In the Name of Allah

The Compassionate,

The Merciful

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The Ontology of Translation: Ideas of Philosophical
Hermeneutics in Translation of Hafiz

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Abstract

Hermeneutics seeks to study the event of understanding a text and the more encompassing question of what is meant by understanding and interpretation. Among hermeneutical ideas, those of Hans- Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur contributing to the ontology of understanding and its application to the different aspects of human life are considered as turning points. The objective of the present study is to exemplify the way hermeneutical ideas like 'historicity of understanding' may result in the 'historicity of translation' which could be effective in coming into a dialogue with the foreign and exchanging understandable ideas in the third space called ' fusion of horizons'. In addition, ideas like ' fusion of horizons' and 'self-through-other' in the philosophical hermeneutics could help us a better understanding of the cultural and linguistic encounters among different people through the act of translation. Accordingly, four of Hafiz's ghazals were selected along with three different translations translated in different socio-historical contexts. The results instanced the link between the historicity of understanding and historicity of translation. Additionally, intercultural understanding could be theorized by applying theories of philosophical hermeneutics in translation. Finally the researcher presents a hermeneutical definition of translation which could be defined as *an act of recreation and fusion of the world of the past to the present in such a way that the process would be involved in a kind of dialogue and then agreement on the matter involved*.

Key words: Translation, Hermeneutics, Fusion of horizons, Foreignization, domestication**,** historicity of understanding, historicity of translation

Table of Content

Chapter Five: Conclusions, Implications & Suggestions for Further Studies

List of figures

Title   **Page**

<div align="center">

Chapter One

Introduction

</div>

1.1. Overview

In a general view, "Hermeneutics seeks to study the event of understanding a text and the more encompassing question of what is meant by understanding and interpretation" (Bleiher, 1982; Palmer, 1969 as cited in Väyrynen, 2012, p. 348). By understanding, it means that any expression can be accessed by the human being through valid as well as reliable ways. Translation can be a valid and reliable medium of understanding not only the meaning of a foreign text but also ourselves through attaining agreement with the foreign. Here, the key role of translation which is revealing what is hidden both in our horizons and foreign horizons is of utmost importance especially in this world full of conflict and misunderstanding.

Among hermeneutical ideas, those of Hans- Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur contributing to translation theories are both significant and interesting, although Gadamer does not considerably contribute to the translation theory. Different notions concerning understanding and interpreting texts of each kind could be among the concerns of translation theory and practice. Ideas like ' fusion

of horizons', applicable to translation theory and practice, which might settle the cultural and linguistic conflicts between two different people on the one hand, and the role of ' tradition' and 'historicity of understanding' which result in the translator's *prejudice* could be effective in coming into a dialogue with the foreign and exchanging understandable ideas in the third space called 'fusion of horizons'. Similarly, the idea of 'oneself as another' proposed by Ricoeur who uses on the other paradigms of translation shed light on the theory and practice of translation.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Each human action, to be fulfilled, involves solving as well as making compromises between many conflicts and tackling many factors. In fact, the agreement among these challenges and conflicts results in the human products whose process of producing affects and is affected, shapes and is shaped by many conflicts and factors which, because of differences between two language systems and cultures, cause the translation to be a specifically-complicated phenomenon among others.

Admittedly, the notion of context determines the social and historical background of a society and the translator is bound to a variety of disciplines concerned with language use, including translation studies. In fact, the notion of socio-cultural context, among others, seems to be the prominent conflict which has raised many struggles among social scientists, anthropologists, and philosophers. House (2005), in case of philosophy which has concerned itself with the structure and nature of language, has viewed *context* as either something contributing to the inherent deficiency of language as a tool for logical thought or as something inherently worthwhile and constructive for *condition humana* (p. 338).

Briefly speaking, philosophy has had a significant role in introducing interesting theories in relation to the language and the conditions of its application. While analytic philosophy looks at language and its interpretation

analytically and objectively, philosophical hermeneutics tries to reach a valid understanding of language interpretively.

Among analytic philosophers, Austin argues for the importance of context of a speech act for linguistic production and interpretation in the form of socio-cultural background and conventions. "It is through these conventions that the force and type of speech acts are determined"(Austin as cited in House, 2005, p.339). By these Austin believes that the socio-cultural context, through which the communication is achieved, determines the meaning of what the speaker has produced through his speech acts and allows the receiver to interpret the matter at issue.

Searle (as cited in House, 2006), on the other hand, not only takes socio-cultural aspects of language and interpretation into account, but also pays special attention to the speaker's state of mind, intentions , and feelings in determining the interpretation of the speech acts.

Opposing the positivistic approaches to the analysis of texts taken by analytic philosophy, hermeneutics adopts the interpretive approaches to understanding the meaning of texts.

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics takes into account the notion of text interpretation by considering the context as a determining factor in the interpretation of texts. Besides, he relatively emphasizes the importance of historical as well as the socio-cultural background of the interpreter (i.e., translator) in understanding the texts. Moreover, his emphasis on interpreter (or translator) being previously involved in hermeneutics in socio-cultural contexts implies that such involvement remains subjective simply on the grounds that it is always regulated by the translator's disposition and stance toward a specific socio-cultural interest to experience things in certain ways (Malpas, 2009, sec. 3.2). Accordingly, Gadamer believes that the interpreter and translator are prone to their prejudices (prejudgment in Gadamer's words) which are determined by their socio-cultural stance per se (ibid). In his influential book, *Truth and Method*, Gadamer (2004) believes that:

Here [in case of translation] the translator must translate the meaning to be understood into the context in which the other speaker lives. This does not, of course, mean that he is at liberty to falsify the meaning of what the other person says. Rather, the meaning must be preserved, but since it must be understood within a new language world, it must establish its validity within it in a new way. Thus every translation is 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 (p. 386).

Gadamer takes the notion of interpreter's prior hermeneutical situatedness as those anticipatory structures that tell us what to be interpreted and grasped in a preliminary fashion (Malpas, 2009, sec. 3.2). In his view, interpretation always occurs from within a particular 'horizon' determined unconsciously by our historically-determined situatedness. That being the case, Gadamer's philosophical approach to the interpretation of the text occurred as a matter of dialogue between the interpreter's horizon (socio-cultural stance) and the text's in the hermeneutical dialogue for gaining access to an 'agreement' about the matter at issue. The interpretation of the message, therefore; involves a process of the 'fusion of horizons'.

Consequently, the interpretation and naturally the translation of a particular text by different translators with different horizons and socio-cultural backgrounds are different in accordance with historically-affected situatedness and the translators' prejudgments.

In this respect, the present study tries to investigate the theories of philosophical hermeneutics in three different translations of Hafiz chosen with respect to different historical periods, translated by Wilberforce-Clarke (1891), Ordoubadian (2006), and Arberry (1947) in order to find out the effect of socio-historical context as well as the translators' prejudgments (horizons) on the interpretation and translation products.

1.3. Significance of the Study

The theory maintaining that socio-cultural and historical contexts may direct our interpretations of texts asserts that every understanding of the world becomes historically defined, hence the historicity of understanding. In fact, in in postmodern theories, nothing is considered absolute and objective; therefore, assessing an interpretation of a single phenomenon in a certain context defines the prejudgment of the interpreter (the translator), hence different, historical interpretation. It shows that socio-historical context is very important in determining the prejudgment of the interpreter; hence, the role of context in determining is linguistically mediated per se.

In addition, hermeneutics is even more fundamental: it concerns the very human existence. It is in this form, as an interrogation into the deepest conditions for symbolic interaction and culture in general, that hermeneutics has provided the critical horizon for many of the most intriguing discussions of contemporary philosophy. Relatively emphasizing the importance of historical as well as the socio-cultural background of the interpreter (i.e., translator) in understanding the texts, Gadamer believes that the interpreter and translator are bound to their prejudices (*prejudgment* in Gadamer's words) which are determined by their socio-cultural stance per se. According to Gadamer (2004), this context is predetermined by conventions which are linguistically mediated (p. 371). He believes that "The essential relation between language and understanding is seen primarily in the fact that the essence of tradition is to exist in the medium of language, so that the preferred object of interpretation is a verbal one" (ibid, p. 391). As far as translation is concerned, such an analysis is useful to evaluate different translations of a single text in order to assess the role of socio-cultural contexts and historical conventions in determining the prejudgment of interpreters in understanding any given text. So far, little attention has been paid to this crucial aspect in Persian translations of different texts, hence doing such case studies is important for social scholars to find out the conventions within which a translator is translating.

1.4. Research Questions

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the historicity of translation according to the theory of historicity of understanding introduced by Gadamer. It also takes advantage of the philosophical hermeneutics in order to consider the role of 'fusion of horizons' in attaining intercultural understanding by applying translation as means of communicating among civilizations. In order to investigate these approaches, the present study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do the approaches of the three translators of Hafiz's poetry examined in this study exemplify the historicity of understanding?

2. How useful the ideas of philosophical hermeneutics concerning translation are in understanding and evaluating the translations of Hafiz's poetry?

3. To what extent do the results of the present study change the definition of translation based on the ideas of philosophical hermeneutics?

1.5. Definition of Key Terms

1. **Translation:** an activity which "consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style" (Nida & Taber, 1969, p. 12).

2. **Hermeneutics:** The term *hermeneutics* covers both the first order art and the second order theory of understanding and interpretation of linguistic and non-linguistic expressions (Vessay, 2005, p. 209).

3. **Philosophical hermeneutics:** A philosophical turning point took place in hermeneutics after introducing existential philosophy centered on the self-disclosure of the structure of understanding as such. Therefore Gadamer, adopting this kind of philosophy, introduced philosophical hermeneutics as " temporality and historicality—a situation in one's present that looks back to the past and anticipates the future—is inseparably a part of each individual's being; that the process of understanding something […] goes on not only in reading verbal texts but in all aspects of human experience; and that language, like

temporality, pervades all aspects of that experience" (Abrams, 2005, p. 137). Hermeneutics, then, as the study of interpretive understanding, becomes both the means for self-understanding and the model for how humans interact in the environment (as text).

4. **Fusion of horizons:** "Gadamer views understanding as a matter of negotiation between oneself [one's horizons] and one's partner[text] in the hermeneutical dialogue such that the process of understanding can be seen as a matter of coming to an 'agreement' about the matter at issue" (Malpas, 2009, sec. 2.2). Coming to such an agreement means interpretation of a text which takes place between the interpreter's horizons (pre-understanding) addressing some questions to the text and the responses elicited from the text's horizons.

5. **Prejudice:** in Gadamer's view, in every interpretation, the interpreter's prejudices (pre-understanding) or socio-cultural pre- structures are required in understanding action. As onset, prejudices play a significant role in proceeding on the act of interpretation because it elicits responses from the text (Gadamer, 1994, p. 490).

6. **Foreignization:** refers to "an ethno-deviant pressure on those (cultural) values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad" (Venuti, 1995, p. 20).

7. **Domestication:** According to Venuti, domestication refers to "an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values, bring[ing] the author back home"(ibid, p. 20).

8. **Historicity of Understanding:** "Understanding and interpretation for Gadamer constitute the mode of being of all our cultural traditions. These traditions are necessarily embedded in language *(die Sprache).* It follows, therefore, that understanding and interpretation are, above all, events in an historical process. Only secondarily do they constitute a specific method of the human sciences" (Mueller-Vollmer, 2006, p. 40).

Chapter Two
Review of Literature

2.1. Overview

The philosophical ideas in translation theory and practice have occupied philosophers and theorists throughout history. In fact, the linguistic nature of translation has stirred these philosophers' minds to inspect the nature of communication among cultures and languages. Analytic philosophy, hermeneutics, structuralism, and etc. have endeavored to explore this nature. Philosophical hermeneutics which tries to investigate the nature of understanding and asserts the historicity of understanding is one of these approaches.

This chapter tries to discuss different approaches and studies in the field of philosophical hermeneutics and clarify the main concepts of this approach which is related to translation theory and practice. It will also discuss different approaches of hermeneutics whose ideas in translation are different and in some cases contrary to philosophical hermeneutics.

2.2. Hermeneutics: Etymology and Definition

Both etymology and definition of hermeneutics are outshone by history and its ongoing process in the human sciences. Some believe that the term