

Bridging the mental Iron Curtain, or, re-exploring the “old” in new contexts

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If we had been born some 70 years ago we would surely, as young scholars, have enjoyed the conference which took place in 1968 in Bratislava and was co-organized by, among others, Anton Popovič and James S. Holmes. Indeed, many years have passed since and after very vibrant communication prior to 1989 (at least in the field of descriptive translation studies – DTS) it seemed for a while that our worlds had taken a diverging rather than converging turn. But that, perhaps, is about to change. It is one of the reasons why we believe it is time to talk about the “re-turn” and the mental Iron Curtain that is, we hope, slowly starting to diminish (at least in the academic environment). And to paraphrase Gambier at the *Transferring Translation Studies* conference in Leuven who said that we need to make our assumptions clear, which means (as we understand it) that before we start internationally talking about “national” theories (if there is such a thing), we should state what we mean by theory and what our points of departure are, and this should help us prevent misunderstandings which have been so typical in previous years. In other words, we often talked about the same things but used often unclear language, thus preventing us from understanding each other. The question was/is whether this lack of understanding was deliberate or subconscious. But where there is a will there is a way, and recent development has shown that the international TS community has been trying to become international indeed, incorporating or giving a chance to once marginalized traditions which, in fact, were not so marginal at all, as they stood at the very dawn of what we now (mainly thanks to James S. Holmes) call translation studies, although this is still sometimes forgotten. As José Lambert (Althoff – Fleuri 2010, 219) suggested in an interview in which he referred to the lack of knowledge of “older” but relevant sources in TS: “[s]cholars in Translation Studies sometimes have problems with information, maybe even with amnesia.” One of the most prominent Slovak translation scholars, Ján Vilikovský, once in a personal conversation made a very perceptive comment on the seemingly repetitive studies of “national” and “international” scholars and on why we haven’t moved far since the inception of translation studies as a discipline. His comment was brief and apt: “If people read more, they would write less.” As we mentioned before, it now seems we have started to be interested in moving forward, but before we do that, it is necessary to review the past and see whether “old” theories are still valid by deconstructing them and

reconstructing them against new situations. Quite a few conferences on “Eastern” translation studies have taken place recently; to name but a few: the 2013 conference *Czech, Slovak and Polish Structuralist Traditions in the Translation Studies Paradigm Today* was held at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic, as part of the 12th traditional translation studies event *The Prague International Conference on Translation and Interpreting*, and in the same year the conference *Low Countries Conference II, Transferring Translation Studies* was also held at the Faculty of Philosophy of the Catholic University in Leuven, Belgium. In 2014 the conference *Slavic Translatology* was held in Bologna. In 2015 the conference *Going East: Discovering New and Alternative Traditions in Translation (Studies)* was held in Vienna, and in the same year a conference entitled *Some Holmes and Popovič in all of us? The Low Countries and the Nitra Schools in the 21st Century* was held at the Faculty of Arts of Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra. It seems that communication has started (at least formally) and we will probably have to wait some years to see it bear methodological fruit. This issue of *World Literature Studies* aims to become a snapshot of the process.

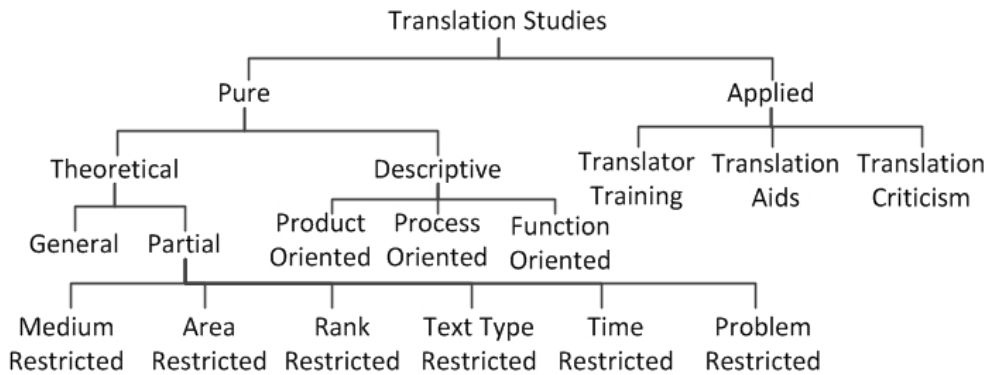
We wish to avoid using binary oppositions such as “West versus East” when talking about the period after 1989 (however, if these terms are used prior to 1989 they need to be understood in this paper as a political division not civilizational – that is the reason why we use capital letters to denote them) and will try to focus rather on emphasizing common and differentiating features of various theoretical models as such. We will also not focus on the ongoing (at least in the Czech Republic and Slovakia) debate on who was first: Holmes or Popovič. This topic is stimulating and certainly deserves further research. Many Czech and Slovak scholars have done some excellent work in this field, for example Vladimír Biloveský (2011), Edita Gromová (2013), Anita Huťková (2014), Zuzana Jettmarová (2008, 2016), Jaroslav Špirk (2009), Libuša Vajdová (2014), Mária Valentová (2009) and others, so we will not be returning to it and instead will try to move forward. It is very hard to say who came up with the idea first, because as José Lambert (Althoff – Fleuri 2010, 212), discussing the origins of TS and Holmes’s contacts with Czechoslovak and Russian scholars, mentions: “The publications came afterwards. And very often the publications did not even come. So I know of lots of documents that have been produced and discussed and that have never really been published [...]” We see three main reasons for Popovič and his ideas being forgotten or misunderstood:

1. Ideology¹
2. Lack of translation
3. Presentation

The first two reasons are obvious and rather straightforward, but the third one, often neglected, is more peculiar. Presentation can be approached from two main perspectives: a) *presentation of Popovič’s work by domestic scholars*, who often concentrate on national and historical aspects of his work and forget to emphasize and reshape the validity of his theories in the contemporary world; b) *the structure of his own work*.

In the former case we may conclude that it is more than reasonable to defend and

re-establish Popovič and his contribution to TS, but we believe that now, after so many articles written, it is time to test his theories against the new cultural context and prove or refute their validity. That would be one of the main reasons for a re-turn instead of a re-inventing of the wheel. In the case of presentation of his own work it comes to be even more interesting; the idea might be illustrated in the following example (Holmes 1987, 21):



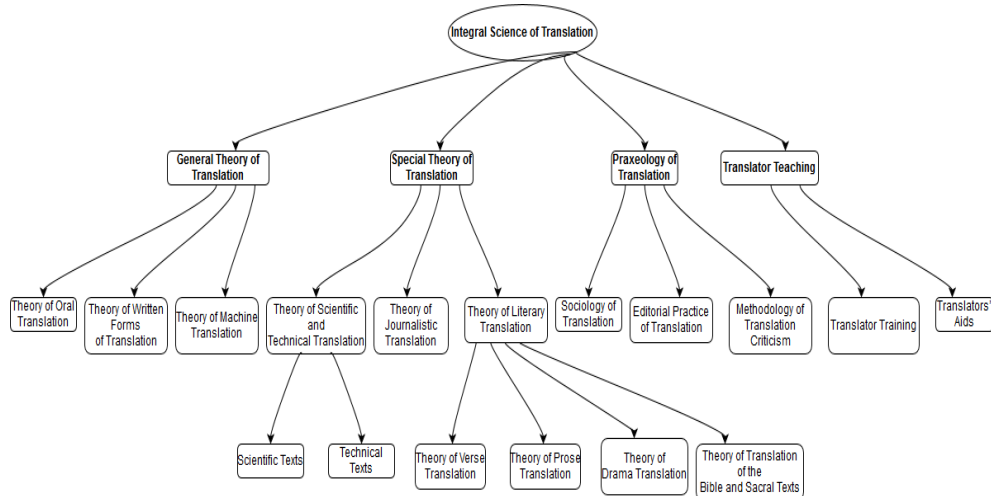
The whole translation community is notoriously familiar with Holmes’s map/tree introducing translation studies. However, Andrew Chesterman (2009) argues that “the published version of Holmes’ original article (1988) does not actually contain it in diagram form. Curiously, some versions of the figure (such as Gideon Toury’s) omit the branch on translation policy, which is nevertheless explicitly listed in the article itself” (Chesterman 2009, 14). He instead offers a model including the omitted branch. The question remains whether the map would have become so famous without a diagram, but this is mere speculation. The story of Holmes’s map, however, is very interesting in itself. The original version of Holmes’s seminal paper (1972) did not include the diagram to the map he outlined. And although many scholars mention that it was presented for the first time by Toury in 1991 or 1995 respectively (e. g. Anthony Pym 1998), it seems evident that the first version of the diagram was presented in 1987’s issue of the *Indian Journal of Applied Linguistics* edited by Toury. Although for some this information might seem irrelevant, we believe that it was the presentation of the map² that made it known to the wider translation studies community, whereas Popovič lacked such representation.

Popovič provided his own classification of translation theory disciplines, originally introduced in 1971 and completed in 1975, which is at least as interesting and informative as the former one:

- I. General Theory of Translation
 - a) Theory of Oral Translation
 - b) Theory of Written Forms of Translation
 - c) Theory of Machine Translation
- II. Special Theory of Translation
 - a) Theory of Scientific and Technical Translation

- Theory of Individual Special Cases of Technical Translation
 - i. Scientific Texts
 - ii. Technical Texts
- b) Theory of Journalistic Translation
- c) Theory of Literary Translation
 - i. Theory of Verse Translation
 - ii. Theory of Prose Translation
 - iii. Theory of Drama Translation
 - iv. Theory of Translation of the Bible and Sacral Texts
- III. Praxeology of Translation
 - a) Sociology of Translation
 - b) Editorial Practice of Translation
 - c) Methodology of Translation Criticism
- IV. Translator Teaching
 - a) Translator Training
 - b) Translators' Aids (Popovič, 1975, 20)³

However, if one tries to compare these classifications, at first sight it is not so obvious why some (mainly Czech and Slovak scholars) talk about such a large number of similarities, even identical features (see Jettmarová 2016). But if we carefully follow the clues provided by Popovič in his *Teória umeleckého prekladu* (1975, Theory of Artistic Translation) and try to construct a “map”, it would look something like this:



After constructing such a diagram⁴ it is much easier to understand what Popovič may have meant and what his mode of thinking was; it is also much less complicated to compare and contrast. These diagrams contain different terms/forms but with very similar if not identical meanings. It might even seem that the one “presented” by Popovič is even more elaborate and complex. When we look at Popovič’s scheme, the first thing that one might want to argue is that he doesn’t include descriptive translation studies, nor its subfields (function-, process- and product-oriented). Holmes, however, talks about the sociology of translation as part of function-oriented TS,

whereas Popovič distinguishes sociology of translation as a separate subdiscipline falling under the praxeology of translation, thus covering function-oriented DTS. The same applies to process-oriented as well as product-oriented DTS, but it is worth noting that while Holmes concentrates on the “little black box” Popovič focuses on the communication process,⁵ and one of the areas that deals with product-oriented TS is for example translation shifts, although these might be perceived as an element uniting all sub-disciplines of DTS, as they are concerned with process, product as well as function.

It is interesting to notice that Popovič, when talking about general translation theory, mentions the theory of oral translation, the theory of written forms of translation and the theory of machine translation, while Holmes ranks them under medium-restricted partial translation studies. In Holmes’s description of medium-restricted translation studies he says that the reason “examples of medium-restricted theories of written translation do not come to mind so easily is largely owing to the fact that their authors have the tendency to present them in the guise of unmarked or general theories” (1987, 16) which may be understood as an indirect reproach to Popovič, who did exactly this; but Holmes adds: “It is moreover no doubt true that some aspects of theories that are presented as general in reality pertain only to the Western cultural area” (17). In this context it is worth mentioning Maria Tymoczko’s definition of the West:

I am using the term Western roughly to refer to ideas and perspectives that initially originated in and became dominant in Europe, spreading from there to various other locations in the world, where in some cases, such as the United States, they have also become dominant. At this point in time, however, when Western ideas have permeated the world and there is widespread interpenetration of cultures everywhere, the terms east and west become increasingly problematic (2003, 1).

Her definition is, we believe, in opposition to Holmes’s, as she considers Popovič to be part of “Western” translation studies whereas, implicitly, we may conclude that Holmes would consider him a representative of Eastern theory. Anyway, today it is, we believe, clear that Popovič was a cofounder of descriptive translation studies by introducing facts and concepts commonly used on the other side of the curtain. To make this matter even more opaque and complicated, Viktor Koptilov in his 1971 paper *Perekladoznavstvo yak okrema haluz’ fililohii* (Translation studies as a separate branch of philology) came up with his own classification of the discipline, dividing it into general theory of literary translation, partial translation theories, specific translation theories, literary translation criticism and history of literary translation.⁶ Of course his views slightly differ from Holmes’s and Popovič’s⁷ visions of the discipline, but we may as well observe some common and differentiating features. Now, whether we like it or not, it is not possible, as has become evident, to separate the West, Centre and East, as the boundaries of intellectual life are not geographical but rather mental and political.

Another interesting point worth mentioning is the fact that while Holmes classifies text-type restricted theories under one general category, Popovič sets out a specific separate category, the special theory of translation, which is further subdivided

taking into consideration concrete text-types which are to be studied deeply and separately, focusing on the common and differentiating features of each of them. It certainly follows the Slovak tradition of style classification (see Miko 1970, or Mistrík 1975) which he later applied when theorising translation. However, his decision to dedicate so much space to them is, we believe, a reflection of the cultural needs of former Czechoslovakia and today's Slovakia. To illustrate this we will use the findings of CEATL, which we quote almost in every paper that we have presented internationally, to illustrate the situation in the translation market: "The real 'European champions' of literary translation are the Czechs and the Slovaks with a proportion of 80 % in fiction" (Fock, De Haan et al. 2008, 67). This means that as much as 80 % of overall literary production consists of translations.

If we look at time-restricted theories,⁸ one could argue that Popovič doesn't take these into account, but the opposite is true. Although they are not directly included in his classification, already in 1971 he mentions three cases:

1. The time of the original's culture is identical to the time of the translation's culture.
2. The time of the translation's culture lags behind the time of the original's culture.
3. The time of the original's culture (a particular segment of it) is completely absent from the translation's culture.

As for applied translation studies, we see no significant differences in classification, only the fact that while Holmes includes translation training, translation aids and translation criticism under the single roof of applied TS (it is worth reiterating that translation policy should have been included in the original one), Popovič divides them into two separate categories: translation teaching (training, aids) and praxeology (methodology of translation criticism, sociology of translation, editorial practices of translation). Similar may be said of many other terms and concepts they share, for example: translation policy (Holmes) – translation programme (Popovič). The more we study and compare their texts the more it is evident that these two scholars are almost impossible to separate, as they complement each other, thus becoming a metaphor for this issue of *World Literature Studies*.

The given scheme and "introduction to comparative translation studies", which are the basic points of departure for the "re-turn", were used to illustrate how the presentation of research may influence the overall reception of a scholar and his model. Had there been someone to draw a map that Popovič had sketched, would he have become more recognized? It is difficult and probably futile to speculate.

The post-structuralist and deconstructionist approach may argue that Holmes's model, and this would also be true about Popovič, was too schematic, rigid, prescriptive and closed, but the opposite is true. Holmes himself, concluding the *The Name and Nature of Translation Studies*, issues the challenge: "Let the meta-discussion begin" (1987, 22), which suggests that there are a lot of possibilities for supplementing, reshaping and even challenging the model.

However, it wouldn't be very productive to focus strictly and rigidly on one paradigm – the descriptive one in this case. It would however be very stimulating to open the model to all "turns" and observe what happens.

Is there a bit of Holmes and Popovič in all of us? Yes, there is, if for no other reason than simply because there is a bit of Holmes in Popovič and a bit of Popovič in Holmes. And even without reading them, if one decides to engage in translation studies, one will sooner or later discover that it is very difficult to come up with anything new and original.

So, where the borders between the two meet, and can the two schools offer new stimuli in present-day translation studies? We believe that both theorists should not be forgotten, nor be looked upon only from the point of view of development of the discipline. It seems they imply further potential and possible applicability in several areas of translation studies. There is still much they can bring and phenomena they can explain all across the TS spectre. As can be proved by a look at the *Handbook of Translation Studies* and other current relevant TS publications, both are still referred to by translation studies scholars today. The legacy of Popovič and Holmes is thus (often implicitly) apparent not only in the regions of James S. Holmes and Anton Popovič but all over Europe, and beyond.

NOTES

- ¹ Ironically enough, it seems that during the totalitarian regime his work was better received in the West than at home, where he was often criticized for being too theoretical. In his own defence, in the introduction to his *Teória umeleckého prekladu* (Theory of Artistic Translation) he says that “theoretical preparation has yet to do a single translator any harm” (1975, 10; translated by M.D.). On the contrary, after the Velvet revolution in 1989 it seems that he started to gain more recognition at home than in the West. Yet another reason to consider the mental Iron Curtain which has probably proved to be more painful than the physical one.
- ² The story of Holmes’s map and its journey with all its modifications and versions is very interesting (see e. g. Jettmarová 2016, 115–122) and would certainly deserve a separate article.
- ³ We are using Špirk’s translation from 2009.
- ⁴ The diagram was first presented by Djovčoš at the conference *Some Holmes and Popovič in all of us? The Low Countries and the Nitra Schools in the 21st Century*, held in Nitra, Slovakia, 8–10 October 2015.
- ⁵ Here we believe he was significantly inspired by E. Nida (1964) and J. Levý (1971).
- ⁶ Here we would like thank prof. Alexander Kalnychenko for sending us the draft of the translation of Koptilov’s paper by Natalia Kamovnikova.
- ⁷ Popovič mentions Koptilov’s paper in the bibliography of his *Teória umeleckého prekladu* (Theory of Artistic Translation).
- ⁸ It needs to be said that Popovič didn’t forget about translation history either. He outlined his model or even the map on methods in translation history in the TS terminological dictionary *Originál/preklad. Interpretačná terminológia* (Original/Translation. Interpretation Terminology) from 1983.

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Anton Popovič. James S. Holmes. Re-turn. Reevaluation. Presentation.

Translation studies has experienced several paradigmatic turns since James Holmes presented his seminal paper in 1972. Each turn has provided the field with new insights. However, it has often seemed that each turn has somehow forgotten the legacy of its predecessors. Moreover, after Popovič and Levý’s untimely departure from the translation community, memories and references to their work started to fade away and were usually reduced to a footnote, as if their ideas were no longer valid and had nothing to offer the field today. However, we have seen an unprecedented boom in international interest in “Eastern” translation studies/translatology, and various conferences were organized dedicated to their legacy (Prague, Bologna, Leuven, Vienna etc.), suggesting that their ideas are worthy of further exploration, reinvestigation and testing against the new environment. Therefore, the paper suggests naming this new phenomenon relating to “Slavic” TS as the “re-turn”, which has been enabled by the development of the cultural and social situation in the post-socialist world in which we saw the mental Iron Curtain enduring much longer than the actual, physical one.

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