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HERMENEUTIC APPROACH TO THE HISTORY, THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TRANSLATION

ГЕРМЕНЕВТИЧНИЙ ПІДХІД ДО ІСТОРІЇ, ТЕОРІЇ ТА ПРАКТИКИ ПЕРЕКЛАДУ

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This article explores translation as a fundamentally hermeneutic act, rather than a purely technical or linguistic operation. Drawing on philosophical and literary traditions from antiquity to the twentieth century, the study argues that translation is best understood as a form of situated interpretation – one that involves dialogical engagement, historical consciousness, and ethical responsibility. Beginning with the foundational reflections of Cicero, Horace, and Saint Jerome, the article traces the evolution of translation theory through the German Romantics, especially in the writings of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who conceptualised translation as a creative, culturally embedded, and historically variable act. Building on this lineage, the study turns to modern hermeneutic philosophers – particularly Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Walter Benjamin, and George Steiner – whose contributions reframe translation as a recursive process of meaning-making, shaped by the translator's own preconceptions, historical location, and interpretive horizon. The article closely examines the implications of such concepts as the hermeneutic circle, the fusion of horizons, and the fourfold hermeneutic motion, arguing that these models offer a more comprehensive and humanistic approach to translation than dominant linguistic or functionalist paradigms. Special attention is paid to Walter Benjamin's vision of translation as the revelation of pure language, Schleiermacher's preference for foreignization over domestication, and Steiner's model of translation as an ethical encounter. The article critiques the reduction of translation to equivalence-based systems and instead proposes an understanding of the translator as a reflective, culturally literate subject who negotiates meaning across temporal and linguistic divides. By highlighting the interpretive agency of the translator and the epistemological openness of the translation act, the study advances a model that is at once historically grounded, philosophically informed, and pedagogically relevant. Ultimately, this hermeneutic approach encourages a rethinking of translator education, emphasizing critical thinking, cultural sensitivity, and the integration of philosophical reflection into translator training. It offers a compelling alternative to technocratic and instrumental conceptions of translation by restoring its complexity as a creative, ethical, and dialogical act of understanding. As globalisation and cross-cultural communication continue to accelerate, the relevance of such an approach grows ever more significant, calling for translation theorists and practitioners alike to engage more deeply with the philosophical foundations of their discipline.

Key words: history of translation, general and classical theories of translation, hermeneutics, interpretation, translator's agency.

У статті розглянуто переклад як насамперед герменевтичний акт, а не виключно технічну чи лінгвістичну операцію. Спираючись на філософську та літературну традиції – від античності до XX століття, автор доводить, що переклад слід розуміти як форму ситуативного тлумачення, що передбачає діалогічну взаємодію, історичну обізнаність і етичну відповідальність. Вихідною точкою аналізу є класичні міркування Цицерона, Горація та Св. Єроніма, після чого простежується розвиток перекладацької думки в межах німецького романтизму, зокрема в роботах Фрідріха Шлегеля та Йоганна

Вольфганга фон Гете, які розглядали переклад як творчий, культурно обумовлений і історично змінний процес. Спираючись на цю інтелектуальну традицію, стаття звертається до ідей сучасних герменевтичних філософів – насамперед Мартіна Гайдеггера, Ганса-Георга Гадамера, Вальтера Беньяміна та Джорджа Стайнера. Їхній внесок переосмислює переклад як рекурсивний процес створення значення, який формується завдяки перекладацьким налаштуванням, історичному контексту й інтерпретаційним горизонтам перекладача. У роботі детально розглядаються такі поняття, як герменевтичне коло, злиття горизонтів та чотирифазна герменевтична модель Стайнера. Стаття доводить, що ці підходи пропонують глибший і гуманістичніший погляд на переклад, ніж домінантні функціоналістські чи мовні теорії. Особлива увага приділяється баченню перекладу у Вальтера Беньяміна як одкровення «чистої мови», позиції Ф. Шляєрмахера щодо переваги іноземнення над окультуренням, а також моделі Дж. Стайнера як етичної взаємодії. У статті піддано критиці редуцію перекладу до систем еквівалентності та натомість запропоновано розуміння перекладача як свідомого, культурно компетентного суб'єкта, що веде міжчасову й міжмовну інтерпретацію. Підкреслюється активна роль перекладача у створенні значення та відкритість перекладацького акту до множинності інтерпретацій. У підсумку, герменевтичний підхід відкриває нові перспективи для перекладацької освіти, акцентуючи увагу на критичному мисленні, культурній чутливості та філософській рефлексії. Він пропонує альтернативу технократичним та інструментальним моделям перекладу, повертаючи йому статус творчого, етичного та діалогічного акту розуміння. В умовах глобалізації та інтенсивного міжкультурного обміну така перспектива набуває особливої актуальності, закликаючи як теоретиків, так і практиків звернутися до глибоких філософських основ перекладацької діяльності.

Ключові слова: історія перекладу, загальні та класичні теорії перекладу, герменевтика, інтерпретація, перекладацька суб'єктність.

Relevance of the Problem. The study of translation, situated at the crossroads of linguistics, philosophy, literature, and cultural studies, has long reflected the evolving dynamics of meaning, interpretation, and human communication. While contemporary translation theory is increasingly enriched by interdisciplinary insights, the hermeneutic approach remains underrepresented in mainstream models, despite its foundational role in shaping our understanding of interpretation, intention, and textual multiplicity. This is particularly evident when revisiting the historical evolution of translation practice and theory – from antiquity to the modern era – through the lens of hermeneutics.

The history of translation is inseparable from the broader intellectual history of humanity. From Cicero's [1] and Horace's [2, c. 118–128] reflections on literary fidelity and rhetorical purpose in Ancient Rome, to St. Jerome's formulation of *sense-for-sense* versus *word-for-word* translation in the 4th century CE [3, c. 112], early debates surrounding the translator's responsibility and interpretive agency reveal enduring tensions between literalism and interpretative freedom. In the medieval period, translation became a vehicle for theological orthodoxy and cross-cultural transmission, while during the Renaissance, humanist translators elevated translation as an act of scholarly exegesis. Each of these stages invites re-evaluation through the hermeneutic paradigm, foregrounding the translator as an interpreter deeply embedded in historical, philosophical, and linguistic horizons.

In the classical and general theories of translation, especially those developed in the 20th century, the emphasis gradually shifted from normative prescriptions to functionalist, communicative, and cognitive models. While influential theories by E. Nida [4, c. 159–160] (dynamic equivalence), R. Jakobson [5, c. 232–239] (intersemiotic translation), and J. P. Vinay and J. Darbelnet [6, c. 30–39] (translation procedures) have contributed significantly to systematising translation methods, they have tended to prioritise technical transfer over interpretative depth. Conversely, hermeneutically inclined scholars – such as George Steiner [7], Paul Ricœur [8], and Hans-Georg Gadamer [9] – have emphasized the translator's role in the dialogical negotiation between texts, cultures, and temporalities. For them, translation is not simply a transaction of code, but a process of understanding shaped by prejudice, context, and historicity.

Given the increasing globalisation of communication and the growing interest in translation as a cultural and ethical act, there is a pressing need to revisit the hermeneutic dimension of translation – both in theory and in practice. This perspective challenges reductive notions of equivalence and promotes a more nuanced understanding of translation as an act of interpretation, where meaning is never fixed but always contingent, mediated, and re-enacted.

Therefore, the relevance of a hermeneutic approach lies not only in its historical continuity with earlier traditions of translation thinking but also in its potential to address current theoretical gaps. It offers a framework capable of integrating textual, philosophical, and experiential layers of translation, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive, reflective, and human-centred theory of translation practice.

Analysis of Studies and Publications. The hermeneutic approach to translation, although less prominent in mainstream functionalist or linguistic paradigms, draws upon a rich lineage of philosophical and literary thought that has deeply influenced the intellectual foundations of translation studies. Its historical roots can be traced to the German Romantics [10, c. 55–66], whose aesthetic and philosophical engagement with language laid the groundwork for understanding translation as a transformative, interpretive, and culturally embedded act.

A seminal moment in the emergence of the hermeneutic tradition was Friedrich Schleiermacher's 1813 lecture *Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens* (On the Different Methods of Translating) [11, c. 43–63], which remains one of the cornerstones of philosophical translation theory. F. Schleiermacher distinguished between two opposing approaches to translation: “bringing the author to the reader” (domestication) and “bringing the reader to the author” (foreignization) [11, c. 49–50]. His preference for the latter highlights the translator's role in preserving the alienating and resistant qualities of the original, thus positioning translation as an interpretive event that resists assimilation and invites the target reader into a foreign linguistic and cultural world. F. Schleiermacher's ideas have had a lasting impact on later thinkers, particularly in their emphasis on preserving difference and foregrounding the subjectivity of the translator.

Closely related are the reflections of Wolfgang von Goethe, who, in his essay on world literature, outlined three epochs of translation: the prosaic or servile phase, the accommodative or imitative phase, and the creative or transformative phase [12, c. 60–66]. These stages suggest a developmental model in which translation evolves from literal fidelity toward interpretive freedom and, ultimately, cultural dialogue. W. von Goethe's insights resonate with the hermeneutic view that translation is not merely linguistic substitution but a culturally and historically situated act of mediation.

In the 20th century, Martin Heidegger's [13] philosophical hermeneutics – particularly his concept of the hermeneutic circle [13, c. 194–195] – introduced a framework that redefined interpretation as a dynamic and recursive process. For M. Heidegger, understanding is never objective or neutral but is shaped by the interpreter's preconceptions and historical context. Applied to translation, this principle suggests that meaning emerges not from the text alone but from the interplay between the translator's horizon and that of the original. Translation thus becomes a hermeneutic negotiation, in which comprehension is deepened through a continuous movement between parts and wholes, source and target, self and other.

Building on these philosophical premises, Walter Benjamin's influential essay *The Task of the Translator* (1923) [14, c. 69–82] offers a profoundly metaphysical account of translation. For W. Benjamin, translation does not merely communicate information but reveals the “pure language” latent within all texts [14, c. 71–72] – a concept grounded in his messianic and linguistic philosophy. He conceives of translation as a revelatory act, one that uncovers hidden affinities between languages and contributes to the unfolding of linguistic truth. While W. Benjamin's position remains abstract and poetic, his insistence on the transformative and non-instrumental nature of translation remains central to the hermeneutic tradition.

In the late 20th century, George Steiner provided perhaps the most comprehensive articulation of translation as a hermeneutic act in his landmark work *After Babel* (1975) [7]. G. Steiner's model of translation as hermeneutic motion outlines four stages: trust, aggression, incorporation, and restitution [7, c. 312–320]. These phases conceptualize translation as an ethically and interpretively charged encounter between texts and cultures. Crucially, G. Steiner rejects the idea of translation as neutral transfer; instead, he posits it as an existential and dialogical process in which the translator both interprets and re-creates meaning across linguistic and temporal divides.

Collectively, these thinkers have contributed to a body of scholarship that views translation not as a mechanical act of linguistic equivalence but as a form of interpretive engagement. Their works underscore the philosophical depth, ethical complexity, and historical contingency inherent in the act of translation. Contemporary hermeneutic approaches build upon this tradition, reaffirming the relevance of these early contributions in a context increasingly shaped by multilingualism, intercultural exchange, and critical theory.

Research Aim. The aim of this study is to examine translation as a fundamentally interpretive act, drawing on the hermeneutic tradition in philosophy and literary theory. By situating translation within the broader framework of hermeneutics, the research seeks to challenge mechanistic and instrumental models of translation that reduce it to linguistic equivalence or functional transfer. Instead, it conceptualizes translation as a dialogical, historically situated, and ethically charged process of understanding.

Specifically, the study aims to: a) revisit key historical milestones in the development of translation theory through a hermeneutic lens; b) explore how classical and modern thinkers – such as F. Schleiermacher [11], W. von Goethe [12], M. Heidegger [13], W. Benjamin [14], and G. Steiner [7] – have contributed to the philosophical foundations of translation as interpretation; c) analyze the implications of hermeneutic principles (such as the hermeneutic circle, horizon of expectation, and subjectivity of the interpreter) for both the theory and practice of translation; d) argue for a reorientation of translation studies toward a more nuanced, human-centered, and philosophically grounded model of translational understanding.

Presentation of the Main Research Material. Translation has long been theorised as a functional activity, one concerned with transferring meaning, preserving equivalence, and maintaining communicative clarity between languages. Yet such models – while valuable in technical or pragmatic contexts – often fail to capture the interpretive depth and existential complexity involved in the act of translating a literary, philosophical, or culturally embedded text. A hermeneutic approach reframes translation not as a mechanical operation but as a situated act of understanding, shaped by the translator's historical position, preconceptions, and dialogical engagement with the source text.

Central to the hermeneutic view is the notion that understanding is always interpretation, never a transparent reflection of an objective meaning. This insight, derived from M. Heidegger [13] and H.-G. Gadamer [9], positions the translator as a co-creator of meaning rather than a neutral mediator. When approaching a text, the translator brings their own “horizon of expectation” (H.-G. Gadamer) [9, c. 302–305] into contact with that of the source, initiating a fusion of horizons in which new meaning emerges.

This dynamic is vividly exemplified in Friedrich Schleiermacher's opposition between “bringing the author to the reader” and “bringing the reader to the author” [11, c. 49–50]. From a hermeneutic standpoint, this dichotomy is not simply a choice between foreignization and domestication but a reflection of deeper epistemological commitments: whether translation aims to preserve the strangeness and alterity of the original or to assimilate it into the reader's world. F. Schleiermacher's preference for foreignization implies that the translator's task is not merely to render meaning accessible but to provoke interpretive effort on the part of the reader – an idea that closely parallels H.-G. Gadamer's emphasis on dialogue and difference as conditions for genuine understanding [9, c. 302–305].

M. Heidegger's [13, c. 194–195] concept of the hermeneutic circle – the idea that understanding moves back and forth between parts and wholes, shaped by the interpreter's pre-judgments – offers a

compelling model for the translator's work. A translator does not approach the text as a *tabula rasa*, but with prior knowledge, assumptions, and cultural perspectives that condition their choices. At the same time, the act of translating requires continuous revision and reinterpretation of earlier understandings in light of new textual insights. Thus, translation becomes a recursive process in which meaning is never final but constantly negotiated.

This recursive model is particularly relevant when dealing with texts marked by stylistic ambiguity, historical depth, or philosophical complexity. For instance, in translating Walter Benjamin's *The Task of the Translator* [14, c. 69–82], one must engage with a text that itself resists paraphrase and instrumental reduction. W. Benjamin's view of translation as a "renewal" of language – a gesture toward *pure language* [14, c. 71–72] – illustrates how the translator, rather than resolving ambiguity, must sustain it, keeping open the multiplicity of meaning that defines the source.

George Steiner's [7, c. 312–320] fourfold model of hermeneutic motion – trust, aggression, incorporation, and restitution – further articulates the moral and interpretive responsibilities of the translator. Trust is the assumption that the text is worth engaging; aggression is the intrusion into the foreign structure; incorporation is the act of absorbing the text into the translator's language and culture; restitution is the ethical obligation to honour the integrity of the original. This model underscores the idea that translation is not only an act of interpretation but also of ethical hospitality, in which the translator must balance fidelity to the text with sensitivity to its context and cultural resonance.

A hermeneutic analysis also reveals the limitations of models that privilege functional accuracy or message transfer. While such models may suffice for technical documentation or informational content, they fall short when applied to texts whose meaning is inseparable from form, tone, historical allusion, or intertextuality. In these cases, the translator must act as both interpreter and writer, recreating meaning not by matching signs but by re-enacting interpretive acts in a new linguistic and cultural framework [15, c. 377–394].

The hermeneutic model carries important implications for translator education and professional development. Rather than treating translation solely as a skill-based activity governed by rules and equivalences, a hermeneutic approach advocates for critical, reflective, and interpretively aware translators. This includes training in the history of ideas, familiarity with philosophical and literary traditions, and an awareness of the translator's own positionality. Such training would prepare translators not only to navigate semantic challenges but to engage with texts as interlocutors, attuned to nuance, ambiguity, and historical embeddedness [16, c. 185–209].

Moreover, in a globalised world where translation increasingly mediates between deeply diverse cultures and epistemologies, the hermeneutic approach foregrounds the ethical and political dimensions of translation. It encourages translators to think critically about whose voices are being translated, how they are represented, and what assumptions underlie the translation process itself.

Conclusions. This study has sought to reposition translation within the broader philosophical tradition of hermeneutics, offering an alternative to functionalist and technocratic models that continue to dominate much of contemporary translation theory. By revisiting key historical milestones in the development of translation theory through a hermeneutic lens, the analysis has shown that debates about the nature and purpose of translation – dating back to antiquity and extending through the German Romantic period – have consistently been informed by questions of interpretation, cultural otherness, and the translator's agency. These historical trajectories not only reveal the enduring complexity of translation but also highlight the inadequacy of purely instrumental paradigms in capturing its full epistemological and ethical dimensions.

Classical and modern thinkers – specifically F. Schleiermacher, W. von Goethe, M. Heidegger, W. Benjamin, and G. Steiner – have contributed to the philosophical foundations of translation as interpretation. Each of these figures, in their own historical and intellectual contexts, has advanced

a vision of translation not as mechanical transfer but as a dialogical, ethically charged encounter between languages and worldviews. F. Schleiermacher's distinction between domestication and foreignization, W. von Goethe's triadic model of translational development, M. Heidegger's hermeneutic circle, W. Benjamin's notion of "pure language," and G. Steiner's fourfold hermeneutic motion all offer powerful frameworks for understanding translation as a recursive, transformative, and meaning-generating act.

The study has also examined the implications of key hermeneutic principles – particularly the hermeneutic circle, the horizon of expectation, and the subjectivity of the interpreter – for both the theory and practice of translation. These principles reveal translation as a process that is historically and contextually situated, shaped as much by the translator's interpretive horizon as by the semantic properties of the source text. This view challenges traditional notions of fidelity and equivalence, proposing instead a model of translation that foregrounds reflexivity, openness to otherness, and the creative agency of the translator.

Finally, the research has argued for a reorientation of translation studies toward a more nuanced, human-centered, and philosophically grounded model of translational understanding. Such a reorientation entails embracing ambiguity, acknowledging the ethical dimension of representation, and recognising the translator as both interpreter and co-author. It also requires integrating hermeneutic theory into translator education and training, encouraging future practitioners to develop not only linguistic proficiency but also philosophical insight, cultural sensitivity, and critical awareness.

In conclusion, the hermeneutic approach enriches our understanding of translation by reframing it as a dynamic act of interpretation rather than a static act of transfer. It restores depth to the translator's role, complexity to the translation process, and ethical responsibility to the translational encounter. As global communication becomes increasingly pluralistic and contested, this paradigm offers a timely and necessary corrective – reminding us that to translate is not merely to say what was said, but to reimagine how meaning can continue to live across time, language, and culture.

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