Translating Sartre’s “Being and Nothingness” in Mongolian language.

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Introduction.

For the university students of philosophy it is great importance to read classic philosophers from Socrates to Sartre. Such philosophers have made philosophy a force in our lives, our world and our vision in 2500 years of our modern world. Great philosophers like Plato and Aristotle developed knowledge and science. Hegel and Marx changed the dogmatic world in a human world.

To translate such classical books from German language into Mongolian language it is always big challenge for me. For three years I started with my students to translate Heidegger’s “Being and Time” and parallel Eric Fromm’s “To have or to Be”. Those two books were already translated and published. With Fromm’s book I planned to clear differences between two concepts “Being” and “Having” because in Mongolian language we have no word for “Having” exactly.

Now I am translating Sartre’s “Being and Nothingness”. After this book I would have completed three classic books about “Being”. In Mongolia we have no philosophical tradition to write philosophical books. There is only one philosophy department in Mongolia. The Philosophy is in a very crucial situation in Mongolia. There are very few Marxist-Leninist books translated from Russian language in the socialist era. There was no systematic philosophy research. Because it was Leninist ideological era the few philosophical books in very wrong concepts translated. People couldn’t understand such books and they used the joke “philosophy means not understanding”. On the other Hand people teaching religion and superstition under the cloak “philosophy”. Bertrand Russell said “Between theology and science there is No Man’s Land. This No Man’s Land is philosophy”.

So Sartre’s famous book is not only important for university students also to understand the society and human life of present time in Mongolia. Sartre was already thinking of constructing a serious philosophy which would provide guidance for life in the contemporary world by explaining the nature of the world and by expressing the human condition, what it is to live as a human being.

In this paper I introduce my philosophical work about translating classic philosophers into Mongolian language and discuss the problems of translate or not translate philosophical concepts. Because philosophy is a profession it is no help professional philosophical concepts to
translate. Immanuel Kant said “Thoughts without content are empty intuitions without concepts are blind.” So we have to go the way concepts in Greece and Latin language not to translate.

1. Three problems of translation of philosophical text.

At the beginning of translation of philosophical text there are three aspects to discuss. These are following:

a. Hermeneutics
b. Philosophy of language
c. Epistemology

a. Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the study of interpretation theory, and can be either the art of interpretation, or the theory and practice of interpretation.

Since Wilhelm Dilthey, the discipline of hermeneutics has detached itself from this central task and broadened its spectrum to all texts, including multimedia and to understanding the bases of meaning.

Advocates of this approach claim that such texts, and the people who produce them, cannot be studied using the same scientific methods as the natural sciences, thus use arguments similar to that of antipositivism. Moreover, they claim that such texts are conventionalized expressions of the experience of the author; thus, the interpretation of such texts will reveal something about the social context in which they were formed, but, more significantly, provide the reader with a means to share the experiences of the author. The reciprocity between text and context is part of what Heidegger called the hermeneutic circle.

Hans Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics is a development of the hermeneutics of his teacher, Heidegger. Gadamer asserts that methodical contemplation is opposite to experience and reflection. We can reach the truth only by understanding or even mastering our experience. Experience according to Gadamer isn’t fixed but rather changing and always indicating new perspectives. The most important thing is to unfold what constitutes individual comprehension.

Gadamer points out in this context that prejudice is a (nonfixed) reflection of that unfolding comprehension, and is not per se without value. Being alien to a particular tradition is a condition of understanding. Gadamer points out that we can never step outside of our tradition; all we can do is try to understand it. This further elaborates the idea of the hermeneutic circle.

The central principle of hermeneutics is that it is only possible to grasp the meaning of an action or statement by relating it to the whole discourse or world-view from which it originates: for instance, putting a piece of paper in a box might be considered a meaningless action unless put in the context of democratic elections, and the action of putting a ballot paper in a box. One can
frequently find reference to the “hermeneutic circle”: that is, relating the whole to the part and the part to the whole.

b. Philosophy of language

Philosophy of language is the reasoned inquiry into the nature, origins, and usage of language. As a topic, the philosophy of language for analytic philosophers is concerned with four central problems: the nature of meaning, language use, language cognition, and the relationship between language and reality. For continental philosophers, however, the philosophy of language tends to be dealt with, not as a separate topic, but as a part of logic, history or politics.

First, philosophers of language inquire into the nature of meaning, and seek to explain what it means to “mean” something. Topics in that vein include the nature of synonymy, the origins of meaning itself, and how any meaning can ever really be known. Another project under this heading of special interest to analytic philosophers of language is the investigation into the manner in which sentences are composed into a meaningful whole out of the meaning of its parts.

Second, they would like to understand what speakers and listeners do with language in communication, and how it is used socially. Specific interests may include the topics of language learning, language creation, and speech acts.

Third, they would like to know how language relates to the minds of both the speaker and the interpreter. Of specific interest are the grounds for successful translation of words into other words.

Finally, they investigate how language and meaning relate to truth and the world. Philosophers tend to be less concerned with which sentences are actually true, and more with what kinds of meanings can be true or false. A truth-oriented philosopher of language might wonder whether or not a meaningless sentence can be true or false, or whether or not sentences can express propositions about things that do not exist, rather than the way sentences are used.

Translation and interpretation are two other problems that philosophers of language have attempted to confront. In the 1950s, W. V. Quine argued for the indeterminacy of meaning and reference based on the principle of radical translation. In Word and Objection, Quine asks the reader to imagine a situation in which he is confronted with a previously undocumented, primitive tribe and must attempt to make sense of the utterances and gestures that its members make. This is the situation of radical translation.

Inspired by Quine's discussion, Donald Davidson extended the idea of radical translation to the interpretation of utterances and behavior within a single linguistic community. He dubbed this notion radical interpretation. He suggested that the meaning that any individual ascribed to a sentence could only be determined by attributing meanings to many, perhaps all, of the individual's assertions as well as his mental states and attitudes.

c. Epistemology
Epistemology or theory of knowledge is the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature and scope (limitations) of knowledge. It addresses the questions:

- What is knowledge?
- How is knowledge acquired?
- How do we know what we know?

Much of the debate in this field has focused on analyzing the nature of knowledge and how it relates to connected notions such as truth, belief, and justification. It also deals with the means of production of knowledge, as well as skepticism about different knowledge claims.

The primary problem in epistemology is to understand exactly what is needed in order for us to have true knowledge. In a notion derived from Plato's dialogue Theaetetus, philosophy has traditionally defined knowledge as "justified true belief". The relationship between belief and knowledge is that a belief is knowledge if the belief is true, and if the believer has a justification (reasonable and necessarily plausible assertions/evidence/guidance) for believing it is true.

Plato tended to oppose knowledge to doxa, which led to the classical opposition of error to truth. A false belief is not considered to be knowledge, even if it is sincere. Belief is a subjective personal basis for individual behavior, while truth is an objective state independent of the individual, i.e., a fact.

2. Translation of Erich Fromm’s “To Have or to Be”

To avoid the problem that there is in mongolian language no word for “to have” exactly Erich Fromm’s book before Heidegger’s “Being and Time” was translated and published in 2010. Erich Fromm truly said in his book that in some languages there is no word for “to have”. For example: in Jewish language.

But in Mongolia we have since Perestroika a very strong capitalism. So people have enormous possibility to own state properties from the socialist era. The word for “Having” grows up. So I found out in Mongolian language the word “Bii” for “to have”. Erich Fromm has also written in his book that through the capitalism many languages produced the word “to have”. In his book, Erich Fromm has differentiated between having and being. The writer mentions how the modern society has become materialistic and prefers “having” than “being”.

The society nowadays has completely deviated from its actual path. The materialistic nature of people of “having” has been more developed than “being”. The modern industrialization has made great promises, but all these promises are developed to fulfill their interests and increase their possessions.

In every mode of life, the people should ponder more on “being” nature and not towards the “having” nature. This is the truth which people deny and thus the people of modern world have completely lost their inner selves. The point of being is more important as everyone is mortal,
and thus having of possessions will become useless after their death because the possessions which are transferred to the life after death, will be what the person actually was inside.

3. Translation of Heidegger’s “Being and Time”

Being and Time (German: Sein und Zeit, 1927) is a book by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger. Although written quickly, and despite the fact that Heidegger never completed the project outlined in the introduction, it remains his most important work and has profoundly influenced 20-century philosophy, particularly existentialism, hermeneutics and deconstruction.

Main concepts in this book are “Being”, “Dasein” and “Entity”. The word Dasein has been not translated in Mongolian language because we have no experience with this word. For month ago was this famous book under the title “Baih ba Hugacaa” published.

On the first page of Being and Time, Heidegger describes the project in the following way: “our aim in the following treatise is to work out the question of the sense of being and to do so concretely.” Heidegger claims that traditional ontology has prejudicially overlooked this question, dismissing it as overly general, undefinable, or obvious.

Instead Heidegger proposes to understand being itself, as distinguished from any specific entities (beings). “Being is not something like a being.” Being, Heidegger claims, is “what determines beings as beings, that in terms of which beings are already understood.” Heidegger is seeking to identify the criteria or conditions by which any specific entity can show up at all.

Thus the question Heidegger asks in the introduction to Being and Time is: what is the being that will give access to the question of the meaning of Being? Heidegger's answer is that it can only be that being for whom the question of Being is important, the being for whom Being matters. As this answer already indicates, the being for whom Being is a question is not a what, but a who.

Heidegger calls this being Dasein (an ordinary German word meaning, roughly, “(human) existence” or, more literally, “being-there”), and the method pursued in Being and Time consists in the attempt to delimit the characteristics of Dasein, in order thereby to approach the meaning of Being itself through an interpretation of the temporality of Dasein. Dasein is not “man,” but is nothing other than “man”—it is this distinction that enables Heidegger to claim that Being and Time is something other than philosophical anthropology.

Heidegger's account of Dasein passes through a dissection of the experiences of Angst and mortality, and then through an analysis of the structure of “care” as such. From there he raises the problem of “authenticity,” that is, the potentiality or otherwise for mortal Dasein to exist fully enough that it might actually understand being. Heidegger is clear throughout the book that nothing makes certain that Dasein is capable of this understanding.

Thus, more generally, the outcome of the progression of Heidegger's argument is the thought that the being of Dasein is time. Nevertheless, Heidegger concludes his work with a set of enigmatic
questions foreshadowing the necessity of a destruction (that is, a transformation) of the history of philosophy in relation to temporality—these were the questions to be taken up in the never completed continuation of his project:

4. Translating Sartre’s “Being and Nothingness”

Important concepts in this book are “existent”, “existence” and “essence”. In Mongolian language we have very similar words for existent and existence. There are two concepts “Orshihuud” and “Orshin”. But for the word “essence” we have no word to translate.

Being and Nothingness is a 1943 philosophical treatise by Jean Paul Sartre. Its main purpose was to assert the individual's existence as prior to the individual's essence. Sartre had begun to write his systematic statement of his philosophic viewpoint during the gloomy winter of 1942 in occupied France.

Like most of the work of Sartre and de Beauvoir during this period much of Being and Nothingness was written in the Left Bank cafes of Paris, in an atmosphere filled with sounds of voices and the clinking of silverware and dishes, the smells of coffee, cigarettes, food, and wine, and sights of customers entering, leaving, and circulating among their acquaintances at the brightly lighted tables.

Sartre has occasionally been accused of being a “cafe philosopher,” suggesting that his writing is not serious scholarship or that it is only a mirror for this passing human scene, the fascinating but frivolous flux of the cafe, rather than being concerned with the serious realm of truth. But in the defense of Sartre, it is only fair to say that many things recommended the cafe as a place to write at that time.

First, and of immediate importance, the cafes were heated, unlike the bitter cold of the tiny, ugly Left Bank hotel rooms in which Sartre lived during the war years. Moreover, the cafes of the great European cities have traditionally been places of intellectuals, radicals of the left and right. But especially for Sartre, who is seeking, like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche before him, to develop a philosophy of human existence which will confront the moral issues of the modern world, the life of the cafe is a continual bubbling sources of the concrete human existence he wishes to capture.

In the introduction, Sartre sketches his own theory of consciousness, being and phenomena through criticism of both earlier phenomenologists (most notably Husserl and Heidegger) as well as idealists, rationalists and empiricists. According to him one of the major achievements of modern philosophy has been to free us of the kinds of dualism that set the existent up as having a “hidden” nature as with Kant's noumenon; Phenomenology has removed “the illusion of worlds behind the scene.”

Based on an examination of the nature of phenomena, he describes the nature of two aspects of being, being-in-itself and being-for-itself. While being-in-itself is something that can only be
approximated, a sort of being that can only be imagined as itself if it is imagined without a witnessing consciousness, being-for-itself is the being of consciousness.

Sartre has written in the very first line of Being and Nothingness:

   Modern thought has realized considerable progress by reducing the existent to the series of appearances which manifest. Its aim was to overcome a certain number of dualisms which have embarrassed philosophy and to replace them by monism of the phenomenon.

For Sartre “We are not causally necessitated things, we are totally free conscious Beings. Sartre’ book is very actual today understanding problems between dualism and monism. Sartre has concluded at this point that consciousness is the starting point of philosophy.

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