

What is Your Opinion?

Translation studies have a rich tradition in Slovakia. Nevertheless, this is not sufficient for a strong discipline. That's why we asked several personalities and experienced translators to express their opinion on the present situation and especially on the future perspectives in Slovak translatology.

Libuša Vajdová

1. *What do you think about the state of contemporary Slovak thinking about translation?*
2. *What perspectives, in your opinion, does Slovak translatology have in the world? In what is it different? What does it excel in, or where does it fall behind? Is it able to assert itself even nowadays?*

Marián Andričík, Universty of Košice

1. It may seem that the Slovak translation studies have withdrawn from its previous positions won mainly by Anton Popovič and his synthetic theory in the 1970s, with research being focused on current partial problems of literary translation. New incentives from present leading foreign conceptions have been recently brought in the anthology *Myslenie o preklade* that can spur our dialogue with European translation studies. What is also positive is a rising interest of young generation of literary scholars in the problems of literary translation, especially the translation of poetry, as can be seen in the proceedings from the latest translation-oriented conferences.
2. An advantage for the Slovak translation studies could stem from the fact that Slovak has always been and will be the language to translate *into* rather than *from*. This has made quite a strong tradition in translating that also gives a good base for its theoretical reflection. In my opinion, quite a lot of work has been done in the research into poetic translation. On the other hand, what seems to lag behind is the criticism of translation, an important part of translation studies which is practically missing, save reviews in a specialised magazine for world literature *Revue svetovej literatúry* or occasional articles.

Braňo Hochel, Comenius University Bratislava

1. Firstly, a word about our past situation, namely about the 1970s and 1980s: translation and translation studies in the context of “our normalization” were lucky to be paid attention by experts (not only philologists), mostly because they did not enjoy such intensive interest – compared with literature, literary criticism, linguistics, philosophy – by the powerful norm-makers of contemporary life. Bibliographies show that the attention to translation was paid practically by all important philologists of the decades mentioned. Behind the curtain of translation we were solving aesthetic, literary, social, methodological, and even political tasks which could not be discussed in other contexts or with other materials. Moreover, we were happy that strong scientific orientation of some translators caused aversions which forced to think, argue, search for different paths. Recent situation lacks the mentioned support. But our branch is popular here as well as throughout the world, it provides the possibility to earn one’s living: by repeating of the said, by discovering the Americas, by catching and re-circling of anything that happens to appear in the “Great World”... By the way: it seems to me that during the normalization we knew everything relevant what was happening in our art/science, that the non-relevant had been caught in the “administrative” networks... and it was very good. I really enjoy how immediately the “Big Things” from “Great Conferences” (their greatness results from the amounts used to propagate themselves) get on the scene in my country... The words of Jozef Vachek – “More you read, less you write.” – are valid today (and forever). But how not to write about translation when there are so many possibilities around?

2. I am afraid I am not a prophet. But I believe (I even know) that in the Slovak world there are young scholars who will be sooner or later noticed abroad. It is doubted that the new “Nitra School” will emerge on the scene; it should be also mentioned that the information of the Nitra School is even in the serious works on translation studies partial, non-precise, very often used from the second and third-hand sources. We do not take back seat if the “main stream” (i. e. popular topics of the season) is taken into account – but it will disappear as snow. What different sources are known and cited by our scholars! But captured by new trends, they do not know e. g. G. Toury who is by them (as well as by the “world”) put into archives! If we are to be seen, we can ignore neither domestic nor foreign scholarly classics: grants, scholarships, visits abroad, currentness are fine for sure, but the science (including translatology) is the science... And it – allow me to add – cannot grow if its objects are – for instance – European pseudo-translations, not translations.

Translated by M. Uhrová

Zuzana Jettmarová, Charles University Prague

1. What you have in Slovakia is a full-fledged and very well institutionalized discipline that the outside world may envy you. There are many countries where TS has not been institutionalized as a separate discipline yet and where research has not enjoyed such a prominent place.

Second, your long-standing research tradition and the tradition of team work is something you should cherish as quite unique. Popovič's Nitra Centre and the research programme at the Slovak Academy of Sciences were launched in the late 60s. In addition, there are five universities running programmes in translator and interpreter training, and pursuing research. It is quite a lot for a country with about 5 million population.

Third, the state-of-the art in the discipline (paradigm, theory, methodology, etc.) – I think some analysis and comparison with the “mainstream” TS as well as with the field of translation and interpreting practice to date must be done before any serious judgement may be given. But the results of short-term and long-term research projects, carried out since the late 60s, have definitely contributed to the continuous development of the discipline to this day. Of course you can ask if the focus or methodology are up to date. This brings me to your second question.

2. What strikes me in some recent revisions of Slovak structuralism is the somewhat defensive standpoint – making the impression that Slovak structuralism is an outmoded tradition and poststructuralism is something to aspire for. The only positive conclusion was that Slovak structuralist methodology is a good analytical tool and that the Nitra approach differed from the mainstream structuralist poetics that was rather static and leaning toward Russian structuralism. So I think that Popovič's theory is modern in terms of its theoretical and methodological underpinnings.

The field of translation has changed - there are new phenomena and relationships to be studied. The discipline has embarked on the sociological turn and requires appropriate methodology, focus, models. Popovič's design of the discipline (paradigm) with its praxeology might fit in well. He developed Levý into a theory with no counterpart as to its refinement; the sociosemiotic communication model is a good underpinning. The type of his methodology is now recognized as a valid successor to positivist determinism and objectivism, thanks to constructivism, open-systemicity, dialectics, phenomenology, sociosemiotics, etc. But there are problems. You need to extend the research and theoretical focus to reflect the reality and concerns, introduce a true and broadly conceived synchronic research, deal more with external frameworks, revise your concepts (e.g. the experiential complex, invariant etc.), perhaps even the model, free the discipline from the whims of literary studies and the syndrome of the missing poststructuralist rhetoric.

Bogumila Suwara, Institute of World Literature, SAS, Bratislava

1. The questions posed reveal worries and unrest about the state of contemporary thinking about translation in Slovakia. Somewhere in the background of these moods hides nostalgia for the “golden era” of the theory of translation (based on the communicative conception of language), emerging in the study of A. Popovič who is well-known and inspirational for researchers not only in Poland, but also in other countries of the so-called Central and Eastern Europe. In the 1980s and 1990s it was characteristic for the Polish reception of Popovič's model of think-

ing about translation that Polish researchers of artistic translation (as a result and a process) often broadened and supplemented or reduced the fundamental notions and phenomena. In the works emerging nowadays references to Popovič almost do not occur. This state has at least two aspects: 1) the orientation of Polish translation research towards the aspects of cultural communication (for example cognitive-communicative theories), 2) often in less or more occasional articles researchers go back to problems already dealt with by Popovič, however, they do not use the well established notions of the communication model. One of the possible motivations of this approach is probably a notion that questions of translation can be addressed by professionals who put more emphasis on their own “translator’s intuitions”, verified primarily by their own experience as pedagogues or translators, rather than on the study of ramified pieces of knowledge about translation, various schools and theories. Or, in other words, refusing the number of the already existing approaches and the impossibility of embracing all aspects of translation with one theory, they attempt at the so-called examination from scratch, or description of observed phenomena, as certain data, for which notions and terms (translational discourse) based on empirical practice will subsequently be developed (maybe), or they will serve for examination of only partial, ad hoc perceived problems.

2. In comparison to the above outlined situation in Polish translatology, no radical criticism of the “golden era/scientific period” of the reflection of translation has ever taken place in Slovakia, and that is why potential impulses of scientific thinking “from within” were not sufficiently utilized. After a period of theorizing about translation, a period of the examination of the reception of foreign literatures set in which is rare in other cultural spaces. It brought much knowledge about the so far unrevealed, often for ideological reasons, sociological phenomena of literary life, publishing strategies, life stories of translators and their translations as well as pointed out the issue of the reception tradition important for Slovak literature. However, due to its rootedness in historical connections it did not provide (?) material for theoretical generalizations. The tendency of a description limited to one concrete literature unwittingly began to dominate also in the reflection of “national” translational theories or, in other words, sciences about translation. In essence, there are no monographs devoted for example to one aspect/problem of translation in the perspective of its dominants and polemics conducted on the level of international professional discourse. For authors the point of departure is rather translator’s experience founded on theoretical instruments associated with the language of the translation and the original. Thus, exhaustive analyses and interpretations of translations emerge the generalization of which remains challenging for Slovak translatology.

Translated by M. Uhrová

Ján Vilikovský, Comenius University Bratislava

1. At present, Slovak translation studies present a rather staid face to the world. History shows, however, that a period of revolutionary storm and drive is usually followed by an age of consolidation. That is why we may observe a certain re-appraisal of the impulses generated by Anton Popovič going hand in hand with a broadly based research of the history of Slovak translation from the various languages and spheres of culture. The resulting publications are no less deserving for being little recognized. At the same time, we have been forced to cope with an unprecedented spate of changes of emphasis and direction: membership of the EU required a refocusing of attention from literary to technical translation, and to a certain extent a shift from translation to interpreting. „Eurospeak“ -- a variety of English not even native speakers always understand (and this is no jest) -- also demands its due. All this requires extra effort on the part of the people active in the field of theory and training -- hence the apparent lack of activity. But -- *They also serve who only stand and wait.*
2. The second part of the question should be addressed to others. As for the first part, these things usually depend on A) the appearance of a stray genius or of someone who is able to process the impulses floating in the intellectual atmosphere and give them a cogent form, and B) a generous supply of filthy lucre. (B being mostly rarer than geniuses, who come free of charge.) The seeming disadvantage of using what is politely called “a language of limited diffusion” can be turned to good purpose by remembering that its users (especially if coming from Central Europe) are usually not only multilingual, but multicultural and have therefore at their disposal a veritable cornucopia of comparative communicative facts that can serve as a foundation for further research. Our forte used to be comparative studies and literary translation with all its quirks and special cases; obviously we should continue in this line of activity. At the same time, however, we should make an effort to catch up with the state of the art in the down-to earth business of instant or fast communication, whether automatic or human-transmitted.

Ján Zambor, Comenius University Bratislava

1. I will speak only about the reflection of poetry translation. He who writes about poetry translation cannot get along with the expression system created by F. Miko and with the general theory of artistic translation by A. Popovič, be they anyhow developmentally contributive and impressive. In no lesser extent poetics is important for him, general and historical (depending on what he writes about), especially versology and tropology, and the up to now gained scholarly knowledge of the work as such. In Miko's and Popovič's effort there was something avant-garde, as if they wanted to forget about the old poetics and create new terminological instruments, which they even did not call using the old Aristotelian notion of poetics. However, in productive thinking about artistic translation we cannot do without the present poetological knowledge and renewed instruments. The best contemporary Slovak thinking about poetry translation (if we do accept that noble word

– thinking) develops various theoretical impulses. At the same time, an important role is played also by the thing which is discussed. It is based on the reflection of particular translations and even theoretical generalizations are not missing there. I think that for an observer it is no less contributive in its peaks.

The general theory of artistic translation is needed but a translator of poetry and, after all, even an interpreter of poetry translations perceives it at the same time as too general. It provides a certain general orientation and to the interpreter also a part of terminology for the naming of things. However, for both of them other things from the theory are no less important – distinctively comparative poetics, especially versology. The situation is to a great extent such that they must evaluate things comparatively on their own. Commented editions and studies about the respective work, especially interpretative and poetological, are welcomed. It is true that even an erudite translator has an ambition to seek new solutions. And it is an important role for a theoretician to recognize them and fixate them.

Contemporary Slovak thinking about poetry translation based on analyses of significant translations with due attention to poetics, oriented to theoretical generalizations, is heading in a productive direction. Projects in comparative poetics, especially versology, based on the reflection of translations and foreign and domestic poetry could be very useful.

2. I think that the standard of the Slovak reflection of poetry translation and the standard of translation itself, despite the differentiation of values, is still higher in Slovakia than in many other literary cultures with a significantly greater number of inhabitants. For sure this holds true also for artistic translation as such. It follows also from the fact that big nations build more on self-sufficiency. Moreover, under some translations of Slovak poetry from the pen of foreign experts in Slovak studies the pressure of the demanding Slovak translation tradition has signed in a favorable way. Our attempt at the comprehensiveness of translation, including paying attention to the acoustic organization of a poem, is by no means so common in western countries. In recent years I have spoken about Slovak translation of poetry in Madrid, in Lisbon and in Moscow and I did not have a feeling that we would fall behind someone. Sometimes I subject to reflection translations of Slovak poetry to different languages: I do not think that we would be behind either in the overall trend, or in top translational manifestations. We are not behind even in thinking about translation.

It is true that translation of poetry has become an exclusive matter in Slovakia, the number of demanding translators keeps diminishing, and so also reflection has less and less incentives.

Translated by M. Uhrová