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Abstract	In seiner "Transzendentalen Asthetik" beabsichtigte Immanuel Kant, die Aprioritat von Zeit und Raum zu beweisen. Ob es ihm aber gelungen ist, sie als eine Begriindung von objektiver Gultigkeit der Erkenntnis geltend zu machen, scheint mir einigermaBen fragwurdig. Um die Begrundung zu berechtigen, muBte auch der ProzeB des Zustandekommens von der Zeit-und Raumvorstellung als apriorisch angesehen, vielmehr bewiesen werden. Meines Erachtens konnte jedoch die Zeit- und Raumvorstellung nur a posteriori entstehen als Bedingung fur Existenz. Dabei taucht eine Frage auf : Wie kommt man zur Erkenntnis, daB Zeit und Raum notwendige Bedingungen fur Existenz seien? Erfahrung allein konnte diese Frage nicht uberzeugend auflosen. Das ist der Grund, warum ich hies Notwendigkeit in zwei Arten kategorisiere : ,,absolute und relative Notwendigkeit,,. Dieser DenkprozeB wird uns unvermeidlich zum SchluB fuhren, daB Zeit und Raum wirklich die notwendigen Bedingungen fur Existenz sind. Alles in allem : die Selbstverstandlichkeit der Existenz hebt die relative Notwendigkeit zur absoluten auf.
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Translatability as a Philosophical Problem

Yuu Tani

Translation is ordinarily conceived as a purely technical problem of peripheral importance to philosophy. This point of view is based on the assumption that philosophical thought is essentially independent of the language in which it is formulated. However, the recent focus on the active role played by natural language in the formation of thought shows us that we must reconsider this traditional assumption, and inquire into the precise relationship between language and thought.

This paper is an attempt to elucidate this relationship through a focus on the question of translatability as it appears in the theories of Roman Jakobson and Jacques Derrida. I begin by accepting the structuralist premise that language precedes and conditions thought. Next, I show how Jakobson attempts to develop a comprehensive theory of translation and meaning upon this premise, but is unable to develop it fully due to an inner conflict within his system. In the third section, I discuss the nature of this conflict through a comparison of Jakobson and Derrida's respective conceptions of language. Finally, I follow Derrida's development of the structuralist thesis to its most radical conclusion, where, paradoxically, he returns to an unstructuralist concept of "origin".

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§ 1 Introduction

The question of translatability is generally accorded little importance among the problems of philosophy. In fact, the only philosopher who easily comes to mind as having placed translation at the center of a philosophical argument is Quine, but even he does not always clarify if he is using translation merely in illustration of an independent theory, or if he intends it to form the basis for a new methodology[1]. In any case, Quine is a rare exception, while the general rule is to treat translation as a technical problem, concerned only with the practical difficulties involved in the transposition of a philosophical text from one language into another. In other words, the general view is that the act of translation involves nothing *essential* for philosophy. I hope to show in this paper that this is not so — that, in fact, a focus on the question of translation and translatability can lead us to a rich and vital reconception of the relationship between language and thought. — That, indeed, thinkers such as Roman Jakobson and Jacques Derrida have already started us on our way.

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The problem of translatability in philosophy involves two somewhat different aspects. The first is the concrete possibility of interlingual translation per se, while the second is the more abstract problem of the relationship between language and thought. Although the latter is recognized more or less universally as a central problem for philosophy, the former is traditionally considered to be of interest only to literary theorists and interpreters of sacred texts[2] (these two areas posing the most practical difficulties for translation). Conversely, the reason for not regarding this problem as a philosophical one arises from the assumption that the content of truly philosophical thought lies beyond and above the contingencies of natural language, and is in no essential way affected by its being

expressed in one language or another. We assume that thought is universal and comes to be expressed in different ways only through the unfortunate accident of there being a multiplicity of languages in this imperfect world of ours.

Today, however, these assumptions have been called into question as never before, especially in the current of thought called structuralism. By this, I refer in a general way to the predominantly French doctrine which regards all systems of meaning (natural languages being the most typical example) as generating these meanings internally, and not by virtue of reference to an external reality. That which we call "thought", being always and foremost a *thinking in language*, is also susceptible to these rules of generation, and thus can claim no independence from the language or culture or history in which it is formulated. The doctrine is of course correct in the sense that our thought is indeed strongly influenced by all of these factors; what is more, it is extremely difficult to refute because even our objections must be couched in a language, which in turn can be accused of cultural and/or historical relativity.

Let us assume then that languge does indeed precede and condition thought. Then what does it mean to think? Do we merely follow language blindly? Are we merely stringing together pregiven formulas? If so, language is truly a prison house and philosophy is little more than tedious slavework. However, such a declaration of complete linguistic relativity leaves several questions unanswered, one of the most crucial of these being[8]: how and why is it possible for us to understand, albeit imperfectly, languages and cultures (and philosophies) that are initially foreign to us? Although we are tempted to reply that we understand each other because we share a common rationality and/or a common experience of the world, we must follow structuralism here, and remind ourselves to pose the question within the boundaries of language. Now Jakobson, as we

shall see later, remains faithfully within these boundaries and tells us that "intelligible" is "translatable"[4]. That is, "understanding" is actually nothing more that a rendering into other signs — a "translation". Thus, from the structuralist point of view, the question of understanding can be restated as: how and why is translation possible?

Translation in this sense is no longer merely a technical problem, but is linked directly to the problem of thought in relation to language. That is, it involves the question of if and how thought can escape the immediate bonds of particular languages. Furthermore, the concept of translation has the advantage of allowing us to probe this possibility of going *beyond* language in an extremely concrete way, from *within* language. It is for these reasons that I speak of translatability as a problem of philosophy, and believe that it can help us to redefine the relationship between language and thought.

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In the following sections, I hope to develop these ideas more clearly through a consideration of the theories of Roman Jakobson and Jacques Derrida. I have chosen these two thinkers as my subjects for two reasons. First, both allow the concept of translation an important role in their respective theories. Secondly, I believe that both are striving toward a reconception of thought (understanding and interpretation) as an integral part of what we call language.

§ 2 Jakobson: Meaning as Translation

Jakobson has written only one short easy that deals thematically with the theoretical aspects of translation. Nevertheless, the concepts of translation and translatability play an important role within his general scheme of language. In the 1959 essay "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation", he states that "the meaning of any linguistic sign is its translation into some further, alternative sign . . .[5]" In criticism of Russell's view that "no one can understand the

word 'cheese' unless he has a nonlinguistic acquaintance with cheese[6]", Jakobson claims that, to the contrary, "the meaning of the word 'cheese' cannot be inferred from a nonlinguistic acquaintance with cheddar or with camembert without the assistance of the verbal code. ... Mere pointing will not teach us whether *cheese* is the name of the given specimen, or of any box irrespective of contents[7]." That is, the only way to understand a word is to understand the meaning assigned to it in the code (i.e. *langue*) to which it belongs, and the only means of effecting such an understanding is by converting it into other signs — that is, through translation.

A similar view is repeated in other essays: among them "Signs and System of Language", where he claims that the basic feature of linguistic signs lies in their translatability into other signs — whether more developed and explicit, or conversely, more elliptic — that belong either to the same or to a different language system[8]. Another interesting example is the one cited previously in the Introduction, where Jakobson equates "intelligible" with "translatable" — the latter being, according to him, "a more linguistic designation" of the former[9]. The inference in all of these examples is that what we call understanding is not a reference to an extralingual realm of thought or reality, but a development or interpretation within a concrete system of signs.

An important point here is that Jakobson's concept of translation is not limited to what we usually call by that name — that is, "interlingual translation" —, but is extended to include what he calls "intralingual translation" and "intersemiotic translation". The former refers to "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language" (i.e. "rewording"), and the latter to "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems" (such as painting, gestures, music, etc.)[10]. This extension of meaning should come as no surprise, since other-

wise, the statement that "the meaning of any linguistic sign is its translation into some further, alternative sign" would mean that linguistic signs have meaning only in relation to other linguistic systems — which of course is untenable by structuralist standards. In any case, this triadic concept of translation shows us that the "system" to which the formula "meaning is translation" applies, is by no means limited to the system of a particular natural language. Rather, it appears to encompass an entire integrated field of communication.

This conception of translation within an integrated field seems simple and straightforward enough on the surface, but we cannot accept it without first inquiring into why and how it is possible to pass from one level of systems to another. Especially important is the problem of commutability between 1) different languages (in the case of interlingual translation) and 2) different semiotic systems (in the case of intersemiotic translation). Both types of translation presuppose a common ground to mediate between the different systems: in the former case, a universal language or linguistic universals of some sort; in the latter, an integrated universe of signs. Jakobson attempts to satisfy both of these presuppositions in the following way: He approaches the first problem from two directions — (A) by insisting on "invariants" or "universals" in language, and (B) by conceiving of all languages as variations of one language, the human language. Concerning the second problem, he (C) envisions all human communication systems as part of a single encompassing structure.

(A) Jakobson recognizes universals of two kinds: 1) certain "relational invariants" that appear in all or nearly all languages (such as the grave/acute opposition at the phonetic level and the noun/verb opposition at the grammatical level), and 2) "implicational rules", which govern the actual appearance or non-appearance of linguistic features in particular languages. Such features, according

to Jakobson, are never randomly present or absent in a language, but "imply" one another. For example, at the phonetic level, if the phoneme/ɲ/or/ŋ/is present in a language, then/n/and/m/will also be present. (Further examples at the higher levels of language are also offered, but are too complex to introduce here[11].) Such universals are what make it possible for us to recognize other languages as languages, and thus to eventually understand and acquire them[12]. Jakobson believes that their existence is due to the biological structure of the human mind[13], but insists that the only way to extract them is through careful empirical studies of all available languages[14].

(B) Instead of regarding natural languages as closed, monolithic structures, Jakobson conceives of actual languages as occupying a spatial and temporal continuity. Such continuity is best exemplified in cases of bilingualism and in language in the midst of historical change, where two or more codes (*langues*) belonging to different spaces and times coexist and overlap each other within a single community or a single individual. This overlapping of codes is true on a smaller scale for "normal" language as well, since all natural languages necessarily extend across space and time and resultingly encompass many variations. Thus all languages across the world and history "can actually be approached as manifold variations of one world-wide them — human language[15]."

(C) In a survey on linguistics in relation to other sciences, Jakobson places the "sciences of man" in a cooperative structure composed of three concentric circles[16]: 1) The innermost circle is linguistics, which studies verbal messages. (Language is placed centrally because it provides both a model and a medium for all the other disciplines.) 2) The next is semiotics proper, which includes the study of nonverbal messages. 3) The third is comprised of anthropological disciplines such as economics and politics, where messages play a relevant but accessory role. A fourth, 4) the biological science of communication, which includes the study of animal language and of

genetics, can be added to the purely human sciences to form an integrated field of human communication[17]. The integration of these four fields into one large field is based upon a teleological conception of mankind as a message-transmitting animal[18]. Jakobson is particularly fascinated by the "extraordinary degree of analogy between the systems of genetic and verbal information[19]" and suggests that the isomorphism may be the result of language being modelled directly upon the structural principles of molecular communication[20].

The above is a far too simplified version of Jakobson's theories, but I believe it is sufficient to show that the system in which meaning is realized through translation is an extremely complex one. Now this in itself is a merit, and Jakobson's conclusions are all the more impressive for being supported by a great deal of empirical data. Nevertheless, this scheme as such is still insufficient. For so far, we are offered only a kind of metaphysical insight into the unity of all systems into one integrated field, with no specific explanation as to why and how it is possible to speak of similarity or analogy or even a sharing of traits between two different systems. If it is true, as structuralism suggests, that the values of semiotic units are determined by their position in the structure to which they belong, how can we speak of equivalence, or even similarity, between two units — be they "bachelor" and "unmarried man", or "cheese" and "fromage", or the word "lion" and the picture of one, or a genetic message and a linguistic one?

Jakobson himself is aware of this crucial question, and what is more, takes steps to resolve it. Leaving aside other systems for the moment, let us return to his views on natural language: "Equivalence in difference is the cardinal problem of language and the pivotal concern of linguistics[21]," he states. He even admits that "there is ordinarily no full equivalence between code-units [i.e. words][22]" either in intralingual or in interlingual translation. How-

ever, he goes on to say that translation does not actually replace words for words, but rather "messages" for "messages", between which equivalence is possible[23]. That is to say, although a word for word translation is impossible by definition (since no two languages are identical in the way their units are arranged, and since no two units even within the same language possess precisely the same value), we can still convey the same message by making use of loanwords, neologisms, circumlocutions, and so forth[24]. But what then are the criteria for judging the "equivalence" or "non-equivalence" between messages?

Jakobson's answer to this questions is difficult, and unfortunately not fully developed. He refers to a "cognitive experience", which is "conveyable in any existing language".[25] Taken superficially, this might be interpreted as an experience that transcends language, acting as a common basis for meaning. However, Jakobson clearly cannot intend this, as it so blatantly contradicts his previously cited views on the meaning of "cheese". Furthermore, he tells us that "the cognitive level of language not only admits but *directly requires* recoding interpretation, i. e., translation[26]." That is, here again, it is translation that makes cognitive experience possible and not vice versa. What then is it that makes *translation* possible?

At this point, we must introduce another crucial concept in Jakobson's theory of translation — that of the "metalinguistic function" of language. The metalinguistic function is one of six functions that Jakobson attributes to language[27]. It is an interpretive function; it is the function of language referring back to itself. "Any elucidating interpretation of words and sentences — whether intralingual (circumlocutions, synonyms) or interlingual (translation) — is a message referring to the code[28]." In other words, translation is one manifestation of the metalinguistic function at work. It is not the only manifestation, for we are told that "it plays a vital role in the acquisition and use of language[29]." Needless to say,

theories about language also show this function at work.

An important point here is that the metalinguistic function is by no means the monopoly of an independent metalanguage; to the contrary, it is an inherent function of all language as such. ("An ability to speak a given language implies an ability to talk about this language[30]."") This is why language — natural language — occupies the central position in Jakobson's concentric scheme of the human sciences. For language, and only language, possesses this innate ability to turn back on itself to interpret and form judgments about equivalence or nonequivalence. Which is as much as to say that language, in itself, possesses the power to think.

Now this is a large statement. Together with Jakobson's equation of intelligibility and translatability, it takes us a considerable step forward in our inquiry into the possibility of crossing the barriers of particular natural languages. The problem, however, is that the conception of the metalinguistic function is not clear enough to be truly convincing. We are told repeatedly that this function is essential if translation is to be possible, and we can see that it is necessary to assure the integration of the field of communication. Yet, we have no clear idea of how it works. One reason for this failure to clarify may be that the concept of "language about language", while given an important role in Jakobson's scheme, somehow contradicts other (perhaps hidden) presuppositions in his thinking, and thus never rises to full citizenship. In pursuit of this matter, I shall go on to discuss Jakobson's basic conception of language in contrast to that of Jacques Derrida.

§ 3 Language as Voice and Language as Ecriture

"Language" is spoken of so often in recent philosophy that we tend to accept it naturally as part of a philosophical argument, frequently without reflecting on the precise nature of its use. This can sometimes be hazardous, since different writers use the word

with different extensions, sometimes to designate 1) what Saussure called *langue* (i. e. individual natural languages such as Japanese or English), sometimes 2) the aggregate of all these languages and the general human ability to use them (i. e. what Saussure called *langage*), and occasionally, 3) systems of signification in general (i. e. whatever comes under the jurisdiction of what Saussure named "semiology"; or again, all that is included in the three outer circles of Jakobson's schema.)[31]

Jakobson, when writing in English, uses the term "language" to designate the second of the above, while he replaces Saussure's term *langue* with "code"[32]. The third field of course has been divided into the three concentric areas mentioned previously. This usage is very clear and definite, and thus useful in clarifying many aspects of language and communication. However, because it is basically tuned to the needs of linguistics, and necessarily based on the assumption that language and code are already well-defined entities, it overlooks some of the less explicit aspects of the language problem that are of such interest to philosophy. This is perhaps why adherents of philosophical structuralism and post-structuralism — Derrida included — have chosen to extend the boundaries of language to include all three of the areas mentioned above. Kristeva, for example, speaks of dreams and gestures as being languages, and does analyses of musical language, visible language (painting, photography), animal language[33]. This extended usage has the disadvantage of blurring the sometimes very important distinctions between different types of systems, but it has become so widespread in recent years that it seems unrealistic to condemn it altogether. Derrida himself is critical of this "devaluation"[34], this "degradation"[35] of the word "language", saying that "it betrays a loose vocabulary, the temptation of a cheap seduction, the passive yielding to fashion, the consciousness of the avant-garde, in other words — ignorance[36]". Yet he also recognizes this phenomenon as the symptom of an epoch

that "*must* finally determine as language the totality of its problematic horizon[37]." Thus he respects this need of our epoch by complying with the extended usage.

The difference in usage between Jakobson and Derrida can be explained thus as the difference between a linguist and a philosopher who is grappling with the deep-rooted problems of modern philosophy. However, there is a further factor, more specific and essential to our arguments here, behind this difference in conception. That is this: Jakobson conceives of language as basically and essentially *verbal* language, while Derrida conceives of it as writing — *écriture*.

Throughout his work, Jakobson clearly and deliberately defines language as *verbal* language. (Needless to say, he is following Saussure on this point.) He regards the linguistic sign as being fundamentally and essentially a unity of *sound* and *meaning*[38]. Thus, "the field of linguistics is confined to the communication of *verbal* messages[39]." Writing, on the other hand, is "a secondary and optional acquisition as compared with the all-human oral speech[40]." In fact, in Jakobson's concentric schema, writing is actually relegated to the outer circle of semiotic systems and is not even considered a part of language as such[41].

Why is this so? Jakobson tells us that it is because visual signs are ruled by the spatial dimension, whereas the temporal dimension takes priority in auditory signs. Because spatial signs are always apprehended as part of the greater visual field, we have a tendency to reify them, to connect them with objects, — in other words, to interpret them, often arbitrarily, as meaning something outside themselves. Sequential signs (i. e. temporal signs), on the other hand, — Jakobson takes both verbal and musical signs as his examples — 1) "present a consistently hierarchized structure" and 2) "are resolvable into ultimate, discrete, rigorous patterned components which, as such, have no existence in nature, but are built ad hoc[42]." In

other words, the inner structure of auditory signs is so systematic and compulsory that they leave no room for interpretation. They are merely accepted as embodying certain values of certain systems. A further dissimilarity between spatial and temporal signs is proposed: To take painting and verbal language as examples, when an observer arrives at an understanding of a contemplated painting, "the painting as a whole remains before his eyes, it is still present [and open to further interpretation]; but when the listener reaches a synthesis of what he has heard, the phonemes have in fact already vanished[43]."

Thus, the verbal sign has two distinct characteristics: first, it requires no effort in interpretation; secondly, it vanishes once its role has been accomplished. Now this is precisely what is required of the *signifiant* in the structuralist model of the sign. In order for the unity of *signifiant* and *signifié* to be complete, the former must point to the latter with no ambiguity; then it must disappear before any discrepancy between the two arises. We see now that Jakobson's definition of language as verbal language is rooted directly in this concept of the sign as a perfect unity of *signifiant* and *signifié*.

Derrida's concept of *écriture* is intended to be a radical criticism of this idea of language as a perfect unity between the word and its meaning. If language is fundamentally verbal language for Saussure and Jakobson, then it is writing — *écriture* — for Derrida. In this case of course, the meaning of *écriture* has been extended across its usual boundaries to encompass an entire *type* of signification — that is, signification of a *signifiant* instead of a *signifié*: "...ceasing to designate a particular, derivative, auxiliary form of language in general..., ceasing to designate the exterior surface, the insubstantial double of a major signifier, *the signifiant of the signifiant* —, the concept of *écriture* is beginning to go beyond the extension of language. In all senses of the word, writing *comprehends* language[44]." However, this is not to say that writing has

stopped being a "*signifiant* of a *signifiant*". It is still that, and in that sense, still secondary. However, it is no longer secondary in relation to language in general, because now, language itself is coneived in its essence to be a "*signifiant* of a *signifiant*". There are no pure *signifiés* in language: "... the *signifié* functions always already as a *signifiant*. The secondarity that we believed to be ascribable to writing alone affects all *signifiés* in general, affects them always already, that is, the moment the game [of language] begins[45]."

Now this difference in conceiving the essence of language necessarily affects its extensions as well. Thus, for Jakobson, "language" is limited to linguistic codes as they apply to spoken and heard language, whereas for Derrida, it refers not only to all systems of notation and inscription, but also to the essence and content of the activities themselves which are noted or inscribed[46]. In Derrida's case, all acts of signification are already included under the one umbrella of *écriture*, and on an equal basis. Thus the problem met in Jakobson — of how it is possible to speak of equivalence between a message in one system and a message in another — never arises. For in Derrida's scheme, where there is only the play of *signifiants* pointing at one another, nothing is ever primary, and "equivalence" is an irrelevant concept. (For equivalence presupposes an objective criterion.) Here, meaning is never a matter of equivalence, but of interpretation.

Such a conception of meaning may seem vague and unsatisfactory, but here we must recall that Jakobson is saying essentially the same thing when he speaks of "meaning as translation", although he does not develop this assertion to its full consequences. He speaks of a "metalinguistic function" of language that makes translation possible; however, as I pointed out at the end of § 2, he fails to show us the concrete workings of this function. This failure, I believe, can now be ascribed to the fact that the metalinguistic func-

tion contradicts the idea of the sign as a unity of *signifiant* and *signifié*. For Jakobson himself defines the metalinguistic function as the function of language referring back to itself; thus all linguistic signs acting upon this function are necessarily "*signifiants* of *signifiants*". Furthermore, since the metalinguistic function is not a secondary function of language but an inherent function of all language as such, and since "the meaning of any linguistic sign is its translation into some further, alternative sign[47]" instead of translation being an act that comes *after* the main events of language, it would seem that the function of language as carrier of meaning is based on the structure "*signifiant* of *signifiant*", rather than that of "*signifiant* of *signifié*". However, because the latter formula constitutes such an important part of Jakobson's linguistics, he is never able to overcome the discrepancies between the two conflicting conceptions, and cannot fully develop his theory of meaning as translation. He is never able to give up his idea of translation as a setting up of "equivalences" in favor of a more flexible conception of translation as interpretation, despite the fact that such a conception would seem to be the natural outcome of much of his theory.

§ 4 Derrida: Translation as Deconstruction and the "Origin" of Languages

According to Derrida, the inner conflict that troubles not only Jakobson, but structuralism as a whole, has its roots in a certain tradition of Western philosophy — what he calls the "metaphysics of presence". According to this tradition, meaning in order to be meaning at all, must be fully and simultaneously present to the consciousness, in a pure and unadulterated state, unencumbered by the weight of the physical form which acts as it vehicle. Here, the role of language is to bring meaning to presence, then to discreetly disappear (as does the "voice" after speaking). The effect of lan-

guage must always be the presence of the *signifié*, and never of the *signifiant*.

Saussure and his followers attempt to defend this idea of meaning, especially in their insistence on defining language as essentially verbal language; yet they undermine it at the same time, by focusing on the nature of the sign as a system-dependent entity[48]. Considered especially important by Derrida are the structuralist theses of "the arbitrariness of the sign" and "difference". Defined very simply, these two theses are respectively 1) that *signifiant* and *signifié* are not tied by a natural bond, but brought together arbitrarily through belonging to a specific system of signification; and 2) that both *signifiant* and *signifié* possess no substantial value, but only differential value, which is engendered by their relationship with other members of the same system. Needless to say, these theses concerning the nature of the sign cannot help but transform the idea of meaning itself. We have already seen a new concept of meaning developed to some extent in Jakobson's theory of meaning as translation; however, as Derrida points out so perspicaciously, the structuralist theory of language cannot be developed to its full extent until it has thrown off the last remnants of the metaphysics of presence.

What then are the ideas of Derrida himself on meaning? on translation? Derrida writes so extensively and difficultly on all of his subjects; I will not even attempt to follow his arguments closely. I will merely offer a short and probably insufficient summary of his final conclusions. Concerning meaning, it is this: There is no such thing as meaning in any substantial sense. There is only the play of *signifiants*, and that which appears to us as "meaning" is merely a "trace" of this play: "*The trace is in fact the absolute origin of sense in general. Which amounts to saying once again that there is no absolute origin of sense in general. The trace is the difference* which opens appearance and signification[49]. Thus what is tradi-

tionally called understanding is a following of this trace — a pursuit however that never achieves a final goal, since the trace is not a substantial entity that can be grasped once and for all. Understanding never goes beyond being an interpretation — or rather, what Derrida calls a "deconstruction" — a pulling down of old structures and putting them together again in new ways.

Now concerning translation. Derrida tells us that the traditional conception of translation is based upon a strict differentiation between *signifié* and *signifiant:* "In the limits to which it is possible, or at least *appears* possible, translation practices the difference between *signifié* and *signifiant*[50]." Jakobson's conception also lies in this direction when he speaks of "equivalence" between a message and its translation; that is, he seems to presuppose the existence of a common *signifié* that is designated by both *signifiants* — what Derrida would call a "transcendental *signifié*", that is independent of language[51]. However, if the relationship between *signifiant* and *signifié* is asserted to be only relative, as it is by Derrida, then the conception of translation must change accordingly: "But if this difference [between *signifiant* and *signifié*] is never pure, then translation is no more so, and for the notion of translation, we must substitute a notion of *transformation:* the regulated transformation of one language by another, of one text by another. We will never have, and in fact have never had to do with a "transport" of pure *signifiés* — that the instrument, or the "vehicle", of signification would leave virgin and untamed — from one language to another, or within one and the same language[52]." Thus translation according to Derrida is a type of creative interpretation, even a "deformation" of the original — which is precisely the type of act that goes by the name of "deconstruction".

On first sight, this conception makes translation a purely arbitrary act, left to the whims and accidental talents of the individual translator. However, this is not necessarily so, as Derrida hints in

his use of the term "regulated transformation" in the previous citation. For there is a singularity that accompanies translation — specifially, interlingual translation —, in that translation is a symptom of the relationship between languages that are essentially strange to one another. In a lecture given in Tokyo in the fall of 1983 on "The Towers of Babel", Derrida tells us, enigmatically as usual, that translation is possible because it is "demanded" by a "linguistic contract" between the languages of the world. Now this contract cannot be a contract in the usual sense of the word, since such a contract always presupposes a common language, or at least an agreement on terms. In contrast to this, the linguistic contract takes place between languages that are completely strange to one another, and what is more, takes place outside of empirical space or time[53]. Then what is the nature of this contract? Derrida says that it might be called a "transcendental contract" in classical terminology, and that it is another name for "the origin of languages" (*langues*). (He stresses here that this is the origin of *langues* and not of *langage*, since *les langues* are prior to *langage*[54].)

This concept of "origin" brings us to the very root of the problem of translatability. For if translation is to be possible, the multiple languages of the world *must* share something in common, whatever structuralism may say. To be precise, even structuralism itself presupposes this sharing, since, as Jakobson has pointed out in another context, how else can we recognize another language as a language, and thus talk about it[55]? In Jakobson's theory, the universality of language is based upon two arguments which, unfortunately, remain unintegrated: On the one hand are empirical data concerning universals in language, and concerning the analogy between natural language and other systems of meaning and communication, particularly the genetic code. And on the other hand is his concept of the metalinguistic function of language — the function of language referring back to language. Derrida takes this lat-

ter argument several steps further in his conception of language as *écriture*, and revises the concepts of meaning and translation accordingly. However, just when he seems to stand on the threshold of an absolute relativism, he introduces this concept of an "origin", of a "transcendental contract" between languages.

As I have already mentioned, the origin spoken of by Derrida is not an origin in a historical or an empirical sense — that is, in a factual sense. That is, he is not speaking of an origin in a particular time or place. "Origin" points rather to the very birth, the very eruption of language and meaning within an intersubjective and temporal field. The reason that this birth can be conceived as the basis of a "contract" between languages is because this field is shared by all men of all times — although of course, each of us necessarily occupies a different position in it, both temporally and spatially. This field is experienced by us as a horizon, and although it is never absolutely present to us in the traditional sense of the word, we have access to it as such, as a horizon. As sharers of this horizon, we live in the *possibility*, if not the *actuality*, of interpreting (or "deconstructing") all of its meanings.

Derrida gives "origin" another name — that of "differ*a*nce". Differ*a*nce of course is a play on the structuralist term of "difference", and is distinguished from it in the following way: Differences are what give rise to meaning *within* a language, within a *system* of language; being in such close relation to individual systems, they are necessarily "historical"[56]. Differ*a*nce, on the other hand, is "the movement of play that 'produces'... these differences." It is "the nonfull, nonsimple 'origin'; it is the structured and differing origin of differences[57]."

Derrida stresses that this origin — this differ*a*nce — is not an *activity*, that it is not *active*. It is rather the "middle voice" that establishes both passivity and activity[58]. Similarly, it is origin of historicity without itself being historical; it ts the origin of facticity

without itself being a fact. And it is here that the "linguistic contract" which *demands* translation and makes it possible, has its roots.

Now all of this sounds much like mere mysticism, and unfortunately, it often seems to be true that Derrida criticizes much and clarifies little. However, we must not allow the significance of these remarks on "origin" to slip past us. Which is this: Even standing on the premise that language precedes thought, that there is no thought independent of language (and Derrida definitely does stand on this premise), it seems that the only ultimate way to explain the inner workings of languge is to return to a concept of origin — that is, to a "neutral" point, where neither language nor thought precedes, but where both find their beginnings.

§ 5 Conclusion

In posing the question of translatability as a philosophical problem, we have discovered that the problem of how interlingual translation is concretely possible, is simultaneously the problem of how thought can cross the boundaries of individual languages.

In § 2, we discussed Jakobson's theory of meaning as translation, and discovered that in his case, the methodologial possibility of translation is based upon an inner function of language — the metalinguistic function. However, even while stressing the importance of this function as the precondition not only of translatability, but of the acquisition and use of language in general, Jakobson does not really clarify its nature. Subsequently, in § 3, I attempted to show through a comparison with Derrida, how this failure to clarify is rooted in the structuralist conception of the linguistic sign as a perfect unity of *signifiant* and *signifié*. Finally in § 4, we followed Derrida's criticism of this conception and his accompanying revision of the concepts of meaning and translation to a point where he must choose between an absolute relativism, or a return to an ultimate

concept of origin. He does the latter, and shows us that a pursuit of the conditions of translatability ultimately lead us to a realm of silence whence both language and thought arise. As for the precise nature of this realm — this origin — we will leave it as a problem for another inquiry.

Notes and References

1) See W. V. O. Quine, *Word and Object* (MIT Press, 1960). Quine's use of "radical translation" — translation between languages with no previous cultural or historical contact — as his model seems to show that he is more interested in creating an extreme case of non-communication for logical purposes than in elucidating any aspects of translation as it really occurs. His direct motive in asserting the indeterminacy of translation is not the denial of translatability as such, but rather the refutation of propositions in logic, with its attendant repercussions in scientific theory. Nevertheless, his theory has illuminated many essential factors that hold true for translation in general, and is by no means irrelevant to the thoughts developed in this paper. Especially interesting to me is a certain passage of Quine's, concerning the "creativity" of translation — and thus of all theories — which seems to show that translation *is* to be viewed as the basis of a new methodology for science and philosophy: "... anyway, I am in favor also of translation, even radical translation. I am concerned only to show what goes into it, and to what degree our behavioral data should be viewed as guides to a creative decision rather than to an awaiting reality." (From Quine's reply to Hintikka, in *Words and Objections;* ed. Davidson and Hintikka, D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1969. pp. 312-313.)
2) For a comprehensive discussion of the literary aspects of translation in relation to its philosophical aspects, see *After Babel*, by George Steiner (Oxford UP, 1975).
3) A second crucial question that I could not deal with directly is the methodological one. Namely, if meaning structures are so self-contained, why is structuralism able to rise above them to a superior understanding of that self-containment? The answer to this depends on the possibility of going beyond particular language systems: thus it is indirectly related to the problem of translatability which we treat here.

4) In "Quest for the Essence of Language"; *Selected Works of Roman Jakobson* Vol. II (Mouton, 1971) (Listed from now on as SW II), p. 345.
5) "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation"; SW II, p. 261.
6) Bertrand Russell, "Logical Positivism". *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, IV (1950), p. 18. Cited in the above.
7) SW II, p. 260.
8) "Zeichen und System der Sprache"; SW II, p. 275.
9) "Quest for the Essence of Language"; SW II, p. 345.
10) "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation"; SW II, p. 261.
11) "Implications of Language Universals for Linguistics"; SW II, pp. 581–582.
12) "Patterns in Linguistics"; SW II, pp. 225–226.
13) "Linguistics in Relation to Other Sciences"; SW II, pp. 676–683.
14) "Implications of Language Universals for Linguistics"; SW II, pp. 580–591.
15) Ibid., p. 581.
16) *Main Trends in the Science of Language* (Allen and Unwin, 1973), pp. 32–36.
17) Ibid., pp. 44–62. See also Elmar Holenstein, *Roman Jakobson's Approach to Language* (Indiana UP, 1976; translation by Catherine and Tarcisius Schelbert, of *Jakobson ou le structuralisme phénoménologique*, Editions Seghers, 1974,) pp. 186–187.
18) "Linguistics in Relation to Other Sciences"; SW II, pp. 681–687.
19) Ibid., p. 678.
20) Ibid., p. 682.
21) "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation"; SW II, p. 262.
22) Ibid., p. 261.
23) Ibid., pp. 261–262.
24) Ibid., p. 263.
25) Ibid.
26) Ibid., p. 265.
27) The six functions are as follows: 1) the emotive function, 2) the poetic function, 3) the conative function, 4) the referential or the cognitive function, 5) the metalinguistic function, and 6) the phatic function. Each of these corresponds to one of the six factors that make up a speech event: 1) An *addresser* sends 2) a *message* to 3) an *addressee*. For this to take place, the message must have 4) a *context* (or a referent); the addresser and addressee must share 5) a *code* (Jakobson's name for what Saussure calls *langue*), and furthermore, there must be some kind of 6) *contact* between them. The functions are named according to which aspect of the speech event is specifically being called into question. Language is normally a mixture of all

six functions.

28) "Shifters, Verbal Categories, and the Russian Verb"; SW II, p. 131.
29) Ibid.
30) "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation"; SW II, p. 262.
31) I myself have been using the term rather loosely, usually to signify 1) and 2), but sometimes to include 3). Loose usage of this sort is never commendable, and usually to be condemned in an academic paper, but I believe that it was necessary in this case to encompass the viewpoints of both Jakobson and Derrida.
32) *Main Trends in the Science of Language*, p. 20.
33) Julia Kristeva, *Le langage, cet inconnu* (Seuil, 1981; originally published in 1969, Editions SGPP, under the name of Julia Joyaux), pp. 291–320.
34) *De la grammatologie* (Les Editions de Minuit, 1967), p. 15.
35) Ibid., p. 19.
36) Ibid., p. 15. (English translation by Gayatri C. Spivak. *Of Grammatology:* John Hopkins UP, 1976, p. 6).
37) Ibid.
38) "Quest for the Essence of Language"; SW II, p. 345. See also *Six leçons sur le son et le sens* (Editions de Minuit, 1976).
39) "Linguistics in Relation to Other Sciences"; SW II, p. 662.
40) Ibid., p. 658.
41) Ibid., p. 662.
42) "The Relation Between Visual and Auditory Signs"; SW II, p. 341.
43) Ibid., p. 344.
44) *De la grammatologie*, p. 16. (Translation my own.)
45) Ibid. (Translation my own.)
46) Ibid., p. 19.
47) See Note 5).
48) *Positions* (Editions de Minuit, 1972), pp. 28–29.
49) *De la grammatologie*, p. 95. (Translation by Spivak in *Of Grammatology*, p. 65)
50) *Positions*, p. 31. (Translation my own.)
51) Ibid., p. 30.
52) Ibid., p. 31. (Translation my own.)
53) "Des Tours de Babel" (Jacques Derrida, 1983); 高橋允昭訳『バベルの塔』(『理想』第608-610号, 1984年1月—3月に掲載), 第610号 pp. 15–16.
54) Ibid., p. 16.
55) See Note 12).
56) "La différance" in *Théorie d'ensemble* (Seuil, 1968), p. 52.
57) Ibid. Translation by David B. Allison in *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs* (Northwestern UP, 1973), p.

141.

58) Ibid., p. 130 of the English version. This portion is not printed in *Théorie d'ensemble.*