

Intersections of Hermeneutics and Intralingual Translation Regarding Comprehensibility

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Abstract

The relationship between hermeneutics and translation is well established. Both fields share a common interest in understanding and interpreting texts, albeit from different perspectives. Hermeneutics is concerned with the theory and methodology of interpretation. At the same time, translation puts these principles into practice: the task of translation is to convey the meaning of texts throughout languages and cultures, to produce a new text that is as faithful as possible to the original. Recently, intralingual translation has emerged as a less explored area of translation. While some argue that intralingual translation is not a true translation, its proponents insist that it meets the same criteria as translation proper. Several points of contact regarding interpretation of meaning, time, context, or linguistic nuances can illustrate the relationship between hermeneutics and intralingual translation.

Keywords: intralingual translation, hermeneutics, comprehensibility

Introduction

The concept of intralingual translation emerged in the mid-20th century. Its first definition can be found in Roman Jakobson's influential essay, "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation" (1959). At the time, the majority of translation theorists were primarily concerned with translation between two languages, which is commonly referred to as "translation proper" (Jakobson 1959, 233, Korning-Zethsen & Hill-Madsen 2016, 692, Korning-Zethsen 2018, 80). Intralingual translation was often regarded as a marginal practice. In this era of information overload and the increasing demand for intelligibility and accessible communication in different areas of society, the significance of intralingual translation is becoming increasingly evident. However, the argument persists that

this type of translation does not fulfill the same criteria as translation proper. This chapter aims to support the claim that intralingual translation is full-fledged translation and to highlight the points of contact between this type of translation and the philosophical field of hermeneutics, which is concerned with the mediation of meaning.

1. Intralingual translation

Intralingual translation is defined as translation within the same language (Popovic 1983, 219), an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language (Jakobson 1959, 233), crossing of language-internal barrier (Korning-Zethsen & Hill-Madsen 2016, 693), language-internal rewriting of a source text into a target text with the purpose of neutralizing a potential comprehension barrier (Hill-Madsen 2019, 538), crossing the language barriers within the same language (Whyatt 2017, 178), and also as processes of reformulation, rewording or paraphrasing (ibid., 176). In other words, it is the translation or interpretation of a text or speech where the source and target languages are the same, aiming at overcoming barriers to understanding and facilitating access to information for a new readership group, for which it was not primarily designed or intended. Korning-Zethsen (2018, 83) provides us with several examples of such translation: easy-readers for children, localization, expert-to-lay translation, new translations of religious texts, etc. The motivation for intralingual translation (INTRA) can be varied, including ideological reasons such as reducing power distance and the degree of control, addressing differences in the receiver's cognitive environment, language modernization, or dialectal differences.

The place of INTRA in the hierarchy of translation typology had already been determined by Jakobson (1959) as a marginal one, and his view is both questioned¹ and supported. His division of translation into intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic forms the point of departure for most of the scholarly texts dealing with translation. A different conception is found in Umberto Eco (2008, 100), who presents us with transcription, intrasystemic (translation within the same language falls into this category), and intersystemic (between two languages) interpretations. Eco deliberately speaks of

interpretation instead of translation, as he considers this term to be more encompassing, whereas translation in his understanding is a species of the genus interpretation, governed by certain principles, thus indicating that he does not consider INTRA to be translation. In terms of sign systems, Toury (in Whyatt 2017, 177) distinguishes between intersemiotic (two language systems involved) and intrasemiotic translation (within the same language system), while within the intrasemiotic one, he defines intralingual and interlingual translation.

While translation between two languages occupies a larger part of the focus of translation studies, INTRA has been marginalized, until recently. In recent years, however, we have seen a surge of scholarly interest in this type of translation. This interest may occur particularly in the context of the need to rephrase or explain a text to make it clearer or more understandable, even if it remains in the same language. INTRA is used to simplify complex language, remove ambiguities, or adapt content to the needs of a wider target group, which may have varying levels of language literacy within the same language.

In reality, individuals often use intralingual translation to convey information to someone who does not share their frame of reference, such as in communication between experts and laypeople, teaching new concepts to students, or communicating with individuals with special needs. In practice, strategies in INTRA may involve, e.g., rephrasing difficult-to-understand or technical terms, shortening original sentence constructions, or adding explanatory notes to improve communication and comprehension. This approach can be useful in various fields, including education, law, medicine, or public administration, where it is important to achieve the most effective communication.

The significance of eliminating communication barriers and power distance caused by using expert language, which often excludes ordinary language users within the same linguistic community due to unfamiliarity with specialist terms, is becoming increasingly evident. This is particularly relevant in fields such as patient care or law (medical records that use Latin terminology or legal documents that employ complex legal language). Barrier-free communication can facilitate collaboration among all members of

society. INTRA has the potential to significantly contribute to accessible communication, as there is a huge demand for expert-to-layman translation because the majority of the experts consider it difficult to express themselves in simple language (Korning-Zethsen, 2018, 90).

In his 2019 article, Hill-Madsen provides a categorization of INTRA based on the original categorization by Gottlieb:

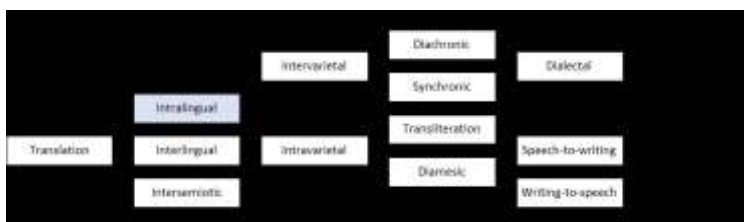


Figure 1: Heterogeneity of INTRA (Hill-Madsen 2019, 544)

The chart illustrates that INTRA comprises multiple subcategories that consider factors such as time, linguistic varieties, form of speech, and register. Thus, this multifaceted and understudied field of INTRA deserves greater attention and extensive research.

2. Hermeneutics and translation

Translation is an inherently interpretive process that is inextricably linked to an understanding of the source text. Proficiency in both the language of the original and the language of the target text is an essential prerequisite for any translator if the translation process is to be successful. In addition, an understanding of the context, the temporal circumstances of the action, and all the conditions under which the original text was produced are also crucial factors in this process. Language is a cognitive tool, and cognition is inextricably linked to understanding.

Translation enables communication between the two parties of the communicative exchange. The essence of any translation is

understanding the source text and communicating it to the audience, for which it was not primarily intended. As House puts it,

... it gives people access to a message that already exists in another language. So, translation is, of its nature, a type of secondary communication. In the process of translating, an original communicative event is repeated in order to enable persons to understand and appreciate the original event, from which they would otherwise be excluded. (House 2023, 9)

Every process of translation consists of two phases: first a translator must grasp the text through their own knowledge, understanding of the subject matter, and translation competence, and then the translator's interpretation is rendered in the target language. Only the meaning that has been grasped can be translated into the target text. Stolze (2012, 31) considers the translator a main factor in the process of translation, with their knowledge of languages, cultures, and translation competence. And as Tomkins and Eatough (2018, 9) point out, the space between the author and the interpreter is not a gap, it is a bridge.

The conditions under which understanding is possible are best illuminated by hermeneutics, a philosophical discipline, which offers insights into the essence of understanding and interpretation. Hermeneutics originated several centuries ago as a discipline concerned with the interpretation of texts in the fields of law and theology, especially the interpretation of sacred texts of Judaism and Christianity. Friedrich Schleiermacher, the founder of modern hermeneutics, is also considered the founder of translational hermeneutics. In his essay 'On the Different Methods of Translating' (1813, 1) he discusses various forms of translation and acknowledges that translation also occurs within the same language. Thus, the idea of applying the hermeneutic method in Translation Studies is not new.

Understanding as a prerequisite for the translation process in terms of hermeneutics involves many aspects: the context, the person of the translator, the historical context of the creation of the work, the aspect of time and its impact on the reader, and the effect of these aspects on the message encrypted in the work. The elements of hermeneutical translation competence include

...readiness for self-critical reflection, the openness for constant learning, the ability to integrate new cognitive input, the courage for linguistic creativity, and an empathetic identification with the message. Only then will the message be translated in an authentic way by the translator as a co-author. (Stolze 2012, 34)

Given the interrelationship between translation and understanding, there are points of contact between hermeneutics as a philosophical discipline concerned with the understanding of texts and intralingual translation.

3. Hermeneutics and intralingual translation

INTRA has only recently come to the forefront of translation studies. However, Friedrich Schleiermacher, in his 1813 essay *On the Different Methods of Translating* recognized that we are confronted with translation in its various forms all around us, and we do not even have to cross the borders of the same language. We encounter different dialects and forms of the same language over time. He also pointed to contemporaries who speak the same language but come from different social classes and have different educational backgrounds, so that their communication with each other is a process similar to translation, apparently accompanied by much explaining and reducing the complexity of debate. Moreover, the different temperaments and opinions of the other person force us to translate the other person's utterances for ourselves, and occasionally we translate our own words as well. Schleiermacher attributes such translation to a momentary emotional need.

Given the above, if we agree with the idea put forward by authors dealing with INTRA¹ that INTRA requires translation competence and has the same features as translation proper and thus deserves to be considered a translation, we can find certain intersections between INTRA and hermeneutics:

3.1 Context

Both hermeneutics and INTRA emphasize the significance of context in shaping meaning. Cultural, historical, social, and situational context plays a crucial role in deciphering meaning and reformulating it in the form of a new text tailored to the needs of a

particular readership, even within the same linguistic community. Maintaining coherence and relevance is inherent in both hermeneutics and INTRA.

3.2 Language nuances

INTRA shares common ground with hermeneutics in the study of language nuances. It involves translating a text within the same language and dealing with issues such as linguistic differences, stylistic changes, and text shifts from one style to another. The process is not a superficial rewording, but a deep exploration of the complexities of expression and communication within a single language. Adapting language nuances to the reader's situation is crucial for conveying meaning effectively. Tailoring the linguistic devices in the text to the specific readership results in greater intelligibility, ensures accessibility of information, retention of attention without distraction, and greater effectiveness of communication.

3.3 Interpretive nature

The connection between hermeneutics and INTRA is evident when considering both processes' interpretive nature. INTRA includes retelling, paraphrasing, description, synonymy, and explanation. All of these strategies are designed to help readers make sense of symbols, texts, and experiences that may initially seem obscure, ambiguous, distant, overly technical, or open to multiple interpretations.

Hermeneutics emphasizes understanding the deeper layers of meaning and provides a theoretical framework for the practical application of INTRA procedures, as in the translation proper. Similarly, INTRA can be seen as the practical application of hermeneutic principles. The text must be comprehensible to all readers, regardless of their age, social status, or disability. This requires clear and concise language, logical structure, and a balanced approach, lowering the level of the language and limiting the use of specialized terminology in expert texts to a tolerable level. The language should be objective and free from bias.

3.4 Subjectivity and Objectivity

Moreover, both hermeneutics and INTRA deal with a certain degree of subjectivity and objectivity. Subjectivity necessarily comes into play with the person of the author, whose unique level of creativity and inimitability makes him exceptional. Cercel et al., (2015, 19) analyzing Schleiermacher note, that the original is always a subjective expression of the author, and therefore in translation it is necessary to understand the author's intention and motivation as part of the creative process behind the text. On the other hand, there is the person of the translator, equipped with his own perception and a certain degree of general insight and knowledge, but also prejudices, who plays an active role in constructing meaning. Together with the factor of time and its passage, there is a constant search for a balance between subjectivity and objectivity. For, as Stolze points out,

[...] every new reading brings about a change in meaning. This issue of subjectivity applies to different individuals, however, also the same person upon rereading the text over time. It should be noted that no translation can be completely objective, it can only strive for objectivity. (Stolze 2022, 115)

Translation is not a neutral process, as it is influenced by cultural background, context, and the subjective experience of the translator. To support this idea, we can paraphrase Gadamer saying that the interpreter's thoughts enter into the reawakened sense of the text (Gadamer 2019, 335, my translation). Moreover, Gadamer noted that to interpret a text is to bring one's prejudices into play (ibid. 341) and that the problem of the interpreter is that they are not aware of bringing themselves and their concepts into the interpretation. In this context, it can be said that the translator works under constant pressure and a burden of responsibility to accurately convey the original meaning of text through their translation. The translator must constantly broaden their horizons, become familiar with the subject matter, especially when translating specialized texts, and keep their general outlook up to date.

Subjectivity, however, is considered an undesirable feature when dealing with technical texts. When it comes to technical writings and their simplified versions within the same language for layman's readership, objectivity is crucial. The translator must

maintain the accuracy of the information, which is often vital, especially in the field of medicine, such as patient information leaflets or medical records. Such translation must remain without interference and the text must not bear any emotional undertones introduced by the translator.

3.5 Perception of time

Similarly, there is a shared intersection between INTRA and hermeneutics in the perception of time. Before hermeneutics spread to various areas of the humanities, it was primarily focused on the interpretation of religious texts and, thus, the communication of their message across the barrier of time.

Depending on the time, individuals may interpret the same text differently, and rereading the text even within a short chronological gap can reveal new contexts. As Stolze (2012, 33) pinpoints, today I speak differently than yesterday because I have learnt something in the meantime.

The factor of time allows individuals to acquire new information and broaden their knowledge horizons. However, due to the finite nature of human existence, there is a limit to this expansion, and it is necessary to pass the acquired knowledge further on if we are to preserve it. Knowledge can only be passed on to our successors through a certain 'pre-understanding' and understanding of the context, followed by interpretation of meanings, and their passage to the next individual. They will again mentally grasp the meaning and pass it on to the next generation over time.

One of the subcategories of INTRA, as defined by Hill-Madsen (see above), is diachronic INTRA. It deals with the translation of the same work considering the time lapse since its creation and often leads to language modernization. As Hill-Madsen, quoting Gottlieb, points out,

[d]iachronic INTRA [...] is concerned with translation between different historical varieties of the same language, typically in the form of modernized versions of pre-modern literary works (Hill-Madsen 2019, 541).

To support his idea, Hill-Madsen offers examples of the Old Testament and other works of translation.

INTRA can also be an asset in terms of cognitive fluency. According to Whyatt, this type of translation benefits the reader by reducing the cognitive effort demanded by the text, thereby facilitating comprehension:

Diachronic INTRA involves updating “aging” texts and making them relevant and comprehensible for the contemporary reader. The purpose of INTRA is to reduce the excessive cognitive effort that otherwise might have been needed to understand a message encoded in an outdated language with archaic forms and references that are no longer a part of the reader’s cognitive background (Whyatt, 2017, 180).

Furthermore, the element of time manifests within the text and influences the translator's personal growth. The translator's exposure to the text leaves an indelible mark, expanding their horizons of knowledge. As Stolze (2022, 113) notes, the translator's personal development occurs through lifelong learning, which shapes their attitude towards other texts.

3.6 Dynamic nature

The passage of time leads us to consider the dynamics of the understanding process, as previously mentioned. Knowledge is not static but rather evolves for each individual based on the stimuli to which they are exposed. These stimuli provide a frame of reference for further reasoning and understanding of the context.

INTRA is also concerned with the dynamic nature of language. Meaning is not fixed and can be influenced by cultural, social, and contextual factors. It highlights the significance of conveying meaning in a manner that is appropriate for the intended audience. This approach aligns with interpretation as a dynamic, ongoing, and developing process. Due to the constant modernization of the language, updating the meanings of words and whole texts with new interpretations, it is often necessary to avoid losing content and information conveyed.

3.7 Understanding, Communication, and Linguistic Mediation

Acts of communication and mediation are inherent in both hermeneutics and INTRA. Hermeneutics deals with understanding and dialogue as the central themes of its interest. Facilitating understanding through translation is an integral part of hermeneutics, as Cercel et al. (2015) pinpoint their interdependence:

[...] hermeneutics is concerned with how texts – both oral and written – are understood, i.e., it deals with the conditions that must be met in order to understand. Thus, hermeneutics serves as a valid background for translation [...] (Cercel et al. 2015, 18).

Similarly, INTRA mediates between different expressions or versions of a text tailored to the needs of various groups of users serving to enhance comprehension, clarity, or accessibility. The pragmatic aspects of both the source and target text must be considered to ensure that the meaning is conveyed effectively. This includes understanding the intended audience, the communicative purpose of the text, and the choice of linguistic means accordingly.

Intralingual translation seems a less obvious kind of linguistic mediation. [...] To facilitate communication in situations when two parties speak the same language but do not share the same frame of reference, the verbal message needs to be reformulated (e.g. paraphrased into plain language). (Whyatt, 2017, 178)

To illustrate this point, I would like to cite an excerpt from the Merck Manual of Diagnosis and Therapy, one of the most comprehensive and widely used medical reference books in the world. The Manual is now available in a web-based format, with two distinct versions tailored to the needs of consumers and healthcare professionals. A description of bleeding, as described for the professional and how the same information is presented to the lay public is provided below. We can notice obvious differences in the choice of vocabulary (etiology = causes, skin lesions = skin marks, petechiae = skin dots, etc.) the length of sentences, and the way the information is presented.



Figure 2: Merck manual, bleeding description, version for professionals



Figure 3: Merck manual, bleeding description, version for public

Whyatt (2017, 179) notes that INTRA, with its various subforms, makes relevant information accessible by removing communication barriers. On the other hand, Korning-Zethsen highlights the distinction between understanding and access. Access to information does not necessarily equate to access to meaning, particularly when the information is encoded in technical language. This can lead to a further deepening of previous obscurity:

[...] having access is not the same as understanding. In fact, having access without understanding may in some cases be worse than not having access. (Korning-Zethsen 2018, 86)

Making information accessible and also understandable can make a significant contribution to reducing the power distance between different social classes, creating a fairer society, establishing inclusion, and reinforcing active individual involvement in both personal and community life, ultimately leading to the betterment of all.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be stated that both hermeneutics and INTRA are aligned in their pursuit of comprehending and deciphering language. The hermeneutic methodology furnishes a conceptual foundation for INTRA, in the same way as in the translation proper, highlighting the interrelatedness of language, culture, and significance. These fields present valuable perspectives on the continuously changing landscape of communication and motivate individuals to unveil the layers of meaning embedded within language(s). Even within a single language.

Summary in plain English

This text is about translation and the philosophy of understanding. Translation helps people to understand texts written in a foreign language. Translation within the same language is about simplifying texts. This is a type of translation where the translator makes complex expressions simpler, makes sentences shorter, and explains unfamiliar concepts. The simplified text is then much easier to understand. Translation within the same language helps make the texts simple.

Hermeneutics is a philosophical field. It is about facilitating meaning. This text looks for connections between translation within the same language and this philosophical field.

Simplified texts can be easily understood. Translation within the same language and hermeneutics give people better access to the meaning of texts.

Notes:

¹ Several authors, including Whyatt (2017), Korning-Zethsen (2018), and Hill-Madsen (2019) have emphasized through research that the same processes occur in intralingual translation as in translation proper and that intralingual translation requires translation competence. According to the aforementioned authors, INTRA deserves its place in the typology of translation. For an account of conflicting claims, see, for example, Mossop, Newmark, Schubert, and others (Hill-Madsen 2019, 539).

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Figures:

Figure 2: <https://www.msmanuals.com/professional/hematology-and-oncology/hemostasis/excessive-bleeding>, my extract

Figure 3: <https://www.msmanuals.com/home/blood-disorders/blood-clotting-process/bruising-and-bleeding>, my extract

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