

TRANSLATION STUDIES IN THE FIRST YEARS OF *SLOVO A SLOVESNOST* (SAS)

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, research into the history of translation studies has been pursued on a national, regional and international level. The objective of this paper is to contribute to research on the history of Czech translation studies. The paper presents an overview of translation studies themes in the early issues of the Czech periodical *Slovo a slovesnost* (Language and Literature) as the intellectual platforms of the Prague Linguistic Circle from 1935 to 1943, at which time the journal was forced to close down due to the Second World War. A thorough examination of this particular topic has never been undertaken. The publications are classified by genre (studies, translation criticism, reviews of theoretical works), by author, and by the relevant philological area. The contributions of the individual authors in *Slovo a slovesnost* are then analyzed with respect to their continued research work.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Several studies focusing on the (self-) reflection of translation studies (TS) conceptions and theories have appeared in recent years. Alongside the work of Professor Santoyo, who is our honoured guest here, we can mention the first volume of the MonTI series entitled *A (Self-) Critical Perspective of Translation Theories*. This paper is part of this current, drawing upon recent studies dedicated to the analysis of the conceptions of the Prague Linguistic Circle (PLC), in connection with its recent eightieth jubilee.

The aim of this paper is to give an overview of the representation of TS topics in the first years of *Slovo a slovesnost* – SaS (Word and Literature) as the academic platform of the Prague Linguistic Circle (1935–1943) up to the forced interruption of the publication of this periodical during World War II. The chosen period also represents, in our opinion, a certain closed stage from a factual point of view: after WWII, due to changes both in the external environment and in the personal situation of the Circle itself (death of V. Mathesius, the emigration of R. Jakobson), its activities have not been resurrected in their full extent, which was also reflected in the content of the periodical. One of the controversial personalities of Czech post-war linguistics, Jan Petr, observed this openly: “We do not want to conceal some of its aspects which have not produced permanent values and which we rightly do not follow up today mostly for ideological reasons.” (Petr J., 82, underlined by J. K.). One of the followers

of Prague Structuralism, the verse scholar M. Červenka (1999: 176), explains this fact with regard to the conception of inter-literary relations in more detail:

Marxism deplored these issues (inter-literary relations and influences – note by J. K.) because of the interpretation of a literary creation as a reflection of the (domestic) social “reality”; schematically applied structuralism for its belated clinging to such an idea of immanent development where the input from a different literature appeared as heterogeneous interference in a succession developing exclusively from its own internal sources.

For the history of translation studies, it is a significant contribution that the first issue of SaS, in connection with the transformation of the “conception of language as a mere means, a mere representation of the material world into an independent subject worthy of our attention, our emotions” (SaS 1/1935: 2), already voiced the need to focus attention upon the problem of translation, albeit particularly in relation to the period-conditioned emphasis on the problem of language culture:

The tremendously increased *translational activity* is not the last source of new tasks. It suffices to look at the statistics concerning translations in fiction, journalism and technical literature to realize how great their impact on language is. And it is exactly in translation where semi-finished products are produced because it is there that we can find most people with insufficient language qualification. That is why here of all places the supervision of language criticism is particularly needed, that is why herein of all places lies the most rewarding field for language therapy and prophylaxis. (SaS 1/1935: 3).

The mere quantitative overview of the number of TS-oriented papers show that the editorial board of SaS observed its proclamation in the investigated period: the periodical published twelve studies dedicated in one way or another to translation, another six shorter texts appeared under the sections “Chronicle”, “Review”, etc. although only some of them were included in the hitherto published works on translation history. Jiří Levý included only two of the published papers in the second part of his *Czech Translation Theories*: F. Žilka’s *The Old and the New Translation of the New Testament* (SaS 2/1936: 106–112), and V. Procházka’s *Notes on the Translation Method* (SaS 8/1942, 1: 1–20). Other studies were later published in the anthologies of the work of individual authors (Mathesius, Mukařovský), usually in Czech.

OVERVIEW OF TOPICS

Regarding the topics, the published papers can be roughly classified into the following groups (albeit represented in an unequal extent):

- a) analysis of a particular translation,
- b) reflection on one’s own translational activity,

- c) general translation issues,
- d) the work of a particular translator.

CONTRIBUTIONS FOCUSING ON THE ANALYSIS OF A PARTICULAR TRANSLATION

In the first volume of SaS, this group is represented by the article of René Wellek entitled *Crux translatorum* (61–63) and by the study of František Novotný *On Translating Plato's Philosophical Language* (140–151). Although both studies convey a prescriptive impression at first sight, certain general characteristics cannot be neglected: Wellek's critique of the translation of A. Huxley's *Brave New World* uses such terms as "correctness" and "incorrectness" in the understanding of the original, the author focuses his attention on the question of the possibility of translation in general, on the issue of paraphrasing and, in the analysis of a particular text, to the different role of quotations from the works of W. Shakespeare in the English and Czech environments. F. Novotný also attempts to define a "correct translation" and points in this context particularly to the role of the differences in the development of the paradigm of a given discipline.

In the second volume of SaS, this group is represented primarily by Jan Mukařovský's article *On the New Edition of French Poetry by Karel Čapek* (253–255). Although it is not published among the general studies, but only under "Chronicle", its conclusions are significant for translation studies, as it emphasizes the role of (Čapek's) translation in the transformation of the domestic structure, independent of the translator's intention. This conception is developed by J. Levý (1971: 227–252).

In the fourth volume of SaS, this group is represented by two studies of Vojtěch Jirát on the translations of Don Juan during the Czech National Revival (first half of the nineteenth century): 1. Macháček's Translation (73–90) and 2. Štěpánek's Translation (202–212). These studies, along with conclusions based on the analysis of particular translations, point to significant phenomena of a more general purport: the concept of the structural dominant feature together with the fact that a libretto forms a whole in connection with music, and the fact that Jirát regards the translation of a libretto, in comparison with the translation of a literary work, as an illuminating example of the genesis of a libretto as such. Here, a parallel with J. Levý's premise (1971: 72, English version by J. Králová, Z. Jettmarová 2008) suggests itself:

Our premise will be inductive and quite simple; I will attempt to illustrate the structure of the process of the creation of a literary work and the structure of the creation of its concrete form. Let us begin with the simplest case: the process of the creation of a translation.

In this context, it is apposite to mention the review of the translation of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, published in the first issue of the last year of the periodical in 1943, where František Vrba's translation is compared with the traditions of Czech translation particularly in the nineteenth century.

REFLECTION ON ONE'S OWN TRANSLATIONAL ACTIVITY

In the second volume of SaS, this group is represented by the study of F. Žilka entitled *The Old and the New Translation of the New Testament*. He regards the translation of the Bible as the inception of every national literature and views the role of the translation of the Classics as pivotal for the emergence of the language norm. This study also reflects the role of the translation in the target (receiving) culture in a particular temporal and social situation. The paper is followed up by a lecture of the same author, whose summary is published in the seventh volume of SaS, *On the Manners of Translating the Scripture*, where he emphasizes the obsolescence of the text of the Bible of Kralice¹ and the need for a new translation instead of revising the old translation.

GENERAL TRANSLATION ISSUES

In the second volume of SaS, this group is represented by the study of Pavel Eisner *On Untranslatable Matters* (230–238). The author works on the assumption that every language is an “autonomous system”, which is why the working languages in a translation are incommensurable at the level of phraseology, tropes, prosody, puns, local and social language determination and of what he calls the language patina (tone).

In the third volume of the periodical, Zdeněk Vančura, an Anglicist, points in his study *On Translating Theatre Plays* to the frequent absence of feedback for the translator in the translation reviews. In particular, he emphasizes the role of differing conventions in dialogue and its consequences for the translation of drama.

The first issue of the eighth year (1942) published a study by Vladimír Procházka entitled *Notes on the Translation Method* (reprinted also in Levý 1996: 230–257). The author, a practising translator, points out the fact that the problems of the “translation method” can be successfully solved only if the fundamental point of departure is considered to be the “function of translation in literature”, as the point of departure for both the literary and the publishing policies. He explicitly refers to the legacy of the Prague Linguistic School and emphasizes that a translation, like any language phenomenon, can be evaluated particularly according to the adequacy for the purpose. The aim here is to transpose a literary work from one language to another while retaining its structure as much as possible. Thus the translator has to understand the original work at its thematic and stylistic level, overcome the differences in the language structure by his/her own means and reconstruct the stylistic structure of the original work in the language of the translation.

One of the last issues of the periodical in 1943 published a key study by V. Mathesius *Notes on Translating Foreign Blank Verse and on the Czech Iambic Verse in General*.

¹ *The Bible of Kralice* (first appeared 1564–1588, cf. Luther's German translation: 1522 New Testament, 1534 Old Testament) is a translation of the Bible from the original languages into Czech by the *Unity of the Brethren* (the New Testament translated by Jan Blahoslav in 1564, the Old Testament translated in 1588).

Proceeding from a statistical analysis of verses in the translations of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, he shows the domestic possibilities of their translation, and at the same time reveals tendencies in the translation of drama into Czech.

In this last volume, this group is also represented by the study of J. Rypka, an orientalist, *On Translating and Translations from Persian and Turkish: Programme and Method*. The author points out the differences between the European and the Asian "poetic school" and emphasizes the different position of literary history in a given period and translation needs, focusing in particular on the reader of the target text.

WORK OF A PARTICULAR TRANSLATOR

This group is represented by the study of the literary historian Arno Novák entitled *Pushkin's Forgotten Pioneer*. Therein he places the translations of Jan Pravoslav Koubek into the context of translations from Russian in the period of National Revival and points to the difficulties with the translations, arising in particular from the misunderstanding of the poem's substance and Koubek's slavophilia.

STIMULI FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRANSLATION STUDIES AS AN INTEGRATED DISCIPLINE

As we have observed above already (Králová 2006; Králová and Jettmarová 2008), Czech structuralists of the classical period of the Prague School from the 1920s on had opened up a number of issues that became established in translation studies only several decades later (the position of translation in the target culture, the dominant feature, the empirical foundation of studies on translation, their descriptive character, the relation between the synchronic and diachronic approach). We will therefore focus on the aspects discussed in the studies published in SaS in the investigated period.

POSITION OF TRANSLATION IN THE TARGET CULTURE

J. Levý (1996, 1: 236) observed that translation "in Czech literature has served the immediate needs of national life more strongly than elsewhere. Therein lies the specificity of the development of Czech translation, natural for a nation whose culture, more strongly than elsewhere, was not only an aesthetic matter, but at the same time a means of the struggle for national existence."

The position of translations in Czech culture is reflected, to a varying extent, in all of the examined studies. Contributions focusing on the analysis of a translation of a particular work include, for instance, the study by R. Wellek in the first volume of the periodical noting the different roles of quotations from Shakespeare in the original and in Czech literature, or emphasizing the role of Čapek's translations in the development of Czech poetry in the second volume. However, the position of a particular translation

in the target culture is also present in the reflection of one's own translational activity – F. Žilka, in *The Old and the New Translation of the New Testament*, emphasizes the role of translation generally in a particular historical and social situation of the target culture.

The position of translation in the target culture is an obvious point of departure even in studies focusing on general issues of translation, including differences between languages in specific areas (P. Eisner), different conventions in dialogue (Z. Vančura), functions of translation in literature in general (V. Procházka), the relation between translation and domestic sources for solving translation problems (V. Mathesius), and the emphasis on the reader of the target text (J. Rypka). The role of the receiving culture is reflected even in the analysis of the work of a particular personality – A. Novák emphasizes the conditions under which stimuli from Russian literature penetrated Czech culture during the Czech National Revival.

In the subsequent periods, these aspects were reflected not only in the studies focusing on translation and its history in other periods (J. Levý), but also in papers dedicated to verse studies (Jan Červenka).

DOMINANT FEATURE IN TRANSLATION

V. Jiráček uses this term explicitly in 1938 in connection with the translation of the libretto of Don Juan, where he considers the structural dominant feature in a libretto to be its relation to music and its final wording to be the product of the librettist's cooperation with the composer.

The study of V. Rypka on the translation from oriental languages and cultures published in the ninth volume in 1939 may as well be interpreted as showing the differences and shifts in the dominant feature of the translated texts.

EMPIRICAL FOUNDATION OF THE STUDIES ON TRANSLATION

All published papers draw on real, made translations. The prime example of this stance is the quoted study by Mathesius entitled *Notes on Translating Foreign Blank Verse and on the Czech Iambic Verse in General*. In his conclusions, the author draws on the comparison of statistical characteristics of verses in translations and in original Czech literary works, and based on these data defines the differences in the conceptions of the so-called Lumír School² of the second half of the nineteenth century and the conceptions of the first half of the twentieth century.

² The Lumír School was a group of Czech writers in the 1870s and 1880s gathered around the literary magazine Lumír. They stood in opposition to the earlier Ruch School (established in the 1860s). While the Ruch group put emphasis on domestic, national and other Slavic sources and influences in literature, the Lumír group declared their aim to be "opening the windows unto the world". As a consequence, their translational activity (especially from English and the Romance languages) was of utmost significance for modern Czech language and literature. The main representatives of the Lumír School were J. Vrchlický and J. Zeyer.

DESCRIPTIVE CHARACTER OF THE STUDIES ON TRANSLATION

The end of the quote mentioned in the introduction to this paper, "... it is exactly in translation where semi-finished products are produced, because it is there that we can find most people with insufficient language qualification. That is why here of all places the supervision of language criticism is particularly needed, that is why herein of all places lies the most rewarding field for language therapy and prophylaxis", tempts to conclude that the aforementioned studies will be suffused with a prescriptive approach to the evaluation of translation. However, in the understanding of the role of translation in Czech culture in its broadest context, in the proper delimitation of the dominant feature and in the emphasis on the empirical approach to the study of the investigated phenomena, we see the reason why the published studies are devoid of any moralizing or prescriptive approach, emphasizing instead description and interpretation.

SYNCHRONIC AND DIACHRONIC APPROACH

V. Procházka formulates this problem explicitly when he speaks about the concept of *modernizing* a translation as a transposition of a work not only from one language into another, but from one cultural period into another. The time-, period- and place-conditioned character of the creation of not only the original text and its translation, but also of different translations of the same work is reflected in several studies: not only in the *Notes on Translating Foreign Blank Verse and on the Czech Iambic Verse in General* by V. Mathesius, mentioned several times already, but also in F. Žilka's *The Old and the New Translation of the New Testament*, and in Arne Novák's article on J. P. Koubek as a forgotten pioneer of Pushkin.

CLOSING REMARK

As stated above, this paper is presented as part of the contemporary current of (self-) reflection in TS conceptions and theories. Its presentation to the international public is significant for one more reason: it shows the role of translations and their absence for the spread of knowledge in the area dedicated to translations. The works I have mentioned here were written in a minority language, in Czech, and many have not been translated. This fact had certainly to do with the national revivalist stance towards scientific knowledge in general. However, coupled with the political and ideological turbulences in Central Europe in the second half of the twentieth century, it led to the fact that a number of concepts and conceptions have remained completely unknown to the international professional public. *Slavica non legitur*.

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