ON EXILE AS ULTIMATE EXPERIENCE IN TRANSLATION

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Introduction

Paul Ricœur, the twentieth-century thinker, has long been considered a diplomat of philosophical exchange between most often irreconcilable viewpoints on philosophy, ethics, history, literary theory, religion, and politics. Hence, his lessons on translation (*On Translation,* 2004/2006) are not just practical theory but telling examples of good practice of dialogue based on depth of conviction and acuity of evaluation in equal measure. His thinking —that of a dialogic/ diacritical hermeneutist, as Richard Kearney (2006) qualifies him—represents both philosophy *as* translation and the philosophy *of* translation (2006: ix-x).

1.The 'task' of the translator between duty and desire

Starting from the assumption that 'to say self is not to say I'—as the hermeneutic self surpasses by far the autonomous subject—, Ricœur proposes the notion of 'oneself-as-another' wherein the subject discovers its meaning in and through the linguistic mediations of signs, symbols, stories, ideologies, metaphors, and myths. Such a self is configured in and through the experience of language/s of one's own and of others. Translation, seen as an *épreuve de l'étranger* (Berman 1984) replicates in Ricœur's understanding of the labour character of translation, which, as Kearney explains, refers to the tension and suffering the translator undergoes as s/he checks the impulse to reduce the otherness of the other thereby subsuming alien meaning into one's own scheme of things. The work of translation is then seen as carrying a double duty: to expropriate oneself as one appropriates the other (xv-xvi). This means, along Ricœur's line of thought, that the good translator must feel ready to subdue one's own language's claim to self-sufficiency in order to *host* the *foreign*. Hence *linguistic hospitality* —source of happiness and reward for the translator—features as *the act of inhabiting the word of the Other paralleled by the act of receiving the word of the Other into one's own home, one's own dwelling* (Ricœur 2006: 10). The translator comes to achieve *linguistic hospitality*, Ricœur tells us, only after s/he has abandoned the dream of the absolute translation and, subsequently, s/he, just like in the act of telling a story, realizes that we can translate differently, without hope of filling the gap between equivalence and total adequacy. *Equivalence without adequacy*, or, elsewhere, *a correspondence without adequacy* can only be tested, apud Ricœur, through the work of retranslation, understood as a sort of exercise in doubling the work of the translator through minimum bilingualism: retranslate after the translator. Such a realization is similar to the work of mourning and memory, the translator has to accept and experience so as to turn loss into gain, and, if possible, initial anxiety into fulfilled happiness.

Ricœur's concern for a paradigm of translation as model of hermeneutics can't escape the association with the avatars of an exile's life whose very ontological condition is predicated on the notion of 'oneself-as-another'. Just as the translator finds his happiness in acknowledging and assuming the difference between adequacy and equivalence, in what

Ricœur ultimately comes to term "linguistic hospitality", so has the exile to acknowledge and assume the impassable status of the dialogicality of exile as the reasonable horizon of the desire to remain creatively sane in language.

In what follows, I intend to show how the '*surplus meaning*' of Ricœur's philosophy of translation does or does not apply to the exile-writer's uprooting from an ethos, a language, a home.

2. The exile-writer *Post* Babel

Writers, exile-writers in particular, very much like philosophers, Ricœur is a case in point, would come to a deeper understanding of how meaning comes to be, or rather how we come to reconfigure the meanings of the past. Sooner than other humans, the exile-writer is to retrieve hidden meanings in the apparent meanings which reside 'outside' of his/her self. By actually taking differing paths through the languages of others, the exile-self finds itself at once constructed (i.e. enlarged/enriched/othered by the odyssey) and deconstructed (i.e. a witness to its own formation/ othering). More exposed to strangeness—from the outside and from the inside—, the exile-writer builds what Ricœur calls '*surplus meaning*', thus giving rise to secondary meanings out of the primary meanings s/he constantly formulates. The exile-writer, like the translator, is best qualified to remind us of the irreducible finitude and contingency of all language. S/he, for better and for worse, comes to embody the very ethics of translation or '*interlinguistic hospitality*' as predicated by Ricœur. The theorist understands the future ethos of European even world politics as a construct built on an exchange of memories, narratives between different nations towards mutual healing and reconciliation. Under such visionary prospects, the exile-writer's mission is, not unlike the translator's, to mediate between languages in translating his/her own wounds into the language of strangers and retranslate the wounds of strangers into his/her own language. But, this is easier said than done, as the subsequent discussion may prove.

Ricœur in his first study *Translation as challenge and source of happiness* (2006: 3-10) describes the translator's double duty towards the author and the reader as an act of double resistance: that of the reader's view that the mother tongue is sacred, and that of the translator's presumption of non-translatability inspired by the original work (2006: 3-8). Hence the translator's necessary acceptance of the work of remembering/memory—an attack at the mother tongue's sacredness—, and that of mourning—a renunciation of the perfect translation.

In the light of the above mentioned, I claim that the exile-writer's status is as ambivalent as that of the translator's inasmuch as s/he wants to force the two forms of resistance: that of the foreign language (the language of adoption, in the case of the exile; the text to be translated, in the case of the translator) and that of the mother-tongue (the exile's own language; the translation's language of reception). The two-part resistance objectifies in how the foreign language is interned into the mother-tongue; and how the mother tongue is filled with strangeness/incongruity. What else does the exile-writer, a bilingual per excellence, do if not *originally* investigate into the processes of a living language which forcefully imposes on him/her (as constraint, usefulness, and desire to create)? Paul Ricœur writes:

> I come close here to the statement that commands the whole of George Steiner's book, *After Babel*. After Babel, 'to understand is to translate'. This is about much more than a simple internalization of the relationship to the foreign, in accordance with Plato's adage that thought is a dialogue of the soul with itself – an internalisation that would transform internal translation into a simple appendix to external translation. This is about an original investigation, which lays bare the everyday processes of a living language: these ensure that no universal language can succeed in reconstructing its indefinite diversity. This is really about approaching the mysteries

of a language that is *full of life*, and at the same time, giving an account of the phenomenon of misunderstanding, of misinterpretation which, according to Schleiermacher, gives rise to interpretation, the theory of which hermeneutics wants to develop. The reasons for the gap between perfect language and a language that is full of life are exactly the same as the causes of misinterpretation (2006: 24-25).

Ricœur's philosophic reasoning on the ontological paradigm of translation from his first study and his essay *Paradigm of translation* (2006: 11-29), suggests, within the limits of my demonstration, a new role for the exile-writer: that of an objective correlative to the myth of Babel, the issue of mis/interpretation and the phenomenon of mis/understanding. The exile-writer's exceptional condition of bilingualism then raises difficult but illuminating questions. His/her intimate knowledge of two/three languages brings him/her irremediably closer to language's propensity for the enigma, for artifice, for abstruseness, for the secret, in fact for non-communication.

At the risk of wasting his previous efforts to debunk the two irreducible pairs: translatable/ untranslatable; faithfulness/ betrayal, Ricœur reads afresh Steiner's adage (*To understand is to translate*):

[T]he equation 'To understand is to translate' closes, then, on the one to oneself relationship in the *secret* where we rediscover the untranslatable, which we had thought we had moved away from in favour of the faithfulness/betrayal pair. We rediscover it on the vow of the utmost faithfulness route. But faithfulness to whom and to what? Faithfulness to language's capacity for safeguarding the secret contrary to its proclivity to betray it; consequently, faithfulness to itself rather than to others. And it is true that the glorious poetry of a Paul Celan is bordering on the untranslatable, bordering at first on the unspeakable, the loathsome, at the heart of his own language as well as in the gap between two languages.(2006: 28-9)

Paul Celan, a German poet and translator of Romanian origin, is taken witness by Ricœur to how genius-writers, exile-writers too, at the risk of their sanity, force the *language's capacity for safeguarding the secret contrary to its proclivity to betray it*. Celan's troubling poems bear witness not only to human suffering, but also to the language's capacity for mis/spelling it.

Vintilă Horia, an exile-writer as well, associates the condition of the writer exiled in a different language to that of the writer writing in his own language. He speaks about a '*secret pact*' between writer and language, similar to the pact between sculptor and marble *neither the writer, nor the artist will freely divulge* (Martin, *Privilegii/ Treats,* 2009).

Herta Müller—a German writer born in Romania, and 2009 Nobel winner for literature,—writes in German, her mother-tongue, in which, she confesses, Romanian (the language-witness to her growth) always reflects. *[T]he taste of things past wears hard*, the writer says. Elsewhere, Müller admits it is the wounds of her Romanian past, which motivate her to write. Despite the fact that her whole work builds on the strong connection between suffering and writing, language and limit-experience, writing and anamnesis, Müller denies that suffering makes a great writer. *I'd rather I hadn't written one sentence, but I hadn't suffered* (from an interview by Rodica Binder, Köln, 1999, in *România Literară* No. 41/2009).

Vladimir Nabokov, an American writer of Russian origin, also enters a privileged relationship with the language of adoption (i.e. English), in whose folds he keeps captive his own dear Russian idiom. He, too, senses the predicament of a reality without absolutes, of language as a synthesis of constantly experienced moments, and of mind incarnated irremediably in things.

L'epreuve de l'etranger for all the above mentioned writers (only a handful from those symbolizing the age of the refugee) is above all the human potential for inhumanity and infliction of suffering, which reflects in the language's capacity for miscommunication,

misunderstanding, misinterpretation. When the poet prays "*Lift not the painted veil which those who live/ Call life*" (Shelley, *Sonnet,* l.1), he in fact voices the fear that not only the traditional language, as full of life as it is, is sadly limited or corrupted by actuality, but that the Platonic dream that behind the actuality there is a realm of permanence is an illusionary fixation of mind.

Conclusions. The exile-writer: a safegurd of distance in proximity

The exile, an in-between cultures/ languages/ identities, is perhaps the best qualified observer for speaking the big truths of a nation as long as s/he doesn't practice what Todorov comes to call the '*euphoria of doubling*', which may lead to some double standard thinking or even a split personality. The exile's doubling involves a certain prioritization, even hierarchization of the two voices, ego-centres capable of mutual clarification or amendments. Todorov (1985), en connoisseur, admits that when bilingualism bases on a certain '*neutrality*' responsible for a perfect equilibrium between two languages (which also involves the respective cultures and the image about the world they presuppose), it may become a dangerous game capable of threatening the very identity of the individual. The idea finds support in colonel Lawrence of Arabia's opinion (as recorded by Malraux and reported by Todorov, 1996), according to which anyone fully belonging to two cultures loses his soul.

Emil Cioran, the quintessential exile-writer, also testifies to the tragic role of the exile-writer as an objective correlative to the myth of Babel, the issue of mis/interpretation and the phenomenon of mis/understanding. *He who denies his own language so as to adopt another, changes his identity, that is his disillusions. One heroic translator who denies his memories, and, to a great extent, his own self*, says Cioran in his essay *Exile*. (*Cine îşi reneagă limba pentru a adopta alta îşi schimbă identitatea, adică decepţiile. Traducător eroic rupe cu amintirile şi, pînă la un punct, cu el însuş*)

So, *l'epreuve de l'etranger* stands for man's *fall* into language too. The Preacher has warned us. So has the exile-writer who sends his reminders of who we are: speaking beings haunted by a *past that never passes*, by a **land of oblivion** *that is constantly remembered* by a language which is nothing but the *homelessness* of being (Kristeva 1987: 70; 1982: 8).

NO, cries Eugen Ionescu, another famous exile-writer, in distrust of language, and in distress because of man's plight in the world.

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THE MEANING OF THE ENGLISH MODAL VERBS IN TRANSLATION

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Introduction

Translating from one language into another is closely related to linguistics. Translation theory derives from comparative linguistics; it is an aspect of semantics. Many translators have translated from source language into target language in order to make the readers of target language, especially ones who do not understand the source language, also consume the message of source language text.

In translating a text, a translator reproduces form of source language into form of target language by way of semantic structure. It means that the meaning should be transferred and must be consistent and the form may be changed. The form meant is the surface structure like words, phrases, clauses, sentences or paragraphs. In translating, the surface structure may be different but the deep structure (meaning) remains the same.

Since each language has its own rule or structure in stating ideas, translators may not be influenced by their native languages. Translators should be aware that each language possesses certain distinctive characteristics, e.g. word building, pattern of phrase order, and technique for linking clauses into sentences. It is necessary to be considered in order to bear the best translation, i.e. a translation which does not sound like a translation.

As one language has different rules from other languages, translators should perform shift in their translation. Shift may occur when there is no formal correspondence.

Although both source language and target language have distribution of sentence, phrase, word, and morpheme; translation may require moving up and down, e.g. from phrase into word, or from clause into sentence. Translators are obliged to make adjustment as shift word order, using verbs in place of nouns, and substituting nouns for pronouns. Those shifts are due to different kinds of language system between source language and target language.

In rendering a text, the forms of the source language have to be replaced by the forms of the target language and the meaning must be equivalent. One of the examples is translating English modals.

Many books have been written about modal auxiliary verbs in English. What makes it difficult to account for the uses of modal auxiliaries is that their meaning has both *a logical and practical element* (Leech 1971: 66). Leech argues that modal auxiliaries can be talked about *in terms of such logical notions as permission and necessity, but this done, we still have to consider ways in which these notions … [are used] in everyday communication between human beings* (Leech 1971: 67). Though many linguists and philosophers have studied the concept of **modality**, it is not easy to find an accurate definition of this concept. Aristotle was one of the first people who committed to writing his ideas on modality. In studying modal auxiliaries we have to keep in mind form and meaning. That is to say, it is important that there must be *some kind of semantic basis* to the concept of modality. Palmer (1990) points out that modality is a semantic, rather than grammatical, term. He asserts that *philosophers have for a long time*

debated whether the future can ever be regarded as factual since we can never know what is going to happen (Palmer 1990: 4). Perkins argues that modal auxiliaries share semantic characteristics, but *no two modal expressions could be said to have exactly the same meaning*.

In *The English Verb*, Palmer (1990: 96) states three main functions of modal verbs: **epistemic**, **deontic**, and **dynamic**. He points out differences in meaning between these three functions. The first function, i.e. **epistemic**, makes judgment of possibility. The second i.e. **deontic,** gives permission to the addressee to do something. The third i.e. **dynamic** indicates ability. These three types can be illustrated in the following examples, <u>as cited by Palmer</u>:

> e.g. *John may be in his office*. (epistemic)
> *John may / can come in now*. (deontic)
> *John can run ten miles with ease*. (dynamic)

According to Bald (1988) modal verbs count among the most difficult areas of teaching and learning in the EFL classroom. Considering the problems noted even in native speakers' attempts to explain the possible uses and interpretations of individual modals, this is not surprising. Even though there is widespread agreement that modals *are used mainly in contexts where the speaker is talking about states of the world which he cannot assert to be true or real* (Mitchell 1985: 173-174), there is an equally general lack of clear-cut categories into which the interpretations of specific modals may be parcelled, especially within a language-teaching and language-learning context. Of course, some well-known descriptive labels such as e.g. **possibility**, **necessity**, **intention**, **ability**, **permission**, and **appropriateness** (cf. Hermerén 1978, Leech 1971, Palmer 1990) more or less explicitly find their way into English textbooks, but the problems remain just the same. As Bald (1988: 348) points out, most conspicuous about the treatment of modals in the literature are the difficulties involved in (i) devising a descriptive system of categories, (ii) developing a profuse terminology, (iii) presenting meaning-definitions through paraphrases and (iv) accounting for semantic and syntactic indeterminacy of elements appearing in context.

In this paper I will argue that the difficulties EFL learners encounter with respect to modal verbs in English are, at least partially, due to the learners' limited access to the cultural values encoded in the descriptive labels used in the traditional paraphrases.

1. The meaning of the modals

In the realm of grammar, teaching the modal system of English can be compared to walking a tightrope. The balance normally required in pedagogical grammars when presenting material that is simplified enough for students to understand is magnified twofold in the modal system. The teacher is required to present an extremely complex system with enough intricacy to illustrate the relationship of the modal auxiliaries to each other and their place in a semantic system (Jarvis 1972). The intercultural aspect of teaching the meanings of modals has not been documented extensively, to our knowledge, and I suggest that this is yet another dimension to consider in teaching the modal system.

The biggest problem ESL students face with modals is their meaning. Each modal can have more than one meaning and each meaning is a member of an inter-related system. When a speaker chooses to use one modal, s/he decides not to use any of the other modals, thereby indicating the degree of emphasis (Byrd 1995). *The problem lies not in the surface positioning of modals, nor in their wide range of meanings, but in associating the right modal with the right meaning* (Cook 1978: 5). The difficulties in interpreting an already complex system have often been compounded by teaching methods that present modals as a list (Byrd 1995). Students memorize the modals with their accompanying meanings, but they may have no idea of the subtle social and cultural information each choice conveys.

Modals can also appear in the perfect aspect with a *have* + -en construction. This can be a difficult area for students. The problems students experience with the perfect modal construction can be attributed to the fact that they often believe the addition of the perfect construction adds **perfectiveness** to the meaning (Bowen et al. 1977). As it turns out, this is not always the case.

Must	Simple	Perfect
Obligation	*He **must stop** at the entrance to the lion's cage.*	
Prohibition	*He **mustn't go** into the lion's cage.*	
Inferred	*The ringmaster **must be** about thirty.*	*He **must have been** about twenty when I met him.*

The third sentence, with inferred meaning, is the only sentence where the simple meaning correlates with the perfect meaning. On the other hand, the first sentence where **must** indicates obligation, *He must stop at the entrance to the lion's cage*, indicates a different even opposite meaning to the perfect form, *He must have stopped at the entrance to the lion's cage*. Grammatically, the second sentence, *He mustn't have gone into the lion's cage*, is correct; however, these forms are *semantically inappropriate as analogues of the simple forms expressing obligation or prohibition* (Bowen et al. 1977: 284). These examples of the perfect construction are used to illustrate problems that are typical for ESL learners. Generally, the student understands or produces a grammatical utterance, but the meaning may be incorrect or misunderstood by the student. If the teacher does not present enough information about the perfect form and its complexities in meaning, then the student may overgeneralize the rules.

Other difficult areas for students are the meanings of negative modals, past conditional modals, and past hypothetical modals. Let's have a look now at difficulties in teaching the negation of modals to ESL learners.

Negation of the modals can be complex for students. There are two main reasons for this. Adding *not* after the modal does not always give the opposite meaning. For example, *the negative of must is sometimes cannot; and that of should is sometimes need not, etc.* (Jarvis 1972: 244). It means that overgeneralization of a rule can lead to confusion on the part of the student.

The second problem with negation is that either the modal or the full verb can be negated, thus confusing the meaning of the sentence to an ESL learner. With modals that are most like the main verb, such as **can**, the modal is negated (Palmer 1974). For example, *He **can't** see the Big Circus Tent*, is a good example of where the modal auxiliary is negated. The problem arises when the main verb is negated. For example, in the case of a sentence such as *He **won't** stop acting like a clown* the teacher should give equal weight to the form of **modal + negation** and what **modal + negation** means. There are other issues with negation of modals and their meaning. However, I consider that the two issues stated above illustrate typical, problematic patterns for ESL learners.

In the view of many ESL teachers, the past conditional and past hypothetical are the most difficult for students to comprehend, even at very advanced levels. DeGarrico (1986) suggests that teachers should take advantage of what is systematic in modality and stress this to students. For example, she states that the overall system of time relationships is simple and orderly for modals and it should be emphasized. Although the hypothetical and conditional meanings of modals are very important topics to cover when teaching modals, I have opted not to include them in this paper due to the complexity of the topics.

Nevertheless, I thought it useful to refer to intercultural issues, as this is another aspect that I consider important to be addressed when teaching the English modal system.

2. Intercultural Issues

Modals that function as social interaction (root) modals require that the characteristics of the social situation be taken into account (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman 1983). **Power distance**, for instance, can determine which modal to use in a given situation. For example, the owner of a circus is talking to the circus clown, and he says, *You **should** be ready to perform tomorrow night at 7:00 pm*. Because of his authority, this use of ***should*** is not just a suggestion. In he says, *You **will** be ready to perform tomorrow night at 7:00 pm*. Inferring the correct meaning requires not only knowledge of modals, but of the power relationship in America and perhaps even the specific culture of the circus.

Geert Hofstede (1986) talks about the nature of these power relationships in culture: *Power distance as a characteristic of a culture defines the extent to which the less powerful persons in a society accept an inequality in power and consider it normal. Inequality exists within any culture, but the degree of it that is tolerated varies between one culture and another* (Hofstede 1986: 25). In Arabic countries, according to Hofstede, there is a large power distance. A native speaker of Arabic has two major hurdles to overcome when confronting the modal system of English. The first obstacle is that there are no modal auxiliaries in Arabic; the second one is that the dynamics of power relationships are very different. Not only does the learner have to overcome these hurdles, but the teacher or translator must also be aware of these difficulties.

Something to take into account is that, when teaching modals, there may not be an issue of comprehension of the modal system. Instead, it could be an issue of understanding the power relationships that are at work in the culture. Another thing to take into consideration is that although not all languages have modal auxiliaries, the concept of modality is universal.

Conclusions

Modality is a semantic concept that covers notions such as possibility, probability, permission, ability, volition, necessity and obligation. The class of modals is in many languages both syntactically and semantically highly irregular and unpredictable: modals frequently have idiosyncratic conjugational patterns and are subject to highly specialized syntactic rules. One of the main characteristic of modal verbs is their relatively imprecise and indeterminate meaning, their ambiguity: the same modal can be **deontic** (i.e. based on rules and regulations), but it may also involve processes, sets of knowledge or belief systems, and thus get an epistemic interpretation.

In order to define the class of modals or to provide a set of environments in which a modal may be correctly or appropriately used, one must refer to many levels of language: the purely syntactic environment, as well as the logical structure, the context of the utterance, the assumptions that are shared by the speaker and the addressee, the social situation assumed by the participants in the discourse, the impression the speaker wants to make on the addressee, and so on. There is also the question of the appropriate context environments, that is, the semantic-pragmatic issue. Therefore, a complete analysis of a particular modal can only be achieved by looking both at its syntactic features and at its semantic structure. In other words, the syntax of a modal verb is based on its semantics, and these two dimensions are inseparable.

To sum up, I do not favour a complicated classificatory scheme that would be hard to handle, but, rather, I plead for training students in translation/ interpreting/ foreign language teaching towards an increased awareness of the possible structural and semantic parallels between source and target language that would speed up the process of establishing correct equivalents between the meaning and the grammatical structure of one language, on

the one hand, and the corresponding meanings and grammatical structures of the other language, on the other.

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