

Introduction

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**Translators' Strategies and Creativity: Selected Papers
from the 9th International Conference on Translation and
Interpreting, Prague, September 1995 . In honor of Jiří
Levý and Anton Popovič**

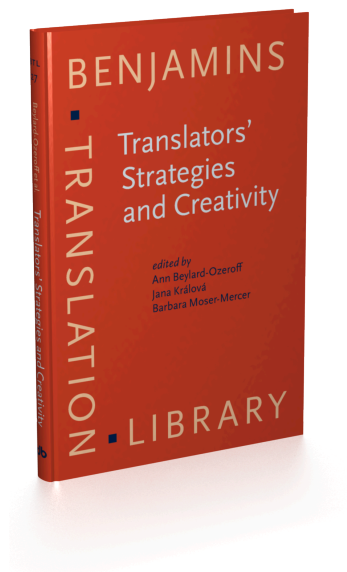
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Introduction

This volume brings together a selection of papers presented at the IXth International Conference on Translation and Interpreting (September 25-27, 1995, Prague) jointly organized by the Institute of Translation Studies, Faculty of Arts, Charles University, and the Ecole de Traduction et d'Interprétation, University of Geneva. The organizers dedicated this conference to Jiří Levý (1926-1967) and Anton Popovič (1933-1984), two scholars who made important contributions to the development of translation studies in the 20th century and whose names are often mentioned in connection with two European schools of translation studies, the Polysystem Theory and the Manipulation School. Both scholars trace their heritage to the Prague Linguistic Circle, whose development in turn was significantly influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure, the linguist whose work is forever associated with the University of Geneva.

The Prague School integrated both linguistic and literary phenomena into the wider system of social values of a particular community. Levý's objective was to isolate those factors in the translation process that affect the translator's work and to improve our understanding of how a particular method of translation potentially modifies the effect the translated text has on the reader. For him translation was a process of communication, and he can thus be considered to be an important forerunner of contemporary thinking on translation. It was only after his death that the idea of a normative, prescriptive approach towards translation was replaced by a new approach that respected the translator's individuality and creativity and viewed translation as a process of communication, in which the original author played as important a role as the translator. The contributions in Sections 2 and 3 focus on one or more aspects of this issue.

Popovič took Levý's ideas one step further: He not only considered it important that translation be seen to occur against the backdrop of a particular set of social values, which have to be integrated into the translation process, but felt that there are certain aspects of translation that contribute more than others to this phenomenon. He decided to focus his research on style, which he defined as the union of linguistic and thematic elements in the text ("expression"). Popovič argued that the linguistic, communicative and semiotic aspects of a text had to be studied before it could be translated and that this was a prerequisite for recognizing "translation shifts", a notion that is discussed in a number of papers in this volume. To this effect Levý had already carried out translation

experiments. He had used back-translation to study the most frequent translation shifts, which he found to occur mainly on the stylistic and lexical level. These results inspired Popovič to formulate his requirements for the teaching of translation, where particular emphasis was to be placed on the semantic and stylistic analysis of a text. This would then allow the translator to specify his own “instructions” for the translation process and allow him to *re-create* the text both on the surface and deep level. Section 4 addresses some of the issues raised in this line of research.

By describing both the requirements for and the possibilities of translation, Levý and Popovič in fact anticipated those aspects of the translation process that are now being studied as *translation strategies and creativity*, the two notions that provided the subtitle for this conference and which are apparently becoming central to the teaching of translation and interpreting today. Contributions in Sections 1, 4 and 5 all attempt to address this issue from a variety of perspectives.

The creative process is a large and ill-defined process at present and has not yet been adequately studied by experimental methods (Massaro 1989). But if we look at some data gathered with the help of think-aloud-protocols it seems likely that creative people go through a series of operations or stages of processing from the inception of a project until its completion. Other researchers in the field of creativity (Halpern 1989) report that two skills seem to be needed for creative problem solving: (1) the ability to generate alternatives, and (2) the ability to evaluate alternatives. Creative thinking can then be considered as a cognitive activity that results in one or more novel solutions for a problem (generating the alternatives), and critical thinking involves the selection of an appropriate solution to a problem (evaluating the alternatives) (Mayer 1992). When looking at think-aloud-protocols of professional translators (Künzli 1995) we note that translators are indeed engaged in a constant process of generating and evaluating alternatives. While professional translators appear to generate alternatives that are ultimately closer to the correct solution, they nevertheless appear to be more productive than student translators in generating possible solutions. This might indeed provide the translation teacher with valuable insights as to what he or she should encourage students to focus on in order to acquire good translation habits.

Research has shown (Binet 1911) that creative problem solving - and we can apply this to translation - can be broken down into individual skill components that can be taught, such as strategies for how to represent a problem or strategies for how to plan a solution. This should be welcome news to the translation teacher who will attempt to break down the translation process into its component parts and provide the student with strategies appropriate for solving the problems inherent in each component of the process. Some of the papers in section 5 may inspire the reader to initiate further research into the various components of the translation/interpreting process and to focus less on the *product* of problem solving (the finished translation handed in by the

student) and more on the *process* of problem solving (the methods used to arrive at the finished translation).

Such an approach was anticipated by Levý who criticized the normative nature of translation theory and argued that translation work “is pragmatic” (Levý 1967) in nature. His approach to translation reflects quite clearly the strategy of generating a variety of solutions, which must then be evaluated by the translator who ultimately chooses the one that - ideally - mirrors the instructions found in the text.

We hope readers will be inspired by the many contributions in this volume to generate a large number of solutions to the many problems faced by the translator and interpreter and to evaluate them against their own professional practice. As is the case for many proceedings of conferences, the reader must arm himself with tolerance regarding the lack of Gestalt: Translation theory is in a state of flux, and that may very well be a guarantee for its survival.

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