

REVITALIZING STRUCTURALISM IN SLOVAK TRANSLATION THEORY – POTENTIAL AND LIMITATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The revitalization of classical structuralist methodologies brought about the birth of the Slovak theory of literary translation in the 1960s, represented in the works of the Slovak literary theoreticians Anton Popovič and František Miko. Applying their concept of literary communication, they emphasized the reader's reception and interpretation of a literary text. Following their theoretical model, they examined translation as a text – that is to say, a text as a basic communication unit. For Popovič translation appeared to be a text about a text, whereas Miko believed that translation was one of many variants. In this article we aim to test the potential and limits of the revitalized methodological model of Popovič and Miko and their connection with contemporary tendencies such as cultural studies, cognitive linguistics, etc. In order to examine the effectiveness of their application in translation studies, we have chosen the category of translatability, which in the classical theory of translation indicates the specific features of a translated text.

Keywords: structuralism; literary translation; translation theory; Nitra school; stylistic model; metatext; prototext

The central question to be examined in this paper is if/how we can revitalize structuralism in the Slovak theory of literary translation. Our suggestions arise from observing attempts at the revitalization of structuralism in Slovak literary studies in the 1960s. The beginnings of Slovak translation studies were seen in the context of literary theory and came as a result of the attempt to revive the Slovak structuralist tradition, which was formed in Slovakia in the 1930s under the impact of the Prague Linguistic Circle. Before World War II there were several members from this research team teaching in Slovakia (e.g. Mukařovský, Kořínek, etc.); conversely, several Slovak structuralist protagonists studied at Charles University in Prague (e.g. Bakoš, Hrušovský, Novák). However, structuralist methods in the Slovak literary environment were significantly modified. Anton Popovič, examining the history of Slovak literary studies, noted that in Slovakia research had developed a more horizontal scope, as opposed to Czech research which proceeded into greater depth. The reason was the fact that such disciplines as ethnogra-

phy, folklore studies, and fine art history were absent in Slovakia and there was a need for their establishment. Besides, in Slovak literary studies, the Czech concept of Mukařovský's aesthetic structuralism was distinguished from Russian formalism while Slovak literary theoreticians considered structuralism and formalism as two separate systems (Popovič 1970: 9–12).

Similarly, in the 1960s there was a new opportunity to revitalize the structuralist tradition in Czech and Slovak literary studies. However, this new attempt was disrupted by the political situation in central Europe during World War II, when structuralist methodology was deformed by communist ideology. Czech literary theory and aesthetics were attempting to expand upon Mukařovský's and Vodička's work; meanwhile, in Slovakia, the Czech and Slovak structuralist tradition was revitalized within the background of the Polish (Sławiński) and Russian (Lotman) traditions. One of the prime revitalizing forces in Slovakia in the 1960s was the Nitra School of Translation and the work of its leading representative, Anton Popovič (1933–1984).

By publishing his monograph *Preklad a výraz* [Translation and Expression], Anton Popovič established Slovak translation studies in 1968. Before joining the Nitra research team, he had worked on a collective project designed to examine the history of translation, at the Institute of World Literature and Languages (SAS) in Bratislava. It was necessary to expand on the theory and working methods of translation. One of the most important concerns was the **shift of expression**. As Jozef Hvišč (1969: 111–112) states, there were several proposals and the most suitable proved to be that of Anton Popovič. He based this problem on two stylistic factors: a) factors of dynamic and **quantitative** interpretation (stylistic levelling, stylistic intensification, stylistic compensation); b) factors of static, **qualitative** interpretation assessment (stylistic substitution, standardization, individualization).

Translation research in the 1960s was systematically linked with the theoretical works of Jiří Levý. It could be observed in Popovič's work (1970: 15), in which he refers to Levý's understanding of translation as a decision process. When dealing with the issue of **shifts of expression**, Popovič was inspired by his teacher and close colleague **František Miko** (1920–2010). Miko was extremely helpful to his student: he gave him his stylistic model of text, not quite finished, which he developed in the ambition to clarify the **specificity** of a literary text – its literariness. Unlike the structuralist attempt to clarify the specificity (of a text) starting straight from a literary text, Miko believed that specificity can be understood and revealed only within the background of non-literary texts, and more importantly, through the effect of its style on the recipient. Based on his long-term observation of how literary and non-literary texts interact through their style in communication and how literary texts are distinguished from non-literary texts, he identified their individual stylistic, better said, **expressive qualities**. As a result, he arranged them into a system of relations, a system apprehending individual expressive values, which correspond to the reality of linguistic expression, in order to get the total effect of the text. Anton Popovič applied Miko's system when working with historical texts in order to reveal the differences in expression between the original and the translated text. In Miko's system of expressive values Popovič found a common principle for comparing the original with its translation, which enabled him to identify the **shifts of expression**. Miko's system of expressive categories proved to be valid as an intermediate mechanism between the orig-

inal text and its translation. In the theoretical part of his book *Translation and Expression* Popovič deals with the relationship between literary history and the poetics of literary translation, while at the same time regarding translation as a creative process, and the structuring of a translated text. The book is a diachronic overview of the three stages of Slovak literary translation in the 19th century. Consequently, he wrote the book *Poetika umeleckého prekladu* [The Poetics of Artistic Translation], which he later elaborated into a well-known book *Teória umeleckého prekladu* [Theory of Artistic Translation].

In 1968 Miko and Popovič presented the fruits of their cooperation in translation theory at the meeting of translators and translation theoreticians organized by the International Federation of Translators, which took place in May 1968 in Bratislava. Miko gave his speech *La théorie de l'expression et la traduction* [The Theory of Expression and Translation]; Popovič presented his paper *Výrazové posuny v preklade* [Concept of Shift of Expression in Translation]. Their papers subsequently appeared in the proceedings with the title *The Nature of Translation*. This book consists mainly of papers by authors from Eastern Europe. The editors – James Holmes, Frans de Haan and Anton Popovič – witnessed the boom of research in literary translation and remarked that its representatives mainly followed the structuralist concept of a literary work. As Popovič (1968/1969: 311–312) stated, structuralism established the foundations of modern literary studies in a very simple way but for its time it was a brilliant idea. It emphasized the importance of a literary work of art and discovered the principles of its internal structure. The structuralist analysis of literary works thus means clarifying the internal principles of a literary work of art. Analogically speaking, the structuralist analysis of the translation of a literary work means clarifying the internal principles of the translation which is formed from its original.

Popovič and Miko began to explore the text as a total unit of literary communication, while Popovič did it systematically, and Miko occasionally – usually when Popovič asked him to cooperate or when he returned back to Popovič's theory in order to reformulate it, from his own perspective, i.e. the relationship between the text and communication (text is identical to communication). The contributions of František Miko to Slovak translation theory and his attitude to Popovič's concept is documented in the anthology of his work *Aspekty prekladového textu* [Aspects of a Translated Text] (Valentová and Režná 2011).

To examine a text from the perspective of communication or its reception was the central facet underpinning the construction of the theory of the literary text and an exploration of the effective method of its interpretation for Slovak literary researchers, who in the 1960s were grouped in, what today is known as, **the Nitra School**. With their new standpoint they contributed extensively to the revitalization of structuralism. The communication aspect of literature re-emphasized the role of the reader – the addressee of a literary work – not only as an equal member of the communication chain (author – text – reader) but also as a determining and decisive member. How and what we communicate after all depends on who we communicate with. Anton Popovič developed this fact in the less known study published in Polish *Rola odbiorcy w procesie przekładu literackiego* [The Role of an Addressee in Literary Translation], which was published in *Problemy socjologii literatury* [The Problems of Sociology of Literature]. In these proceedings, edited by Janusz Sławiński, there were published representative studies of the Polish theory of literary communication. Popovič here deals with the translator's and reader's

intention, the reader's function in translated literary texts, and the stylistic conventions of a reader of a translated text. He believes that translation is the specific exchange of a text for another one – a new one – and it is the reader who influences the so-called **meta-creation process** whose result is a new text – the well-known **metatext**. While exchanging one text for another one, in the new text there are aspects that are not present in the original. For instance, various translator's parentheses and explanations are not only the proof of the active participation of a translator when creating a new structure of a text, but they are the reader's footprints in the text. Briefly, Popovič examined problems such as **communication in a text**, **reader's conventions** projected in a text, and **text in communication**.

In this context, translation seems to be a text that intermediates the original, a text about a text or so-called **metatext**. Popovič was inspired by the Dutch translation theoretician of American origin J. S. Holmes, who discerned (Holmes 1970a) the analogy between literary interpretation of a poem on the one hand, and the translation of a poem on the other hand. He distinguished between creative literature, poetry, drama and **metaliterature**, which uses language to talk about literature itself. Literary criticism and interpretation are then examples of metaliterature. Thus literary translation is an example of metaliterature, too. A poem conceived in the translation process is called a **metapoem**. Popovič elaborated on Holmes' idea – he specified it when defining translation as a stylistic (thematic and linguistic) model of the original. A metatext is a text that repeats the features of another text, adding specific features to it. In this respect, it differs from a technical copy, the reproduction of a text. Popovič applied the idea of metatext to all types of manipulation with the text, that is to say, to different kind of addressees (a translator, an author, a reader, an editor, a teacher, a literary critic, etc.) Consequently, he arrived at the idea of intertextual linking, which is generally known as intertextuality.

Notwithstanding, Popovič's idea of metatext is a most controversial one. Even František Miko reacted critically to it and proposed his own definition: he viewed translation as one of the variants of an original. Both Miko's and Popovič's theory of translation prompted and still prompts diverse reactions in the Slovak literary environment. On the one hand, there is an obvious attempt to develop some aspects of Popovič's theory (e.g. analytical studies by František Koli, Edita Gromová, etc.), on the other hand, there are critical stances. Ján Vilikovský, the renowned Slovak translator, responding to Popovič's theory (2005: 180), concludes that today the positive impulses of his theory are exhausted and under the impact of new trends we can realize its drawbacks. What could be criticized in Popovič's theory is its eclecticism – merging communication theory unsystematically and overemphasizing the priority of linguistic aspects rather than cultural and aesthetic aspects. Other potential points of criticism are the terms **prototext** and **metatext** used as synonyms for original and translation. Metatext is a text about a text; however, as Vilikovský believes, translation is a new, original text. Popovič's contribution to the theory of translation is however the shift of expression and the fact that translation is not viewed as a copy anymore but as an example of intertextual linking and as a new member of the textual chain.

If then Popovič's theory of translation is 'exhausted', it is impossible to revitalize it and we should take a step back from it. Nonetheless, criticism of Popovič's theory has its

limitations, too. It is not often based on a complete knowledge of his work and it does not respect the fact it was developed in two different stages: the first period is when Popovič examined the stylistic aspect of a translated text and his second period is when he treated translation as a mode of manipulation of a text. This is recorded in his *Dictionary for the Analysis of Literary Translation*, which was published in 1976. Apart from this, the dictionary includes terms related to the cultural aspects of translation. As Gromová and Müglová conclude (2005: 63), “Popovič in his theory of translation characterized translation as a fact of intercultural communication, when he employed the terms **inter-spatial factor** of translation, **cultural factor** of translation, **creolization of culture**, the time of culture in translated text, domestic culture, etc.” (transl.: the authors). These terms were taken from Lotman (Popovič 1971a: 106), similarly, terms such as historization, modernization, naturalization and exotization come from Holmes (Popovič 1971a: 99). Criticism which takes into consideration only the resources of Popovič’s inspiration overlooks the fact that he re-formulates ideas in order to comprehend the specificity of a translated text and view it as a unique phenomenon of inter-lingual, intercultural, and inter-literal communication.

The revision of structuralism, and the revitalization linked with it, manifested itself as an effort to expand the research field of the original structuralist literary studies and as an effort to enrich the structuralist model of apprehension of the literary work, and, eventually, to form a new version of Czech and Slovak structuralism (Popovič 1970: 36). Popovič’s translation theory, along with the application of Miko’s stylistic model, represented the most important theoretical initiative of its time. The theory of translation they initiated was established as a new discipline. They also changed the direction of this discipline, as they did not hold only to the language/linguistic model of translation but began to deal with a stylistic model. According to Miko, the stylistic model is a higher, more constitutive level of equivalence and it is more consequential in assessing the nature of translation, its conditions, forms, and functions. This does not mean the exclusion of the linguistic aspect from the translation process; it means complying with or yielding to a higher criterion – the stylistic one. With this idea translation theory as a linguistic discipline fails; however, the linguistic aspect as such is not reduced in the translation process. Ultimately a new version of structuralism was developed, in which the text started to be viewed through its effect, that is to say, from the perspective of its reader, its recipient (the aspect of communication). Through the concept of literary communication they revitalized the structuralist model of text and modernized Slovak literary studies. Compared with Czech literary theory, it is clear that they returned to a structuralist heritage in a different way to Mukařovský’s followers, who dealt with the semantics of a literary work. Slovak researchers dealt primarily with a text and they stopped distinguishing between a work of art and an artefact. They started to observe how artistic, literary texts exist in literary communication.

Since the 1980s different branches of literary studies have been modernized by incorporating cultural studies. Translation studies has not been an exception. What could be criticized about this modern approach though is that it is accompanied by the loss of autonomy of its traditional object of research – the process of translation – by avoiding the specificity of a literary text and by ignoring the lower levels (the linguistic and stylistic aspects) of translation. Emphasizing the perspective of cultural studies, increasingly

more attention is paid to ideological issues, translation and editorial policy, and to the questions: what do we translate and why? What does one culture take from the other and why? As a result, less attention is paid to the question: how do we translate, i.e.: how does the original text change or transform in the translation process without having to relinquish the original identity of its style, or its aesthetic, artistic value. If, however, the cultural level of translation now appears as central, it does not mean that we can ignore the lower levels – the linguistic and stylistic. It would be ‘uncultured’ to respect the cultural level while at the same time underestimating those lower layers of a translated text emphasized by the structuralists.

Although the translation of literary texts at present appears to be a peripheral phenomenon (as opposed to the past, when the exchange of cultural values among nations was achieved mainly through the translation of literary texts), its theoretical framework constitutes the theoretical background for other types of translation, particularly the translation of texts for specific purposes. Nevertheless, the character of literary translation remains the sphere of individual creativity of the translator, who seeks to bring its poetics to the original level of the text. The creativity of translation, according to Peter Zajac (1986: 274), a follower of Anton Popovič and František Miko, depends on two interrelated essentials. The first one is the ability of a creative, i.e. qualitative, reading of the original. In such a reading the reader recognizes the integral sense of the literary text, the poem. The integral sense of a literary text will then form the concept and the prime instruction for carrying out an artistic translation, which is the second essential of the creativity of translation (and the translator). The high degree of creativity and complexity of literary translation is the reason why literary translation should not be avoided in contemporary translation studies and its concepts should be applied in the teaching process at universities preparing future translators.

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