

Hermeneutics and the Problem of Translating Traditional Arabic Texts

Hermeneutics and the Problem of Translating Traditional Arabic Texts

By

Alsayed M. Aly Ismail

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



Hermeneutics and the Problem of Translating Traditional Arabic Texts

By Alsayed M. Aly Ismail

This book first published 2017

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2017 by Alsayed M. Aly Ismail

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-9594-6

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-9594-1

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	vi
Introduction	1
Chapter One..... Hermeneutics: A Theory of Understanding and Interpretation	17
Chapter Two..... The Reconstruction of Authorial Intention and the Translation Process	30
Chapter Three..... The Philosophy of Being and the Concept of Existential Equivalence	47
Chapter Four..... The Phenomenological Equivalence	69
Chapter Five..... The Historicity of the Context versus the Divinity of the Text	88
Chapter Six..... The Hermeneutic Concept of Language and Translation	113
Chapter Seven..... Hermeneutic Translation: Theory and Practice	129
Conclusion.....	144
Works Cited.....	149

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank God, the Almighty, glorified be He, who helped me to start, pursue and finish this book.

My sincere thanks go to Professor Gamal Abdel Nasser and Dr. Awad Alkilany, who provided me with academic and moral guidance.

I should not forget the moral encouragement I received from my family, especially my mother and my wife.

INTRODUCTION

Hermeneutics is a controversial term that has undergone various changes since its earliest usage. It can be defined as an art of understanding, a science of interpretation and a methodology for translating biblical and traditional (scriptural) texts. Furthermore, it is employed as a technique for interpreting legal, social science and literary texts. Historically, hermeneutics has been divided into three major stages of development: biblical, traditional and modern. Biblical hermeneutics consists of a number of stages. The first stage is thought to have originated in the first century AD at the very beginning of the establishment of the Christian Church.

Having an ardent belief that the word of God was complete and transcendental in and of itself, the early theoreticians of biblical hermeneutics applied a literal method to understanding and interpreting the Bible (Silva, 122). The Old Testament was to be understood from within the boundaries of its text and without being linked to any external elements. With the advent of the second century, biblical hermeneutics matured and started to incorporate contextual, grammatical and historical approaches into its interpretive process. This application of contextual elements to the act of interpretation is emphasized by David Dockery who argues that “all of the Fathers gave assent to the literal sense of Scripture, but a contextual, grammatical, and historical interpretation was emphasized by Theodore, and Chrysostom, with a developing convergence in that direction with Jerome, Augustine, and Theodoret” (157).

In the medieval period, biblical hermeneutics formalized its concept of interpretation; this was known as the concept of ‘the fourfold interpretation’ and included literal, allegorical, topological and anagogical senses (Cassian, 80). During the Reformation, attention was drawn to the literal interpretation at the expense of the allegorical interpretation—this was advocated by Martin Luther, John Calvin and Erasmus. However, in the eighteenth century—the Age of Enlightenment—there was a clear shift in Biblical hermeneutics and the concept of interpretation started to draw heavily on ideas of rational thinking: the miracle of the Bible was rejected and a rational and logical understanding adopted (McClean, 184). The meaning of the Bible was to be determined by the power of the intellect.

This movement developed through the work of Rene Descartes and Immanuel Kant.

This growing belief in the power of the intellect sharply influenced hermeneutics. Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768–1834), a German protestant theologian and philologist who established hermeneutics as a theory of understanding—the Romantic hermeneutics of the nineteenth century—began to formalize the principles and rules of hermeneutic interpretation (Hamlin, 40). In her book, *Victorian Interpretation*, Suzy Anger contends that Schleiermacher sees hermeneutics as a two stage process: the first stage is that of grammatical understanding and the second is that of psychological understanding. Understanding a text requires the interpreter to interpose himself/herself into the mind of the author. This starts from the premise that the conception of a larger text relies on understanding its smaller constituent units, and vice versa. The translator needs to understand the text hermeneutically, that is, he/she attempts to re-experience the circumstantial realities of the author while translating his/her work.

In the twentieth century, Martin Heidegger developed the field and theory of existential hermeneutics from Romantic hermeneutics. He focused on the process of depicting the world of the text and its relationship to external reality and introduced a new concept of language and understanding on engagement and praxis (*Being and Time*, 60). Having introduced a new concept of language and understanding, Heidegger argued that the interpretation of the text has nothing to do with its linguistic structure, rather, its meaning and interpretation should be shaped by learning about the invisible elements that surround the text, that is, the contextual elements found in the cultural milieu, social environment and historical context.

In the middle of the twentieth century, Hans-Georg Gadamer, in his book *Truth and Method*, introduced the theory of philosophical hermeneutics. Gadamer holds the position that hermeneutics fails to provide an unprejudiced translation or interpretation because the human being undertaking this activity is a historically conditioned creature. The process of translation is always presuppositional in that it focuses on the previous background of a translator whose act of understanding is limited by his/her historical context. Seeking understanding, the translator opens up a dialogue with a traditional text, bringing it from the past to the present in order that it can be studied and investigated.

According to Gadamer, the text is neither stable nor fixed; it is a moving object that travels from the past to the present. Throughout its extended journey, it undergoes various changes, including linguistic,

cultural, historical and social changes, as does its receiver. Philosophical hermeneutics is mainly interested in the philosophy of valid interpretation and concerned with getting to the true meaning of a text. As such, this study attempts to establish a methodology for getting to a true and precise meaning of traditional Arabic texts and asks how they can be translated accurately into English. This study raises questions related to issues of understanding, translation, the concept of the traditional text and its translation, and attempts to answer these crucial issues. It seeks to show the importance of the theory of interpretation in translating traditional texts and starts from the premise that linguistic theories of translation, on their own, are not able to provide us with the true and authentic meaning of a classical text.

In achieving such an objective, I hope to explain the characteristics of traditional texts and how the theories of literary interpretation and linguistic analysis relate to them. This study does not aim to give practical examples in translating traditional texts. Rather, it seeks to present a theoretical framework developed from the hermeneutic theory of understanding, interpreting and translation, and the linguistic theories of translation, in order to address the problematic issues that arise in rendering a traditional text. It proposes a theoretical approach that reconsiders and revisits the traditional Arabic text and how it can be translated in order to communicate its content as clearly and as accurately as possible to the wider world. It attempts to bridge the gap between linguistic theories of translation and theories of literary interpretation, exemplified in hermeneutics (I would suggest that most linguistic theories of translation draw heavily on hermeneutics without admitting that they do so).

What matters in such a context is not how to render a text, but how the translator can mentally and intellectually prepare him/herself to produce a precise translation of a traditional text. Hermeneutics, as a translation approach, is proposed as a means to address the problematic issues of translation. It presents a theoretical and cognitive framework that seeks to overcome the impediments of understanding and translation. These cognitive and intellectual elements are often overlooked in linguistic theories of translation, badly affecting the quality of translated texts. This study seeks to present an integrated approach to translation and interpretation, which combines elements of the philosophy of translation, the rules of literary interpretation and the codes of linguistic understanding.

It draws on the different trends of hermeneutics and applies their key rules and relationships to the process of translating classical texts. The concept of hermeneutic understanding is extensively described in this

study—the idea of understanding is the hallmark of hermeneutic studies. Being acquainted with the truth of the concept of understanding and its connection to the text, the translator's vision of the traditional text as a static object or a linguistic structure is substituted by a broader vision that regards the text as a living, changeable entity. Breaking with linguistic tradition, this introduces a new concept that highlights how closely language is related to its surrounding world and culture.

This attempts to reveal the problematic issues that arise from translating traditional texts alongside the problem of understanding the language of the text itself. Accordingly, this study underscores the importance of critically examining the hermeneutic concept of language and how significantly it affects the process of translating a traditional text. It also attempts to address the following questions: is the language of a text fixed or changeable? What elements affect the process of understanding the language of a text? What is the relationship between the language of a traditional text and the modern world? How can a modern translator understand the language of a traditional text? Is the language of a text sufficient in and of itself to provide a complete understanding of the text? How can the translator deal with the problematic issues that arise in the language of a text, such as its symbolism, metaphor, semantic shifts, figurative language and connotations, and the changing socio-spatial realities of a traditional text?

In *Context and the Attitudes: Meaning in Context*, Mark Richard argues that the process of arriving at the meaning of a traditional text is pertinent to its internal structures; the translation process cannot be done precisely or accurately without understanding the invisible/contextual elements that have brought a text to reality. When the translator deals with a traditional text he/she does not only render its linguistic structure and language, but also the invisible/contextual elements that provide the language with its meaning. The difficulty in understanding and translating a traditional text does not lie in how to bring an ancient text from the past to the present, but in how to reproduce it in the present.

There are several problematic issues that arise in translating traditional texts. In their book, *Found in Translation: How Language Shapes Our Lives and Transforms the World*, Nataly Kelly and Jost Zetzsche accentuate the reciprocal relationship between language and the world. Such an overlapping and intertwined connection between language and the world leads to several issues in translation; these can be divided into two major categories: the visible/linguistic category and the invisible/contextual one. The visible/linguistic elements of a text are best described as the direct, transparent and comprehensible elements comprised of its grammatical

structure, sentences and words; these elements, however, cannot accurately be discerned when separated from their invisible context. Isolating language from its world turns it into a meaningless artifact that is void of a common sense.

In *Language and Linguisticality in Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, Lawrence Kennedy Schmidt underscores the significant role of invisible/contextual elements in shaping and reshaping the meaning of a text. The invisible/contextual elements are the paracontextual elements—the historical moment, socio-spatial realities, cultural influence, temporal distance, historical consciousness, time and space and so on—the understanding of which motivates the translator to grasp these contextual elements. Understanding the effect of contextual elements on traditional texts is a prerequisite for their translation. Appreciating their influence may help us to develop more convincing answers to the following question: how do invisible/contextual elements shape and create the meaning of a text and affect its language, its meaning and its translator's understanding? In *Theories of Translation*, Jenny Williams states that the linguistic theory of translation has focused on the importance of contextual elements in understanding and translating traditional texts. Translation, as a distinct field of knowledge, emerged during the 1960s and was pioneered by Eugene Nida, Ian Catford, Geroges Mounin and others, who set out the key linguistic principles for translation. In the 1970s, translation theory largely developed due to innovations in semantic linguistics, textual linguistics, sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics (Hardin, 40).

In *The Science of Linguistics in the Art of Translation*, Joseph L. Malone expounds his views on the inextricable connection between modern translation theories and linguistics—assuming that translation is a scientific discipline that employs linguistic tools for translating texts, translation theories are devised in relation to linguistic theory. According to Andre Lefevere, the issues of translation are related to language and linguistic issues. In the rapidly developing discipline of translation studies, focusing on semantics is proposed as to be an objective approach in translation—meaning is both relational and can be derived through a number of semantic categories, such as phonological meaning, lexical meaning and situational meaning (Kempson, 100). Language plays a pivotal role in translation studies because the translation process is principally based on deciphering and conveying meaning from the source language to the target language.

In his book, *Course in General Linguistics*, Ferdinand de Saussure classifies translation under the umbrella of sociolinguistics as the translation process focuses mainly on the sociocultural differences

between the source language and the target language. The sociolinguistic concept of translation seeks to study the text in relation to its generative community and social values in order to understand it. This approach repudiates the literal translation approach with its inability to uncover the conceptual differences between the source text and the target text.

In *Translation and Culture*, Katherine M. Faull contends that language represents a way of life and depicts the life of its people from a very narrow cultural perspective; she considers that this burdens the translator with great difficulty in producing corresponding equivalence in the target language. Though some linguists believe in the cultural singularity of language, corresponding directly only to its local culture, others, such as Joseph Harold Greenberg and Noam Chomsky, suggest that the languages of the world share universal features: that there is a common set of properties and features shared by all world languages.

However, the hermeneutic world view of language, as proposed by Heidegger, Gadamer and Wilhelm von Humboldt, is quite different from the universal view of language. The hermeneutic concept of language argues that a language reflects its own world and the very specific and private experience of its people to the extent that it is inseparable from its spatial environment and the socioeconomic realities of its own narrow culture. In *On Language: on the Diversity of Human Language Construction and its Influence on the Mental Development of the Human Species*, Humboldt argues that language manifests the extra-linguistic realities that surround it in its own culture.

In *Comparative Stylistics of French and English: a Methodology for Translation*, Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet argue that translation theory is a purely linguistic discipline that draws on a situational equivalence—the translator attempts to render the situation out of which his/her text is woven. Paradoxically, the basic idea of connecting language to a particular situation is a hermeneutic act of understanding. Focusing on the relationship between translation theories and linguistics, Mounin maintains that language reflects its own culture.

The cultures of the world are not necessarily identical or correspondent, which may bring about wider problems in translation as each culture has its own internal specificity. Cultural singularity is likely to shape the cognition of a translator as the meaning of words is constituted in relation to one's culture and local environment. As such, the process of understanding and translating is relative and culturally oriented. Analyzing such conceptual differences may help translators render their texts and overcome these cultural barriers: translation is meant to transfer the life experience depicted in the original text to the target text.

In *Reflections on Translation*, Susan Bassnett postulates that the translation process is not centered completely on the idea of linguistic understanding, especially with literary translation which has little to do with the linguistic analysis. According to Bassnett, rendering a literary text requires both a linguistic analysis and a contextual understanding. However, although linguistic analysis contains the principal tools needed for the translation process, it does not represent its end point. The translator should bridge the cultural gap between two distinct languages in order to provide a true translation. However, Tony Pinchuck believes that “linguistics, undoubtedly, has most to give and translation as a discipline should be regarded as a branch of Applied Linguistics” (17).

Translation theorists have oscillated between whether translation is a linguistic understanding and representation of the original text or a kind of cultural rendering. In *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context*, Ernst-August Gutt elucidates that the idea of reducing the translation process to linguistic analysis leads to a very flat perception of the text—it implies that the full meaning of a text can be rendered through analyzing it linguistically. Such a naïve conception helps strip the text of its real life context and its interaction with external reality. The core idea of the translation process is to deliver a message; this is more contextual than textual. Communicating a clear message becomes very difficult when dealing with a written text: focusing only on rendering the language of a text without drawing attention to the importance of its contextual elements does not deliver the full message of the original text. The idea of translation should remain largely consistent with the original text and concord well with its nature, its type and its relationship to the outside world.

In *Relevance and Linguistic Meaning: the Semantics and Pragmatics of Discourse Markers*, Diane Blakemore illustrates how linguistic theories of translation focus the translation process on three ordinated stages. These stages are: linguistic analysis, semantic understanding of a text’s meaning and pragmatic analysis of its context. Since the translation process is closely related to understanding the true, original meaning of a text, semantic analysis is applied to the original text. This semantic analysis encompasses its connotative, figurative and metaphorical language.

However, it is essential to determine whether such a semantic analysis can cover all the issues arising in the language of the original text or not. In addition, it is necessary to determine whether this semantic analysis has the potential to address the problematic issues arising from the cultural boundedness and specificity of the language in a traditional text. One can further ask whether semantic analysis can tackle the changeable language

of traditional texts and address their invisible elements. In his article, 'Pragmatic Aspects of Translation: some Relevance Theory Observations,' Gutt defines the concept of context, from a pragmatic perspective, in the following way:

"In relevance theory, the notion of 'context of an utterance' is a psychological construct, a subset of the hearer's assumptions about the world; more specifically, it is 'the set of premises used in interpreting utterance' (Sperer & Wilson 1986: 15). Under this definition, 'context' is a very wide notion that can include virtually any phenomenon entertainable by the human mind" (42).

Although pragmatics attempts to understand the meaning of a text in relation to its context, it neither explains how the translator can learn about the contextual elements nor does it provide a clear vision of the nature of context. Rather, it presents a simplistic and flat notion pertaining to the idea of context. Adopting such a general and unspecific concept of context, pragmatics is trapped in a condition of ambivalence and ambiguity, that is, it cannot distinguish between 'true' contextual elements and fallacious ones; this has a negative impact on the translator's understanding of his/her text. There is a remarkable difference between the concept of context that is applied by pragmatics and that adopted by hermeneutics.

Pragmatics is mainly interested in understanding speech acts rather than written documents. In his book, *How to Do Things with Words*, John Langshaw Austin discusses the theory of speech acts and introduces the term 'performatives.' According to Austin, performatives include those types of verbs that imply the performance of an act. Performative verbs can be either implicit or explicit. John Lyon indicates that an explicit performative is meant to give an explicit and direct meaning that helps listeners avoid misunderstanding. An implicit performative gives an unclear meaning and is subject to different interpretations. Its meaning draws heavily on linguistic analysis of a statement. It has little to do with the surrounding contextual world of the statement in a speech act. The pragmatic vision of context pertains mainly to conversations and speech acts and does not provide remedies or solutions to the problems of written texts.

In his book, *Principles of Pragmatics*, Geoffrey Leech divides speech acts into the following categories: a locutionary act refers to the idea of producing some words conveying a limited linguistic meaning. An illocutionary act refers to the social validity of an act beyond the internal linguistic meaning of an utterance. A perlocutionary act refers to the actual

impact of an act beyond its internal linguistic meaning. According to Yule George, what matters here is the illocutionary act because it has an inextricable connection to the speaker's intentions. It can be discerned by focusing on the communicative force of the spoken message. The illocutionary function is defined as the actions and physical gestures of a person, while talking, that help communicate the intended message of the speaker. It seems that the illocutionary function only addresses the issues of spoken language and Leech does not identify its application to written texts. When applied to translating across different cultures, the actions of a speaker, his intentions and methods, may be incomprehensible to members of another culture; this impedes the process of intercultural communication. In addition, it does not provide a valid methodology for translating those texts taken from the past.

The English language philosopher Paul Grice suggests a 'cooperative principle' as a means to understanding the meaning of spoken language. He states that there is a mutual relationship between the speaker and the hearer since they are speaking about common goals or their speech shares something in common that facilitates the process of understanding. Grice devises the theory of implicature to explain the differences between what is said and what is meant. Stephen C. Levinson argues that the two parties involved in a conversation or dialogue engage a set of presuppositions when conversing with one another, that is, they are guided by these assumptions in order to understand the intended messages articulated through a conversation. The implicature model can be applied to understand figurative language, puns, metaphors and indirect speech. A text can reveal different meanings through its different interpretations; a text is a 'floating' entity, which takes on different shapes and various forms. Linguistic theories of translation end up in a vicious circle in pursuit of the true meaning of a text. In spite of diagnosing the problems of translation, they fail to present solutions for these problems and neglect the role of the translator in the translation process—his/her ability to produce a precise and true understanding in a translated text.

Sometimes issues may arise in applying linguistic theories of translation to culture-bound elements and culturally specific words. In such cases, the semantic theory of translation does not sufficiently accommodate the cultural connotations concealed in a text; meaning is not only disclosed through linguistic analysis, but also through cultural understanding. Linguistic theories of translation may fail to deal with issues stemming from translating traditional and ancient texts due to a lack of connection to their cultural and historical roots and an inability to deal with changes in meaning across time and space. The cultural theory of

translation offers some solutions and remedies. The cultural theory of translation was proposed in 1980, as described in the following:

“Ever since its appearance as an academic branch in the 1970s, Translation Studies has always dealt with the thorny problem of the transfer, firstly between languages and later between cultures. In the 1980s the so-called “Manipulation School” led by scholars such as André Lefevere, Theo Hermans, Gideon Toury⁷ and Susan Bassnett introduced a cultural perspective in translation that was seen as an act of re-writing of the source text. According to these scholars, decoding the language coincides with decoding the culture in which that language is embedded. It follows that translators need to be not only bilingual, but bi-cultural. This line of thought shifted the attention to the target text, claiming that all translated texts reflect the cultural and social norms of the system to which they belong, and are by nature manipulations of the source texts.” (Cappuccio, 49).

It can be assumed that the theory of cultural equivalence that emerged in the 1980s regards the text as a kind of cultural production, that is, linguistic analysis has to be coupled with cultural understanding. Faull argues that the cultural theory of translation is designed to address translation problems related to dialects, traditional texts, artistic expressions, proverbs, folklore items, archaic items and so on. In other words, culture brings language to life—this results in the specificity and singularity of concepts that have no equivalence in another culture.

Proponents of the cultural theory of translation highlight the issues that arise in translating cultural markers and culture-bound elements without providing objective solutions as to how one can address these problems when translating a text. In addition, the cultural concept of translation does not touch upon the problems of metaphorical meaning, a remarkable feature in traditional texts, which is placed under the rubric of semantic shift. Verifying whether a meaning is meant to be metaphorical or real cannot be achieved unless the translator starts searching for the classical meanings of the word.

In *Meaning and Translation: Philosophical and Linguistic Approaches*, Franz Guenther and M. Guenther-Rutter demonstrate that meaning, which is a true reflection of its own culture and historical time, is fixed and unchanged. However, the intention or the sense of a word is changeable and transformable across time and history. This idea is clearly asserted by Ibrahim Anis in his book *Arabic Dialect*, where he explains that the traditional meanings and authorial intention of the majority of classical Arabic words have changed to such an extent over time that consulting traditional Arabic dictionaries may confuse the modern reader;

these dictionary meanings are now largely different to the current meanings. In his article ‘Limits of Cultural Interpretation,’ J. Robertson McQuilkin indicates an overlapping connection between language and culture:

“A particular culture would consist of at least the following: Manners, beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, laws (written and unwritten), ideas and thought patterns, language arts and artifacts, tools, social institutions, religious beliefs, myth and legends, knowledge, values, concept of self, morals, ideals and accepted ways of behaving. In short, culture is the total way of life of any group of people” (113).

There is a reciprocal relationship between culture and language; languages abound with cultural terms and expressions, including dialect words, traditional language, social and historical terms. This inextricably intertwined association between culture and language results in several serious problems for translation, particularly with those texts that have been shaped by their traditional cultural context.

Several questions need to be raised with the aim of settling the problem of translating traditional texts: should traditional texts be translated according to the values and norms of the past or the present? How can the modern reader understand the complexities and the ambiguities of an ancient culture? Should a text be rendered meaningful according to the norms of the present to be intelligible to the modern reader? The cultural theory of translation does not provide clear answers for these basic but important enquiries. Though these questions seem to be basic, they are also profound and their answers complicated. In this respect, Irma Hagfors writes:

“All texts reflect the period of time and culture where they were written” (Oittinen 1997:13, my translation). This is what Riitta Oittinen discovered when she studied three different Finnish translations of the British children’s classic *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). Each of these translations was made in a different period of time. Oittinen’s aim was to study how the period of time in question and the stage of Finnish culture concerned had affected the translations.” (115).

The proponents of linguistic and cultural theories of translation pay little attention to the idea that a traditional text represents an integrated system of life; they ignore the fact that the translator belongs to a very different world to that of the original text. The idea of perfect correspondence is a far-fetched dream. Therefore, translating religious, cultural, dialect-heavy and traditional texts has various issues. From this perspective, the hermeneutic theory of translation is proposed to address

these issues. Hermeneutics seeks to provide acceptable remedies for what are often considered to be untranslatable texts. The process of translating a classical text is problematic since its understanding requires a deciphering of the invisible elements surrounding the text that impede the readers' understanding.

Hermeneutics has long been used in the Arab world as a theory for interpreting and studying traditional literary works. The application of hermeneutics to interpreting traditional discourse was pioneered by Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid in the Arab world through his literary works—these were mainly concerned with interpreting and understanding the Arabic tradition. This is clearly reflected in his works: *The Philosophy of Interpretation*; *The Text, the Authority and the Truth*; *Critiquing the Religious Discourse*; *The Problematic Issues of Reading and Hermeneutics*.

Abu Zaid uses hermeneutics both to provide an objective reading and understanding of the tradition and also to train the Arab reader to critically understand and evaluate his/her longstanding tradition. Hermeneutics is used as a method of understanding that seeks to reconstruct the mind of the modern Arab reader in order to objectively understand his tradition. Hermeneutics is a potent methodology for understanding and interpreting traditional literary work.

Abu Zaid, Gaber Asfour, and Mohammed Arkoun engage with hermeneutics as a theory of interpreting and understanding the Arabic tradition. Hermeneutics has been employed as a tool for re-reading and interpreting the realities of this tradition. However, hermeneutics has not yet been applied as a method to provide better translations of traditional Arabic literary texts. As a means of communicating the message of a text with greater precision, hermeneutics is proposed as an approach for translating traditional and classical texts.

This study attempts to provide insight into the issues arising in translating classical and ancient texts, and modern literary texts. It applies hermeneutics as a translation approach to solve the issues inherent in translating ancient texts. It deals with translation not as a science or as an art, but as an act of understanding and interpretation, whose goal is to provide accurate and precise translations of ancient literary texts, taking into account their lexical, etymological, phonological, cultural, social and historical changes over time. Not only does it attempt to bridge the gap between the traditional text and its translator, but also between its past history and its present time. This study suggests an approach to translation derived from hermeneutics that focuses on the following:

- The Traditional text undergoes an endless journey in its travels across time and space and reproduces and reconstructs itself with each new reading. In this study, traditional texts are those texts dating back to ancient times, such as classical Arabic texts, religious texts, culture-bound elements and so on.
- The language of the traditional text derives its meaning and significance from its temporal reality, meaning that the language of the text may fail to reflect the true meaning concealed in the text in its contemporary context; the translator derives the text's meaning from its contextual world.
- The language of the traditional text is not fixed, but changes over time; it can be understood in relation to the social, historical and cultural changes that affect the development of the text and its surrounding world.
- The concept of understanding represents the main channel for the interpretation and translation of the traditional text.
- Those translations that undermine the historicity of the text are deemed inaccurate and imprecise: history not only changes the language of the text, but also its cultural and historical context.

Hermeneutics encompasses the foundation of the philosophy of translation. Modern literature started to focus on the philosophy of translation in 1923 with Walter Benjamin's 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers.' Benjamin argued that the relationship between the original and translated text is organic and similar to the relationship between life and the human being—although a human being is originally born in the world, he/she is relatively free from it. The translated text is derived from the original text, but it is no longer shackled by its linguistic structure and is transformed into a totally different language, while still communicating a meaning relatively close to the original one. Hence, what is reflected by the translated text is a kind of a new life fit for a new world: "The notion of the life and continuing life of works of art should be considered with completely unmetaphorical objectivity" (Benjamin, 153).

In *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, George Steiner argues that "translation between languages is a particular configuration and model fundamental to human speech, of writing, of pictorial encoding inside any language" (xii). Steiner divides the problems of translation into two major approaches: the universalist and the relativist approach. The first category maintains that the languages of the world share universal features and that, as such, the process of presenting corresponding equivalence is realizable. The second category is the relativist approach,

that is, the languages of the world have relative similarity and it is proposed that translation can only ever be approximate translation—there is no such notion as identical equivalence. Hermeneutics adopts the relativist approach of translation in that it envisions the text as a fluid entity.

Hermeneutic translation addresses the issues of the translation problematic that cannot be remedied by linguistic theories of translation or a culture-based approach. Likewise, it pays special attention to the significance of the translator's role in the translation process. It not only approaches the translation process as a method of thinking, coupled with a concept of understanding, but also equips the translator with the necessary skills of critical thinking and tools of literary interpretation.

This study consists of an introduction, seven chapters and a conclusion. The introduction provides the background to the study. It outlines the problems of the study and how they can be addressed. In addition, it provides a review of the relevant literature, the methodology of the study and the questions this study seeks to answer.

Chapter one, *Hermeneutics: a Theory of Understanding and Interpretation*, discusses several definitions of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is introduced as a theory of understanding. The concepts of understanding and interpretation are critically investigated and analyzed with the aim of establishing the basic rules necessary for bridging the gap between translation and interpretation. The mechanism of hermeneutic understanding is clarified and a chronology of hermeneutics is briefly introduced.

Chapter two, *The Reconstruction of Authorial Intention and the Translation Process*, aims to establish the necessary background of the proposed approach of translating classical texts into English. This chapter also presents the concept of traditional hermeneutics, namely Romantic hermeneutics, where the text can be interpreted and translated through a focus on its linguistic structure coupled with a psychological reconstruction of the author, in order to understand his/her authorial intention. This chapter traces how, in historical hermeneutics, a work of art can be translated through coming to terms with the author's lived experience; this can be used as a technique for getting acquainted with authorial intention.

Chapter three, *The Philosophy of Being and the Concept of Existential Equivalence*, tackles the concept of translation and its intricate relationship with the concept of the world. It considers the text as an existential entity whose meaning is taken from its existence in the world. Therefore, those terms and expressions which no longer exist cannot be interpreted or rendered unless the translator searches for their position in the world. It begins with an explanation of the philosophy of Being, time, Dasein,

understanding, historicity and interpretation, drawing mainly on Heidegger's *Being and Time*, with the purpose of identifying the principal features of hermeneutic translation theory. This chapter starts from a premise that any interpretation is a kind of translation. As such, the concept of interpretation substitutes the concept of translation. The reciprocal relationship between understanding and interpretation is underscored and the impact of historicity on the process of understanding and interpretation is critically examined.

Chapter four, *The Phenomenological Equivalence*, outlines the rules for translating traditional texts; translation is not presented as an act of linguistic transfer, but as a phenomenological transfer that conceives of the thoughts and ideas concealed in a text. Translation is viewed from a new perspective, that of the reflexive concept of translation, breaking with traditional and contemporary concepts of translation—the translation process is to be seen not only as a reflection of the text, but also as a manifestation of its context and its world. The principles of translation in this approach are explained.

Chapter five, *The Historicity of the Context versus the Divinity of the Text*, presents Gadamer's concept of hermeneutics, including his concept of historicity that presents a new vision of understanding and interpreting the traditional text. In addition, this chapter provides a hermeneutic vision of the classical text and its tradition. It explains the characteristics of the classical text, including its transformative nature and temporality. It also explains the paracontextual components of the traditional text, such as its ideology, the ideology of the reader, the feeling revealed by the text, the politics of the text and its socioeconomic realities. Gadamer's explanation of the historical approach to interpretation is taken into consideration. This chapter aims to explain aspects of difference and similarity between the traditions of historicism, new historicism and Gadamer's hermeneutic concept of history. The difference between the true, prejudiced reading of the text and the false, prejudiced reading is introduced. This chapter establishes the interpretive techniques that can be used to provide well-defined strategies for interpreting and translating ancient texts.

Chapter six, *The Hermeneutic Concept of Language and Translation*, establishes the core rules of the hermeneutic theory of translation. The hermeneutic concept of language is clearly explained in relation to modern linguistic theories. It presents a comparison between the approach of hermeneutic translation and modern linguistic theory. The areas of similarity and difference between traditional and modern hermeneutics are discussed. The invisible elements constituting the traditional text are also examined.

Chapter Seven, *Hermeneutic Translation: Theory and Practice*, addresses the issues arising from the translation of the traditional text. In addition, the remedies and solutions for such problems are proposed. The hermeneutic approach to translation is presented and a set of strategies are proposed for translating traditional texts. Translation theories that tackle the issues of translating traditional texts are critically examined. Practical examples are kept to a minimum as the primary concern of this study is to suggest an approach for addressing translation problems in the application of hermeneutics.

Finally, the conclusion recapitulates the main argument and the findings of this book, and completes the discussion of this important topic. Regardless of the difficulties encountered and the shortcomings to be expected in translating traditional texts, I hope that this book makes a contribution and helps translators of texts everywhere.

CHAPTER ONE

HERMENEUTICS: A THEORY OF UNDERSTANDING AND INTERPRETATION

The idea of hermeneutics is deeply rooted in the history of the Western philosophical tradition. In *The Hermeneutical Self and an Ethical Difference*, Paul Chung expounds the idea that hermeneutics comes from the Greek word ερμηνεύειν (hermeneuein), which means *to interpret*, and its derivative ερμηνεία (hermeneia), which means *interpretation*. It has a linguistic relationship to *Hermes*, the messenger of the Olympian gods, who translates the language of the gods to the people.

Hermeneutics, as praxis, is regarded as a means of translating and interpreting the Bible, the Homeric epics, the Torah, the Talmud and the Midrashim. However, hermeneutics, as a methodology and theory, is said to have changed technically with the advent of Schleiermacher's hermeneutic circle that focused on the problems of interpretation and the need for a unified systematic method of interpretation. Later on, hermeneutics invaded the literary arena, giving rise to the method of literary interpretation; it is also employed in addressing the translation problems of ancient texts.

Therefore, hermeneutics has been subject to various changes and numerous developments in both content and structure. Von Bormann emphasizes that in the development of the term 'hermeneutics,' the Latin word *hermeneutica* was first presented by a theologian from Strasbourg, Johann Dannhauer, as an essential requirement of all sciences that rely on the interpretation of texts. According to H. E. Hasso Jaeger's article 'Studien zur Frühgeschichete der Hermeneutik,' *hermeneutica*, terminologically, is drawn from Aristotle's treatise *hermeneutica* (*De interpretatione*); he states that modern hermeneutics is a continuation of Aristotle's Organon. Aristotle's treatise *peri hermeneias* defines interpretation as 'enunciation,' a definition that suggests the first direction of its meaning was 'to say' or 'to announce' (Palmer, 12). Accordingly,

Aristotle defines hermeneutics as the power of the mind to produce statements that can be true or false.

In *Hermeneutics: an Introduction*, Anthony Thiselton proposes that “hermeneutics explores how we read, understand, and handle texts, especially those written in another time or in a context of life different from our own” (1). It is mainly concerned with the process of reading, understanding and handling texts from ancient times and different cultures. His use of the word ‘handle’ signifies that the idea of encountering any given text is best described as hermeneutic; therefore, handling a text means to analyze, interpret, evaluate or translate it. In other words, hermeneutics is mainly engaged in using the critical and cognitive tools of reading and translating those texts travelling across history from distant times and far-flung places.

In *Biblical Hermeneutics: a Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testament*, Milton S. Terry argues that hermeneutics is the science of interpretation, treating it as “both a science and art. As a science it enunciates principles [...] and classifies the facts and results. As an art, it teaches what application these principles should have” (qtd in *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 5). In ‘What is Hermeneutics,’ Romualdo E. Abulad defines hermeneutics as “the art of interpretation” (1). Definitions of hermeneutics can be divided into either the scientific or the artistic; a consequence of this is that there is no clear and explicit strategy for addressing the problems of mistranslation and misinterpretation. If hermeneutics is classified as a science, it has to identify explicit rules for understanding, interpreting and translating texts. However, should it be regarded as an art, it cannot develop fixed or explicit rules for interpreting and translating texts. In his book, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*, Peter Sznodi elucidates this controversy over the definition of the concept of hermeneutics as follows:

“Hermeneutics has persisted, in part, because it is so protean and polymorphous that if repressed in one form it returns in another. [...] Hermeneutics has meant so many things over the last two decades, not to mention the last two centuries, or the last two millennia, that any definition must be vague, partial, or misleading” (XIII).

Sznodi exhorts that hermeneutics is a flexible and liquid concept—it has a conceptual framework that adapts its interpretive strategies and techniques to its respective text. This flexibility provides the interpreter/translator with the freedom to use cognitive tools and interpretive styles that ensure an accurate interpretation and precise translation of the text. The fluidity of hermeneutics makes it an indefinable

concept: it is abstruse to assume that a comprehensive and clear-cut definition of hermeneutics can be given. In this respect, in *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer*, Richard E. Palmers argues that one of the advantages of this liquidity of hermeneutics is its ability to interpret and translate different branches of knowledge and different types of texts: “The rules would naturally be varied with the object, and thus there is a hermeneutics for poetry, for history or for laws” (Palmer, 81).

Being liquid and transformable, hermeneutics is a multifaceted philosophy of interpretation and translation that uses various rules, different methodologies and distinct techniques to translate and interpret. For this reason, hermeneutics is a practical, rather than a theoretical, methodology. It is chameleonic in that it changes its interpretative techniques and strategies according to its current situation and type of text.

In *Understanding Hermeneutics*, Schmidt argues that the interpretive tools applied to a historical text may be different to those used to interpret a legal text: hermeneutics persistently creates new rules of understanding and interpretation to fit its purpose. After all, the core idea of hermeneutics is implicit in the concept of understanding; its end result is interpretation and its tools are the rules of interpretation. Despite the longstanding controversy as to whether hermeneutics is definable or not, a large number of its critics have come to the conclusion that it generally involves a process of understanding and interpretation.

In *The Power of Dialogue: Critical Hermeneutics after Gadamer and Foucault*, Hans Herbert Kögler and Paul Hendrickson elucidate that hermeneutic interpretative and translational techniques are derived from the act of pre-understanding—there is no concept of original understanding. A human being’s comprehension of his/her surroundings is hierarchical in the sense that it is related to something else. Kögler writes:

“Understanding is subject to a historical-cultural pre-understanding. Inasmuch as pre-understanding is the condition of possibility for understanding, it is possible to ‘get behind’ pre-understanding. Nevertheless, we are to infer from this insight not the strong thesis of an event of interpretation, but rather the idea of a reciprocal interplay between implicit assumptions and the reflective presentation of another’s meaning, and, contrastively, one’s own interpretative premises. This process is essentially determined through language, which first makes possible something like the experience of world or being and, through its dialogic structure, endows understanding with the character of conversation” (*The Power of Dialogue*, 83).

The translator/interpreter investigates his/her text from a previous background that is pertinent to both the interpreter and the text. Overloaded with his/her values and traditions, the reader approaches a text burdened with a set of assumptions mixed up with those ideas revealed through the text; these exert a major influence on the process of determining the meaning of a text. What is encountered in such a complicated process is the language of the text—the translator/interpreter plays a game of musical chairs with the language of the text and through an exchange of roles. A conversation between the text and the reader opens with the aim of making the text speak out its meaning.

Having handled a text, the translator unconsciously starts explaining it; an explanatory interpretation: “In hermeneutics, this area of assumed understanding is called pre-understanding” (Palmer, 25). This process of pre-understanding is inseparable from the sociocultural realities encompassing both the reader and the text. In his book, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, Duncan Sheldon defines pre-understanding as the “body of assumptions and attitudes that a person brings to the perception and interpretation of reality. The pressing question is now: how do we classify the myriad forms in which these assumptions and attitudes appear?” (13). The idea of pre-understanding epitomizes the interpreter’s intentions, background, previous thoughts and knowledge related to a text, thereby assuming an essential component in the process of translating and interpreting. Palmer acknowledges that the mutual connection between comprehension and language is the core issue of hermeneutics—it is “the process of bringing to understanding, especially as this process involves language, since language is the medium par excellence in this process” (13). Hermeneutics is an act of understanding, encapsulated and articulated through language. Thiselton argues that hermeneutics is mainly concerned with interpreting and comprehending various types of texts. He outlines it clearly in the following:

“(1) Biblical hermeneutics raises biblical and theological questions. (2) It raises philosophical questions about how we come to understand and the basis on which understanding is possible. (3) It involves literary questions about types of texts and processes of reading. (4) It includes social, critical, or sociological questions about how vested interests, sometimes of class, race, gender, or prior belief, may influence how we read. (5) It draws on theories of communication and sometimes general linguistics because it explores the whole process of communicating a content or effect to readers or to a community” (1).

In its endeavor to interpret and translate a text, hermeneutics employs a number of techniques and complex methodologies to seek out its meaning.

It searches for any ideas, information, value or vision, which may clarify or reduce the ambiguity of a text, and summons up all the potentialities of the reader, his/her skills, previous background, assumptions, cultural views and knowledge, to achieve its purpose. The translator/reader not only reads the text but also visualizes it as an anthropomorphized figure with whom he/she has a relationship of intimacy to make the text reveal its secrets. Hermeneutics, as a theory of translation, employs philosophical, linguistic and even historical concepts and techniques to help provide a clear understanding of an interpreted/translated text and force the reader to spare no effort in getting to the most accurate understanding of it. In *Hermeneutic Dialogue and Social Science: a Critique of Gadamer and Habermas*, Austin Harrington underscores the significance of visualizing this dialogue between the text and the interpreter and considers this process to be an essential step in disclosing the ambiguity of the text. He writes:

“Gadamer and Habermas are well known for upholding a 'dialogical' conceptions of the grounds and context of knowledge in the human sciences. Although there are also important differences between the two thinkers, Gadamer defending respect for the heritage of 'tradition' and consciousness of historical finitude, Habermas espousing the project of universal enlightenment and emancipation, both agreed that all understanding of social life should take the form of a real or virtual dialogue between the interpreters of cultural phenomena and the subjects whose lives, actions and productions they interpret. In their views, researchers must not only demonstrate 'understanding' of their subjects, in the traditional sense of an empathic act of *Verstehen* aimed at eliciting the subjective meaning of historical actors; they must also regard their subjects as possible partners to a normative conversation about the world and imagine themselves as actively seeking to reach critical agreement with them about the appropriate forms of rationality and ways of describing the world” (1-2).

Hermeneutics is the art of revealing the concealed parts of a text: that which is not directly stated, that which is excluded and that which is not articulated through words. Similarly, hermeneutics tries to learn not only about what is unsaid, but also what is intended by the author. The written words themselves do not manifest everything about a text and hermeneutics raises unending questions in exploring the invisible parts of the interpreted text in order to gain a more accurate and insightful interpretation.

The proponents of hermeneutics like Peter Sznodi, Martin Chladenius, George F-Meier, Friedrich Ast, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Hans-Georg

Gadamer, Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl and Wilhelm Dilthey maintain a consensus that hermeneutics is the art of understanding and interpretation. However, each writer employs his own distinct concept of this interpretation, which differs from author to author. For example, Schleiermacher believes that the grammatical and psychological modes of interpretation are the most relevant ones for comprehending a given text; Husserl believes that interpretation is a phenomenological act *par excellence*; Dilthey thinks understanding draws on comprehending the lived experience of both the text and the author.

According to Heidegger, the idea of interpretation breaks with the previous Western philosophical tradition that sees it as a mental activity; he conceives of it as a way of coping with the objects being understood—an existential interpretation. Gadamer believes that interpretation is a historical process. In his book, *Radical Hermeneutics: Reception, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project*, John D. Caputo states that although the proponents of hermeneutics supply varied visions concerning the notion of understanding, they concede that all types of understanding are presuppositional.

The hermeneutic translation or interpretation of a traditional text draws on the receiver's familiarity with the text: "It is rather the case that the hermeneutics itself changes over time, as does the concept of the literary work; and this dual change should result in a modification of the rules and the criteria of interpretation, or at least necessitate their reexamination" (Sznodi, 3). In his book, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: a Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, Grant R. Osborne argues that hermeneutics yields a singular vision of the concept of context—described as unpredictable, transformable and relative. The text and its related context persistently metamorphose into new realities as it is subject to different external and internal influences; one's own interpretation of a certain phenomenon at the age of 18 will be different at the age of 50. David Jasper has this to say:

"If you give one text to thirty people, you will come up with more or less thirty different readings, none of them, perhaps, wholly wrong or wholly right. True, there will be a great deal of overlap, and when a powerful institution like a church seeks to impose uniformity on reading (in the interests of orthodoxy or order) we can be persuaded pretty well all to think alike. But the fact remains that what is called 'reader response' to a text is various and often contradictory especially with authoritative, often patriarchal, texts like the Bible" (16).

Hermeneutic interpretation is largely influenced by a reader's knowledge, his/her psychological condition and life experience, which,

consciously or unconsciously, influence his/her analysis of a text. Since interpretation is an individual act, it varies from person to person and two individuals may present two different readings or two distinct translations of the same text. In addition, a single reader can present different readings of the same text at different ages. Accordingly, the ideas of comprehension and interpretation are best described as transformative, since they derive their existence from the notion of context and time—changeable concepts, as is clearly suggested by Palmer:

“Understanding of literature must be rooted in the more primal and encompassing modes of understanding that have to do with our very Being-in-the-world. Understanding a literary work, therefore, is not a scientific kind of knowing which flees from existence into a world of concepts; it is a historical encounter which calls forth personal experience of being here in the world” (10).

Palmer explains that understanding cannot be aggregated out of nothing because it is closely related to external reality—a part of the world—it is inseparable from its surroundings. However, the world is neither fixed nor static; it is moving forward and a product of renewable historical experience—it derives its logic from this continually renewed context. This explains why a literary work cannot be translated through resorting to a set of fixed scientific rules that give face-value judgments as to the nature of a text—the meaning of literary works changes over time. Analyzing a literary work cannot be reduced to a mere process of interpreting its textual structure; the interpreter not only explains the information being displayed in the words of a text, but also highlights its relevant paracontextual elements. Jasper contends that the meaning revealed in a text derives its conceptual renewal from both internal and external factors. A literary or traditional text has a fixed meaning but a changeable intention and the role of the translator/interpreter should be to disclose the invisible intentions of the text that are constantly being reshaped and transformed: “Hermeneutics recognizes this slippage between intention and meaning, or worse, between the slipperiness of written words and human understanding” (Jasper, 14). The translation process of a text is unique in and of itself, and its interpretation is ultimately different from reader to reader: “A work of art is always stamped with the human touch; the word itself suggests this, for a work is always a work of man” (Palmer, 7).

In his essay, ‘Interpretation and the Science of Man,’ Charles Taylor argues that “interpretation, in the sense relevant to hermeneutics, is an attempt to make clear, to make sense of an object of study. This object

must, therefore, be a text, or a text-analogue, which in some way is confused, incomplete, cloudy, seemingly contradictory—in one way or another, unclear” (Taylor, 153). Interpretation is best designated as the logical result of understanding since there is no interpretation without prior understanding. In ‘Literary Interpretation,’ Donald G. Marshall stresses the relationship between interpretation and understanding:

“Literary interpretation is another specification of this basic structure. The literary interpreter helps someone understand the meaning of a text. Knowledge of a text’s language and of relevant historical contexts and references is presupposed or must be supplied before interpreting can begin. But alienness is also presupposed: something in the text or in our distance from it in time and place makes it obscure. The interpreter’s task is to make the text speak again. This task is accomplished by ‘reading’ the text and by helping students learn to read it” (159).

The process of interpretation/translation requires a number of actions to be carried out correctly: pre-understanding, that is, the presuppositions of the interpreter are projected onto the interpreted text; the interpreter/translator should be able to understand the linguistic structure of the text and its historical context; the interpreter/translator should learn to connect his/her presuppositions to the content of the text; finally, applying such a process helps provide a better interpretation. It is a circular process that starts from pre-understanding and ends at relative understanding. In his book, *The Contexts of Understanding*, Herman Parret argues that this concept of circular interpretation can be applied to translating traditional texts. Some traditional texts cannot be clearly understood without reading them in the light of an entire tradition. This is clearly reflected in attempts to understand religious texts—there are often ambiguous parts that are impossible to understand without reference to an entire religious tradition.

The hermeneutic circle has been applied to interpretation of the Holy Quran in the light of the Old and New Testament. This trend has been addressed in a number of different works. For instance, in the *History of the Quranic Text: from Revelation to Compilation*, Muhammad Mustafa Al-A’zami argues that the Quranic text can be more clearly understood when it is compared to the Old and New Testaments. In his unpublished PhD thesis, *Modern Quranic Hermeneutics*, Peter Mathews Wright explains that the Quran should be interpreted in the broader context of the Abrahamic religions.

In *The History of the Quran*, Theodor Nöldeke contends that the meaning of Quranic verses cannot be accurately interpreted or translated without investigating them in the light of their historical tradition. This