



Copyright © 2016 by Academic Publishing House

Researcher

All rights reserved.

Published in the Russian Federation

European Journal of Contemporary Education

ISSN 2304-9650

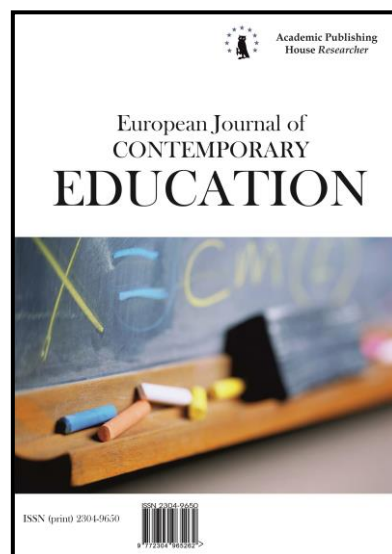
E-ISSN 2305-6746

Vol. 16, Is. 2, pp. 198-204, 2016

DOI: 10.13187/ejced.2016.16.198

[www.ejournal1.com](http://www.ejournal1.com)

**WARNING!** Article copyright. Copying, reproduction, distribution, republication (in whole or in part), or otherwise commercial use of the violation of the author(s) rights will be pursued on the basis of Russian and international legislation. Using the hyperlinks to the article is not considered a violation of copyright.



UDC 37

## Teaching Translation and Interpreting in Slovakia: is there anything other than Levý and Popovič?

Vladimír Biloveský<sup>a, \*</sup>, Martin Djovčoš<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Matej Bel University, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia

### Abstract

Institutional translation and interpreting training has a long lasting tradition in Slovakia mainly thanks to such significant translation scholars as Anton Popovič, František Miko, Ján Vilikovský and many others. However the situation has changed after the Velvet Revolution in 1989 and the education needed to start adapting to the new market situation and face new economic conditions. The paper presents the tradition, its main point of departure, describes market conditions and suggests some methods how to improve the training of future translators not neglecting the tradition. It is a very delicate and sensitive issue. But finding the right balance seems to be the effort worth taking. The paper also introduces a project of University Translation Centre which has been designed to tackle this challenge and provide students with variety of practical experience during their studies.

**Keywords:** translator training, tradition, Slovak translation school, employability, market requirements, University Translation Centre.

### 1. Introduction

Translator and interpreter training has a long-standing tradition in Slovakia. Its institutional and academic roots can be traced all the way back to the common state of the Czechs and Slovaks, to the times of Czechoslovakia. On 15 September 1961 the University of 17th November was founded in Prague, former Czechoslovakia. The role of the university was to provide university education to foreign students, to prepare them language-wise for studies at different Czechoslovak

---

\* Corresponding author

E-mail addresses: [vladimir.bilovesky@umb.sk](mailto:vladimir.bilovesky@umb.sk) (Vladimír Biloveský),  
[martin.djovcos@umb.sk](mailto:martin.djovcos@umb.sk) (Martin Djovčoš)

universities, to prepare Czechoslovak experts for working in foreign countries as well as provide university education to Czechoslovak students. This course included training of future translators and interpreters within a translation and interpreting programme. The University consisted of two faculties: the Faculty of Language and Professional Training and the Faculty of Social Sciences. We must mention that the University of 17th November was the third higher-education institution founded in the Eastern Bloc (following Patrice Lumumba People's Friendship University in Moscow and the Herder Institute at Karl Marx University of Leipzig, Germany) with the aim of assisting foreign students, especially those from the Third World. At that time, this institution was the only one offering the study of translation and interpreting in Czechoslovakia. In 1969 a subsidiary of the University of 17th November bearing the same name was established in Bratislava, Slovakia (then part of Czechoslovakia), and the Institute of Translation and Interpreting was created there thanks to efforts by Anton Popovič and others. This institute was then the only institution offering translation and interpreting field of study in Slovakia. Unfortunately, the University of 17th November was closed in 1974 and its fields of study were transferred to other faculties. Translation studies/translatology was moved to the Faculty of Arts at Charles University in Prague and to the Faculty of Philosophy at Comenius University in Bratislava.\*

## 2. Discussion

The status quo and the existing methodology used in translation and interpreting training have built, to great extent, on the traditions of the University of 17th November in Czechoslovakia. Besides creating an institutional and academic base for translation and interpreting training, it also contributed to the successful development of translation studies research in Czechoslovakia at the time, significantly impacting the methodology and contents of translation and interpreting training. The groundwork for translation studies was laid in the 1950s, and Slovak and Czech linguists, literary scientists and theorising translators (Havránek, Horálek, Ilek, Levý, Hausenblas, Kochol, Felix, Čepan, Jesenská, Ferenčík, et al.; Demjanová, 2016) played an important role in its formation. It was then that the fundamental concepts of general translation theory were formulated, taking directions related to linguistics, stylistics, versology and literary science. The scholars involved devoted themselves primarily to literary translation, which reflected the translation trade's focus on literary texts at the time. However, Slovak thought on translation developed intensively and distinctively in the 1970s and 80s. We must note that at that time the works of theorists reflected the influence of Soviet structuralism and literary communication on one hand, e.g. works by semiotician Lotman, as well as the influence of Jakobson's theories of translation. In 1968 the conference *Translation as Art* was held in Bratislava under the auspices of the International Federation of Translators. Popovič was the leading figure of translation studies research at that time as well as the founder of the theory of literary translation. His scholarly activities were the outcome of literary translation activities in the 1950s. Popovič closely cooperated with significant Czech translation theorist Jiří Levý, who had greatly influenced his thinking on translation studies, especially with his work *Umění překlada* (The Art of Translation, 1963). Besides the influence of Levý, works by Popovič also reflected Western translation studies, namely Nida, Holmes and J.C. Catford. As early as the late 1960s, Popovič launched a systematic development of Slovak translation thought, bringing about the semiotic and communication theory of translation. This concept can be already found in his first monographs *Preklad a výraz* (Translation and Expression, 1968) and *Poetika umeleckého prekladu* (The Poetics of Literary Translation, 1971). In his concept, Popovič applies the general communication model AUTHOR – TEXT – RECIPIENT to translation. He considers translation to be a communication confrontation with the original act and expresses this in the model EXPEDIENT – TEXT 1 – TRANSLATOR – TEXT 2 – PERCIPIENT. Popovič believed that the translation process is a confrontation of systems of two expedients, two texts and two percipients, as well as of two different cultural and literary systems. The key concept of the Slovak thinking on translation is shift, which would later become shift in translation. Popovič considered the idea as early as 1970 in his essay *The Concept 'Shift of Expression' in Translation Analysis*, defining it on the basis of Levý's stylistic shift. Up to that

---

\* Important current Slovak translation theorists and practicing translators such as Ján Vilikovský, Alojz Keníž, Edita Gromová, Jana Rakšanyiová, Milan Žitný, etc. graduated from the Slovak subsidiary of Prague's University of 17th November.

point, differences between the source text and its translation had only been assessed empirically and subjectively, though a certain amount of subjectivity is doubtlessly also present in Popovič's shifts. Nonetheless, the concept of shift of expression is an attempt to objectively determine and give a name to what is lost and gained in the translation process. It allows us to delineate translation approaches more precisely, label differences between the original and the translation, even identify the styles of individual translators. The shift of expression also enables us to investigate often disregarded equivalence, given that shifts of expression are used in order to attain equivalence/adequacy at the higher level of the text. Shifts can thus signalize equivalence between the source and target texts, emphasizing the fact that the term is not restricted to describing "negative" changes occurring during the translation process; it also aims to describe the broadest possible array of phenomena that occur when textual-cultural material is transferred from one culture to another. Taken together, Popovič's shifts of expression in translation – which he further divides into categories such as constitutive shifts, individual shifts, retardation shifts, negative shifts, thematic shifts, generic shifts and rhythmic shifts – enable us to compare the source and the target text with the goal of establishing the extent of their commensurability or relation to each other. These are, above all, terminological contributions, but they also contribute methodologically to the theory, history and criticism of translation, and even to translation in practice. Furthermore, we cannot omit Popovič's understanding of translation as intercultural communication, through which he introduced the following concepts: interspatial factors in translation, cultural factors in translation, cultural creolization in translation, temporal cultural factors in the translated text and domestic culture in translation. As already mentioned, in defining these concepts, he drew on those conceived by Russian semiotician Yuri Lotman. We believe that Popovič's theoretic model of translation activity and translation process has not lost its relevance even today and can be very appropriately used in training translators and interpreters, although it requires some "refurnishing". It needs to be built on and further developed; however, it seems to have been forgotten today under the influence of other foreign theories.

When considering the Slovak translation tradition and translation and interpreting training we must also look beyond teaching at institutions. In the 1970s, "besides teaching at institutions, theoretical and critical reflection on translation was promoted in the form of scholarly seminars, conferences and club activities" (Keníž, 2015: 153). These activities also included the Summer School of Translation, which first took place in 1975 and lasted for three weeks. Popovič, the founder of the Summer School of Translation, explains the establishment of the traditional event as follows: "The idea of organising the Summer School of Translation emerged from day-to-day needs in educating the young generation of literary scientists and journalists, as well as from the awareness of the increased significance of translation in the life of our society. Our intention was also motivated by the lack of qualified translation critics at a time when translation practice had reached a decent standard, and its top representatives, especially in poetry, even comprise a new school. Under such circumstances the lack of informed professional criticism and translation theory was especially critical" (Mínáč, 1982: 29). The tradition of the Summer School of Translation has been preserved until this day. It has undergone some organisational changes and now is only held for three days, not three weeks. Every year of the Summer School of Translation is devoted to one particular issue. The School takes the form of lectures, which are then included in the proceedings. The proceedings aim to capture the content of the Summer School of Translation in particular years and to document it. The Summer School of Translation has impacted the development of Slovak translation theory and its penetration into wider translation circles, and today it offers the opportunity for young translators and translation and interpreting students to present themselves, as well as facilitating dialogue between translators and publishers.

We have been recently witnessing an increased interest in "Eastern" translation studies. This is evidenced by international conferences primarily focusing on Eastern European translation studies research: in 2013 the 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 a 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 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 the conference entitled *Some Holmes and Popovič in all of us? The Low Countries and the Nitra Schools in the 21st Century* will be held at the Faculty of Philosophy of Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, where Anton Popovič worked in the past. This makes us wonder: Are all these conferences reflecting Eastern European translation studies just a coincidence? It seems that Western translation studies is seeking new insights and has therefore begun to reinvestigate and show interest in seemingly long-forgotten thought on translation. This claim is supported by the fact that current translation studies research performed in the West might be inspired by Eastern European translation-studies research. In the East, however, we are witnessing an uncritical and indiscriminate uptake of Western theories, as if we did not value our rich own translation-studies tradition (e.g. represented by Czech: Levý, Polish: Balcerzan, Russian: Rossels, Toper, Slovak: Popovič, Miko).

The form of translation and interpreting studies in Slovakia builds on the rich Czechoslovak tradition. The Czechoslovak tradition favoured a combined study of translation and interpreting within a single programme. The model which is currently used in Slovakia also offers the combined study of translation and interpreting to students within one programme. Another distinctive feature of the Slovak model is that students of translation and interpreting study two foreign languages simultaneously. We believe that graduates in the field of translation and interpreting designed in this way are better equipped for practice and have increased opportunities of finding employment in the trade. Such graduates may choose whether they will pursue both professions (translator and interpreter) or work only one field. This is a market requirement reflecting the “smallness” of our language. We are seeing that this form of study is a good choice with regards to the needs of the Slovak translation market and other factors, and this has been proven by the long-standing Czechoslovak tradition. At the moment, the translation and interpreting field of study is offered by four Slovak universities (the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University in Bratislava, the Faculty of Arts of Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra, the Faculty of Arts of University of Matej Bel in Banská Bystrica and the Faculty of Arts of Prešov University in Prešov). The content of the programmes at these institutions is slightly different in structure: some of them emphasise literary translation, some focus on non-literary translation and others accentuate interpreting. Besides traditional university education for translators and interpreters, these university institutions also offer specialised postgraduate forms of study focusing solely on translation, which are designed for practicing translators with any kind of master’s degree. The postgraduate study is a two-year programme completed by a final examination and a final translation of a technical text. Graduates of this form of study are awarded a certificate. Such specialised study may only be offered by university institutions with nationally accredited bachelor’s and master’s degree programmes in the field of translation and interpreting. The curriculum for the programme was developed in 1990 in cooperation with the Institute of Translation, Interpreting and International Relations of Marc Bloch University in Strasbourg.

### **Market situation and student employability**

As mentioned above, in Slovakia there are four institutions officially focused on translator training and some that offer optional or elective translation courses as a part of their curriculum within general linguistic programs (e.g. Košice, Trnava etc.).

The result is market oversaturation. According to the official data provided by the Institute of Information and Prognoses of Education, in 2003 there were 130 graduates of translation and interpreting programs in all language combinations, whereas in 2013 there were 820 graduates\*. (Pym et al., 2012: 37), in a chart summarizing association members and percentage of potential

---

\* It has to be noted that the huge increase may be caused by the introduction of the bachelor’s degree in line with the Bologna Process. Some of these students decide not to continue and not to complete their master’s degree. However, they still possess an official document proving that they have completed their education in TS. It also needs to be noted that only approximately 40 % of graduates are interested in profession they graduated in. Moreover the official information of Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family states that at the end of 2013 there were only 56 unemployed graduates of Translation and Interpreting Studies. However, they were unable to say which positions were the graduates employed at.

demand for translators, conclude that in Slovakia, given the present data, 102 % of potential demand is fulfilled by the members of three associations alone (SSPUL, SSPOL, SAPT). Had the studies also taken into account the current numbers of members for the Slovak Association of Translators and Interpreters (app. 160 members up to date; the authors state data from 2005, which was 82) and the Union of Interpreters and Translators (which is active mainly in the Czech Republic but has also Slovak members), the potential demand would have been exceeded even more. If we add the overall number of annual graduates, we may clearly see that the market is not able to accept such a surge of translators and interpreters, which consequently leads to market deviations and failure of a basic signalling mechanism – the authority of academic qualification. Interestingly enough, when talking about the state regulations guiding the translation profession, Pym et. al. (2012) also say that “A more concerted exception would appear to be Slovakia, where Appendix 2 of the Trades Licensing Act No. 455/1991 was amended in 2007 so that translation, interpreting and teaching became licensed trades. This means that in order to present an invoice for a translation, the translator needs to be professionally qualified as a translator, with a degree either in Translation and Interpreting or in the languages concerned. There are, however, several ways of getting around this, and we would hesitate to claim that this constitutes complete protection of a professional title.” Moreover, we see a great demand for translations. For example, in the area of literary translation, as stated in the survey performed by the European Council of Literary Translators’ Associations (CEATL), “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. However, Djovčoš, 2012, for example, in his comprehensive study of the translation market in Slovakia, found that only 44.8 % of interviewed translators actually have a degree in translation studies.

In other words, we can say that the Slovak translation market is full of paradoxes. On one hand, we see a significantly oversaturated market that keeps being “resaturated” every year by the hundreds of new graduates, but on the other hand there are a lot of translation requests to “feed” these multitudes. Still, when it comes to decision making on the part of the client, we dare say that academic qualification is not sufficient. They seem to be more interested in practical experience and “real” skills than formal education, as illustrated in the OPTIMALE project, for example, the previously mentioned study by (Pym et al., 2012).\*

In order to keep pace with the market demands and avoid contributing to further deviation of the market, the Faculty of Arts has started the project of a Translation Centre in August 2012 in order to provide our students real-life experience with translation situations, teamwork, project management, editing, efficient communication with clients etc. The centre is supervised by the project manager (Marianna Bachledová, previously Zuzana Kraviarová), who also teaches translation and CAT courses. The Centre mainly translates texts for internal university purposes (general documents, scholarly papers, contracts, promotional materials), but also cooperates with state institutions such as the municipal office and the State Scientific Library in Banská Bystrica. Students are divided into teams, each consisting of a project manager, terminologist, translator, editor, and proof-reader. Moreover, the whole process is supervised by the quality manager, who oversees students’ communication and workflow. After a translation is completed, the final product is proofread by a professional native-speaker editor/reviser, who corrects the text and sends it back to students so they can learn from their own mistakes. Professional editors are selected in line with the subject of the text. If the translated text is about economics, the editor will have a background in that field in order to discover as many errors as possible. At the end of the process, the text is sent to the client, who provides us with valuable feedback.

Since its founding, approximately 60 master’s students have worked for the Translation Centre. Over three years they have translated 2524 standard pages<sup>†</sup> and interpreted 90 hours

---

\* For a more detailed analysis see Djovčoš, Martin (2014). Translators and Social Context: The Case Study of Slovakia. In *Meta: journal des traducteurs / Meta: Translators’ Journal*, vol. 59, n° 2, 2014, pp. 330–359.

† It needs to be added that the number doesn’t include an extensive project in cooperation with the Faculty of Political Science and International Relations, where our students worked on translation of 18 books, app.

(consecutive and simultaneous). During the simultaneous interpreting, the student is in the booth with a professional interpreter who mentors him/her.

In 2014, former project manager Zuzana Kraviarová conducted a survey to assess students' satisfaction with this way of gaining practical experience. Overall she managed to collect 29 responses. She was interested in why they had decided to work for the Centre, what they thought about this opportunity, how satisfied they were with the Centre's management and which skills it helped them improve. In the conclusion of her paper she summarises her results as follows:

1. More than 90 % of students who worked for the Centre did so voluntarily and their primary motivation was either personal or professional;
2. More than 95 % of students considered this kind of practice absolutely essential or somewhat important;
3. More than 90 % of students considered the Centre's management to be excellent or somewhat satisfactory;
4. The practice helped students gain new skills in translation and interpreting from and to Slovak, terminology research, editing and work with CAT tools;
5. It also helped them improve their soft skills, mainly communication in a team and working under pressure (time/deadlines, stress etc.);
6. It didn't help them in terms of specialisation in a given field of expertise, translation ethics or finding a paid job.\*

### 3. Conclusion

So is there anything other than Levý and Popovič in Slovakia? Yes there is. Although their theories are still valid, they need to "refurnished" in order to suit new situation. Slovakia has a rich tradition in theorising and teaching translation and interpreting. However, the current chaotic market and defective signalling mechanisms require serious rethinking and reshaping of traditional didactic methods, which nevertheless need to stay an integral part of the process. We have thus presented our reaction to the current situation, and we believe that students with such experience are better prepared for the market and have a better starting position.

### References

- [Bilovesky, 2013](#) – Bilovesky V. (2013). Does Integrating Europe Need Polylingualism and Multiculturalism? *European Researcher*, 2013, Vol.(42), N° 2-3, pp. 455-461.
- [Demjanová, 2016](#) – Demjanová E. (2016). Dubbing in Slovakia: A Heuristic Overview of the Process. *European Journal of Social and Human Sciences*, 2016, Vol.(9), Is. 1, pp. 9-16.
- [Djovčoš, 2014](#) - Djovčoš Martin (2014). Translators and Social Context: The Case Study of Slovakia. In *Meta: journal des traducteurs. Meta: Translators' Journal*, vol. 59, n° 2, 2014, pp. 330-359.
- [Erasmus Network for Professional Translator Training, 2011](#) - Erasmus Network for Professional Translator Training (2011). The OPTIMALE employer survey and consultation, 8-9. Visited on 30.10.2012, <[http://www.translator-training.eu/attachments/article/52/WP4\\_Synthesis\\_report.pdf](http://www.translator-training.eu/attachments/article/52/WP4_Synthesis_report.pdf)>.
- [Fock, 2008](#) - Fock H., De Haan, Martin and Lhotová Alena (2008). Comparative income of literary translators in Europe. (Last update 05 December 2008). Brussels: CEATL. Visited on 30 April 2012, <<http://www.ceatl.eu/docs/surveyuk.pdf>>.
- [Keníž, 2015](#) - Keníž A. (2015). Teória prekladu Antona Popoviča z pedagogického hľadiska. In *Teória umeleckého a prekladového textu: tradície a inovácie*. Nitra: Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa, 2015.
- [Kraviarová, 2014](#) - Kraviarová Z. (2014). Prax v integrovanej výučbe odborného prekladu (Practice in an Integrated Model of Specialized Text Translation Teaching). In *Preklad a tlmočenie*

---

2000 pages. The project is due to be finished by the end of the July, so it is not yet possible to provide the exact number of translated pages.

\* It is important to note that during the survey these were still full-time students, so it is understandable that they didn't have a full-time paid job. However, 30 % of those interviewed stated that it helped them get their first paid assignment. At the moment we are conducting a poll among the same students one year after their graduation, and we will be able to see whether it helped improve their employability.

11: Má translológie dnes ešte čo ponúknuť II. Banská Bystrica: Univerzita Mateja Bela, 2014. pp. 32-41.

[Masárová, 2012](#) - *Masárová L.* (2012). Sociological aspects of "quality" in translation service from customer perspective. Master's thesis. Banská Bystrica: Univerzita Mateja Bela, 2012.

[Mináč, 1982](#) - *Mináč V.* (1982). Texty a kontexty. Bratislava: Slovenský spisovateľ, 1982.

[Pym et al., 2012](#) - *Pym A., Grin F., Sfredd C. et al.* (2012). The status of the translation.

[Profession in the European Union, 2013](#) - *Profession in the European Union (2013)*. Brussels: DGT. Visited on 12 June 2013, <[http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/translation/publications/studies/translation\\_profession\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/translation/publications/studies/translation_profession_en.pdf)>.