



BEYOND EQUIVALENCE: A HERMENEUTIC FRAMEWORK FOR TRANSLATIONAL UNDERSTANDING

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Abstract

Hermeneutics – the philosophy of interpreting meaning – has long informed literary criticism and theology, yet its contributions to translation studies are still unfolding. This article synthesises classical hermeneutic insights and recent empirical findings to propose an integrated model in which translation is viewed as a recursive dialogue between text, translator, and socio-historical context. After reviewing key philosophical foundations, we map hermeneutic principles onto contemporary process-oriented translation models and illustrate their explanatory power through literary and technical cases. We argue that a hermeneutic lens clarifies why purely algorithmic equivalence fails to capture intercultural meaning and offers pedagogical benefits for cultivating critical reflexivity in translators. The conclusion outlines research trajectories for integrating cognitive logging methods with hermeneutic theory in an era of machine-mediated multilingual communication.

Keywords: Hermeneutic Translation, pre-understanding, hermeneutic circle, horizon fusion, reflective competence, machine translation post-editing, contextual embedding, translation pedagogy

Introduction

Dominant paradigms in translation studies have oscillated between linguistic equivalence, functionalist skopos, and sociological turns. Recently, scholars have revisited hermeneutics to explain how translators construct meaning beyond surface correspondences (Stolze, 2011). Hermeneutic thinking views language



not merely as a code but as a historically situated medium in which understanding is co-produced by interpreter and text (Gadamer, 2004). By reframing translation as an event of anlaying – *interpretatio* in Aristotle’s sense – the hermeneutic paradigm foregrounds interpreter subjectivity, pre-understanding, and the fusion of horizons. This article offers a systematic account of how hermeneutics enriches our comprehension of translation processes and outcomes.

In his 1813 lecture, Schleiermacher distinguished two translatorly moves: “to bring the reader to the author” (foreignising) and “to bring the author to the reader” (domesticating). Both paths presuppose a dialogic act of understanding in which linguistic form and cultural context interact (Schleiermacher, 1813/2012).

Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* extends hermeneutics from textual exegesis to all acts of historical understanding. Meaning emerges when the interpreter’s horizon intersects with the text’s horizon, creating a negotiated vantage point that is neither purely original nor purely contemporary (Gadamer, 2004). Translation thus becomes a “conversation” rather than a transfer.

Building on these foundations, Paepcke (1986) and Stolze (2011) systematise hermeneutics into a translation-process model comprising pre-understanding, analytical exploration, textual restructuring, and evaluative revision. Empirical studies using eye-tracking and keystroke logging confirm that experienced translators oscillate between holistic comprehension and analytic problem-solving, mirroring hermeneutic circles (Krüger, 2022).

Every translator brings linguistic competence and world knowledge that shape initial expectations. Cognitive models such as Alves and Hurtado’s (2014) stylus of expertise align with hermeneutic “fore-structures.” However, hermeneutics adds a normative dimension: pre-understanding must remain open to revision, avoiding “fore-closure” that would freeze horizons.

Translation progresses through iterative spirals: initial comprehension, target-language reformulation, back-referencing to the source, and horizon adjustment. This circularity is visible in pause-burst patterns captured by Translog-II and Tobii eye trackers (Krüger, 2022), supporting hermeneutic claims that understanding deepens through successive approximations.



Unlike code models, the hermeneutic view embeds every textual element in layers of socio-historical meaning. Terminological clean-room procedures in technical translation, for instance, cannot be divorced from institutional ethics – patient safety, environmental norms – that pervade specialised discourse (Prandi, 2023).

Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* contains multilevel irony and biblical allusion. A hermeneutic translator confronts not only wordplay but the Soviet censorship context. When translating “он не заслужил покоя” (“he has not deserved peace”), a literal rendering misses the subtext of state persecution; a hermeneutically informed choice – “he had never been granted repose” – preserves both semantics and oppressive undertones. The translator's horizon must fuse early-20th-century Soviet nuance with contemporary readership expectations of stylistic verisimilitude.

Biomedical device instructions require absolute clarity, yet they also encode the manufacturer's liability ethos. A machine-translation output for “Ensure the catheter is primed” might yield the literal Uzbek *Katetrni tayyorlang*. In surgical parlance, however, *tayyorlash* implies general preparation, not fluid priming. A hermeneutically savvy translator opts for *Katetrni eritma bilan to'ldiring*, explicitly referencing solution filling, thus fusing pragmatic, semantic, and ethical horizons.

Translation curricula often prioritise linguistic accuracy and CAT tool proficiency. Integrating hermeneutic exercises – textual diaries, horizon-mapping, dialogic peer reviews – cultivates critical reflexivity (Kiraly, 2016). Students learn to articulate their pre-understandings and consciously negotiate them during translation.

Neural machine translation (NMT) excels at surface fluency yet lacks situated understanding. Post-editors frequently encounter culturally embedded idioms that NMT flattens. The hermeneutic model provides theoretical grounding for post-editing guidelines that emphasise meaning reconstruction over form preservation (Toral & Koehn, 2020).

Combining hermeneutic theory with process-based empirical tools – eye-tracking, keystroke logging, retrospective protocols – can map micro-events of horizon adjustment. Such mixed-methods studies will reveal how translators



navigate the hermeneutic circle under time pressure, shedding light on expertise development.

Hermeneutics repositions translation from a code-switching exercise to an interpretive endeavour in which meaning is co-constructed through historically informed dialogue. By integrating pre-understanding, recursive analysis, and contextual embedding into process models, a hermeneutic framework explains both literary creativity and technical precision. Pedagogically, it fosters reflective translators capable of mediating personal, textual, and social horizons. As machine systems assume routine transfer tasks, hermeneutic competence becomes the differentiator for nuanced intercultural communication. Future scholarship should operationalise hermeneutic constructs with cognitive data to build actionable models for an AI-augmented translation profession. (1,206 words)

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