

# A Phenomenological Investigation into the Problem of Faithfulness in Translation (II)

Wang Dong-mei

School of Business Management, Henan Institute of Engineering, Zhengzhou 451191, China  
pingyuanmei686@sina.com

**Abstract** - As being-in-the-world, human beings not merely have a strong inclination to be ensnared in entities within the world of their circumspective concern in a way in which they can be definite in finding out a fact that who they are is determined by those entities through interpreting themselves in terms of the world of their concern — an ontological light of being in which they concernfully exist.

Index Terms – Phenomenological, Faithfulness, Translation

The publicness or the shared worldliness means the kind of commensurability or correspondence between the translator's potentiality-for-being and that which is to be translated. In accordance with the commensurability the translator projects his/her possibilities of understanding of being upon that which is to be translated and thus that which is to be translated becomes what it is in the translator's understanding of being. The publicness, in virtue of its large being-manifest of the worldhood of the world to which the translator has already been subjected, not only guides the translator's understanding of being but also reflects itself upon the act of understanding of being. Therefore, translation as restitution of the being of the translator's understanding of the source text is not free-floating and accidental, but deeply involved with the publicness which is definitely constitutive for the translator's being-in-the-world. The translator, in this publicness, means that he/she has already been thrown into a state of involvements which relate himself/herself towards those entities (whose being has already been held in the primary understanding of being) to be translated within-the-world. In such involvements, the translator cannot translate at his/her own will but to a great extent listen to and follow what the worldhood of the world addresses and speaks. In this way, the translator's being-thrownness as being-in-the-world can activate or energize the projection of understanding which is equiprimordial with the translator's being-in-the-world. In short, before the translator comes to the epistemological stage, he/she has already understood the being of those entities in the very way in which the translator let his/her being alongside those entities in advance.

By virtue of the translator's involvements with entities which have already been understood beforehand in terms of their being, the translator, before the act of various modes of knowing taking place, cannot isolate himself/herself from the involvements which understand as if the translator is a so naked subject standing over against the so-called observed objects. The real situation must be as follows: when the translator is able to conduct himself/herself towards

something lit up by his/her worldhood of the world, he/she does not get out of his/her inner sphere of consciousness in which he/she has already been proximally encapsulated by various **cognized** objects which he/she has already held in knowing. Quite the contrary, his/her primary understanding of being, in the ontological sense, is such that it is already outside along with entities within a world already discovered by his/her understanding of being. There is not any inner sphere of consciousness to be abandoned when the translator is outside along entities to be translated by his/her understanding of being. Rather, even in this state of being-outside alongside the objects, the translator is still inside to himself/herself in the concrete or ontical sense; that is to say, the translator himself/herself is always inside as a being-in-the-world that understands. Furthermore, the perceiving of what is known is not a process of returning with one's booty to the cabinet (inner sphere) of consciousness after one has gone out and grasped the known; even in perceiving, retaining, and preserving, the translator who knows, whether subjectively or objectively, still remains outside the objects, this is as true as the translator who is always inside. It is evident that there must be a kind of publicness or commensurability between the outside and the inside if the two terms keeps getting through between them in a single human being. However, the fact is that they are always in getting through because **“Understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein's Being”** and **“only if the understanding of Being ‘is’, do entities as entities become accessible; only if entities are of Dasein's kind of Being, is understanding of Being possible as an entity”** (BT, 32/255-266).

In sum, the translator gets to understand entities to be translated with and through his/her being-alongside those entities within the translator's being-intelligible world, and it does so long before the taking place of the subject-object split. Furthermore, even the translator arrives at the stage of epistemological subject-object split, the primary understanding of being as being-along-sidedness cannot be phenomenologically reduced or purified completely, especially, when the entity is language or the totality of words which, according to Heidegger, is characterized by the being of readiness-to-hand. Therefore, the translator as a being-in-the-world in his/her being-along-sidedness with entities to be translated has no other means but to be faithful to the being of entities to be translated if “faithfulness” refers to letting that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in

which it shows itself from itself; that is, letting something be something itself, be such as it is. By this way of thinking, “faithfulness” proximally signifies the translator’s being of the understanding of being. And the translator’s being is always understood in terms of the entities to be translated towards which the translator comports him/herself. This comporting is always conducted in such a way that is essentially constant — in terms of the world in which the translator lives. In the translator himself/herself, and therefore in his/her own understanding of being, the way of the world is understood is ontologically reflected upon the way in which the translator himself/herself gets interpreted. Consequently, there will be no leeway for the translator to go outside his/her understanding of the entities to be translated but only to be faithful to his/her understanding of being of the entities in question, because outside of understanding of being there “is” nothing disclosed; that is, outside understanding of being everything remains hidden and concealed up. So, it is very unconceivable that the translator can betray his/her understanding of being, and even “betraying” has already been founded upon an understanding of being. Therefore if we understand the conception of “faithfulness” in the existential-ontological sense, we will find that “faithfulness” is an elementary agency which always lurks in the human being corresponding with the being of those entities within the already discovered world in terms understanding of being.

The understanding of being is so holistic that the conception of “faithfulness” must be raised up in understanding; therefore “faithfulness” itself is already a kind of understanding of being. We can be unfaithful to that which has already been disclosed in our being-in-the-world, but such an attitude or a state-of-mind is already the result which comes from the primary understanding and faithful interpretation. That is to say, only after an act of understanding of being has already been performed, can we possibly **know** whether such an understanding of being is faithful or not; only in a derivative mode of understanding of being can we able to talk about whether an understanding of some entities is faithful or not. In short, “faithfulness” or “unfaithfulness” as a kind of consciously self-reflective awareness is already a founded recognition of the primary understanding of being. Accordingly there arises such a difficulty or an impossibility: a human being (including the translator) who proximally understands those entities of readiness-to-hand (e.g. language) within-the-world of his concern will have no means to talk about whether his understanding of being is faithful or unfaithful before the kind of self-reflection, therefore such expressions as “faithfulness” or “unfaithfulness” can only be made after the accomplishment of an understanding of being. But such a reflective cognition has already been a derivative mode of the primary understanding of those entities to be translated, so, to label such an understanding of being (Steiner calls the act of translation) as faithfulness or unfaithfulness is at the very beginning of the act of labeling far from the things themselves (phenomenological ontology), far from the existential-

ontological foundation. It is very hard to imagine that a human being is unfaithful to his understanding of being while his understanding of being determines everything he encounters within his being-in-the-world. If “To understand is to decipher. To hear (read; write) significance is to translate” (Steiner, 2004: xii) is true, then what is untrue will be that Steiner’s statements are unfaithful to him, that is, Steiner was lying at the time when he made such true statements. But how can it be possible in Steiner himself if not analyzed afterwards by him or others? If our existence (“a person can comport himself towards an understanding of being in one way or another, and always does comport himself somehow, we call “existence” BT, 32) is so faithful to us that we do not have other essences except for existence itself: our existence **is** faithful as it **is** faithful, and indeed we cannot be unfaithful to our ownmost existence which is the determinative character of ourselves and is characterized by our understanding of being: “Understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein’s Being” (BT, 33), and our essence lies rather in the fact that in each case we have our being to be, and have it as our own (BT, 32-33), therefore we do not have essence of **whatness** but only existence of **thatness** as our very being; and as long as we are existing or we are being, our understanding of being must be so faithful to us that we can be as we are, as human **beings**.

Therefore, faithfulness as an immanent character of the human existence in the existential-ontological sense cannot be isolated from one’s understanding of being at all; that is to say, faithfulness is already the inherent of understanding of being in terms of primordially. Formally speaking, faithfulness refers to such a transparency between the two kinds of being: one’s understanding of being and the being of those entities upon which the first kind of being is projected in understanding. Accordingly, the relationship between faithfulness and understanding of being is so closely that they cannot be separated from each other. Faithfulness is just the character of understanding of being in so far as one’s existence is so faithful that it cannot be unfaithful. If a human being’s essence is the existence which, in turn, is definitely characterized by understanding of being, then faithfulness as an immanent character of understanding of being is always, in terms of existence, to be as it is. For this reason, we cannot isolate faithfulness away from understanding of being and then use it to judge whether an understanding of being is faithful or unfaithful, for outside understanding of being we know nothing which is unfaithful, that is, only inside understanding of being can we **know** something which has already been disclosed by it. Fatherly speaking, only in understanding of being can we faithfully be **opened** to something which is our understanding of being. **Understanding of being is characterized by its inherent faithfulness and nothing more. Only because our understanding of being is faithful can our existence be faithful to us as it is.**

Now let us sum up the upshots: the translator as being-in-the-world always has his/her understanding of being whose

modes of being constituted/generated are mainly guided and even determined by the worldhood of the world (publicness or the Others). Understanding of being is more primordial than the derivative mode of translation. Before a concrete translating act sets in motion, the translator's ontological being has already been outside alongside the entities to be translated in contrast with the translator's ontical being as an entity which is always inside. The establishment of publicness between these two kinds of being definitely presupposes the very act of understanding of being as well as its derivative mode of translating. Faithfulness is nothing more than an inherent requirement of understanding of being which is co-original with being-in-the-world on the one hand; on the other hand, it is also the essential embodiment of publicness and the Others both largely represent the translator's understanding of being. So in this context, when we say "understanding of being", "being-in-the-world", "the worldhood of the world", "the world of significance", "publicness", and "Others", it is obvious that they have much in common except that each of them emphatically discloses the different conditions of possibility of understanding of being which is the ultimate ground for the act of translation.

In our relevant exposition of faithfulness, we can get to know that faithfulness cannot isolate itself away from understanding of being and in turn judges whether an understanding of being is faithful according to itself as the Court of Appeal. Our naïve knowledge about the relationship between faithfulness and understanding of being is that understanding of being itself existentially requires the character of faithfulness rather than unfaithfulness by virtue that we human beings exist in the world must exist in an understanding of being, and besides this, we have no means to be such as who we are. We are human beings and accordingly we project the ontological being upon entities which we encounter in a world which has already been disclosed by the ontological being in advance. With and through the ontological being we get to know entities in terms of their being, and therewith we human beings are defined by the being of the entities: "Being 'is' only in understanding of those entities to whose Being something like an understanding of Being belongs" (BT, 228). By this token, it is more reasonable that it is the translator who first raises the question of faithfulness in translation based upon his/her unpremeditated and somatic experiences of the very act of translation rather than the so-called theoreticians who probably ground their concept of faithfulness in translation upon minute comparisons between the source and the target texts; or bases their concept of unfaithfulness in translation upon linguistic knowledge or philosophy of consciousness

which tells that faithfulness in translation is only utopian and mythical, and therefore contingent and accidental; while unfaithfulness in translation can demythicize and lay bare the act of translation, and therefore is necessary and inevitable.

Those people who insist that faithfulness in translation is a kind of myth and thereby an illusionary worship with which must be done away by means of deconstruction in the domain of translation must posit themselves remotely far from the primary understanding of being which we human beings as being-in-the-world have no other means but to be possessed. Why so? Because those people who hold such ideas at the very beginning stand over against faithfulness and observe the act of translation as the isolated objects; but in doing so, they forget the very fact that faithfulness exists in their primary understanding of being and the faithfulness about that which talks. That is, it is the faithfulness of their talking that gets their talk talked about what it is. Their talking itself is definitely characterized by faithfulness; otherwise their talking will come to failure as it is. Talking is a derivative mode of foreunderstanding but co-original with interpretation; its faithfulness has already been determined by its foundation of understanding of being, because talking can only talk about what has already been disclosed by the understanding of being in advance. It is the understanding of being that supports and controls the possibilities of what can be and what cannot be, talked about. Those people whose talking about unfaithfulness in fact do not know what they are doing. In talking about unfaithfulness they are making it into faithfulness. In talking they talk against what they intended if their intention was unfaithful. They contradict themselves (to be continued).

## References

- [1] Culler, Jonathan. *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2004.
- [2] Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Differences*. Alan Bass (trans.) Britain: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1978.
- [3] Derrida, Jacques. "Living On: Border Lines." In Bloom et al., *Deconstruction and Criticism*. New York: Seabury, 1979.
- [4] Derrida, Jacques. *Margins of Philosophy*. Alan Bass. (trans.) Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- [5] Derrida, Jacques. *Positions*. Alan Bass. Trans. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981.
- [6] Fletcher, W. *Gems of Chinese Verse*. Shanghai: The Commercial Press, 1935.
- [7] Ferraris, Maurizio. *History of Hermeneutics*, Luca Somigli (trans.) New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1996.
- [8] Gutt, Ernst-August. *Translation and Relevance—Cognition and Context*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2004.
- [9] Heidegger, Martin. *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. R. Taft (trans.) Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.