



# Words Without End: Translatability VS Untranslatability in T. S. Eliot's Poem "Ash Wednesday"

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** Translation used to be considered an inter-language transfer of meaning, which is the point of departure for research and study. **Methodology:** Many earlier definitions demonstrate this, using source language and target language as their technical terms. Moreover, translation theories strictly confined themselves within the sphere of linguistics. For many years the popular trend in the translation circles had been perfect faithfulness to the original both in content and in form and it had been regarded as the iron criterion as if from the holy Bible for translators to observe. **Results:** The godly status and the impossible idealistic belief were not altered until new thoughts arose with the respect of consideration of target readers, the unavoidable translator subjectivity and the purpose and function of translations. This thesis, starting to look from new angles such as the accommodation to target cultural conventions, the translator's consciousness of linguistic and cultural adaptations to make it easy for readers to understand translated works without too much pain and effort, and translation as a purposeful endeavour. **Conclusion:** Translation is then understood as a much more complicated activity with a much broader scope

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## 1. Introduction

Language is the central subject of any discussion about translation. However, there are certain elements involved in the process of translation which go beyond this conventional area. This is especially true for literary translation in general and translation of poetry in particular. According to Translation used to be considered an inter-language transfer of meaning, which is the point of departure for research and study. Many earlier definitions demonstrate this, using source language and target language as their technical terms. Moreover, translation theories strictly confined themselves within the sphere of linguistics. For many years the popular trend in the translation circles had been perfect faithfulness to the original both in content and in form and it had been regarded as the iron criterion as if from the holy Bible for translators to observe. The godly status and the impossible idealistic belief were not altered until new thoughts arose with the respect of consideration of target readers, the unavoidable translator subjectivity and the purpose and function of translations. This thesis, starting to look from new angles such as the accommodation to target cultural conventions, the translator's consciousness of linguistic and cultural adaptations to make it easy for readers to understand translated works without too much pain and effort, and translation as a purposeful endeavor. Translation is then understood as a much more complicated activity with a much broader scope.

Translation of poetry was, and still is by some, believed as impossibility for any unfaithful elements would have been taken as failure, be it content or form. The arguments include linguistic elements and cultural elements. Most importantly the myth of untranslatability looks upon poetry as beauty itself which is untouchable for once it is touched it is destroyed. But as translation of poetry has never been stagnant though sometimes vigorous and sometimes not, there is strong evidence in both translation history and present day practice that poetic translation, a literary form as distinguished from fiction, drama, and prose, is translatable. Poetry itself serves a purpose, be it an elusive matter, and aesthetics can be reproduced in another language and culture if accommodation is made. It would be highly likely that the target readers would obtain rather similar if not the same aesthetic pleasure reading the

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translation as would the source readers reading the original poem. And this is, I believe, the only criterion in evaluating and assessing what is a successful piece of translation. Of course there are other functions of poetry like informative, didactic, cognitive, practical and even entertainment functions. The aesthetic function stays at the top of the list, though.

In other words, if a translation fails to perform the aesthetic function it is in my eyes a bad translation, no matter how well the form is preserved. A word-for-word translation may be judged faithful in form, but it is failure in terms of the performance of functions. As aesthetics of one people influences them with different elements from that of another, accommodation in translation is of urgent necessity. Often loss or addition is made to achieve that end and sometimes only some elements are preserved while other elements are neglected. This is inevitable or there will be no translation, which means if one fears any loss or addition, one should learn to read the original always instead of reading the translated version. But how many of us can do that?

### 1.1 What is translation?

- Translation studies were born at a 1976 colloquium in Leuven, Belgium. While at this time the participants were still trying to pin down what practicing translators actually do in specific situations, currently many theories of translation are proliferating, often without connections to empirical research.
- Research in new translation studies is proceeding along 3 lines of investigation: 1) theory, 2) history, 3) practice. Ideally, scholars in all 3 branches should exchange ideas. There is a disturbing lack of interaction between scholars in the theory and practice branches.
- New university programs in translation are being established, i.e. Univ. of Massachusetts at Amherst. Already existing reputable ones are at Columbia, Iowa, Kent State, Arkansas, Penn State, and SUNY.
- New Journals are springing up, such as *The Translator* (UK), and *Target* (Belgium, Tel Aviv), new book series are being started, and important international conferences are being established, one being the Maastricht-Lodz colloquium on “Translation and Meaning”, which is held every five years.
- Translation, perhaps because it has always been concerned with the recovery and representation of meaning (or the impossibility thereof) has much to contribute to ongoing discussions of literary and cultural studies. Robinson’s subjective approach along with its proposed pragmatics and range of ideas is not a traditional Anglo American literary translator approach, nor a modern linguistic approach, nor any of the literary critical approaches.
- Robinson brings up never before mentioned influences on translation practice – such as a translator’s mood affecting his translation, or the source-text reader’s role in translation theory. These concepts have never before been mentioned in translation theory. He also calls attention to a class struggle within translation theory - the fact that there are currently few theories that span the gap between literary translation, which is occupied by high salary academic researchers, and free-lance or corporate translation (such as technical translation, mass-market genre fiction, advertising translations, etc.) whose translators need to translate in order to live.
- Part I: Robinson finds it important to include historical selections on rhetoric, grammar, and hermeneutics. This section traces common assumptions, held by early theorists on how language functions. According to Robinson, these theories remain in the “collective intellectual operating system”, albeit unconsciously, and need to be included in new translation studies models.
- Part II: Robinson confronts Polysystem Theory, a substantial theoretical development in the field. It is a model for studying the position of translated texts within cultural systems, including the role of translation in “emerging cultures”.
- Part III: Focus on “strategies of resistance” – strategies frequently employed by marginalized groups in any given culture.
- Robinson raises a critique on a contradiction in the way translation studies came into being. Some scholars argue that the field has been marginalized by literary and linguistic studies in general and that it should be considered a legitimate academic discipline, arguing the possibilities for systemic rigor and research. On the other hand, new translation studies are also defined by rethinking translation in unconventional ways, thus opposing traditional methodologies for studying translated texts (i.e., as practiced in publishing firms, literature programs, linguistics dept.).
- Robinson himself is poststructuralist and personal (vs. systems theory or structuralize).
- For example, he raises questions about radical translation methodologies and their link to modernism and nationalist and elitist movements.
- In connection to this, he also raises questions about how anyone can ever access “the other”, such as the viewpoint of the community that created the original text. Traditional methods of translation have been used as colonizing tools in the imperialist project of European colonizers – a criticism that has led to influence on postcolonial translation theories.
- Literary translation in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in Anglo-American culture either conforms to the dominant poetics and political norms of the receiving culture (=domestication), or refuses to conform by developing affiliations with strategies employed within marginalized literary movements or excluded cultures, allowing space for the emergence of the source culture, “the other”. The latter postcolonial practice is called “foreign zing translation” or “abusive fidelity”. According to some scholars, it is important to recognize this movement and to import new literary devices and techniques. One scholar writes, “The contemporary translator should seek forms of resistance against the regime of fluent domestication”. The foreign zing stance is thus a cultural/political fluency resistance movement and is often compared to the communist revolution against capitalism.

**Table 1. Domesticating Translation**

Hegemony (Domesticating Translation)	Counter hegemony (Foreign zing Translation)
Reification of the domestic ideal	Idiosyncratic Response – acknowledging the unregulated variety of reader response
Fluency ideal	Other (or no) ideals Example: Fragmentation and open-endedness of thought and conversation
Fluent writing	No fluent writing

- However, the concept of “foreign zing translation” raises many questions. One is if it is such a novel concept as initially believed (dating back to Roman culture). Another is the question about who is abused in such a translation situation, the source-language author, the source-language text, or the source-language culture? Or is it the target language reader, text, and culture that’s being abused?
- Robinson himself, when translating, uses “foreign zing strategies” such as maintaining foreign word order and translating idioms in a word-for-word fashion rather than searching for the English equivalent. For example, his translation of a Finnish play received raving reviews, and even though it read stiltedly and disturbingly, the actors loved it.

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1.1 UNTRANSLATABILITY—WHAT THEY ARE SAYING

"Traduttore-traditore." (Translator = traitor.), says the well-known Italian phrase. "Poetry is what gets lost in translation," Robert Frost says.

Western tradition and culture is founded on untranslatability. This may sound like a paradox, if one thinks of the long tradition of translation study or translation imperil in the culture, or if you just ponder the very word tradition. Tradition, from Latin trader ('hand over'), implies a process of communication, transmission, and transference that necessarily allows for the transformation, whether in terms of “losses” or “gains,” usually associated with what we consensually mean by translation. To translate is not to say the same thing in another tongue, but to make manifest a different thing. This may sound close to what we used to call “the impossibility of translation”.

Booker (1996) holds that poets cannot be compared, as each is unique. Translation is impossible; it is only a pedagogical necessity. The responsibility of the interpreter is to capture "the mood or state of being (stato d'animo) of its author."

In modern times some scholars have come to realize that something in a language cannot be fully translated into another, in other words, there is an inevitable loss of meaning. Catford (1965), a celebrated translation scholar of the linguistic school, raises the issue of untranslatability with a new perspective. He argues that linguistic untranslatability is due to the difference in the Source Language (SL) and the Target Language (TL), whereas cultural untranslatability is due to the absence in the TL of relevant situational features. Connor (2006), in the fruitful book *A comparative French and English Stylistics* have analysed in detail the points of linguistic difference between the two languages, differences that constitute areas where translation is impossible. Cowart (1980) also has attempted to define untranslatability without making a separation between the linguistic and cultural factors. Nida (1984) presents a rich source of information about the problems of loss in translation, in particular about the difficulties encountered by the translators when facing with terms or concepts in SL that do not exist in TL. Newmark (1981) has also once briefly talked about the deviation in translation.

In Chinese translation history, in contemporary and modern day translation circles, many experts and scholars have also discussed the problem to some extent in their empirical assertions and research papers.

As early as the flourishing period of Buddhist scriptures, the problem of untranslatability was mentioned and a rather strong expression was used to criticize certain versions as ‘feeding others what one has munched in his own mouth’ (嚼饭与人, my translation), not mentioning translation of poetry.

Zhu (1987) says that the reason why poetry translation poses more difficulty than prose translation lies in that poetry stress more on its musical quality while prose emphasizes more on meaning.

Translating meaning is apparently easier than translating the musical quality (my translation). Chinese, unlike English, uses characters which are all single syllables, namely, one character as one syllable. So phrases and clauses are easily arranged into even number phrases and neat even number couplets, if the need arises for comparison or contrast. However, the western languages have strict grammatical rules, requiring fixed structures that forbid free inversions or disorders. If translating literally according to the Chinese form, confusion emerges. (Ibid: 201) (My translation) Poetry can not only be translated into a foreign language nor can it be translated into another style or another historical period of the same language because the sound and meaning of the language change with the times. Modern syllables and rhythms cannot replace those needed in ancient language and modern associated meaning cannot replace the ancient associated meaning (Ibid: 223) (my translation).

Berger (1997) proposes that poetic untranslatability mainly lies in the transference of the beauty of the original sound. If put in order, the transference of sound stays at the top of the list, then form and style, lastly meaning (my translation).

Zhu (1987) exemplifies untranslatability as follows: “Li Bai stands between the ancient style and contemporary style. His *wul ù*, which consists of five characters in each line and eight lines altogether, has the soul of ancient style and the body of the contemporary which is characterized with abundant embellishment. The embellished style may be translatable but not the poetic power. Nevertheless Li Bai without his tremendous power is no longer himself”. (My translation) For example, the lines 人烟寒橘柚, 秋色老梧桐 was translated as:

The smoke from the cottages curls

Up around the citron trees,

And the hues of late autumn are on the green paulownias. “What is the matter?” Mr. Zhu asks, “The glorious beauty of the Chinese poem, once transformed into English should become so barren and mediocre! Such precious lines as these are untranslatable for they are too subtle and too refined. If one has to translate it anyway, it is doomed to be destroyed. Beauty is untouchable. If it is touched, it dies.” (My translation) (Ibid: 150).

But Zhu later has to admit in another book that translation is not intended for the original author or those who understand the source language. It should not intend to compare with the original. It is impossible and unnecessary to please the reader who understands the source language with one's translation (my translation) (Ibid: 154).

In summary, I find that those who stick to untranslatability are but two kinds of people. Some strictly believe the holiness of the original text and others the absoluteness of the unity of meaning and form in a certain language. And they, idealistically, do not allow any addition or loss of meaning in the transferring process as in translation, which is actually inevitable and is a rule rather than an exception.

## 2.2 TRANSLATABILITY --A HYPOTHESIS

Translation work, in its present form, dates back more than a thousand years in China and in Western countries. The ever-lasting practice of translation itself manifests the translatability of languages. Therefore, it stands to reason that a language can be translated from one language into another. Under the guide of this perception, former scholars usually probe into the problem of translation from an instinctive and empirical point of view.

Not all words need to be translated. Some cannot. Some can be transcribable, but if there is no cultural equivalent, whether it is translatable or not it still needs to be explained, just like a jargon needs to be explained to the non-specialist in a footnote. Words, expressions or interjections that are exclusive to a culture, a religion or a jargon cannot always be translated in a satisfactory way because the same thing does not exist in the other language's culture. In many cases such words with no perfect equivalent are the words that end up being borrowed by the other language, sometimes with a possible spelling adaptation to ease pronunciation in the other language.

Clark (1981) comes to the conclusion that poetry by definition is untranslatable. Only creative transposition is possible. With this as a prerequisite, translation of poetry should and must be translatable.

Historically speaking, the activity of poetic translation has always been there, popular at one time and losing momentum at another, though always being practiced. In other words, whenever human communication is necessary, translation will live on and maintain a firm and fast stronghold. The reason is simple but unavoidable—we, as a nation or a country, are not living alone. As long as we do not lock ourselves up, translation will be translatable, be it scientific translation or poetic translation.

Many translators in contemporary and modern China have made and are making outstanding contributions to the literary and poetic exchanges between China and the West through their diligent and painstaking work. Xu Yuanchong, for instance, has translated several books of Chinese ancient poems into English, the most important being the 300 Hundred Tang Poems. Gu Zhengkun, by rendering into English the Collection of Mao Zedong's Poems, is another example to have introduced Chinese poetry to readers of English. Foreigners include Arthur Waley, Herbert Giles, Witter Bynner, W.J.B. Fletcher, James Legg, Amy Lowell, etc. Translators from English into English are, needless to say, numerous, such as Bian Zhilin, Guo Moruo, Tu Ang, Huang Gaoxin, Jiang Feng, Cao Minglun, and Zhu Chunshen, to name but a few for the present purpose.

All these people do not only support the idea that translation of poetry is possible but provide living proof by their many well-received and highly-acclaimed translated works.

## 2.3 UNTRANSLATABILITY—ANALYSIS OF WHY

Let's see what specialists say, to begin with, about the nature and essence of translation.

Bowen (1974) says that indeed, modern translation theory denies the very existence of translation as it has previously been understood, i.e. as the replacement of an utterance in one language by another, so that the two are interchangeable. The dream of “literal” or “close” translation, which culminated in the attempt to computerize translation, has given way in turn to what might be termed a higher subjectivity. Since “there are connections but not correlations or diagnostic correspondences between cultural norms and linguistic patterns”, no language is ever a valid substitute for another;

“Faithfulness” in translation is thus impossible.

Burgess (1975) believes that translation is and will continue to be a relative concept. It could be said that every translation represents a transposition from the perspectives of one linguistic view of the world to those of another and that this cannot take place entirely without changes or metamorphoses (change of form or character).

Carrier (1965) holds that the world view of one's native tongue is dominant, thus making man a ‘prisoner of his language’. Wolfram Wilss (Ibid: 49) says, “The translatability of a text can thus be measured in terms of the degree to which it can be re-contextualized in TL, taking into account all linguistic and extra-linguistic factors. ... The translatability of a text is thus guaranteed by the existence of universal categories in syntax, semantics, and the (natural) logic of experience.

...Linguistic untranslatability occurs when the linguistic form has a function beyond that of conveying factual relationships and is therefore a constituent part of the functional equivalence to be achieved. This, for example, is true of play on words, which can usually be adequately translated semantically but not stylistically.” For instance,

1)-Are you training for a race?

– No, I'm racing for a train.

2) Just because I am chased don't get the idea I am chaste.

These are examples of linguistic play of words.

- 1) The problems of the world are easily soluble in wine.
- 2) Pay your taxes with a smile.

These are instances of cultural play of words. Catford (1965) believes that Cultural untranslatability is usually less “absolute” than linguistic untranslatability. Nida (1984) holds that relative adequacy of interlingua communication are based on two fundamental factors: 1) semantic similarities between languages, due no doubt in large measure to the common core of human experience; and 2) fundamental similarities in the syntactic structures of languages, especially at the so-called kernel, or core, level.

#### **2.4 LINGUISTIC ELEMENTS**

Coombs (1984) thinks that the translator frequently finds himself in a conflict-and decision-marked situation during the translation process, a situation which becomes all the more difficult to master, the more complex the textual segment to be translated is in terms of syntax, semantics and stylistics.

In recent years the scope of linguistics has widened beyond the confines of the individual sentence. Text linguistics attempts to account for the form of texts in terms of their users. If we accept that meaning is something that is negotiated between producers and receivers to texts, it follows that the translator, as a special kind of text user, intervenes in this process of negotiation, to relay it across linguistic and cultural boundaries. In doing so, the translator is necessarily handling such matters as intended meaning, implied meaning, presupposed meaning, all on the basis of the evidence which the text supplies. The various domains of socio-linguistics, pragmatics and discourse linguistics are all areas of study which are germane (pertinent) to this process.

The focus of translation studies would be shifted away from the incidental incompatibilities among languages toward the systematic communicative factors shared by languages. Only in light of this new focus can such issues as equivalence and translation evaluation be satisfactorily clarified.

Boesewinkel (2010) says that the problem of translatability or untranslatability is closely related to man's understanding of the nature of language, meaning and translation. From the socio-semiotic point of view, “untranslatable” are fundamentally cases of language use wherein the three categories of socio-semiotic meaning carried by a source expression do not coincide with those of a comparable expression in the target language. Three types of untranslatability, referential, pragmatic, and intra-lingual may be the carrier of the message. Language-specific norms considered untranslatable by some linguists should be excluded from the realm of untranslatable. And since translation is a communicative event involving the use of verbal signs, the chance of untranslatability in practical translating tasks may be minimized if the communicative situation is taken into account. In a larger sense, the problem of translatability is one of degree: the higher the linguistic levels the source language signs carry meaning(s) at, the higher the degree of translatability these signs may display; the lower the levels they carry meaning(s) at, the lower the degree of translatability they may register.

#### **2.5 CULTURAL ELEMENTS**

Translation practice is one of the strategies a culture devises for dealing with what we have learned to call the “Other” (a term borrowed from Lefevere, meaning a culture different from one's own—my interpretation). The development of a translational strategy therefore also provides good indications of the kind of society one is dealing with. The fact that China, for instance, developed translational strategies only three times in its history, with the translation of the Buddhist scriptures from roughly the second to seventh centuries AD, with the translation of the Christian scriptures starting in the sixteenth century AD, and with the translation of much Western thought and literature starting in nineteenth century AD, says something about the image of the Other dominant in Chinese civilization, namely that the Other was not considered very important, only as ‘branches or leaves’ instead of the ‘trunk’. Cultures that are relatively homogeneous tend to see their own way of doing things as ‘naturally’, the only way, which just as naturally becomes the ‘best’ way when confronted with other ways. When such cultures themselves take over elements from outside, they will, once again, naturalize them without too many qualms and too many restrictions.

When Chinese translate texts produced by others outside its boundaries, it translates these texts in order to replace them, pure and simple. The translations take the place of the originals. They function as the originals in the culture to the extent that the originals disappear behind the translations. The Chinese were forced to deal with the other by the spread of Buddhism, which did not threaten the fabric of society, and therefore could be acculturated rather easily on the terms of the receiving, Chinese society. This is apparent not just from the manner of translating, but even more so from the fact that Taoist concepts were used in translations to acculturate Buddhist concepts (Bassnett, 2013).

What are the options the translator faces? We suggest they are as follows:

Is the element being translated obligatory or optional in the TL text format?

If it is obligatory, is the order in which it occurs appropriate for the TL text format?

If it is obligatory and the order is appropriate, will iteration (repetition), if there is any, be appropriate in the TL text format?

The less evaluative the text is, the less need there will be for its structure to be modified in translation. Conversely, the more evaluative the text is, the more scope there may be for modification. (ibid: 187)

The less culture-bound (treaties, declarations, resolutions, and other similar documents) a text is, the less need there will be for its structure to be modified in translation. Conversely, the more culture-bound a text is, the more scope there may be for modification.

#### **2.6 HISTORICAL ELEMENTS**

There are numerous examples in both English and Chinese that exhibit historical elements deeply rooted in the languages. Idioms and legends always provide ready support in this respect.

Once an idiom or fixed expressions has been recognized, we need to decide how to translate it into the target language. Here the question is not whether a given idiom is transparent, opaque, or misleading. Maybe it's easier to translate an opaque expression than a transparent one. The main difficulties in the translation may be summarized as follows.

An idiom or fixed expression may have no equivalent in the target language. One language may express a given meaning by means of a single word, another may express it by means of a transparent fixed expression, and a third may express it by means of an idiom, and so on. So it is unrealistic to expect to find equivalent idioms and expressions in the target language in all cases.

The idioms and expressions may be culture-specific which can make it untranslatable or difficult to translate. The expressions such as hot dog (热狗) and Kangaroo Court (非正规法庭) which relate to specific cultural background provide good examples.

An idiom or fixed expression may have a similar counterpart in the target language, but its context of use may be different; the two expressions may have different connotations, they may not be pragmatically transferable.

The expression such as *make a come-back* (东山再起, 卷土重来), though similar in meaning, the contexts in which the two idioms can be used are obviously different. *Make a come-back* is usually in positive occasions, but *卷土重来* is usually used in negative occasions.

An idiom may be used in the source text in both its literal and idiomatic senses at the same time. The expression such as *kick down the ladder* (过河拆) is a good example

.It means *treat with contempt those through whose assistance one has risen to a position of importance*. It refers to the rising up politically or socially. But 桥 in Chinese translation refers to the tool or means to overcome difficulties, and is widely and commonly used. They are similar in the point of *forget the help, and do harm to* (忘恩负义) but different in details.

Legends are of a quite similar character. What is a legendary hero in one language, for example, King Arthur in English may not be known in another language, such as Chinese. Without necessary annotation the target reader would be certainly at a loss. But if a Chinese legendary figure is loaned to serve the purpose of a courageous and brave man, the readers may be wondering if the English people also have such a legend, which may result in misunderstanding. Translation from Chinese into English exhibits the same problem.

## 2.7 GEOGRAPHICAL ELEMENTS

Just as the Chinese saying goes that a people of one geographical location is different from that of another, translation of geographical terms is where another problem is encountered. Recognition and familiarity of the geography is of immense help to bring about the readers' association, thus making comprehension easier. On the contrary, without a sense of geography, the readers have only their imagination in their power to employ. Translation of the following Chinese poem is a case in point.

春怨 打起黄莺儿, 莫教枝上啼。 啼时惊妾梦, 不得到辽西。

Xu Yuanchong's translation of the geographical location *liaoxi* becomes 'frontier', which provides enough space for readers' association even without a note to explain it. Unlike Xu, another translator uses *pinyin* and has it annotated, saying it is the frontier of the battlefield.

Herbert Giles also translated this poem.

Drive the young orioles away,

Nor let them on the branches play;

Their chirping breaks my slumber through and keep me from my dreams of you.

In this translation the translator dismisses the geographical location *liaoxi* altogether, for it would be difficult for English readers to associate the place with the frontier where her husband has been summoned. The reason why the geographical name is omitted is that the translator feels no need to burden the target reader who would know little where that place is while for a Chinese the association is immediate, activating a vivid picture of the harsh environment for the poor soldiers, hungry, cold with knee-deep snow and whipping wind, hopeless of returning safe and sound, and confronted with the deadly barbarian enemy.

## 2.8 RELIGIOUS ELEMENTS

Lindbeck in his article *The Gospel's Uniqueness: Election and Untranslatability* says: "This essay is an experiment in looking at the uniqueness of Christianity from the perspective of religions as community-forming comprehensive semiotic systems. Uniqueness in this outlook consists formally of untranslatability and materially of the un-substitutable memories and narratives which shape communities identities".

The Biblical story is well known. It has two main chapters: chapter one, Babel (Genesis 11: 1-9); chapter two, the Pentecost (Genesis 10: 9-11). In Genesis, the Almighty creates the different human languages to colonize an upstart humanity and thus secure the untranslatability of his own divinity. In the Acts of the Apostles, the miracle of total intelligibility, because it is a *miracle* and not a first instance of simultaneous translation, transcends language difference, and hence humanity, and thus once again presupposes and guarantees the ungraspable ideal of God's absolute meaning. The Babelic confusion of languages imposed by a jealous God, on the one hand, and the gift of the Holy Ghost in the Pentecostal cloven tongues of fire granted by a proselytizing god, on the other, both tell the same story of imperial identity and subjugated otherness. One single language is good, for it bespeaks the untouchable self-sameness of the deity.

If we follow the argument above, then translation simply becomes 'mission impossible'. Yet translation of all kinds of religious scriptures are taking place all the time, with either meaning addition or loss of the original. And the ideas are spreading far and wide. Untranslatability of the divinity is only of pedantic research value, not barring the way of the translators practicing translations, much less the way of the common people fervent to learn about divinity.

## 3. Discussion and results

### 3.1 TRANSLATION AS A PROCESS

Basic problems faced by translators in their work in broad and general terms (Abbasi & Manafi, 2004):

- 1) Comprehension of source text:
  - a. parsing of text (grammar and lexis);
  - b. access to specialized knowledge;
  - c. access to intended meaning.
- 2) Transfer of meaning:
  - a. relaying lexical meaning;
  - b. relaying grammatical meaning;
  - c. relaying rhetorical meaning, including implied or inferable meaning, for potential readers.
- 3) Assessment of target text:
  - a. readability;
  - b. conforming to generic and discourse TL conventions;
  - c. judging adequacy of translation for specified purpose. This is a rather complete and thorough description of the translation process, without the detailed steps of which there would be no guarantee for the best quality of the translation.

### 3.2 TRANSLATOR AS MEDIATOR

What, then, is involved in this process of mediation? Most obviously, the translator has not only a bilingual ability but also a bi-cultural vision. Translators mediate between cultures (including ideologies, moral systems and sociopolitical structures), seeking to overcome those incompatibilities which stand in the way of transfer of meaning. What has value as a sign in one cultural community may be devoid of significance in another and it is the translator who is uniquely placed to identify the disparity and seek to resolve it. But there is another sense in which translators are mediators; in a way, they are “privilege readers” of the SL text. Unlike the ordinary ST or TT reader, the translator reads in order to produce, decodes in order to re-encode. In other words, the translator uses as input to the translation process information which would normally be the output and therefore the end of, the reading process. Consequently, processing is likely to be more thorough, more deliberate than that of the ordinary reader; and interpretation of one portion of text will benefit from evidence forthcoming from the processing of later sections of text. Now, each reading of a text is a unique act, a process subject to the particular contextual constraints of the occasion, just as much as the production of the text is. Inevitably, a translated text reflects the translator's reading and this is yet another factor which defines the translator as a non-ordinary reader: whereas the ordinary reader can involve his or her own beliefs and values in the creative reading process, the translator has to be more guarded. Ideological nuances, cultural predispositions and so on in the source text have to be relayed untainted by the translator's own vision of reality.

Reading is a two-way process. On the one hand, readers bring to texts their own sets of assumptions based on previous experience of the world, so that each successive portion of text is processed in the light of these assumptions, and predictions are made about the likely development of the text. On the other hand, text items are analyzed in themselves and matched against each other, a process of syntactic and lexical decoding which results in the gradual building-up of composite meaning as reading proceeds (Alderson and Urquhart 1985). Two procedures are known: top-down and bottom-up.

The key concept here is interaction. We suggest that interaction is a process which takes place not only between participants (ST author translator, TT reader), but also between the signs which constitute texts and between the participants and those signs.

Armed with this complex structural outline, the translator makes choices at the level of texture in such a way as to guide the TT reader along routes envisaged by the ST producer towards a communicative goal. That is, items selected from the lexico-grammatical resources of the TL will have to reflect the overall rhetorical purpose and discourse values which have been identified at any particular juncture in the text.

### 3.3 TRANSLATION MEANS TRANSLATING MEANING

Lye (1996) says that meaning is a difficult issue. What is said here only scratches the surface of a complex and contested area. How do we know what a work of literature is 'supposed' to mean, or what its 'real' meaning is? There are several ways to approach this:

- 1) that meaning is what is intended by the author
- 2) that meaning is created by and contained in the text itself
- 3) that meaning is created by the reader.

#### *The author*

Does a work of literature mean what the author 'intended' it to mean, and if so, how can we tell? If all the evidence we have is the text itself, we can only speculate on what the priorities and ideas of the author were from our set of interpretive practices and values (how we read literature and how we see the world). We can expand this:

- 1) by reading other works by the same author
- 2) by knowing more and more about what sort of meanings seem to be common to works in that particular tradition, time and genre,
- 3) by knowing how the author and other writers and readers of that time read texts -- what their interpretive practices were (as reading and writing must be part of the same set of activities), and
- 4) by knowing what the cultural values and symbols of the time were.

Any person or text can only 'mean' within a set of preexisting, socially supported ideas, symbols, images, ways of thinking and values. In a sense there is no such thing as a 'personal' meaning; although we have different experiences in our lives and different temperaments and interests, we will interpret the world according to social norms and cultural meanings -- there's no other way to do it.

We may have as evidence for meaning what the author says or writes about the work, but this is not always reliable. Authorial intention is complicated not only by the fact that an author's ways of meaning and of using literary

Conventions are cultural, but by the facts that

- 1) the author's work may very well have taken her in directions she did not originally foresee and have developed meanings which she did not intend and indeed may not recognize (our historical records are full of authors attesting to this),
- 2) the works may embody cultural or symbolic meanings which are not fully clear to the author herself and may emerge only through historical or other cultural perspectives, and
- 3) persons may not be conscious of all of the motives that attend their work.

#### *The Text*

Does the meaning exist 'in' the text? There is an argument that the formal properties of the text--the grammar, the language, the uses of image and so forth--contain and produce the meaning, so that any educated (competent) reader will inevitably come to essentially the same interpretation as any other. Of course, it becomes almost impossible to know whether the same interpretations are arrived at because the formal properties securely encode the meaning, or because all of the 'competent' readers were taught to read the formal properties of texts in roughly the same way. As a text is in a sense only ink-marks on a page and as all meanings are culturally created and transferred, the argument that the meaning is 'in' the text is not a particularly persuasive one.

The meaning might be more likely to be in the conventions of meaning, traditions, and cultural codes which have been handed down, so that insofar as we and other readers (and the author) might be said to agree on the meaning of the text, that agreement would be created by common traditions and conventions of usage, practice and interpretation. In different time periods, with different cultural perspectives (including class, gender, ethnicity, belief and world-view), or with different purposes for reading no matter what the distance in time or cultural situation, competent readers can arrive at different readings of texts. As on the one hand a text is a historical document, a material fact, and as on the other meaning is inevitably cultural and contextual, the question of whether the text 'really means' what it means to a particular reader, group or tradition can be a difficult and complex one.

#### *The Reader*

Does the meaning then exist in the reader's response, her processing or reception of the text? In a sense this is inescapable: meaning exists only insofar as it means to someone, and art is composed in order to evoke sets of responses in the reader (there is no other reason for it to exist, or for it to have patterns or aesthetic qualities, or for it to use symbols or have cultural codes). But this leads us to three essential issues.

Meaning is 'social', that is, language and conventions work only as shared meaning, and our way of viewing the world can exist only as shared or sharable. When we read a text, we are participating in social, or cultural, meaning. Response is not merely an individual thing, but is part of culture and history.

Meaning is contextual; changes the context, you often change the meaning.

Texts constructed as literature, or 'art', have their own codes and practices, and the more we know of them, the more we can 'decode' the text, that is, understand it - consequently, there is in regard to the question of meaning the matter of reader competency, as it is called, the experience and knowledge of decoding literary texts.

You might have been nudged to insist on your having and practicing competency in reading by insisting that any interpretation you have (a) be rooted in (authorized by) the text itself and (b) be responsible to everything in the text -- that is, that your interpretation of any line or action be in the context of the whole of the work. But you may have to learn their competencies too. For instance in reading Mulk Raj Anand's *The Untouchables* you might have to learn what the social structure of India was like, what traditions of writing about and/or by Untouchables were in effect in India in the early 1930's, what political, cultural, and personal influences Mulk Raj Anand was guided by in constructing the imaginative world of this short novel; you might have to learn, in reading John Donne's poems, about, for instance, the 'platonic' (really, Florentine Neo-Plutonian) theory of love. As another kind of competency, you might have to practice reading certain kinds of literature, whose methods seem alien to you or particularly difficult for you, so that you can understand how that kind of literature works.

### **3.4 Translatability vs. Untranslatability**

Throughout the history of translation the question "Is translation possible or impossible?" has been repeatedly asked and debated among philosophers, linguists as well as translators and translation theorists. Some scholars and artists believe that virtually everything is translatable. Newmark, for example, argues that the "untranslatable" can be translated indirectly by transferring the source item and explaining it if no parallel item can be found in the target language and no compensatory effect may be produced within the same paragraph. Hence every variety of meaning in a source language text can be translated either directly or indirectly into a target language, and therefore everything is translatable. Newmark (1981) insist that translation is ultimately impossible. Von Humboldt, e.g. maintains that all translations are apparently attempts at finding a solution to some insoluble problem.

Catford (1965) distinguishes two kinds of untranslatability, that is, linguistic untranslatability and cultural untranslatability.

*Linguistic untranslatability*, according to Catford, occurs when there is no lexical or syntactical substitute in the target language for a source language item. For example, the Danish *Jeg fandt brevet* (literally "I found the") is linguistically untranslatable, because it involves structures that does not exist in English.

*Cultural untranslatability* is due to the absence in the target language culture of a relevant situational feature for the source text. For example, the different concepts of the term for *bathroom* is untranslatable in an English, Finnish or Japanese context, where both the object and the use made of that object are not at all alike (Bassnett, 2013). The controversy over the problem of translatability or untranslatability stemmed from the vagueness of the notion of meaning and a lack of consensus over the understanding of the nature of language and translation.

For example, Many people in ancient religious worlds were incredulous of the validity of translating as they believed that language was sacred and mystic, in which was hidden the will and order of God. Based on that understanding of the nature of language, they tended to regard translation or any kind of contrived conversion of a divine message from one language into another as no less than profanity and vice (Ben-Porat, 1976). *II Corinthians*, for instance, contains the following passage in which the sacramental nature of language is asserted:



And I know that such a person □ whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows □ was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat. (*II Cor.* xii. 3-4) In this paper, the author will attempt a reconsideration of the age-old problem of translatability (or rather, untranslatability) from the sociosemiotic perspective. The observations made are based upon sociosemiotic studies of the nature of language, meaning and translation. 2.14.1) Sociosemiotic View of Meaning and Translation a systematic study of meaning in translation was made by the present author (Barney, 2008) in the sociosemiotic vein and the following conclusions regarding meaning and translation were drawn:

- (1) An attribute of the sign, meaning is the relationship between a sign and something outside itself. Such a relationship is fundamentally conventional, i.e. language specific.
- (2) Three facets or dimensions of sign relationships may be distinguished: the relationship between signs and entities in the world which they refer to or describe is *semantic*; that between signs and their users (interpretants), *pragmatic*, and that between signs themselves, *syntactic*. Corresponding to the three types of semiotic relationships are three categories of sociosemiotic meaning: (a) *referential meaning*, (b) *pragmatic meaning* (including identification, expressive, associative, social or interpersonal, and imperative or vocative meanings), and (c) *intra-lingua meaning* (which may be realized at phonetic and phonological, graphemic, morphological/lexemic, syntactic, and discourse/textual levels and is termed accordingly).
- (3) Style in both its broad sense (features of situation ally distinctive uses of language, i.e. the variations of regional, social, and historical dialects; or even such intra-lingua peculiarities as plays on words, acrostic poems, and rhythmic units) and in its strict linguistic sense (linguistic representations of the relations among the participants in an event of verbal communication, chiefly level of formality) may be reduced to identification, expressive, social, and intra-lingua meanings for transference.
- (4) Referential meaning, pragmatic meaning, and intra-lingua meaning are all parts of an organic whole. They combine to make up the total meaning of an expression or a discourse. But in different contexts the three categories of sociosemiotic meaning may carry different weight or show different degrees of prominence.
- (5) Since the spectrum of sociosemiotic meanings carried by a linguistic sign in one language rarely forms a one-to-one correspondence to that of a comparable sign in another language, the translator, when striving to communicate the maximum number of meanings an expression or discourse carries in a given context, usually has to give priority to the most prominent or important one(s) of them, ensuring its/their correct transference in whatsoever circumstances and, if no other alternative being available, at the expense of the other meanings of the sign.

## 4. Conclusion

### 4.1 Three Types of Sociosemiotic Untranslatability

According to the property of the untranslatable element(s) in a source item, we may distinguish three types of sociosemiotic untranslatability, i.e. *referential untranslatability*, *pragmatic untranslatability*, and *intra-lingua untranslatability*.

#### 4.1.1 Referential Untranslatability

Referential untranslatability occurs when a referential element in the source message is not known or readily comparable to a particular item in the target language. The Chinese language, for example, has different names for several different kinds of stuffed wheaten food: *baozi*, *jiaozi*, and *huntun*. But to the English speaker, all these have but one name □ dumpling (a small piece of dough, boiled or baked, often enclosing meat, fruit, etc.): the contrasts between these different kinds of stuffed food are not lexically represented in English. Of course circumlocution or description may often help bridge the lexical gap. *Jiaozi*, for one instance, may be “boiled dumpling with meat and/or vegetable stuffing”. But awkward situation may still emerge sometimes, as is evidenced in the following case:

In a translation into an Indian language of Latin America, *ass*, was translated as “a small long-eared animal”. The effect was to suggest that Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on something which closely resembled a rabbit.

#### 4.1.2 Pragmatic Untranslatability

Pragmatic untranslatability arises where some pragmatic meaning encoded in a source item is not encoded likewise in a functionally comparable unit in the target language, or where the exact pragmatic meaning(s) carried by the source sign is/are unclear or indeterminable due to historical reasons or to the intentional equivocation on the part of the author (as may be found in some theological and mystic writings). Newmark (1981) notes that *jolly* in *jolly good* is mainly pragmatic, a slight middle-class intensifier, which can only be over-translated in French (*drôlement*) and under-translated in German (*ganz, vielleicht*) □ both languages missing the connotation of social class.

Bassnett argues that even a concept supposed to be universal or “international” may be untranslatable on some occasions, as is the case of the loose translation of the sentence *I'm going home* spoken by an American resident temporarily in London into French as “Je vais chez moi”. The English sentence could either imply a return to the immediate “home” or a return across the Atlantic, depending on the context in which it is used, a distinction that would have to be spelled out in French. In the latter case, the French translation should be something like “Je vais à Mon pays”. Moreover the English term *home*, like the French *foyer* (“hearth, furnace”) has a range of associative meanings that are not translated by the more restricted phrase “chez moi” (Bassnett, 2013).

#### 4.1.3 Intra-lingua Untranslatability

By intra-lingua untranslatability we mean any situation in which the source expression is apparently not transferable due to some communicatively foregrounded linguistic peculiarity it contains. It differs from “linguistic untranslatability” as defined by Catford in that instead of including those

conventionally followed rules of the language, it pertains only to those linguistic features that are foregrounded somehow in the context. Intralingua untranslatability accounts for a majority of cases of untranslatability.

Semantically prominent phonetic and phonological elements (known with some scholars as “phonaesthetic morphemes”), e.g. alliteration (“kith and kin”, “time and tide”, “might and main”, etc.) and rhyme, are frequently untranslatable. That is perhaps one reason why Robert Frost asserts that “Poetry is what gets lost in the translation.” One case of phonological untranslatability may be found in homophonous puns, e.g. the advertisement put up by a tire manufacturer: “It’s time to *retire*”.

Graphemic meaning, which may be found across the smallest units or forms of the writing system of a language, is usually untranslatable, too. For example, the Chinese proverb *Bazi hai meiyou yi pie ne* “Not even the first stroke of the character *ba* [八 “eight”] is in sight yet” is used to denote a situation wherein there has not yet been the slightest sign of the beginning of something referred to, because the Chinese character *ba* is composed of two strokes (the left-falling stroke “丿”, and the right-falling stroke “㇇”). One has to set on paper the first, left-falling stroke before drawing the second, right-falling one, and thereby spelling out the whole character.

Difficulties may occur with the translation of morphological meaning and lexemic meaning (or morpheme-level and lexis-level intralingua meanings). A few years ago, the

Apple Computer set up a division called “Apple PIE”. The PIE in the name is really the acronym of “(Apple Computer’s) Personal Interactive Electronics” (*Personal Computer World*). Although this name may be put into Chinese as “(Pingguo Jisuanji Gongsi de) Geren Jiaohushi Dianzi Shebei Bu” (Apple Computer’s Personal Interactive Electronics Division), the punning effect of the acronym PIE would still be lost. The comic effect of the dialog derives from the “witty puns” (puns in which both members of the word-pun bear meaning in the context) used by Shaw: “engaged” means both “busy” and “under a promise to marry somebody”, and “see” means both “meet” and “discern”. It is very difficult or flatly impossible to find Chinese expressions which may suggest the same meanings as carried by the two English words in this context.

If referential and pragmatic untranslatability’s are relative, intralingua untranslatability is usually “absolute”, since languages differ from each other more in their structure (which, as we have come to see, may generate intralingua untranslatable if deliberately manipulated by the language user) than in the communicative functions they may be employed to perform. 2.18) T.S. Eliot: *Ash Wednesday*

*Ash Wednesday* and although I did not want to provide a reading of a long poem for some time, I thought not posting on T.S. Eliot’s *Ash Wednesday* (1930) would be a lost opportunity. Below is a Dantean reading of Eliot’s poem. The wonder of Eliot’s poetry (like most great poetry) is that it can lead you anywhere. So read this post and take from it what you will but take a break before reading the poem. Grab a coffee, watch *Downton Abbey*, but try to read the poem without me in your head. I’d love to hear any interpretations. Enjoy.

For Eliot, Dante was more than a poetic master who had achieved the heights of poetry. As Eliot struggled through life literally searching for perfection, he rediscovered Dante, finding in his poetry not merely a poetics but also a way of life. Now, I don’t solely mean in regards to religion, in fact I am hardly concerned with religion at all. Eliot himself had written in that ‘It is wrong to think that there are parts of the *Divine Comedy* which are of interest only to Catholics’ and in his address ‘What Dante Means to Me’ (1950)—after his religious conversion—he stated, ‘to call [Dante] a “religious poet” would be to abate his universality.’ Eliot looked to Dante because Dante had succeeded in attaining the closest thing a poet could to poetical perfection, and he had done it regardless of the social and personal complexities of life. Eliot, initially captivated by Dante’s poetics, would come to grow engrossed by the man as their respective lives began to mirror one another to the extent that the modern and the medieval can.

Although Eliot’s early poetry uses many religious themes and motifs, it is not until 1925 that his poetry begins to convey any sort of leaning toward a single dogma. In fact, Eliot had regarded Buddhism as perhaps the most compelling form of spiritualism at the time of *The Waste Land*. Given these early, protean views, readers rising out of *The Waste Land* and moving directly into *Ash Wednesday* will experience one of poetry’s most difficult transitions in regards to philosophical positioning; however ambivalence may be what Eliot is attempting to convey, as it is his belief that the highest stage possible for the civilized man ‘is to unite the profoundest skepticism with the deepest faith.’

In 1925—two years prior to his conversion and the subsequent writing of what is now part II of *Ash Wednesday*—Eliot had begun to reassess his studies of Dante. Sometime between 1926 and 1929 (the year Eliot published his most substantial work on Dante), he would come to parallel his beliefs most fundamentally with those of Dante’s. It is likely that—on some level—Dante influenced Eliot’s religious conversion. Despite its religious leanings, *Ash Wednesday*—as Eliot says of

Dante’s *Paradiso*—is not didactic. The religious, Dantean themes in *Ash Wednesday* have been thoroughly excavated by scholars, as the allusions are relatively more palpable than they are in his other poetry. However, what is most important is that in *Ash Wednesday* Eliot searches for (and seems to gain) a particular assurance that his poetry *can* bridge the gap between the ‘low-dream’ of the modern world and the ‘high-dream’ of Dante’s vision. *Ash Wednesday* marks Eliot’s personal-poetic search for the ability to materialize the Word Incarnate with the written word.

Eliot’s view that ‘all faith should be seasoned with a skilful sauce of skepticism’ is what makes the first line of *Ash Wednesday* and the position of the speaker’s philosophy throughout so difficult to fully ascertain. Eliot institutes several disjunctive techniques as a type of objective correlative that sustains the vacillating nature of the speaker’s mind. These are the overlay of space and place, a lack of linearity, and ambiguous lexicon or multiple entendre. The ‘turn’ in the opening line of *Ash Wednesday* denotes the linchpin around which the whole poem rotates: ambiguity. The turn will come to signify the turning toward God, the look to a secular past, glimpses toward the future and many other possibilities. Most importantly, the turn is the repetitious but non-retrogressive movement from the active will to the contemplative mind. Part I portrays the struggle between the individual’s will and intellect, collating the two pressing skepticisms within its ambiguity. That Eliot begins *Ash Wednesday* with an almost direct translation of Calvacanti followed by an almost direct quote from Shakespeare, marks Eliot’s first skepticism. The ‘gift’ Eliot desires to be gifted with is poetry that can transcend to heaven. Through the rewriting of text, Eliot tries to attain ‘a conception of poetry as a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written.’ The word of the poet and the transcendent Word are wholly deliberated upon in both the fourth poem, in which the pure poetic imagination is considered, and the fifth poem, where the poet’s adequacy in the expression of reality is questioned. This questioning of his poetic transcendence is most explicitly present in his humility at the gate of Purgatory in the third poem: ‘Lord, I am not worthy / Lord, I am not worthy / but speak the word only.’

The passage through the gate of Purgatory will mark the full religious conversion and it is figured within a poem that is an exodus more fully realized than *The Waste Land*; the exodus here is one of necessary, willful expiation, as for Eliot the ascetic way of penance is the means to the way of grace. The will (which wavered in the opening poem) is strengthened in the final two lines, representing not the altered word of some poet but rather the pure speech of transcendence through the voice of the Churches invocation of Mary: ‘Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.’ The death is the spiritual death leading to baptismal rebirth that Eliot had feared (‘Why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?’) out the outset.

The second poem of *Ash Wednesday* was originally titled ‘Salutation’, referring to the first time Beatrice greets Dante in *La Vita Nuova* III: ‘with a salutation of such virtue that I thought then to see the world of blessedness.’ In *La Vita Nuova*, Dante struggles twice with the desire of the *physical*; first with Beatrice and later with a mysterious lady to whom he is attracted. It is possible that Eliot’s renunciation of the ‘blessed face’ is in fact the *physical* face, which Dante renounced in order to attain salvation, and not a turning from the spiritual face. The ‘three white leopards,’ might be read as a positive inverse of the leopard of lust of Dante’s *Inferno*, representing a violent though willful expiation of lust. After the leopards have ‘fed to satiety on my heart my liver and that which had been contained / In the hollow round of my skull,’ the left over bones ‘shine with brightness’ because of the virtuousness of the Lady. The now pure essence of the speaker—the ‘I who am’—is able to ‘Proffer [his] deeds to oblivion’ and his ‘love / To the posterity of the desert,’ which is at once in ‘The desert in the garden [and] the garden in the desert’ brought about by Mary, ‘The single Rose’ who is now ‘the Garden / Where all loves end.’

In Part III, the speaker has awoken from the dream of contemplation at the violet hour and come face-to-face with three stairs of the active will. The progression of the winding staircase holds in the balance the presence of a metaphysical poetry within the modern world. ‘The broad backed figure driest in blue and green’ who enchants ‘the may time with an antique flute’ is not only a look back to secular desires—figured here in pagan imagery—which once enchanted the heart, but, if it is succumbed to would assert that modern poetry is only capable of the ‘low dream.’ For this reason the look back to the pagan imagery on the third stair can only be glimpsed through a ‘slotted window bellied like a fig’s fruit’ (109); the vision is impeded upon by the narrowed window of secularism because both the will and the intellect are torn between the secular world and the World of God. As Eliot climbs the third stair, having gathered the ‘strength beyond hope and despair,’ he is able to humbly admit that he can ‘speak the word only’. After this admission, he is able to re-experience for himself the vision of God’s Word that he had only evinced through Ezekiel beneath the juniper tree, and he recapitulates the experience through the great mediator of the Word (Dante) who Eliot considered to have the gift of incarnation.

While walking ‘between the violet and the violet’ in a garden where the ‘fiddles and the flutes’ of the pagan scene have been ‘bear[ed] away’, Eliot is able to *initiate* his transcendence. His memories of the previous years are restored through a ‘bright of cloud tears’ and he subsequently will be able to write ‘With a new verse the ancient rhyme’ in order to ‘Redeem / The unread vision in the higher dream.’ Then the Lady, Word of no speech, ‘Signed but spoke no word.’ Logos is witnessed but it is still mediated through another.

However, he does not experience the transcendental movement into the still point of Incarnation. He is still aware of the ‘the empty forms’ of the secular world and also that through the process of memory he may renew the ‘salt savor of the sandy earth.’ In this moment, when face-to face with a carnal past, ‘the weak spirit quickens to rebel.’ It is not until the crucial moment when he ‘[spits] from the mouth the withered apple-seed’ thereby purging himself of humanity’s first failure that he can attempt to reach Logos on a personal and intellectual level.

### 3.7 Analysis

This is a poem of penitence, near despair, and hope. Its title derives from the first day of Lent, Ash Wednesday, during which a sign of the cross is made on the forehead of the penitent, a reminder of transitoriness and sinfulness. “Ash Wednesday,” Eliot’s first major poem written after his conversion to Christianity, focuses more on struggle and doubt than on belief. Eliot does not doubt God, rather his own ability to respond to Him.

The poem begins with a nearly despairing awareness of weakness and a very unmodern sense of personal sin. Consistent with his high church predilections, Eliot has his speaker appeal to an intermediary—a Beatrice-like woman—to plead his case before God. This intermediary is necessary not only because of the speaker’s spiritual weakness but also because this world is not a place conducive to spiritual renewal and growth.

Throughout his life and his poetry, Eliot wrestled with the tyranny of self and self-consciousness. He is keenly aware in this poem that he is a public figure who has made a very public and controversial conversion to religion. He confesses the painful difficulty of matching inner reality with outer pronouncements and wrestles with that false self who mocks the new Eliot with his old weakness.

### 3.8 Untranslatability: the reasons

Most foreign languages that people encounter in well developed countries belong to the family of Indo-European languages. The communities speaking these languages are organized alike and adhere to similar cultural and social patterns. However, even among the languages of this cultural circle, the use of similar grammatical and semantic constructions is often impossible. As Eva Hoffman (1991:43) in her work states: ‘In order to translate a language, or a text, without changing its meaning, one would have to transport its audience as well’. One could ask about the purpose of approaching the impossible. Bloor T (2013) answers this question: ‘there are texts which we cannot yet translate but which may through linguistic changes, (...) refinement of interpretative means (...) (and) shifts in receptive sensibility, become translatable in future’. This chapter deals with the notion of and the reasons for untranslatability in the case of English-Persian translation.

#### 3.8.1 Untranslatable matters

As it was mentioned earlier in this work, translations other than literary are to some extent easier to achieve. This also applies to the notion of untranslatability. Translation of literature is considered to contain many issues impossible to translate. The question of whether untranslatability can be scientifically explained had its answer in the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which assumed that human languages determine the structure of the real world as perceived by human beings, rather than vice versa, and that this structure is different and incommensurable from one language to another. Even though this hypothesis collapsed due to its imperfections, some linguists claim that it still explains the reason why literary translation is in many cases untranslatable.

Amateurs interested in the problem of untranslatability think that the main problem with translation are the difficulties resulting from the difference in the structures of the output and the target languages. 3.8.2 The reasons for untranslatability.

Untranslatability cannot be treated as a rule stating that it is impossible to create a text in the target language in the form of a text previously written in the source language. Untranslatability concerns some special cases that can be interpreted as the exceptions to the general rule of translating from one language to another. Untranslatability arises due to the differences in the structures of languages. The differences can generally be of two kinds. The first results from the fact that the target language does not contain certain structures existing in the source language. The second obstacle is the fact that it is impossible to express in the target language some concepts that can be expressed in the source language. These two reasons can be divided into many elements, which will be described below. Obviously, the following reasons for untranslatability do not constitute the whole problem. They are useful examples as far as the two translations of T.S Eliot by Bijan Elahi and Houshang Irani are concerned.

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