

**JIŘÍ LEVÝ'S CONTRIBUTION TO TRANSLATION
STUDIES AS REPRESENTED IN THE DE GRUYTER
ENCYCLOPEDIA *ÜBERSETZUNG, TRANSLATION,
TRADUCTION***

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ABSTRACT

About fifty entries in the Index of Names (HSK. 26.3: 2728) assign Levý to a relatively small number (little more than a dozen) of most frequently quoted and discussed translation scholars. It is important to note that, out of Levý's works, only two titles are referred to – “The Art of Translation” and “Translation as a decision process”. Both titles are exclusively quoted either in German (1969) or in Russian (1974), in English (1967) or in German (1981), respectively. The total absence of contributions written in Czech is due to the fact that the editors of the encyclopaedia did not succeed in acquiring Czech and/or Slovak contributors to the handbook. In some entries, Levý is seen as a forerunner within the history of translation studies. In most entries, however, he is seen as an integral part of the discipline and actual discussions. Sometimes, it is regretted that his contributions to the field are not looked into well enough. While the methodological (structuralist) and ideological context of his works is only mentioned, a host of concrete linguistic and literary problems (the idea of decision making, ways of handling proper names, aspects of drama translation) are referred to or discussed at some length. The paper presents the results of an evaluation and looks more thoroughly into some especially relevant questions raised.

Keywords: Levý as pioneering translation scholar; the de Gruyter “International Encyclopedia of Translation Studies”; presentation of Czech structuralism in the “Encyclopedia”; Roman Jakobson; Schamschula's German version of the “Art of Translation”; Morgenstern's “Aesthetic weasel” as recurrent case in point in translation argument

1.

This paper endeavours to ascertain Jiří Levý's (1926–1967) role as a translation scholar through the prism of the de Gruyter Encyclopedia (Kittel et al. 2004–2011, = HSK. 26.1–3) – one of the largest handbooks on translation studies ever. About fifty entries in the Index of names at the end of the three volumes of the Encyclopedia (HSK. 26.3: 2728) assign Levý to a relatively small group of most frequently quoted and discussed experts.

The group of philologists referred to in fifty and more entries amounts to about fifteen names, among them Armin Paul Frank (HSK. 26.3: 2705), Roman Jakobson (HSK. 26.3: 2719), José Lambert (HSK. 26.3: 2726), Gideon Toury (HSK. 26.3: 2763) and others. Jakobson's name shows that next to Levý's contribution to translation studies, Czech structuralism will also have to be observed – at least to some extent. The fifty entries connected with Levý, however, will be the focal point of the following evaluation. It is important to note that in some instances, e.g. in cases of more detailed discussion of translation problems found in Levý's studies, the name appears on three and more pages running. This means Levý is quite present in scholarly argument of the 21st century.

At the outset, to render the following observations understandable, the Encyclopedia has to be characterized in some of its main traits. The de Gruyter *International Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* originated in the context of the former Göttingen University's Research Centre in Literary Translation (Sonderforschungsbereich 309 *Die Literarische Übersetzung*).¹ Each of the 284 entries – written mainly in German but also in English and French, occasionally also translated from other languages, e.g. from Russian – is followed by a "Selected bibliography". Some of these bibliographies, in accordance with guidelines for the authors, not only contain literature referred to in the entry, but also additional literature concerning the topic at hand or translation as such. In some instances, then, Levý's name only figures in the "Selected bibliography": so to speak as a name which must not be left out. Next to the conception of an open bibliography, the idea of a specifically detailed index of subject is also relevant to the evaluation of Levý's 'portrait of a scholar'. There are more than 100 pages of Subject Index (HSK. 26.3: 2773–2883). This Index is not only meant to lead to the host of subject matter contained in the single entries; it is also meant as a research tool. Users of the Encyclopedia should be encouraged to go through a given passage of the Index as if it were a text, i.e. envisage further systematic and historical aspects of the topic of interest. To give an example: starting from the phenomenon of "indirect translation", by the way already shortly touched upon in *The Art of Translation* (Levý 2012: 98, 182f.),² users may open up for themselves a whole area of research still full of blind spots.

This makes us consider the historical distance between Levý's contributions to translation studies and the coming into being of the Encyclopedia. When the de Gruyter Encyclopedia was being conceived of, i.e. in the second half of the 1990s, and even more when the handbook appeared, between 2004 and 2011, about five decades of international research had been going on. Linguists, literary historians, specialists in comparative literature and experts in cultural studies (often with several competences assembled in one scholar) had probed their ways and specific, 'discipline-bound' gain in and for translation studies. Moreover, many of the scholars of the younger generations had the chance of profiting from the ongoing evolution of the discipline in cooperation with research teams all over the world. In 1957, i.e. when Levý published his first larger study on literary translation (*České teorie překladu – Czech theory of translation*),³ and even when his

¹ Cf. Harald Kittel's information in the 'Preface' (HSK. 26.1: VIII), the German and French versions respectively (ibid.: V, XI).

² Cf. Schultze (2014).

³ Cf. Levý, Jiří (1957) *České teorie překladu*, Prague: Státní nakladatelství krásné literatury a umění.

classic (*Umění překladau – The Art of Translation*)⁴ appeared for the first time, in 1963, the potential philological discipline “Translation studies” was only in the process of gaining shape. From this perspective, Levý appears as a pioneer who – within extremely short time – equipped the new discipline with tremendous insight into many facets of this field of research and also with impulse to further research. Among the guiding questions in evaluating Levý as a translation scholar, then, has to be, if he is rather seen as a precursor of the present state of things (e.g. of the way the discipline is inclined to see itself) or as an authority to turn to even now.

This leads to further preliminary reflections. Levý’s contributions to translation studies, it is known, contain some assumptions and statements which, partly for political (ideological) reasons, have not been acceptable. There are certain onesided, maybe short-sighted, statements Levý probably never had the time to reconsider. He may have corrected himself had he been given a chance to do so. A Marxist position, so it seems, made him again and again claim “objective reality” in a work of art, i.e. “objective reality” which is “reworked/remodeled” “subjectively” by the artist (Levý 2012: 43–44).⁵ Of course, we doubt there are such things as “objective reality” and “objective sense of a work of art”.⁶ Suffice it to recall works of art rendering ‘possible worlds’ instead of “reality” or cases of selfreferential poetic function as it is discussed in Mukařovský’s writings. And suffice it to recall works of art which contain – in subtext, between the lines – traces of personal life and thought which have been deciphered only long after the coming into being of the respective text. Božena Němcová’s novel *Babička* (*Grandmother*) with plenty of deep structures deciphered only during the last decades, may serve as an example.

In the following (paragraph 2), the choice of Levý’s contributions to translation studies quoted in the Encyclopedia, will be shown as a component of the presentation of Czech structuralism in the handbook. For, of course, next to the already mentioned founding father of the Prague school, Roman Jakobson, further representatives of Czech structuralism, e.g. Jan Mukařovský, also figure in the handbook. The central part of this report (par. 3) will concentrate on the set of entries naming Levý as a translation scholar. Starting out with a number of general observations, the evaluation will turn to examples of more extensive quotations of Levý’s studies and also to cases of specific affirmation or rejection of positions found in the studies. Final considerations (par. 4) will concern the visibility of the translation scholar Jiří Levý in publications of the last years, i.e. around 2010.

2.

In view of the guiding theme of the conference, it may be worthwhile noting there is one entry concerning Prague structuralism as such (HSK. 26.3: 2846). In his article “Translating for the theatre: dramatic conventions and traditions”, Wolfgang Ranke

⁴ Levý, Jiří (1963) *Umění překladau*, Prague: Československý spisovatel. – It should be mentioned that the title “The art of translation” had already been applied to translation studies before 1963, e.g. by Th. H. Savory (*The art of translation*, London 1957 ff.), cf. Gero von Wilpert (2001) “Übersetzung” [Translation], in *Sachwörterbuch der Literatur*, 8th edition, Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 857–860, here 859.

⁵ If not indicated otherwise, all translations from German, Czech etc. into English are mine, B. S.

⁶ The phrasing is “objektivní smysl díla”, e.g. Levý (2012: 58). Of course, readers of Levý’s writings have to be attentive. Sometimes, the word “objective” just means ‘verifiable’.

mentions the “influence of Prague structuralism” – together with theatre semiotics of the 1970s and the 1980s on a series of attempts at describing the specifics of theatre translation.⁷ A further entry on “literary structuralism” (HSK. 26.3: 2846) also leads to Prague traditions, in fact to Květoslav Chvatík’s study concerning “Czechoslovak structuralism”.⁸ This means that the Index of subjects, which is, in fact, not quite complete in matters of Czech structuralism, at least contains traces of this great tradition. The Index of names, on the other hand, offers plenty of context for Levý’s contributions to translation studies (Levý 1967). Though Trubeckoj’s name is missing, the beginning of the Prague school is brought into mind by 51 entries concerning Jakobson’s works (HSK. 26.3: 2719). Of course, many of these entries refer to studies written when Jakobson was already living in the USA. Five entries concern writings by Jan Mukařovský (HSK. 26.3: 2738), 15 lead to Anton Popovič as a translation scholar (HSK. 26.3: 2746) etc. Jakobson’s article “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation” (published in 1967) (HSK. 26.1: 61, 67, 274 passim) appears to have become a classic – similarly to Schamschula’s translation of Levý’s *The Art*.

Coming to Levý’s writings contained in the Encyclopedia, it is important to note only two titles are being referred to – *The Art of Translation* and *Translation as a decision process*. Furthermore, both titles are quoted either – and this goes for *The Art* – in German or Russian (Levý 1969; from the Russian translation resp.) or in English or German. This goes for the article on decision making translated by Wolfram Wilss (Levý 1981). The total absence of Czech titles is probably due to the fact that the editors of the Encyclopedia did not succeed in winning Czech and/or Slovak contributors to the handbook. So up to now, Schamschula’s translation has been used by translation scholars in Poland, Sweden and other countries – provided they had enough reading knowledge of German.

One ought to take into consideration that Schamschula’s translation which was printed only once, in 1969, is a sort of special version for Non-Czechs. And the adaption was done by Levý himself. The same goes for the Russian translation which appeared only in 1974. In the preface to his translation, Schamschula makes it a point that the translation came into being in close cooperation with the author himself: “for this German and for a Russian translation” Jiří Levý had largely reworked *The Art of Translation*. “Whereby”, Schamschula writes, the “necessity” of creating an “adaption for German and Russian readers” ensued from the fact that some of the texts referred to were likely to be “incomprehensible to the foreign language sphere” and “the problem of translation appears different in countries with different cultural traditions”.⁹ Schamschula mentions that the German translation of *The Art* was the last project Levý was able to finish before his death. And, this is important for users – Levý helped in coining adequate terms for the German version of his book.¹⁰

⁷ Ranke, Wolfgang (2004) ‘Übersetzen für das Theater: Dramatische Konventionen und Traditionen’, in HSK. 26.1: 1015–1027, here 1016.

⁸ Schultze, Brigitte (2004) ‘Kontexte in der literarischen Übersetzung’ [Contexts in literary translation], in HSK. 26.1: 860–869, here 862. (Chvatík’s explanations concerning “context” are quoted at quite some length.)

⁹ Cf. Walter Schamschula (1969) ‘Vorwort’ [Preface], in Levý (1969: 11); comp. Jettmarová, Zuzana (2012) ‘Předmluva ke čtvrtému vydání’ [Preface to the fourth edition], in Levý (2012: 9).

¹⁰ Schamschula, Walter (1969) ‘Vorwort’ [Preface], cf. note 9.

This means we have to do with an authorized variant of Levý's Czech study. It seems worthwhile to mention that the scholars making use of either the German or the Russian translations – as a rule – take their sources for fully reliable.

3.

Coming to the Levý entries in the Encyclopedia, it is important to note that 45 entries are to be found in volume I, i.e. in the part dealing with general (if not fundamental) questions as e.g. the role of translation in history and at the present, the range of theoretical and methodical problems in linguistic, literary and cultural studies' approach to translation, differences in translations of aesthetically organized texts (poetry, fictional prose, theatre texts) on the one hand and nonfictional prose of all kinds on the other hand.¹¹ Taken together, the entries, at least to some extent, mirror the horizons and many-sidedness of Levý's contribution to translation studies. Wordings with ideological background are, by the way, mostly just ignored. Levý's structuralist context, however, is mentioned repeatedly. A few examples may be quite instructive. Dealing with "The language of theatre as a translation problem", Norbert Greiner and Andrew Jenkins put certain shortcomings in Levý's chapter on drama translation down to a "structuralist understanding of literature": "Starting from a structuralist understanding of literature, his 'Theory of Translation' takes structuralism as a basis for interpreting texts. Such thoughts [...] still reveal a perspective largely referring to the original, a perspective leading to the expectation of achieving a degree as high as possible of mirror image between original and translation."¹² Greiner and Jenkins discuss Levý's contribution to drama translation at quite some length. They make it a point that Levý's approach "reaches beyond an exclusively literary way of handling drama translation".¹³ In this instance, Levý's (by the way, together with Mounin's) pioneering role for translation studies is being stressed. Theo Hermans who sees Levý as a pioneer in historical-descriptive translation research, likewise points at the structuralist context: "The idea began to be put into practice in the 1960s by literary researchers working along structuralist lines. The Czech scholar Jiří Levý (1967), who tried to conceptualize the translator's activity by viewing translating as a decision making process, sought to account for particular forms of translation as expression of differences in poetics between national traditions or literary periods."¹⁴ Carrying on, Hermans characterizes František Miko's and Anton Popovič's contribution to translation studies.¹⁵ The conceptualization of translation as a decision making process is one of the achievements most frequently mentioned in the entries. So this aspect will have to be taken up again.

¹¹ Cf. Kittel, Harald, et al. (2004) 'Conceptual outline', in HSK. 26.1: XXVII–XXIX; German and French versions respectively (ibid.: XVIII–XX, XXXVI–XXXIX).

¹² Greiner, Norbert, Andrew Jenkins (2004) 'Bühnensprache als Übersetzungsproblem', in HSK. 26.1: 1008–1015, here 1010.

¹³ Greiner/Jenkins (ibid.), comp. 1011f.

¹⁴ Hermans, Theo (2004) 'Translation as an object of reflection in modern literary and cultural studies: Historical-descriptive translation research', in HSK. 26.1: 200–211, here 201.

¹⁵ Hermans (ibid.: 201f.).

It should be emphasized that Levý is mainly seen as one of the most important precursors of actual translation studies. Sometimes, such views are given very briefly. Discussing historical and terminological problems of “translation procedures”, Käthe Henschelmann mentions “strategies of optimal ways of compliance with rules following principles of usefulness and economy”. She indicates: “zuvor (i.e. ‘before’/‘beforehand’) Levý, 1981”.¹⁶ Similarly as in Henschelmann’s observations, other contributors to the Encyclopedia affirm the validity of many of Levý’s reflections and observations concerning translation up to now. Greiner and Jenkins, who – by the way – frequently mention the year of publication of *The Art*, 1963, together with the publication of the German translation, 1969, make it a point that Levý discusses some aspects of drama translation “in more detail” than many other scholars. And they regret some of Levý’s suggestions, e.g. the idea of “closer cooperation of theatre specialists and linguists” in the case of relations between “phonetic make up and mimic utterance” in theatre texts, “have remained unnoticed”.¹⁷

Of course, the contributors to the Encyclopedia occasionally also object to arguments put forward in Levý’s studies, first of all in *The Art*. Starting from controversial opinions about untranslatability, Armin Paul Frank pinpoints the fatal missing of some of the essence of art in Marxist argument: “Jiří Levý, employing a Marxist variant of dialectics, defines literary translation as the rendering of a work’s unity of content and form in the material of a different language [...]. Due to the distinction between *form* and language considered as material, it is clear that Levý uses *form* in the sense of *internal form* (‘pattern’ [...]). [...] his notion that language is, as a rule, inert material [...] certainly does not hold true of a perfect work of literary art, whether in prose or verse.”¹⁸ Some of Levý’s phrasings – the Schamschula translation used by Armin Paul Frank is quite correct (“v jeho jednotě obsahu a formy”, “jiným jazykovým materiálem”; Levý 2012: 109) – may sound embarrassing to readers familiar with aesthetically organized texts. It is certainly to be welcomed that such traces of ideological shortsightedness (after all, a part of academic history in Europe) are not entirely concealed in the handbook.

As mentioned above, decision making as one of the basic concepts in literary translation is referred to in many entries. These entries show, however, that the usability of the concept and term in scholarly discussion is not overestimated. In his article “Metaphor and image in the discourse on translation: A historical survey”, Theo Hermans states that “Several approaches [...] operate under the aegis of metaphorical expression”, e.g. “Translation as a decision-making (Levý 1967)”.¹⁹

Next to such general systematic and/or historical aspects of translation studies, the entries naming Levý concern a host of questions either directed at one of the literary genres, mainly drama and poetry, or at specific ‘points of observation’ (in German “Beobachtungsorte”) in literary translations, e.g. style (HSK. 26.1: 477, 672, 877, 888 *passim*), humor and irony (which, of course, often overlap with aspects of style) (HSK. 26.1: 877f., 880f.), different branches of metrics (HSK. 26.1: 967; HSK. 26.2: 1103), language variants

¹⁶ Henschelmann, Käthe (2004) ‘Übersetzungsverfahren’, in HSK. 26.1: 388–406, here 389.

¹⁷ Greiner, Norbert, Andrew Jenkins (2004) ‘Sprachwissenschaftliche Aspekte der Theaterübersetzung’ [Linguistic aspects of drama translation], in HSK. 26.1: 669–675, here 672.

¹⁸ Frank, Armin Paul (2004) ‘Literary translation as art’, in: HSK. 26.1: 852–859, here 857.

¹⁹ Hermans, Theo (2004) ‘Metaphor and image in the discourse on translation: A historical survey’, in HSK. 26.1: 118–128, here 124.

(HSK. 26.1: 902) and many others. Language variants, again, may likewise be looked upon in connection with style. In his reflections on “Literary style in translation: Language variants”, Norbert Greiner makes it a point that Levý “in his structuralistic approach” “most likely does justice to the fundamental meaning of elements of style in translating. Through the [...] distinction between the general and the specific of a text, however, all variants are ascribed to the specific and obtain only secondary expressive value (Levý 1969, 105) in the sense of atmosphere [colour].”²⁰ At this point, Greiner is referring to one of the most effective examples in all of Levý’s writings – Morgenstern’s poem *Das ästhetische Wiesel* (*The aesthetic weasel*). Levý himself makes use of this poem in both *The Art and Translation as a decision process* (Levý 1969: 103–105; Levý 1967: 1178f.). In this case, of course, style hinges on word play, specifically on corny pun (in German *Kalauer*). All this has nothing to do with the Czech language varieties (in German *Sprachvarietäten*). When Levý wrote his classic, in 1963, he could probably not foresee the translation problems and also the academic challenge connected with these varieties in Czech literature of the decades to come.²¹

Morgenstern’s *Aesthetic weasel* is a real ‘hit’ in the Encyclopedia. Several scholars adopt the *Weasel* – so to speak, as an ideal example. Using the Russian translation of *The Art*, A. D. Švejcer in his article on “Possibilities and limitations of linguistic approaches to translation” quotes from the *Weasel* to illustrate that “poetic function” is “far more important than the referential situation”.²² *The Weasel* is likewise welcome in Švejcer’s reflections on “Translatability with reference to different levels of linguistic description”.²³ Other scholars find this example just as convincing.²⁴

A number of entries not quoted in this paper certainly also deserve being looked into more closely. Further attention should be turned to several entries discussing different topics in Levý’s chapter on drama translation.²⁵

4.

Throwing a glance at recent contributions to translation studies, i.e. contributions of the last four or five years, the question of Levý’s visibility or invisibility is hard to answer. Evidently, there are large differences in respect to single countries. In countries with long and lasting traditions of quoting Levý as a translation scholar, e.g. Poland and Germany,

²⁰ Greiner, Norbert (2004) ‘Stil als Übersetzungsproblem: Sprachvarietäten’, in HSK. 26.1: 899–907, here 902.

²¹ A study best to consult on the varieties (i.e. Standard or Literary Czech [*spisovná čeština*], Colloquial Czech [*hovorová čeština*] and Common Czech [*obecná čeština*]) is: Bermel, Neil (2000) *Register variation and language standards in Czech*, Munich: LINCOM EUROPA, (LINCOM Studies in Slavic Linguistics 13). See esp. 3, 5, 12–14, 33.

²² Švejcer, A. D. (2004) ‘Possibilities and limitations of linguistic approaches to translation’, in HSK. 26.1: 236–242, here 240.

²³ Švejcer, A. D. (2004) ‘Translatability with reference to different levels of linguistic description’, in HSK. 26.1: 376–387, here 384.

²⁴ E.g. Schwalm (HSK. 26.1: 477) and the team Greiner/Jenkins (HSK. 26.1: 670), cf. note 17.

²⁵ Cf. Schultze, Brigitte (2014) ‘Jiří Levý’s contributions to drama translation revisited’, in *Czech, Slovak and Polish structuralist traditions in the translation studies paradigm today*.

he is still quite present.²⁶ In other countries, e.g. several romance countries, his name is rather absent. It cannot be excluded that the availability of an English translation of *The Art* since 2011²⁷ will lead to some form of belated reception in some places.

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²⁶ Lukas, Katarzyna (2009) *Das Weltbild und die literarische Konvention als Übersetzungsdeterminanten. Adam Mickiewicz in deutschsprachigen Übertragungen* [Conception of the world and literary conventions as determinants of translation. Adam Mickiewicz in German rendering], Berlin: Frank und Timme, (TRANSÜD 26), 23, 37f., 47f. passim. (There are 11 entries all counted.); Krysztofiak, Maria (2013) *Einführung in die Übersetzungskultur* [Introduction into Translation Culture], Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 15–19, 40, 96.

²⁷ Cf. Levý, Jiří (2011) *The Art of Translation*, Transl. by Patrick Corness, ed. by Zuzana Jettmarová, Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.