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HERMENEUTIC READING FOR TRANSLATING ENGLISH AND UZBEK NEWS HEADLINES

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Abstract

Headline translation is difficult not because words are unknown, but because much of the intended meaning is implicit: agency can be backgrounded, evaluation can be smuggled in through metaphors, and culturally shared scripts do the rest of the work. This article develops a practical hermeneutic model for headline translation between English and Uzbek, grounded in a comparative analysis of online headlines from Reuters and Kun.uz (2024–2026). Building on philosophical hermeneutics and on pragmatic research about headline interpretation, the paper identifies three recurring translation risks: (1) mismatched presuppositions about institutions and authority, (2) shifts in news values when evaluation is lexicalized differently, and (3) divergent ‘economies of explicitness’ in agency and modality. The article then proposes a classroom-ready translation protocol aligned with UNESCO media and information literacy aims, and shows how multilingual language models can support training by clustering headline variants and surfacing hidden frames. The contribution is a method that is both interpretive and teachable: it operationalizes hermeneutic insights into repeatable translation decisions and learning tasks.

Keywords: headline translation; hermeneutics; presupposition; news values; intercultural pragmatics; media literacy; English–Uzbek

Introduction

Translating headlines is a high-stakes micro-task. A headline is short, but it can shape readers’ judgments before any supporting evidence is read. When

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headlines move across languages, the risk is not only lexical mismatch; it is the loss or distortion of implicit cultural meaning.

Headline pragmatics helps explain why. Headlines are designed to be optimally relevant to a target audience, giving a high ratio of contextual effects to processing effort (Dor, 2003). They also exploit curiosity management in digital environments (Kuiken et al., 2017) and may use forward reference as an attention lure (Blom & Hansen, 2015).

Hermeneutics adds an essential corrective: meaning is produced within horizons of understanding. A translator is an interpreter who must negotiate between horizons, not simply map words (George, 2020; Malpas, 2003).

Translation Risks as Hermeneutic Problems

Risk 1: presupposition mismatch. Many headlines presuppose institutional knowledge or cultural scripts. For example, a policy headline may presuppose how accountability is assigned, or which institutions are trusted. If these presuppositions do not travel, literal translation can become misleading even when it is accurate at the word level (Ifantidou, 2009).

Risk 2: news values shift. Newsworthiness is discursively constructed; evaluative meaning can be carried by a single metaphor or adjective (Bednarek & Caple, 2012). Translating “battleground” into a more neutral Uzbek phrase may reduce the conflict frame; translating “ma’lum qilindi” into an active English clause may increase actor visibility and moral assignments.

Risk 3: explicitness economy. English headlines in many institutional contexts tend to externalize agency (named actors, active clauses), whereas Uzbek headlines often allow institutional procedures to carry meaning through announcement-like structures. The translator must decide whether to preserve the source economy or adapt to target expectations.

Method and Illustrative Cases

The article uses a small set of publicly accessible Reuters and Kun.uz headlines (2024–2026) as illustrative cases. The purpose is methodological: to show how translation decisions can be justified through a hermeneutic–pragmatic protocol.

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The protocol has four questions: (1) What is presupposed? (2) What frame is activated (problem/causality/evaluation/recommendation)? (3) Who is agentive, and who is backgrounded? (4) What cultural horizon makes this headline efficient for its audience? These questions are answered first in the source language and then re-answered after drafting the target headline. Divergences reveal where translation risks cluster.

A Teachable Protocol for Translators and Students


Step A: annotate the headline. Students underline agency markers (subjects, passives, nominalizations), circle modality (will/may/must; -adi/-iladi), and label evaluative lexicon (conflict metaphors, intensifiers).

Step B: write a ‘horizon note’. In two sentences, students state the background assumptions they think the headline relies on (e.g., ‘policy is contested and actors are accountable’ vs. ‘policy is procedural and announced through institutions’).

Step C: draft two translations. Translation 1 preserves the source economy; Translation 2 adapts to target expectations (e.g., increasing actor explicitness in English). Students then compare which version better preserves the frame.

Step D: connect to media literacy outcomes. UNESCO’s MIL curriculum emphasizes competencies for interpreting media messages and recognizing how communication shapes understanding (UNESCO, n.d.). A translation classroom can align with these aims by treating headline translation as an exercise in identifying implicit framing rather than only lexical equivalence.

Step E: optional computational support. Contextual language models (Peters et al., 2018; Devlin et al., 2019) and multilingual models such as XLM-R (Conneau et al., 2020) can cluster headline variants and surface semantically similar frames across languages. Used carefully, these tools help students see patterns (e.g., ‘announcement’ constructions) and test hypotheses about framing without replacing interpretive justification.

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Conclusion

A hermeneutic approach makes headline translation more disciplined: it requires translators to justify how presuppositions, frames, and implicit evaluation are carried across languages. The model presented here is deliberately teachable: it can be implemented as a classroom protocol, a peer-review checklist, or an editorial guide for bilingual newsrooms.

Future work should expand the corpus and evaluate the protocol's outcomes empirically (e.g., whether students' translations preserve frames more consistently). Combining hermeneutic reasoning with carefully constrained computational tools offers a promising path for translation pedagogy in multilingual media environments.

Ethics and Permissions

This study uses only short quotations of publicly accessible headlines and does not involve human participants, private datasets, or identifiable personal data. No copyrighted figures, tables, or photographs are reproduced. The author consents to authorship identification and accepts responsibility for the analysis.

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