

Anton Popovič. *La scienza della traduzione. Aspetti metodologici. La comunicazione traduttiva*, trs. Bruno Osimo and Daniela Laudani. Milano: Editore Ulrico Hoepli, 2006. xx + 194 pp. ISBN 88-203-3511-5. 19 €. [Original: *Teória umeleckého prekladu*. Bratislava: Tatran, 1975.]

Reviewed by Ubaldo Stecconi (Brussels)

On May 1, 2004 ten new countries joined the EU and the division of the continent into Western and Eastern blocs symbolically came to an end. According to many commentators, the division had always been artificial: Europeans on opposite sides had always shared more than their governments did. This is how Prof. Peter Liba — who helped me put Anton Popovič's work in its proper historical context — put it: “We [under the totalitarian regime, behind the Iron Curtain] have never stopped being in Europe and develop its cultural potential” (Liba 2006). From a Western European viewpoint, this has been repeatedly confirmed as the institutional, cultural, and intellectual heritage of the East has become progressively familiar. The Italian edition of *Teória umeleckého prekladu* (1975) brings this realisation to Translation Studies.

Anton Popovič (1933–1984) was not exactly unknown. A good academic manager and organiser, his international links included Poland, Hungary, the Netherlands, Canada, and the US. From his Cabinet of literary communication at the University of Nitra, he established contacts with translation scholars (cf. Holmes, de Haan and Popovič 1970; Popovič 1970) and the quality of his work was recognised in Western circles (cf. Dimić 1984; Beylard-Ozeroff, Králová and Moser-Mercer, eds. 1998; Tötösy de Zepetnek 1995; Zlateva 2000; Gentzler 2001). However, according to Mr Osimo, who translated the text reviewed here with Daniela Laudani, no extended part of his work has been available in the academic *lingua francas* of the West (cf. pp. x–xi).¹ Unfortunately, Italian is not exactly the first choice as a *lingua franca* either. *Teória umeleckého prekladu* should appear in more widely used languages, and I hope the reasons will be clear to you by the end of this review.

Why did an interest in translated communication arise in Nitra in the late 1960s? Prof. Liba informs us that the Cabinet of Literary Communication was born as an interdisciplinary project of František Miko, a linguist, Popovič, a literary comparatist, and other teachers. A covert disagreement with Marxist approaches to literature lay in the background, but the project could push through because Nitra's marginal position eluded political monitoring. Secondly, those scholars felt they had to critically come to terms with Western theories of literature. The initial interest was thus literary studies, particularly Miko's theory of style, which Popovič

— whose main interest had always been translation theory — later applied to literary translation.

La scienza della traduzione appears 31 years after the Slovak original and 26 after the 1980 translation into Russian, on which it is also based. In spite of this, many positions and insights still read fresh and provocative. How can it be that the book does not show its age? I can think of two reasons: either Popovič was a Leonardo-like genius way ahead of his time, or Translation Studies has been running out of steam lately. This seems the conclusion Palma Zlateva reached at the end of her comprehensive overview of the Russian edition of the work:

It is unfortunate that Popovič left us so early, before he could witness both the influence of his ideas and our failure to overcome during these years some of the pitfalls which he had been warning us in his writings. (Zlateva 2000: 115)

I believe she has a point. Already in the introduction, Popovič laments the lack of a solid theoretical background in translation circles, especially practitioners (p. xxvii). As we know, this is still the case. His solution is as follows: a theory of translation can be developed on the basis of a more general semiotic theory of communication and it should strive to remain an open interdisciplinary field. However, this implies the danger that Translation Studies loses its individual character:

To prevent that researchers from other disciplines deny the science of translation the status of an independent discipline, I have drawn a map of the relationships between the science of translation, linguistics and comparative literature. (pp. xxviii–xxix)

The map appears at pages 12–13 and makes an interesting read if compared with the Toury-Holmes map (e.g. in Toury 1995: 10) Western scholars are more familiar with.

Popovič was bold and optimistic, but it seems to me that we have not moved a lot forward since. Perhaps Translation Studies has chosen the wrong time to fight for the independence of its province within the larger confederation of the human sciences. Today's research — both in the human and the natural sciences — is no longer structured around disciplinary boundaries but around problems, regardless of where their solutions may come from. At any rate, it is interesting to note the close association between a solid theory for translation and a precise technical terminology for its operational concepts. This attention to a 'scientific' terminology is demonstrated by a 30-page glossary that closes the book. The glossary is explicitly presented as "a theoretical microsystem" (p. 147) and most of the entries it includes read like an encyclopedia. Theory, specialist terminology, and independence are three corners of one and the same figure for Popovič: "although the science of translation has an interdisciplinary outlook, there exists a specific

domain for it which does not automatically borrow the terminology of the other disciplines" (p. 5).

According to Prof. Liba, Popovič translated little and did not have a large first-hand experience of literary translation. In spite of this, I found his remarks on the practical act of translating insightful and to the point. Starting from the recognition that any translation is a secondary model, Popovič writes that "Translating ... is a consequence of the clash between primary and secondary communication" (p. 47). This is a theoretical position that sets the stage for a dynamic and dialectical view of translating.

One can find a first reflection of this view already in the terms proposed for what we sometime call source and target texts. Popovič defines them *prototext* and *metatext*, thus highlighting their distinct and convergent functions for the act of translating. The prototext is defined as "Subject of intertextual continuity. Original text, primary model which is the basis for second-degree textual operations" (p. 166). This definition suggests an ontological primacy for the act of translating, of which the prototext is nothing more than a 'basis'. Consistently, the metatext is defined as a "Model of the prototext" which is the product of "a logopoietic activity carried out by the author of the metatext" (p. 159). What are the crucial elements around which this logopoietic activity revolves? Recalling the literary context in which Popovič operated, it is not surprising that style comes first, with content and expression distant seconds. "The concept of translational correspondence must be defined above all at the stylistic level; content and language elements give equally important functional contributions to it" (p. 76). At this point it should be obvious that the text is the only workable unit of translation: "Ideally a translation that strives to build stylistic similarities must be carried out at textual level" (p. 68).

This outlook has interesting consequences on the notion of equivalence. "The art of translation is the exact reproduction of the prototext as a whole" (p. 82). This statement should not be mistaken as endorsing such ideas as perfect equivalence or identity. Popovič forcefully rejects the notion of total equivalence; in fact, his core theoretical argument is the alternative and more realistic notion of change or shift. Translators change the prototext precisely *in order to* convey it as exactly as possible, "to possess it in its totality" (ibid.). Both absolute freedom and absolute faithfulness are self-contradictory conceptions; in fact, translating can actually be defined in terms of stylistic, linguistic or semantic shifts. There can be no trade-off between faithfulness and freedom; rather, they are dialectically related.

The optimal situation is functional stylistic change; i.e. change whose goal is the expression of the prototext's character in a way that responds to the conditions of the other system (p. 83). This state of affairs gives translators their fair share of semiotic responsibility. Popovič has no doubt that translating involves creativity:

Every translator interprets the prototext and develops its creative potential. (p. 126)

A translator is both more and less than a writer. Less, because his or her art is 'secondary'. More, because ... he or she has to mix analytical thinking with creative abilities; create according to fixed rules; and introduce the prototext into a new context. (p. 38)

Because creativity means making choices, this complex translational task can be neatly expressed as follows: "Translators choose within choices already made" (p. 39). As we know well, not everyone is convinced that translating involves creativity yet. Those who deny translators' creative efforts presuppose that translating is a simple recording of the original; those who recognise them presuppose that translating happens in the mind of the translator. Popovič would certainly prefer the latter position as is evidenced by his rejection of the conception of the copy and of machine translation: "Machine translation ... is devoid of style; to use a figure, it is 'dehydrated'. Since it is not a text, automatic translation cannot even be regarded as a translation in the first place" (p. 69).

Popovič refuses to accept that the copy, the perfect matching of all levels of expression between prototext and metatext, is a desirable — if unreachable — limit translators should tend to. In fact, the copy is the *opposite* of translation; its very negation. It is not the first time a case needs to be made along these lines for the independence of a form of semiotic work. A debate in early 16th century Italy compared the expressive powers of painting to poetry and sculpture. Then too people wondered whether painting originated in the imagination or was a mere recording of something else. Today, we have no doubt that painters are creative artists, but before the year 1500 they were regarded more or less as craftsmen. Masters such as Bellini, Giorgione and Titian, active in Venice in the first three decades of the century, helped change the public perception of painters. When will this happen to translators? Arguments like those included in *La scienza della traduzione* can certainly bring that time closer, and this is another reason why — I repeat — I hope this book will soon appear in a language that is more familiar to the community of scholars.

Note

1. All references to *La Scienza della traduzione* include page numbers only; all translations into English are mine.

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Emily Apter. *The translation zone: A new comparative literature*.
 Princeton-Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006. xii + 298 pp. ISBN
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Reviewed by Anthony Pym (Tarragona)

This book attempts to redefine Comparative Literature in terms of translation, deemed to have become a key factor in the post-9/11 world. The text begins with twenty theses on translation, the first of which is "Nothing is translatable" and the last of which is "Everything is translatable". Along the way we have insights like

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