Translation and Philosophy: Disciplines in Need of Dialogue

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Translation is in the ascendent, philosophy is in decline. As academic disciplines, their fortunes could not be further apart, nor their futures seem less convergent. In years to come, generations ahead of us may be astounded that - while the philosophy of language has long dominated the field of analytic philosophy – its contributors have had barely *anything* to say about translation. Meanwhile, the field of Translation Studies has grown enormously across Universities around the world since the turn of the new millennium. Consequently, is it not about time these two disciplines learned to speak to one another, productively and coherently? A strong example of their mutual significance is expressed in the staggering discovery that one of the founding tenets of Western thought and philosophy - Renee Descartes' famous "I think therefore, I am" - was not in fact a product of the philosopher's own authorship, but an invention of his translator.[1] This sharply brings into focus what is at stake in their engagement.

As a prominent scholar quipped, there are few professionals who complain about their working conditions more than academic humanists.[2] If that is true, and if we take that a step further by trying to imagine a sort of 'hierarchy of complaint' among the disciplines, at the highest point of that list must surely be analytic philosophy. Its outlook is bleak, as it continues bemoaning, with great acidity, its own dysfunction. According to a much-circulated online article, the discipline presently

> suffers from a triple failure of confidence, especially among younger philosophers. People are not confident it can solve its own problems, not confident that it can be modified so as to do better on that first score, and not confident its problems are worth solving in the first place.[3]

Its present malaise can be seen in its increasing detachment from pressing social and existential questions. Raymond Geuss notes that analytic philosophy seems curiously uninterested in exploring the sources of human discontent, and instead focuses on hyper-specialized topics of limited practical significance.[4] Similarly, Amia Srinivasan argues that contemporary analytic philosophy often lacks 'imaginative openness to alternative ways of thinking,' which limits its engagement with non-Western perspectives and broader societal issues.[5] This disconnect has led Liam Kofi Bright to suggest that 'analytic philosophy's fixation on clarity and precision' has ironically stifled intellectual creativity, making it ill-equipped to address the complex, interconnected crises of the modern world.[6] Consequently, as Lisa Herzog puts it, 'analytic philosophy risks becoming a self-enclosed discourse' that fails to resonate beyond academia, calling for a reimagining of its methods and aims in the face of global challenges.[7]

In a particularly vivid analogy, like 'Polish apparatchiks in 1983,' contemporary philosophy professors 'turn up to work and do what they did yesterday just because they don't know what else to do, not because they seriously believe in the system they are maintaining.'[8] Mala Chatterjee describes this problem as an example of when methodology is enlarged at the expense of objects.

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Philosophers seem to have forgotten that 'analysis is merely our tool, our vehicle for exploring and making sense of the world. Empty in itself, it is only animated and rendered valuable by the inquiries we have the imagination to ask."[9] A stringency of philosophical method, she continues, has somehow prompted philosophy departments to stringently constrain their 'inquiries, materials, and forms':

> We have become comfortable – too comfortable – with the limitations we have imposed on ourselves. It's easier to determine what exactly follows from a set of materials when they are unambiguous propositions rather than, say, works of art, our lives, or any other phenomenon that does not already present itself to us in forms most amenable to our methods.[10]

These self-imposed limitations are increasingly arbitrary for philosophy researchers, but also prove an obstacle to students interested in looking further into the field. In an interview for his book *Empty Ideas: A Critique of Analytic Philosophy* (2014), Peter Unger elaborates on his student's disenchantment with these outworn constraints:

> To me, all this sort of stuff is parochial, or trivial. People who are signing up for philosophy don't think they're going to end up with this kind of stuff. They want to learn something about the 'ultimate nature of reality', and their position in relation to it. And when you're doing philosophy, you don't have a prayer of offering even anything close to a correct or even intelligible answer to any of these questions.[11]

The view promoted by this issue of *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* is that these disciplines are in serious need of mutual engagement. Having studied both subjects, and seeing their disparity for himself, it is the editor's view that translation is a much-needed lifeline for philosophy. That the vast majority of analytic thinkers emanate from South-East England and the East Coast of the United States seems, for the many on the outside, to only further the impression of an unwelcoming and exclusionary Old Boy's Club: 'English is the language of analytic philosophy. 97% of citations in prestigious analytic philosophy journals are of works written in English, and 96% of the journals' board members reside in English-speaking countries.' Excluding the broad majority of humanity, analytic philosophy has found itself in a state of decadence.[12] Philosophy has gone a long way from Socrates's invocation to imagine an 'examined life,' and not necessarily in the right direction. Which brings up the historical dimension of its isolation.

Think of Socrates, of Plato, or Hegel or Immanuel Kant. These thinkers changed the world. They are still read, pored over, and continue to push many to enrol in philosophy programs in the first place. Then, consider the fact that none of them would fit the current stereotypes of analytic philosophy.[13] If that does not sound the alarm, nothing will. In a world of unparalleled intercultural access, dialogue, communication, this is coming to be seen as an insufficient and unsustainable state of affairs. The problem is, 'there is no successor paradigm in a position to really take advantage of this weakness, and so the field listlessly drifts on, anxious and insecure and filled with self-recriminations.'[14]

The fact that so many of these critiques are available online may say more about the discipline's gatekeepers than the authors themselves. A possibility toward solving this issue lies in the direction of Continental Philosophy, and all the languages beyond this narrow confinement. Analytic philosophers themselves, however, seem doubtful as to such solutions. 'I think analytic philosophy in my lifetime will just barely shamble on, unable to free itself, anchored to a worldview it can no longer believe in.'[15] The question is: Does it *have* to be this way? Of course, the present intervention comes with its own limitations. No single issue of a journal can solve this by itself. The present issue can, at least, attempt to negotiate ways around this *impasse*, and suggest routes out of disciplinary malaise and decay. A suspicion that motivates this collection of essays is that the answer may lie not simply in a 'Continental turn,' but in an acknowledgement of translation as a logical path to its survival.

The philosophy of language has struggled to articulate ideas about translation and untranslatability because of its historical focus on abstract structures of meaning, truth, and reference – often isolated within the boundaries a single language. This focus emerged from foundational figures like Frege,

Russell, and early Wittgenstein, who prioritized the logical structure of propositions and the conditions under which statements could be true or false. Translation serves to challenge this, when it brings to the surface the culturally contingent, or context-dependent aspects of meaning, that logical structures alone cannot capture. Many concepts in one language do not have direct equivalents in others, which destabilizes the notion of stable, universal meaning that the philosophy of language often assumes.

Lastly, translation raises questions about cultural and philosophical differences that lie outside the analytic framework, touching on issues of worldview, identity, or ethics. These challenges, often explored more in continental philosophy and translation studies, demand an interdisciplinary approach that philosophy of language has been slower to adopt. The difficulty of defining translation and untranslatability in purely logical or truth-conditional terms has thus left these concepts underexplored, as they challenge the discipline's commitment to universality and clarity. If one thinks of the aforementioned locations where analytic philosophy is most firmly centred - namely England and America - another question arises. If a self-imposed isolation from continental currents of thought has left it to wither and run dry, is it not time, at a very minimum, to rethink its engagements?

In an attempt to provisionally address this matter of discursive dialogue, the present issue runs across Chinese and Continental thought in its attempts to formulate new ways of considering these issues. In order to express interrogate these issues more directly, the present article is separated between three sections. At one point or another, the author wanted to devote their contribution to only one of these inquiries; over time, however, they built upon each other in ways that felt successive and connected. The editor's final decision was that, even it came at the expense of depth, each were worth articulating side by side.

The first section takes a survey of the philosophy of language, inquiring as to why, despite decades of activity, it scarcely engages with translation.[16] This oversight is not only fascinating insofar as the philosophy of language still exerts weight on curricula worldwide, but also serves to confirm the monolingualism of the field itself. The author hopes to emphasize that the oversight of translation, in these theories, reveal a vital blind-spot in their contemporary application.

The second section turns to the reception of untranslatability within translation theory, centring on the ongoing differences between two leading thinkers in the discourse of translation and untranslatability, that is, Emily Apter and Lawrence Venuti. Acknowledging the attention that the debate over untranslatability has received, it is also worth investigating how both thinkers overlap one another in their critiques of the analytic philosophical tradition.

Finally, in an attempt to move untranslatability into a new discursive opening, and to practice the engagement suggested throughout this issue, my final section attempts to articulate untranslatability through the language of Formal Logic. I will end by suggesting a provisional model for recognising untranslatability in philosophy. The inquiries that structure the present contribution therefore run as follows:

1. Why is translation so unthought in The Philosophy of Language?
2. Why is untranslatability so untheorized in Translation Theory?
3. Can untranslatability be expressed through Formal Logic?

1. Why is translation so un-theorised in the philosophy of language?

Before this question can be answered directly, a preliminary rehearsal of modern philosophy is needed. The 20th century schism between continental and analytic philosophy unfolds as a tale of two radically divergent approaches to meaning, language, and the human experience. On one side, continental philosophy is a labyrinthine inquiry into the fabric of existence, engaging with the profound uncertainties and irresolvable issues of human life. It is a journey through the deep waters of phenomenology, existentialism, and hermeneutics, where thinkers struggle with questions that

often transcend rational articulation. These works continue to fascinate those within *and outside* the University; they are trying to probe into the unsayable, the textures of being and temporality, and to reach beyond the layers of culture and psyche.

Analytic philosophy, meanwhile, is intolerant of ambiguity. It adopts the surgeon's precision: it dissects, clarifies, and categorizes. Born in reaction to the perceived obscurities of traditional philosophy, its first practitioners (Russell, Carnap and Quine) strived for the rigor of science, hoping to effectively purify thought from language. It is a discipline of grammar and logical structure, where philosophy becomes a handmaiden to mathematics and the empirical sciences, meticulously eradicating the shadows cast by metaphor and ambiguity. Its obsession with the sciences is not only narrow but unrequited.[17] Analytic philosophy insists, and is indeed premised upon, the assertion of its own transparency, thereby shaping a world where propositions can be measured, verified, and systematized.

Both schools of philosophy illustrate their arguments in vastly different ways. In the framework of continental philosophy, art is an illustration of philosophical ideas, often through its ability to destabilize or complicate traditional forms of knowing. Philosophers like Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty argue that art holds the capacity to present truths that are fundamentally linked to being, perception, and temporality. Art is not merely a mirror reflecting the world but actively shapes how we experience and interpret our lived realities.[18] Heidegger's interpretation of Van Gogh's shoes, or Merleau-Ponty's reflections on Cézanne, suggest that art opens up the possibility of a more embodied, sensory form of knowing that goes beyond intellectual categorization, making visible the structures of experience that would be otherwise obscured by traditional philosophical methods.[19] In this way, art for continental philosophers is fundamentally dynamic. Art not only serves as an illustration of thought, but actively contributes to the very constitution of meaning itself.

Analytic philosophy, by contrast, tends to understand thought experiments as vehicles for explaining conceptual problems and testing the limits of logical reasoning. Drawing from traditions of empiricism and logical positivism, thinkers like Kripke and Parfit use hypothetical examples to clarify distinctions, or to reveal the contours of language, identity, and metaphysics.[20] These thought experiments are structured scenarios designed to isolate and analyse particular facets of philosophical problems with the goal of reducing complexity to a formal logic that is measurable and definable. While this approach privileges clarity and precision, it also works to maintain the separation between philosophy and lived experience – what continental thinkers might regard as the affective, embodied, and historical dimensions of life. The thought experiment becomes a self-contained mechanism that bypasses the ambiguity and interpretive openness that art embraces, where analytic philosophers argue for a logically rigorous argument anchored in hypothetical situations rather than the ambiguities of human existence or the emotional resonance of art. This impacts not only how these texts are written, but also how they are translated.

One key point of contention, in the present century, could be the fact that the analytic school of thought has dominated not only its own discipline, but also the translation of continental texts into academic English. This dominance is not merely a matter of linguistic preference but is deeply tied to the power dynamics that structure philosophical inquiry itself, and speaks to deeply ingrained intellectual hierarchies.[21] This hierarchy has meant that the analytic style, with its emphasis on clarity, precision, and empirical verification – often defines the parameters within which meaning is understood – leaving the more nuanced, culturally embedded, and historically contingent nature of continental and non-Western thought marginalized and adrift.

Ian James retranslates Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophy into critical English, for example, but here and elsewhere, there is a nagging sense that the translation of continental texts becomes an act of "reconciliation" with the analytic tradition: stripping away ambiguity and emotional depth for the sake of rigor and systematic analysis.[22] Thus, the translation of continental works into English is not simply an exercise in language transfer but an act of cultural mediation, where the subtleties of thought are sometimes sacrificed in pursuit of disciplinary acceptance, leading me back to my initial inquiry.

When addressing why translation remains the great *unthought* of the philosophy of language, exceptions deserve mention. In fairness, there have been some discussions of translation. Yet these are relatively rare compared to the attention given to other issues. Donald Davidson and Samuel Kripke's work remains foundational: the former's notions of 'conceptual schemes' and 'radical interpretation,' in particular, introduce translation at the level of an interpreter encountering a completely unknown language.[23] Although Davidson's goal was more about understanding meaning and truth, not translation *per se*, his concept paved the way for thinking about the challenges of cross-linguistic understanding. Davidson's framework, however, sidesteps deeper cultural or idiomatic untranslatability, as it assumes that meaning can be stabilized through truth-conditional structures.[24] Kripke focused on proper names and rigid designators, suggesting that reference is fixed across all possible worlds. This could have had fruitful implications for translation, raising questions of whether names or referents must remain stable across languages.[25] Kripke did not focus on translation explicitly, but his ideas challenge translators to think about how identity and reference work when linguistic labels differ across languages.

W. V. Quine was one of the first to directly address translation within philosophy, particularly in his thesis on the 'indeterminacy of translation.' Here, Quine argues that there can be multiple equally valid translations for a given sentence in a foreign language. His work implies that translation might lack a 'one-to-one' correspondence, exposing deep ambiguities. This view inspired interest in how translation impacts meaning and interpretative frameworks, though he was more sceptical about finding stable translations than he was constructive in theorizing them.[26] This left a robust framework, for thinking about translation within the philosophy of language, unformulated.

Years later, David Kaplan and Robert Stalnaker contributed to theories around indexicals, demonstratives, and context-dependent expressions, which are crucial in translation as they reveal how meaning varies with context.[27] Kaplan's work on indexicals, for instance, highlights the role of speaker and listener context, influencing how we understand terms that lack stable meaning across languages. Again, while neither philosopher focuses directly on translation, their frameworks allow deeper questions on translating context-bound expressions.

In response to this assessment, it would appear that a broad and persistent monolingualism of the analytic field has rendered questions of translation peripheral – eventually, to its own intellectual detriment and disenchantment. The 'majority Anglophone countries house only about 6% of the global population. Philosophical discussion is consequently deprived of a huge pool of philosophical talent.'[28] With the rise of the BRICS and various other nations, that pool is only getting larger. As such, the discipline's quest for transparency has, in a strange way, led to its own obscurity. Each of the aforementioned philosophers address translation issues to limited extents and with varying degrees of persuasion; none of them have led to constructing a robust framework for its inquiry. It is as if the philosophy of language were authored to project its *own* possible world: one where everyone thinks and speaks in English.

Mercifully, applied and interdisciplinary studies have slowly provoked a growing awareness of the need for philosophy to address translation directly. Is this enough, and has it come too late? At the present moment, it is hard to say. If the philosophy of language has never been prepared to tackle the issue of translation, then the broader complaints of analytic philosophers are trivial. When contemporary philosophers make objections to the discipline itself, about its lack of direction, or its self-imposed limitation, or its longstanding distrust toward continental philosophy - all of these ailments must further first reckon with and confront this peculiar oversight. This is a large issue, of course, and cannot be substantially addressed or corrected here with any finality.

Instead, my next inquiry takes up a more contemporaneous discussion between translation theory and the field-defining rise of interest in untranslatability. This means turning to leading proponents that will act as representative of either viewpoint: Lawrence Venuti, a leading translation scholar and literary translator, and Emily Apter, whose promotion of untranslatability in landmark publications has earned the former's critical derision.

2. Why is untranslatability so un-theorised in Translation Theory?

On the surface, Emily Apter and Lawrence Venuti's dispute over the status of untranslatability appear to diverge. This does not mean their frameworks are mutually exclusively.[29] Answering here, provisionally, the inquiry as to why untranslatability has struggled to find a foothold of consensus in Translation Theory, this section briefly surveys the field itself and its responses to this theme. It then turns to look at Apter and Venuti in more detail. As I come to elaborate, both scholars critique Anglo-academic monolingualism with variety, conviction and eloquence, which brings to light a previously unacknowledged commonality in their accounts of translation and philosophy. The following section will take this point one step further, in the direction of formal logic, in order to confirm this point for an analytic audience.

First of all, untranslatability has haunted the margins of critical translation theory since its inception. Frustration can be read in Philip E. Lewis's claim, from 1984, that to 'deny that language has this capacity is demonstrably foolish, and to claim that philosophy or linguistic theory should not, or need not, reckon with the incidence of untranslatability seems hopelessly defensive.'[30] Yet one would be misguided to assume that such cases amounted to a sense of welcome anticipation in the academic field of translation itself.

Several scholars have challenged its utility and implications. Aria Fani, for example, contends that untranslatability can inadvertently reinforce 'the core logic of romantic nationalism,' emphasizing languages as discrete, bounded entities. He argues that this focus on linguistic boundaries may constrain the field, situating translation within nationalist frameworks that reify and solidify differences rather than fostering interaction and fluidity between languages.[31] François Noudelmann suggest that an overemphasis on untranslatability risks essentializing cultural and linguistic specificity, potentially narrowing the scope of what translation can achieve by concentrating on what cannot be transferred – instead of on the possibilities of transformation and reinterpretation that translation invites.[32] This perspective is echoed by Brian Lennon, who proposes that translation should not be limited by notions of complete fidelity to the original but should embrace the creative tensions that emerge in cross-cultural exchanges.[33] Despite the ongoing nature of this debate, it is crucial to consider the theme in the context of philosophy.

Following Barbara Cassin's original volume in 2004 – commended for curtailing 'the imperium of English thought' with strategic finesse – Apter set out to translate it with co-editors Jacques Lezra and Michael Wood, publishing the English edition of *Dictionary of Untranslatables* a decade later.[34] While Cassin's original volume 'has quite a bit of analytic philosophy already in it,' 'it is often skewed in favour of Continental perspectives.' Apter insists that, for the English edition, 'the decision was made to preserve this skew, on the grounds that part of the project's interest for an anglophone readership was its demonstration of where Continental and analytic philosophy disagree irreconcilably.'[35] Since its publication in 2014, Apter has become principally associated with this contested notion. To assert untranslatability, in her view, is to insist upon the opacity of cultural difference and the ethical responsibility to engage with that opacity, rather than dissolve it in the search for seamless equivalence. Here, what she refers to as 'the skew' between analytic and continental traditions is not a methodological oversight, but a regulative principle worth preservation and extension.

Apter's Preface to the *Dictionary* is a bold rethinking of language's limits and the ethics embedded within linguistic boundaries. She explains how the Untranslatable is not merely a term or phrase resisting direct translation but is an invitation to consider the histories and epistemologies particular to each language that shape thought itself. The *Dictionary* advances a framework whereby the untranslatable functions as a critique of universalism, challenging the dominance of any single linguistic or cultural framework. Each Untranslatable term acts as a reminder of the cultural and philosophical specificity that persists in language—a reminder that no language can fully assimilate the nuanced complexities of another.[36]

In the present issue, it is worth emphasising Apter's call for a 'philosophizing in languages,' where the act of translating philosophical concepts is as much an engagement with the singularity of each language's "thinking" as it is with the text itself. By embracing a dictionary model that maps terms across languages, the project 'proves useful for teaching in myriad ways,' effectively turning the act of translation into a pedagogical tool that both acknowledges and preserves the boundaries of linguistic meaning.[37] Rather than assimilate, the Untranslatable proposes that we pause, in order to recognize language's resistance as a critical reflection of the world it names, and the ethical limitations intrinsic to any act of translation.[38]

Meanwhile, Venuti went further than anyone in his critique of the Untranslatable.[39] Venuti, by contrast, contends that untranslatability is a restrictive frame that devalues the productive labour of translators – a labour described as 'hermeneutic translation.'[40] The 'hermeneutic translation' model 'understands translation as an interpretive act that varies the form, meaning, and effect of the source text according to intelligibilities and interests in the receiving situation.'[41] Apter's notion of untranslatability fails the test of his governing criteria, between 'hermeneutic translation' and 'instrumental translation,' the millennia-long misconception of the translated text as simply an 'untroubled reproduction' of the original.[42] True, incommensurability may exist; but according to one of Venuti's most incisive texts, it

> remains largely unaffected by translation. This fact does not, however, support claims of untranslatability. Such claims necessarily assume a concept of what translation is, how it should be performed, what it should yield. That concept is an instrumental model of translation, positing an invariant that should but cannot be reproduced. If any text can be interpreted, however, then any text can be translated.[43]

He therefore considers the absence of 'interpretation' as inconceivable in practice. In Venuti's reading, Apter and Cassin seem more interested in viewing untranslatability as evidence of an unchanging, sometimes sacred or sometimes fetishized 'semantic-invariant' in the original text: 'Yet the invariant does not exist. If any text can support potentially infinite interpretations, then any text can be translated in potentially infinite ways.'[44] How does one reconcile these viewpoints, in a way that is relevant to philosophy?

For now, and in the hope of answering the present inquiry – as to why untranslatability has been un-theorised within Translation Theory – it will be relevant to first revisit one of Venuti's older texts, originally published in 1996 and republished in *The Scandals of Translation* (1998).[45] Here, translation and philosophy are tackled directly:

> Philosophy does not escape the embarrassment that faces contemporary academic disciplines when confronted with the problem of translation. In philosophical research, widespread dependence on translated texts coincides with neglect of their translated status, a general failure to take into account the differences introduced by the fact of translation. The problem is perhaps most glaring in Anglo-American cultures, where native philosophical traditions from empiricism to logical semantics have privileged the idea of language as communication and therefore imagined the transparency of the translated text.[46]

Perhaps more 'embarrassing' still, is how relevant these words still read against the backdrop of analytic philosophy, despite the many years since its publication! As was alluded to by various philosophers earlier, the dominance of English, with its 'imagined transparency,' has continued to constrain the field of philosophy, its methods, objects of analysis and its venues of circulation. Yet the conceptual framework Venuti brings into this inquiry is an unusual one.

This is the notion of the 'philosophical remainder,' as inherited from Lacan's notion of *lalangue* (a French compound of 'language' and 'tongue') and subsequently developed by linguist Jacques Leclerc.[47] What is this concept, and why does it sound so similar to Apter and Cassin's notion of the Untranslatable? 'Venuti appears to take for granted the legitimacy of the concept of the 'remainder,' as well as its acceptance by the reader, and provides little discussion of it in the book.'[48] As such, and

especially for the sake of reconsidering the tangled relationship of translation and philosophy anew in this issue, it may be worth a closer examination.

As Jacques Leclerc forewarns, in *The Violence of Language* (1990), 'even where progress in linguistics seems most obvious, it is never assured.' For linguists, as for philosophers, 'development often means going back to an older theory and re-exploring its potentialities. It is a story of gain and loss, rather than the linear progress and cumulative increase of knowledge.'[49] The problem is that language, itself, 'is not a rational construct but the product of a historical conjecture. It is therefore arbitrary, but not random, an arrangement, not a machine that conforms to teleological structure.'[50] By implication, if philosophy is premised on the transparency of its language, then it is premised on a construct that is not stable or rational. Philosophical propositions are not just subject to language itself but are subject to the various forms of 'historical conjecture' through which language is augmented.

Faced with a fluid and transformative thing called language, Leclerc describes the 'remainder' as something that is somehow 'excluded from the rules of grammar' while also exceeding 'scientific inquiry'[51]: 'the remainder is not merely to be conceived as what lies outside; it is also within grammar. The process must be understood as a renewed but always failing attempt at disengagement.'[52] The 'remainder' is both embedded in, and separate from, linguistic structures. This dual nature suggests an ongoing, yet incomplete, struggle to define the boundaries between what language encompasses and excludes. The 'remainder' is, effectively, a transcendent constructive principle.

This holds uncertain implications for translation, which may be where the linguist got Venuti's attention: 'If I translate this into my terms,' writes Leclerc, 'it implies that the remainder, far from being a residue, has now invaded the whole field. There is no longer a frontier, a line of separation.'[53] In this statement, Leclerc posits that the 'remainder' has transcended its status as a marginal element to influence the entire linguistic domain. By doing so, it erases clear separations between what belongs to grammatical norms and what lies beyond them, blending these realms into a single continuum.

The 'remainder' cannot therefore be reduced to a single word, term, phrase or textual passage, but rather, in Venuti's gloss, stands for 'linguistic effects triggered by the variety of forms which the user employs selectively to communicate, but which, because of their circulation in social groups and institutions, always carry a collective force that outstrips any individual's control and complicates intended meanings. Translating increases this unpredictability.'[54] It applies to phenomena within a *single* language, and its 'unpredictability' is extended when it enters another. Aside from this Husserlian promotion of intentionality, in Stephen Noble's recent reading, the 'remainder'

> is akin to a profusion of meaning which exists by virtue of the very material conditions of language itself, or, in other words, by virtue of the fact that a language is part of a defined culture and that it is comprised of a particular grammar, vocabulary, and conceptual framework, *all of which are untranslatable as such into another system of written signs.* Furthermore, the 'remainder' is not simply present in a translation, but it exists in each language taken individually, regardless of any actual or possible translation of it.[55]

As my italics mean to insinuate, there is something noticeably significant in Noble's inability to describe the function of the 'remainder' *without* mentioning untranslatability in the process. Should this necessarily lead critics, translators or philosophers to consider the 'remainder' as related to the Untranslatable? Are they similar, overlapping, or even synonymous? To answer this section's central inquiry – that of the untranslatability's marginality in translation theory – has it simply surfaced, here, under a different name?

At first glance, in both the Untranslatable and the 'philosophical remainder,' we find parallel lines tracing a territory of refusal - each refusing a tidy assimilation of words across the mutable, uncertain border of languages. Apter's insistence on untranslatability hails the unreachable in language, a kind of linguistic solitude or arrest; meanwhile, Venuti's 'remainder' offers a lingering, spectral presence within the text, an open invitation to engage with what remains hidden or half-glimpsed. Each approach is a negotiation with the unyielding core of linguistic identity, a project of insisting that

language speaks itself in ways not available to translation, that there is always something unspoken lingering in the interstices.

Both concepts occupy different but mutually implicated spaces in the discourse on translation, each gesturing toward the profound alterity in which languages are involved. The Untranslatable serves as a boundary, a resistance to equivalence, and a necessary acknowledgment of the limits of linguistic comprehension. As Cassin proposes, the Untranslatable is an ethical stance that calls for attentiveness to what language cannot fully disclose: an insistence on maintaining the incommensurable qualities of culture, context, and the otherness of meaning.[56] To encounter the Untranslatable is to experience a kind of linguistic opacity, a call to respect the fissures that lie between languages without rushing to bridge them.

The 'philosophical remainder,' by contrast, occupies a quieter, more subtle territory. It marks not an unbridgeable chasm, but a residue, a vestige, that clings to translation even as it seeks to bridge linguistic divides. Where the Untranslatable confronts us with the limit of what language can do, the remainder is an afterglow, an enduring murmur of what language once held, and still holds, subtly alive within every translated word. This 'remainder' is not an absolute limit; it is the trace of a language's material and socio-historical conditions which persist even in acts of linguistic transfer. It points to an excess that resists containment, of a residue that destabilizes any simple notion of equivalence. The 'remainder' reveals language's embeddedness in time, place, and culture, underscoring the impossibility of rendering any text without these elements.

Yet, Apter's and Venuti's concepts part ways in their final ethos toward translation. For Apter, the Untranslatable constitutes a kind of reverence: to hold one's language intact, to refuse translation as an act of preservation. Venuti, however, regards this boundary as generative; the 'remainder' becomes not a halting point but a fuel, a strange energy, catalysing new meanings, dialectical expansions, and the multifaceted identity of a text reborn in another language. In a sense, Apter's untranslatability carves out a sacred linguistic space, while Venuti's remainder summons us to wrestle with its lingering resistance and bring it to vibrant articulation in a new tongue. Each approach, then, provides a unique framework through which we might engage with philosophy in translation. In reviving interest in 'the philosophical remainder' as well as the Untranslatable, my point is that even if these notions do seem similar on the surface, they are indeed different. Either concept is worth further investigation.

This section has attempted to answer the inquiry as to why untranslatability has been so little theorised in the field of Translation Theory. While I have surveyed its notable absence across the philosophy of language, its renewed presence in recent publications signal that this is soon to change.[57] The TransPhil community, led by Alice Leal and Philip Wilson, continues to promote an ongoing dialogue between these disciplines.

In the next section, it is worth referring to Venuti's notion of 'hermeneutic translation,' which acknowledges how inevitable shifts occur in meaning, but embraces them as sites of creative potential, a way to make visible the multiplicities within and between languages. Rather than halt at the boundary of the Untranslatable, the next section examines if it is possible to not only balance these conceptual frameworks, but also, whether they can be successfully translated into formal logical formulae. This adjusts theories of translation for an analytic philosophy audience, which – according to the writings of its present inmates and 'apparatchiks' – is so in need of new approaches and new ideas.[58]

3. How can untranslatability be translated into the language of Formal Logic?

Of course, little can be gained by criticising one of these disciplines at the expense of the other. It is up to this section, then, to prove that translation and untranslatability can indeed be registered in the language of formal logic on which analytic philosophy is founded. In an analytical bid to confirm not only the salience of untranslatability, but also the relevance and mutual relevance of Apter's notion of untranslatability alongside Venuti's definition of hermeneutic translation, the present section in-

tends to lay out the following categories. Promising and exciting inroads in this area are already being produced.[59] These categories should act as not only formulations of translation itself, but of their philosophical promise in the long-established sphere of logical thought. These are:

(1) Untranslatability as a context dependent incompatibility;
(2) Formalizing hermeneutic translation as a mapping of non-equivalence;
(3) Untranslatability as a Product of Hermeneutic emphasis on Foreignness;
(4) Pragmatic Constraints and symbolic representations of Foreignness.

In keeping with the purposes of the issue overall, each are illustrated through examples of philosophical texts from outside the analytic tradition, as well as a brief qualification of the limits of their application. Each of these formulas are provisional, and in need of extension and further inquiry – hopefully, one day, from both disciplines.

3.1. Untranslatability as Context-Dependent Incompatibility

In this model, we consider each language as having a set of *contextual frames* that inform meaning. Let's denote these contexts as **C**L1 for the source language and **C**L2 for the target language. For a term or expression **T** in **L**1, we define its meaning not only by its semantic components but by its place within **CL**1, encompassing cultural, historical, and interpretive dimensions.

In this schema, **untranslatability** occurs when the contextual frame **CL**1 cannot map onto **CL**2 without significant loss of this embedded cultural meaning. In hermeneutic terms, this loss implies that the translator must make interpretive choices to highlight or adapt aspects of CL1 in the translation, acknowledging the difference rather than erasing it.

A prominent example from Chinese Philosophy would be from Confucius' *Analects* (206-220 AD).[60] The term *ren* is one of Confucius' core concepts, often translated as "benevolence," "humaneness," or "virtue." However, in Confucian philosophy, *ren* is a complex term encompassing a particular ideal of humaneness, ethical self-cultivation, and relational morality, which lacks a straightforward English equivalent. Translating *ren* as "benevolence" or "humaneness" limits the term's moral and philosophical scope, as English terms don't convey its embeddedness in social harmony and moral duty. This untranslatability arises from differences in moral and relational frameworks between Chinese and English-speaking cultures. Translators often face the choice between using the term with a footnote, keeping *ren* untranslated, or risking a partial interpretation.

3.2. Formalizing Hermeneutic Translation as a Non-Equivalence Mapping

In Venuti's view, translation is not merely about transferring meaning; it's about conveying *the resonance of the foreign*. We can formalize this by saying that for a given term **T** in **L**1, the translation into **L**2 involves finding an interpretive function *h* that emphasizes the *foreignness* by retaining certain elements of **CL**1 even if they do not directly correspond to elements in **CL**2. This function *h* might preserve culturally specific features (like idioms or historical references) even if doing so introduces unfamiliarity in the target text.

Mathematically, if **CL**1 and **CL**2 are not directly compatible, then *h*(**CL**1) is not a strict equivalence but an interpretive mapping that selectively maintains aspects of **CL**1 to preserve *foreignness*.

One could look, by way of example, to Mikhail Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, where Bakhtin uses the term *ðàçíîðå÷èå* (*raznorechie*), which means "multi-voicedness" or "heteroglossia."[61] What Venuti would call a hermeneutic translation of the term, is the one that has won the hearts and minds of Western critics: "heteroglossia." The term *raznorechie* is more than just "multi-voicedness"; it denotes a philosophical concept central to Bakhtin's understanding of how multiple voices and perspectives interact within a text to create layered meaning. "Heteroglossia" was adopted as a neologism in English to capture this unique, culturally specific idea, which has since become integral to literary and philosophical studies. This non-equivalent mapping reflects Venuti's hermeneutic

translation by creating a new term to preserve Bakhtin's conceptual nuance, rather than attempting a rough equivalent like "multi-voicedness" or "polyphony."

3.3. Untranslatability as a Product of Hermeneutic Emphasis on Foreignness

We can redefine untranslatability within this hermeneutic framework by specifying that the lack of equivalence isn't just a failure but a feature of the translation approach. Instead of aiming for equivalence, the model uses *hermeneutic distance*, denoted by *dh*, which represents the interpretive space between **CL**1 and **CL**2 where the translator's interventions operate.

For instance, if we denote the translated term as **T**2 in **L**2, then:

$$\mathbf{T}2 = h(\mathbf{T}, dh((\mathbf{CL}1 ! \mathbf{CL}2))$$

where *dh* allows elements of **CL**1 to appear in **L**2 as a deliberate choice to *signal* untranslatability rather than conceal it. This function highlights the interpretive act by presenting non-equivalence as an enriching aspect of the translation, foregrounding the difference rather than smoothing it out.

The Portuguese phrase *conscientização* in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, refers to an evolving concept of critical consciousness and social awakening.[62] *Conscientização* is central to Freire's philosophy, embodying a deeply Brazilian and Latin American concept of awakening social awareness and a commitment to liberation. While the English phrase "critical consciousness" is often used, it doesn't fully convey the sense of experiential awakening rooted in social struggle.

Leaving *conscientização* untranslated in key passages or using it alongside "critical consciousness" preserves the foreignness and specificity of the concept, aligning with Venuti's approach by emphasizing the source text's cultural specificity over full English assimilation. Emphasizing foreignness risks exoticizing the source text, reinforcing a sense of otherness that could marginalize the culture being translated. While this approach underscores the ethical responsibility of preserving the source's alterity, it may inadvertently alienate readers of the target language by creating a barrier to understanding.

3.4. Pragmatic Constraints and Symbolic Representations of Foreignness

Finally, to fully align with Venuti's hermeneutic translation, we can say that untranslatability is symbolized within the text by retaining symbols or references that anchor **T**2 back to CL1. For example, names, idiomatic expressions, or certain syntactic structures might remain untranslated or only partially adapted. In logical terms, these are the "fixed points" that mark the boundary of untranslatability, serving as reminders of the source language's uniqueness.

This approach, based on Venuti's hermeneutic translation, thus embraces untranslatability as an interpretive practice that enhances the foreignness of the source text. Rather than seeking strict equivalence, it highlights the role of the translator in mediating difference, inviting readers to engage with the cultural richness embedded in linguistic gaps. *Dasein* is a core concept in Heidegger's work, for example, referring to a unique sense of human existence or "being-there" that is difficult to express directly in English.[63]

Miles Groth offers a nuanced critique of how the term *Dasein* has been rendered in translations of Heidegger's works, emphasizing its philosophical specificity and resistance to reductive equivalence.[64] He critiques translations that render *Dasein* as "human existence," arguing that this is redundant because the concept inherently refers to specifically human existence. Groth sees such translations as reflective of a broader challenge: conveying Heidegger's intricate vocabulary, which operates within a deeply German philosophical framework, into English without distorting its meaning. This challenge is not merely linguistic but ontological, as Heidegger's terms are central to his philosophy's project of exploring the nature of being and thought. English translations retain *Dasein* untranslated to symbolize Heidegger's distinct philosophical approach and the unique framing of human existence that defies a simple equivalent. This choice reflects a respect for the foreignness of the term, inviting English readers to engage with Heidegger's thought on its own terms while preserving the linguistic and philosophical uniqueness of his vocabulary.

4. The present issue

As has been seen here, there is much at stake in the engagement between translation and philosophy today – more than could be captured in a single issue. I began by surveying the general disenchantment of the latter discipline, asking first why translation has played such a minimal role in the philosophy of language. The broad monolingualism of the field, in its institutions and dissemination, plays a large role in that answer. Secondly, I looked closer at the reception of untranslatability within the field of translation theory, discovering in the process 'the philosophical remainder' as an earlier concept of limited attention and application before now. Finally, as an olive branch to the analytic school of philosophy, my third section presented a series of formulas for analysing the translation of philosophy with both Venuti's 'hermeneutic translation' and Apter and Cassin's 'untranslatable' as relevant and mutually adaptable frameworks. Each of these formulas was followed by an example of a philosophical tradition from outside the realm of analytic philosophy, in keeping with the thesis of the second section.

As this issue draws to a close, it is worth considering the broader arc of reflection emerging in the field - one which *Universality and Translation* (2025) eloquently epitomizes. That volume contends that any claim to universality, whether philosophical or translational, is itself conditioned by translation. In other words, universality does not precede translation - it is produced by it. This represents a paradigmatic inversion of earlier assumptions, situating translation not as an obstacle to universality but as its necessary condition. Where traditional philosophical discourse often assumed a universal rational subject, the insights of *Universality and Translation* compel us to see that this subject is always already embedded in linguistic difference. In doing so, the volume affirms many of the suspicions traced through this issue: that the drive for clarity and equivalence in analytic philosophy often masks a refusal to encounter the foreign. Translation, then, is not just the vehicle by which philosophy travels across cultures - it is the crucible in which philosophy itself is formed, fractured, and reimagined. If analytic philosophy is to endure, and not merely shamble on in its disenchantment, it must come to terms with this translational condition - not as a crisis, but as a site of reinvention.

An engagement between translation and philosophy - whether posed through the nexus of untranslatability or otherwise - holds within itself great promise for future avenues of research. Translation has, as the engagement between one group of languages to another, preceded philosophy as a pre-ancient activity; its incorporation into a broader philosophical paradigm is a mission this special issue hopes, in whatever unforeseen way, to contribute.

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