CONTEXTUALIZING THE TRANSLATION STUDIES DISCOURSE IN COMMUNIST ROMANIA

Ana-Magdalena Petraru, Postdoc Researcher POSDRU/159/1.5/S/140863, "Al. Ioan Cuza" University of Iași

Abstract: This paper deals with the Romanian discourse on translation during the communist period and its relation to Translation Studies (TS) as established discipline. Thus, we will particularly refer to the English and French approaches to TS as highlighted by Romanian critics and translators in their studies that enjoyed book-length treatment (e.g.: Leon Levițchi´s Indrumar pentru traducătorii din limba engleză în limba română/ A Manual for English Translators, Gelu Ionescu´s Orizontul Traducerii/ The Horizon of Translation or Ioan Kohn's Virtuțile compensatorii ale limbii române în traducere/ Compensatory Virtues of Romanian in Translation). We will also contextualize Romanian translation norms as outlined during the communist years and see whether the discourse was marked by the ideology of the time or not.

Keywords: *translation history, Translation Studies discourse, communist Romania, translation norms, Marxist ideology.*

Introduction

Even though reflections on translation have been published since early times by authors and translators such as Martin Luther (1530), Etienne Dolet (1540), John Dryden (1680), Alexander Tytler (1792), or Friederich Schleiermacher (1813), to name but a few, translation theory has only started to develop since the beginning of the 20th century (*cf.* Walter Benjamin's 1925 *The Task of the Translator*) and the rise of Translation Studies (TS) occurred along with the publishing of Eugene A. Nida's seminal *Towards a Science of Translating* (1964). The name of the discipline was given almost a decade later by a Low Countries Group scholar, James Holmes in a paper presented at a conference on applied linguistics in Copenhagen, i.e. "The Name and Nature of Translation Studies" (1972). Known as *traductologie* in French and *ubersetzungwissenscraft* in German, the discipline of TS is perhaps best rendered by *traductologie* in Romanian (Dimitriu, 2002: 9, *passim*). Its interdisciplinary character lies in its influences: primarily drawing either on linguistics or literature, later on it came to encompass pragmatics, semantics and even sociology. Thus, there are several 'turns' that the discipline has taken since it emerged, the cultural and empirical ones included (*cf.* Mary Snell Hornby's *The Turns of Translation Studies*, 2006). The latest turn acknowledged by literature is the sociological one (*cf.* Michaela Wolf's *Constructing a Sociology of Translation*, 2007).

In Romania, reflections on translation have also come out since the first translations were carried out in our country (Deacon Coresi's 1559 *The Christian Inquiry*, Simion Ștefan's 1648 version of the New Testament or the first complete translation of the Bible in 1688, not to mention Dosoftei's extremely influential translation from David's *Psalms* published in 1673). However, it is with the 19th century disputes between great literary figures such as Mihail Kogălniceanu who rejected translations based on the fact that they destroyed the

BDD-A22311 © 2014 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-19 21:33:03 UTC)

specificity of a language and culture and Heliade Rădulescu who supported them for contributing to a nation's progress that the Romanian discourse on translation started to take shape. The situation of translations and translators up to the second half of the 19th century is most accurately outlined by Cornea (1966: 38-77) who pinpoints the role of (free, indirect) translations in the Romanian culture and language, still young at the time and in need of setting its orthographic norms.

During the inter-war and World War Two Romania, critics deplore the state of translations in times ruled by private publishing houses with no coherent selection and translation policies, guided by commercial criteria and leaving canonical works aside. Moreover, translators are criticised for their poor job, some critics going as far as militating for the right to claim damages for mutilated translated works (Călin Alex, cited in Lăcătușu, 2000: 63-83). However, the communist years mark a shift of perspective with respect to translations and the translator's status due to: the foundation of state publishing houses with coherent translation policies (e.g. Univers, Minerva, Albatros, etc.); the rise of professional translators, great philologists and professors of foreign languages (e.g.: Leon Levițchi, Dan Duțescu, Antoaneta Ralian, Frida Papadache, Mircea Ivănescu, Petre Solomon, Ion Frunzetti, Irina Mavrodin, etc.) and periodicals dealing with translations (*România literară/ Literary Romania*, *Secolul XX/ The 20th Century*) in an era in which the concept of 'world literature' was coined (Dimitriu, 2000: 185-186, *passim*).

The Translation Studies Discourse during the Communist Years – Context and Influences

Since the first English-Romanian dictionary came out in 1945-1946 and the Dubrovnik Translator's Charter was established in 1963, communist translators had more resources available and recommendations to follow than their counterparts in the previous historical periods. Approved by the Congress at Dubrovnik in 1963, and amended in Oslo on July 9, 1994, the Charter stipulated that translation should be viewed as "an intellectual activity" having as object "the transfer of literary, scientific and technical texts from one language into another" and imposing on those who practice it "specific obligations inherent in its very nature" [S1]. Moreover, the translator alone is responsible for the translation, "whatever the character of the relationship of contract which binds him/her to the user"; the translator shall only give to the text those interpretations he/she approves and refuse others which would contravene the obligations of his/her profession. The Charter also advocated that "every translation shall be faithful and render exactly the idea and form of the original – this fidelity constituting both a moral and legal obligation for the translator." (*ibidem*) This is in keeping with the problem of fidelity of translation, an older topic that lies at the core of the traditional translation discourse even before the emergence of Translation Studies as a distinct discipline. Fidelity is either to the 'spirit' or to the 'letter', the fundamental alternatives being 'word for word' or 'meaning for meaning' (St. Jerome, cited in Dimitriu, 2002: 22) in a translation that can be either faithful or unfaithful. More recent trends in TS have centered on dichotomies referring to the translator's devotion to the Source or Target: structure/ meaning-oriented translations, retrospective/ prospective, author-centred/ reader-centred, SL oriented/ TL oriented, source culture (SC) oriented/ target culture (TC) oriented, semantic/ communicative translations, etc. The Charter further clarifies the concept of faithfulness in translation which should not be mistaken with that of literalness, "the fidelity of a translation not excluding an adaptation to make the form, the atmosphere and deeper meaning of the

BDD-A22311 © 2014 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-19 21:33:03 UTC)

work felt in another language and country" (*ibidem*), a precept directly related to the issue of domestication versus foreignizing and the translator's (in)visibility in Venuti.

With respect to the Romanian discourse on translation, Leon Levițchi's view on faithfulness is the most illustrative in this sense; the Romanian philologist argued that to translate was to render, as faithfully as possible, the content of ideas, the logical and emotional structure of the original SL into the TL so that the general effect on the reader should be that of an original, not a translation (1975: 8). His guidelines refer to denotation (and the use of monolingual and bilingual dictionaries), vocabulary (homonymy, polysemy, false friends, etc.), grammar (anaphora and cataphora, verbs, sequence of tenses), figures of speech (allegory, allusion, ambiguity, ellipsis, pun, etc.), stress, intonation, repetition, rhyme, modality, connotation, coherence and style. The importance of parallel texts is also acknowledged and his bibliography on translation contains both Western (Benjamin Walter, Catford, Cartledge, Savory) and Eastern criticism (Fedorov and Aristov).

Mainly drawing on *Rezeptionsästhetik* and Jauss's horizon of expectation for his theory of translation, in his *Orizontul traducerii/ The Horizon of Translation* published in 1981 and reedited in 2004, Ionescu makes an overview of the translations into Romanian from the beginning to present time; he also brings into play the issue of faithfulness which has become a cliché, considering it a 'false obsession', irrespective of its appurtenance to the 'spirit' or the 'letter' of a language. This is because a literary work should be regarded as a system in which these so-called 'spirit' and 'letter' cannot be dissociated. It is also a matter of loss and gain in translation, sometimes of compensation (as the spirit could be better expressed by the letter), of meaning and nuances, called by the Romanian critic, *a migration of accents* which are often betraying in letter, yet faithful in spirit (2004: 25).

While pleading for the necessity of new translations from a historical period to another, Ionescu (2004: 22-24) brings into play opinions of reputed English and French Translation Studies scholars to support his arguments. Thus, Nida's view on translation as 'operation', and not 'conclusion' consisting in the search of 'the closest natural equivalent of the SL message' makes the Romanian critic reflect on the meaning of what is 'natural', particularly in the case of literary translation. Opposites such as substance-form, signifier-signified, expression-content, system-text, and paradigmatic-syntagmatic are usually debated on and, in Ionescu's opinion (*ibidem*) rather prevent than help solving the theoretical problem of translation. Translation Studies scholars (and especially French ones such as Georges Mounin or Edmond Cary) do not seem to have reached a consensus on the translation of literature and its inclusion within the arresting dichotomy between art and science. The solutions they provide are unsatisfactory, (literary) translation being an art founded on science, on philological and linguistic practice (Mounin) and a literary work, not a linguistic operation (Cary). However, Ionescu admits that the international viewpoints expressed in his work are far from exhaustive and theoretical considerations on translation such as Walter Benjamin's, Octavio Paz's, Jini Levy's or Ortega y Gasset's would have deserved to be reviewed, not to mention more recent ones belonging to H. Meschonnic or George Steiner that the Romanian critic was unable to procure during communist Romania when the first edition of his book was published.

Ioan Kohn's *Virtuțile compensatorii ale limbii române în traducere/ Compensatory Virtues of Romanian in Translation* (1983) is innovative for the Romanian discourse on translation, in general and the communist period, in particular since, as outlined in our previous research (Petraru, 2014: 1163), the book praises the virtues of the target language in translation. This is against the background of endless translators' complaints about the impossibility of maintaining the effect of the source culture and language in translation which

BDD-A22311 © 2014 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-19 21:33:03 UTC)

is usually considered to be less expressive than the SL. The Romanian critic finds support in the concept of equivalence in TS, drawing on two principles, the *translatability* of the general (referential) sense of the message and the *compensation* of stylistic values, both destined to ensure the endurance of a literary work and its aesthetic value in a different literary space.

Admittedly drawing on Marxist linguistics and translation practice to rise against the main orientations in TS that deny the legitimacy of the translation process, in the first three chapters of his study (preliminaries, linguistic and aesthetic problems of translation), Kohn makes an overview of the theories in TS, a field that was scarcely researched at the time. Starting from acknowledging the appurtenance to an era of translation in which we all live (*apud* Pierre-François Caillé, the founder of *Babel*, one of the most important TS reviews worldwide) since more translated literature than original one was read in the 70s and probably still is today, Kohn (1983: 12-15) brings into play opinions of reputed Western linguists (Nida's views on the science of translating, Hjelmslev's *glossematics*, Harris's *distributionism*, Bloomfield's *behaviourism* and the neo-humboldtian approaches of Whorf, Sapir or Cassirer). Moreover, in the line of Marxist thought, and probably as a tribute to the new regime, the Romanian scholar makes reference to Soviet views on translation such as A.V. Fedorov's that assesses its linguistic primacy. It is also important to mention that *Tratatul de lingvistică generală al RSR/ SRR's Treaty of General Linguistics* was cited with its three subchapters on the field. i.e. idiom equivalence, the possibility of translation and machine translation drafted by I. Preoteasa. Among other Romanian critics (and translators) that discussed the phenomenon of translation, Kohn quotes Paul Miclău who translated Blaga into French and discussed the issue of translating poetry from a semiotic perspective, his considerations not going beyond the role of translation and its implications as a cultural fact (*ibidem*). Mounin and Steiner are invoked when dealing with the controversy of translation as art or science, the complementarity of the two being emphasized when defining it. Popular dichotomies in TS such as the ones mentioned above by other Romanian scholars in the field are listed, Kohn's added value consisting in *prospective* vs. *retrospective* and *receptive* vs. *adaptive* renderings (Ro: 'tălmăciri') of the original in translation (1973: 18).

To support the compensatory values of Romanian as target language in translation, Kohn brings forth as evidence the expressivity of sound groups in Romanian (perhaps best rendered by Eminescu's poetry in original, yet also present in Al. Philippide's translations from Goethe's poetry or Șerban Bascovici's from Baudelaire). The compensatory efficiency of Romanian lexical items such as 'dor', 'cuvânt' and 'duh' originally considered to be untranslatable is not unique; French or English counterparts could be provided, i.e. *charme* or *esprit* and *gentleman* or *understatement*, respectively. Finally, the suggestive and compensatory power of rhyme in the translation of poetry is illustrated (starting from Romanian folklore and ending with excerpts of translations from Mallarmé or Petöfi). Furthermore, translation is deemed to certify and reveal what is creative in the translator's personality, some translators being suited for particular genres or texts (e.g.: Blaga's preference for Hamlet, not Macbeth, or Goethe, instead of Shakespeare, 1973: 178). When tackling style and personality in translation, Kohn (1973: 182) draws on Leo Spitzer and genetic criticism in stylistics to discuss the functions of metaphor in Octavian Goga (who translated from Petöfi, Ady and Madach), and revelatory untranslatability (Goga's poetry in Hungarian, to name but a few TS aspects.

Translation Norms in Communist Romania

Coined by the Israeli scholar Gideon Toury in the 1970s, the notion of 'norm' refers to "regularities of translation behaviour within a specific sociocultural situation" (Toury 1978,

BDD-A22311 © 2014 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-19 21:33:03 UTC)

quoted by Baker and Saldanha, 2009: 372). Extremely influential in the subfield of written translation, norms are in-between competence, i.e. "the level of description which allows the theorist to list the inventory of options that are available to translators in a given context" and performance, namely "the subset of options that translators actually select in real life" (*ibidem*). Divided into initial, preliminary and operational norms (Toury, 1978), product or process norms, on the one hand and expectancy norms and professional norms, on the other hand (Chesterman, 1997), norms can also be regarded as conventions (be they constitutive or regulative as outlined by Nord, 1991) and even reach the status of laws (of growing standardization and interference, Toury, 1995) (*cf.* Dimitriu, 2006: 48-59).

With respect to the Romanian discourse on translation and its relation to norms, during the communist period, the issue was tackled by Romanian critics without acknowledging it as such. Thus, the English scholar Savory (1957: 49) is mentioned by Kohn (1973: 19-20) with his principles which could be also regarded as norms in TS; moreover, they reflect two main attitudes towards what can be called a 'method' of translating: the 'documentary', 'literal', 'exact', source-oriented ones vs. 'adaptation' and exoticising (Ro: 'împământenire'):

"1. A translation must give the words of the original
2. A translation must give the ideas of the original.
3. A translation should read like an original work.
4. A translation should read like a translation.
5. A translation should reflect the style of the original.
6. A translation should possess the style of the translator.
7. A translation should read as a contemporary of the original.
8. A translation should read as a contemporary of the translator.
9. A translation may add to or omit from the original.
10. A translation may never add to or omit from the original.
11. A translation of verse should be in prose.
12. A translation of verse should be in verse." (Savory, 1957: 49)

As discussed in our previous research (Petraru, 2004: 1162-1163), the proceedings of the National Colloquium on Translation and World Literature (1981), a unique document that reflects writers', critics' and translators' opinion on the matter also contains instances of (prescriptive) norms. Slightly marked by Marxist grids, since the importance of translation and its superiority as compared to the previous historical periods are emphasized and the communist regime is given credit for it, the Romanian discourse of translation and its relation to norms in the proceedings is best shown by the a series of 'rules' which any 'honest' translator should obey, namely:

1) translations should be 'complete' (he gave the instance of the critical Romanian edition of Shakespeare's works which was not supposed to be a 'family' edition in the Bowdlerian acception);

2) translations should be direct, i.e. carried out from the original source language (indirect translations are accepted as auxiliary material);

3) prose should be translated by prose and verse by verse and prosodic forms should be preserved (no more than 5% of additional verses are accepted);

4) the translator should not overstrain or understrain the readers (omission is particularly forbidden);

5) the end product of the translation process should not read as a translation, but as an original (no language violations are accepted);

BDD-A22311 © 2014 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-19 21:33:03 UTC)

6) translations should have in view their readers just like the author who addresses his. hers; therefore, translators should be as 'communicative' and 'connotative' as possible.

7) there should be certain 'affinities' between the translator and the work s(he) has chosen to translate (1981: 54-55).

Conclusions

In our paper, we showed that the Translation Studies discourse in our country widely acknowledged the importance of translations for a country's culture, in general and the Romanian one, in particular, except for 19th century disputes (i.e. Mihail Kogălniceanu vs. Heliade Rădulescu). Slightly influenced by Marxist grids (as can be seen from Kohn's *Virtuțile compensatorii ale limbii române în traducere/ Compensatory Virtues of Romanian in Translation* or the proceedings of the National Colloquium on Translation and World Literature), the TS discourse during the communist period draws on both Western (English: Catford, Nida, Savory and French: Mounin, Cary, to name but a few) and Eastern influences (Fedorov, Aristov, etc.). Last but not least, translation norms in Romania during communism as outlined by TS scholars are prescriptive in nature.

Bibliography

Baker, Mona and Saldanha, Gabriela (2009) *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, New York: Routledge.

Cornea, Paul (1966) "Traduceri și traducători în prima jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea", *De la Alecsandrescu la Eminescu*, București: Editura pentru literatură, p. 38-77.

Dimitriu, Rodica (2006) *The Cultural Turn in Translation Studies*, Iași: Institutul European.

Dimitriu, Rodica (2002) *Theories and Practice of Translation*, Iasi: Institutul European.

Dimitriu, Rodica (2000) "Translation Policies in Pre-Communist and Communist Romania. The Case of Aldous Huxley", *Across Languages and Cultures* 1(2), pp. 179-192.

Ionescu, Gelu (2004) *Orizontul traducerii*, București: Univers.

Kohn, Ioan (1983) *Virtuțile compensatorii ale limbii române în traducere*, Timișoara: Facla.

Lăcătuşu, Tamara (2000) *Cultură şi comunicare. Raporturi literare româno-britanice, 1900 – 1950*, Iași: Junimea.

Levițchi, Leon (1975) *Îndrumar pentru traducătorii din limba engleză în limba română*, București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică.

Petraru, Ana-Magdalena (2014) "Translators and Translation in Romanian Culture and Society", *SGEM Conference on Psychology & Psychiatry, Sociology & Healthcare, Education. Conference Proceedings volume II, Sociology & Healthcare*, Sofia: STEF92 Technology Ltd, pp. 1157-1164.

Savory, Theodore Horace (1957) *The Art of Translation*, London: Jonathan Cape Ltd.

_____ "Colocviul național de traduceri și literatură universală. Stenograma lucrărilor." (1981) *Viața Românească*, număr special, XXXIV.

_____ *The Translator's Charter*, approved by the Congress at Dubrovnik in 1963, and amended in Oslo on July 9, 1994 <http://www.fit-ift.org/en/charter.php> [S1]

Acknowledgements: This work was supported by the strategic grant POSDRU/159/1.5/S/140863, Project ID 140863 (2014), co-financed by the European

BDD-A22311 © 2014 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-19 21:33:03 UTC)

Social Fund within the Sectorial Operational Program Human Resources Development 2007 – 2013.

BDD-A22311 © 2014 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-19 21:33:03 UTC)