

## HOW MANY FUNCTIONALISMS ARE THERE IN TRANSLATION STUDIES?

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### ABSTRACT

Slavic translation studies as a whole is an uncharted territory almost missing on the international map of the discipline. At the same time, Western digests, overviews and encyclopaedias often reduce functionalism to the Skopos theory. There are several reasons for this *status quo* in the discipline. Jiří Levý, sometimes referred to as a Russian formalist, is taken here as an example of Eastern functionalism and compared to Western functionalisms. It is hoped that recent tendencies in TS will result in the integration of Eastern TS into the mainstream and in the extension of the functionalist family membership, along with the reassessment of what functionalism is.

**Keywords:** translation studies; translation theory; functionalism; functional translation; equivalence; Czech translation theory; Slavic translation studies; norms; teleology; communication; sociosemiotics; structuralism; historiography; misinterpretation; Levý; Gentzler

### Introduction

One of the memes circulated in current mainstream Translation Studies has been the rather narrow concept of functionalism. This seems to go hand in hand with Western paradigmatic changes in the humanities: Western theories produced before the pragmatic/linguistic turn in the 1970s are assumed to be prescriptive, source-text oriented, non-holistic and de-contextualised. Due to the linguistic inaccessibility of some TS sources, scholars often rely on indirect sources, or on one article only, and this is the way memes are most readily replicated. Such is the case of Eastern functionalisms. For example, Jiří Levý, who developed his theory during the 1950s–1960s, is a genuine functionalist, and so are e.g. Popovič (1968) and Balcerzan (1968) with their focus on communicative and other functions.

## Western functionalisms

Christiane Nord (2012: 30) complains that some representations of the Skopos theory in general introductions to Translation Studies are distorted because their authors cannot read the German texts by Reiss and Vermeer, and had to draw on second- or even third-hand sources. However, the following presentations do justice to the Skopos; some of them present it as virtually the only existing functionalist theory of translation. In his entry on *Communicative/Functional Approaches* in the Routledge Encyclopaedia of Translation Studies (2005) Mason says that these represent:

A view which refuses to divorce the act of translating from its context, insisting upon the real-world situational factors which are prime determinants of meaning and interpretation of meaning. [...] The function of a translated text is a crucial determinant of translators' decisions.

He distinguishes three main strands:

(a) British functionalist linguistics to Catford; (b) Dell Hymes's communicative competence; (c) a tradition stemming from Karl Bühler, which sees judgements about the communicative purpose/scopos (Reiss and Vermeer) or set of functions (Nord) of the act of translating.

In the Handbook of Translation Studies (vol. 3, 2013; *Common grounds in translation and interpreting studies*) Wolf and Grbič claim that the functionalist approach was developed in Germany in the 1970s and 1980s and that it is precisely in T/I training that it is popular.

The Handbook of Translation Studies (vol. 2, 2012; *Theory of Translatorial Action/Functionalist Approaches*) posits a similar claim:

The 1970s saw the development of functionalist approaches to translation. The prime aim of translation is its purpose for the addressees. Translation is a form of human action between cultures in context. [...] Functionalist approaches were initiated and further elaborated in Germany (Reiss, Vermeer, Nord, Hönig, Kussmaul).

In the 1st Volume of the Handbook (2010; *Functional Approaches*), Nord claims that “functionalist approaches to translation are derived from a general theory called Skopos-theorie, brought forward by the German scholar Hans J. Vermeer in the late 1970s and early 1980s”, and that it became a didactic theory in Germany (Mainz, Germersheim).

Earlier, on the back cover of Nord's *Translation as a Purposeful Activity. Functional Approaches Explained* (1997) Pym, as St. Jerome's editor of the *Translation Theories Explained Series*, notes that there are two functionalist approaches that revolutionised German-language approaches to translation: the theory of actions (*Handlungstheorie*) and the theory of a translation's goal or purpose (*Skopostheorie*). He considers them “functionalist as they liberate translators from servitude to the source text, seeing translation as a new communicative act that must be purposeful with the request to the translator's client and readership”.

Nord's *Introduction* (1997: 1–3) may be the primary source of this particular conception of functionalism. Although she admits that “functionalism is a broad term for various theories that approach translation in this way [focusing on the function or functions of texts and translations]”, Nord claims that Skopostheorie has played a major role in the development of this trend. She intends to “look at functionalism as a broad approach” because all human activity has a purpose/aim and is carried out by individual agents, in the case of translation by means of translated texts aimed at the receivers: other roles are played by the translator and, in professional settings, the third party – the commissioner or initiator who has a communicative purpose of their own. For her, functionalisms account for norms and evaluation (i.e. values) as they are the precondition of functioning.

However, in her *Historical Overview* (1997: 4–14) Nord refutes all preceding and concurrent (Western) translation theories, ending up with Skopostheorie and Handlungstheorie as the only two legitimate functionalist candidates, arguing that translation theories before the pragmatic and cultural turns were SLT oriented and saw translation as a code-switching operation disregarding cultural differences and communicative needs.<sup>1</sup> The quintessence of the claim here and throughout the book is that previous theories: (a) were focused on partial linguistic (functional) translation equivalents regardless of the function of the whole text, and that (b) they accounted neither for the purpose of translation nor for (c) the possibility of different function/s of the text in the receiving culture, nor for (d) the people involved, especially the receiver and the initiator, in another culture.

Vermeer (2000: 223–224), in his response to criticisms, points out that unlike retrospectively oriented theories based on transcoding, Skopostheorie is prospectively oriented, i.e. focused on the target culture, admitting, however, that a certain skopos may require transcoding, or e.g. “fidelity” which is often the case in literary translation. He insists that the translator should be aware of the effect of the translation and how much it will differ from the effect of the original. For Vermeer (2000: 224) the Skopos is (a) the goal of the process, (b) the function of the translation and (c) the intention of the translation mode. He (2000: 229) defines commission as “the instruction, given by oneself or by someone else, to carry out a given action”. For Hönig (1998: 13) it is the translator who defines the skopos and the strategies in order to meet the receiver's requirements. Nord (2003: 111) adds that these decisions are guided by ideological criteria.

According to Schäffner (1998), the functionalist approach has shifted the focus from linguistic equivalence to functional appropriateness of the translation in its context of use and on the communicative act as a process determined by the expectations and needs of recipients, which frees the translator from the narrowly defined concept of loyalty in terms of linguistic equivalence.

In opposition to unnamed German particularistic and source text oriented linguistic translation theories, the prospectively and holistically oriented Skopos theory is based on the communication model – the act of communication taking place in the receiving culture, with the established purpose of communication to be achieved at the receiver's end. The theory explains why (a) one source text may be translated in different ways depending on the purpose and the receiver, and (b) that the overall function of the origi-

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<sup>1</sup> This interpretation is obviously not true for Nida.

nal may either be preserved or changed in translation depending on the purpose. A translation should be adequate to the purpose, but may be functionally equivalent only if the function of the text remains the same. Such an *equifunctional* translation preserves the original's overall function (after Bühler – referential, expressive or appellative; Nord added Jakobson's phatic function).

Although this is a unique theoretical contribution by the Skopos, as Nord (2013) suggests, it may not be the reason for disqualifying other communication-based theories from the functionalist family, especially because the Skopos model lacks the dimension of historicism: the history of translation has seen a more extensive variety of functions and effects of translation in the receiving cultures and on higher intercultural levels, at times with no tangible “commissioner” on the scene. This may be the reason why Tymoczko (2007) combines the Skopos and Polysystem (DTS) models to introduce the cultural-historical dimension.

### **Western equivalence versus function**

The developments in Western translation theory regarding the opposition between equivalence and function are interpreted by Pym (2009):

Equivalence has thus been used in at least three different ways: to conceptualize cultural adaptation ('dynamic equivalence'), to refer to reproduction of different 'natural' source text levels and functions (where the term does indeed recuperate the millennial discourse of 'fidelity'), and to think about the different choices facing the translator. The result is a complex paradigm, too often reduced to some of its more naïve formulations. Underlying *all* these conceptualizations is the common idea that the way one translates depends, in the last instance, on the nature of the *source* text, since that is what a translation is equivalent to. That is the point on which the late twentieth century challenged the basic concept of equivalence.

From the perspective of purpose/aim oriented Skopos theory Pym (2009) adds:

Translations are generally seen as fulfilling functions quite different to those of source texts, since they are for a fundamentally different audience, in a new cultural situation. The same text can therefore be translated in different ways, to suit different purposes. The translator must first decide, in consultation with the client, what the purpose is to be, then act accordingly. This theory does not abolish equivalence by any means – it simply makes equivalence a special case, to be sought in situations where 'functional consistency' is required between the source and target situations.

Looking at the other end of the current western functionalist spectrum – the DTS, Pym (2009) notes that descriptivism made equivalence a “banal presupposition” because all translations are supposed to be equivalent to their sources, however DTS aspired to empirically establish the functions of translation, although the scope of interest was on the interaction between the systems of domestic and translated literatures. Pym (2009) concludes that, while none of the two theories tackled the issue of meaning indetermi-

cy, Vermeer focused on the narrow communicative act and was speculative, while Toury worked on the level of entire cultural systems and was positivist:

Vermeer refers to 'function' in terms of the role given to a piece of language in an action, whereas Toury's functionalism refers to what translations do in an entire cultural system; Vermeer does not require empirical justification (theoretical reflection is enough), whereas Toury has always actively sought it.

The concept of translation norms, introduced in the West by Toury, was meant to be a descriptive and explanatory tool linked to functionality. In other words, although the Polysystem and DTS are labelled as target-oriented, they see the dichotomy between source and target orientedness as a norm-dependent socio-historical variable attached to culture needs. From this perspective the Skopos seems to lack the historical dimension.

There are also regimes, like for example, fanslation or volunteer- and crowdslation. While the former is based on self-commissioning, the latter is commissioned to whoever volunteers, but in both cases the translator is probably not the 'expert' in the sense attributed to this agent by the Skopos theory. On the market, there are also substandard translations (inadequate in terms of Skopos) – they represent deviations from ideal models, or at least from current norms.

During the 1990s Chesterman (1993, 1997, 1999) proposed the integration of normativity as a bridge and as a means of introducing axiology and human agency, a bridge between what a translation is and what it ought to be, a bridge between descriptivism and prescriptivism. He was also careful to distinguish between a translation act, a translation task and a translation event. Chesterman also suggested a taxonomy of norms and pointed out the concept of value related to function. His proposal seems to have remained a 'solitary call', probably because he was ahead of the western methodological 'clock' in Translation Studies.

Perhaps the most universalist and up-to-date Western functionalist model proposed by Lefevere has been left aside, except for Hermans (1999) who ranks Manipulation theory as the most advanced, and except for empiricists, like e.g. Pokorn (2012), who finds it the best foundation for her investigation into the history of translation, allowing, at the same time, for the bird's eye view on communicative acts and events in translation linked to their historical contexts.

While in Germany the Skopos may be the only functionalist/communicative theory and model, in Western TS taken as a whole there are more members in the functionalist/communicative family: Catford, Nida, Newmark, Chesterman, the Polysystem, the Manipulation, and Tymoczko who has combined the Polysystem and Skopos models.

### **Eastern functionalisms exemplified**

According to Jiří Levý (1963, 1969, 1983, 2011) the basic function of a translation is to represent the inaccessible source message as its communicative substitute in the secondary communication act which takes place in the receiving culture (no matter what the structural relationships are between the original and its translation). Translation as

an act of communication is therefore both retrospectively and prospectively oriented on a dialectical scale, with the ratio depending on the period translation norm (basically deriving from the needs and expectations) and other factors, including the translator with his dispositions. This has been illustrated by Levý on the extremes of the French classicist translation versus the German romanticist translation. He also identified other methods, e.g. the formalist and the naturalist.

This sociosemiotic conception of translation is based on Prague School structural semiotics (or theory of literary communication), as well as on Levý's empirical research into the history of translation. Czech semiotics builds, *inter alia*, on the theory of function, with norms and values inextricably attached to it. Its basic model is the act of communication conceived as a goal-oriented (teleological) human inter/action in a communicative situation embedded in the culture.

What matters to Czech structuralism is the function/s of the whole message as well as of its constituent parts on different hierarchical structural levels. Some functions, levels and their elements are dominant in the message, in which both the content and form constitute its semantics. The message exists only when received, therefore 'text' is not an appropriate denomination as it rather implies the material object. The conditions of functioning are the intersubjective norms that meet expectations and values and "needs" of the recipients (in other words that the message has a utility value in providing access to the inaccessible original, facilitating its consumption by and effect on a group of individuals with their world views, tastes, beliefs etc.). The precondition of functioning and reception is intelligibility.

However, some forms or content in translation may, unlike their SLT, acquire an additional function in translation, e.g. adding local or historical colour, and thus may become dominant elements. This depends on the prospective function of a translation and the translator's pre/conception of it.

Messages, designed to fulfill intended communicative functions, become part of a diachrony in the evolution of a particular genre or discourse; they can either reinforce the period models or bring in some innovation. Some may even initiate a new genre, or on the other hand they may challenge or even hamper domestic production. So they do possess the potential of carrying the 'evolutionary function'. Here Levý (2011: 180–182) transcends the level of individual culture systems as he points to the role of translation in the globalization process of the evolution of world literature. For him translation is a mediating factor in this type of mass communication through which the author and his work are inevitably deprived of some specific traits, which leads to uniformity. However, within individual cultures, retranslations provide numerous variants, therefore translation is a factor resulting in both more variety and more uniformity.

Levý suggested several models of translation. The most fundamental of them is the communicative processual model where the primary communication act is linked with the secondary one taking place in different socio-historical circumstances (contexts) and being the result of three interpretations: (1) the author's interpretation of the reality, (2) the translator's interpretation of the message and (3) the reader's interpretation of the translation. Indeterminacy of meaning is resolved through interpretation based on Ingarden's phenomenology, further developed by Vodička in Prague into a reception theory on the culture level. This conception is integrated with another processual model, which might

be called a 'Zoom-in 1'. Here translation is performed in three stages: (a) understanding, (b) interpretation ending in a concretization of the original and in the production of a conception of the translation, all this followed by (c) re-stylization. The process also involves ideology, especially in the stage of interpretation, reader sociology especially in the stage of re-stylization, and the dispositions of the translator in all the stages.

Stage (c) is integrated into a third, linear model, which might be called a 'Zoom-in 2'. Here the translator proceeds in a linear manner, unit by unit, but it does not mean anything like word-for-word or literal translation, nor does it necessarily preclude it. Because the conception of translation, whose establishment also derives from the translation norm and the goal of translation, among other factors, also determines the global method or strategy with respect to the function of the whole and its constituent parts. What is also important here is that the process is incremental, reflecting the time-line of reading linked to (a) predictability and (b) predetermination vs. accident. This decision-making process, its accompanying minimax strategy, the translator's idiolect and tendencies, as well as the receiver's sociology, are known from Levý's articles (1967, 1971/2008).

Although Levý's communicative model may seem to lack commission and the commissioner who is supposed to be the 'trigger' in the Skopos theory, this is not so. Theories and models should be open and elegant. The Czech semiotic model features agentive positions that may be shared by diverse participants occupying differentiated roles in the communicative act: sender – message – receiver. One agentive position may involve multiple participant roles of agents (e.g. the slot of the translator may be occupied by roles such as initiator, commissioner, publisher, translator editor, proofreader, sender). The message produced by the translator may be a preliminary product (received by the processor/s), while what is finally circulated and received is another message.

Levý's translator has a communicative intention/goal that may come from anywhere, and the crucial point is the translation's value derived from its function. However, in his model of translation as a decision process (1971: 73) Levý added a footnote that the primary decision, usually by-passed in translation theory, is the selection of works to be translated – a complex strategy, usually in the hands of publishers, a topic for the sociology of literature. Having mapped the history of Czech translation and its practice in the European context, Levý (1957/1996) pointed out the socio-historical links between function, norm and value not only on the canvas of a culture and its systems, but also on the canvas of societal group interests, individual initiatives and dispositions within their contexts.

Among other things, Levý (2011: 19) introduced the category of noetic compatibility, distinguishing the polarity between illusionism and anti-illusionism, which is also perceived as a measure of translativity, depending on the translation norm and derived from the hybrid nature of translation (2011: 70).

On normativity, i.e. on matching a translation to the period norm of translation, Levý notes:

If we say that a translation is a reproduction and that translating is an original creative process, we define translation normatively, declaring what a translation should be like. Such a normative definition would entail an ideal translation. The poorer the translation, the further removed it is from this defined norm (Levý 2011: 59).

Levý integrates the future lower-level Skopos and the upper-level Polysystem, focusing on semiotics, communication, individual agency, reception and cultural effects. He designed a partial theory of literary translation, but his models are generally applicable to any type of human translation as goal-oriented verbal inter/action.

### Gaps in the translation studies map

Mainstream historiography of Translation Studies is typically sparse regarding Eastern traditions; some representations are taken from secondary sources and/or based on one article alone, some traditions are missing. The main cause may be linguistic inaccessibility. For example, Jiří Levý has been widely presented as the author of translation as a decision process (his article was published in English in 1967); Anton Popovič has been presented as the author of shifts (his article was published in English in 1970), and his colleague František Miko has been presented as the author of changes of expression (based on his French article published in 1970).

Their articles were published in collective volumes or conference proceedings by western publishers. With the bulk of their work remaining mostly unknown and unread outside their own countries, it is not surprising that their functionalist theories have remained unknown. There were individual exceptions when western scholars, developing their theories back in the 1970s and 1980s, were inspired by the Czech and Slovak sources – namely the Holmes group. For example, Gideon Toury, considered to be the first theorist to introduce the concept of translation norm, was inspired by Levý (Toury, in Delabastita et al. 2009).

In respect of norm-related functions of translation, the Czechs and Slovaks distinguished between communicative and evolutionary functions: the boundary between target vs. source orientedness does not hold here as translation is a socio-historical fact oscillating between the poles of target and source orientedness.

The communication-based Skopos drives communicative target-orientedness to the extreme whereby the boundary between translation and other types of mediated communication disappear. The polysystem, on the other hand, seems to favour the evolutionary aspect.

A common historiography of Central and East European translation studies is still missing, but some national ‘maps’ already exist (e.g. Klaudy et al. 2006, Costantino 2010). Although the post-socialist countries are mostly Slavic (except the DDR, Hungary and Romania), there is no reason to subsume their scholarships under Russian formalism as Gentzler (2001) and Tymoczko (2007) have done. For example, Czech structuralists were functionalists, anti-formalists and anti-positivists (see Jettmarová 2010); even the well-known Russian formalist Roman Jakobson, when he left their country after almost 20 years (1920–1939), was a functionalist ‘convert’. Many of his famous ideas about translation (Jakobson 1959, 1960) had originated in this country, for example his concept of *creative transposition* (now perhaps transdaptation or transcreation) is a substitute for the Czech concept *přebásnění* (transversification) standing for a translation method in poetry based on substitution – the method was widely discussed from the late 1800s and was anchored in the substitution theory proposed in 1913 by Mathesius.

## Conclusion

Historiography can never be absolutely objective, but the first move to help enhance objectivity is to communicate the Eastern tradition in a lingua franca. Therefore Pokorn's recent call for establishing Post-Socialist TS is in place (Pokorn 2012: 4–5). She suggests research should focus on the influence of the communist regime on translations, translation practices and theories, and that major theoretical conceptions should be presented to the international public. This may eliminate the risk of second-hand misinterpretations and represent the first step on the way to an integrated discipline and its historiography, including the reconsideration of functionalism.

There have been some recent initiatives regarding Eastern TS. Levý has been published in English (2008, 2011), Portuguese (2012) and Spanish (2013); after his Italian translation (2006) by Osimo, Popovič's English translation is underway also thanks to the support of the EST; Cracow intends to publish a Polish anthology both in Polish and English. Brian Baer (Kent State University, US) has been planning an anthology of Eastern TS. Specific platforms will be provided by the Bologna conference on Slavic TS in May 2014 and the Vienna conference "Going East" scheduled for December 2014. A bridging conference is the Antwerp "Transferring Translation Studies" (November 2013).

Let us wait and see how many members the functionalist family actually has.

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