

**Joys and Sorrows of the Translator:  
A Critical Reading of José Ortega y Gasset's Viewpoints on Translation**

Mohammadreza Lorzadeh<sup>1</sup>

PhD Candidate in Translation Studies, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran

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**Extended abstract**

**1. Introduction**

By borrowing the motifs of the German 18th-century philosophical theories and applying it to the areas such as linguistics and translation, José Ortega y Gasset, a Spanish philosopher, founded his philosophy called "vital reason" or "ratiovitalism". His theory was mainly focused on the decline of Spain and the broader context of the cultural issues in Europe as well as its tangible historical issues. The prominent aspect of this thinking system is relying on justification and life, defined in contrast with the thoughts of Gasset's contemporaries (Graham, 1994).

**2. General Theories and Viewpoints**

Following long discussion and contemplation on the nature of the existence and comparing his opinions with those of the contemporaries, he put aside the theological concerns and focused more on culture; Gasset, through researching in Simmel's theories, found that there was a difference between life as a process and life as a cultural fact, whereas culture is the representation of the mixing both approaches (Dust, 1989). He employs Cohen's logical system to come to an understanding of life not as a quest for identity but as a scientific rationale. In his influential book entitled "*Historia como sistema*", Gasset proposes a disbelief in scientific research due to the flaw in their definition of human being (Mann, 1999). Through a reductive existentialism, he challenges the historical prejudices that man possesses a nature known to science and suggests a "radical reality" based on which the individual's life has three main features: having the conscious challenging quality, making decision from among possibilities and limiting the possibilities.

**3. A Critical Reading of Translational Viewpoints**

As for his pragmatic background, for Gasset, stability is far beyond human's reach. Therefore, all of the human activities including translating are impossible, yet unavoidable, since they reflect an easy-yet-difficult situation, falling far out of

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<sup>1</sup> Corresponding Author: m.lorzadeh@gmail.com

human's reach, thus any effort in human affairs are in strive for utopia (Graham, 2001). Consequently, Gasset portrays the easy-yet-difficult position of language: on the one hand, it makes possible and eases humans' communication. On the other hand, it does not lend itself to function analysis. Translators always try to appropriate foreign topics and concepts to their own culture and language in order to make it included/mixed with their mother tongues while the form of presenting meaning would be different with totally/semi different effects in the target language (Gasset, 1992; White, 2003), which is just the beginning of utopian season for translation. In addition, while making a translation closer to the original text, retaining and transmitting new literary genres don't cause mistakes in understanding the original text and in mediating between languages (Gasset, 1992; Schulte and Biguenet, 1992). In his description of this choice, Gasset depicts various aspects reflected in the various translations of a text (of course, compared to the original text), in each of which there is an aspect of meaning. Therefore, a fluent and beautiful translation is undoubtedly a barrier to some aspects of meaning (Chang, 2006), as it destroys the text's abnormalities.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Gasset places the translator in an atmosphere resembling the inter-lingual fuzzy space, which is in complete accordance with the reality. However, where it comes to mediation, seemingly the translator acts in an atmosphere devoid of the two languages in which he interacts with the original language and writer, and then transmits this interaction in the form of translation which is not factual. Although the space for understanding and interacting is the source/original language, the space for reconstruction and creation is the target language and all of those understandings would not benefit the audiences before writing. The utopian position of the translator is closely related to the joy of understanding and the sorrow caused by inability in its full transmission in the form of translation while the conversation with the writer makes it joyful. Being indebted and unable to transmit, it leaves the translator with sorrow. In addition, when Gasset talks about the stylistic features as the criteria for this joy and sorrow; in fact, he targets literary texts in which stylistic features and the reflection of writer's self are of a greater importance rather than the mere transmission of meaning. Generally speaking, it can be claimed that Gasset's theory of translating/translation is close to those of functional theorists, as he considers translation a representation of an interaction rather than a representation of the original text, which can be exactly compared to the function and profile of the original text.

**Key words:** Ortegay Gasset, Joys and Sorrows, Silence, Mediation, Interlingual relation.

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