



Ministry of Science, Research and Technology  
Azarbaijan Teacher Education University  
Faculty of Literature and Humanity  
English Language Department

Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Office and the Department of English in  
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts (M.A)  
in English Language Teaching

**The Implications of Derrida's Concept of "Différance" for  
Literary Translation**

Supervisor:  
B. Behin, Ph.D.

Consultant:  
. Ramazani, Ph. D.

By:  
Yavar Bavafa Moradlu

February, 2009  
Tabriz, Iran

IN THE NAME OF GOD

TO:

My parents

and

My teachers

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I wish to thank, in particular Dr. Behin, my supervisor, for his teachings, insights, and encouragement. He taught me how to think critically and avoid taking things for granted. He has been of a great help from the time I chose my topic until now. Whenever I became discouraged or disappointed because of the difficulty of handling the research, he encouraged me to continue. My thanks also go to Dr. Ramazani, my advisor, whose deep knowledge of English literature has been of great help to me.

Finally, I am sincerely indebted to Dr. Azabdaftari, Dr. Behnam, Dr. Salashoor, and my dear classmates.

# Table of Contents

Title	Page
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	x
List of Abbreviations .....	xi

## CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

1.1. Introduction .....	2
1.2. Purpose of the study .....	3
1.3. Limitations of the Study.....	3
1.4. Research Questions .....	4
1.5. The Significance of the Study .....	4
1.6. Definition of Key Terms .....	5
1.6.1. The Process of Translation .....	5
1.6.2. Equivalent Effect .....	6
1.6.3. Formal Equivalence .....	7
1.6.4. Dynamic Equivalence .....	7
1.6.5. Semantic Translation .....	7
1.6.6. Communicative Translation .....	7
1.6.7. Translation Shift .....	8
1.6.8. Foreignizing Tanslation .....	8

<b>1.6.9. Domesticating Translation .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>1.6.10. Logocentrism .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1.6.11. Diff'erance .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1.6.12. Abusive Fidelity .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1.7. Organization of the Dissertation .....</b>	<b>10</b>

## **CHAPTER TWO: Review of the Related literature**

<b>2.1. The prelinguistics period of translation .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>2.1.1. Word-for-word or sense-for-sense translation.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>2.1.2. Faithfulness, spirit and truth .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2.1.3. Early attempts at systematic translation theory.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2.1.4. Schliermacher and valorization of the foreign.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>2.2. Equivalence and equivalent effect .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>2.2.1. Roman Jakobson .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>2.2.2. Nida and the science of translating .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>2.2.2.1. The influence of Chomsky .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>2.2.2.2. Formal and dynamic equivalence .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>2.2.3. Newmark: semantic and communicative translation.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>2.3. The translation shift approach .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>2.3.1. Vinay and Darbelnet's Model .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>2.3.2. Catford and translation shifts .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>2.4. Functional theories of translation .....</b>	<b>25</b>

2.4.1. Text type .....	25
2.4.2. Translational action .....	28
2.4.3. Skopos theory .....	28
2.5. Discourse and register analysis approaches .....	29
2.5.1. House's model of translation quality assessment.....	31
2.5.2. Hatim and Mason: Discourse and the translator.....	32
2.5.2.1. Communicative dimension .....	32
2.5.2.2. Pragmatic dimension .....	33
2.5.2.2.1. Speech act theory .....	33
2.5.2.2.2. Gricean maxims.....	34
2.5.2.3. Semiotic dimension .....	35
2.6. Polysystem theory .....	38
2.6.1. Polysystem theory of Itmar Even- Zohar .....	38
2.6.2. Toury and Descriptive Translation studies .....	40
2.7. The cultural turn .....	41
2.7.1. Translation as rewriting .....	41
2.7.2. Translation and gender .....	42
2.7.3. Post-colonial translation theory .....	43
2.7.3.1. The Brizilian cannibalism .....	44
2.8. The invisibility of the translator .....	44
2.9. Philosophical Theories of Translation .....	46
2.9.1. The Task of The Translator: Walter Benjamin.....	46
2.9.2. The Hermeneutic Motion: George Steiner .....	51

<b>2.9.3. The Energy of Language: Erza Pound.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>2.9.4. Deconstruction.....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>2.9.4.1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>2.9.4.2. Definition.....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>2.9.4.3. Against The Hierarchy.....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>2.9.4.4. Against Logocentrism.....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>2.9.4.5. The challenge to “the meaning of being as presence”.....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>2.9.4.6. Derrida and Speech Act Theory .....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>2.9.4.7. Deconstruction and Translation.....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>2.9.4.8. Différance and Translation .....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>2.9.4.9. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>2.9.4.10. A Report of Previous Applications of deconstruction to Poems and its Implications for Translation .....</b>	<b>74</b>

### **CHAPTER THREE: Methodology**

<b>3.1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>3.2. The Methodology of the Present Study .....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>3.3. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>79</b>

### **CHAPTER FOUR: Data Analysis and Discussion**

<b>4.1. Working out a conventional meaning on the poem .....</b>	<b>83</b>
--	-----------



<b>4.2. A Deconstructive Reading .....</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>4.3. The Measure of Abuse in Translation .....</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>4.3.1. Riming Poem .....</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>4.3.2. Pun( Paronomasia) .....</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>4.3.3. Harmony .....</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>4.3.4. Gemming .....</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>4.3.5. Alliteration .....</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>4.3.6. Equivoque .....</b>	<b>91</b>

## **CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications**

<b>5.1. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>5.2. Pedagogical Implications .....</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>5.3. Suggestions for Further Studies .....</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>99</b>

## ABSTRACT

The present thesis deals with the implications for translation of the concept of *différance*, one of the terminologies of deconstructionism, which is considered as a critical approach to language, meaning and consequently translation. The major tenet of deconstructionism is the indeterminacy and undecidability of meaning. Deconstructionism challenges the binary oppositions and meaning of being as presence. It is against any fixed and unified meaning. Unlike logocentrism which leads to a hierarchical mode of thinking, i.e. one of the terms dominates the other (light is superior and opposite to dark), deconstructionism proposes an alternative in which the two terms are not opposite to each other, but each element is a trace of the other. Proposing the notion of trace, deconstructionists believe that a text differs from what it tends to say. Focusing on a poem by Hafiz, an Iranian poet in the 8th century, the present researcher aims to demonstrate the indeterminacy of meaning and examine the application of the notion of “abusive fidelity” to translation. In order to accomplish such a goal, the researcher focuses on the binary oppositions and argues that they are not opposite to each other and the meaning of the words is not clear and the text undermines its own logic. Then, he concludes the study by examining the quality of transference of the rhetorical figures and thus the success or failure of the translator in following the strategy of abusive fidelity.

**Key Terms:** translation, deconstruction, *différance*, logocentrism, metaphysics of presence, binary oppositions, trace, undecidability (or indeterminacy) of meaning, abusive fidelity, equivalence, the energy of language

## List of Abbreviations

1. ST.....Source Text
2. TT.....Target Text
3. DTS.....Descriptive Translation Studies

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **Introduction**

## **1.1. Introduction**

Although it is said that the theory of translation is as old as the tower of Babel, it was really introduced in 1980s for the first time. According to Gentzler (1993), George Steiner maintains that up until the time of Roman Jakobson the translation theory included a sterile debate making a distinction between word- for- word (i.e. literal) and sense- for-sense (i.e. free translation). Modern theories of translation such as the American translation workshop, the science of translation, the translation shift approach, etc. began with the era of structuralism while deconstructionism is among the theories which are introduced in the era of poststructuralism. The outstanding characteristic of deconstructionism concerning translation is that it does not make a distinction between the original and the translation, nor does it assume that there should be an equivalence of some sort between the translation and the original. Deconstructionism challenges the long-standing notion of the translation as inferior to the original. It introduces a radical view of translation in which translation is not a marginal but a primary activity. Ironically, the cannibalistic metaphor has been used to demonstrate to translators what they can do with a text. According to Bassnet and Trivedi (1999), Heraldo de Campos likens translation to "a blood transfusion, where the emphasis is on the health and nourishment of the translator"(p.5). This is "a far cry from the notion of faithfulness to an original" (Bassnet and Trivedi, 1999, p. 5).In this sense, the translator is an all-powerful reader and a free agent as a writer.

## **1.2. Purpose of the study**

The major tenet of deconstructionism is the indeterminacy or undecidability of meaning of any text. In order to prove this claim, deconstructionists' strategy is to read the text closely and critically in order to find inconsistencies and contradictions within the text. They use these contradictions in order to argue that the text is different from what it tends to say. This difference is due to the fact that the meaning of any word, for example, is endlessly contaminated by its connotations (opposites, etymology, etc.) and never comes to rest in an actual and complete presence. Hence, the indeterminacy and incessant deferment of meaning. As the subject of translation is concerned, it is no longer regarded as the transference of pure signifieds from one language into another. And fidelity to the original is impossible. Deconstruction, instead, proposes the notion of abusive fidelity as the strategy by which the inevitable loss in translation can be compensated for. The present researcher wants to examine whether the translator of Hafiz's poems has afforded to observe the abuse of his poetry.

## **1.3. Limitations of the Study**

It is known to everybody that the subject of deconstruction is a new one in Iranian universities; therefore, few people have much information about it. When the researcher was going to choose the topic, "The Implications of Derrida's Concept of Différance for Literary Translation," all the classmates started disappointing him, saying that they might not be relevant to each other or if there was any relation between them how he was to prove it in practice because the few readings looked very abstract and no work had already been done practically. The researcher looked high and low in vain to find any practical work on

the subject; yet he knew that finally one way could be found. The penchant for the subject and the burning interest in the matter of translation besides the dear supervisor 's encouragement and insights made possible the continuation of the work. He started to study earlier theories of translation and drafted much of the Review section, not knowing how it could be possible to show the implications of deconstruction for translation but thinking of the issue all the time when eating, sleeping, walking, and when at work. Finally, it occurred to him like a revelation that he could accomplish the study by focusing attention on the different rhetorical figures used in Persian poems and examining the quality of their transference.

#### **1.4. Research Questions**

1. Is there such a thing as the indeterminacy of meaning? Is a text subject to multiple interpretations?
2. Does a text differ from what it tends to say?
3. Is fidelity to the original text (especially a literary text) possible? If not, what can the translator do?

#### **1.5. Significance of the Study**

Three things urged the researcher to do a study in this area. Firstly, deconstructionism is a radically new approach to language, meaning and text. However, very little has been said and written about it in Iran. Therefore, many of its angles remain to be discovered. Except for a few cases such as "The Dialectics of Sign and Anti-Sign", an

essay written by Farzan Sojudi (1998) in Persian, no one has applied deconstructive reading to the great Persian literary works. Ironically, any student of language who is interested in this approach applies it to a foreign work like "A Deconstructionist Analysis of William Blakes 'A Poison Tree'", an unpublished MA Thesis by Davoud Reza Zamzia (2008). Then the researcher feels the need to apply such a theory to a national work. Secondly, much has been said and written about the possibility or impossibility of poetry translation and some of the studies have a negative attitude towards that. Some have even recommended that poetry translation be avoided because of the inevitable losses occurring in translation. However, deconstruction differs from other approaches in that it encourages translation because it believes that the original text is dependent on the translation since there is some specificity in every text which cannot be discovered unless it is translated. The original text is indebted to the translation because the translation lets the original text continue life more and better. Thirdly, such an approach can have a great impact on classroom practices. Teachers who are familiar with deconstruction would not mark students' papers with a fixed interpretation of a text in mind. And students do not feel constrained to deal with translating literary texts.

## **1.6. Definition of Key Terms**

### **1.6.1. The Process of Translation**

In "Introducing Translation Studies", Jeremy Munday (2001) defines the process of translation in the following way;

The process of translation between two different written languages involves the translator changing an original written text (the source text or ST) in the original



verbal language (the source language or SL) into a written text (the target text or TT) in a different verbal language ( the target language or TL).(p.5)

This type corresponds to "interlingual translation" and is one of the three categories of translation described by the Czech structuralist Roman Jakobson (1959/2000) in his seminal paper "On linguistic aspects of translation";

1. **intralingual** translation , or rewording: an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language;
2. **interlingual** translation, or translation proper: an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language;
3. **intersemiotic** translation, or transmutation: an interpretation of verbal signs by means of non-verbal sign system.

Interlingual translation would occur, for example, when we rephrase an expression or text in the same language for the purpose of clarification. Intersemiotic translation would occur if a written text were translated, for example, into music, etc. It is interlingual translation which is the focus of this study.

### **1.6.2. Equivalent Effect**

According to Newmark (1988), equivalent effect is a principle the aim of which is to produce the same effect (or one as close as possible ) on the readership of the translation as was obtained on the readership of the original.

### **1.6.3. Formal Equivalence**

According to Leonardi (2000), Nida and Taber maintain that formal correspondence focuses attention on the message itself, in both form and content. Formal correspondence consists of a target language item which represents the closest natural equivalent of a SL word or phrase

### **1.6.4. Dynamic Equivalence**

As Leonardi (2000) points out, Nida and Taber define dynamic equivalence as a translation procedure according to which a translator translates the meaning of the original text in such a way that the target language text will have the same impact on the target culture audience as the original text did upon the source text audience. They argue that the form of the original text is changed, the message is preserved and the translation is faithful.

### **1.6.5. Semantic Translation**

Newmark (1988) says "semantic translation attempts to render, as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the second language allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original"(p.47).

### **1.6.6. Communicative Translation**

Newmark (1988) says "communicative translation attempts to render the exact contextual meaning of the original in such a way that both content and language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership"(p.47).

### **1.6.7. Translation Shift**

According to Leonardi (2000), Catford defines shifts as deviations from formal equivalence in the process of translating a source text into a target text. Catford (1965) claims there are two main types of translation shifts, namely level shifts, where the SL item at one linguistic level (e.g. grammar) has a TL equivalent at a different level (e.g. lexis), and category shifts which are divided into four types; Structure-shifts, Class-shifts rank shifts and intra-system shifts.

### **1.6.8. Foreignizing Translation**

According to Xianbin (2005), "foreignizing translation procedure involves the choice of a foreign text and the invention of translation discourses"(p.2). In other words, a translator can achieve a foreignizing translation through the use of a discursive strategy that deviates from the prevailing hierarchy of dominant discourses (e.g. dense archaism) as well as choosing a text that is excluded by dominant cultural values in the target language. The purpose of this strategy is to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text.

### **1.6.9. Domesticating Translation**

Domesticating translation leads to the production of a text so transparent that it does not seem to be translated. As Norman Shapiro notes "A good translation is like a pane of glass" (as cited in Venuti (1995, p.1)). In it foreign words are avoided and it depends on a syntax that is not so faithful to the foreign text.

### **1.6.10. Logocentrism**

According to Norris (1991), Derrida claims that not only all Western philosophies and theories of language, but all Western uses of language, and all Western cultures are logocentric; that is, they are centered on a logos or they rely on "the metaphysics of presence". They are phonocentric; that is, they prioritize speech over writing as the model for analyzing all discourse. Logocentrism or metaphysics of presence is described as craving for origins, truth and presence. It is a sickness that is prevalent all the way from Plato until now.

### **1.6.11. Diff'erance**

Abrams (1993) says Derrida coins the term "diff'erance" to indicate a fusion of two senses of the verb "differer": to be different and to defer. Firstly, the significance of a text is the result of its difference. Secondly, the significance can never come to rest in an actual presence, or extralinguistic "transcendental signified"(p.227); rather its determinate signification is deferred from one linguistic interpretation to another in a movement or play in an endless regress.

### **1.6.12. Abusive Fidelity**

Lewis (1985) describes abusive fidelity as a strategy of translation which involves risk-taking and experimenting with the expressive and rhetorical patterns of language. It requires that the translator focus on the chain of signifiers, on syntactic processes and discursive structures, on the incidence of language mechanisms on thought and reality