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A Hermeneutic Critique on George Steiner's Hermeneutic Motion in Translation

Abstract. George Steiner's *Hermeneutic Motion,* published in his major book *After Babel,* is usually regarded as the most important theory in the hermeneutics and even philosophy of translation. The work, however, has received criticism by authors who normally write outside of the classical realm of hermeneutics. A lingering assumption is that hermeneutics, and even other strands of Continental philosophy, necessarily need or should rely on Steiner's postulates. A critical approach to his theory from a hermeneutic perspective can clarify how valid/practical Steiner's ideas are. Reviewing all of the chapters in *After Babel,* this study thematically unifies the criticisms on Steiner's theory, while highlighting deeper conflicts in the work. As a most substantial reading of the hermeneutic motion, the study emphasizes the importance of emerging hermeneutic theories of translation in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: translation theory, Ricoeur, Gadamer, translation studies, literary translation.

Introduction

Many translation studies (TS) readers assume that the most significant twentieth-century work in hermeneutics and translation is George Steiner's four-fold *Hermeneutic Motion,* published in his voluminous book *After Babel* (1998; previously published 1975, 1992; this title is abbreviated as AB throughout the paper). Although a highly influential and potentially the most important philosophical publication in modern translation theory, Steiner's work is itself a narrative to be re-examined in the light of developments in translation and hermeneutics, especially those occurring over the second decade of the twenty-first century. Although the work has received criticism from non-hermeneutic authors, there has rarely been a hermeneutic examination of the book. Such a re-reading is overriding for the newly emerging theories, such as translational hermeneutics (Stanley, O'Keeffe, Stolze, and Cercel 2018; Stolze, Stanley and Cercel 2015), particularly as these movements might be unjustifiably compared to or associated with Steiner's approach.

Vague, enigmatic and unconventional diction/style, non-scientificity, non-systematicality, (perceived but apparently misunderstood) bias against women, tendency to avoid analysis, and universalist ideals are among the major topics of criticisms of Steiner's work. This study, taking a hermeneutic stance, unifies and tries to unfold even deeper problems in the hermeneutic motion, by

recourse to the works of other hermeneutic thinkers (e.g. Gadamer and Ricoeur) and to novel theoretical contributions, particularly translational hermeneutics. In doing so, this critical approach first reviews all of the chapters in *After Babel,* collecting the pieces that shape the hermeneutic motion. The study then divides the problems into four groups that are further explored and elaborated on: overcomplicated style and diction; overreliance on literature; theoretical shortcomings; methodological shortcomings.

The investigation, quite contrary to popular belief, reveals that Steiner's reading only partially relies on hermeneutics, and that at many levels it is counter-productive to hermeneutic research. For instance, emphasis on Universal Grammar, as an epistemological notion, would violate such ontological principles as the historicity and situatedness of human experience. Furthermore, universalist equilibrium, as the ultimate purpose of the four-fold process, is a misconception and is not even supported by Steiner's examples. As a most comprehensive reading of Steiner's translation theory, the study emphasizes the systemacity and applicability of innovative trends in hermeneutic theorizing, while underscoring the significance of Ricoeur's philosophy and the works of authors contributing to translational hermeneutics.

Steiner's translation theory
After Babel

Steiner's hermeneutic motion, although usually construed in isolation from the other chapters in *After Babel,* emerges from a series of investigations and criticisms presented before Chapter Five (in which the central theory is proposed). As a result, a thorough understanding of the theory is only possible when the highlights and relevant arguments addressed in the preceding chapters are well scrutinized. In this section, apart from Chapter Five (*The Hermeneutic Motion*), the rest of the chapters are briefly reviewed. As the reservoir of concepts in *After Babel* covers an unbelievably huge number of concerns from various disciplines, the main purpose of this section is to point out, even selectively, the themes addressed in the book. Meanwhile, the parts and pieces that ultimately contribute to the formation of Steiner's translation/interpretation theory are explored in further detail.

Composed of six chapters (and a total of 538 pages), *After Babel* represents a semi-encyclopedic book which, despite a relatively coherent plotline, does not show any thematic centrality. The reader is bombarded with a seemingly endless collection of notions, theories, conceptions, ideas and hypotheses gathered from a considerable number of disciplines. The first chapter, Understanding as Translation, is an attempt to build a grand metaphorical system in which "translation" refers to any possible mode of communication. The major notions dealt with in the chapter include interpreting a nation's past literary treasure, linguistic change over time (as studied in lexico-statistics), the biology of language, the Middle Ages, and language and social class. Steiner views all sources of difference among people as a form of "translation."

The idea of "privileged inferiority" (AB: 39), too, describes the social and cognitive status of women/children in communication with males, who are usually powerful interlocutors. The con-

clusion made in this chapter is: "inside or between languages, human communication equals translation. A study of translation is a study of language" (AB: 49). In these examples, however, translation substantially loses its academic or disciplinary sense and becomes an unbounded frame that could potentially cover any sort of dialogue. Regardless of the rich background reviewed in Chapter One, the attempt to attribute any mode of understanding/dialogue to translation rests on shaky ground, because this approach over-generalizes the notion of translation while ignoring relevant philosophical discussions. Trying to resolve the challenging problem of "understanding (verstehen) versus explanation (erklären)" in the German hermeneutic tradition, Ricoeur (1976) devotes several passages to the differences between understanding, explanation and interpretation. He then makes an important conclusion:

> … the polarity between explanation and understanding in reading must not be treated in dualistic terms, but as a complex and highly mediated dialectic. Then the term interpretation may be applied, not to a particular case of understanding […], but to the whole process that encompasses explanation and understanding (Ricoeur, 1976: 74).

This reading solves two basic problems: first it avoids overemphasis on understanding (which was common to Heidegger's Fundamental Ontology), and second it suggests that interpretation could serve as a more comprehensive notion which can also incorporate explanation. Understanding as Translation, then, appears to be a title that remains problematic as the basis of Steiner's translation theory. Considering Ricoeur's argument, more feasible titles would be *Understanding as Interpretation* or *Translation as Interpretation.*

Chapter Two, *Language and Gnosis,* explores the roots of linguistic diversity across cultures, addressing biological/genetic causes, language maps, human races, Darwinistic adaptive mechanisms, Benjamin's universal language (die reine Sprache; AB: 67), the possibility of translation, comparative language studies (including primitive root languages), the impact of language on civilization and vice versa, and Whorf's meta-linguistics. The heated debate between monadist untranslatability and imaginative universals is explicated in this chapter (AB: 77-9). This debate initially frames the very philosophy behind the hermeneutic motion, as Steiner quite actively tries to rule out linguistic relativity on the grounds that human beings possess universal qualities that can help them communicate. According to an important argument, "Proof that mutual transfer between languages is possible should follow immediately on the principle of *substantive universality* [emphasis added]. Translation ought, in effect, to supply that principle with its most palpable evidence" (Ab: 110).

Considering these views, one should not be surprised to discover a Chomskyan transformational-generative grammar (TGG) essence in Steiner's translation theory. Steiner defends this stance by criticizing the Humboldt-Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, showing a strong inclination towards universalism (AB: 97-103). Nonetheless, he admits that even this theoretical

stance is not sufficiently verifiable, stating, "the assumption that 'several languages' merely represent a more complex variant of 'one language' may be fallacious" (AB: 128).

In Chapter Three, *Word against Object,* Steiner (AB: 115-120) addresses an ambiguity which is overriding for the development of his theory in Chapter Five: if language is a phenomenological perception, then how could it be explored through mathematical models? This concern is highly important for the validity of Steiner's translation theory, because although he tries to pursue an interpretive approach to language, the epistemological foundation of TGG could irreparably damage the consistency of his theory. He initially explains that, "… general propositions about language can never be entirely validated" (AB: 129). To strengthen this position, he relies on a diversity of ideas that demonstrate the instability of the content of language. Arguably, if a variable does not remain existentially constant over time, it cannot be subjected to reliable verification. Therefore, despite some linguists' attempt to mathematize language, linguistic materials reveal variability over time (past, present, future): "Different ages and civilizations work differently with words, with verbal taboos, with levels of vocabulary. They probably attach differing truth-values and postulates of reality to their designation of objects" (AB, 142-3).

Exploring lingering problems in linguistic empiricism (e.g. ambiguous referentiality, the problem of falsifiability, and instability of meaning), Chapter Three clarifies many issues in Steiner's theory. Following these substantial introductory remarks, Chapter Four, *The Claims of Theory,* focuses on the history of translation (form Cicero to Hölderlin), and finally discusses hermeneutics as in the works of Schleiermacher and Gadamer (AB: 249-250). Steiner, apparently to justify his theory in the next chapter, mentions a gap in translation theory and its marginality in literature (AB: 284). A preliminary observation is that "… all theories of translation – formal, pragmatic, chronological – are only variants of a single, inescapable question. In what ways can or ought fidelity to be achieved?" (AB: 275). Following that, he initially addresses another important proposition to be later incorporated into his theory:

> Should a good translation edge its own language towards that of the original, thus creating a deliberate aura of strangeness, of peripheral opaqueness? Or should it naturalize the character of the linguistic import so as to make it at home in the speech of the translator and his readers?" (AB: 280).

The last preparatory issue mentioned in Chapter Four is the "totalizing" nature of the Steiner's translation theory, the fact that a theory of translation is a theory of language (AB: 294). Chapter Five proposes the hermeneutic motion, which is substantially elaborated in the present paper (see the sections below). Finally, Chapter Six, *Topologies of Culture,* introduces another set of theories that expand the realm of the notion of translation as explored in Chapter One. The major concern is to inspect various modes of inter-semiotic interpretation, by a reference to topology: "Topology is the branch of mathematics which deals with those relations between points and those fundamental properties of a figure which remain invariant when that figure is bent out of shape" (AB: 448). In line with this notion, translation is regarded as "the primary instrument of formulaic

expansion. It transforms the 'deep structures' of inheritance – verbal, thematic, iconographic – into 'surface structures' of social reference and currency" (AB: 452). Music and translation, traditionality, recursive linguistic structures, reduplication of archetypes, and finally the politics of English as the international language are the concluding concerns in *After Babel.*

This preview of the book will considerably clarify the postulates taken for granted in the central theory, as well as the criticism raised in this study. Obviously, although Steiner addresses a variegated network of important matters in Continental philosophy and of course in hermeneutics, he is predominantly interested in universalism, while hermeneutics as a discipline is hardly expounded in his writing.

The Hermeneutic Motion

As already mentioned, the hermeneutic motion is not an out-of-context theory, and is a result of Steiner's evaluation of other narratives coupled with his peculiar innovation. The motion involves four stages: Trust, Aggression, Incorporation and Compensation. The purpose of this process is to reach "equilibrium" at the end of the translation project. The theoretical contribution is to over-come what Steiner calls "a sterile triadic model" (AB: 319), which is identified as the distinction between literalism, paraphrase and free imitation. The first stage is called Trust, a phenomeno-logical notion that is proposed to respond to the problem of unequal understanding explored in Chapter One (e.g. temporal remoteness, perceiving the foreign, and cognitive differences between males and females).

> [Trust] is an operative convention which derives from a sequence of phenomenological assumptions about the coherence of the world, about the presence of meaning in very different, perhaps formally antithetical semantic systems…. (AB: 312).

Trust is a presupposed expectation for discovering meaning despite numerous differences across languages and cultures. The belief in finding meaning in a text is to expect that human beings have constructed their world through lingual and semiotic systems that can be interpret-ed and understood. Incomprehensive strings of text, alien cultural symbols and objects, strange social norms or conventions, and numerous other elements out of our known world may create the image that the foreign world is not to be perceived. The initiatory stage of Trust also makes it possible for the translator to actually "situate" herself with respect to the text (or any semiotic/ symbolic entity to be translated). The real problem, however, reveals itself when Trust is drastically tested against the formal integrity of the text; the task at hand is not just about meaning, but there are strong internal relations that hold the foreign text together beyond our expectations (AB: 313).

The second stage is Aggression, which rests on Heidegger's philosophy. Every individual comes from a specific background and tries to put the world into his own understanding. Steiner describes this interpretive tendency as being "aggressive." In our self-understating, we "cut" everything into

the molds of our personal or collective worldview. This is the reason understanding is thought to involve a degree of violence. Concerning this issue in translation, Steiner states:

> Saint Jerome uses his famous image of meaning brought home captive by the translator. We 'break' a code: decipherment is dissective, leaving the shell smashed and the vital layers stripped…. [T]he text in the other language has become almost materially thinner, the light seems to pass unhindered through its loosened fibers (AB: 314).

"Materially thinner", which seems to apply to literary translation more than other types, is a metaphor describing the condition of the text after being analyzed (dissected) by the translator. The text at this stage loses much of its "otherness." The next problem to tackle is to situate the interpreted text in the receiving language. A diversity of questions must be answered here: How does the original meaning find its place in the receiving language and culture? How should the form be re-created in the target language?

Because the original is a product of a different system, and because the target language already has its system too, the translator has to decide about which of these two extremes to reflect in her final work. The third stage, which is the construction of the linguistically visible realization of the translation, is the textual production in the target language. In fact, at this stage, the degree of strangeness or naturalization of the text will be decided. According to Steiner, some translations remain domesticated or at-home (Luther's Bible) and some strange and marginal (Nabokov's English *Onegin*) (AB: 314-15). Exposure to the foreign can, of course, transform the receivers' identity.

If transformation is a consequence of translation, then naturally good or bad consequences may follow. "Sacramental intake" represents the good side of being transformed by translation. This outcome, as implied by Steiner, should follow an oriented and mature native matrix, which means that the translated text should find an appropriate position in the target language (a theory of equilibrium). Evaluating these positions is itself a matter of difficulty and complexity.

The other consequence, the negative one, is infection: "After a time, the native organism will react, endeavouring to neutralize or expel the foreign body" (AB: 315). This endeavor could be realized in different ways, especially as institutions that pursue national, socio-political goals. As can be simply expected concerning Steiner's observation, this attempt is made to regain balance in the native language.

The last stage is Compensation, which is otherwise called the "métier and morals of translation" (AB: 316). Compensation is a sign of responsibility. This last stage raises ethical questions about the strategies through which the lost merits of the source text can be regained in the final target text, although compensatory strategies would most probably create a new reading of the text. Compensation opens a wide variety of possibilities to the translator, and at the same time reveals how diverse translations can be. These considerations go beyond mere linguistic options, clarifying why translation is an artistic act, according to Steiner.

The problems found in the previous stages of translation could be described as follows: "The translator has taken too much – he has padded, embroidered, 'read into' – or too little – he has skimped, elided, cut out awkward corners" (AB: 317). Methodologically speaking, Compensation can take different forms and is highly context-specific: How do we translate classical language into modern language? How do we render rhyme into a poetic system that is not regulated by rhyme? Steiner's idea of "energy" refers to the specifications of a text, such as its style, format, rhetoric, significance, and so on. "Balance" is the compensatory strategy which regains the original energy in the translation. Ethically then, the translator has to find a compensatory strategy to reflect the unique dimensions of the original text in the translation. Following this introduction, the next section presents a criticism of the hermeneutic motion by grouping the problems into four general categories.

A critique of the hermeneutic motion
Overcomplicated style and diction

The range of words used in *After Babel* is as diverse as the topics addressed in the book. The style of writing is characterized by the conventions of literary criticism combined with the enigmatic style of Continental philosophy discourse. Complex diction, (vague) metaphorical language, reliance on an overload of information not explored in the text, citations without explaining contextual relevance, and frequent thematic changes are some of the specifications of Steiner's narrative. Another serious problem is that the work does not rhetorically situate itself in the background of any well-identified academic discipline. It covers issues important to many audiences, such as linguists, literary critics, translators, philosophers and sociologists, but it does not focus specifically on any of these disciplines.

It is understandable that when *After Babel* was published there was no perfectly identified audience for TS as a discipline. Yet, although Chapter Four deals with translation history, it does not report a comprehensive outline of TS research since the 1960s, and especially in the third edition of the book in 1998 when the foundations of the discipline had been shaped. Yet, what seems to be the most problematic aspect of Steiner's writing lies in his recurrent use of metaphors (particularly in Chapter Five). Minier (2006: 43), for instance, states, "The metaphors of intrusion and intervention reflect a notion of the initial text/original as a plot of land being invaded and adjusted for good purposes."

What is evident about this style of writing is that it can unfavorably expand the range of interpretations, thus triggering misconceptions. Perhaps the most serious consequence of the metaphorical language Steiner configured in his book is the gender-related criticisms that suggest Steiner's theory is biased against women. However, given the matrix of the metaphors in Chapter Five, one should also consider possible misunderstandings and misreadings of the work.

Following Hegel and Heidegger, Steiner describes understanding as an aggressive act. In reality, however, this reading rests on a phenomenological basis, on the idea that an individual tends to shape the world by putting it into the limits of his/her perception/experience. This idea could

be expressed in different ways, and it does not need to be aggressive (see Ricoeur's Self-Other disunion below). It should be remembered that Aggression, the second stage of translation, is not free-standing and is part of a larger narrative world (which is the theory).

In the section devoted to the hermeneutic motion, there is an intricate network of metaphorical language, which is essentially inspired by the discourse of physics, biology and geology. Here are some terminological samples: *mine, penetration, (alternative) mould(sic), extractive, ingestion, dissected, landscape, embodiment, vacuum, intake, infection, energy, knocked off balance, indigestible, disequilibrium, residue, inflammatory, unbalance, equalize, and entropy* (AB: 312-19). If one puts the single words against the broader network of the metaphors, one learns that the metaphors individually contribute to a whole narrative in which "understanding" is depicted as a physical event. That is, the words and their connotations should not be seen in isolation from the rest of the narrative. In nature there is always a degree of interplay and collision between forces, and usually one force tries to overcome or disturb the balance of another. If a foreign text is viewed as a mine, then to be exploited it must be broken into pieces. This metaphorical structure can be applied to various modes of forceful interaction, although an interpreter may highlight one possibility over another. For instance, one could suggest several different modes of power relations inferred from Steiner's set of metaphors: parent-child, man-woman, colonizer-colonized, or conqueror-conquered (St. Jerome's idea of capture).

As a result, the common belief that the hermeneutic motion expresses bias against women represents only one, and seemingly insufficient, interpretive possibility. However, Steiner's writing style is still responsible for the misunderstandings, and that is basically a shortcoming. The problematic language clashes with the communicative purposes of hermeneutics. Gadamer's (1960) notion of the "fusion of horizons" (Horizontverschmelzung) views communication as a merging of understandings which seeks to pursue a dialogue. Ricoeur (1984), too, in his narrative theory, explains that a text is normally configured for a particular group of readers who will in turn respond to it. Apart from many passages that seem to meet the expectations of literary critics, *After Babel* appears to be a book without any definite range of readers. Therefore, the book fails to construct an interpretable "horizon" for a large number of interested readers. More importantly, frequent references to aggressive ideas, even metaphorically expressed, is not in line with novel hermeneutic theories. Ricoeur, in his major book, Oneself as Another, devotes a substantial passage to what motivates people to understand each other. Besides regarding the Other as an integral part of the Self, Ricoeur (1990/1992) assigns the motivation behind understanding to "affection", which radically diverges from Steiner's theory (see below).

Overreliance on literature

Although *After Babel,* in its initial review chapters, covers a wide variety of concepts, the book in its analytic procedure heavily relies on literary works, especially masterpieces of literature. This exclusion of a diversity of possible text-types makes the assumption that hermeneutic theorizing must necessarily address enigmatic, problematic or polyvocal texts, while a simple, linear text

would never require a hermeneutic analysis. It must be noted that in Continental philosophy there is a long-standing tradition of reading and analyzing *literary* works. Major figures such as Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur and Derrida have all written about literary genres (e.g. poetry and novels). The central question is whether there is an "essential" relationship between such thinkers' theories and literary production.

More specifically, one could ask: why did such philosophers choose literature to test their textual analysis models? We should remember that hermeneutics is a philosophy of "everyday life", a strand of intellectuality that distances itself from Cartesian subjectivity and radical rationalism. For many philosophers there is basically no reconciliation between thinking and poetry, as a result of which merging thinking and literature would represent an exotic act of resistance to the historical postulates of Western philosophy. Gadamer has explicated various dimensions of Plato's philosophy, specifically addressing the Platonic criticism of poetry:

> In his Republic, a work which develops an ideal order for the state and for its program of education, Plato condemned Homer and the great Attic dramatists to permanent exile from the state. Probably nowhere else has a philosopher denied the value of art so completely and so sharply contested its claim – which seems so self-evident to us – to reveal the deepest and most inaccessible truths (Gadamer, 1980: 39).

This tendency to explore the world of literature is different from the general interests of literature readers. "Artistic creativity", in which art is a mode of building, is a central notion for hermeneutic thinkers who try to figure out how human imagination and willfulness can be expressed as literary configurations (Ahmadi 1998) or material tools such as scientific instruments (Kharmandar *forthcoming*). As a result, literature is not seen as a genre in this context, but as a peculiar, lingual mode of human expression and creativity, in line with the conclusions that the thinkers sought to draw. Creativity, however, could be explored in other modes of human existence (not just art or literature); for instance, as Kharmandar (*forthcoming*) demonstrates, new trends of hermeneutic research have concentrated on material creativity in such fields as empirical science and technological development.

What can be inferred from the issues mentioned above is that thinkers tend to select the kind of data that is harmonious with their ultimate goals, and that literary analysis in the works of some hermeneutic intellectuals *does not have any essential connection* with hermeneutics. In TS, for instance, Stolze (2010, 2011, 2013) has investigated non-literary translation (especially legal translation), proposing professional/practical notions with no association with literature. Delineating the bases of translational hermeneutics, Cercel, Stanley and Stolze (2015) do not express any literature-specific, foundational principle. In Ricoeur's extended translation theory the network of textual/semiotic relations is brought to a whole new level in which the important factors are socio-political facets of globalization, cybernetics, information technology, and multilingual (virtual/physical) spaces (Kharmandar 2015).

From the perspective of these new movements, one may question the actual practicality of the data Steiner "analyzes" for the majority of translation professionals, practitioners and researchers. The hermeneutic motion, no matter how many concepts it addresses, is exclusively about literature, whereas other possible genres of translation, such as legal, commercial, academic or journalistic, have no place in the textual analysis sections. Steiner's passages most basically contribute to the literary tradition of translation, while the concerns they address are compatible with the expectations of literary critics. This limited text-type variability chosen for analysis definitely represents a shortcoming in the hermeneutic motion. Meanwhile, this literary speculation is not presented in an organized method as it remains largely shapeless, and almost any source of information may be included in the analysis. The problem is that the average reader may feel perplexed about how to apply the model to another context.

Theoretical Shortcomings

The ultimate purpose of the hermeneutic motion is to achieve a state of balance between the energies transferred and received. Nonetheless, if this ethical ideal fails to reach its purpose, one could assert that the theory substantially losses its validity. In this section, various dimensions of the notion of equilibrium as a result of compensation are critically examined. The ideas of abstract balance and reaching equilibrium, as well as some references to Chomsky's universal grammar, shape the philosophical foundations of the theory. The emphasis on Compensation, which restores the balance between the two systems involved, suggests that there is actually a *preexisting* balance that can be retrieved and evaluated.

To clarify the idea of Compensation, Steiner re-visits the notion and describes it further in Chapter Four, sub-section 5: "A bad translation is one which is inadequate to its source-text for reasons which can be legion and obvious. The translator has misconstrued the original through ignorance, haste, or personal limitation" (AB: 416). A more detailed description can be found in this part:

> The translator has grasped and/or appropriated less than is there. He traduces through diminution. Or he has chosen to embody and restate fully only one or another aspect of the original, fragmenting, distorting its vital coherence according to his needs or myopia. Or he has 'betrayed upward', transfiguring the source into something greater than itself (AB: 417).

This depiction of balance is so idealistic that many of the examples Steiner cites do not fit into the theoretical framework he suggests. For instance, as a justificatory preparation for the notion of Compensation, Steiner talks about the dangers of translation, pointing out pressures imposed on individuals and communities through translation (or what he calls "the inhaled voice of the foreign text; AB: 315):

> Societies with ancient but eroded epistemologies of ritual and symbol can be knocked off balance and made to lose belief in their own identity under the voracious impact of premature or indigestible

assimilation. The cargo-cults of New Guinea, in which the natives worship what airplanes bring in, provide an uncannily exact, ramified image of the risks of translation (AB: 316).

Although Steiner is well-aware of this socio-political imbalance, the kind of remedy he suggests to overcome this immature change appears to be too idealistic. How can a community of primitive people find a compensatory strategy to strike a balance between their undeveloped status and the technology/products of an advanced culture? What is there in their history, rituals and society to help them restore what they do not possess? This question is left unanswered, although readers may expect to find a solution to the problem raised, at least after Compensation is introduced.

Quite contrary to what is called balance in this theory, what might happen even after "mature" assimilation could be an alteration of identity, and consequently of disposition, lifestyle and social conduct. Steiner's theory of equilibrium, in fact, suffers from a temporal paradox: how is it that a community can restore foreign difference by resorting to its own past, while keeping balance? The universalist underpinning of the theory most conspicuously reveals itself at this point; difference here is not seen as an inevitable motive for "changing one's state", but as a return to a vague space of selfhood where the foreign can be found. This condition is only imaginatively possible when some sort of Cartesian subjective system (such as Chomsky's TGG) founds a theory.

This idea, besides questioning hermeneutics, remains theoretically problematic. Steiner's notion of translation rests on such traditional values as fidelity, faithfulness and adequacy, as he frequently mentions them in Chapter Four. To explain the socio-political functions of translation, a whole theoretical apparatus must be considered. An important issue is that the hermeneutic motion requires a refined theory of identity, change and uncertainty. What happens in New Guinea is a result of transformation, a narrative move from one point to another. Linguistically speaking, too, various methods of Compensation should be evaluated within relevant systems (e.g. literary criticism, academic writing, journalistic conventions) that can pass judgment on the success or functions of compensatory strategies.

For instance, only a theory of poetics can help examine the possibility of translating originally rhymed poetry into rhymed poetry in another language. The specifications of original texts are metaphorically called "energy" in the hermeneutic motion. Modern Persian poetics, for instance, does not prefer to render masterpieces of literature into rhymed Persian translations. There are, however, translation traditions that have been shaped to add aesthetic value to literary translations. Does this situation suggest that "the energy of rhyme" is lost in the translations and that translators are at fault? What if rhyme is not important anymore, even to the literary critics of the original language?

Another problem with Compensation is the uncertainty of the strategies that may be implemented. As Cercel et al. (2015) explain, one of the fundamental principles of translational hermeneutics is "process character", which denotes that there is no single translation strategy predetermined for a translation problem. Each strategy may contribute to an internal system of aesthetics or narrative configuration. How a source of energy is decided depends on the axiological concerns

of text re-producers (e.g. news agencies, education systems, freelance translators) and on the practicality of the text for readers.

Furthermore, there is still a question concerning the ontology of change as a result of exposure to the foreign. Steiner only speculates on the transformative function of translation (whether seen as immature assimilation or any other consequence). He mentions Heidegger's idea that "we are what we understand to be" (AB: 315), but never explores the variability of this ontological status. To explain the variability of identity in translational theory of identity and disposition is needed. Ricoeur's *Oneself as Another* represents one of the highly significant works in the thinker's philosophy of time, identity and linguality. One of the topics Ricoeur substantially explores in the book is the history of the notion of identity in Western philosophy: sameness (Latin idem, German Gleichheit, French memete), and selfhood (Latin ipse, German Selbstheit, French ipseite) (Ricoeur 1990/1992: 116).

Following a chain of investigations, he suggests that identity is a qualitative measure composed of two major sub-components: structure and event. The former encompasses all variables of an individual's or a community's character that remain "stable" over time, such as genetic code, skin color, or historical monuments. Event, on the other hand, involves temporal variability of character, as a result of which an individual can develop new forms of habit. This significant distinction can have several functions in TS philosophy, such as solving the "lingering problem of translation habitus" (Kharmandar 2018: 151). Steiner's theory, however, lacks such a qualitative measure, as it takes the structure and event of identity for granted.

The last issue addressed in this section focuses on one of the central criticisms of the hermeneutic motion, the claim that understanding involves a degree of violence. Do all hermeneutic thinkers share the same opinion? The second stage, influenced theoretically by Hegel and Heidegger, depicts understanding as an aggressive act. Of course, far from this metaphorical image, the second stage relies on the phenomenology of perception; it is true that individuals shape the world in a particular way, and to understand others they "cut" (as if with a knife) the world into specific molds. However, this process can be expressed otherwise.

In explicating his Self-Other disunion, Ricoeur (1990/1992: 317-19) mentions that the disunion is regulated by what he calls *affection,* "which explains that the Self and the Other are not (complementary) counterparts but the Other is an intimate, integral component of the Self" (Kharmandar 2015: 84). One of the most important contributions of Ricoeur to the philosophy of interpretation is his critical hermeneutics, which emphasizes the possibility of "breaking with" the structures of subjectivity and of expanding the Self. The subjective stage of Ricoeur's translation theory involves a mental procedure which includes three stages: wager (hypothesis), verification, and transformation (Kharmandar 2015: 78).

Transformation here denotes an interpretive move from one state to another (as the moment an understanding takes place). Although Steiner is well-aware of the transformative praxis of translation, there is a slight and very implicit conflict in his idea of Aggression. If perceptual violence leads to a delimitation of understanding, then how can one explain the change of identity

as a result of translation (as suggested in the third stage)? If we tend to cut the foreign into our own schemes and frames of perception, only a self-questioning manner of confronting the foreign, quite contrary to an aggressive one, can help us truly perceive the foreign. Clearly, the idea of aggression/violence is too crude to account for a theory of translation.

Methodological shortcomings

One of the central objectives Steiner tries to achieve in Chapter Three is to demonstrate that lingual content cannot be subjected to empirical verification. He plausibly argues that language undergoes change over time, and its various dimensions cannot be verified through the conventionalized methods of science. This stance, however, led him to question any regulative or systemic treatment of translation:

> Our instruments of perception are not theories or working hypotheses in any scientific, which means falsifiable, sense, but what I call 'working memory'. At its finest, translation has nothing to gain from (mathematically) puerile diagrams and flow-charts put forward by would-be theoreticians. It is, it always will be, what Wittgenstein called 'an exact art' (AB: xvi).

As mentioned in the review of Chapter One, Steiner's theory fundamentally rests on a traditional notion of understanding that would distance itself from explanation. As a consequence, if a frame, such as a flowchart, is perceived to have explanatory functions, it is naturally ruled out in Steiner's approach. It must, however, be noted that a theory seeking to achieve a systematic, regular and structured whole does not necessarily follow the radical postulates of science (e.g. positivism). As a result, mathematical flowcharts, for instance, seek to inter-semiotically "simulate" the process of translation, while a schematic representation does not necessarily render a process verifiable.

Furthermore, the traditional idea that hermeneutics cannot enter into a dialogue with empiricism appears to be an outdated assumption. Emphasizing the future plans of translational hermeneutics as an objective research paradigm, Cercel, Stanley and Stolze (2015) highlight the possible areas of research between hermeneutics and cognitive science (see also Piecychna 2015). Trying to destruct the hermeneutics versus empiricism dichotomy, Kharmandar (*forthcoming*) proposes a systematic framework of empirical hermeneutics that reveals how scientific knowledge emerges from genuine acts of interpretation and innovation, such as material tool-making.

Considering Steiner's negative approach to systemacity and analysis, it would not be a surprise to find methodological defects in his system of interpretation. Trust is described as an assumed convention: "we grant ab initio that there is 'something there' to be understood" (AB: 312). Is Trust part of the analytic procedure? Should it be repeated each time, or is it a decision to be made only once in a translation project? The way Steiner explains Trust suggests that the first stage is a philosophical principle rather than a methodological one. As such, investment of belief in the meaningfulness of languages despite radical difference lacks any procedural functionality. It just represents a human convention. In simple words, Trust must not be part of the analytic frame-

work of the hermeneutic motion. Steiner's lack of consideration of the symmetric geometry of models is reflected in the structure of his work.

Even more ambiguous than symmetry, there is the problem of representation: do all the examples mentioned by Steiner mirror the functionality of his model? It was explained earlier that Steiner fails to answer a socio-political question he raises about the risks of transfer; the model cannot justify how equilibrium can be maintained when, for instance, a receiving culture simply imports the advanced technology of a developed culture. The problem here, however, relates to the textual analysis parcel of the model. Consider this example: "It looks like rain/le temps està la pluie" (AB: 320). After a chain of detailed ideas about the conventional meanings of the words used in the English and French sentences, there is this seemingly conclusive statement about the translation: "*Le temps està la pluie* has a resigned yet also subtly acquiescent assurance entirely lacking from the ephemeral clairvoyance of "it looks like rain" (AB: 321). Elsewhere, in a multilingual evaluation of a number of Genesis 1:3 translations, Steiner (AB: 322) mentions numerous linguistic categories used in his analysis: "Et factaest lux", "Sialuce. E fuluce", "EswerdeLicht. Und es ward Licht", "Let there be light: and there was light." Although no ultimate decision is made about the validity of these translations, there is an abundance of minimal item-by-item examinations; here is an example: "Eswerde das Licht. Und es ward das Licht is possible in a way the English is not. It is weaker, more oddly specific and inferential of some Plotinian discrimination between effulgences, but just possible" (AB: 323).

Despite the obvious fact that different languages bring the phenomena into different frames of understanding, it is unclear how the analysis is hermeneutical or how the model is applied to the samples. Without a doubt, Trust has no function in these examples because it remains in the background; but more problematically almost all of the notions addressed, such as syntax, semantics, cognates, sentence length, tenses and the rest can be quite sufficiently pointed out by a *linguist* as well. It is true that in some cases (e.g. Rimbaud's Il pleu tdoucement sur la ville), Steiner tries to unearth meanings through inter-textual analysis, but the kind of method he generally uses is a distorted version of simple linguistic analysis. Therefore, Newmark's (2009: 26) observation that Steiner belonged to a "linguistic turn" in translation history appears to be a plausible judgment. Another issue is that although some of the translations do not completely "match" their originals and can in turn have pedagogical value about the difficulties/failures of translation, generally Compensation does not seem to be a major concern. The set of examples concerned with Genesis 1:3 somehow betrays the analytical shortcomings of Steiner's model. First, there is no Compensation involved, and the whole universalist underpinning of the theory fades away. The cross-comparison of the samples problematizes the bilingual essence of the model, because how can a German translation be validated against an English one when neither is the source text? In most of these cases only Aggression applies. This is not the image of a coherent method. It is once more emphasized that Steiner's disregard for systemacity and objectivity accounts for the methodological flaws in his hermeneutic motion.

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Concluding remarks

Briefly reviewing all of the chapters in Steiner's book *After Babel,* this critical investigation suggested a new reading of the *hermeneutic motion* as a philosophical translation theory. Although this theory was already challenged by non-hermeneutic critics, an interesting question was how the theory would be approached in a hermeneutically oriented reading. Many TS readers might assume that the *hermeneutic motion* remains an inevitable and acknowledged asset in the reservoir of hermeneutic translation theories. This critical study, however, would at many levels violate common beliefs about *After Babel* and the translation-specific notions expressed in it. To verify the most important ideas in the book, the works of authentic scholars, Gadamer and Ricoeur, as well as the postulates of translational hermeneutics, were explored.

As a result of reviewing the book and the hermeneutic motion, the problems were categorized into four groups: overcomplicated style and diction; overreliance on literature; theoretical shortcomings; methodological shortcomings. Various language-related issues in *After Babel* were pointed out, and it was explained that the range of ideas and claims in the book was considerably wide. As a result, misunderstandings would be very probable when interpreting the hermeneutic motion. It was also mentioned that the book was written within a particularly literary criticism framework while ignoring various possible text-types important in TS. Theoretical and methodological defects in the framework were also highlighted, and ultimately it was argued that the work clashes with hermeneutic theorizing in many respects.

New trends of hermeneutic theorizing, which can suggest strong bases for translation philosophy and practice, should not be unjustifiably compared with Steiner's theory. Translational hermeneutics, a movement based in Germany with international contributors/readers, can serve as a novel platform for studying the philosophy, theory and practice of translation (Stanley et al. 2018; Stolze et al. 2015). This movement is open to empirical investigation and cognitive science, while appreciating systemacity and objectivity in analysis. Ricoeur's philosophy, too, demonstrates an important stake for TS readers and all researchers interested in probing into interpretation/construal, understanding and language. It must also be noted that, contrary to popular belief, Steiner's translation theory is not a strong representative of hermeneutics, and authors who write about the history of TS should consider this fact in their narratives.

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