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Towards a Phenomenologically-Oriented Translation Theory

Abstract: This article examines whether the theory and methodology developed by phenomenology can be applied to translation praxis and translation studies. The opening sections present some fundamental assumptions of phenomenology, both as philosophical doctrine and in terms of its methodological approaches. The phenomenological approach to translation theory is then discussed as a response to the relativism, psychologism and subjectivism that characterize certain contemporary translation theories. Subsequently, the application of phenomenological approaches to translation theory and practice is considered. The article further explores Roman Ingarden's theory of the literary work of art and its implications for literary translation. In this framework, a literary work of art is understood as a schematic, multilayered structure, and a translated work is regarded as its concretization. Finally, the discussion addresses whether and how translators of literary texts can integrate both objective and subjective perspectives when translating a text.

Keywords: translation theory, literary translation, phenomenology, Roman Ingarden, essence, concretization

Abstrakt: Artykuł podejmuje zagadnienie, czy teoria i metodologia opracowana przez fenomenologię może być wykorzystana w praktyce tłumaczeniowej i badaniach nad tłumaczeniami. Na wstępie przedstawiono kilka podstawowych założeń fenomenologii jako doktryny oraz jej metody. Fenomenologiczne podejście do teorii tłumaczenia omówiono jako odpowiedź na relatywizm, psychologizm i subiektywizm, dostrzegalny obecnie w niektórych teoriach tłumaczenia. Następnie rozważa się zastosowanie metod fenomenologicznych w teorii i praktyce tłumaczeniowej, po czym omawia się teorię dzieła literackiego Romana Ingardena wraz z jej konsekwencjami dla tłumaczenia literackiego. Dzieło literackie traktowane jest jako schematyczna, wielowarstwowa struktura, zaś tłumaczenie jako jej konkretyzacja. Rozpatruje się, czy i w jaki sposób tłumacze tekstów literackich mogą połączyć obiektywne i subiektywne spojrzenie na przekładany tekst, sytuując dyskusję w kontekście rozważań Ingardena nad tłumaczeniem literackim.

Słowa kluczowe: teoria przekładu, tłumaczenie literackie, fenomenologia, Roman Ingarden, istota, konkretyzacja

Introduction

There are two ways of interpreting what a phenomenologically-oriented translation theory might entail. Phenomenology is, first and foremost, a discipline of philosophy, but it can also be related to other fields of enquiry. As defined in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, phenomenology is “a. The science of phenomena as distinct from being (ontology). b. That division of any science which describes and classifies its phenomena. From the Greek *phainomenon*, appearance” (Smith 2013). Therefore, the term ‘phenomenologically-oriented translation theory’ can denote both a theory that seeks to approach the phenomenon of ‘translation’ in a descriptive manner – reflecting the second definition above – and a theory that actively employs the concepts and methodology developed by phenomenology in the philosophical sense, to inform translation praxis and translation studies.

As a theory that aims to describe the phenomenon of ‘translation’, phenomenology has long been applied in translation practice, encompassing numerous attempts to examine this complex, multifaceted object called ‘translation’ both as a process and as a product. However, these endeavors have rarely, if ever, been explicitly labeled as ‘phenomenological descriptions’.

Given that descriptions of the nature of translation have always served as a way of apprehending and understanding its essence, this paper will not focus on that aspect. Instead, the central concern here is to investigate whether the theories and methodologies developed within phenomenology can be meaningfully applied to translation practice and to the study of translation itself.

Phenomenology

It is not my aim to provide a detailed account of phenomenology here, as that would exceed the scope of this article. I will, however, highlight some of the most important features of this philosophical discipline before turning to the discussion of its relevance for translation studies.

Phenomenology as a philosophical school was established in the early 20th century by Edmund Husserl. The term itself, however, dates back to the 18th century, when J.H. Lambert used it in *Neues Organon* (1764). It later appears in the writings of I. Kant, G.W.F. Hegel, Ch. Renouvier and others, but it was Husserl who first developed phenomenology into a fully-fledged philosophical movement (cf. Bocheński 1992, 26). Literally-speaking, phenomenology is the study of ‘phenomena’. According to Husserl, it is a fundamental discipline of philosophy, that, by examining what is directly and clearly given – i.e. phenomena or things as they appear in experience – and by attending to the objects themselves, provides the foundation for all knowledge (cf. Podsiad 2000, 261–262).

Phenomenology is concerned with the meanings that things hold in our experience, the ways in which we experience them, and the conditions under which such experiences occur. Smith (2013), in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, defines phenomenology “as the study of structures of experience, or consciousness,” and outlines its scope as follows:

Basically, phenomenology studies the structure of various types of experience ranging from perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, and volition to bodily awareness, embodied action, and social activity, including linguistic activity. The structure of these forms of experience typically involves what Husserl called “intentionality”, that is, the directedness of experience toward things in the world, the property of consciousness that it is a consciousness of or about something. (Smith 2013)

Intentionality and consciousness occupy a central place within phenomenological studies.¹ According to classical Husserlian phenomenology, as Smith (2013) emphasizes:

our experience is directed toward – represents or “intends” – things only through particular concepts, thoughts, ideas, images, etc. These make up the meaning or content of a given experience, and are distinct from the things they present or mean.

Phenomenology, therefore, examines the background conditions of experience that make intentionality possible.

The proper object of phenomenological study is the essence of things. According to Józef M. Bocheński (1992), the phenomenological essence is not hidden; rather, it is something that manifests itself, for the essence *is* the phenomenon. In this context, the phenomenon refers both to what is apparent and how it is apparent.² The notion of phenomenological essence or *eidōs*, encompasses all aspects present within a phenomenon, including its Aristotelian qualities. However, it excludes two categories of factors: existence itself and anything accidental. Thus, the phenomenological essence may be described as the fundamental structure of an object, where structure encompasses all essential content and properties of the object (cf. Bocheński 1992, 37).

In Husserl’s work, phenomenology denotes both a doctrine and a method. The specific methods of phenomenology will be discussed in section 4, following the discussion of why a phenomenological approach to translation is both appropriate and necessary.

The Phenomenological Approach to Translation as a Reaction to Relativism, Psychologism and Subjectivism

When phenomenology was founded by Husserl in the early 20th century, it emerged as a response to the relativism and psychologism that characterized the intellectual climate of his times.³ Epistemologically and methodologically,

¹ Heidegger (2002) regards intentionality as one of the central discoveries of phenomenology. For him, intentionality is “a structure of lived experiences” (Heidegger 2002, 258), because “the very being of comporting is a directing-itself-toward” (Heidegger 2002, 260). By intentionality, Heidegger does not mean “an objective relation which occasionally and subsequently takes place between a physical thing and a psychic process, but the structure of a comportment as comporting to, directing itself toward” (Heidegger 2002, 265).

² In Heidegger’s own words, intentionality is “das *Sich-an-ihm-selbst-Zeigende*, das Offenbare” (1993, 28) – that is, the object-as-it-appears.

³ Husserl, by contrast, maintains “that psychologism fails to do justice to the idea that truths are eternal” (Kusch 2015). For Husserl’s antipsychologism, see, for example, Kusch (2015).

phenomenology emphasized the need to distinguish clearly and distinctly between the object and the subject. While this distinction may appear trivial at first glance, it carries significant implications for translation theory and practice.

Accordingly, a phenomenological approach to translation theory should be understood as a response to the relativism, psychologism and subjectivism observable in some contemporary translation theories. To illustrate these tendencies, I will provide a few representative examples without attempting an exhaustive survey, since the scope of the paper does not permit it.

First, consider a remark by Krzysztof Hejwowski (2004), a proponent of the cognitive-communicative approach. In his book on translation theory, he asserts, *inter alia*, that translation equivalence can only be discussed on the level of textual interpretation in the minds of both source-text and target-text recipients. Thus, when he states that “these texts or these passages are equivalent”, he means that, in his view, “the given original text and its translation evoke similar interpretations in the minds of their recipients” (Hejwowski 2004, 58, my trans.).

In this framework, Hejwowski does not distinguish between subject and object. Equivalence is determined not by objective features of the texts themselves, but by the content of consciousness – by how texts are represented in the mind. Consequently, equivalence becomes a matter of subjective interpretation rather than an objective property.⁴ This consequence of Hejwowski’s thesis leads directly to relativism: if a translated text evokes similar interpretations in one out of a 100 people, but not in the remaining 99, is this person more well-read, or better informed, or an expert, or has s/he undergone a different experience? Is the target text then equivalent to the source text or not? According to this approach, there is no single truth but many truths: a text may be equivalent for one reader and not for the other 99. This raises further questions, such as whether texts are non-equivalent when interpretations differ, or only when divergent interpretations are possible. Practical consequences also emerge, particularly concerning the evaluation of translations when criteria are so inherently subjective and relative. Moreover, proponents of such subjective and relativistic approaches fail to examine the conditions that make similar interpretations of both the source and the target texts possible. Yet these objective, underlying conditions – those that enable recipients to arrive at comparable interpretations – are crucial.

Psychologism can be detected in definitions that prioritize similarity of reactions, as in Hejwowski’s approach. Olgierd Wojtasiewicz, the founder of Polish translation studies, defines correspondence as follows: “Text *b* in language *B* is a correspondence of text *a* in language *A* if text *b* evokes the same reaction (complex of associations) in the recipient as text *a*” (Wojtasiewicz 1996, 17, my trans.). Here, too, evaluative criteria reside in the subject’s mind rather than in objective features. Wojtasiewicz acknowledges the limitations of behavioral criteria, but emphasizes the communicative function of language, arguing that

⁴ Hejwowski’s argument would sound quite different if he claimed that equivalent texts – whatever equivalence may mean – enable their recipients, by virtue of their features, to arrive at similar interpretations; in other words, that such texts have the potential to generate similar interpretations in minds of their recipients.

reactions caused by a text can be, if not identical, then sufficiently similar due to this function (Wojtasiewicz 1996, 18). Other theoreticians, like Stanisław Barańczak (2004, 15) go even further, proposing that the test for the identical functioning of source and target texts can be a physical, physiological reaction – a somatic experience.

Subjectivism can also be linked to some other tenets in translation theory. Over recent decades there has been a strong tendency to center theory on I/Me (translator) and You (addressee),⁵ elevating the agent who decides, chooses, and interprets, to the primary position, as seen in action theories such as the theory of translational action. In these frameworks, the work itself becomes secondary,⁶ losing its autonomy, sovereignty and integrity (inviolability). It is transformed into an “offer”⁷ (see the Skopos-theory⁸), with its value determined instrumentally. Here, the main concern lies not in the object but in the uses to which the object can be put. Purpose, aim, “Skopos”, manipulation and adaptation dominate the theory, and the translation must fulfil a goal defined by the agent.⁹ As a result, the original text may be altered considerably, since “the *skopos* of an action takes precedence over the mode of action, i.e. the purpose determines whether, how and what is done” (Reiss and Vermeer 2013, 89). Consequently, in the theory of translational action, “the end justifies the means” (Reiss and Vermeer 2013, 90), since absoluteness is replaced by relativity.¹⁰ The main argument of the authors and proponents of the *Skopos*-theory centers on the “interdependence of language and culture” (Reiss and Vermeer 2013, 1), and thus “translational action is not only a linguistic but also a cultural transfer” (Reiss and Vermeer 2013, 3).

In contrast to these positions, phenomenology insists on an orientation towards the “objects themselves”. From this perspective, both the original work (source text) and the translated work (target text) are treated as objective entities, distinct from the subjective impressions, ideas, thoughts or judgments of their audiences (recipients/addressees). Undeniably, recipients’ subjective responses – impressions, ideas, thoughts or judgments – do influence interpretation. In this case, the most important recipients are primarily the translators, and consequently their subjective cognition and presuppositions will shape how they read, understand and render texts. The critical question, however, is whether and how their

⁵ The question of “for whom” a translation is (or should be) produced has influenced not only the theory of Nida and Taber (1969, 1) and the Skopos-theory, but is also reflected, in various forms, in the work of other theoreticians and practitioners in the field of translatology. In Skopos-theory, “The intended audience (‘addressees’) or recipient may be described as a specific kind or subset of skopos. How an interaction is carried out depends, among other things, on the relationship between the parties to an interaction” (Reiss and Vermeer 2013, 90).

⁶ Dizdar summarizes this perspective: “Somit steht nicht der Ausgangstext (AT) als solcher, sondern das intendierte Ziel am Beginn des Translationsprozesses” (Dizdar 1999, 104).

⁷ For example, Reiss and Vermeer view “translational action as ‘an offer of information’” (2013, 33), while Nord reflects: “I felt competent enough (...) to analyse and understand the source-language offer of information and to choose the appropriate translation strategies and procedures” (in Reiss and Vermeer 2013, iv).

⁸ Importantly, *Skopos*-theory does not require functional constancy.

⁹ As Reiss and Vermeer note: “A translational action is governed by its purpose” (2013, 84).

¹⁰ In line with this, Vermeer advocates a position of ‘relative relativism’ (cf. Dizdar 1999, 106).

subjectivity can be mitigated. This raises a central issue: how does phenomenology approach the task of getting to the ‘things themselves’? What methods has it developed and can these methods be applied to translation studies and practice? These questions will be addressed in the subsequent sections.

The methods of Phenomenology and Their Application to Translation Theory and Practice

When approaching a work to be translated, we usually consider it from a particular perspective. As Hejrowski observes:

Our understanding of other worlds and other beings is always based on our own experience and knowledge of our own culture, so it is to a certain (or even a large) degree anthropocentric, Euro-centric (in the case of a European) and ultimately self-centred (...). (2004, 16, my trans.)

The phenomenological approach differs from this natural attitude by its deliberate suspension of presuppositions and assumptions. In the natural attitude, we are guided by prior knowledge, memories, theories, speculations, and expectations about the world. Phenomenology, by contrast, postulates that we should initially set all of these aside and allow the phenomenon itself to act on us, as it appears. In other words, accessing the “objects themselves” requires the exclusion of all subjective influences – a purely objective stance must be adopted. Moreover, all theoretical frameworks, hypotheses, prior knowledge or claims made by others must be bracketed, leaving only the given object in focus (cf. Bocheński 1992, 27).

To minimize the influence of preconceived judgments, phenomenology employs the method of *Epoché*. Derived from the Greek term for reserve or distance, originally denoting “an attitude of noninvolvement” (cf. Britannica 2016), *Epoché* in phenomenology entails the suspension of judgment – a deliberate or abstention. For Husserl, this involves bracketing all theoretical assumptions about an object, so that its true nature can manifest – its ‘quiddity’ or ‘whatness’.

This methodical approach, which brackets natural attitudes, is particularly important in encounters with the Other, ensuring that the stranger is not unconsciously assimilated.¹¹ This is the basis for Husserl’s analysis of intersubjectivity: the world of the Other (*Fremdwelt*) must not be assimilated into one’s own home-world (*Heimwelt*),¹² with no “unconscious annexation” or reduction of alterity

¹¹ Ricoeur, referring to Husserl, notes that in his work the other is termed a stranger, and that “strangeness is in every other” (Ricoeur 2009, 368).

¹² Husserl developed his analysis of intersubjectivity in *Cartesianische Meditationen* and in the volumes *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität* (Hua XIII–XV). He distinguishes between *Heimwelt*, the horizon in which the subject is originally rooted – encompassing language, culture, customs, and perceptual patterns – and *Fremdwelt*, which is constituted through encounters with another subject who possesses a world irreducible to one’s own. Husserl emphasizes that the shared world (*eine Welt*) is not given immediately but arises through a process of transcendence from *Heimwelt* toward *Fremdwelt*, facilitated by analogizing apperception and empathy (§58–60, Hua XV).

to one's own categories. Husserl's method of *Epoché* (suspension of judgment) serves a protective function here: it allows the bracketing of natural attitudes, stereotypes, and pre-existing interpretive schemes, enabling the Other to appear within their own horizon.¹³ The translator, like the phenomenologist, should refrain from immediate interpretation in terms of their own homeworld, thus avoiding distortions of meaning rooted in the alienworld. For translators, this requires a critical distance from their own categories, beliefs, opinions and experiences.¹⁴ Accordingly, *Epoché* is especially suitable for literary translation, where capturing the *quiddity* of the original work is paramount.

Epoché demands not only cognitive distance, but also a temporal pause – a moment to stop, contemplate and observe, free from presuppositions and prejudices. How, then, can the *Epoché* method be applied in teaching translation, translation practice and translation theory? In teaching translation, it encourages reflective attentiveness and empathy.¹⁵ Roman Ingarden (1988, 50) advocates adopting an aesthetic attitude characterized by inner contemplative peace and full immersion in the work of art, while avoiding reference to one's personal experiences. Another phenomenologist, Max Scheler, notes that perception involves a triplet of sensation, memory, and imagination; observation must therefore be cultivated and imagination disciplined (Scheler 1987, 455).

For instance, in a translation course, students may analyze a poem and identify those elements of the text that should be retained in any translation – the so-called invariants. They learn to distinguish the poem's essential features, its quiddity, from incidental qualities. By consciously recognizing their own presuppositions, beliefs, biases, and cultural conditioning, students develop the ability to activate different kinds of experience and adopt alternative cultural perspectives. Subsequently, they should evaluate whether their perceptions stem from the text itself – its structures and linguistic means – or from personal stereotypes and assumptions, and which language characteristics of the poem influence their sensations. The goal here is to raise the awareness of students or translators, and direct their attention to the object itself, as well as heightening their awareness of the cultural shaping of experience. The students are given a questionnaire to complete, in order to activate and describe various kinds of experience “ranging from perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, and volition to bodily awareness, embodied action, and social activity, including linguistic activity” (Smith 2013), which fosters consciousness and intentionality. According to Smith:

¹³ Conversely, the translator must remain firmly grounded in their homeworld, since, as Zahavi observes, “[w]ithout a basis in one's homeworld, one cannot encounter and recognize an alien world” (2025). Zahavi further notes that “[c]entral to Husserl's late reflections on these topics is the interdependence of the two notions” (Zahavi 2025).

¹⁴ This insight is crucial because, as Ricoeur points out, “we only have points of view, perspectives, partial visions of the world” (2009, 369, my trans.). Consequently, there is never a definitive end to explanations when addressing someone who perceives an object from a perspective different from our own (Ricoeur 2009).

¹⁵ Subsequent steps, such as applying methods of academic literary analysis, can of course then be applied.

The basic intentional structure of consciousness, we find in reflection or analysis, involves further forms of experience. Thus, phenomenology develops a complex account of temporal awareness (within the stream of consciousness), spatial awareness (notably in perception), attention (distinguishing focal and marginal or “horizontal” awareness), awareness of one’s own experience (self-consciousness, in one sense), self-awareness (awareness-of-oneself), the self in different roles (as thinking, acting, etc.), embodied action (including kinesthetic awareness of one’s movement), purpose or intention in action (more or less explicit), awareness of other persons (in empathy, intersubjectivity, collectivity), linguistic activity (involving meaning, communication, understanding others), social interaction (including collective action), and everyday activity in our surrounding life-world (in a particular culture). (Smith 2013)

Thus, various forms of awareness can be cultivated in teaching translation to mitigate subjectivism and enhance objectivism, benefitting not only students, but also experienced translators seeking to improve the quality of their work. Even in the case of translation theory, *Epoché* facilitates an impartial description of translation, untethered from ideological or cultural biases. A phenomenological account seeks to understand translation on its own terms, not merely through existing beliefs, schools, or cultural frameworks. Whether this ideal can be fully realized remains an open question.

Alongside *Epoché*, eidetic reduction (*eidetische Reduktion*) plays a central role in Husserl’s phenomenological methodology. Its primary aim is to grasp the essence (*eidōs*) of any given phenomenon, by transitioning from individual, contingent instances to what is necessary and invariant. To accomplish this, Husserl introduces the technique of imaginative variation (*Phantasievariation*), which involves “varying” the given object or phenomenon by altering its features. Through this process it is then possible to observe which characteristics can be modified without compromising the identity of the object, and which remain indispensable: the latter constitute the phenomenon’s essence (*eidōs*). In the reduction everything irrelevant should be eliminated, leaving only the essence of the object to be analyzed (cf. Husserl 1967, 94; Strzyżewska 2014, 206–207).

The phenomenon of ‘translation’ can be observed from multiple perspectives, each revealing only partial aspects, or “shades”. Husserl describes the process of these partial representations as “shading”: the object is never represented to us in full view, only perceived from a certain viewpoint. So how do we capture the essence? Husserl attempts to analyze the process of viewing the essence via the theory of ‘free variations’. This method (described, together with others, in his *Phenomenological Psychology, Lectures*, 1925) is, according to Moran & Cohen, “central to Husserl’s methodology for moving from the individual instance to the viewing of essence” (2012, 160).

By considering the possible variants of the phenomenon known as ‘translation’, one arrives at an invariant, since, according to Husserl, the essence manifests itself through the free variations of an object, emerging as an invariant. It is crucial that “das Ideal nicht getrennt vom Realen und über diesem liegt, sondern daß es durch dieses erscheint” (Hamazu) (“the ideal is not disconnected from the reality and it doesn’t lie above it, but rather it appears through it”, my trans.). Free variation can be applied both to translation theory itself as an object and to

the translatable or translated literary work, as well as to its translation or translations. By examining possible variants, one can thus arrive at the invariant. This approach is, for example, useful in the analysis of the source text for translation purposes, but also in the analysis of a series of translations, since individual translations are precisely those variants – those aspects in which the original text shades off.¹⁶

Bearing in mind the role of variants and invariants in translation theory, Hejwowski's work may be commented on by noting that the interpretation formed in the mind of the recipient is only one of the possible variants in the consideration of a work and its translation; it represents merely one of its 'aspects'. The search for the essence – for the invariant – within the translation process should therefore be grounded in the intentional examination of the text from different perspectives, in order to arrive at that essence. Ultimately, however, each translation constitutes a variant that both partially reveals and simultaneously conceals the essence. In other words, perspective both contributes to concealment and allows for the misrepresentation of the object.¹⁷

Bocheński emphasises that objectivism is one of the fundamental principles of the phenomenological method: "In all enquiry thought should be concentrated exclusively on the object, to the complete elimination of everything subjective" (Bocheński 1965, 19). As a result,

the investigator should devote himself completely to the object of the enquiry, having regard only for what is objective. He must exclude everything that comes from himself, from the subject, above all his own feelings, desires, personal attitudes, etc. What is required from him is detached observation of the object, a pure theoretical approach, in the original Greek sense of the word "theory" (observation). The researcher who acts in accordance with this rule is a pure knowing essence, one who forgets himself completely. (Bocheński 1965)

As far as the attitude of the translator towards a literary text that is to be translated is concerned, the task requires detached observation and a theoretical, contemplative stance. Whether this is correct or feasible will be explored in the next section, with reference to Roman Ingarden's theory of the literary work of art.

¹⁶ "Das Ding schattet sich ab in seinen Aspekten" (Heidegger 1979, 58) ("The thing adumbrates, shades off in its aspects") (Heidegger 2002, 270). When Wawrzycka speaks of "the truth about the great value of the 'fresh eye' and a different 'ear' in evaluating and editing translations" (2024, 11), she addresses precisely this issue: a "fresh eye" and a "different ear," approaching a text from another perspective and through the lens of different experiences, can perceive alternative aspects, thereby enabling a deeper understanding of its essence. This idea becomes even more evident in another passage, where the perception of different aspects through the prism of alternative viewpoints is highlighted: "In our correspondence, Professor Heydel suggested the need for a new edition of the translation, proposing some changes that are inevitably prompted 'when a text, especially a translation, is looked at by a fresh eye,' by someone with a 'different linguistic sensitivity' and a different 'ear' – someone who can suggest lexical improvements, particularly since Ingarden's style 'is not friendly to the English language and to modern scientific temperament' (Wawrzycka 2024, 10).

¹⁷ Therefore, as Barańczak observes, successive translations of the same work – serving as complementary or polemical interpretative approaches – can illuminate new and additional layers of meaning in the original text (cf. Barańczak 2004, 14).

But there is another important principle within the phenomenological method which opposes the utilitarian approach common in contemporary translation studies. As Józef M. Bocheński highlights: “the rule requires a contemplative attitude, i.e. the exclusion of utilitarian considerations. The scientist must not ask himself what purpose this or that might serve, but purely and simply how it *is*” (1965, 19). This is surely a more appropriate principle than the utility-oriented attitude, since by identifying the essential qualities of the source text, including its function (what belongs to the essence), it then becomes possible to create a functionally equivalent translation.

This argument aligns well with the principles of the German translation theorist, Jörn Albrecht (1990), who posits that each text possesses an ‘objective given’ sense – one which is independent of specific reception acts¹⁸ – and asserts that constancy of function should be a *conditio sine qua non* for the existence of translation. In his opinion, with which I concur, translation, in the strict sense, occurs only when the function of the target text is directly derived from the essential features of the original¹⁹.

The Theory of *The Literary Work of Art* and Literary Translation

A phenomenologist who devoted considerable attention both to the essence of the literary work and to issues of translation was Husserl’s student from his time in Göttingen, the Polish philosopher and aesthetician Roman Ingarden. He published a dedicated article on translation in 1955, entitled “O tłumaczeniach” (“On Translations”). This article is conceptually based on an earlier work in which Ingarden identifies the specificity of the literary work and its constitutive elements – namely, the treatise *Das literarische Kunstwerk* (*The Literary Work of Art*). Therefore, this foundational work and its implications for translation will be discussed first, followed by a brief return to the article on translation.

The Literary Work of Art by Roman Ingarden

The Literary Work of Art, first published in 1931, offers a phenomenological analysis of a given literary work of art, examining its fundamental structure and nature. Ingarden conceives of the literary work of art as an ‘intentional object,’ distinguished both from material objects and from psychological states.²⁰ His starting

¹⁸ “ich gehe von der nützlichen Annahme aus, daß jeder Text einen ‘objektiv gegebenen’, d.h. unabhängig von allen konkreten Rezeptionsakten bestehenden Sinn aufweist”. (Albrecht 1990, 71)

¹⁹ “Ich würde demgegenüber Funktionskonstanz zur *conditio sine qua non* für das Vorliegen einer Übersetzung machen. Nur wenn die Funktion des Translats aus gewissen Merkmalen des Originals unmittelbar abgeleitet wurde, nur dann liegt eine Übersetzung im engeren Sinne vor.” (Albrecht 1990, 79)

²⁰ Ingarden points out that “the stratum of the literary work which is constructed out of word meanings, sentences, and complexes of sentences has no autonomous ideal existence but it is relative, in both its origin and its existence, to entirely determinate subjective conscious operations. On the other hand, however, it should not be identified with any concretely experienced ‘psychic content’ or with any real existence” (Ingarden 1973, 105–106). The identification of a literary work of art (and

point is also important for understanding translation as a product: on the one hand, as indicated above, the literary work cannot be equated with mental states and should be distinguished from them, and on the other, it is more than a mere material object.

According to Ingarden (1973, 29), every literary work is a stratified formation composed of four heterogeneous strata:

1. The stratum of *word sounds* and higher-order *phonetic formations* built from them.
2. The stratum of *meaning units* of various orders.
3. The stratum of *schematized aspects* and aspect continua and series.
4. The stratum of *represented objectivities* and their vicissitudes. (Ingarden (1973, 30)

These strata are interdependent, mutually influencing each other, and their interaction contributes to the polyphony of the work of art. Ingarden considers the stratum of meaning units as a fundamental layer which

provides the structural framework for the whole work. By its very essence it requires all the other strata and determines them in such a way that they have their ontic basis in it and are dependent in their content on its qualities. As elements of the literary work, they are thus inseparable from this central stratum. (Ingarden 1973, 29)

The first stratum refers to the sound shape of the text, “including the typical rhythms and melodies associated with phrases, sentences and paragraphs of various kinds” (Thomasson 2012) and although it is considered to be most important in poetry, it is in fact essential for any literary work. The third stratum encompasses different sensual aspects – visual, auditory, olfactory and tactile – which enable the represented objectivities, such as characters, places, events and states of affairs, to be apprehended ‘quasi-sensorially’.

Although I cannot delve into all the individual strata here, it should nevertheless be noted that in many translations, the fourth stratum appears to be the most significant, while the third is often ignored. Yet reproducing these schematized aspects is crucial for the quality of the transfer; the moment of ‘illustration’ (*Veranschaulichung*) turns out to be fundamental to the process of literary translation. This issue has been discussed in detail elsewhere (Kubaszczyk 2014, 2017).²¹

The Literary Work of Art as a Schematic Structure and ‘Concretization’

According to Ingarden, the possibility of multiple readings of a literary work – and, consequently, multiple translations – stems from its schematic structure. Essentially a schematic formation, the work contains gaps, spots of indeterminacy and schematized aspects. Certain components, such as schematized aspects, exist in potentiality and are held in readiness. Only a concretization (sometimes translated as ‘concretion’), completed via the act of reading, allows the work and its

its translation) with an experienced ‘mental content’ underlies the problem in Hejwowski’s cognitive approach, as well as in the similar opinions I critiqued above.

²¹ This issue of translating schematized aspects is also raised by Krauss (2010).

components to move from pure schematization into actuality and concreteness (cf. Ingarden 1988, 409f). Due to this schematization, multiple (translational) interpretations, all justified by the work itself, are possible.

According to Ingarden, there are two possible approaches to a literary work: the theoretical, purely knowing (*erkennend*), and the aesthetic. The theoretical approach grasps the work's schematic nature, but avoids the aesthetic perception, and blocks access to literature as an aesthetic object. Nevertheless, according to Ingarden, the aesthetic attitude is essential for encountering a literary work of art and is only possible in one of its concretizations. He calls this the 'sighted' or 'seeing' attitude, since it allows us to see in our imagination the represented objectivities of a literary work and to engage in an attitude of pure viewing toward them. Clearly, for Ingarden, the presentation (*Vergegenwärtigung*) of the work in the imagination plays an important role in the reception of a literary work of art.

The process of concretization involves all strata of a literary work of art: word sounds and linguistic units of a higher order are actualized (even if in silent reading they are purely imaginary). Meanings of words and sentences are realized through different potential interpretations, which can lead to shifts in the meaning of the text. The meaning of sentences does not reside in pure intentional potentiality; rather, it is actively realized by the reader. According to Ingarden, however, the main difference between a literary work and its concretizations is in the stratum of its schematized aspects; thus, it is vital that the spots of indeterminacy are filled during concretization (cf. Ingarden 1988, 418).

A purely theoretical recipient, however, need not adopt an aesthetic attitude of pure viewing, nor perform concretizations. Such a reader adheres closely to the text, revealing all the work's potentialities and indeterminacies. As a result, the individual spots of indeterminacy of the represented objectivities in the text are revealed but are not filled in, nor does the reader actualize the aspects or eliminate their schematization.

This raises an important question for the translation process: should the translator adopt a theoretical or aesthetic attitude? Is detecting and analyzing the work purely theoretically sufficient for a good translation? Or is aesthetic reception a necessary part of the reception of the work in the translation process, connected with concretization, filling in spots of indeterminacy, actualizing aspects and eliminating their schematization? In practice, both the theoretical approach (the gain in knowledge analysis), as well as the aesthetic ('seeing', 'viewing') approach are important and may alternate during translation.

The concept of concretization is crucial for phenomenologically-oriented translation theory. According to Ingarden,²² the reception of a work of art involves a number of subjective operations that are partly conscious and partly unconscious, including acts of perception and cognition, on which are based acts regarding the mental acquisition of meaning. Building on these acts, acts of imagination

²² I have devoted a separate text, published in Polish, to the issue of concretization, in which I discuss Ingarden's concept of concretization in greater detail within the context of translation. I reiterate certain points here to ensure the argument remains comprehensive (cf. Kubaszczyk, 2013).

(*Vorstellungsakte*) take place, wherein the represented objectivities are engaged within the presentation (*Vorstellung*).

The concretized reception of the literary work of art occurs in three stages: perception, semantization and imagination. In such an act of reception, the reader does not stop at merely understanding meaning; further cognitive operations – specifically, acts of imagination – build upon the actualized meaning, that is, the meaning as the reader has grasped and interpreted it. Yet, the reception of a literary work of art is never complete. Certain elements are always perceived, conceived and imagined with greater consciousness, while others may be overlooked or suppressed. Consequently, the work is always experienced in a state of ‘perspectival foreshortening’ (Ingarden 1973, 335). Readers are therefore never able to actualize all the qualities of the work in a single act of concretization. For example, they might fail to actualize the phonetic stratum or other layers of the work, focusing solely on its intellectual message.

However, concretizations are not entirely arbitrary. According to Ingarden, a concretization is, on the one hand, shaped by the reader’s corresponding experience, but, on the other hand, it has an ontic basis in the literary work itself (cf. 1988, 414). This interplay of objective and subjective factors means that a concretization is always doubly dependent: on the work of art itself, and on the subject engaging with it. This has several implications for translation (cf. Kubaszczyk, 2013):

- a) Any translation of a literary text is, by its very nature, a concretization, because it is an interpretation: “Translation relies on interpretation. Interpretation also involves a series of many, partly subconscious acts. Only a certain combination of these acts will lead us to ‘understand the message’ and discover its true content, that is, the truth it conveys” (Pisarkowa 1998, 11, my trans.).²³
- b) No two concretizations are identical; consequently, as a result of subjective binding, there will never be two identical translations. Concretizations rooted in the work itself are legitimate, because “Each work of art permits of a variety of legitimate concretizations which, unlike the work of art itself, may vary from viewer to viewer” (Thomasson 2012).
- c) The schematic aspects concretized in the translation can either conceal or reveal the original. The translation itself can, in fact, conceal the original by “acting out” something it is not. Therefore, before beginning a translation – and as part of translation criticism – it is essential to conduct specific research to determine the essence of the work. Such an analysis enables one to understand the extent to which changes can be made without either destroying the original work or creating an entirely new one (Ingarden 1988, 427).

²³ “Przekład żywi się interpretacją. I także ona jest zespołem wielu, częściowo podświadomych aktów. Dopiero pewna ich suma ma doprowadzić do tego, że ‘pojmiemy komunikat’, odkryjemy jego prawdziwą zawartość, czyli prawdę, którą niesie.” (Pisarkowa 1998, 11)

- d) Translation as a product differs from other concretizations in that it is itself a reverbalized, multilayered schematic formation: in the translated text, new schematic aspects and new zones of indeterminacy emerge.
- e) To qualify as a concretization of a given literary work of art rather than as a new work, a translation should not conceal the original; it must be grounded in it. Therefore, as Ingarden (1988, 430) emphasizes, it is necessary to properly “educate” the reader so that the concretization (translation) can adequately embody the original work. The techniques discussed above can serve this purpose.
- f) By adhering to the specifications of the original, the translator performing the translation fulfils the ‘ethical’ postulate. This postulate, which requires refraining from distorting or appropriating someone else’s work, ensures that the concretization does not obscure the original, in its concretization, thereby doing justice to the author.²⁴

A translation, in essence, pretends to be the original, replacing it in such a way that the absent object (original) appears present in the object that represents it (the translation) (cf. Ingarden 1988, 314f). Ingarden sees a similarity between icon and referent as verification of truthful representation (cf. Pisarkowa 1998, 13), believing that a literary work of art can undergo certain changes without losing its identity (Ingarden 1988, 437). *Mutatis mutandis*, transformation in the form of translation can also preserve the original’s identity if it does not conceal it. However, the translation must “embody” or “make present” what has been recreated (Ingarden 1988, 314). Nevertheless, capturing all features of the original is never fully possible due to our cognitive limitations (Ingarden 1988, 317), making translation a continuous, never-ending endeavor.

Translation and the Essence of the Original

For an understanding of Roman Ingarden’s phenomenological approach to translation, his article “O tłumaczeniach” [“On Translations”] is of key importance. The central idea presented in this article is **that translation depends on the essence of the original**. Consequently, the notion of ‘fidelity’ in translation cannot be considered in isolation from the type of text to which such fidelity is meant to apply.²⁵ Ingarden illustrates this by contrasting two kinds of texts: literary works and scholarly writings.

Ingarden argues that, due to the complex structure and rigorous composition of its constituent elements, a literary work can only be rendered in another language through a reconstruction that either preserves the identity of the original, or results in a qualitatively distinct work, markedly different from its source text

²⁴ The issue of translation ethics within the context of Ingarden’s work and thought is explored in detail by Bukowski (2024).

²⁵ Piotr de Bończa Bukowski, in his analysis of Ingarden’s concept of fidelity, emphasizes the need to situate it within the broader context of the philosopher’s overall reflections on translation (cf. Bukowski 2024, 14). However, since fidelity itself is not the central focus of this article – my primary concern lies with the fundamental possibility of accessing the essence that makes a faithful translation possible – I refer interested readers to Bukowski’s work.

(2013, 79–80). By introducing the notion of the very sameness (identity²⁶) of a literary work in translation, Ingarden emphasizes the importance of distinguishing the purely constructive elements of a work from those that influence its aesthetic perception (Ingarden 2013, 80).²⁷ These purely constructive elements form the foundation of the work and entail the presence of other components. For example, the stratum of meaning units conditions the emergence of represented objectivities within the work and, like the stratum of word sounds, may influence the stratum of schematized aspects. Although the stratum of meaning units plays a highly significant, constructive role in a literary work, its perceptual-aesthetic function is subordinate and sometimes even indifferent. The perception of the work is shaped by “the polyphonic harmony of aesthetically relevant qualities constituted on the foundations of all four strata of the work” (Ingarden 1991, 144). The challenge of literary translation lies in the fact that translations often either approximate the original in the stratum of word sounds and phonetic formations, while differing in the stratum of meaning units, or, conversely, preserve the meaning units while losing artistic qualities, particularly those related to sound (Ingarden 2013, 101). Yet the stratum of sounds is fundamental to literariness, especially in outstanding poetic works (Ingarden 2013, 100).

The situation is different in scholarly works, where the stratum of meaning units is fundamental both for the construction and perception of the work, since what matters is the meaning of words and higher-order semantic units, while other elements, if present, play only a subordinate and auxiliary role. Their alteration in translation does not affect its adequacy, provided that the stratum of meaning units remains intact (Ingarden 2013, 81). Therefore, for the reconstruction and preservation of the very sameness of a scholarly work, it is essential to maintain the meaning of the original sentences and, as far as possible, their order, preserving the logical relations between them.

Ingarden also highlights the properties of language that account for differences in the translation of both these types of verbal creation. While scientific language is subject to regulation, concepts are refined, and there is a tendency toward terminologization, the colloquial language used in literature “is also more deeply rooted in the life of an individual person” (Ingarden 2019, 96). Among the factors shaping the form of an ethnic colloquial language, Ingarden lists the psychologi-

²⁶ Ingarden distinguishes between ‘identity’ (*tożsamość*) and ‘sameness’ (*takożsamość*). Jolanta Wawrzyccka (Ingarden 1991, 141) translated *takożsamość* as “individuality”, which, in my view, does not fully capture the essence of this term. *Takożsamość* refers to the relation of the translation to the original, which is intended to be the same as the original. For this reason, I use the term “the very sameness” instead.

²⁷ In Wawrzyccka’s translation: “These changes, however, can be of such a nature that either, in spite of, them the work maintains its individual identity: or its identity is violated and in “translation” we acquire an entirely new work, markedly different in quality from the original. In considering the work’s individual identity, resp. individuality of the work in translation, it is highly important to distinguish the purely structural role of some of its components (or moments) from the perceptual-aesthetic role of often the same, but more often – different, parts of the work (that is to say, from their role as the elements and moments of the work’s unique visual shape especially in the work’s aesthetic perception).” (Ingarden 1991, 141–142)

cal characteristics of members of a given linguistic community, social relations, cultural contact under changing political conditions, and so forth (Ingarden 2019). These factors result in significant differences between the respective scientific and technical languages – which may even allow for a certain degree of artificiality – and natural ethnic languages.

From this phenomenological insight into essence, Ingarden concludes that the concept of fidelity cannot be applied uniformly to all types of verbal creation; rather, it must be defined separately for literary works and scholarly texts. *Mutatis mutandis*, this principle can also be extended to other kinds of translation. Penetrating the essence of the original may allow the mode of translation to be adapted to its *quiddity*, its true nature. Consequently, fidelity in translation cannot be understood as a fixed notion; rather, it assumes a different form in each instance. This is because translation, as a phenomenon, is configured not only through its observable aspects and manifestations – perceived within a perspectival foreshortening and subject to considerable variation, as illustrated by the contrast between literary works and scholarly texts – but primarily through its orientation toward its original source. Only after establishing the essence and identity of the original text – those constitutive elements without which it would cease to be what it is – can one aspire to create a translation that preserves this ontological sameness. This approach follows Ingarden's phenomenological framework, which emphasizes the determination of a work's essential structure as a prerequisite for any faithful translation.

Although only some aspects of a phenomenologically-oriented translation theory have been outlined here, I argue that applying phenomenological methods to translation studies and translation practice is highly promising. Such an approach can yield valuable insights, clarifying the essence of translation, and shedding light on many longstanding contentious theoretical and practical issues.

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