

# The voice of the East

## Towards a Post-Socialist Translation Studies?

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**Post-Socialist Translation Practices: Ideological struggle in children's literature**

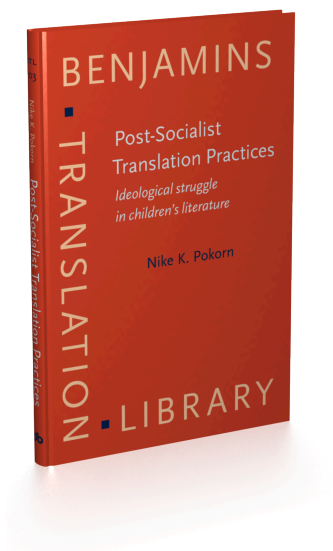
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# The voice of the East

## Towards a Post-Socialist Translation Studies?

In this book I explore how Communism and Socialism, through their hegemonic pressure, found expression in translation practice, and at the same time plead for a broader action within Translation Studies that will reach out to the general public. Translators in all Socialist states, as in other totalitarian regimes, were subject to different forms of censorship, ranging from punitive, repressive or post-censorship to different forms of preventive or prior censorship, as well as to the self-censorship of the translator. Despite the variety of different forms of censorship, it is argued here that Socialist translation in different cultural and linguistic environments nevertheless purged the translated text of the same or similar elements. The book shall attempt to identify these disturbing elements and outline the typical and defining features of translatorial behaviour by re-reading translations of children's literature and juvenile fiction published in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY).

Despite the fact that in all former Socialist states in Europe, Socialism and Communism belong to a period that came to an end two decades ago, that in former Socialist countries a number of excellent translation departments and schools function at numerous universities employing and producing quite a number of Translation Studies (TS) scholars, and that the great majority of them, like myself, received all their basic education during the Socialist period, the Socialist and Communist impact on translation is very rarely discussed in TS. Other cultural environments have reacted differently: for example, the TRACE Project (Traducciones Censuradas) reveals the systematic attempts of Spanish scholars to analyse mechanisms of oppression and censorship in Franco's Spain ([www.ehu.es/trace/](http://www.ehu.es/trace/)). In addition, there have been many works published dealing with ideology in translation in the West (e.g. by André Lefevere), with translation censorship in particular (e.g. a special edition of *TTR: traduction, terminologie, rédaction* in 2002), and also with translation censorship in Nazi Germany (e.g. Sturge 1999a, 1999b, 2002, 2004), in Fascist Italy (e.g. Rundle 1999, 2000, 2010; Rundle and Sturge 2010), and in Salazar's Portugal (e.g. Seruya 2008). On the other hand, Socialist translation strategies have been treated in a few isolated articles (e.g. Baer 2011; Inggs 2011; Priestly 2001) and only one book has been published on

East German censorship files, which, unfortunately, does not explore the manifestations of the ideological imperative in the translated texts themselves (Thomson-Wohlgemuth 2009). And because there are almost no critical analyses of Socialist translations, the texts that were translated in that period still circulate in post-socialist countries, are very often reprinted, some of them regularly find a place in school text books, and are thus uncritically accepted in their environments. The engagement of TS researchers in this field is therefore of vital importance – it can render a service to the general public and promote democratization in a society where civil liberties and respect for the Other are cherished.

This plea for active engagement, however, does not reflect a naïve expectation that one revealed instance of textual manipulation in this or that fairytale shall trigger general awareness of hidden mechanisms of power and stimulate the development of critical thinking in every individual who shall thereafter be able to read between the lines and employ a hermeneutics of suspicion towards any attempt of ideological oppression and any concealment of political interests served by the text. The benefits of a systematic analysis of the control mechanisms of the ruling ideology which operated during the period of Communist rule and of the way they manifested themselves in translation are going to be much more modest – as, indeed, are the gains of every similar TS project. Revelations of the hidden workings of hegemonic discourses in translation cannot change the world irreversibly, or prevent further manipulation, or create critical minds that are never again going to be susceptible to manipulation: even if a particular piece of research might lead to retranslations and to an increased public awareness of the possibility of manipulation through translation, the situation is much more complex. Unfortunately, not only do the dominant ideologies impose themselves at various levels of society, they also constantly reinvent their ways of manifesting themselves. If one hiding place is revealed, they shift their attention to another. Indeed, the struggle is never over: when one ideology, dominant poetics or hegemonic discourse loses its power, there are always new aspirants eager to take its place. Bearing the relativity of any our “success” in mind, the drive that nevertheless keeps such translational research going is a conviction that a greater insight into the mechanism of the society and a greater understanding of the processes that try to shape our lives through translation and interpreting can lead us to a greater resistance to new forms of hegemonic discourse. Although there is no hope of any final victory, just a promise of constant struggle with various forms and manifestations of different ideologies, poetics and hegemonic discourses that attempt to present themselves as stable, eternal and immutable, such attempts are not in vain, since through our efforts we join forces with other continual efforts in TS and in society at large to uphold and increase the level of democratic commitment to civil rights, civil liberties and respect for the Other.

Almost three decades ago, Jacques Derrida (1985:227) wrote: “Rien n’est plus grave qu’une traduction.” And even if we are convinced that this indefatigable fighter against the “logocentric” bias was exaggerating (“In short, I exaggerate. I always exaggerate,” (Derrida 1998:48)) and we doubt whether this *magister ludi* was serious when he wrote that “nothing is more serious than a translation”, there is no doubt that a number of hegemonic discourses would strongly agree with his statement that translations are very important indeed. Not only the old oppressive regimes and totalitarian states, when the social structure applied the fiercest pressure on the individual, but it is also quite clear that the age of the fragmentary, dispersed, schizoid subject celebrating cultural pluralism and eclecticism (see Lyotard 1986) is not immune to different power structures that very often manifest themselves in translation.

Although Greenblatt is right in insisting that cultures are never fixed and stable (cf. Greenblatt 2010), and should therefore never be regarded as monolithic entities, constituted by one ideology and characterized by homogeneity and stasis, this pluralism and fluidity does not safeguard them from attacks by power structures and their controlling mechanisms. Indeed, inherently unstable, relativistic and always shifting in meaning and shape (cf. Greenblatt 1992), cultures are, nevertheless, not immune to hegemonic discourses: certain societies prove to be discriminatory, certain values and practices are often revealed as the cultural capital required for success in dominant institutions, and certain ideologies attempt to present themselves as stable and eternal. These mechanisms of power that almost as a rule choose to operate in a hidden way can be detected in translations. Translations thus not only reflect the strength of a particular, usually dominant, poetics, but also the hidden motives of the dominant ideologies, revealing their urge to present themselves as stable and eternally viable. Numerous pivotal translational studies (see e.g. Lefevere 1990; Hermans 1985) have thus shown the self-image of a particular culture and the changes that self-image undergoes, and insisted that the critical study of translations could reveal the way different cultures interact and, even more importantly, the ways texts had been manipulated through translation. Therefore, *rien n’est plus grave qu’une traductologie*. But the question remains: what kind of Translation Studies?

In a recent article, Kaisa Koskinen (2010) retraces the matrix of translation studies: instead of theoretical, applied and descriptive branches she proposes scientific, critical, pragmatic and public Translation Studies, and pleads for TS research to intentionally engage in a sustained dialogue with neighbouring disciplines and also the non-academic audience. Although Koskinen finds an ethical motivation primarily in the so-called critical translation studies (cf. Koskinen 2004), it seems that all branches of TS can produce research that is ethically motivated and aimed at active engagement in society. For example, numerous

studies of public service interpreting, aimed at raising standards in this field and thus falling under the category of pragmatic TS, are motivated by a deep respect for human rights. Similarly, quite a number of studies belonging to scientific TS, drawing their conclusions on the basis of empirical research, focus on society with a clearly defined ethical agenda. Let us take for an example André Lefevere's pivotal and classic descriptive analyses. His analyses of Brecht's translations (Lefevere 1998: 109–122), Arab and Latin poetry, Greek comedies, the diary of Anne Frank etc. (Lefevere 1992) showed that all forms of rewriting could be subject to manipulation, cultural bias, assimilation and deliberate distortions by the target language (TL) culture and that Western culture tended to hide or suppress certain themes or elements in order to strengthen TL cultural stereotypes. The disquieting and destructive features were usually the reality that did not correspond to the Western conceptualization and traditional understanding of the Other: for example, a different political position, a different poetics that did not correspond to established Western poetical forms, or the literary expression of explicit sexuality. However, Lefevere did not restrict himself to the level of individual cases: his primary aim was to reach beyond the descriptive stage and stress that through showing how manipulative shifts take place in translation, translational research provided an insight into the processes that shape our lives, and “teach us a few things not just about the world of literature, but also about the world we live in” (Lefevere 1990: 27). Consequently, Lefevere was convinced that such findings were intriguing not only for TS scholars, but also proved to be extremely valuable and interesting to the general public (see Lefevere 1992: 51) – if nothing else, although the public do not like what they see, there is a certain pleasure in the mere realisation that at least they “shall not be kept in the dark” (Lefevere and Bassnett 1990: 13).

Therefore, I hope that this book shall encourage other East and Central European TS scholars to address these issues in their own cultural environments and reveal in part the complex construction of their own cultures. Since the “spectre of Communism” is still haunting us in numerous translations that are uncritically reprinted (often in order to reduce costs – a similar practice has been observed by Cristina Gomez Castro (2008: 184) in Spain, where censored Francoist translations are still in circulation because it seems “cheaper to recycle an existing translation than to commission a new one”) and found in school books, readers and book series, there is a need to combine our efforts and create something we might call Post-Socialist Translation Studies. There is a need for a body of work within TS that would refer to specific cultures and states as they existed during and after the time when they had a Socialist or Communist government. Post-Socialist TS should thus focus on the influence of Socialism and Communism on translations, and on translation and interpreting practices

and theories, covering all the different aspects of translation and interpreting affected by Socialism and Communism from the moment of Socialist revolution to the present day. Post-Socialist TS could, for example, try to present some of the major Socialist TS theoreticians to the West (as is exemplified by the presentation of the work of Jiří Levý (2011)), describe Socialist translation and interpreting practices, and reveal the achievements and abuses of these translation practices as they manifest themselves in Socialist and post-Socialist times, i.e. not limiting itself to historical studies, but focusing intensively on the lasting influence of Socialist theories and practices on the contemporary state of affairs. The Communist and Socialist systems seemed to have functioned similarly in various parts of the world, especially where the Soviet model tried to impose itself, which means that also the ways of influencing the cultural development and within it also translation were similar and were shared by more than one cultural environment. Systematic research of the Socialist and Communist interventions into the field of translation in one country might therefore produce results that could trigger similar research in some other culture. Perhaps we shall discover at the end of the day that in the field of translation the hidden Socialist International still invisibly and strongly binds us together.

