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Editor's introduction to the English edition

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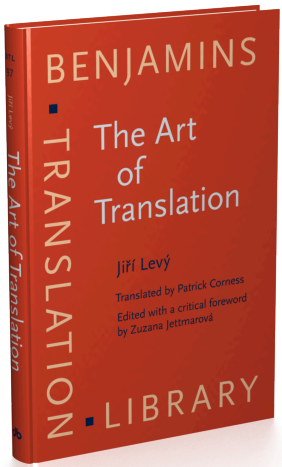

Pages xv–xxvi of
The Art of Translation
Jiří Levý †
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Editor's introduction to the English edition

Levý's *Art of Translation* – his seminal work in translation theory, first published in 1963 – has nurtured generations of Czech and Slovak students, scholars and practitioners alike. He is the founding father and the most outstanding figure to date of Czech Translation Studies, although it took another three decades before this discipline was institutionalized in his own country. Levý's writings on translation cover theory, methodology and historiography, and the present book offers a synthesis of his theoretical and extensive empirical research in a number of fields. The foundation of his theory is empirical – it is a theory derived from practice. In 1957 he published a voluminous history of Czech translation in the European context from the Middle Ages to 1945 – at that time perhaps the most comprehensive history of translation and thinking on translation.

The second foundation of the theory is Czech 'functional' structuralism as its epistemological and methodological basis. Levý adhered to its principles producing an open, dynamic and dialectic theory, a design that has become part and parcel of the Prague project aspiring to embrace art at large – Czech structuralist aesthetics or sociosemiotics. From its very beginnings Czech structuralism built on multi- and inter-disciplinarity, drawing on and integrating a range of domestic and international sources and disciplines. In promoting this line of inquiry Levý not only founded the *Group for Exact Methods and Interdisciplinarity*, but he also followed this course in his own research, including experimental research and integrating methods and findings of adjacent fields such as sociology, psychology and informatics, not to mention theatre, literature and other art disciplines. The last chapter in Part I of the book deals with research methodology in a synthesized manner (analytical articles can be found in Levý 1971 and 2008).

Another pillar of Levý's book was the state-of-the-art in translation theory and adjacent disciplines both at home and abroad. Working behind the communist Iron Curtain, but also serving as the Czech representative in the FIT and as board member of its journal *Babel*, he was able to tap current resources and integrate them into his theoretical-methodological framework with admirable lightness, or on the contrary expose their weaknesses with remarkable openness, as we can see especially in the first chapter. The list of references in the book is quite impressive, and Levý also provided his German and Russian editions with an exhaustive reading list covering several disciplines.

While the first part of the book covers general theory and methodology, prose and drama, the second deals with poetry translation. Levý was already specializing in general theory of verse, comparative versification and English poetry during his university studies; his publications in this field outnumber his output in translation theory. Extending this line of inquiry to translation issues was a logical step as literary history was the bridge. Also his chapters on drama translation have a solid foundation. In addition to following Czech and English studies at the university, Levý took a course in Theatre at an academy of performing arts. At that time Drama was a focus of Czech aesthetics and also Stanislavskii's method of actor training was very popular (it has remained so until today).

Levý suggested that the principles of the method might be used as a tool in teaching translation. It fitted quite well into his concept of translation as *reproduction* and translating as a *reproductive art* in opposition to conceptional or originary art (including artistic literature, for example). This concept is not only a corner-stone of his theoretical design, but also a tool in solving the issue of the day, i.e. whether translation was art, craft or science. Czech methodology has not operated with static concepts or categories, only with dynamic ones; and as Levý found in his empirical research reproduction and originarity in translation are two opposites (or poles of a dialectic entity with its internal dynamics and subject to external agentive intervention).

Levý (1926–1967) was a modest scholar and a genuine workaholic. During his 20-year academic career, cut short by his untimely death, he published over 200 items. He was born in Slovakia into the family of a French university teacher and translator; they moved to Bohemia at the onset of World War II in 1939. Levý graduated from Brno University (1949) where, after years of teaching at Olomouc University (1950–1963), he assumed an academic post in 1964. As a teacher Levý was also concerned with translator training for the improvement of translation quality, and he sought to turn out well-informed and self-reflecting translators whose dispositions had been enhanced by training. Apart from publishing a students' handbook in collaboration with his colleague Bohuslav Ilek he addressed a larger readership through his *Art of Translation* to help improve translation quality and foster the translator's self-awareness and ethics. Although he says his theory is normative, it is not prescriptive in the traditional sense. Derived from historical practice and built on historical dialectics, it may be called weakly normative (i.e. *ought-to* statements to optimize practice).

In other words, Levý's 'benchmarking' of translation is based on the historical affinity of methods, norms, social functions and values, and accounts for the translator's individual subject as well as for other agents involved in the process. This does not mean that he would refute 'norm-breaking' translation designs and methods. He would point to the function and value of the translation in its particular

historical context. He wants to make translators more aware, reflective and responsible, but he counts on their minimax strategy, on their idiolects as well as their weaknesses. In fact the minimax strategy implies all kinds of potential restraints imposed on the translator during the process. Although he often speaks of and illustrates contemporary norms, his arguments can be extrapolated and applied to any period. Today translation is practised by many people lacking this type of insight, which makes the 'practical' mission of the book as *advice-to-improve-practice* or as a theory extending to practice quite pertinent.

Levý's book is therefore both a textbook and a scholarly work; it serves this dual purpose and is based on rigorous empirical research as well as on a valid methodology. Although it is a book on literary translation, there is a general theoretical core built on the Czech semiotic model and applicable to other mediating or reproductive activities; this potential has been verified by the Czech practice both in training and research. Such flexibility in Levý's theory may be due to the underlying methodology.

When Levý's book *Umění překladu* (1963) became popular among Slavists abroad, they wished to see its wider circulation; therefore Levý prepared a new version for German and Russian readerships, sending it out to his translators chapter by chapter during 1967. The German version came out in 1969, the Russian one in 1974; in 1982 his book came out in Serbo-Croatian. The second Czech edition, translated from the German, was published in 1983 and re-published in 1998. The present English version is based on the 1983 edition, therefore some back-adjustments were involved, in particular reductions and substitutions of text added by the previous editor from the 1963 edition for the Czech reader. Although in international Translation Studies circles Levý has come down almost exclusively as the author of *translation as a decision-making process* (1967), his theory and concepts were familiar to the members of Holmes's group in the 1970s.[1] For example, Toury (in Pym et al. 2008: 402) recalls that his first encounter with Levý's norms was Even-Zohar's dissertation (1972). While in 1977 Lambert (in Delabastita et al. 2006: 1) complained that "nombreux sont les spécialistes qui ignorent Die Literarische Übersetzung de Jiří Levý (1969 [1963]), ouvrage capital s'il en est.", in 1991 he notes that:

> In the West-European countries it is above all since the publication of (the German translation of) Levý's Literarische Übersetzung (1969, orig. 1963) that the study of translated literature has really changed (although slowly and not everywhere...). (Lambert, in Delabastita et al. 2006: 82)

In the 1970s western academic centres may have been still preoccupied with linguistic aspects of translation, but over the past four decades the theory of literary

1. See e.g. Lambert 1988 (in Delabastita et al. 2006: 54), Snell-Hornby (2006: 45), van den Broeck (1999: passim).

translation has not only emerged and thrived, but according to some views it has proliferated at the expense of other TS subdisciplines as well as in respect of the total translation output where literary translation represents a small fraction. The idea of an over-arching general or universal theory of translation seems now intangible and ephemeral the more specialized translation theories become and the more variegated translation practice becomes. Combined with the developments in humanities and post-industrial life in western post-modern societies (with attributes like globalization, loss of identity and many more) the focus of attention in Translation Studies has been shifting, and the shifts entail new methodological and epistemological approaches. How specific was Czech structuralism at the time when Levý wrote his book and how specific it is today? Snell-Hornby's comment on Levý is sober but optimistic:

> His exuberant pioneering spirit is all the more remarkable, as is the fact that his innovative ideas have in essence neither been refuted nor become outdated over the last forty years, many have on the contrary been confirmed, in Radnicky's phrase, as part of the "raw program" of the future discipline of Translation Studies. (Snell-Hornby 2006: 23)

However, some TS scholars may have experienced difficulty in positioning Levý within the discipline, e.g. in attributing Levý to Russian formalism, although Prague structuralism was in many fundamental ways its outright opposite. Also the assumption that Czech structuralism must have grown out of Russian formalism is a distortion, and so is the assumption that Czech structuralism must be obsolete (as was the case with French structuralism). Levý seems to 'float in the space' between the USSR and the USA, or between Russia and Israel. He was a structuralist of a special kind, he was a descriptivist but not western-positivist, he was a functionalist, not a formalist, and he was both a literary scholar and a linguist because the two branches of Czech structuralism – the aesthetic or semiotic branch and the linguistic branch – were integrated by functional stylistics, another specific Czech phenomenon.[2] Dynamism, historicity, mild epistemological relativism and sociology (its concepts such as norm, function, value, collective and individual agency), for example, were the building blocks of the Czech method, with sources like Hegel's dialectics, Marx's historicism, Bühler's psychology, Ingarden's phenomenology or Durkheim's and Weber's sociology, to name but a few.

The combination of Hegelian and Kantian aesthetics distances radically Czech aesthetics from is formalist Russian counterpart which was Kantian only. The Czech artistic sign combines form and content in a dynamic integral whole embedded in its social context. This is also why Levý speaks of the *ideo-aesthetic*

2. For more details see Jettmarová (2008, 2010, 2011) and Levý (2008).

function of the sign as a work of art rather than of its aesthetic function only. Dynamism comes from within the sign (dialectic oppositions or forces) and from its external environment (human agency and autonomous systems). Meaning, sense and aesthetic function are not stable essentialist entities but social and phenomenological variables. Therefore even the term poetics may mean different things in different contexts. In Czech structuralism poetics is the artistic style conceived as a combination of content and form, i.e. of thematic and formal elements, in functional-systemic and functional-contextual perspectives. In poetry, of course, the significant contribution of form to the overall message comes to the fore.

Poetics of verbal art is based on the use of materials, tools, techniques and models or matrices as in other arts. Levý uses the concepts of *style*, *stylization* and *re-stylization* with careful consistency to distinguish them from the restrictive concept of linguistic style. But stylization, not only in verbal art, involves yet another aspect, that is the closeness or remoteness with regard to the represented reality. Take Picasso and the realists, for example. Artistic discourse may sound or look more or less natural, i.e. be more or less stylized as compared with authentic language in reality. Stylization is then a socio-historical variable based on norms. Differences in its degree have preoccupied translators specifically in drama and audiovisual fiction, while cross-cultural differences in style in general involve any translation.

In 1940 Jan Mukařovský (2007: 21–22), the founder of Czech structural aesthetics, noted that Czech aesthetics was a specific phenomenon with no methodological counterpart in terms of its elaboratedness and in terms of conceiving artistic structure as sign and its meaning. Earlier, in his preface to Shklovski's *Theory of Prose* in Czech translation (1936) Mukařovský outlined some of the differences:

> Every literary fact thus appears as a product of two forces: the intrinsic dynamics of the structure and external intervention. The fault of traditional literary historical studies was that they only accounted for external interventions and so deprived literature of its autonomous evolution; the one-sided view of formalism, on the other hand, situated literary events in a vacuum [...] I tried to suggest that the field of literary sociology is fairly accessible to structuralism [...]
>
> Structuralism [...] is neither limited to the analysis of form nor in contradiction with the sociological study of literature [...] but it insists that any scientific inquiry shall not consider its material a static and piecemeal chaos of phenomena, but that it shall conceive of every phenomenon as both a result and a source of dynamic impulses, and of a whole as a complex interplay of forces.
>
> (Mukařovský 2007: 506–507)

Three decades later Levý (1971: 71–72) pointed out that structuralist literary methodologies abroad were still confined to static literary facts, ignoring the dynamics of the literary process – its genesis and reception, in his words 'all that precedes and follows the literary work'. For description and explanation he therefore suggested

generic and recognoscative analytical models applicable to original production as well as to translation as reproduction. He saw a radical difference between the positivist *savoir pour prévoir* seeking unilateral causativity, and the antipositivist, Czech structuralist *savoir pour construire* seeking deeper understanding and explanation in a dynamic, structuralist and phenomenological way. Instead of looking for the causes of phenomena the Czechs focused on their function or position in the network of a higher-order structure while also accounting for external interaction, especially with human agents as producers and receivers. Receivers are not considered passive agents – they interfere in the production phase of the communication act as well as in the reception phase, while changing with every act of reception. The socio-historical concept of the receiver combined with the phenomenological concept of reception ushered in another dimension in the dynamics of the sign, including the aspect of its schematicity and indeterminacy in correlation with the involvement of the human subject. This brings in the functional semiotic dimension of communicative intention and purpose as well as ideology.

Levý avoids drawing a hard line between thinking on translation and scholarly inquiry, suggesting instead a correlation between translation method and translation theory as socio-cultural and historical variables. Translation theory is also a dynamic entity subject to heterotomous intervention. In 1913 Vilém Mathesius, one of the founders of the Prague Linguistic Circle, proposed a functionalist theory of verse translation – the substitution theory – based on functional substitution of style, that is to say on the principle of function-for-function on the level of the whole (i.e. the sign as a work of art), in place of the traditional word-for-word or meaning-for-meaning dichotomy; he called the functionalist method of poem-for-poem translation *přebásnění* (rendered as *transversification* in this book).[3] His theory fitted very well into the Czech general functionalist-structuralist framework and gave birth to the Fischer School of translating that extended this method to translation of prose and drama. What Jakobson (1959) meant by *creative transposition* probably stands for this Czech concept.

A source text is a source text. But *předloha* (prototype, master copy) may be a handier concept although in this book it is rendered simply as the *source*. Levý uses it in synonymic variation with the *original*, the *work under translation*, the *source work* or *foreign work* etc. But he always means the same concept: a prototype that served as the model (direct source) for the derived work as its functional substitute, in our case the translation, accepted as its assumed adequate substitute because of its assumed appropriateness in terms of representing the source. This concept was borrowed from other disciplines (e.g. cybernetics and theory of modelling) in the 1920s by Czech structuralists, integrated into semiotics and further

3. Cf. also homological translation (Nord 1997) or metapoem (Holmes 1988).

developed.[4] Prototypes or master copies or models from which copies are made are something we live by. Even a verbal message is a model of its prototype – i.e. of the cognitive counterpart in the mind of the speaker as its substitute. A translation, too, is a model of a prototype (model); if it is not its complete representation, then it is its sample (extract, fragment). If it has not been derived from the model and is presented as if it were so, then it is a pseudotranslation (i.e. a pseudo-ostension as representation of a non-existing model). If it is a translation presented as an original then its derivation is concealed for whatever reason. A prototype itself may not be the original but a translation as is the case of indirect translation; or a series of models may be derived from one prototype producing a serial or multiple translation. Such conceptualization may be an enhancement compared to Jakobson's well-known triad of types of translation.

There are several types of relationships that hold between the *prototype model* and its *derived model.* The two most relevant may be the functional and structural relationships. The functional one means that the derived model functions for someone as the representation of the prototype which is not available for direct observation. Pragmatically, such presented models are normally taken at face value, without being questioned on their structural relationships with the prototype (unless the model is found to be defective in its function or if there is a suspicion of some kind). This is the communicative basis of *illusio* or the category of noetic compatibility.

Levý (1971: 11) suggests we should also inquire into the structural relationships because function and value are not indicative of the actual structural relationships and because a translation is necessarily a different structure; therefore beside a functional model (hence a translation is what functions as translation) we also need a structural one. But structure is fluid. We also need a processual model to understand the generation and reception – these are all modelling activities: the first (the prototype) is the mental representation of transformed reality and verbalized, the second is the mental representation of this verbalized model by the receiver/translator, the third is the mental representation of the translator's verbalized model by the receiver (Levý 1971: 13, 17). Therefore the final representation in translation is a model derived in multiple stages and subject to a number of objective, intersubjective and subjective agents during the stages of its production and reception. The structure has been processualized and contextualized. From this perspective a translation is an unending process as long as it is read.

Structural relationships between the prototype and its type are generally supposed to respect the dimensions of isomorphism, isofunctionalism and homology, to varying degrees. In translation, structural representativeness or similarity

4. Cf. Osolsobě (1971, 1986), Levý's follower in general semiotics.

depends on numerous factors. If isofunctionalism is upheld, the translation is not only functioning as an illusionistic representation or substitute of its model, but also of its function/s; other structural aspects may be subordinated to this goal, therefore a functional structural equivalent may mean different things in different cases. For a translation to function or be received as a literary fact and yet reproduce its original, Levý proposed the sliding scale (the dialectic dichotomy) of the *dual norm* in translation, but he was well aware of the variety of functions translation performs in addition or even in contrast to the original. He isolated an array of functions translation had played throughout history, and grouped them into two categories – *communicative* and *developmental*, with the latter contributing to intra-, inter- and supra- cultural development, including what we now call globalization (he called it a universalization process) *vis a vis* the maintenance of cultural differences or identities (including the refinement of their literary systems).

For Levý translation is also an inevitable *hybrid* of two languages and cultures; its make-up is not absolutely pre-determined by structural norms but depends on individual translators, their goals, ideology, dispositions etc., and collective or institutional values and beliefs as well. In tracing history Levý saw translation in service of the culture, he saw translation hampering domestic literary production, he saw contradictory pursuits and methods and a great variation of output in terms of representations accepted as translation. He saw that much may depend on how a culture feels and what kind of world it sees, what it thinks it needs; but he also saw the aftermath. Then he extrapolated the following system.

The category of *noetic subjectivism/ objectivism* is the ideological basis of a culture's world view focusing either on the 'self' (translations tend to retain specific alien features through 'faithful' translation), or on the 'other' (translations tend to generalize or suppress foreign features, highlighting those shared by two or more cultures, or even substituting domestic elements for foreign ones through 'free' translation). The general outlook of a culture may be either universalist and integrative, or dissociative and isolationist. If a culture feels it needs to protect or preserve its identity, what will be its translation method (unless it is imposed on it)? If a culture wants to be integrated (unless it is imposed on it) what will be the method? And if a culture wants to remain untouched (with no imposition), what will be the method? Answers are not simple because there are other factors involved in particular cases, as Levý points out. But this is reflected in the category of translativity.

The bridging category is *noetic compatibility* based on *illusio*; it works like Grice's principle or like the above semiotic ostension of a model when the original is inaccessible. Translations normally tend to be illusionistic, being presented and received as if they were originals. Levý likens this situation to a theatre performance when the audience switches to the mode of *as if*, i.e. the mode of a game and

make-believe, supposing the presentation is life-like. The same applies in translation – *illusio* works if the translation gives out no signals of untruthful reproduction and if the translator is transparent, that is invisible, like actors on the stage. Such transparency may entail some compromises, and vice versa. Of course, there are genuine anti-illusionist translations, and there are even more translations occupying the space in between the two poles – transparency or visibility are a matter of convention, and some anti-illusionism may be unavoidable in rendering texts from distant cultures. The degree of in/visibility involves *překladovost* (translativity).

Translativity[5] was conceived by Levý as a semiotic category representing a scale with two poles: the domestic and the foreign, correlated with the time scale (the old vs. the new) and involving the integration of form and content. The salience of translativity depends on the distance between the original author and the translation receiver as perceived by the receiver. It is therefore neither an essential or adherent quality, nor a static quality, but it is a dynamic variable. In other words the perceived salience may change with time due to e.g. cultural convergence or assimilation, or even with individual receivers due to their dispositions, while the 'text' as artefact remains the same. Repeatability or repeated exposition influences expectations, i.e. non-markedness and assimilation or accommodation at the point of reception; it is a fairly dynamic and inter-subjective category related to the receiver's dispositions, explaining why for some receivers in the same culture and even in the same period of time, the perceived salience with the foreign element may be different.

It also explains the process of appropriation and the dynamics of anti-illusionism. The receiving culture or its part may, for various reasons, ascribe different values to translativity – positive, neutral (irrelevant) or negative. If the value is positive, translativity tends to be more salient, so the method of *exoticizing* is applied, and original works may simulate foreign provenance or be presented as translations (pseudotranslations); translativity may even carry an aesthetic function. If the value is in the neutral, *creolization* is the most likely method. If the value is negative, translations tend to look like and be presented as non-translations: here the overall method ranges from *neutralizing* to *naturalizing*, including content *localization, modernization* or *adaptation*. But even the method of *archaization* may work as a domesticating strategy. Levý also suggests that artistic or aesthetic quality in translation may be degraded by general translation tendencies (called universals today) e.g. those resulting in higher predictability and lower entropy. But above all the translator is both a unique individual and a socialized

5. Cf. *translationality* in Popovič (1976); Pym (1998: 57) interprets *translationality* as inherent property of translations. *Translation-ness* is mentioned in Toury (1995: 213).

subject. His decisions, not necessarily conscious, are based on his dispositions but also on intersubjective and contextual factors.

Here Levý suggests three processual models of translation. The first of these, based on the Prague structural-functionalist model, is the *translation-as-a-secondary-communicative-act* linked to the primary communication act of the original. The sign as artefact-and-message is interrelated with participating human agents; agents and the sign are interrelated with their social context as the resulting stage of its previous evolution (diachrony in synchrony) but projected in the model as the current stage + its (living) tradition, because what matters in communication is cognitive dispositions of participants in the act, including their historical awareness such as, for example, their knowledge of models in the domestic literary tradition, i.e. the so called *evolutionary sequence*.

Cognition is not sterile, as it involves, apart from individual experience, worldview and world-knowledge, also attitudes, ideological convictions, beliefs and derived values – all linking cognition with emotion and volition; aesthetics and taste are therefore a much more complex issue than a matter of form. In consequence, the ideological standpoint of the translator as of any receiver is an omnipresent variable. The second model, embedded in the former as a structural and phenomenological zoom-in comprising three stages: *apprehension*, *interpretation + conceptualization, re-stylization*. The translator conceptualizes the original and forms a *conception*[6] of the translation accounting for relevant differences – the cognitive make-up and taste of his receivers, higher-level norms and generic models (matrices), the objectives of the translation and its positioning, his ideology etc. Then he proceeds to its verbal materialization. This stage is zoomed-in in a linear or a serial model presented in detail in Levý 2008 (published in Czech in 1971 and as a sketch in 1967) and integrated with the former two.

Levý's theoretical-methodological design involves a number of specialized concepts not treated here, but some footnotes have been attached to the running text. This translation project would not have materialized without the institutional and financial support of the wide-scale university project *Language as human activity, as its product and factor* (registered under MSM 0021 620 825) of which it is a part. The book would not have come out without the generous permission of Jiří Levý's family (his wife Hana and their children Jiří and Jana) – the heirs – who granted the rights for this publication. My special thanks also go to Patrick Corness who translated the book with great care, to Isja Conen of JB Publishers for her enduring patience and advice, to Dana Martínková for her handling of our draft format, and last but not least to our families for their support.

6. Cf. Toury's *underlying conception of a translation* (1995) or Holmes's *map* (1988).

Levý is a philosopher's stone of translation theory forged from the fortuitous alchemy of Czech structuralist method, his talents, diligence and historical coincidence. It is my hope that this book will contribute to current discussion, to international historiography of the discipline, and above all that it will be found useful by students, scholars and practitioners alike.

Zuzana Jettmarová

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