


## Book Review on ‘The Hermeneutics of Translation: A Translator’s Competence and the Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer’

### The Hermeneutics of Translation: A Translator’s Competence and the Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer

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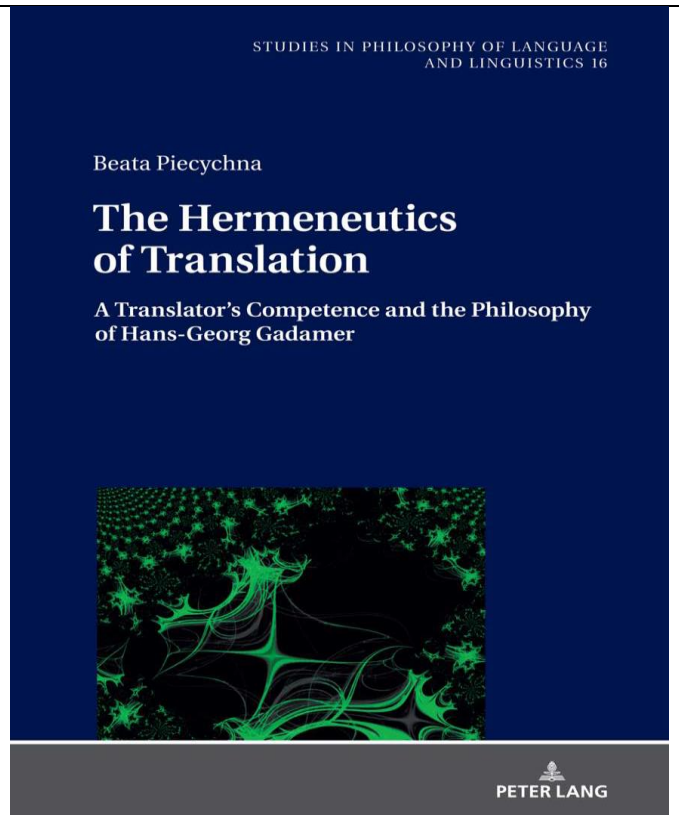
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### What Lies Under A Translator’s Competence?

The Hermeneutics of Translation: A Translator’s Competence and the Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer, as a revised and shortened version of the author’s doctoral thesis in Polish, was translated into English and published in 2021. As an important and unique study of its kind, its re-creation in English will undoubtedly get to be known to a much wider audience, and inspire and lead further studies on the Hermeneutics of Translation.

The book is situated within the contemporary translation study which deals with the question of what determines a successful translation and a competent translator. Although relatively recent interest to researchers in the field, it is acknowledged the subject is contextualized in many different ways in the available literature. However, the author argues, the works in the literature have no reference to philosophers who reflected on translation in their works.

With this criticism and anticipation that it will shed a new light on the question, the author pulls the issue of translator competence into the field of hermeneutic philosophy, especially of philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer. The main purpose of the study is “to analyse and reconstruct

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Gadamer's views on understanding, history, dialog, and indirectly on language, and to find an answer to the question of the nature of a translator's competence analysed from the perspective of his hermeneutical philosophy" (p. 18). The research question of the study is justified on the basis of insignificant number works concerning translator competence within the framework of the hermeneutics of translation, the relationship between philosophy (especially hermeneutics) and translation, and unsatisfactory conceptualizations of the concept of translator competence within cognitive approach to translation.

The book is comprised of four chapters each of which delves into main concepts of Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy to give a detailed analysis of their relevance to the translation act and translator competence. Chapter One explores Gadamer's concept of language. It begins with the question of what the hermeneutic philosophy of language is. As a specific medium of understanding, hermeneutic philosophy of language, with a holistic analysis, relates it to human existence, the world, and other people. With this orientation, Gadamer's most famous words and ultimate view of language "being that can be understood is language." (Gadamer, 2004, p. 470) is quoted and taken as a starting point to inquire into the pertinence of language to any worldly experience including translation. In the emergence of contemporary hermeneutic theories, text and translation have had an exclusive impact on disclosing the phenomenon of language. Gadamer expounds these aspects in his *magnum opus* (i.e., Truth and Method), which will be a great help to any study on the competences of translators.

Chapter Two examines the circularity of understanding (see Gadamer, 2004) which is a crucial point in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Developed from the idea of part and whole, basically it means, in Gadamerian terms, there is a dynamic relationship between our prejudices and the text we are trying to understand. We use our prejudices to anticipate a meaning from a text and what we get out of the text either validates or reinforces our prejudices or existing ones are discovered to be invalid or inadequate. In other words, there is not an ultimate understanding and each understanding becomes a pre-understanding for the consecutive one. The hermeneutical circle shows what the process of translation is. Translation act gets the meaning of a text on the basis of individual parts available to the translator and of the parts on the basis of the whole, which covers the points such as the historicity of the text, its cultural and social conditions. A competent translator, aware of his/her limitations in understanding a text, does not translate uncritically and considers the origins and horizon of the text.

Another key concept to Gadamerian hermeneutics is historically effected consciousness (Gadamer, 2004, p. 296), and it is expounded in Chapter Three. Expressed succinctly, it means we never escape from history to a point out of it where we can get a complete knowledge of ourselves. In other words, as historical beings, we are always in the hermeneutical situation which makes our knowledge and understanding incomplete. The chapter, whereby translation is taken as the concretization of historically effected consciousness, explores other Gadamerian concepts of hermeneutic experience, effective history, horizon, and their relevance to the act of translation and competences of translators. It concludes "the competent translator is immersed in history and tradition, but has the ability to transcend them, to take a different stance on a given issue and to open up to new interpretive possibilities" (p. 172). The question of how a translator achieves this is scrutinized in the last chapter.

Chapter Four focuses on the concept of hermeneutical conversation which, according to Gadamer, characterizes the event of understanding in that it is achieved through dialectic of question and answer (Gadamer, 2004, p. 363). As an inherent and indissoluble element in all understanding, translation is a form of hermeneutical conversation in which the translator and the text are partners. The text speaks through the translator so a competent translator opens oneself to the otherness of the text by drawing and accentuating the similarities and differences at various layers of interpretation.

In Concluding Remarks, after a summary of concepts found in philosophical hermeneutics and their relevance to the act of translation in general and specifically to a translator's competence, the

author offers a model of a translator's competence based on Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Very similar to the hermeneutic circle and circular structure of understanding, the model poses a circular character, which implies the dynamic character of a translator's competences.

In the closing section titled "Coda: Hermeneutics of Translation, Where Are You Heading?", the author, after presenting the justified relationship between hermeneutics and translation with reference to philosophers and translation theorists, tries to clarify the scope and subject of the fields of hermeneutics of translation studies and philosophical hermeneutics of translation. The book is situated between the interfaces of these two fields on the ground that they offer questions to each other on many common concepts which fosters conversation between the researchers of both fields.

As a great source for anybody studying and reflecting on translation, the monograph is invaluable in its attempt to define "hermeneutics of translation" which, when hermeneutics taken as an "art of heading to the darkness" (Tatar, 2014, p. 8), will enable us to find out the correct questions to fully appreciate the phenomenon of translation. It gives us insight into the conditions in which a competent translator rises. However, a particular practice of a hermeneutics of translation should also reflect on the journey of the text from one language to another. What happens to the text? What is it that is translated, subject matter or intention of the author? How does it achieve validity and keep its "horizon" in a new "tradition"?

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