

Translation Studies from within the Iberian-Slavonic Perspective: Overview and Outlooks

Although the idea that translation takes place between (and among) cultures, not languages, had already been claimed as early as 1940 by Eugene Nida (see Nida 1945), the emergence of culture oriented approaches to translation studies can be observed only some forty years later, when André Lefevere and Susan Bassnett suggested that

[t]here is always a context in which translation takes place, always a history from which a text emerges and into which a text is transposed. [...] [T]ranslation as an activity is always doubly contextualized, since the text has a place in two cultures (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990: 11).

In spite of the numerous ground-breaking shifts in the paradigms and viewpoints observable in the realm of translation studies since the above-cited “manifesto” (Bassnett 1998: 123)¹, it is the “cultural turn” advocated by Bassnett that appears to have been of utmost relevance for Iberian-Slavonic Studies.² The importance of a culture-oriented view about translation within the Iberian-Slavonic framework can be explained on two accounts: not only does it provide insights into the manipulative potential of the translation process, thus foregrounding a vast array of textual and extra-textual constraints upon the agents involved in this process, but, more importantly, it also sheds light on the historical and cultural circumstances under which translations have been produced. In other words, this broadened perspective on translation opened up new methods of analysing translational exchange between Slavonic and Iberian cultures.

The cultural shift in translation studies, observable in the 1980s and 1990s, coincided with major alterations in the history of intercultural relations between the two extremities of the European continent. Previously represented in ambiguous dialogues, conditioned by fear-inducing stereotypes, and viewed as too distant to be directly experienced (see, for instance, Franco *et al.* 2010), the two cultures have been recently presented with new opportunities for fruitful encounters and comparisons. The collapse of Franco’s (1976) and Salazar’s (1974) para-fascist regimes,³ followed by

1 See, in this respect, Snell-Hornby (2006) or (2010).

2 For an overview of the discipline, see Pięta (2011).

3 The term here employed was coined by Griffin (1991: 121) to describe the Spanish and

the breakdown of the communist Eastern Bloc (1989), marked the beginning of a step-by-step Iberian-Slavonic cultural approximation.⁴ Following the changes on the contemporary map of Europe – multicultural and fluid, with its extremities moving ever closer – both Slavic and Iberian countries entered into the process of adjusting their collective memory and self-defining to the new European experience of the opening up to the “Other” (see, for instance, Wagstaff 2004, Waldenfels 2007 and Zarycki 2007). The two eastward enlargements of the European Union (2004 and 2007) brought about a significant rise (observable since the late 1990s) in the migratory movements from the former communist countries (especially Ukraine), thus rendering Slavonic Europe into an every-day reality in the already highly homogeneous and multicultural societies of Iberian Peninsula. This immigration flow also entailed the influx of high-skilled intellectual immigration which, later on, contributed to the boost in the production of direct translations.

Regrettably, regardless of the methodological and socio-political developments referred to above, and irrespective of the intensification of cultural and political relationships addressed in the previous paragraphs, until very recently the translational exchange between Iberian and Slavonic cultures has been largely understudied.⁵ However, as has been argued by a number of scholars from the field (see, for instance, Franco *et al.* 2010 or Pięta 2009), a thorough empirical study of translational exchange between Iberian and Slavonic polysystems (cf. Even-Zohar 1990; Lambert 1995) may prove to be revealing on various accounts. First and foremost, it may help to explore the way in which cultural relations between (and among) (semi) peripheral languages are shaped and take place.⁶ By doing so, it may also provide a better understanding of the complex role of intermediary centres,

Portuguese regimes, both of which are considered to be examples of not fully realized fascist systems.

⁴ The (re-)establishment of diplomatic relations and the inauguration of academic contacts which took place in the late 1970s and 1980s may be regarded as indicative of this approximation.

⁵ Until very recently only occasional, unsystematic and, to a large extent, single case studies had been conducted. More systematized research on Iberian-Slavonic translation started ca 2006 with the establishment of the CompaRes Iberian-Slavonic Translation Studies Study Group (see <http://www.iberian-slavonic.org/studygroups.htm>, accessed January 2010). A very first draft of a list of studies regarding the cultural relationships between Iberian and Slavonic countries is available in Franco *et al.* (2010: 259-262).

⁶ The terms peripheral (with regard to Belarusian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Macedonian, Portuguese, Serbo-Croatian, Slovak, Slovene and Ukrainian) and semi-peripheral (with regard to Czech, Spanish and Polish) are taken from Heilbron (1999: 434) and refer to the position of these languages within the international cultural transfer achieved by means of translation. By the same token, the majority of Iberian and Slavonic languages can be listed among the so-called dominated (Jacquemond 1992 and Casanova 2002) or source-intensive (Cronin 1995: 88) languages of which Pascale Casanova (2002: 9) says that, irrespective of the number of speakers and regardless of their diffusion or literary tradition, they are hardly recognised beyond national borders and their value on the international literary market is low. All things considered, much more is translated into than out of these languages.

such as Paris or London, in the cross-cultural literary transfer.⁷ Moreover, it is likely to contribute to a total sum of knowledge about the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion of foreign literary works in a given (in this case Iberian or Slavonic) target culture (cf. Toury 1995). Finally, by researching the *modus faciendi* of exporting channels operating in a given (for example, Iberian or Slavonic) source culture, it may also shed new light on the national self-image that this culture wants to build and project abroad. All in all, an in-depth study of Iberian-Slavonic translations may help fill the historiographical gap in the world map of relations between (and among) cultures and traditions

All these reasons rendered translation practices and translation studies a prime area of interest for scholars working within the realm of Iberian-Slavonic Studies. They also contributed to the development of an international and interdisciplinary research network dedicated to the study of cultural exchange between the two regions, which consists of three academic bodies: International Society of Iberian-Slavonic Studies (CompaRes)⁸, Research Group 5 “Iberian and Slavonic Literatures and Cultures” at the Centre for Lusophone and European Literatures and Cultures of the Faculty of Letters of the University of Lisbon (CLEPUL 5)⁹ and Commission for Iberian-Slavonic Comparative Research at the International Committee of Slavists (CISCR-ICS).¹⁰ From the very beginning of their existence, these entities have been focused on promoting research on translation within the Iberian-Slavonic context. Moreover, by funding translation grants, they have also contributed to the creation of propitious conditions for the increase in the number of direct translations from Slavonic to Iberian languages and vice-versa. The results of these endeavours are to be published in the forthcoming volumes integrated into the recently launched series entitled *Iberian and Slavonic Cultures in Contact and Comparison* (Caos Editora).

The vast array of activities carried out by the three institutions mentioned above led to the production of a considerable body of works on Iberian-Slavonic translations developed by an interdisciplinary group of contributors. Initially, these works included both panoramic overviews and individual case studies, although the former tended to be outnumbered by the latter. Additionally, more often than not, translation practices have been approached from a linguistic rather than a cultural perspective. The most striking example of these

7 Although, to our best knowledge, the scholarship still lacks a thorough empirical study regarding the role of mediating cultures in the cultural exchange between the two language groups concerned, there is no doubt that they have exerted a major impact on the selection of works to be translated. This is also confirmed, though only in passing, by a number of case studies, such as Hodousek (2003), Mychko-Megrin (2007), Pięta (2009), Schejbal and Utrera (2004), Špírk (2009), Štěpánková (2009) and Zurbach (2008), to name but the most recent ones.

8 For further information on this entity see <http://www.iberian-slavonic.org/> (accessed January 2011).

9 See <http://www.clepul.eu/areas.asp?id=7> (accessed January 2011).

10 See <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~slavic/acs/geninfo1.html> (accessed January 2011).

tendencies can be found, for instance, in the post-conference book resulting from the first event in the series *Iberian and Slavonic Cultures: Contact and Comparison*.¹¹ The Translation Studies section of this collective volume (Cieszyńska 2007) is divided into two parts. The first part accommodates overview essays on the context and translation policies applied in translational exchange between the two regions concerned, whereas the second one includes a series of case studies addressing individual facets of the issues raised in the opening section. The former group of texts encompasses studies on the literary transfer between the following language pairs: Portuguese and Serbo-Croatian (Medvedec 2007), Portuguese and Russian (Semenova-Head 2007), Spanish and Slovenian (Pregelj and Kozak 2007), Spanish and Czech and Spanish and Slovak (Hermida and Gonzalo 2007). The latter section, in turn, accommodates a number of essays focused on the import and reception of a Portuguese author in Poland (Plecinski 2007), a Spanish author in Slovakia (Zambor 2007), a Portuguese author in Bulgaria (Timenova 2007) and a French author's text concerning Portugal in Poland (Wójcicki 2007). Despite the initial predominance of linguistic perspectives, the majority of more recent studies has adopted cultural and sociological approaches, thus shedding new light on the multifaceted interrelations between the two cultures in question.¹²

Nonetheless, in spite of progress referred to above, and without denying responsibility on the part of Iberian and Slavonic scholars, it is a fact that the history of Iberian-Slavonic translational exchange remains non-existent to most translation studies experts. To make matters worse, most of reliable empirical data on translational transfer between these cultures is still not available.¹³ The four studies included in this section are meant to begin to make up for this conspicuous absence.

The four essays in question are based on the papers presented during the *Second International Conference from the series: Iberian and Slavonic Cultures in Contact and Comparison* and are conducted within a variety of frameworks based on linguistics, literary studies and reception studies, presenting translation practices as intersections of different cultural and political influences. It should also be stressed that the articles do not trace the fortunes of individual authors in translation for their own sake. More importantly, none of the essays here approaches the relationship between the

11 See, in this respect, <http://www.iberian-slavonic.org/pierwszakonf.html> (accessed January 2011).

12 This seems evident in Mychko-Megrin (2007), Pięta (2009), Špirk (2009), Štěpánková (2009) or Zaboklicka-Zakwaska (2007).

13 It is hoped that an ongoing project under the programmatic title "Intercultural Literature in Portugal 1930-2000: a Critical Bibliography" carried out by the CECC (Research Centre for Communication and Culture, Portuguese Catholic University) and the CEAUL/ULICES (University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies) will help to fill this gap. For a general outline of this project, see Seruya (2009) and <http://www.translatedliteratureportugal.org/eng/index.htm> (accessed January 2011).

“original” and its rendering in a prescriptive manner or as a matter of moral probity where the ideal result would be a perfect reflection of the sacrosanct source. Rather, the source texts/target text relations are studied for the insights they may provide into the strategies employed by the translator. In other words, the papers here presented look into the relationship between the translator and the cultural and historical context in which (s)he operated. Furthermore, in line with translation scholars like Lefevere (1992), translations are assumed to be active interventions into texts and, therefore, active interventions into the receiving culture.

Three out of four papers included in this section are developed within the framework of Spanish-Slovene relations. **Jasmina Markič**'s contribution (“Srečko Kosovel’s *Integrals* in Spanish”) deals with Spanish translation of one of the most prized Slovene poets - Srečko Kosovel (1904-1926). Firstly, Markič presents biographical data regarding the poet in question and places them in historical and cultural context (the outbreak and vicissitudes of the First World War, Italian occupation and Slovene struggle for independence). Secondly, she provides an overview of Kosovel’s literary heritage, presenting him both as a prolific poet (over a thousand poems, the majority of which were published posthumously) and a prose writer (many essays, sketches, diaries and so on). The third section of Markič’s paper is devoted to Kosovel’s *Integrali*, here described as very particular constructivist writings, positioned at the interface between Expressionism, Futurism and Dadaism. The fourth section of the paper is focused on the study of the Spanish translation of Kosovel’s work. Also, a Catalan translation is mentioned in passing. After presenting a selection of excerpts from the Spanish translation (together with their Slovene originals), Markič concludes that the existence of the Spanish version of *Integrali* proves the universality of Kosovel’s poetry.

The two remaining papers developed within the framework of Spanish-Slovene relations deal with the Slovene reception of works by Federico García Lorca. In her paper (“The Slovene Reception of Federico García Lorca’s plays”), **Maja Šabec** focuses her attention on the Slovene translations of Lorca’s dramatic texts. She starts by identifying 10 (re)translations of Lorca’s plays and comments on the translators’ linguistic awareness and overall competence. Next, she turns to Lorca’s Slovene stage presentations and depicts their diachronic distribution. Šabec observes that although the first peak in an apparent demand for Lorca’s plays can be found in the 1950’s, immediately after this the number of stage productions came to a virtual standstill. This decline was followed by a considerable boost in the number of plays staged from 1970s onwards. Finally, drawing on two kinds of epitexts (theatre programmes, on the one hand, and many kinds of reviews which were issued in mainstream and specialist press, on the other), the author discusses the complexities and discrepancies in the

Slovene reception of the Spanish poet-cum-playwright. In her conclusions, Šabec emphasizes the canonized status of Lorca's dramatic texts in the Slovene literary system while at the very same time alerting to the overpolitization and narrow-mindedness in a number of their Slovene interpretations.

For her part, **Branca Ramšak** ("The Slovene Reception of Federico García Lorca's Poetry") turns her attention to Slovene translations of Lorca's poetry. After presenting succinct remarks on the nature and connotations regarding Lorca's works, Ramšak refers to six translators (Alojz Gradnik, Peter Levec, Jože Udovič, Nico Košir, Ciril Bergles and Aleš Berger) responsible for introducing the Spanish poet to the Slovene readership. In what follows the author studies closely only two of them. With regard to the first one (i.e. Jože Udovič - a neo-realist poet from the post war period considered the most important translator of Lorca's poetry into Slovene) Ramšak observes that, in order to maintain the imagery and reduce the political image of Lorca, he neglected assonance and introduced free verse. In so doing, Udovič is said to have presented Lorca as an exclusively avant-garde poet. With regard to the second translator (Aleš Berger, the author of the first complete translation of Lorca's *Romancero gitano*), Ramšak's contrastive analysis leads her to conclude that Berger managed to maintain the assonance, though at the cost of metaphors. By way of conclusion, Ramšak suggests that the Slovene readership still lacks any holistic view of Lorca's poetry. According to the author, it is now high time that Lorca should be presented to the public reading him in Slovene as a master of both form and imagery.

The section closes with an essay by **Zlata Putnik** ("Problems of Gender in the Translations from Serbian to Portuguese of Miloš Crnjanski's poem *Lament over Belgrade*"). Her paper is the only contribution in the Translation Studies section which takes up linguistic issues and is developed within the framework of Luso-Serbian relations. Drawing on Umberto Eco's definition of translation, Putnik makes the interesting point that translating gender from one (in this case Serbian) language to another (Portuguese) necessarily requires negotiations at the syntagmatic and paradigmatic level, thus representing a double challenge. Translating from Serbian into Portuguese (and, for that matter, the other way round) is said to be even more problematic given that the former makes use of three (feminine, masculine, neutral) and the latter of only two (feminine and masculine) genders. To illustrate possible consequences of such discrepancies of gender classification to translational transfer, Putnik presents a possible Portuguese translation of a Serbian poem *Lament over Belgrade* by Miloš Crnjanski. In her conclusions she argues that introducing shifts at the syntagmatic level of the target text is possibly the most efficient way of preserving the semantic load of the source text.

With a view to promoting scholarly study of translational phenomena from an Iberian-Slavonic perspective and in order to encourage discussion between (and among) translation scholars coming from differing academic backgrounds, the editors of *IberoSlavica* welcome submissions of papers of an interdisciplinary nature that report either on empirical studies or speculative and applied studies. Also, contributors are highly encouraged to promote their research projects and recent publications via our *Yearbook*. In order to do so, please contact us at: compares.yearbook@gmail.com.

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