

## Power and shifting paradigm in translation \*

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### **Abstract:**

The paper deals with interrelation of dominant ideology and its influence on the translation and publishing policy as reflected on the example of Slovakia. The introductory part is devoted to theoretical framework for the research drawing upon the works of Slovak and foreign translation scholars. The analytical part is contrastive; it presents publishing tendencies in selected dominant vs dependent cultures within the periods of opposing ideologies (socialistic vs democratic regimes). It clearly shows the shift of paradigm and the place of “small cultures” in the intercultural dialogue/monologue.

**Key words:** translation, culture, ideology, power shift, publishing policy, intercultural monologue

### **Resumen:**

Este artículo se ocupa de la interrelación de la ideología dominante y de su influencia en la traducción y en las políticas de publicación que se reflejan en el ejemplo de Eslovaquia. La parte introductoria se ha dedicado al marco teórico de la investigación orientada a los trabajos de académicos eslovacos y extranjeros. La parte analítica es contrastiva; presenta tendencias de publicación en las culturas seleccionadas dominante vs. dependiente en períodos de oposición de ideologías (régimen socialista vs. democrático). Se muestra claramente el cambio de paradigma y el lugar de las “culturas minoritarias” en el diálogo/monólogo intercultural.

**Palabras clave:** traducción, cultura, ideología, cambio de paradigma, política de publicaciones, monólogo intercultural.

### **Résumé:**

Cet article essaie de retracer l'interrelation de l'idéologie dominante et de son influence sur la traduction et sur les politiques d'édition perçues dans l'exemple de la Slovaquie. La première partie est dédiée au cadre théorique du projet de recherche orientée vers les travaux de chercheurs e académiques slovaques et étrangers. La partie analytique est contrastive; nous y présentons les tendances d'édition dans les cultures sélectionnées (dominante vs. dépendante), dans des périodes d'opposition d'idéologies (régime socialiste vs. démocratique). Le changement de paradigme est clairement montré ainsi que la place des “cultures minoritaires” dans le dialogue/monologue interculturel.

**Mots clé:** traduction, culture, idéologie, changement de paradigme, politique d'éditions, monologue interculturel.

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## Introduction

We live in a very dynamic world in which intercultural communication plays a major role. This communication is mainly performed via translation. The world is currently facing an unprecedented “translation boom”, and contemporary translation studies should reflect this. The ways it does vary and may be generally distinguished as positive attitudes, usually represented by practicing translators, and negative or sceptical ones, usually represented by deconstructionist/poststructuralist/postcolonial translation scholars who are dealing with translation as a significant ideological tool used to colonise “minor” or non-dominant cultures. Tymoczko for example asks “*To what extent will cultural exchange be multidirectional in the age of globalization, and to what extent will asymmetries of power, resources, and technologies mean that “cultural exchange” will become an euphemism for the acculturation to Western or dominant international standards of many peoples around the world.... to what extent will “cultural exchange” become a banner for opening up and exploiting new markets around the world?*” (Tymoczko, 2007, pp. 4-5). This statement, however radical it may seem, is very interesting and worth exploring. It will be very interesting to observe how power and dominant ideology influences the selection and above all the quantity of translated works into “small languages” and from “small languages” into the language of the dominant culture.

## Theoretical Frame

The term “intercultural communication” implies cultural dialogue. Lotman (1994)<sup>†</sup>, who quotes Newson, mentions that the main condition of dialogue is to communicate by taking turns speaking, the silent communication partner repressing their activity and focusing on receiving their partner’s activity. In general we may understand literature as a dialogue between readers and the author, but taking translation into account, also as a dialogue between cultures, through which cultures learn from each other. However, it is very interesting to observe the position of so-called “minor”, “small” or “subordinate” cultures in this dialogue. Lotman (1994) uses the analogy of hemispheres to illustrate cultural mechanisms and changes, which take place during this process. He says that in order to have balanced perception, both hemispheres have to function equally (pressure versus back pressure/rational versus irrational). It is the same with culture. Static cultural periods are created at the expense of compromised balance between contradictory tendencies. He further claims that there are stabilising and destabilising mechanisms which present its means of self-organisation either in a dynamic or a balanced way<sup>‡</sup>. If we apply this analogy to the political situation, power structures and asymmetries and how these influence translation, we may find rather interesting results. There has always been a “dialogue” between the world powers that have always been

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<sup>†</sup>When quoting Lotman we use Slovak translation published in 1994.

<sup>‡</sup>Lotman says that if the analogy is not used properly it may cause more harm than good. We hope this is not the case.

struggling for control over areas and the tool not only for this area but also cultural and intellectual colonisation has often been translation. Tymoczko claims that “...the writers (translation scholars) give prescriptive and definitive advice and they proclaim clear norms. It does not seem to matter to writers that they contradict each other from decade to decade, from century to century, often knowingly.” (Tymoczko, 2007, p. 17). Debeljak (2006) says that translation makes the foreign understandable and is therefore inevitably political. However, we believe that this “cultural dialogue” or intercultural communication is applicable only to dominant powers<sup>5</sup> and those subordinate are usually only consumers of what is being served. Slovakia is surely a great example of such a consumer. In this context it is worth considering also development of patron’s shifting position in Lefevrian sense containing the ideological, economic and status element. Lefevre (1992) sees ideology as a general worldview, which influences action of people. This can be for example choosing a book for translation and we will try to prove that at least in Slovakia, the strongest element influencing publishing policy is economic patron thus becoming a prevailing ideological element. The economical element directly deals with money, salaries or royalties.

Lefevre then splits patronage into undifferentiated and differentiated. Undifferentiated patronage means, that it is i.e. one patron, who dictates the elements. This is a typical feature of monarchies or totalitarian regimes as were the case in Slovakia before 1989 and we will provide examples on this. At the same time, we will provide some examples of economic determination of publishing policy in recent years. Differentiated patronage means, that there are more patrons present and each of them represents a different ideological position. The strength of the patrons can be unequal, which for example means, that the financial success does not need to reflect a good status.

As Kusá (2005) states in her study *Translation as a Part of the History of Cultural Scope* (Preklad ako súčasť dejín kultúrneho priestoru), each translation within translation literature is impacted by the national and political system, the social and cultural system and by the literary system, and its functions change along with space and time. In the case of Slovakia, our social and cultural scope is determined by our geographical and political context as well as being influenced by surrounding cultural contexts: Czech, Russian and even Anglo-Saxon and Romanic contexts.

During the period of the communist regime, Slovak connections with foreign cultures were characterised by the relative absence of contact with Anglo-Saxon culture. There were historically conditioned contacts with the Czech, Russian, Hungarian, German and French cultures, and yet direct connections with the Anglo-Saxon culture were almost non-existent. The situation since has changed – we are now primarily dominated by the European Union and the United States.

We will try to illustrate the changing paradigm in intercultural relationships by comparing translation production during two periods: 1945 - 1968 and 1989 - 2010. The types of translation and selection of works to be translated clearly show the shift

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<sup>5</sup>And even here the asymmetry is obvious, depending on the current power and political situation.

in power structures. Whereas during the socialist period, translation was the main political propaganda tool (with minor exceptions that we will mention later), nowadays it is a commercial commodity and thus also propaganda tool for the dominant ideology. In his paper dealing with translation as a reflection of the cultural situation in Slovakia, Keníž stated: *“Sixteen years after the velvet revolution that changed us, determined warriors against American and western imperialism, into its fiery promoters, in the times when the globalization wave took the essence of our economy and some level of self-sufficiency, we come to see that it is also robbing us of the last thing that we had – national culture and national identity.”* (Keníž, 2006, p. 29)

As for the philosophical and aesthetic aspect of quality, translation is often underestimated and poorly paid. If we look at this from the perspective of national identity we see it is highly questionable. Quoting Levy-Strauss's notion, Keníž (2008) claims that we are over communicated and that differences between cultures are productive and move culture forward. The mentioned asymmetries deny minor cultures to a higher or lower extent depending on how aggressive and refined they are. In general, minor cultures are usually subject to one-way translation and communication, and therefore not a dialogue but a monologue. Still, the situation isn't purely pessimistic if we take into account the benefits for practicing translators in connection to translation units and translatability mainly from the English language. Globalisation has caused that objects that were not reachable to common individuals behind the iron curtain have entered our reality thus made foreign things assessable and “translatable”. From the “how to do it” or functional point of view, this can be perceived as a positive tendency as it enables translators work more accurately. But again, we have to relativize the notion of accuracy when we take into account that the amount of new objects and notions is so high that they are often not translated but used in their original form, despite in many cases possessing Slovak equivalents. This causes the foreignisation of the receptor culture. We will not discuss matters of foreignisation and domestication or naturalisation and exotisation in this article in more detail, as that would be a topic for a separate paper.

In the 1990s, Gideon Toury introduced a concept based on target-oriented translation. Well aware of the dominance of mainstream cultures, he advocated for an approach that would shift the attention from the place of origin of literary text to the place of their reception by means of translation. As for the choice of texts to be translated, he proposed a three-phase target-oriented methodology.

- 1) Consider the text in terms of target culture to determine its significance and acceptability.
- 2) Compare segments of the source text and target text to determine the linguistic relationship.
- 3) Distinguish trends, make generalizations, identify norms, and draw conclusions for future decision-making.

However, while contemporary translation production reflects the fact that Toury's concept is a well-defined theory, the situation on the translation market is different.

Rather than speaking of a target-oriented approach, we should be speaking of a market-oriented approach.

As we have stated at the beginning, our aim was to emphasize how the changing paradigm of translation policy is dependent on the changing paradigms of domineering power by comparing the translation data representing selected dominant and small cultures during the period of strongest ideological oppression, 1945 - 1968, and the period after the fall of the iron curtain.

For the period of the communist regime, we relied on available bibliographies published by Slovak headquarters of book culture between 1945 - 1976/1977<sup>\*\*</sup>; for the post-communist period, we drew on the database *The Index Translationum*, an international bibliography of translations, created in 1932. The database contains cumulative bibliographical information on books translated and published in about one hundred of the UNESCO Member States since 1979 and totals more than 2,008,763 entries in all disciplines: literature, social and human sciences, natural and exact sciences, art, history and so forth. It is planned to update the work every four months.

## Contrastive analysis

The data that we analysed for the purposes of this paper resulted in the following findings:

### 1) Intercultural dialogue?

As for the existence of intercultural dialogue that has been on everybody's lips for over a decade, there is not much of it. Translations are being made in great numbers, but when we compare the reciprocity of translation among selected cultures, we come to see that rather than speaking of intercultural dialogue it would be more appropriate to speak of intercultural monologue. It is not surprising that there is great discrepancy in numbers when comparing traditionally big and small cultures (e.g. American/Slovak)<sup>††</sup>, but great differences in the number of translations to and from particular languages appear even in the case of relatively comparable cultures from the perspective of their population or economic power (e.g. USA/China, USA/Russia). We can probably attribute this discrepancy to the historically and

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<sup>\*\*</sup>See the list of bibliographies we worked with in the Bibliography at the end of the article.

<sup>††</sup>Small countries have always been under the dominance (political/ideological, economical, cultural) of big countries (in case of Slovakia we can mention Slovak forced loyalty to Austro-Hungarian Empire between 1867-1918; to Germany during the period of Slovak State that existed from 1939 to 1945 when Slovakia was an ally and client state of Nazi Germany ; and to Soviet Union during the era of Communism between 1948-1989).

economically conditioned supremacy of American culture (representing *pars pro toto* the whole of Western culture, especially due to its overwhelming production of films, songs, TV programmes, fashion and other forms of art and pop culture) executed by means of the English language, the contemporary lingua franca.

### Facts in numbers, part 1<sup>‡‡</sup>

In providing the following figures, we are well aware of the fact that the size of a particular nation/culture is logically reflected in the nation's financial support of the field of culture, number of translators, publishing policy and publishing market; however, we believe that all these aspects are interconnected and are good indicators of cultural permeability as well as cultural dominance/subordination.

We were primarily interested in the number of translations from American literature to prove our point on the dominance of American culture; however, the statistics in Index Translationum only show the number of translations from English to other languages without distinguishing the country of their origin – thus we have to take into consideration translations from British literature and other English-written literatures as well.

#### USA – Slovakia

Translations from English to Slovak	5487
Translations from Slovak to English	29

#### USA – China

Translations from English to Chinese	31261
Translations from Chinese to English	1038

#### USA – Russia

Translations from English to Russian	27433
Translations from Russian to English	2127

The only cases of intercultural dialogues were seen in the translation interaction of two relatively comparable non-Anglophone cultures (e.g. Slovakia/Slovenia, France/Germany). In connection with the “translation permeability” of particular cultures, J. Vilikovsky<sup>§§</sup> speaks of the importance of the phenomenon of open and

<sup>‡‡</sup>All statistics taken from Index Translationum were retrieved on June 8, 2011.

<sup>§§</sup>Comment presented at the 3rd Triennial Conference of English and American Studies, 21-22 October, 2010, Budmerice, Slovakia.

closed cultures; e.g. Germany has traditionally been perceived as an open culture, and the statistics presented in the Index Translationum testify to this.

### **Facts in numbers, part 2**

#### **Slovakia – Slovenia<sup>\*\*\*</sup>**

Translations from Slovak to Slovenian	7
Translations from Slovenian to Slovak	23

#### **France – Germany**

Translations from French to German	14295
Translations from German to French	12228

### **2) Shift in translation paradigm**

By this we mean the shift in the focus of translation production from source to target cultures, conditioned by political and ideological pressures. What had once been the dictate of ideology now became the dictate of good marketing. We demonstrate this with the comparison of translation production from American literature and Soviet literatures into Slovak in 1945 - 1968 and in 1989 - 2010.

### **Facts in numbers, part 3**

#### **Situation in Slovakia from 1945 – 1968**

Total number of translations	4479 <sup>†††</sup>
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<sup>\*\*\*</sup>It is interesting that in case of Slovakia and Slovenia the numbers of translations have changed quite significantly in the period between October 2010 and June 2011. While the number of translations from Slovak to Slovenian has remained unchanged, the number of translations from Slovenian to Slovak has increased by 14. This can be due to the fact that Slovenian cultural policy is oriented towards strong promotion of Slovenian culture abroad. The Ministry of Culture in Slovenia directly subsidizes translations (<http://www.culturelink.org/culpol/slovenia.html> ). Also, Slovenian government elaborated a document called National Programme for Culture 2008-2011 where they declare their support for participation of the best Slovenian authors in the project European Capital of Culture in other countries, their effort to promote balance between the promotion of Slovenian culture abroad and presentation of other cultures in Slovenia and other priorities. ([http://www.mk.gov.si/fileadmin/mk.gov.si/pageuploads/min\\_eng/legislation/Nacionalni\\_program\\_za\\_kulturo\\_2008\\_2011\\_FINAL\\_AN.pdf](http://www.mk.gov.si/fileadmin/mk.gov.si/pageuploads/min_eng/legislation/Nacionalni_program_za_kulturo_2008_2011_FINAL_AN.pdf))

<sup>†††</sup>IMPORTANT NOTE: This number does not express total translation production from all foreign literatures; an overall statistic of the whole translation production in Slovakia between 1945 and 1968 would be impossible to provide since no electronic database has been created yet. For the purposes of our research we have elaborated a representative sample of literatures representing Western bloc (American, British, Spanish, Italian, and Swedish literatures) and Eastern bloc (Soviet literatures, Yugoslavian literatures, Hungarian literature, Polish literature, Bulgarian literature, Romanian

Translations from American literature	347 = 8%
Translations from Soviet literatures	2040 = 46%

Proportion of translations from Western literatures in total translation production	994/4479 = 22%
Proportion of translations from socialist literatures in total translation production	3485/4479 = 78%

#### **Situation in Slovakia in 1989 - 2010**

Total translation production	10769
Proportion of translations from English-written literatures in total translation production	5487 = 51%
Proportion of translations from Russian-written literatures in total translation production	185 = 2%
Proportion of translation of non-English literature excluding the Soviet Bloc	5097 = 47%

We believe the juxtaposition of the data provided is stunning. The reversed proportion of works translated from Soviet literatures and Western literatures between 1945-1968 (46%: 8%) and between 1989-2010 (2%: 51%) is the strongest argument we thought we could provide to demonstrate the direct impact of a dominant ideology on the publishing policy in a small and historically conditioned dependent country.

#### **Facts in numbers, part 4**

The following table reflects the translation production from English-written literatures in Slovakia between 2008 and 2010. It was elaborated by classifying a list of 708 works translated from English-written literatures into particular genres.<sup>+++</sup> We decided to provide a table reflecting the following data due to several reasons:

- 1) The two-year period of 2008-2010 is a symbolical representation of Slovakia's present exposure to the English-speaking world as well as Slovak uncritical

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literature, and literature of East Germany). You can find the list of bibliographies of translation we worked with in the section Bibliography at the end of the article.

<sup>+++</sup>The comprehensive list of all literary works translated into Slovak between 2008 and 2010 was provided by Slovak State Library in BanskáBystrica and processed as a part of a longitudinal research conducted by an M.A. candidate Zuzana Benková, B.A. The full-text version of the list consists of 200 pages, thus it would be impossible to make it a part of the presented paper.



tendency to praise everything coming from the West.<sup>§§§</sup> This is a logical response to the period of our forced loyalty to the Soviet Union (1948-1989) when majority of Western cultural production was considered decadent as we have already illustrated on the number of translated works from Western and Soviet literatures provided in tables in the section Facts in numbers, part 3.

- 2) The table explicitly shows the dominance of production of translations from American literature among other English-written literatures.
- 3) The third outcome of the presented table is the identification of the wide range of genres being translated as well as the sad fact that commercial genres highly outnumber high-quality genres.

Genre/Origin	All	British	Irish	American	Canadian	Australian	Other
<b>Romance novels</b>	131	29	1	86	5	9	1
<b>Juvenile literature</b>	114	62	1	48	0	2	1
<b>Horrors and thrillers</b>	74	17	0	52	5	0	0
<b>Fairy tales</b>	72	31	1	40	0	0	0
<b>Social novels</b>	63	13	2	41	4	1	2
<b>Detective stories</b>	61	16	0	38	4	0	3
<b>Fantasy and science fiction</b>	57	11	7	36	0	3	0
<b>Girl novels</b>	42	22	0	18	2	0	0
<b>Historical novels</b>	26	6	0	19	0	1	0
<b>Religious, spiritual and esoteric literature</b>	21	7	0	14	0	0	0
<b>Short stories and novellas</b>	13	1	1	9	2	0	0
<b>Humour and satire</b>	11	8	0	3	0	0	0

<sup>§§§</sup> At this point we would like to emphasize that it is certainly not our goal to criticize the dominance of Western translation production in Slovak culture; we are aware of the fact that hand in hand with huge amount of literary works of poor aesthetic quality our literature is by means of translation enriched by many works of high quality (e.g. translations of contemporary American postmodernists such as Paul Auster, Philip Roth etc.).

<b>Biographies</b>	10	3	1	6	0	0	0
<b>Poetry</b>	6	2	1	2	1	0	0
<b>Drama</b>	4	4	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Popular science</b>	3	0	0	3	0	0	0
<b>All</b>	<b>708</b>	232	15	<b>415</b>	23	16	7

Even though we consider these statistics more informative than 100% accurate (the data in the Index Translationum database vary from month to month), we believe they serve as an explicit indicator of the translation/reception situation in Slovakia within the above-mentioned context of power shifts and intercultural monologue.

## Conclusion

However pessimistic this article may seem to be, it is not its goal to treat translation as something harmful to culture. Translation is needed as it helps us communicate about common issues (non-literary texts) as well as aesthetic values (literary translation). Our main goal was to warn about and challenge the hypocrisy expressed by the term “intercultural communication”, or more specifically, “intercultural dialogue”. Even Slovak scholars are not united in their treatment of these issues. Keníž for example used the metaphor of “*rizňa*” (a wooden one way water-trough used for transportation of wood from the forest), saying that we keep taking from others while nobody takes from us. Kusá on the other hand used the metaphor of a bridge where the transport of people keeps taking place, but it is not equal. However it may be, in the end we all have to translate, but we must not forget the cultural context and possible effects of our work.<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup>

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<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup> Quoted from an authentic discussion among significant Slovak translation scholars that took place at Summer School of Translation in Budmerice in September 2010.

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