

## INTRODUCTION

Translation, in nature is both a linguistic and cultural phenomenon. According to Gadamer, understandings occur in language event, and translation can be well defined as such kind of cross-cultural communicative event. Gadamer views interpretation as an ongoing dialogue between one's horizon and the object's horizon, thus, translating source text into an understandable meaningful piece into target language and culture is a continuous process. The fusion of horizons among the interpreter, text and the future readers determines a successful translation work.

Reception theory believes that text itself does not have any established meaning, while the interpretation based on socio-cultural and historical context done by the translator makes the text dynamic in meaning. Cultural empathy is the ability of awareness and understanding of the cultural attributes of a given society and how they differ from one's own culture. Given the process of translation, capacity of empathy affects the translator in the ongoing understanding and interpretation; hence empathy plays a crucial part in the fulfillment of the goal of intercultural translation.

### I. EMPATHY

According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, empathy is the action or capacity of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner. It is the act of constructing for oneself another person's mental state (Hogan 1969), which is based on self-awareness and avoidance of judgment in communication. In simpler words, it refers to the psychological process and capacity in which a person shows a great consideration of the thinking and feelings of others by putting oneself in the others' position.

Cultural Empathy requires one's acute observation of the other and the capability to draw oneself out of native cultural stereotypes that has been long rooted as one's development in life; it also entails the capacities for understanding and compassion.

Translation, as a cross-cultural phenomenon, is an open field of activity, which is affected by multiple factors, among which socio-cultural and historical contexts consist of the major external factors. Such factors at the same time perform their influence on translators as well.

Eugene Nida believes that a good translation relies more on the command of the two cultures involved than that of the two languages, for words only adopt meaning in the certain culture environment. Thus, Translation is now compared as cultural portraiture. A successful translation agrees with the original work in letter and in spirit as well.

This is the ultimate goal pursued by all the translators.

Similarly, Marianne Lederer (1994) pointed out the common feature of translation is perception of the original meaning and reproduction. There are two steps in such a process: to understand the text and to express the meaning in another language. Lederer believes that both the understanding and the reproduction steps not only happen in the linguistic level but beyond it. To understand the text requires more than linguistic knowledge from the translator. Given the process of translation, empathetic capacity of the translator is undoubtedly a crucial element in determining the success of translation.

## II. FUSION OF HORIZONS

Hans-Geroge Gadamer establishes himself in philosophical hermeneutics and considers human prejudice as indispensable factor of interpreting and understanding meaning. He argues that people have a 'historically effected consciousness' and that they are embedded in the particular history and culture that shaped them. Thus interpreting a text involves a fusion of horizons where the scholar finds the ways that the text's history articulates with their own background.

Gadamer believes that understandings occur in language-event or through language, and his approach to hermeneutics is of the trilogy of language, understanding, and dialogue. Gadamer sees understanding as process of a dialogue, in which obtaining an agreement is of great importance. After all, only when an agreement is reached, would there be mutual understanding, otherwise it is a failed communication. Gadamer believes that "Understanding is, primarily, agreement. Thus people usually understand each other immediately, or they make themselves understood with a view toward reaching agreement."(Gadamer, 2004)

One's horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point, according to Gadamer; he sees the process of understanding an ongoing negotiation between one's own horizon and the text's in a hermeneutical dialogue. Interpretation of a text is, thus, a continuous process in which the interpreter's horizon (pre-understanding) keeps making inquires to the text and the responses are elicited from the text's horizon. Understanding does not occur in a vacuum, the hermeneutic process is dynamic and the movement towards a fusion of horizons is constant. The interpreter is always projecting the meaning initiated by his fore-meanings and fore-structures which themselves are constructed or in a better term raised by the horizons projected by the thing (cited in Gadamer, 2004). The dialogue continues till both horizons extend to which a fusion of horizons occurs and hence a hermeneutic understanding is attained.

Some linguists like Leonard Bloomfield, Antoine Meillet, Colin Cherry, etc. have all done theoretical study concerning the determination of meaning and some of them

proposed that meaning is reproduced during communication. For instance, Bloomfield believed that meaning of a remark consisted of the situated environment of the remark and the reaction from the message receiver (Bloomfield, 1995). But it is Gadamer who first asserted that human mind is always in a state of processing hermeneutic interpretation of the environment around him and human understandings are in fact a kind of interpretation. He rationalized the so-called prejudice and believes that the interpreter cannot break away from his "situatedness", the social, cultural and historical environment he is in, and always interprets the world based on such situated prejudice. The text itself does not have any established meaning. Interpretation of the text is always made within the socio-cultural and historical context which affects the understanding of the interpreter.

Cultural aspect of translation is gaining more attention and observation in recent studies. From a global perspective, the "un-translatability" is mostly originated from the cultural aspect of the text, so cultural untranslatability, or insufficient readability does not allow the value in the source culture to manifest itself well in the target one. In reality, such a process of hermeneutic interpretation in translation takes place when the source culture is decoded in target language and received as something exotic in the target culture, and it requires such a dialogue between different cultures and finally a kind of "fusion of cultural horizons".

### III. HOW COULD FUSION OF HORIZONS BE ACHIEVED IN TRANSLATION

Culture is the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression (Newmark, 1988). As a result, culture is mostly identified by its manifestation in certain language and is deeply rooted in the community of the language users. This is evident in the work of translation.

#### 1. Translation

Roger T. Bell (1999) thinks that translation involves the transfer of meaning from a text in one language into another language. It seems to be a very simple definition of translation. While Eugene Nida (1983) makes it a bit complex by asserting that translation consists of reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style."

Since the study in translation takes on the cultural orientation, it is obvious that translation shall not only aims at the linguistic transfer of the printed message from the text, but to transfer an understanding to those in target language in order to arouse the most similar impact from the audience as the original work does.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1992) considers translation as "the most intimate act of reading", she argues "unless the translator has earned the right to become an intimate reader, she cannot surrender to the text, cannot respond to the special call of the text". Translation is viewed as an intelligent activity involving complex processes of conscious and unconscious learning, and it requires creative problem-solving in novel, textual, social, and cultural conditions (Robinson, 1997).

Such opinions above from Spivak and Robinson place the translator to a crucial position in translation, making high standards and criteria, assigning great mission for them. Thus, translators, constantly making the interaction with the language and culture involved in translation work, are simultaneously doing the decontextualization and recontextualization work. Since translator plays the major subjective role in translation, translation could never be as innocent as a scientific research.

From the perspective of hermeneutics, Gadamer (2004) raises that "every translation is at the same time an interpretation. We can even say that the translation is the culmination of the interpretation that the translator has made of the words given him.". Given that understanding and interpretation are viewed as an ongoing process of dialogue or negotiation, translation could also be analyzed from the process of the conduct.

## 2. Process of translation

Marianne Lederer (1994) believes that the nature of translation process is universal regardless of different works and different languages, and she proposed that translation process is to understand the original text, break away from the original language form and use another language to express the understood content and perceived emotion.

George Steiner (1975) proposed that to understand is to decipher. To hear significance is to translate. On the premise that translation is a kind of cross-cultural communication, he proposed understanding as translation. He believes that translation process includes "trust", "aggression", "incorporation" and "retribution" four movements; among them "trust" and "retribution" honour the original work including the author's intentions, while "aggression" and "incorporation" describe the dynamic interpretation process conducted by the translator.

Chinese writer Yu Guangzhong (2002) propose that there are similarities between the intelligent activity of translation and creation, and strictly speaking, it is not possible to eliminate creation from the process of translation. In terms of the performance of translator's creativity, Chinese translator Ye Jianjun (1998) proposed that in order to do translation, one has to understand the author's feeling, and this can only be done through the conjecture based on the literal meaning of the text, and the perception of the spirits and meaning between the lines.

Apparently, study of translation process values understanding of the translator, who is playing an indispensable role in the realization of fusion of horizons in translation. Study of philosophical hermeneutics offers enlightenment to the study of translation, particularly in its cultural orientation. Translation process is a hermeneutic process as well. Hermeneutic analysis of the process of understanding and interpretation is instructive in the well management of relationships between the translator, the interpreter, with other subjects of translation, namely, the author (text) and the target reader.

Based on the philosophical hermeneutics, scholars from the Constance School, namely, Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss, proposed Reception Theory argues that absolute interpretation of the meaning of a text does not exist because the reader plays a subjective role in the reading process. The Theory places reader to a very important position as to the interpretation of the text. In the process of translation, translators are interpreters, and are privileged readers. Their understanding and interpretation of the text determines the success of a translation work.

### 3. Fusion of horizons in translation by empathetic translators

Culture is the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression" (Newmark, 1988, p.94). As a result, culture is mostly identified by its manifestation in certain language and is rooted in the community of the language users.

#### 3.1 Interrelation between culture and translation

Bassnet and Lefevere (2000) argue that culture and translation are interrelated and merged especially in today's globalized world, thus, cultural turn in translation theory and practice occurs as it is supposed to be. Consequently, the study of translation shall take broader issues into consideration, such as the social and cultural context, historical and conventional situation, etc.

In the case of intercultural understanding and interpretation, fusion of horizons is made by way of translating the Other into the Self. From the perspective of translation process, translators are digging the hidden meanings from the original text, making it understandable to themselves, and interpreting the message in target language. Since culture and translation is interrelated, translation not only conveys linguistic messages among languages but also makes cultures understandable among one and another. The scope of translation shall be expanded from a message transfer to the transfer of cultural connotation under specific social and historical context.

#### 3.2 Reading conducted by the translator

During the process of reading, translators are constantly interacting with the text. According to Louise M. Rosenblatt's text *The reader, the Text, the Poem* (1978), during the act or event of reading,

*A reader brings to the text his or her past experience and present personality. Under the magnetism of the ordered symbols of the text, the reader marshals his or her resources and crystallizes out from the stuff of memory, thought, and feeling a new order, a new experience, which he or she sees as poem. This becomes part of the ongoing stream of the reader's life experience, to be reflected on from any angle important to him or her as a human being.*

Rosenblatt also asserts that the relationship between the reader and the text is not linear, but transactional. Accordingly, reading of a translator is an event that happens under a certain context in which the text and the translator condition each other. Within such transaction, meaning, which does not exist within the text itself or in the translator's mind, is created. Translators usually bring their own "temperament and fund of past transactions to the text and live through a process of handling new situations, new attitudes, new personalities, [and] new conflicts in value. They can reject, revise, or assimilate into the resources with which they engage their world." (Rosenblatt, 1978) In the meantime, via such transactional experience, translators consciously and unconsciously amend their own world view.

### 3.3 Realization of fusion of horizons by empathetic translators

The fundamental prerequisite for every valid understanding is a dialogue. "Conversation is a process of coming to an understanding. Thus it belongs to every true conversation that each person opens himself to the other, truly accepts his point of view as valid and transposes himself into the other to such an extent that he understands not the particular individual but what he says."(Gadamer, 2004)

In addition, understanding could not be made without the fore-meanings about the things require an understanding. The fore-meanings are the basis on which a valid interpretation is made. Cultural interpreter is bound to his situatedness and socio-cultural stances in order to project these fore-structures to the horizons of the text.

Besides, Gadamer addressed the importance of prejudgments in understanding as follows: Of course this does not mean that when we listen to someone or read a book we must forget all our fore-meanings concerning the content and all our own ideas. All that is asked is that we remain open to the meaning of the other person or text. But this openness always includes our situating the other meaning in relation to the whole of our own meanings or ourselves in relation to it ( Gadamer, 2004)).

Accordingly, Gadamer (2004) holds that reaching an understanding needs the fore-projection of meaning for the thing to be understood. In fact, the person who wants to understand the present thing is equipped "with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. Working out this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding

what is there".

On the other hand, Gadamer also believes that misunderstanding would occur if the interpreter is distorted by his fore-meanings; however, if he could work out such fore-meanings in the process of hermeneutic movement, his prejudgments, in stead of the presumptions, would guide him into the right path to the cultural understanding and valid interpretation.

Given the fore-meaning and fore-projection of the thing to be understood, empathetic translator would constantly move from the whole to the part of the text and back to the whole. In the domain of translation, hermeneutic process of understanding finally leads to the agreement among cultural horizons. Such agreement, the interpretation of the text, takes place in the process of the interaction between the horizons until the hermeneutic understanding arrives.

As Gadamer views understanding as a matter of negotiation between one's own horizon and the text's horizon, empathetic translators, in the hermeneutical dialogue of coming to an 'agreement' about the text, would be in a better position to initiate their fore-meanings and make fore-projection and negotiate with the text, which, in turn, would offer feedbacks from text's own horizon. During such continuous process, the capacity of empathy of the translator would facilitate the interpreter's horizon growing close to the horizon of the text, and finally the fusion of horizons would be able to be fulfilled to the utmost level.

Similarly, translation involves a dialogue between the translators and the translated work, which is to be read by target readers. The ongoing negotiation would also be true between these two horizons in picture. The ultimate fusion of horizons in question is made by the three, otherwise, translation could not be completed.

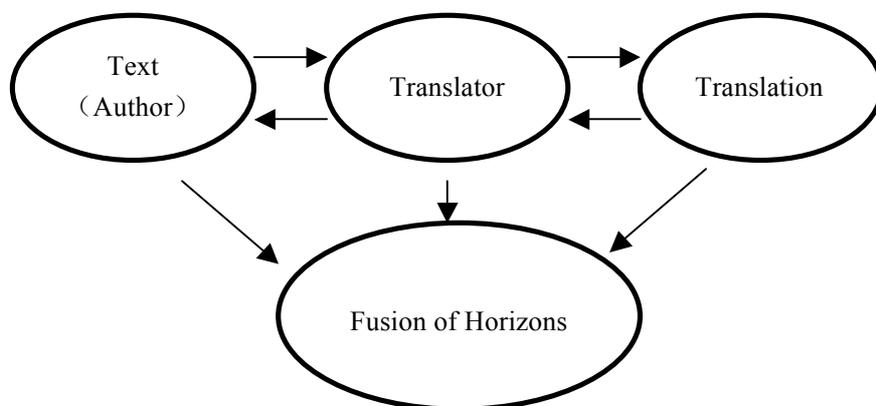


Figure 1

As is shown in figure 1., translator is positioned in the center of a translation process. As interpreter, his fore-meaning and projection towards the text from his prejudgment, is inevitable and crucial to the understanding of the text. Though such prejudgment is subjective, it is dynamic and open to change as his horizon is dynamic. Two similar processes of interaction would occur when the text is understood and when the understood text is interpreted in the target language. Empathetic translators have a better stance and are more readily to make the fusion of the horizons involved in translation.

Based on the theoretical study above, the role of cultural empathy in the process of translation mainly takes on in the job of the translator. Empathetic translators tend to shift from paradigms or stereotypes within their inherent mode of thinking more readily, show tolerance and understanding towards the thoughts and feelings of the author, hence better comprehend the author's intentions in creation; besides, empathetic translators would make considerate speculation of the target readers' aesthetic orientation and cultural acceptability, and finally, accomplish, to the maximum extent, the fusion of horizons by their empathetic perception and interpretation.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In this trend of globalization, the world is in dynamic complex changes everyday. As Prof. Huntington brought out earlier, the conflict in 21<sup>st</sup> century would most frequently and violently occur from cultural rather than ideological differences, tolerance and agreement among cultures seems indispensable for the world in every aspect. Translation, as a complicated and multi-faceted activity, a socio-cultural phenomenon, presented itself as a bridge among cultures and is of great importance in cross-cultural communication. Concerning the importance of an adequate translation, Bates (1943) proposes in his book that, "nothing moves without translation . . . No change in thought or in technology spreads without the help of translation." While comparing Chinese culture to an everlasting running river, Prof. Ji Xianlin also value translation as the vital stimulus to the development and progress of Chinese civilization (cited in Xu, 2009).

Adequate and fine translation should fulfill the same function in the target readers as the original work did in the source language readers. In an increasingly interrelated world today, the predicament in translation would no longer lie in the dissimilarities of languages, but in the complexity of cultural conventions and orientations. Well management and elimination to the most extent of such predicament is the primary task for translators today.

Translation is such an open forum where every hidden cultural phenomenon shall becomes understandable by a kind hermeneutic process in which a translator equipped with his prejudices (fore-projections) approaches the text situated in other

socio-cultural and historical context, to understand and interpret it. As the nature of translation process is universal and featured the translator as the major subject who performs a vital part in understanding and interpretation of the text, development of empathetic capacity would facilitate translators in the fulfillment of fusion of horizons while conducting translation, particularly the minimization of cultural untranslatability or low readability. [Supported by the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities]

## REFERENCES

- [1]. Bates, E.S. (1943). *Intertraffic: studies in translation*. London: J. Cape.
- [2]. Bassnett, Susan & Lefevere, Andre. (2000). *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- [3]. Bell, R. T. (1991). *Translation and translating: theory and practice*. London & New York: Longman.
- [4]. Bloomfield, Leonard. (1995). *On Language*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.
- [5]. Gadamer, Hans-Georg. (2007). *Language and understanding*. In Palmer, R.E. (Ed.), *The Gadamer Reader* (pp. 89-107). Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.
- [6]. Gadamer, Hans-Georg. (2004). Weinsheimer, J, & Marshal, D.G. (Trans.). *Truth and Method*. New York: Continuum.
- [7]. Gadamer, Hans-Georg. from : [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans-Georg\\_Gadamer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans-Georg_Gadamer)
- [8]. Hogan, R.T. (1969). Development of an Empathy Scale. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*. Vol.33, pp. 308.
- [9]. Lederer, Marianne. (1994). *La traduction aujourd'hui: le Modèle interpretative*. Paris: Hachette Livre S.A.
- [10]. Newmark, Peter. (1988). *A Textbook of Translation*. London: Longman.
- [11]. Nida, Eugene A. (1984). *On translation*. Beijing: Translation Publishing Corp.
- [12]. Nida, Eugene A. (1993). *Language, Culture, and Translation*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- [13]. Robinson, D. (1997). *Becoming a translator: an accelerated course*. London: Routledge.
- [14]. Rosenbaltt, Louise M. (1978). *The Reader, The Text, The Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work*, Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press
- [15]. Spivak, G. (1992). The Politics of Translation. In A. Barrett (Ed.), *Destabilizing theory: contemporary feminist debates* (pp. 177-200). London & New York: Routledge.
- [16]. Steiner, George. (1975). *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*. London: Oxford University Press.
- [17]. Xu, Jun. (2009). *On Translation*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- [18]. Ye, junjian., & Xu, jun. (1998) *Top Quality Works Should be Produced in*

Translation. Yilin. 1998 (5). (In Chinese)

- [19]. Yu, Guangzhong. (2002). Yu Guangzhong's Thoughts on Translation. Beijing: China Translation & Publishing Corporation. (In Chinese)



Puyu Ning, North China Electric Power University, China  
Liangqiu Lv, North China Electric Power University, China  
Yushan Zhao, North China Electric Power University, China

# The European Conference on Language Learning 2013

## Official Conference Proceedings

