Ricœur’s Extended Hermeneutic Translation Theory
Metaphysics, Narrative, Ethics, Politics

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Abstract:
The purpose of this study is to propose the structural outline and conceptual framework of a Ricœurian translation theory. Following a discussion on the ambiguities around situating Ricœur in translation theory, three major interlinked components of the theory are explored. First, the metaphysics of meaning and translation is established based on Ricœur’s hermeneutics of infinitude. Then, the language-processing component is constructed through an incorporation of Ricœur’s narrative theory. Finally, the ethics and politics of translation, particularly in globalization, are founded based on Ricœur’s “age of hermeneutics theory.”

Keywords: Ricœur’s Philosophy, Hermeneutics, Translation Theory, Narrative.

Résumé:
L’objectif de cette recherche est de tenter de définir la structure ainsi que le cadre conceptuel de la théorie ricœurienne de la traduction. Après avoir discuté des ambiguïtés concernant la situation des thèses de Ricœur dans les théories de la traduction, nous analyserons les trois principaux éléments constitutifs et interconnectés de cette théorie. Dans un premier temps nous examinerons la métaphysique du sens et de la traduction impliquée dans l’herméneutique de l’infinitude de Ricœur. Puis, dans un second temps, nous essayerons d’analyser le procès langagier en le rattachant à la théorie narrative de Ricœur. Dans un troisième temps enfin, nous tenterons de mettre en relief l’éthique et la politique de la traduction qui, à l’époque de la mondialisation, correspondent selon Ricœur à “l’âge de la théorie herméneutique.”

Mots-clés: La philosophie de Ricœur, herméneutique, théorie de la traduction, narration.
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It is surprising that despite the exceptional fecundity of Ricœur’s contributions to multiple fields of speculation and inquiry, there is no clear, adequate, and consistent account of what would constitute a fully-fledged Ricœurian translation theory. At least two reasons seem to account for this situation: first, the magnitude and richness of Ricœur’s works make it difficult to establish a comprehensive theory, and secondly, there are dangers in relying on Ricœur’s thematic studies of translation (mostly represented in On Translation), because they do not seem to adequately reflect his true position in translation studies. In fact, what Kristensson Uggla has observed about Ricœur’s contributions in general is especially true of his work on translation: “Ricœur’s contributions reach far beyond his own intentions and work.”

Broadly speaking, an important peculiarity of Ricœur’s works lies in their self-expanding progression, as pursued by him (through the continuum of his philosophical development) or by critical readers of his works. Some instances of such a development can be detected in the history of his theorizing. For instance, in Oneself as Another, Ricœur introduced “the little ethics” when examining “the problem of selfhood,” whereas a thorough exploration of what could be called “the greater ethics” was to be worked out in his later discussions on modernity, history, temporality, justice, social structure, and so on. The same logic of theoretical expansion holds true for the present study, as it takes a step further from On Translation, as “the little version” of Ricœur’s translation theory, all the way to a greater extended theory.

As a response to problematically divergent readings of Ricœur on translation and in light of recent related criticisms, this study seeks to propose an extended Ricœurian translation theory, starting with a proposed metaphysical underpinning and ending with suggestions for an ethico-politics of globalization. More specifically, three interconnected components will shape the body of the proposed theory: a) Ricœur’s hermeneutics of infinitude; b) his theory of narrative; and c) some reflections on the ethics/politics of interpretation in globalization. It is hoped that this framework will contribute both to theoretical and to applied explorations of translation, while unfolding a coherent network of contributions to those explorations in Time and Narrative, The Symbolism of Evil, Oneself as Another, and Memory, History, Forgetting.

The Need for a Ricœurian Translation Theory in the Philosophical Paradigm of Translation

The main purpose of this section is to navigate a number of conflicting accounts of Ricœur’s place in translation studies, with a view to determining the actual place that his contribution to translation deserves. Although his contribution has been entangled in confusing accounts, it can be salvaged through a dialectical assessment of the important voices involved in
the discussion. The first step is to consolidate Ricœur’s position in translation theory. Pym, in his profound exploration of translation theory, has enumerated seven paradigms that together form an evolutionary chronology.\(^5\)

According to Pym, this critical, developmental chronology of theoretical breakthroughs in translation studies goes all the way from Natural Equivalence to the fifth paradigm, Uncertainty, which is otherwise known as the philosophy-inspired paradigm of translation.\(^6\) In the course of the history of modern translation theory, meaning has lost its former certainty, the significance of the source text has diminished, and translation has become an instance of epistemological indeterminacy and multivocality. The Uncertainty paradigm captures, in clustered theories, the postulates of such thinkers as Quine, Humboldt, Jakobson, Wittgenstein, Benjamin, Locke, Peirce, Eco, Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricœur while addressing the overriding question of the uncertainty of meaning. Not surprisingly, Ricœur falls under the hermeneutic sub-section. Clearly, a well-structured theory (Quine’s principle of indeterminacy is exemplary in that regard) would have given Ricœur an identity in translation theory which he really deserves.

Yet, despite the seemingly secure classification of Ricœur under Pym’s fifth paradigm, Pym makes certain statements complicating Ricœur’s identity in translation studies. Perhaps, the most serious instance can be found in Pym’s remark that Ricœur’s idea of translation is reminiscent of the Natural Equivalence paradigm:\(^7\)

His [Ricœur’s] findings sound provocative: “one must conclude,” writes Ricœur, “that misunderstanding is allowed, that translation is theoretically impossible, and that bilinguals must be schizophrenic”… If you look closely, though, Ricœur’s dichotomies are close to those of natural equivalence, where structuralist theories had long ago posited that translation was impossible simply because the theories could not explain it.

Natural Equivalence, the first of Pym’s translation paradigms, presupposed an equal translatable symmetry among languages although, as he points out, a radical structuralist approach to equivalence rules out the possibility of ever reaching such equivalence. Structuralism posits that, “since different languages cut the world up in different ways, no words should be completely translatable out of their language system.”\(^8\) Pym’s endorsement of the structuralist criticism effectively relegates Ricœur’s theorizing on translation to an underdeveloped status.

Apparently, Munday, another translation theory critic, agrees to some extent with Pym, although Munday also points out a notion that could serve as a pathway to saving Ricœur from the charge that he advocated, in some ways, radical untranslatability:

For Ricœur […] Benjamin’s pure language does not offer a practical translation solution. Translation, for Ricœur […], poses an ethical problem – it risks betraying author and reader but it operates its practice of “linguistic hospitality,” allowing the two texts to live side by side.\(^9\)

Munday’s reference to Ricœur wanting to talk about hospitality, a notion that entails an ethical perception of difference and liberal co-existence, is bound to leave philosophers and translation theorists wondering how it makes sense to assume that Ricœur’s translation theory would justify linguistic determinism. In addition to the evidence afforded by Ricœur’s presupposition of
perceptible difference, there are other pieces of evidence that can help strengthen his position within the philosophical or Uncertainty paradigm, such as the thoughts he and other theorists like Berman and Steiner share. More specifically, as Lee and Yun argue, there are peculiar affinities between Ricœur and Berman, the prominent French translation philosopher, when it comes to their opinions on translation. In another study, Yun and Lee explore Heidegger’s and Ricœur’s role in the formation of Berman’s unfinished “hermeneutic turn” project. This philosophical convergence with Berman, a thinker known for advocating an ethics of difference in translation, provides striking evidence in support of the claim that Ricœur has a potentially central position in the future of translation theory and ethics.

There is also concrete evidence presented by Kearney, who seems to have meticulously studied Ricœur’s hermeneutics and philosophy of translation. Kearney divides Ricœur’s conceptualization of translation into two parts, namely linguistic and ontological. He emphasizes Ricœur’s cognizance of the role of inter-linguistic translation in shaping historical events (Luther’s translation of the Bible, the Renaissance, etc.), pointing out that “the transmigration of one linguistic thesaurus into another was linked with modern ideas of human emancipation and change.” Such an account of Ricœur’s understanding of translation constitutes a profound basis that, more important than any other implication emphasizes the multiplicity, variety, and imbalance among languages. Furthermore, Kearney, like Munday, highlights Ricœur’s “ethics of hospitality” in translation, emphasizing the perception and appreciation of difference in cross-cultural encounters.

The present study, too, regards Ricœur’s theory of translation as an expression of human historical progression and change; a process that, although faced with suspension, misunderstanding, and violence, is inherently possible, and can further shed light on the interface between translation theory and Continental philosophy. The following sections seek to organize Ricœur’s divergent concepts, putting them into a coherent theory.

Hermeneutic Metaphysics of Meaning:
The Core of Ricœur’s Extended Translation Theory

The emphasis in the previous section on securing Ricœur’s position as a proponent of the philosophical translation paradigm, and within that category as a genuine scholar of hermeneutics, carries over to this section and has implications for an approach to resolving current and future philosophical ambiguities in translation studies. As we shall see, recent developments in translation and the hermeneutic metaphysics of meaning have made Ricœur’s position very significant indeed. This section seeks to reach a “core” for a Ricœurian translation theory by defending the ideas that Ricœur’s hermeneutics is a hermeneutics of infinitude, and that his translation ethics is inherently valid. It will defend these ideas in the context of criticizing Venuti’s recent recourse to Badiou’s philosophy, both in terms of metaphysics (of infinitude) and ethics of translation.

Hermeneutics and translation share a strong history and a robust theoretical affinity. In modern times, scholars of hermeneutics have speculated on translation, as especially manifested in the works of Schleiermacher, Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricœur. Perhaps the most significant contribution of hermeneutic thought is to explore the ontological question: What is
translation? Such a question leads to an examination of linguisticity, multiplicity, temporality, and interpretation. As every philosophy rests on its specific metaphysics, philosophy of translation, too, inevitably entails an exploration of the metaphysics of meaning. This is the fundamental stance from which hermeneutics contributes to the nature of translation.

Starting from this same hermeneutic stance, Venuti traces the metaphysical narratives of meaning and translation, as seen from a Western historiographical perspective. This renowned translation critic and scholar contends that, viewed historically, there are two major metaphysical conceptualizations of meaning in translation, namely, the instrumental and the hermeneutic. The former, which has been a foundation of Western translation theory for centuries, rests upon the notion of the “invariant” as advocated by St. Jerome (374-420 A.D.), the Illyrian Latin Christian theologian and historian. Instrumentalism views translation as having to do with “an unchanging essence inherent in or produced by the source text, so that if assimilated to the receiving language and culture that essence is transmitted intact.”17 According to St. Jerome, a text could be rendered in two dominant ways: word-for-word and sense-for-sense. Yet, both of these methods were considered to be regulated by the idea of an invariant, a perceived fixed meaning. This lack of variance could be said to presuppose a state of equality across languages and cultures, which ultimately leads to the imperialistic illusion that the language of the foreign text is simply a formal distortion, and that its content does not transcend the horizons of the text receivers.

An implication arising from such a view is that if others (foreigners) have the same knowledge as the target language speakers do, then the latter are authorized to manipulate the foreign language as much as they please, actively suppressing any difference or manipulating the ideology in the original text. In response to this long-standing theory, Venuti believes that an ethical theory of translation is one that “fabricates a transparent understanding of the interpretation that the translator inscribes in the source text.”18 Such a theory would be founded upon a “hermeneutic” metaphysics of meaning. Venuti’s work points to the true functions of philosophy and particularly hermeneutics, and its thinkers, in the twenty-first century. Yet, the type of evidence Venuti provides in support of his thesis appears to be problematic and could benefit from the addition of insights drawn from recent studies of Ricœur’s philosophy.

Ignoring Heidegger and Ricœur, Venuti cites Nida and Gadamer as representatives of the hermeneutic approach.19 Venuti’s main concern is to reveal an incentive for ethical decision-making in view of cross-cultural differences, and in the pursuit of this agenda he, rather unconvincingly, repudiates Gadamer’s philosophy of translation as advocating the “invariant.”20 The solution Venuti proposes is striking and of course inherently problematic. He proposes that Badiou’s philosophy, with its emphasis on “truth” and “event,” can detect unethical decision-making within the hermeneutic model. Although Venuti’s proposal could be seen as an important step in drawing Continental philosophy and translation closer together, it is definitely presented in an unripe configuration.

To establish a frame or basis for a future speculation on the metaphysics of meaning and translation, I suggest that the idea of infinitude, arguably discernible in Ricœur’s philosophy, can help us to construct a conception that is both faithful to the hermeneutic paradigm and adaptable for other purposes. This conception could be called the metaphysics of hermeneutic infinitude and translation, and it should be seen as shaping the core of a Ricceurian theory of translation. But, how can this conception contribute to and be well-established in the theory of translation?
To establish the Ricœurian metaphysics of translation, as a consolidation of the original hermeneutic model, two important issues are addressed in this section:

1. What is the consequence of the finitude/infinitude debate for translation theory?

2. Can Badiou’s theory sufficiently justify ethical translation?

Considering the current level of theorizing in translation studies and the important role of the hermeneutic approach in any metaphysics of meaning, the most important issue at stake here is to grasp the nature of interpretation in “futural plurality.” In other words, if translations are interpretive acts capable of creating new readings, they must involve a futural component and that would give a new dimension to Venuti’s hermeneutic model. The interpreter, reader, or critic of a translation, following the anti-invariant hermeneutic metaphysics, will attempt to unfold points of natural divergence between the two texts and will be committed to finding instances of unethical rendering.

At this point, one can conceive of the temporal relation between the source text and the target text, a relation which reveals an instance of (pseudo-)causality rather than equality (as imagined in some paradigms such as the Equivalence paradigm). The temporal nature of this causality, along a continuum, brings about multiple readings of a text, creating the image of an infinity of interpretations in translation. This same concern simply leads us to the finitude/infinitude debate, to which Purcell has contributed.

Purcell has discussed recent philosophical debates, directed by Badiou and Meillassoux that seem to radically question one of the traditional postulates of hermeneutics: the finitude of human understanding (Verstehen), a criticism in face of which, according to Purcell, hermeneutics “will be of little more than historical interest.” To counter this criticism, Purcell pursues two lines of attack: a) unfolding the unresolvable difficulties in Badiou’s and Meillassoux’s arguments; and b) arguing that phenomenological and hermeneutic philosophy is not necessarily limited to the idea of finitude, by exploring Ricœur’s philosophy. Because the debates are so substantial in their content and length, the present study will have to concentrate on the points that directly contribute to the problematic at hand; that is, if it is to maintain a coherent story-line and to observe constraints of space.

Inherent in the notion of a hermeneutics-based metaphysics of meaning and translation, is a sense of a lack of identity or equivalency and an unbounded multitude of possible interpretations. In fact, considering the theoretical developments in Continental philosophy, this notion would have to be seen as a case of (in)finitude. Nonetheless, this important issue seems to have been thematically ignored in Venuti’s speculation. The closest Venuti came to addressing Badiou’s infinitude is the following paragraph:

For Badiou, truth is not adequacy to reality or illumination; it is rather an investigative process initiated by an “event, which brings to pass ‘something other’ than the situation” defined by “opinions” and “instituted knowledge”… The event simultaneously locates and supplements a “void” or lack in that situation creating a subject who is committed to maintaining a “break” with it by articulating and investigating the consequences of the event, the ramifications of the idea, form or practice that acquires such value as to be called a “truth.”
The above comment effectively posits the theory of infinitude, especially through the idea of “break” that it promotes, and yet, Venuti never actually mentions it. Presumably, the idea of “void” is the quintessential idea, justifying Badiou’s affinity with the assumptions of the hermeneutic translation model. However, the Badiouian ideas of self-reflexivity, on the part of the translator, and of the infinitude of meaning appear to be at best redundant and historically suspended in translation theory, and may even be entirely problematic in light of new criticisms that have emerged in Continental philosophy.

According to Purcell, Ricœur’s distanciation from Heidegger in the case of the “hermeneutic circle” and his appropriation of Nabert provide a coherent answer to Meillassoux’s criticism (ancestral argument), thus yielding evidence for there being an idea of infinitude in Ricœur’s thought:

Ricœur’s transformation of the hermeneutic circle thus establishes an alternative correlation: the correlation between the question and that questioned. In order for this new correlation to achieve the status of an infinite recovery, a supposition underwrites it: there is nothing which we cannot at least question.23

This idea of inquiring proposes a critical implication for the anti-invariant conception of meaning in translation. Inquiring about the possibility of interpretations provides a futural and so infinitude-oriented approach to the hermeneutic model of translation, which can sufficiently explain the mechanism of Uncertainty in translation. Similarly, translations that are seen to include interpretations of source texts can be conceptualized as new readings that pose questions about a new possibility. In the same vein, but in a more refined and robust discussion, Purcell seeks to correct another misconception about Ricœur’s metaphysics and its difference from that of Heidegger and Gadamer. Ricœur’s hermeneutics is then shown to be committed to an idea of infinitude rather than of finitude. Expanding his former position about the “hermeneutic circle,” Purcell wishes to demonstrate “truth’s itinerary from alētheia to attestation.”24

The important premise is that Ricœur was a pioneer of “infinite hermeneutics,” and, in The Symbolism of Evil, proposed a three-stage model of recovery/completion [Aufhebung] of events with a (symbolic) meaning. The following is a paraphrase of the model:25

- The wager: this stage involves a “wager” that there is such a thing as symbolic meaning, which differs from normal or dictionary meaning;

- Verification: meaning is to be verified in the face of possible and conflicting interpretations, apparently as a “criterion for truth”;

- Transformation: upon reaching the criterion for truth, the newly interpreted and verified meaning can be realized, transforming the sense of dictionary records, texts, and previous interpretations.

This three-stage model of meaning discovery “initiates a form of inquiry that is infinite not in the sense that it continues indefinitely, but in the sense that it breaks utterly with established semantic sense.”26 The model can perfectly explain how the process of translation is accomplished through a mediation, integration, and progression of symbols, in a process that, although not bound by prior knowledge and ad hoc expectations, is free from a nihilistic uncertainty. This new
understanding of Ricœur’s contribution to the problem of infinitude considerably strengthens and fills a major gap in the hermeneutic metaphysics of translation.

Although the idea of infinitude was left out in prior philosophical speculation on translation, the next problem to be discussed has been richly explored. Here again the focus of this study will be on Venuti’s reliance on Badiou. Badiou’s assumed contribution rests on the ideas of “event,” “void” and “simulacrum of truth,” which together permit a certain articulation of the unethical, which is described as “a pseudo-event that locates not a void but a ‘plentitude’ or ‘substance’ and thus gives rise to a ‘simulacrum of truth’.”

Reviewing the history of his own theorizing, Venuti explains that he stopped his long-standing advocacy of the Schleiermacher-Berman model of hermeneutics because of the inherent “invariant” in their theories, just as he had done regarding St. Jerome’s strategies, and he turned to Badiou “to reformulate a translation ethics.” However, Venuti’s current theoretical “update” is basically problematic due at least in part to his lack of engagement with Ricœur, even when he reviews Heidegger and Gadamer. Further, Badiou’s supposedly useful ethics of translation faces serious problems. Here is how Purcell unfolds a fundamental shortcoming in Badiou’s ethics as opposed to that of Ricœur:

The difference, in fact, suggests that while Badiou’s truth procedures clearly lack any regulative critical moment [emphasis added], Ricœur’s require such a moment. While ethics, for Badiou, is simply the account of those empty personal virtues that enable one to continue in a truth procedure, Ricœur’s, by contrast, is necessarily substantive and normative.

Apart from this criticism, the example that Venuti analyzes, based on Badiou’s notions of void, pseudo-event, and simulacrum of truth, may seem confusing to the translation studies reader. In Jerome’s letter to Pammachius, we find two versions of his translation of a line from the Greek Hebrew Bible: the first version is a sense-for-sense translation, and the second is word-for-word one:

Oportebat nos, dilecrissime, clericatus honore non abuti in superbiam.  
It is fitting, dearest one, that we not abuse our privilege as clergy out of pride. 
Oportebat nos, dilecte, non aestimatione clerorum ferri. 
It is fitting, dear one, that we not overestimate the clergy.

The ethical problem detected by Venuti is that:

… Jerome’s first version makes additions that don’t merely show that he has translated with latitude, but also point to his application of a specific thematic interpretant, a value with which he encodes the source text: he assigns an “honore” or “privilege” to the clergy which is absent from the Greek.

From a pedagogical perspective, however, the above investigation is quite shapeless and unregulated. However, if one views the problem from the perspective of Ricœur’s three-stage model, a clearer and more practical handling of the problem can result:
Wager: “Ἐ δει ἡµᾶς ἄγαπητέ µή τι οἰήσει τῶν κλήρων φέρεθαι” presents a collection of symbols, creating a (new) meaning that may not be realized due to the translator’s subjective, social, institutional, or cultural functioning; but the translator is not circumscribed by a totalizing finitude and so can perceive the need for verification of the meaning;

Verification: a meaning has been subtracted that needs to be saturated and its truth has to be established with intelligibility;

Transformation: the set of symbols, rendered as “Oportebat nos, dilecte, non aestimatione clerorum ferri”, creates a new meaning that can return the first wager with a potentially transforming significance attached to it.

Upon closer investigation, what is concealed in Jerome’s translation is a manipulated story. He puts the meaning into a new account with a relatively different plot (privilege of clergy), which serves his ideology in practical ways. Apart from issues of meaning, a “unit” is needed to realize (manipulated) stories. Ricœur’s theory of narrative and its constituents can better reveal what has happened in the translation, explaining how a new reading is made possible through translation. The next section will propose a narrative theory of translation.

Ricœur’s Theory of Narrative as the Linguistic Realization of his Translation Theory

The previous section explored and proposed the “core” of a Ricœurian translation theory. Now, any literary, linguistic, social, and political reading of Ricœur’s philosophy of translation will rest on the metaphysical core. The next step is to show how such a metaphysical foundation may be realized in practice. A traditional, normally linguistic question in translation studies concerns the “translation unit” of a particular model, paradigm, or theory. The question can be phrased as follows: How can the conceptualizations of the theoretical construct in question be linguistically observed, practiced, and assessed? To answer this question, this section examines an important component of Ricœur’s philosophy, namely, his theory of narrative, and then builds upon it. It also discusses his “Self and Other” disunion, as developed in Oneself as Another, which incorporates translational alterity into his narrative theory.

Narrativity is one of the most peculiar modes of linguisticality, temporality, and interpretation, revealing an intermixture of factors in (inter)textuality processes. Mcquillan, collecting a rich conceptual history of narrative theories, explains why narrative can morph into any structural linguistic rank or socio-functional act:

If a single word, a single letter, a sign or a single mark can qualify as a narrative (that is, can represent, under the appropriate contextual conditions, some instance of intersubjective experience) then a narrative mark can no longer be thought of as an identifiably well-defined set of borders generically separate from other forms of verbal or written discourse. In simple words, the term “narrative” can apply to all thinkable units of meaning from a word to a whole discourse. Furthermore, as far as translation is concerned, narrative can encapsulate a fluidly flexible “unit” for textual analysis, resolving a basic form-related problem found in
philosophical theories of translation. Along the same lines, Ricœur’s theory of narrative, explicated most basically in his three volumes of *Time and Narrative*, represents one of the most theoretically well-founded and practically diversified theories of narrative.

There is an advantage in relying on narrative when constructing the foundations of a Ricœurian translation theory. It serves to solve two problems: a) because the construction is not bound to any specific genre, it solves the problem of *text-type* by providing an important translational conceptual tool; and b) it solves the problem of subjectivity of form in (neo)hermeneutic translation theories (see House’s criticism on such theories). Of course, it must be noted that this is not the first time that a narrative theory has been applied to translation.

In her book *Translation and Conflict*, Baker, a translation studies scholar, extends a narrative approach, from a social communicative perspective, to the study of “conflict” and translation. Her study, although highlighting the multitude of applications of narrative in translation, is not a genuinely philosophical exploration of narrativity. Rather, it identifies narrative as a contributory factor in ideological, political, racial, and military debates that are said to be fueled by translation. In contrast, the present study aspires to be a fundamental, systematic explication and expansion of a Ricœurian narrative-centered theoretical construct in translation studies.

Ricœur’s theory of narrative, as explored in the first volume of *Time and Narrative*, conceptualizes the order of actions as perceived by human subjectivity as well as the major temporal entanglements and paradoxes that complicate the narrated sequence of actions. When founding his narrative theory, Ricœur begins by unraveling the unique similarities between metaphor and narrative when it comes to creating new meanings. Then, he explicates the essence of the problematic at hand: “the temporal character of human experience.” To harmonize the multifarious dimensions of the problematic, Ricœur expands the rudimentary Aristotelian notion of *mimesis*, introducing three phases of mimesis and placing *(em)plotment* at the heart of the process. The whole process is described as being governed by three stages: prefiguration, configuration, and refiguration:

In constructing the relationship between the three mimetic modes I constitute the mediation between time and narrative. Or to put it another way, to resolve the problem of the relation between time and narrative I must establish the mediating role of *emplotment* between a stage of practical experience that precedes it and a stage that succeeds it.

This process can thus be perfectly summarized as follows: *We are following therefore the destiny of a prefigured time that becomes a refigured time through the mediation of a configured time* (emphasis original). Due to the wide-ranging applications of this model and a clear-cut identification of factors involved, it is possible that it could guide every act of translation. And yet, we need to take account of another significant work of Ricœur if we are to fully implement the whole model in the world of translation. Following a focused recapitulation of the phases, the perception of alterity, as explored in *Oneself as Another*, will be incorporated into the proposed translation-specific narrative theory.
MIMESIS:

This primary stage is concentrated on the “preunderstanding” of structural aspects of the narrated world of action, its symbolic content, and its temporal complexities. The structural frame involves goals, motives, agency, interaction, and change (in fortune), which collectively constitute a relation of “intersignification” that gives rise to our “practical understanding.” Narrative understanding is connected to this practical understanding through “a relation of presupposition and of transformation,” or in simple words, a mediation between familiarity and unfamiliarity. The questions that deal with the existential aspect of the narrative (who, what, how, why, etc.) are answered here, although these answers constitute a signifying relation that connects all of these pre-understandings together. Yet, these primary structures would demand “content” or pieces that could fit into the mold of structures. This second aspect subsumes symbolic resources: “If, in fact, human action can be narrated, it is because it is always already articulated by signs, rules, and norms. It is always already symbolically mediated.” Such symbols could be conceived as the culture-specific or contextualized determinants. This aspect of mimesis draws on social and anthropological work on symbol as well as on a structural system of symbolic interaction. From the perspective of norm theories, symbols, due to their socially organizing role, can constitute “rule-governed behavior,” providing grounds for passing ethics-regulated judgment on actions. Yet, even if one posits the importance of structures and symbols in refiguring narratives, there is still the need for including a mechanism that regulates them.

The third element is temporality and the experience of time. Following a discussion on Augustine and Heidegger, Ricœur states that: “within-time-ness or being-“within”-time deploys features irreducible to the representation of linear time. Being-“within”-time is already something other than measuring the intervals between limit-instants.” The reason behind this exploration of within-time-ness, according to Ricœur, is that, “[n]arrative configurations and the most elaborated forms of temporality corresponding to them share the same foundation of within-time-ness.” The process mentioned here constructs the “emplotment” that imitates human action in the prefiguration stage. The structures, symbolic content, and temporal lived experience still necessitate presupposing a construction that could put them into a well-framed whole.

MIMESIS:

If the shapeless preunderstanding is to reach a more tangible stage, it has to be molded into an organization of the events. Ricœur describes the function of this stage as follows:

The dynamism lies in the fact that a plot already exercises, within its own textual field, an integrating and, in this sense, a mediating function, which allows it to bring about, beyond this field, a mediation of a larger amplitude between the preunderstanding and, if I may dare to put it this way, the postunderstanding of the order of action and its temporal features.

The mediatory function of emplotment has three general aspects: a) a synthesized and meaningful incorporation of events into a larger plot; b) a homogeneity of diversified elements (e.g. agents, goals, interactions, etc.); and c) the temporal reconciliation of the heterogeneous as
“concordant discordant.” The last aspect deals with a paradox between two narrative times: chronological and configurational. The former subsumes episodic dimensions of a story, including the external relations of action, the open succession of events, and harmony with the irreversible time of human/physical actions. Yet, the latter is the unifying whole that connects all of the incidents happing in the story. In fact, the configurational time constitutes something approaching the atemporal theme of the narrative, because it creates a sense of closure (conclusion) in the face of an endless succession of events, and makes it possible to read events in the inverted (and surely paradoxical) order (backwards).

MIMESIS

Following prefiguration and configuration, the process still has to go through another stage, which could be called “the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader.” In this section of his inquiry, Ricœur deals with certain ambiguities. Following a resolution of problems concerning the circularity of interpretation, he directly addresses the transition from mimesis to mimesis, which is a phase concentrated on reading as “the final indicator of the refiguring of the world of action under the sign of the plot.” At this point, Ricœur argues that the complete shape of this whole process demands the incorporation of a theory of writing into a theory of reading and reception. To explain this stage, Ricœur partially draws on Gadamer’s notion of “fusion of horizons”:

What is communicated, in the final analysis, is, beyond the sense of a work, the world it projects and that constitutes its horizon. In this sense, the listeners or readers receive it according to their own receptive capacity, which itself is defined by a situation that is both limited and open to the world’s horizon.

This condensed model of narrative can shape the foundations of the language-realization component of the Ricœurian theory of translation proposed here. As mentioned earlier, an important ingredient of Ricœur’s theory of translation is its notion of “intralinguistic translation.” In reality, this component clarifies that narratives in the source language itself are not static and they, too, are subjected to an active process of interpretation. How the author pre-figures and co-figures the narrative in the source language would simply represent concerns of various types depending on the situation.

However, before we attempt to construct a fully developed translation model, it is important to envisage a conception of “alterity” that could put the axiological stakes of source texts into a mechanism of duality and plurality. I argue that this conception, which is perfectly conceived of in Ricœur’s philosophy, can be identified in Oneself as Another. In fact, if narrative is the “translation unit” in this Ricœurian theory, alterity renders it bilingual and/or multilingual. It should be remembered that both of these processes (narratives and perception of alterity) are regulated by Ricœur’s hermeneutics of infinitude (see above).

The analysis of “Self and Other,” proposed in Oneself as Another, is divided into two parts: ontological and ethical. The ontological part explains the necessity and interdependence of the Other in shaping the Self. However, this discussion does not posit any act of judgment about how the Other should be treated or reacted to. The ethical part, which is substantially explored in the
next sub-section of the paper, concerns practical judgments in the constitution of the ethico-politics of translation in light of Ricœur’s treatment of alterity and his political philosophy.

In Oneself as Another, Ricœur follows three philosophical purposes, the third one of which is to address the dialectics of “self and the other than self”, where otherness helps constitute the Self.55 This purpose is explored here to demonstrate philosophically how narratives of the Self are represented to the Other.

The dialectics of selfhood and otherness constructs a “metacategory” which is itself a threefold issue that Ricœur calls “the triad of passivity and, hence, of otherness” hypothesis.56 In this regard, he explores three types of passivity namely, experience of one’s body, relation of the Self to the foreign and intersubjectivity, and relation of the Self to itself (conscience). Clearly, the relation which is of paramount importance to the narrative representation of the Other in translation would be the second one: the Self and other people. Meanwhile, to better understand the point of Ricœur’s discussions, the notion of attestation should be considered, although it was briefly reviewed in the metaphysics of infinitude (see above).

Distinguishing attestation from epistemic or scientific knowledge, Ricœur describes it “as a kind of belief” or “the credence – that belongs to the triple dialectic of reflection and analysis, of selfhood and sameness, and of self and other.”57 More specifically, in the case of the Other, in its broad denotation, one deals with “an attestation which itself is broken, in the sense that the otherness joined to selfhood is attested to only in a wide range of dissimilar experiences, following a diversity of centers of otherness.”58

The central issue in the problem of “self and other” is affection, which explains that the Self and the Other are not (complementary) counterparts but the Other is an intimate, integral component of the Self. Focusing specifically on the theory of narrative and literature, Ricœur contends that:

It is, once again, the same exchange between the affected self and the affecting other that governs, on the narrative plane, the way the reader of a story assumes the roles held by the characters, which are most often constructed in the third person, inasmuch as they enter into the plot at the same time as the action recounted.59

The above statement captures, in a relatively simple way, the vital incorporation of narrative and understanding-of-Other, which can function as a theoretical frame constituting translation-centered narrativity. This entails an investigation of theories of reading as well (as Ricœur suggests those of Jauss and Iser), the purpose of which is to delve into the understanding-of-Other process. The situation in the case of translation appears to be even more fascinating, as translation involves a re-narrating of the whole text (reconfiguration, configuration, and reconfiguration), demonstrating that the perception of otherness is not bound just to the reconfiguration (reading) stage, but it, along with the entire narrative process, re-constructs a new dialectics, rhetoric, stylistics, and poetics in the receiving language.

This perhaps overly complicated intertextuality and intersubjectivity could be explained, however, through a re-folding of Ricœur’s formulaic process. This cross-linguistic re-narration is governed by an “interpretive act.” These interpreted narratives, of course, need to be regulated by certain codes of ethics in socio-political practice, as explained in the next section.
Ricœur’s Ethico-Politics of Translation

In the previous sections, the metaphysical underpinning of meaning and translation was explored, and it was further explained how an infinitude of interpretations reach intermittent closures in cross-linguistic narratives. In the discussion on “Self and Other” a division was made between ontological and ethical dimensions of the understanding of alterity. The concern now is to concentrate specifically on the ethics and socio-politics of translation, in a globalizing world, and of course from a Ricœurian perspective. Because politics, globalization, mass media, minorities, migration, diaspora, and so on, are becoming increasingly expansive topics in our era, translation studies has in turn entered a new phase of development. In constituting an ethico-politics of translation, especially in view of the unprecedented revolutions of hypertextuality and mass media, a solution could be found in an ethical reading of Ricœur’s “Self and Other,” coupled with some of the propositions of Memory, History, and Forgetting.

If, as mentioned earlier, Ricœur’s prescription for understanding the other selves revolves around intimacy and affection, then there must be a regulative discipline for passing judgment on deviation from or appreciation of the foreign. In a lucid rethinking of this problem, Kearney states, “… if others become too transcendent, they disappear off our radar… [and the] possibility of imagining, narrating or interpreting alterity becomes impossible.” On the contrary, if extreme immanence is exercised, “they become indistinguishable from our own totalizing selves (conscious or unconscious).”

The most serious threat arises when “totalizing selves” intend to expand a “totalizing globalization,” in which the inherent act of ethical distanciation, as posited in Kearney’s statement, starts to gradually lose its motivation, while both selves and others decide to drastically, yet deceivingly, eradicate their borders of difference. Translation, at least at a discoursal level, has been the facilitating factor of globalization, while imbalances of technological, economic, and political power have engendered asymmetric relations among cultures worldwide. Apart from the problem of asymmetry, translation has actively contributed to the continuation of the existence of texts across cultures and languages. The function of translation in the history and future of the world’s languages, then, appears to be a prolongation of survival in inherently asymmetric world histories.

To understand the imbalances, one has to consider studies of global language systems, best exemplified by Heilbron’s sociology of the “international system of translation.” Dividing world languages into central, semi-peripheral, and peripheral groups, Heilbron states:

Distinguishing languages by their degree of centrality not only implies that translation flows more from the core to the periphery than the other way round, but also that the communication between peripheral groups often passes through a centre [emphasis added].

Philosophically speaking, the facilitating factor of translation will generate growth in familiarity (assimilation) following a sharply contradictory agenda: those in the center of world languages and dominant cultures will establish a hierarchy of power relations, in which those who have been assimilated are decentralized toward peripheral margins. If translation is meant to foster affection and intimacy between and among the parties involved, then how could it ultimately result in an imperialistic state where most of translation’s ethical claims fail? This paradox is
strengthened by translation in globalization. If being part of the internationalizing ocean would enhance assimilation, familiarity, and equality, then why is there a hierarchy of central, semi-peripheral, and peripheral languages?

Meanwhile, translation in a world of cybernetics, mass media, and constantly updated webpages, will face new challenges when it comes to questions of authority, quality assessment, and conflicting interpretations. Along with the essential affinity of translation and hermeneutics, these new challenges seem to create yet another zone where translation must rely on hermeneutics, although the latter is still undergoing development regarding these same challenges. The question is quite straightforward: What are the implications for translation of a hermeneutics that interprets in a globalized situation? The ethico-politics of translation in the context of globalization could represent a developmental project that is guided by new discussions on Ricœur’s philosophy. To facilitate such a development, we must first conceptualize a Ricœurian hermeneutics of globalization and then we must establish, even as a mere transitory codification, certain regulative codes of conduct for global translation.

One of the major theoretical attempts to help hermeneutics contribute to the problem of globalization has been suggested by Kristensson Uggla, who believes that some radical transformations are needed: “hermeneutics is compelled to find a way out of the blind alley of the German hermeneutics of understanding (and pre-understanding).” Kristensson Uggla has tried to explore two problems that can contribute to a type of mutual resolution.

On the one hand, the idea of globalization has not been incorporated into hermeneutic considerations (not even in Ricœur’s original thought), and on the other, globalization has manifested a genuine, and perhaps most exotic, space of rapidly developing, conflicting interpretations. In fact, according to Kristensson Uggla, hermeneutics and globalization can create a union that theoretically enhances both sides. In advancing his argument, Kristensson Uggla builds on some propositions of the philosopher Vattimo, who contends that communication technologies “have prepared us for hermeneutics by generating conditions in which there are no longer any stable facts, only variable interpretations.”

This proves to be an interesting suggestion for a new application of hermeneutics in an environment characterized by unpredictability, uncertainty, and the rapid growth of information in electronic spaces. To prepare hermeneutics for this new problem of interpretation in the simultaneous multivocality of the global world, Kristensson Uggla proposes an “alternative approach” that is founded upon “the manner in which Ricœur coped with the specific limitations connected with his most important protagonist (and contributor as well) within German hermeneutics: Heidegger.” In a nutshell, this alternative can be described as follows:

By developing ontology in this way, that is, with the help of epistemology (instead of Heidegger’s fundamental ontology) and truth through method (instead of Gadamer’s “truth or method”), Ricœur has brought about a metamorphosis of the concept of interpretation, which paves the way for hermeneutics in the new century.
between Finland and Sweden, which remind us in every possible way of the geopolitics, socio-culturology, and socio-politics of translation in globalization. According to Kristensson Uggla, the political sense of hermeneutics can be found in Ricœur’s Memory, History and Forgetting, where narratives are constructed through selectivity in a continuum of memory and forgetting: “One cannot recall everything and one can always recount differently, due to the unavoidable selective nature of narrative and its connective functions. Selection means that seeing one thing means not seeing another.”

This problem, which is directly reminiscent of the Uncertainty of meaning in translation, requires at least a zone for a partial determination of “truth,” which is the condition of possibility for the very act of interpretation. The challenge facing hermeneutics now is the fact that, “the turbulent transformation of all and everything in today’s world means that all absolute knowledge is almost automatically eroded.” To partially resolve or at least deal with the uncertainty of conflicting interpretations, a Ricœurian critical/dialectical hermeneutics can be considered “that incorporates an encompassing dialectic involving both listening and suspicion, understanding and explanation, the hermeneutics of tradition as well as a critique of ideologies.”

Considering the notion of alterity, coupled with conflicting interpretations and the international translation system, I argue that Ricœur’s fundamental logic of “Self and Other” applies here, although in a non-linear, fuzzy, and multilingual complexity network. If, as some translation critics (e.g. Lefevere, Asad, Baker, Venuti, and Spivak) acknowledge, translation involves manipulation, re-writing, re-framing, and re-presentation, it is very likely that central languages (and specially the hyper-central language English) cannot reliably and sufficiently serve as the “lingua franca” for a globalizing world. If the Self is in part constituted by the Other, as suggested in Oneself as Another, a refined explanation of this proposition in Memory, History, and Forgetting can clarify the ethical and political problematics of globalizing translation systems.

If there is narrative selectivity in the memory-forgetting balance, then what one is to remember and what one is to forget would be decisions for those who possess instruments of disseminating, legitimizing, manipulating, or terminating narratives through translation. In assimilating foreign narratives into central languages, there are always forces that could manipulate any of the aspects of the narrative (in prefiguration, configuration, refiguration), thus re-shaping a false alterity and, even more threateningly, deforming and minoritizing identities on a global scale, while dangerously constituting the Self by way of a flawed otherness.

This memory-forgetting pattern, as represented by narratives, can be in part explained by the functioning of traditionality: a dynamic pattern of tradition-versus-innovation as “internalized interaction.” This quest would help explore how meaning is decided in traditions (regardless of authorial intention) and to what extent new narratives (as criticisms, statements, literary works, or translations) strengthen or violate accumulated historical memory. A translation is in part an intertextual continuation of previous (native and/or foreign) discourses, but the degree to which it “breaks” with the past would determine its traditionality. This would ultimately lead us to “futural plurality,” as explored earlier, as the temporal condition in the continuation of narratives. But, how are we to ethically evaluate this narrative selectivity?

From an ethico-political perspective, two transitory solutions are proposed here, both fully based on Ricœur’s critical/dialectical hermeneutics. The direction of reflexivity is twofold:
one is the responsibility of creating true narratives and the other a theory of self-reflexivity in reading/interpreting. The first solution invests in the responsibility of information dissemination agents who, from a moral point of view, are expected to act as critically as possible when rendering narratives (no matter of which text-type). However, in the case of ideologically loaded texts, there are forces manipulating translations. That is why translations always need another critical dimension.

The other strategy is a theory of critical reading in narratives, which has been suggested by Baker, although her theory lacks an elaborate metaphysical groundwork. Baker describes her narrative approach as follows: “The notion of narrative used in this book overlaps to some extent with Foucault’s ‘discourse’ and Barthes’ ‘myths,’ especially in its emphasis on the normalizing effect of publicly disseminated representations.” In fact, what she tries to explore for the most part is the intrinsic ethical problem of the “normalizing function of narratives” which, over time, represents narratives as “self-evident, benign, uncontestable and non-controversial.”

The conclusion that Baker draws could be regarded as a call for the “critical” evaluation of narratives and the manner in which they are made to serve (political) ideologies. Ricœur’s three-stage model of infinitude is just as applicable to Baker’s ideology as it was to Venuiti’s call for ethics in translating. In fact, Baker’s approach falls neatly under Ricœur’s hermeneutics of translation, as explored here, even though, as a theory of social communication, it lacks a genuine metaphysical substance. Furthermore, a critical dialectics of interpretation, inferred from Ricœur’s philosophy, can thematically subsume the conclusions that Baker seeks to derive.

The entire dialectics is characterized by the ability to transcend totalizing narratives and to practically exercise verification and finally reach transformation, helping the Self to constitute judgments based on the (perceived) reality of the Other. To actualize the two above-mentioned ethical strategies, there are two functional possibilities: First, new translation-language pairs can be constructed (e.g. Arabic <> Italian, Spanish <> Persian, Armenian <> Japanese), which would help languages directly transfer narratives across their borders, within a fuzzy network, without the intermediacy of central languages, giving rise to a fully dynamic epoch of cross-cultural and translational encounter. Yet, as colorful and democratic as this option may appear, it is equally dependent on expert human resources and the availability of instruments to sustain its practicality. The second option is to live with globalized narratives but through a constant process of attestation. As a characteristic of globalization, “accessibility” of information (narratives) through the Internet and electronic resources can help create “parallel” hypertexts dialectically comparable to each other. The narratives of peripheral nations, although consciously translated into central languages by such nations, are composed of a specific memory-forgetting pattern that serves those nations’ self-interests, providing an opposing vantage point for evaluating alternative globalized narratives, whether established as traditions or as emerging ideologies.

**Conclusion**

This study proposed the general framework of an extended Ricœurian translation theory. Broadly speaking, the study sought to achieve two objectives: a) to contribute to Ricœur studies by way of defending Ricœur from a number of misinterpretations, and by laying out what his “extended theory of translation” is; and b) to contribute to translation studies by spelling out a broader philosophical theory of translation, one currently unrecognized in the existing literature.
The theory outlined in this paper was founded upon three components: a) a metaphysics of meaning; b) a narrative theory; and c) an ethico-politics of translation. It set out to show that the three-stage model (wager, verification, and transformation) is the core of Ricœur’s hermeneutics of infinitude in translation, and that narrative is the linguistic realization of meaning in translation, arguing that translated narratives should be subjected to ethical considerations. It noted that conflicting interpretations in globalization, intensified by the instrumental function of translation, constitute a completely new ground for hermeneutic exploration. It suggested that representing alterity through narratives is something that can be guided by Ricœur’s critical/dialectical hermeneutics at two levels of reflexivity: the moral responsibility of narrative disseminators and the self-reflexivity of readers. It is hoped that this theoretical/applied incorporation of Ricœur’s philosophy has the potential to occupy a central position in future translation theory, underscoring the close affinity of translation with Continental philosophy.

2 Bengt Kristensson Uggla, *Ricœur, Hermeneutics, and Globalization* (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), 7. (abbreviated here as RHG)


4 *Ricœur, Oneself as Another*, 169.


7 Pym, *ETT*, 100.


10 See Ricœur, *On Translation*.


14 Kearney, “Paul Ricœur and the Hermeneutics of Translation,” 155.


This view is extremely problematic as it would even question the very logic of Venuti’s dichotomy. If Gadamer is a representative of hermeneutics in translation, then how could one assume that Gadamer’s philosophy would advocate Jerome’s invariant?


23 Purcell, “After Hermeneutics?” 177.


26 Purcell, “Hermeneutics and Truth,” 151.


34 Munday, Introducing Translation Theories and Applications, 114.


38 Ricœur, Time and Narrative, 53.

39 Ricœur, Time and Narrative, 54.

40 Ricœur, Time and Narrative, 55.

41 Ricœur, Time and Narrative, 55.

42 Ricœur, Time and Narrative, 57.
43 Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, 58.
44 Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, 58.
45 Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, 62.
46 Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, 64.
51 Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, 71.
52 Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, 77.
53 Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, 77.
54 Kearney, “Paul Ricœur and the Hermeneutics of Translation,” 149.
55 Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 3.
56 Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 318.
57 Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 21.
58 Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 318.
59 Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 329.
62 Kristensson Ugga, *RHG*, 47.
63 Kristensson Ugga, *RHG*, 53.
64 Kristensson Ugga, *RHG*, 42.
65 Kristensson Ugga, *RHG*, 49.
66 Kristensson Ugga, *RHG*, 95.
68 Kristensson Uggla, RHG, 51.

69 Heilbron, Sociology of Translation, 310.

70 Ricœur, Oneself as Another, 156

71 Baker, Translation and Conflict, 3.

72 Baker, Translation and Conflict, 11.