

The Translator, the Interpreter and the Dialogue of Languages in the Digital Age

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Edited by

Adriana Neagu

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FOREWORD

The challenges digital culture poses to translation are, as the contributions to this collection show, being received by academics and practitioners as an opportunity to reaffirm the values of translation as a practice and translation studies as an academic discipline, rather than as a threat.

I have always regarded translation studies as a discipline at the very heart of the humanities because of its fundamental intercultural dimension. It is not just the field of literary translation that requires more than simply an ability to understand two languages. Translation and interpreting are not simply about transmitting meaning from one language into another; they always involve an aspect of mediation and a sensitivity to the broader society and culture of the target language, as well as the social and interpersonal context in the moment of interpreting. Good translators have to be connoisseurs of society and culture, as translation involves communication between two people from different traditions, customs, and cultures.

This primacy of intercultural understanding has not changed in the contemporary digital revolution, and although technological innovations may push translation and interpreting into a new realm, one where the human appears of secondary importance to the machine, the human capacity to guide and condition technological aspects of translation is more important than ever. This knowledge is revealed by the popular appreciation of the value of translation. While non-academics and non-specialists in translation may automatically welcome technological

advances in translation studies because of the promised benefits of technological modernisation (i.e. developments in technology are making it easier to communicate to those who speak different languages), a deeper anxiety is revealed in the way the practice of translation and the figure of the translator is represented in popular culture.

Consider the 2016 movie *Arrival*. Besides the familiar alien-invasion trope, immediately recognisable from blockbuster movies like *Independence Day*, this film was notable for focusing on the value of translation. The alien visitors are eager to communicate with humankind and therefore a specialist in translation needs to be deployed by the US army. The one chosen, Dr Louise Banks, is a Professor of Linguistics who is transported to Montana to co-ordinate the interplanetary translation effort. This depends on technological innovation as the aliens' visual form of communicating must be captured by computer and then analysed as a form of code. But, in addition to the technological competence Banks and her team utilize, it is her ability to understand the aliens on an intercultural level that is crucial—not only to understand the language, but to recognise that the visitors (at odds with the standard tropes of the genre) do not wish to do harm to humanity. It is this intercultural empathy that averts a potential interplanetary conflict, which would be disastrous for humankind.

The film, therefore, presents a refreshing alternative to the conventions of the alien-invasion genre, or even sci-fi as a whole, in that it does not just present an affirmation of the values of science and technology, but the values of the humanities in general, and translation studies in particular. While depicting a time-honoured sci-fi scenario, it also clearly articulates the sense of global risk that is typical of much of the tenor of our age. It deploys the tropes of science fiction to express an anxiety that is very much of our time: how liberal values are in danger of being overtaken by a

self-interested, forceful, and intolerant kind of politics. Its plot imagines alien beings visiting Earth, the disastrous consequences of which can only be averted by a transnational, indeed transplanetary, feat of translation.

Arrival thus articulates what we might consider an appreciation that translation is at the heart of the humanities. The film depicts a collaborative project that brings together researchers from the humanities and the sciences. In doing so, it conveys the more general values of human interaction, which lie at the very heart of the activity of translation. Translation is an activity sustained by a faith in the ‘human’: the values of remaining open to otherness, believing in self-fulfilment, and promoting intercultural communication. Translation has always been crucial in allowing different varieties of humans, with different languages, throughout the world, to come together ‘as one’. Now, more than ever, and not simply because of the consequences for translation of developments in digital technology, the values inherent in translation, as both a practice and an academic discipline, are vital to our transnational world.

Digital culture has had a dramatic impact on global society in a wide range of spheres, influencing how we belong to communities, how we consume cultural production, and how we participate in politics. The contributions to this collection provide a valuable complementary analysis on the specific consequences for translation in the digital age in a way that enables us to explore specific developments, such as online tools and virtual platforms; computer assisted translation (or CAT); practices in education or at conferences; as well as appreciating the continuing vitality of translation studies as a discipline.

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TRANSLATION AGENCY IN THE DIGITAL ERA: FREEDOM OR LIMITS TO FREEDOM IN THE POST-COMMUNIST ROMANIA OF THE 21ST CENTURY

SILVIA BLANCA IRIMIEA
AND ADINA-MARIA CORNEA

Agency

As an investigative concern, the concept of agency in translation attracted the interest of translation scholars in the 1990s when the term was defined by Sager (321). His definition of the agent, as quoted by Mary Shuttleworth in the *Dictionary of Translation Studies*, was ‘an intermediary position between a translator and an end user of a translation’ (in Shuttleworth, Cowie 7). John Milton and Paul Bandia expand on the role of agency in translation and credit agents for the ‘major historical, literary and cultural transitions/changes/innovations through translation’ (Milton & Bandia 1). As to who may be an agent, Milton and Bandia suggest that they can be text producers, mediators and all those who contribute to changes by means of expressing an attitude or creating a trend of thought that influences the audience’s and the editors’ perception of texts. Milton and Bandia also recognize the translator’s own contribution to the translated text (1). Further examples of agency include magazines, journals, and institutions, i.e. all those who contribute to the perception of a work (of art). Milton and Bandia opine that, through their

direct or indirect contribution, agents can change cultural, linguistic, and translation policies (2).

Sager states that agents are often individuals who perform several functions or roles simultaneously. For example, they may be individuals who devote their lives to principles or ideals and fight for them, while translating, teaching, and, finally, disseminating the works they have become attached to. Reference is made, in this respect, to those translators who have greatly contributed to the dissemination of foreign literature in their own countries in the past. In their 2009 book, *Agents of Translation*, Milton and Bandia emphasize the role of agents in changing and innovating culture and literature and insist on the contribution of those outstanding examples who challenged commonplace assumptions, thereby risking imprisonment, fines, or their own professional and personal lives (5). This has been the case for many translators in many countries who denounced and fought against tyrannical regimes, endangering themselves and even risking their liberty.

However, most of the agents who changed cultural and linguistic policies and behaviours, as well as many of those who studied agency-related phenomena, primarily dedicated their insights to literature, while neglecting, to a certain extent, the translation of non-fiction texts.

Milton and Bandia refer to two specific types of agent: 1) those who have affected or influenced the style of translation in force, who have made a number of translations available to their readership, and who have contributed to the spread of a particular kind of literature or the works of a particular writer; and 2) those who 'have helped or attempted to innovate by selecting new works to be translated and introducing new styles of translation' in their own literary culture (Milton & Bandia 2). Examples include Cemal Demircioğlu, Denise Merkel, Francis Jones, and Paul

Bandia. In some other cases, stylistic innovations related to politics and political views have been introduced by translators through their translations of Marxist, nationalist, and other ideas. Such examples are characteristic of authoritarian regimes, where translators purposefully select elements or translations that fit their own views about the society they live in and which they wish to change.

Patronage, Power, and Influence

Agency has been linked to several concepts all of which have influenced the evolution of human thought and cognition. After the *linguistic turn* of the early twentieth century, the *cultural turn* of the late twentieth century had a profound impact on literature and translation studies. The latter was the outcome of major social shifts in society and the analytical traditions of academia. It emerged among scholars of humanities and social sciences who brought culture to the foreground of scholarly debate. In translation studies, the cultural turn rose to prominence in the 1990s as scholars became more interested in translators and their work and in the factors that influenced translators, among which the necessity to pay more attention to the role of the target culture in translation was emphasised.

An often discussed concept is that of *patronage*, a product of the cultural turn of the late twentieth century, as coined by André Lefevere who discussed the role of patrons in the production of works of art. He defined the term patronage as ‘a religious body, a political party, a social class, a royal court, publishers, and, last but not least, the media, both newspapers and magazines and larger television corporations’ (Lefevere 15). Patrons have played different roles in different societies, such as regulating the literary system, awarding prizes, exercising censorship, and

influencing the education system. Systemic patronage was operating as early as Shakespeare's time, for example, whose works were patronised by the Earl of Southampton. In later times, states and education systems played significant roles in channelling the readership and mainstream cultural or literary trends in their desired direction. By means of their book, *Agents of Translation*, Milton and Bandia present a broad scene for the comprehension of patronage.

In his 1992 book, *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, Lefevere classifies patronage into: undifferentiated patronage, which exists in totalitarian systems where the writers are attached to rulers, party leaders (as in single-party systems) and benefit their patrons in the way they praise them; and differentiated patronage, which is the kind of patronage that functions in free market environments (15).

As a rule, in totalitarian systems patronage that is favoured or patronised by (political) institutions, rulers, leaders, is somewhat overt and is political; while endowed or talented individuals, who are less favoured by authorities, can also play a role in influencing culture and published literature by showing their dissatisfaction or disagreement with the status quo, or trying, in their own way, to bring about change.

Some other influences of patronage can be exerted by agents who act on behalf of national authorities or appointed institutions, with responsibilities to raise national consciousness by promoting a form of culture or literature, such as ones related to discriminated groups or minority ethnic groups. Other acts of patronage, national, cultural, political and social in nature, may take a stronger national form: promoting the creation and spread of national languages or minority/ethnic cultures and languages; creating or fostering identities; and acquiring national recognition of particular values. Such practices follow overt or hidden strategies of harmonising national cultural

landscapes, examples of which include the same policies and strategies that are employed by democratic regimes across the world (such as those found in the US and the European Union).

Milton and Bandia state that ‘many minority cultures have survived the onslaught of dominant global languages through a deliberate translation of themselves into such global languages, which they subvert through innovative linguistic practices for the purpose of asserting their national identity, making their national cultures more visible and known’ (Milton & Bandia 3). Milton and Bandia argue that ‘the crisis of identity is being addressed through the agency of creolisation as self-translation’ (Milton & Bandia 3). They also admit that writers who come from peripheral, marginalised, dominated or minority cultures have become *agents of translation* insofar as their works enter the international literary marketplace as a reaction to the hegemony of globally important or powerful languages and cultures.

A particularly important role in the education and dissemination of cultural, linguistic and literary values is played by *publishing companies*, whose traditional role as agent has been to influence and change public literary or cultural taste by promoting a particular culture or literature. This phenomenon has become a common practice in all societies and will be analysed further in the following. For example, Heinemann Educational Books, as an agent of changing literary taste, has played an active role in the promotion and dissemination of African literature both in its original form and in translation across the world. Heinemann had the educational or didactic mission of marketing British books in Africa, but soon realised that spreading African literature around the world offered better opportunities. As a result, it became ‘the vanguard of the movement for representing African identity in the world’ (in Milton & Bandia 4).

By spreading and increasing the production of books, Heinemann, along with other well-healed publishing houses, saw the possibility of selling books at low prices and making them more affordable to a broader readership. Heinemann acquired yet another remarkable success by selecting marginalised women writers from particular patriarchal regimes for publication. Last, but not least, Heinemann also made known to the world many writers who had fled into exile from totalitarian regimes or who were imprisoned for their political views. Milton and Bandia state without any hesitation that the agency and patronage of Heinemann in disseminating and canonising African literature ‘is without parallel’ on the continent (Milton & Bandia 5).

However, patronage, just like any other social or cultural process or phenomenon, is linked to power, and once the translator is associated with the “wrong” or “opposition” party, they and their patron may end up being persecuted, imprisoned, and, in some cases, even assassinated. A particular case, in this respect, is provided by Bento Monteiro Lobato, who adapted *Peter Pan*. He altered the original story and turned it into a political work the content and message of which expressed opposition to the Brazilian political system. As a consequence, Bento Monteiro Lobato, a writer, translator and publisher who criticised Brazil through negative and disdainful imagery, was imprisoned for three months in 1941.

In his writings, Lefevere tackles the concept of power, the influence patronage may exert on agents of translation, and the role that personal relationships play within the system. Lefevere speaks about an ‘undifferentiated’ form of patronage, which exists in countries where a totalitarian regime favours a writer committed to serving the court or the power; and ‘differentiated’ patronage, which exists in free market systems (15). Lefevere concludes that patronage is both important and influential

in regards to who and what gets published, but reveals little about the individual agents who influence the publishing policies and who are dissatisfied with the *status quo*, opposing the existing regime. On the other hand, Stephen Greenblatt, a proponent of New Historicism, presents the *agency of individuals* in society as ‘these selves, conditioned by the expectations of their class, gender, religion, race and national identity, are constantly effecting changes in the course of history’ and states that ‘it is this insistence on agency’, which is inevitable, and which even as ‘inaction or extreme marginality’ acquires meaning and implies intention (Greenblatt 164, in Milton & Bandia 6). Greenblatt argues that ‘Every form of behaviour [...] is a strategy: taking up arms or taking flight is a significant social strategy, but so is staying put, minding one’s own business, turning one’s face to the wall’ and concludes that ‘[a]gency is virtually inescapable’ (in Milton & Bandia 6).

Although not perceptible, academic and literary power and relations may influence issues such as who is published, who is promoted, who receives a scholarship, tenure, or a job, and who is removed from the literary landscape and exiled.

Milton and Bandia argue that ‘[t]he way in which ideas in Translation Studies gain currency, even the way in which Translation Studies itself has gained influence, and conflicts between agencies, is a theme’ scholars interested in agency issues should reflect on and discuss (Milton & Bandia 8).

Habitus

Individuals live in societies and hold various roles as members of that particular society. They act by virtue of their job, their affiliation, the influence they possess over other members, and by virtue of the life

experiences they have acquired through their exposure to the environment in which they live and act. In order to be accepted by society and be successful professionals they have to act in compliance with the social norms or conventions set up by society. These norms or conventions, for example, will tell professionals how to act or perform their accepted or assigned roles. As such, in order to be employed and published or rewarded, professional translators have to comply with the conventions set up by the society in which they work.

To explain the relationship between individuals and the society they live and work in, Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) used the concept of *habitus*. According to Bourdieu, *habitus* stands for the *cultural capital* of individuals, i.e. the deeply ingrained habits, skills and dispositions that individuals possess due to their acquired life experiences. Bourdieu, one of the most influential twentieth century social theorists, used sporting metaphors to describe *habitus*, explaining it as a ‘feel for the game’, being the way in which individuals know how to react to certain social situations or ‘games’ they find themselves in.

Bourdieu’s work has influenced translation studies scholars and has shed light on the role of agency in translation. *Habitus*, as a form of governing capital, was taken up by Daniel Simeoni to point out the role of translation agency in his essay “The Pivotal Status of the Translator’s *Habitus*”. Simeoni holds that, just like in any profession, translation trainees learn norms from their teachers and practitioners, norms which they need to follow if they hope to become successful translators or interpreters. However, according to Milton and Bandia, Simeoni separates *habitus* from norms ‘stressing the roles of translators’ as agents of translation (8). Quoting Toury, Simeoni argues: ‘It seems to me that Toury places the focus of the relevance on the pre-eminence of what controls the

agents' behaviour—"the translational norms", while, a '*habitus*-governed account, by contrast, emphasizes the extent to which translators themselves play a role in the maintenance and perhaps the creation of norms' (Simeoni 26). Simeoni wished to further understand what enhances 'socio-cognitive skills' and, finally, what generates 'the micro-level of stylistic variation' (Simeoni 31). Looking at present-day translators, Simeoni argues that they have departed from other older models or patterns of *habitus* where translators defied the mainstream tradition, and have become more servile and loyal to the author, as they have to cope with a broader array of tasks and experiences. Simeoni reasons that this passivity in their *habitus* is the outcome of the complex environment translators work in and the variety of client demands they have to comply with (31). Indeed, translators face new challenges, and have to adapt to different norms, different texts, and different translation requirements. Additionally, the translator works in a different environment governed by other dominant factors, such as computers, translation tools, and applications, which have changed their work entirely. Finally, in order to survive in a competitive professional environment, translators need to be permanently updated about relevant software tools and keep up with advancements in translation studies. Indeed, nowadays translators attend academic and master's degree programmes to familiarise them with translation theories, traditions, and best practices.

In opposition to the passive *habitus*, Milton and Bandia quote Helen Buzelin's article, "Unexpected Allies: How Latour's Network Theory Could Complement Bourdieusian Analyses in Translation Studies", in which she presents another case: more pro-active translators who adopted the theories of Henri Meschonnic and Antoine Berman in France and who, at that time, were thought to presage a change in the *habitus* of literary

translators in France. These tendencies of pro-active translators were considered dangerous and were blamed for their rigidity and having lost sight of the ‘pleasure’ of the text (Buzelin 204 in Milton & Bandia 9).

As presented by Milton and Bandia (10), Bourdieu’s contribution to translation studies in his 1990 essay “Les conditions sociales de la circulation internationale des idées” was analysed by Meylaerts, who discussed the relationship between ideas and national/international boundaries and insisted on the view that ‘intellectual life’ is rather confined by national contexts (278). Milton and Bandia suggest that Bourdieu tackles the role of those agents who introduce new elements into a foreign culture calling them ‘gate-keepers’; he exemplifies this particular case with Heidegger who was ‘imported’ to France to reduce the dominance of Sartre’s ideas. Perhaps, most of the time, gate-keepers try to change a translator’s *habitus*. This is the case with Lobato, whose translation ‘introduced a more colloquial Portuguese’ (10).

Habitus and Politics

Politics has made its way into all aspects of human life and has also penetrated the translation environment. Politics is an inherent characteristic of any human society and individuals are ‘by nature political animals’ (Aristotle) who enter into social relations with one another or with other communities. In this perspective, individuals made social contracts with institutions and created governments for their own defence, which they eventually feared, resisted, overthrew, or improved; they accepted institutions, political relationships and processes in exchange for their preservation and welfare. From the political point of view, translation

agents are either partisan and defend the nation's *status quo*, or they fight an oppressive system that works against the nation's best interests.

In liberal democracies around the world, where an individual's rights are protected by constitutions and laws, translators are at liberty to follow the constraints of their profession. They are very much 'regulated' by the theories, traditions, and conventions established by professional or scientific communities, by appointed commissions, by training institutions, and finally, by clients, the regular consumers of translation products, and the readership. In many Western cultures, professional intermediaries work as literary agents or agencies, whose role is to promote and market the literary works of various writers.

Politics is about the use of power, the distribution of power, relations of power, ideology, and typical discourses and genres harboured in/by different societies. An increasing number of research traditions have turned to the study of language and discourse used to express power relations in society. Traditions like critical linguistics and critical discourse analysis investigate how and to what extent discourse reflects power relations between power holders and weaker members in a society. Writers use a particular form of language or a particular discourse as part of their *habitus* to express support or disagreement, or even to fight against an unfriendly or autocratic regime.

Translator agency has come under closer scrutiny in the last two decades and has been studied from different perspectives. Many of these studies have focused on individual agency or agents, the way in which they influence the selection (or rejection) of translated books, and how such translation was carried out. Their personal contributions rely on the choice of translation strategies, the use of which source texts, issues of typography and layout, and fees etc. (Paloposki 2006). Other scholars have

discussed the collective norms instituted or imposed to guard the translation process and limit the freedom of writers and translators. At the same time, translation scholars have shed light on the balance between individual agency and collective norms, taking place in an ever more complex translational space dominated by several influential actors, including writers, translators, norms, publishers, the readership, intermediaries, and all the issues that affect these actors.

This study seeks to showcase the freedom of a translator or lack thereof in Romania before and after the 1989 revolution to draw some conclusions on the relationship between translator-agency and society.

The Role of Individual Agency versus the Role of the Social

Individual agents of translation have been studied from different perspectives since the 1990s. The freedom of a translator depends, firstly, on the position they hold in society, or rather the role assigned to them by society. Among the factors that determine the translator's position are the expectations of the reader. Over the past few decades, diverse researchers have insisted on the importance of various issues related to the agency of individual translators and the subjectivity apparent in their translations has been studied more and more.

Regarding *individual agency*, Kaisa Koskinen (99) classifies the visibility of the translator as either textual, paratextual, or extratextual. Paloposki (191) argues that Koskinen's classification can be applied to agency as well, with textual agency referring to the translator's voice, which is perceived in the text through strategies of 'deliberate manipulation, stylistic preferences or habits (Baker 2000; Gullin 2002; Pekkanen 2007) or functionalist-oriented adaptation or anything in

between' (191). Paratextual agency is made visible in the insertions, notes, and prefaces written by the translator, while extratextual agency refers to the capacity of the translator to have a say in the selection of the book to be translated, the use of different editions or intermediary translations, and the role of translators to stand up and speak in favour of a translation explaining their point of view and strategies. Furthermore, the translator may make a further contribution by selecting books for a broader audience, thus addressing the whole market and acquiring a formative role in influencing or educating the people and their tastes.

On the other hand, those interested in *collective translation agency* have examined the norms and constraints imposed on translators by various institutions and authorities. Some researchers, including Siobhan Brownlie, have noted the difference in approach between Barman and Toury on the relation of the individual to society; the conclusion put forward is that: '[w]hile not denying the role of the other pole, Barman thus gives emphasis to the individual, and Toury to the social' (Brownlie 102). After comparing these frameworks and perspectives, Brownlie reconciles them by setting them in different social circumstances: 'Rather, difference may be seen as a question of supplementarity. Toury's work was a necessary move away from a prescriptive, source-text oriented framework in Translation Studies, but in no way does it erase or make redundant earlier work on translations'. 'Translation is not separate from any other human action: the role of the social and the role of the individual vary and are negotiated each time anew in new circumstances'. Brownlie justifies such an approach by stating that the 'study of such negotiations is and has been one of the major concerns of modern sociology' (Brownlie 102 in Paloposki 190). According to Paloposki, '[t]racing the origins of this discourse to Karl Marx, Anthony Giddens (1984: xxi, 162-179)

formulates an account of human agency and “structure”, i.e. the constraints imposed by economic and political systems’ (190).

Agencies in the Service of Authors

Economy activity has been the engine of progress in human society and has required social change, including in education and the labour market. The labour market has often driven society forward by finding means to solve a professional or consumer-related gap by matching certain needs and demands. This is also the case for writers or authors who are at a loss when they are to publish a book or are in search for a publisher who might be ready to take the risk or share the success of publishing their writing. The gap between writer and author and publishing house has become filled by agencies—businesses that find the right publisher for a writer or find the writer for a publisher.

In the UK, several agencies operate nationally and internationally, providing writers with opportunities to be successful and become recognized in an increasingly competitive market. Such agencies work with a large teams of specialised editors, typesetters, designers, illustrators, and proofreaders who have the success of the author in mind though their work is for both author and customer, while keeping a keen interest in dissemination to the mainstream readership. Agencies operate successfully in the USA, France and many other democratic countries and display a high degree of specialisation and professionalization. This need for specialised agencies or intermediaries has been felt in Romania as well, where agencies have been less popular. Looked at from the perspective of the *habitus*, this does not imply a restriction on the writer or author’s rights or status, but rather a diversification and broadening of the spectrum

of qualifications that are linked to writing, as new opportunities given to a writer to help their writing/authorial persona and enjoy public recognition. Publishing with an agency appears attractive to any writer or translator, seeming simple and fast. Once the electronic version of a manuscript is submitted to the publishing house, an editorial team assesses the content, the subject matter, the quality of the manuscript, and its suitability for the publishing house's list of work. If the work is found appropriate, the publishing house or an editor may make an offer and suggest the terms and conditions for publishing the work. A simple search of the Internet brings up an impressive number of results such as 'find a publisher', 'join our team', 'no agent needed', or 'send us your work', with online offers and specialised literary agency directories testifying to the size of the 'find a publisher' market.

This is a two-way process, however, which also works from agencies towards writers. Sites focused on 'publishers seeking writers' also tend to make their way onto the market. Apart from assisting young or unpublished writers make their work known, this unprecedented boost of publishing offers can signal another phenomenon: publishing too many works leading to quality being compromised. Once books become means of making money in various ways and become commodified, quality may be deemed to suffer.

In France, for example, publishing houses and editors prefer to deal directly with the writers or authors, and foreign authors contact translators rather than publishing houses. In the case of well-known or successful authors, French publishing houses approach foreign publishing houses instead of liaising directly with the writers. Apparently, this system functions satisfactorily since France is a country where a large number of translations are published. At the same time, literary agents prove to be

efficient and do their work well and French literature is the most widely translated literature domain in the USA.

In Romania, in spite of the many sites inviting writers to send their manuscripts to helpful agencies or agents, well-known writers work directly with translators and publishing houses and vice-versa, as direct and trustworthy relationships are more treasured, and because such a relationship is based on mutual trust and experience. Lesser known writers or young writers may appeal to the services of agents, but then they may experience long and winding relationships where confidence and mutual trust have to be built over time. The fact that the website of the Romanian Writers' Union and its Bucharest branch promotes the services of foreign agencies is encouraging for less experienced writers and offers a new, modern approach to the issue.

Freedom or Limits on Translators' Freedom in Communist and Post-Communist Romania

Firstly, it should be stated that little literature has been published on the issue of individual and collective translation agency in Romania. Secondly, there is little or no recorded evidence regarding the circumstances in which translators performed their duties in the past and even less information on how translators do their job today. In the past, during the communist years, translations were rarely undertaken, and translation agencies and the role of translator were even less widely known. Translations were published in literature books, magazines, and dailies. Translators published their comments on translated literature in reviews, analyses, commentaries, and interviews primarily in literary

magazines. Literary magazines published commentaries and editorials on translations, mostly written by reputable poets and writers.

The scarcity of literature on agency in translation in the period that followed the 1989 revolution is partly due to the decentralisation and the fragmentation of Romanian society. Romania became a democratic republic; it was subject to a less heavily controlled economy with a market driven by various forces, where state enterprises and private ones competed for power and financial profit.

Literary critics and writers of the twenty-first century have become more involved in contemplating and (re)constructing the translational *persona* of the literary translator. Contributors have built an online community, which has made the activity of translators known to a larger audience, enhanced debates, and encouraged contributions.

For most of the *communist period*, translators were little known and little promoted; their routines were hidden or overshadowed by other more significant cultural, political, or social issues. Their existence was, in general, overshadowed by the personality of the writer of the source text or by the topic itself. However, in spite of a lack of substantial evidence, this study will highlight some aspects and put forward some pieces of information from the specialist literature, which can be used to build a case on the freedom or lack thereof of translators in communist and post-communist Romania.

1. The Pre-Communist Period

The post-war period was a period in which the greatest Romanian writers and poets undertook to translate classics of world literature. Mihai Eminescu and Ion Luca Caragiale were followed by a plethora of poets

and writers. Lucian Blaga, one of the most representative poets of Romanian literature, translated Goethe's *Faust* as well as the work of G. E. Lessing into Romanian in the late 1950s. Tudor Vianu translated Shakespeare and Goethe into Romanian in the 1960s; Alexandru Philippide translated Baudelaire and E. A. Poe; Ion Vinea translated Shakespeare's tragedies (*Henry V*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *The Winter's Tale*) for ESPLA (Editura de Stat pentru Literatură și Artă) and E. A. Poe's romantic stories (especially *Berenice*, *Ligeia* and *The Fall of the House of Usher*). Vinea is given credit for translations of Balzac, Romain Rolland, and Washington Irving. As with many of the writers, poets, and translators of this period, Ion Vinea was kept under surveillance, subject to wire-tapping, and persecuted by the Securitate¹. This period, as well as the one following, was characterised by the resistance and struggle of writers, poets, and translators against wartime policies and the belligerent powers or their leading parties. Collective agency was weak, given the focus of the powers involved in the distribution of power and military conflicts and translators had to try to find their way through these troubled political and military circumstances.

During these decades, Tudor Arghezi, a controversial intellectual, poet, and translator, was imprisoned without trial in a penitentiary along with several other political prisoners like Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, Ion Gheorghe Maurer, and even Nicolae Ceaușescu. After his release, and after Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej consolidated his power over the state and the Party post-1952, Arghezi came to be considered an asset to the new, popular regime and was awarded several prizes. Recognition abroad made him a recipient of the Herder Prize. He held a unique place in Romanian

¹ The Securitate was the repressive state organ assigned the role of protecting the communist regime in Romania.

literature for his contribution to poetry and children's literature; but he is also remembered for his translations of Molière, La Fontaine, and Krilov in the 1950s and 1960s. His remarkable translations from Russian were considered masterpieces. Such translators emphasised the role of individual agency in translation; going beyond translation they managed to create masterpieces that stood as an expression of their own talent and represented the writer less. Their translations were dominated by their creative genius, which could break down the pre-communist limits of collective agency and, given the swift political changes in society, they could be pardoned and rehabilitated for their dissident ideas or activities after the fall of contested regimes.

In general, the writers and poets who distinguished themselves in the post-war period and lived through the 1950s and 1960s expressed their views openly and accused the regime of crimes. Most of them were dissidents and tried through their work or translations to pay tribute to the great writers of world literature. Some of them had supporters or shadow patrons, who tried to protect them from the Securitate or the communist authorities. This was the case with Arghezi who was protected by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej.

At the conclusion to the communist period, Paul Cernat ("Traducerile fac o literatură. Pentru o istorie a literaturii române prin traduceri") states that the period was one of 'cultural survival' through translation. In the 1950s, prominent writers underwent a so-called requalification process as they produced unsurpassed translations of world literature.

From the perspective of translation agency, the pre-communist period created a generation of translators who contributed to the dissemination of foreign literature in Romania, in spite of the harsh, outspoken political post-war changes and the communist threat that swept over Central and

Eastern Europe. Their dedicated attitude stimulated them to create unique translations, whose stylistic innovations and creative genius made their works representative of a significant body of translation. Blaga, Vianu, Philippide, Vinea, Arghezi and many others enriched Romanian literature by selecting, translating, and disseminating the works of renowned Western writers and poets.

2. The Communist Years

The communist period stretched over more than five decades in Romania (from the 1940s to 1990s), including the popular regime of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, which preceded the period known as ‘communist’. Communism in Romania is best known as having led by Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife, Elena (from 1965 to 1989).

Generally, historians distinguish two periods making up the Romanian communist era: the first between 1965 and 1971; and the second between 1971 and 1989. In his first year as ruler, as General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party, Ceaușescu’s policies were more liberal and oriented towards the West and the USA. This was a period of economic relief when blocks of public housing were built for workers and the entire population was given access to free education. Later on, in particular after Ceaușescu’s visits to other communist countries, he adopted a different approach, one based on a personality cult and extreme nationalism; he broke relations with Western countries and the Soviet Union. All activities and relations were controlled by the Communist Party and those who did not obey the Party’s rules were punished. Peoples’ lives changed drastically after Ceaușescu decided to pay off all the external debt of the country in the 1980s. This decision reduced people’s welfare, imposed