarrassment from, the foreign. Ultimately, translation is a way to come to terms with the foreign in general and of language in particular. The 'Roman' imperialist mode to stay out of this embarrassment is the double-negation of the foreign. First, the imperialist subject negates the foreignness of the text through conquest. Second, by the force of the power-relation of conquest, the foreign takes a different identity, and thereby it negates itself.

A number of post-colonial scholars and students discuss translation from the reversed viewpoint, i.e., the encounter of the post-colonial subject with hegemonic European languages.[16] It is not surprising that Spivak's advice for the translator is to surrender herself to the text: 'First, then, the translator must surrender to the text. She must solicit the text to show the limits of its language, because that rhetorical aspect will point at the silence of the absolute fraying of language that the text wards off, in its special manner'.[17] Surrendering oneself to the text is perhaps the anti-thesis to the imperialist subject, which dominates and conquers the text. For her, the text guides the 'translator/reader' to its own structural silence and rhetoricity, which affirm the special possibilities of the text.

This mode of translation fits the age in which the tower of Babel has to be set in motion. When languages are liberated, as Heiner Müller observed, and they can be spoken, it seems we need translation more than ever. Spivak follows the maxim to use what is useful in the text when translating—not only what is useful in the text, but also the dominant hegemonic language of English as a platform and as a target, which has to be disrupted.

Although I find the mode of translation versus reading that Spivak describes very valuable, the talk about hegemonic languages in post-colonial studies leaves me with questions, because I suspect that the term 'hegemonic language' needs clarification. Spivak distinguishes between the English, which she uses to translate the works of Mahasweta Dovi, and the 'Transletese', which 'cannot compete with the spectacular stylistic experiments of a Monique Witting or an Alice Walker.'[18] This is a very useful distinction. She goes on to say about transletese that it is a language in which 'the literature by a woman in Palestine begins to resemble, in the feel of its prose, something by a man in Taiwan. The rhetoricity of Chinese and Arabic! The cultural politics of high-growth, capitalist Asia-Pacific, and devastated West Asia! Gender difference

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[16]   Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'The Politics of Translation', in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London: Routledge, 2000); or Gikandi, 2011.
[17]   Spivak, 400.
[18]   Spivak, 400.

inscribed and inscribing in these differences!'[19]

'Translatese' blurs differences, it sterilizes stylistic and aesthetic experimenting, and makes a nuanced language dull and tedious. Spivak's 'solution' to this problem is to translate with diligence, careful reading, and full awareness of the possibilities of Bengali and English. That is why she demands from the translator/reader to be bi-lingual. She views it as ironic that 'the wheel came full circle' and (forced) bilingualism of colonial and post-colonial subjects gives them 'a bit of an advantage'.[20] So, the solution to the problem of hegemonic languages seems too technical: Translation done carefully would disrupt the hegemony of the 'old imperial languages'.[21] However, hegemony and hegemonic language works on structural level, and I suspect technical 'solutions' alone will not touch upon the structure. I now explain my reasoning.

'Translatese' in my view is not equal to the English in which Spivak translates. While I agree that there is a mode of translation and even a dialect that we may call 'transletese', I am not quick to dismiss it. I think, it needs further examination. 'Transletese' is hegemonic, powerful and can – not in theory, but also in practice – create categories like 'Third World Literature', where the literature by a Palestinian woman feel like the prose of Taiwanese man. But this is why there are no hegemonic *languages*, if we mean with languages English, French and the like. English is not *per se* hegemonic, because it can be used as 'transletese' and as the language, which Spivak uses to translate from Bengali, i.e. a language that can do justice to the aesthetic aspirations and rhetoricity of a text.

Even though I do not endorse 'transletese', I want to understand what it can and cannot do, because what at stake is the politics of translation. The more adequate term to be explored, less spectacular, but still informative, is *lingua franca*. Transletese is possible because of the *lingua franca*, which in turn develops always alongside imperial projects. Spivak tells us, 'transletese' cannot communicate the full range of literariness of (great) novels. That is true. But the hegemony of *lingua franca*, which makes 'transletese' possible, allows us to communicate with many people around the world. When I am in a country, where English is not one of the local languages, and people make an effort to speak with me in English, I contend, this is a politics of hospitality. Spivak endorses this sort of politics. When managers of large corporation talk to each other in bad English, it is the embodiment of imperial function of transletese. Anecdotally illustrated, an Ikea top-manager said once, we don't talk Oxford or American English, we talk bad English and we are proud of it. So it is not one-sided with these things.

Spivak's framing of translation as a form of political action is basically correct; yet my contention is that the politics of (nuanced) translation moves in a different dimension than the politics of Empire. Spivak's project of making these texts 'speak English', for it 'is more just to give access to the largest number of feminists', can only happen in 'transletese', as, in order to read into the nuance and style, the reader must be a student of literature, i.e., a professional reader. Paradoxically, 'transletese' does not have the capacities to formulate the complexity, nuance, and style of these texts. In this context Spivak's project seems to move towards an aporia.

I do not suggest ways out of the aporia, but rather a sober evaluation of the potentialities of translation in the political field. As I see it, nuanced translation does not

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[19] Spivak, 400.
[20] Spivak, 404.
[21] Spivak, 406.

capitalize on Empire, which creates the possibility or the platform, i.e. the *lingua franca*, for 'transletese'. It is independent from Empire, because it is moving from local to local context. It is beyond the capacities of the practice and politics of translation to counter Empire. Further, I claim, we cannot use the instruments of Empire against itself. Using 'transletese' will not undermine Empire, because it will strengthen the *lingua franca* and we will end up serving Empire by creating 'Third World Literature'. So, not serving Empire is the only resistance, which the politics of translation can offer.

In his analysis of the present Müller asserts that the collapse of the tower of Babel means the liberation of local languages and that they can be spoken now. With Müller, I would say that local languages can circulate works of literature and other cultural artifacts between them. In fact, Müller remarks, den Turm in Bewegung übersetzen. The expression *übersetzen* (lit.: translate) is equivocal. It implies the use of translation as a way of setting the frozen structure in motion. It can also mean to transform (*über-*) the tower by setting (*-setzen*) it in motion. Translation has the capacity to set texts and experiences in motion. This motion has an origin, but has no target. It is the free-travelling and free-flaw of texts within a multi-lingual world. After we have digested its antagonisms and capitalized on its structures, we should transform them by setting them in motion.

Hence, whether in transcendence or immanence theory, origin had better not seen as primary. This puts the original and its translation on equal footings, whereby the ontological entity of each is recognized as equally worthy and having equal epistemological status. Dismantling the primacy claim creates the possibility of a politics of translation, which is independent from the politics of Empire and contrary to the imperial mode of translation.

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Traducerea dincolo de Regat. Despre echiprimordialitatea originalului și a traducerii

Articolul încearcă să răspundă la întrebările: reușește textul original să aibă întâietate din punct de vedere ontologic sau epistemologic asupra traducerii? Este relația dintre original și traducere cel mai bine descrisă ca relație dintre o entitate primară sau secundară? Examinând aceste întrebări, articolul revendică faptul că textul original și traducerea sunt primordiale în egală măsură. Argumentul meu este că revendicarea primordialității originalului se bazează pe relația de sens a textului, atunci când înțelesul este transcendent sau imanent în text. Această descoperire nu se justifică și în cazul teoriei transcendentului și a imanentului. Arătând și punctele mai puțin consistente ale acestei teorii, articolul explorează motivele pentru care viziunea asupra relației dintre original și traducere a fost atât de influentă. Punctul meu de vedere este că această viziune a folosit traducerilor care au fost realizate cu scopuri imperialiste. Traducerea sub premisa echiprimordialității ia forma circulației unor texte care pot fi interpretate dincolo de politica Imperiului.