

## The economies of interlingual intercultural transfer: Towards a complex picture of translators and interpreters in Slovakia

MARTIN DJOVČOŠ – IVANA HOSTOVÁ – EMÍLIA PEREZ –  
PAVOL ŠVEDA

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Increased interest in translators and interpreters as active mediators of intercultural communication has been most consistently emphasized by the sociology of translation and interpreting (T&I).<sup>\*1</sup> More recently – as academia and the public increasingly perceive what seems to be an inevitable global ecological crisis –, there have also been calls for rethinking T&I from the point of view of political economy (Baumgarten and Cornella-Detrell 2019). As a number of scholars (cf., e.g., Bednářová 2013; Kusá 2005; Lefevere 1992; Pliešovská 2016; Tymoczko 2007; Tyšš 2017) have argued, the process of bringing a foreign text into a cultural space – from the choice of translator/interpreter and the selection of text to be brought to the target culture to the specific decisions on each level (cf., e.g., Toury 1995) – is demonstrably a political and economic question. The present article will attempt a partial mapping of the changing social position of translators and interpreters in Slovakia through some of the questions Andrew Chesterman (2006, 21) deems relevant in the sociology of translation with regards to translation as practice viewed from the perspective of the relationship between translators/interpreters and other agents. At the same time, we will try to shed light on the findings through the prism of the region's political economy. In an attempt to do so, we will present individual probes into several interconnected interlingual and intercultural exchange subfields<sup>2</sup> (literary translation, specifically poetry translation, interpreting, and audiovisual translation – AVT).<sup>3</sup> Through a diachronic analysis of the position of the agents active in these subfields (visibility, economic conditions etc.), we will sketch an initial outline for further mapping of the complex sociology of the T&I profession in Slovakia as seen from the perspective of the political, economic and ideological forces that shape it.<sup>4</sup>

The first two sections of the article will address the question of the changes in the visibility<sup>5</sup> and status of literary translators by analyzing paratexts and conducting interviews. In the first part, the article will look at the visibility of literary translators in a diachronic perspective, mapping the amount of feedback (in reviews) their work has received since the mid-20th century to the present day. We decided to look at lit-

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erary translators mainly because, prior to 1989, literary translation dominated translation practices into Slovak. From these, poetry translators held the highest status.<sup>6</sup> We have no sociological data concerning the number of translators or interpreters prior to 1989; although the recently published dictionary of Slovak literary translators of the 20th century (Kovačičová and Kusá 2015, 2017) does provide a certain clue (it lists 439 translators of literary texts who translated from 134 literatures<sup>7</sup>), its index is far from comprehensive. The statistical overview will be followed by an analysis of interviews with poetry translators active in the field before and after the fall of state socialism in Czechoslovakia. We addressed four such agents who had been publishing book translations for at least a decade before the political changes brought about by the Velvet Revolution. The sample does not claim to provide statistically relevant data – what it does instead is to offer a qualitative deepening of the first part of the article with the aim to clarify further paths of thought. The third section will probe into the archives of secret state service on the interpreters' profession and their position with regards to the socialist regime. The final section will map the gradual professionalization of AVT in the country. It explores the status of the professionals working in T&I field in Slovakia and will provide data for making preliminary conclusions clarifying the complex relations between the ideology,<sup>8</sup> politics (and policies) and economy and the social status of the translator/interpreter.

External factors conditioning translation, such as economic models, geopolitical and linguistic situation, political gestures (political interference with translation and translating), religious disagreements or fragmentation and discontinuity of translating and translators as agents of translation (Bednárová 2013) tell us little about the translators' and interpreters' "experienced" and "perceived" habitus. In Chesterman's view, the public image of a translator is comprised of such elements as the "discourse on translation, representation of translators in literature, customer satisfaction, feedback, rates of pay" (2006, 21). The public image of translators and interpreters as a result of complex economic and political relations is, we believe, responsible for the historical lack of visibility of these professions.

We believe that the "experienced" and "perceived" habitus can be viewed from these three main perspectives:

1. perception of translators/interpreters by society vs. their actions;
2. (self-)perception of translators/interpreters within their field(s) vs. their actions;
3. perception of society by translators/interpreters.

The first area may be investigated through thorough research in media, looking for how often and in which context translators are mentioned when translations are publicly discussed. The second point can be investigated through structured interviews with translators, and the third area – which will not be touched upon here – is concerned with the identity of translators.<sup>9</sup>

## THE PERCEPTION OF LITERARY TRANSLATORS

This section will focus on the first of the three areas through which the professional habitus of translators and interpreters can be studied, i.e. on the perception of translators by society vs. their actions. The question we will try to answer is the fol-

lowing: Has the Slovak literary space – and, by extension, Slovak society – been aware of translators, and has their perception been influenced by the officially endorsed ideologies? Or, in other words – is the binary narrative of the pre-1989 totalitarian regime versus post-1989 neoliberal capitalism applicable to the description of the (possible) changes in the social and economic standing of translators and interpreters in Slovakia? In an effort to find a relevant and empirically based answer, we investigated translators' visibility during five different periods in Slovak history which were dominated by different political values: 1945–1948; 1949–1956; 1957–1963; 1964–1968 and 2007–2017 (for discussions of the periodization of the state socialist era in Slovak culture see Bednářová 2015a, 2015b; Marčok et al. 2006; Mikula, Májeková, and Mikulová 2005; Pliešovská 2016; Zajac and Jenčíková 1989). The first period was characterized by the political and cultural struggle between East and West after World War II. Democratic forces typical of the pre-war period First Czechoslovak Republic resisted the ultimately successful proponents of totalitarian power. After the “victorious February”, as the official propaganda called the 1948 coup d'état, totalitarian Soviet-centered rule took power. The second period was dominated by political trials, the prosecution of ideas that were not in line with the regime and by strong censorship. It ended in 1956 with the 20th National Convention of the Communist Party, protests in Poland and the Hungarian “counter revolution”. In the period between 1957 and 1963, the system started to ease the tension, although there was still very strong ideological pressure demanding ideological orthodoxy. The fourth period was characterized by the efforts to develop what Alexander Dubček called “socialism with a human face,” which eventually ended in 1968 when the military forces of the Warsaw Pact crushed the movement. The following period of so-called normalization lasted until the Velvet Revolution in 1989. From the decades following the fall of state socialism, we decided to look more closely at the time following the year 2007, when T&I became a regulated profession in Slovakia.

For the first four periods, we analyzed 305 reviews of American fiction and poetry translated into Slovak and published in 29 magazines.<sup>10</sup> The basic criteria of visibility were as follows: mentions of the translator's name and qualitative features of the translation, in other words, whether the reviewers spoke of the translation in a positive or negative way. In the current article, we decided to focus only on translations from English, but in the future, it would be interesting to compare these with translations from Russian. Since we analyzed the situation before and after the Velvet Revolution, we assumed that there might be some differences in the perception of the translator. For the period between 1945 and 1968, only reviews published in magazines and newspapers were analyzed. We did not look at essays by translators, translator's notes, prefaces, postfaces (paratextual information as such). Most information about books and translators in the pre-internet era reached the general public via print and broadcast media. Television mainly dealt with films and other programs, which is the issue we will address in the section on AVT. Therefore, we were interested in how much information the public got from literary magazines dedicated to the wider readership. The total corpus, encompassing 483 reviews (including the reviews of poetry translations) in total, is presented in Table 1 and 2.

Period	Overall number of reviews of translations from American literature	Overall number of analyzed reviews of translations from American literature	Percentage of reviews covered by the research
<b>1945–1948</b>	54 (13.5 per year)	30	56%
<b>1949–1956</b>	103 (13 per year)	52	50%
<b>1957–1963</b>	146 (21 per year)	87	60%
<b>1964–1968</b>	173 (35 per year)	136	79%
<b>Total</b>	<b>476 (20 per year)</b>	<b>305</b>	<b>64%</b>

Table 1: Corpus of analyzed reviews 1945–1968

For the period 2007–2017, we drew our data from the leading online bookseller, martinus.sk. According to official statistics sent to us by the website administrator, the site registers a million clicks per month; it may therefore be suggested that the current social image of translators in Slovakia is to a great extent created in this very place.<sup>11</sup>

Period	Books investigated	Overall amount of comments to award-winning translations from English
<b>2007–2017</b>	25	178

Table 2: Corpus of analyzed reviews 2007–2017

In each review, we looked at the presence/absence of the translator's name. We were also interested in if and how the translation was mentioned (positive vs. negative remarks; see Table 3). For the period 2007–2017, we analyzed the comments under the book and looked for the same features (see Table 4).

Period	Analyzed reviews	Translator's name	Remarks about translators	Positive remarks	Negative remarks
<b>1945–1948</b>	30	19 (63%)	12 (40%)	9 (30%)	3 (10%)
<b>1949–1956</b>	52	27 (52%)	13 (25%)	8 (15%)	5 (10%)
<b>1957–1963</b>	87	29 (33%)	22 (25%)	14 (16%)	8 (9%)
<b>1964–1968</b>	136	49 (36%)	16 (12%)	14 (10%)	2 (1%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>305</b>	<b>124 (41%)</b>	<b>63 (21%)</b>	<b>45 (15%)</b>	<b>18 (6%)</b>

Table 3: Visibility markers 1945–1968

The final chart looks at 178 reader reviews of 25 translations from English that had received the Ján Hollý Prize for translation.<sup>12</sup>

Period	Books analyzed	Overall number of comments	Translator's name mentioned with the book title	Remarks about translators	Positive remarks	Negative remarks
<b>2007–2017</b>	25	178	20 (80%)	19 (11%)	10 (6%)	6 (3%)

Table 4: Visibility markers 2007–2017

From the numbers stated above, several interesting conclusions may be drawn. First of all, we may see that translators enjoyed the highest recognition by review-

ers – observable on all four levels we investigated – in the period between 1945 and 1948 when pro-democracy forces, educated people used to expressing their free will within intellectual circles, were still quite prominent. The decline started after the Communist Party seized power and, despite dramatic political changes, continues until the present. Although the fact that one of the online bookseller Martinus (in most of the analyzed cases) does state the name of the translator, the reviews still continue to ignore the mediator (as illustrated in Tables 3 and 4 when looking at the percentage of mentions of the translator's name and the number of comments on translation by the readership). Remarks on translation are usually limited to a single sentence, whether it is a good or bad translation.<sup>13</sup> The most positive remarks concerned poetry translators, both during the period of socialism and after.

Drawing on the data we gathered, the tendencies concerning the position of the literary translator into Slovak since the mid-20th century to the present seem to be clear:

1. Marginalization of translators in reviews by critics and readers' comments on the internet has been on the increase and does not depend on the official ideology;
2. The amount of positive remarks concerning published literary translation has decreased;
3. The recent shift in the official political and economic model of social organization in the Slovak cultural space has not had any influence on the amount of negative remarks on translations.

These tendencies seem to point to the fact that the amount of attention the literary translator in the Slovak cultural space has received in the given period had less to do with overt political changes and more with the position literature occupies in the infosphere as “the world of organised information” (Floridi 1999, x). The gradual decrease in the importance of literature in the public sphere – a process that goes hand in hand with the growing impact of other media on public discourse (radio and TV in the 20th century, cyberspace in the 21st century) – seem to be in direct proportion with the changes in the perceived habitus and visibility of the literary translator within the literary field as such. In what follows, we will try to determine the impact of the growing marginalization of the literary translator, as observed in the analyzed reviews, on the experienced habitus of the prototypical literary translational agent – the translator of poetry.

## THE STATUS OF POETRY TRANSLATORS

In this section, we would like to supplement the statistical analysis presented in the first part of the article with an insight into the “experienced” habitus (Chesterman 2006, 21) of poetry translators – how literary translators perceive their specialized professional status and whether their economic conditions have changed after the ideological function of literature was shifted into the periphery and the literary market came into being after 1989. Taking sociological analytical tools as the methodological basis (Bourdieu 1983; 1996) and drawing on analyses of post-1989 literary and publishing conditions in Slovakia (Ráková 2015, 2017a; 2017b; Šrank 2015a, 2015b), the local history of literary translation in the 20th century (Bednárová 2015a,

2015b; Kusá 1997, 2005; Passia and Magová 2015; Pliešovská 2016; Tyšš 2017; Vajdová 2000) and insights into globally-spread models of cultural policy (Bonet and Négrier 2018), we conducted and analyzed four interviews with poetry translators who published their first verse renditions between the late 1960s and early 1980s and who are still active in this field. In a small culture that publishes about 20 books of translated poetry a year,<sup>14</sup> the number of poetry translators who have been active in the sphere for decades cannot achieve statistical relevance. However, certain conclusions can be drawn even from such small-sized samples (cf. Jones 2011, 85–106). The interviews were conducted by email between 16–19 November 2019 and contained 7–11 questions. The four respondents, each of whom has published more than ten book translations, include two women and two men. Two of the translators specialize (besides other languages) on translating from Russian and two translate (also) from English. We inquired about their personal opinions on matters such as whether they perceived a change in the social status of the poetry translator after 1989 and their own experiences in the field ranging from the selection of poets to the fee they received.

The end of the era of state-regulated culture saw the radical remodeling of the publishing industry and the re-creation of the formal literary market and autonomous literary space. These processes had a major impact on the conditions of the production of literary translation. Here we will be looking at how these shifts affected the translators of poetry who are perceived as agents belonging to the most autonomous part of the literary field – the translation of poetry is understood as a subfield of non-translated poetry and is generally also done by poets. Poetry translators have been chosen because of poetry's specific (highly autonomous) position in the post-1989 literary field and because poetry has been – with various modifications – long seen as the carrier of culture in the Slovak literary space. As such, it has also inspired much of the pre-1989 local thinking on translation but has been losing its potential to inspire post-1989 translation and interpreting studies (TIS) in Slovakia. The subfield of translated poetry can therefore offer a sideways look at the complex situation in the current translational culture in the locale. We were interested in two components of the work and social role satisfaction as perceived by the translators themselves: (1) their perception of their status as translators of poetry and (2) their economic conditions.

The perceived social status of a translator of poetry can be determined by a combination of several factors. We were looking at translators' subjective impression of the visibility and the amount of feedback they and their work receive and the perception of the degree of recognition given to their status. Their answers varied in the degree and form of critical analysis of the overall cultural situation after 1989 and the attitude towards the current ways of cultural regulation. Since the value of translation in the literary field has, as a rule, been lower than that of the original creation (Maier 2009, 236), the self-identification of the subjects with the position on the spectrum poet–translator also influenced their responses. An analysis of the answers suggests that the perception of the status of the poetry translator and the axiological interpretation of this position depended on the respondents' attitudes to the coexisting mod-



els of cultural policy. These, according to Lluís Bonet and Emmanuel Négrier have diachronically evolved from models aimed at “the preservation of excellence and cultural democratization [...] to the emergence and evolution of later notions of cultural democracy, cultural development and cultural diversity” and, more recently, towards the “growing importance of the synergic relationship between culture and the economy, the development of creative economy policies” (2018, 64). Agents active in the literary field in present-day Slovakia adhere to one or more of these four co-existing models: the receding (1) excellence and (2) democratizing models that were dominant in the literary field before 1989 and (3) democracy and (4) creative economy that have become more dominant after 1989.

When asked about the current overall visibility of the poetry translator and his/her work, the respondents put different emphasis on the maker and the product, which indicates varying degrees of the internalization of the general invisibility of the translator as such. Satisfactory visibility of the product was observed by one of the translators who said that translated poetry is accessible, and it is the reader who only has to look for it. Her opinion was obviously based on the democracy model where the producer of culture is gradually pushed to the background and at the same time points to an internalized normalcy of the translator’s subservient role. Another respondent put the degree of visibility in direct proportion to the visibility of poetry in contemporary culture – which is to say generally low – but expressed satisfaction with this state because he viewed it as a neutral situation of literature freed from its politically subservient function. The remaining two respondents perceived a lack of visibility – despite the fact that, from among literary translators, as the analysis of the reviews presented in the introductory part of this article showed, they are the most positively received stratum – and view it negatively. However, they approached the matter from different angles – one took on the activist attitude and expressed the wish that the names of translators be made more visible. This attitude was determined by the perceived place of the respondent on the translator–poet spectrum. She is positioned on the right pole of the axis and feels it as an ethical obligation to promote the translator – also of her own poetry. The final response pointed to an adherence to the model of excellence and aesthetic exclusivity: the respondent stated that only the best translations should be made more visible.

Feelings of their work being valued similarly depended on the previously mentioned factors. The interviewee who combines several professional habitus (including the habitus of social critic)<sup>15</sup> viewed the matter with a significant degree of detachment and interpreted the perceived low recognition of poetry translators as a symptom of the position of translated poetry in post-1989 culture. The remaining three answers were more subjective: the respondent whose role in the literary field is closest to that of the translator stated that she feels that her work is recognized to the same degree as before 1989. The respondent closest to the poet pole of the axis determines recognition on the value of her non-translational work. The interviewee who positions himself between the poet and translator feels valued. Overall, it seems that the respondents were satisfied with the recognition they get for their translational work, but the source of recognition they sought was again signifying of the model of cul-

tural policy they adhere to, naming the size of readership and popularity on the one hand and formal prizes awarded by professional legitimizing bodies on the other.<sup>16</sup>

When turning to the economic conditions of the translators of poetry, it becomes very clear from the beginning that the respondents agree that it is not possible to make a living nowadays by only translating poetry and that it has been the case since they started translating poetry (in the late 1960s–early 1980s). The income and professional habitus of the poetry translator has been mixed both before and after 1989. The four respondents we interviewed combined several roles in their professional lives and their income came from several sources. When asked about differences between the rates, the three respondents whose professional habitus are not solely translational, agreed that the reward a poetry translator gets for her or his work at present is generally lower than it was before 1989. The fourth one, a prototypical literary translator, stated that the fee remains approximately the same. The discrepancies in the answers can be explained by the fact that both before and after 1989, there have been relatively large differences in the rates for translation per verse. As one of the respondents explains, although the calculation of the fee before 1989 was fixed (as he explains, the sum was based on the number of lines and the number of printed copies), the final sum varied depending on the position the translator occupied with respect to the state power – the respondent quotes a range in which the highest rate per line is 2.5 times greater than the lowest one. Currently, the print run of translated poetry is much lower, and the fee is usually based solely on the rate per line which varies to an even greater extent (approximately from €0.7 to €2). We were also interested in whether the rates the translators receive are sufficient when considering the time and difficulty of the job. Based on the answers, two respondents felt that financial remuneration was wholly unsatisfactory; the other two found it unsatisfactory for demanding and difficult poetry. A certain financial aid for poetry translators can be provided by fellowships, but as pointed out by one of the respondents, it often happens that when the translator picks the poet himself/herself, the conditions he/she is able to negotiate with the publishers prevent him or her from applying for grant schemes. The symbolic capital the given translator has been able to accumulate – despite or owing to the political changes of 1989 – and his or her ability to negotiate conditions with the publisher (from including the translation in their editorial plan to having a signed contract) play no small role in the field where most of the agency lies with the translating subject himself/herself.<sup>17</sup>

Overall, these brief insights into the matter supplement the statistical data – they suggest that the formal change of political regime had little impact on the status, visibility and economic conditions of the translator of poetry, which seem to have worsened slightly, but not radically.<sup>18</sup> Thus both visibility within the literary field and by extension, in society and the status of the translator as he/she experience it seem to be more dependent on the general position of aesthetically demanding literature in the public sphere. As shown in the previous part of the article, the amount of visibility of the literary translator can hardly be explained by the formal political changes with which we traditionally describe the Slovak cultural space. A pronounced drop can be observed in the mid- or late 1960s, since when the amount of attention devoted



to the literary translator has been more or less stable, decreasing only slightly (cf. Tables 3 and 4). This stability is corroborated by the statements of the translators, most empirically with respect to the economic conditions which have changed little since the interviewees entered the field. The following section will put these findings into a discussion with certain politically charged aspects of the habitus of pre- and post-1989 Slovak interpreters and allow us to compare the situation. We will try to find out if the perceived political alliance or formal loyalty to a specific regime (official communist ideology) had significant bearing on the ability of the interpreting agent to adjust to new proclaimed ideologies (connected with the EU).

### THE LOYALTIES OF INTERPRETERS BEFORE AND AFTER 1989

The specifics of the interpreting profession result in the fact that the amount of written evidence that would enable us to map it is limited, which has a strong impact on the methodologies researchers can use when investigating it. Another important aspect of the interpreting profession is proximity to foreigners – often personalities of political, economic or cultural importance. From 1948 to 1989, Czechoslovakia's totalitarian regime strictly limited the possibilities to travel abroad or meet people coming from beyond the Iron Curtain. It can therefore be presumed that language specialists – and especially interpreters who were to a certain extent exempt from this general rule – were a closely monitored group of professionals (cf. Baigorri-Jalon and Fernandez-Sanchez 2010; Footit and Kelly 2012; Laugesen and Gehrmann 2020). In this section of the article, we will take a look at the interpreting profession from the outside – through the lens of the pre-1989 secret police since it can be presumed that State Security (Štátna bezpečnosť) observed and penetrated the community of interpreters who were active before 1989.

During the 1980s, the last decade of state socialism, the activities of professional conference interpreters were generally closely connected with the predominant orientation of Czechoslovakia's economic, cultural, political and diplomatic activities in the countries of the Warsaw Pact and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. In the second half of the decade, however, a limited opening to the countries on the other side of the Iron Curtain can also be observed. This opening, especially in the cultural area, can be attributed to the process of perestroika and a slight relaxation in the strict policies of the Communist Party. Apart from a cultural opening, many contemporary interpreters who were active during this period recall a large number of technical conferences, where a broader language regime was used. Dominant conference languages during this period were French, German, Russian and English (Šindelářová 2015, 69–72). This development had only had a limited impact on the community of professional interpreters in the smaller federal component of Czechoslovakia, the Slovak Socialist Republic.

The political and economic position of the Slovak part of the federation created specific conditions for its interpreters. While both state languages of Czechoslovakia were formally equal and the share of the use of Slovak language in public was as a rule rather strictly observed, Slovak was rarely used in diplomatic contact and on the highest governmental level.<sup>19</sup> From that it followed that interpreters of Slovak were

mainly working for the devolved government in Bratislava or in academia, culture or industry in the Slovak Socialist Republic. Contemporary interpreters recall that often Czech interpreters travelled for assignments to Slovakia (72). As exposure to Western languages was very limited, the professional community was naturally dominated by interpreters of Russian, and to a lesser degree by other languages of the socialist bloc (German, Polish, Hungarian and Spanish among others).

Despite the changes in the political climate during perestroika and glasnost, the secret police continued its activities, safeguarding the Communist Party's monopoly of power. Interpreters were naturally a sensitive group of professionals, as they complied with multiple criteria the secret police used to identify targets for monitoring and possible cooperation. The Order of the Police Chief of the 1st branch of State Security, dated 19 January 1982, states that "the opportunities provided by investigation of the group of visa tourists who travel to the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic as tourists or as a part of commercial, cultural, scientific and social contacts with their Czechoslovak counterparts, are insufficiently used" ("Rozkaz náčelníka..." 1982, 1).<sup>20</sup> This and other available period documents confirm that foreigners travelling to Czechoslovakia were persons of interest together with those with whom they were in contact.

In order to inspect this phenomenon more closely and grasp the level of penetration of the state secret police into the community of interpreters, we have checked publicly available databases of the Slovak National Memory Institute ("Registračné protokoly..." 2019) which include information on all people who knowingly or unknowingly cooperated with State Security, were monitored by the secret police or were marked as enemies, suspicious individuals and other threats to the state. Since before 1989, there was no registry of interpreters or a professional organization that would list professionals working in the field, we have decided to check those individuals who were later, in the period 1999–2009, accredited as interpreters for European institutions. Some of the interpreters who were 25 or older in 1989 (born before 1964) and succeeded on the professional scene after the fall of state socialism by reaching the most prestigious form of accreditation would presumably have been recorded in the secret police archives.

Out of the 34 people who fulfilled these two criteria (born before 1964 and accredited as EU interpreters after 1999) 11 had their files in the State Security archives. Not all people who are in our sample actively worked as interpreters before 1989, they all, however, actively interpreted for at least several years after 1989 and later received accreditation to work as interpreters for EU institutions. They were recorded in the following categories:

1. Agents (3 interpreters): these individuals actively cooperated with counterintelligence officers, carried out their orders, actively identified suspicious foreign assets, approached them, collected intelligence and in some cases received remuneration or other benefits ("Rozkaz ministra..." 1978, 4);
2. Candidates for secret cooperation (5 interpreters): individuals who were (unknowingly) identified as possible sources of information or possible future cooperation, from whom intelligence could be collected or who could become active. They

were actively monitored and their reliability and loyalty were verified (“Rozkaz ministra...” 1978, 6–9);

3. Confidants (6 interpreters): these were selected from “reliable citizens of Czechoslovakia, Communist Party members and non-party members, who were voluntarily and, *on the basis of common trust* and their capacities, willing to report information to counterintelligence, provide necessary support and services” (“Vysvětlivky k...” 2019; emphasis in the original).<sup>21</sup>

These three categories of people knowingly or unknowingly cooperated with the secret police. It should be emphasized that several individuals from our set were listed in multiple categories (e.g. first they were listed as candidates for secret cooperation and later became agents). Four interpreters were, however, also monitored as part of preventive measures and were listed as “Monitored individuals”. In such cases, the secret police collected information in order to determine the level of threat a given individual presented or his or her exploitability for cooperation (“Vysvětlivky k...” 2019).

As we can see, the community of professional interpreters was considered a sensitive one and received considerable attention from State Security. Perhaps equally important is the fact that there were no individuals who were identified as “threats to the establishment” or other categories considered as dangerous or suspicious among all 34 interpreters in our sample, but at least a third of those who later became active interpreters and worked for European institutions were monitored by the secret police and were knowingly or unknowingly involved in counterintelligence activities. This probe confirms the findings of the previous sections of the article: although interpreters in the Slovak Socialist Republic were necessarily perceived by the central power as loyal – otherwise they would not have even been permitted to work in this sphere – and in some cases even presented possibilities for collaboration, the formal political change that took place in 1989 had little bearing on their ability to accommodate to the new political relations. Mechanisms governing the status of the interpreter seem to be other than adherence to the explicit political agenda promoted by the client (institutional bodies in this case) and may indeed lie in the economic circumstances. The skill of the interpreter, his/her flexibility, value for money, etc. as economic factors might have been of greater importance in the past four decades (given his/her ability to formally adhere to the client’s promoted ideology) than the concretization of the formal political working conditions. What does have a direct bearing on the profession, though, is legislation, more specifically language policies. Within Czechoslovakia, Slovak interpreters were not used at the state level which limited their number and influenced their social standing. After the creation of the Slovak Republic, which uses Slovak in all areas of the public sphere, the status of the interpreter changed accordingly. Slovakia’s inclusion into the EU also made it adhere to its language policies.

The final section exploring the sociology of the agents facilitating interlingual transfer into Slovak will examine the position of the audiovisual (AV) translator. This contextualization will enable us to confirm or reject the tentative hypothesis drawn from the previous three sections, namely that the political change and formally

endorsed ideology has less impact on the status of the translator/interpreter than the particulars of the political economy and language policies.<sup>22</sup>

## THE ACTIVITIES OF AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATORS

The present state of the AVT field as an academic discipline, the growing number of professional events and initiatives and educational activities for AV translators in Slovakia seem to reflect the appetite of the community as well as its efforts to achieve more convincing visibility and recognition. Understanding of the concept of professionalization in AVT, however, remains rather sketchy in Slovakia, firstly due to the manifold definitions of the term in relation to the translation profession as such, secondly because of the character of the occupation in the country, which was long represented by a smaller group of translators active in various fields – literary translation in particular. According to the current criteria used to judge professionalization, these translators were not trained specifically as AV translators, nor institutionalized, and until the 1990s AVT mostly represented only a portion of their overall income, although one would not dare label them as non-professional. The cultural and sociological contextualities of the past have not only significantly influenced the recent development in the area, but they facilitate an outline of the current profile of Slovak AV translators. The trend towards a more significant professionalization of AV translators in the country is in accordance with similar tendencies in other European countries, already foreseen by Jorge Díaz-Cintas in 2003 acknowledging the “buoyancy of the field at all levels: educational, research, professional and social” (203).

The professionalization of Slovak AV translators can be divided into three distinct periods. The first one covers the beginnings of Slovak AVT and its development during state socialism (the 1930s and 1948–1989), the second one – the so called “golden era of Slovak dubbing” – covers the first two decades after the Velvet Revolution, and the third period starts with the beginning of institutionalized – university – training in AVT in 2009. The outlined timeframes were suggested also with respect to the four stages of the professionalization process proposed by Joseph Tseng (1992), as presented in relation to translation training by Joanna Dybiec-Gajer (2014) as follows:

1. Market disorder: a phase in the professionalization process characterized by ongoing competition between skilled and non-skilled practitioners, little consistency in translation and training standards;
2. Consensus and commitment: a phase in the professionalization process characterized by a general consolidation of the translation market and development in training and professional guidelines;
3. Formation of formal networks: a phase in the professionalization process characterized by the improved collaboration of stakeholders with regard to controlling admission to the profession and enhancing its status;
4. Professional autonomy: a phase in the professionalization process characterized by the close collaboration of stakeholders, introduction of tighter control over the profession (creation of codes of ethics, certification) and working towards achieving market control and influencing legislation.

The first dubbing initiatives in Slovakia dated from the 1930s. The postwar years, characterized by an increase in the popularity of film and TV broadcasting, strengthened the efforts to provide Czechoslovak audiences with foreign films. This period contributed to the development of Slovak dubbing translation and production, although the amount of Czech dubbing in Czechoslovakia was significantly higher and the selection of AV works from abroad in the period 1948–1989 was influenced by the political orientation of the country. This, however, did not necessarily mean stagnation in dubbing. As Miroslava Brezovská (2017, 10–11) points out, interest in foreign film production was specifically intense during the socialist period, when for several reasons – technical, historical, political – availability of information about life abroad, as well as foreign-language competence, was limited. The reasons why dubbing remained the major medium of providing foreign AV works to the local audience, leaving subtitles behind, seem to be similar. Such a development could be linked to the situation in other European countries, where the predominance of dubbing is often interpreted also in relation to the policies of totalitarian regimes with consistent and complex strategies of regulation of information and censorship and for which the technical specification of dubbing productions posed several possibilities. As Díaz-Cintas puts it, “the potential power that cinema exerts upon audiences has always been acknowledged by political regimes of all colours and at all times” (2012, 286), and many governments addressed it by passing legislation to control original as well as imported AV works (286).

The preference for dubbing and the increasing number of dubbing translators during state socialism should, however, also be interpreted in the context of other significant aspects. As in several other European countries, dubbing initiatives in the region and the first dubbing teams in the country originated before World War II. Subtitles, on the other hand, were seen as more problematic. One of the reasons was the state of foreign language competence in Czechoslovakia during state socialism (see also Brezovská 2018) because of which subtitle perception by viewers was more demanding than today. Nowadays, the majority of the audience consuming mainstream Anglophone productions with Slovak subtitles is to some extent familiar with both the cultural and linguistic context, but the situation during state socialism was starkly different. Secondly, the quality of subtitles in the cinemas was rather low, especially because of their unsatisfactory technical elaboration and poor quality; they were difficult to read, displayed too quickly and were graphically inept (Kautský 1969, 25–26; Makarian 2005, 13).

The change of political regime and technical developments after 1989 brought a massive increase in the number of imported AV works to the country. The new market conditions enabled the founding of several private broadcasters which was shortly followed by the establishment of several private dubbing studios. For Slovak translators, the situation rapidly changed after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993, before which the amount of Slovak dubbing was minimal and film translations into Slovak were only used for a few genres (mainly children’s films and USSR-produced pieces).<sup>23</sup> The dissolution of the public Czechoslovak broadcaster into Czech and Slovak channels initiated the so-called “golden era of Slovak dubbing” when the

demand for professional studios and more professional translators increased (see Brezovská 2017). The “goldenness” of its state, however, could also be questioned: training in AVT was still only provided in the professional environment and qualified translators and editors of dialogues needed to be found promptly. The level of foreign-language competence, especially the level and knowledge of English, became a key factor in selecting AV translators, and special training in translation was not always regarded as crucial, so the quality of Slovak dubbing versions at the beginning of the “golden era” was often criticized (Makarian 2005, 15).

Based on our interview with the well-known Slovak AV translator Miroslava Brezovská,<sup>24</sup> in terms of administrative operation before and after the fall of state socialism, the working status of Slovak AV translators had the character of authorial creative work, contracting individual tasks besides other employment. As opposed to dialogue writers, who originally had a media background, most translators were employed full time in publishing houses, mainly as literary translators. They were trained in-house in individual procedures applied by dubbing studios, and their affiliation to a professional association can be dated to 2007, when they became a recognized category of the Slovak Association of Literary Translators.

Investigating who Slovak AV translators are – or should prospectively be – is nowadays related to university AVT training efforts which were initiated in 2009. In order to map the current state of affairs, we conducted an online survey which saw 37 Slovak AV translators answer questions on their work in AVT.<sup>25</sup> The gender representation of 72.2% female and 27.8% male translators was parallel to the distribution in other Slovak sociological surveys on the translation profession in general (Djovčoš and Šveda 2017) and in AVT particularly (Rondziková 2019). The largest group of respondents (54.5%) was represented by the age category of 25–35, 24.2% of the respondents were 36–46, and the age categories of 47–57 and 58–68 were represented by 9.1% each. There was also one recent graduate in the range 18–24 years, whose highest level of education was the MA degree. Despite the fact that the heterogeneity of the market and translators’ administrative operation make it difficult to determine the exact number of professional AV translators in the country, we believe that the sample, which exceeds the samples addressed in previous research on the topic (Janečová 2014; Djovčoš and Šveda 2017), is representative enough to give an informed insight into the current state of AVT in Slovakia.

Regarding affiliation with professional associations, 48.4% of respondents are not members of any professional translators’ association. This number, however, is not surprising, since it is in congruence with the overall value in the results of our survey (49%). The majority of Slovak AV translators grouped in such associations are members of the Slovak Association of Translators and Interpreters (71.4%), considerably more than the traditional Slovak Association of Literary Translators with 42.8%. It should be noted, however, that members of these associations also claimed multiple memberships and the age composition and character of both associations must have influenced the choice of preferred organization. More importantly, no significant relation between overall performance in the market and membership in a professional organization was confirmed in our survey.



In terms of training, most of the respondents hold an MA degree (63.9%); 30.6% have a PhD, and the remaining group equally shares the status of BA or high school graduates. In terms of their university specialization, the majority of respondents hold a degree in TIS (61.1%) with languages and culture coming second (30.6%). The remaining respondents did not study either of these specializations, while all the respondents in this category fell into the age group 47–57. It should be noted that university AVT training in Slovakia is solely provided within TIS programs (since 2009) and that an individual AVT program has never existed. That is why we were also interested in whether the respondents were trained in AVT mainly in their university environment, by their employer, or learned most of the skills themselves. As we found out, the largest group (44.5%) claimed to have gained their AVT training in a university environment. With the exception of two respondents from the field of languages and culture, all respondents in this category gained a university degree in TIS. Out of these, 80% belong to the two youngest age groups (18–24, 25–35). This also confirms a high probability of attendance of specialized AVT courses, as was stated by the respondents themselves. Another 36% of respondents would best describe the way they obtained their AVT training as autodidacts. No statistically relevant relation with categories of age, education and university specialization was confirmed for this group. Slightly smaller was the group trained mainly by their employer (19.5%), again with no significant relation to the abovementioned categories.

These findings point to the positive role university AVT training has played in the last decade and suggest a clear increase in the professionalization of the AV translator. However, no bold conclusions should be drawn without looking at the performance of the translators on the market. The survey observed this category via the proportion of AVT revenues in annual income, but the results at this stage cannot be seen as leading towards any conspicuous generalizations and more ongoing observation in the following years, focusing mainly on the younger generation of translators, will be needed. As respondents indicated, the representation of AV translators for whom AVT is the main annual source of income, was 13.9%. These were – to be more specific – 3 translators aged 25–35, all with an MA degree in TIS, claiming to have gained the bulk of their AVT practical training in a university environment; 2 other translators in this group belong to the higher age groups, in whose case the values in other categories do not show a statistically significant relation. For a further 3 translators from the age group of 25–35, AVT income represents half of their annual income. There is one more translator in this group, aged 58–68, whose training was provided by his/her employer. AVT generates a third of the income for 8 translators with the majority of them (5) again aged 25–35, holding an MA in TIS and having been trained in AVT in a university environment. The remaining 20 respondents stated that AVT income represents an insignificant part of their annual income.

We might make a positive evaluation of the potential employability of graduates and the quality of AVT training provided in relation to the cohort of more recent graduates who have been relatively successful in practice. However, extrapolating similar market success to a larger number of translators (although the market can be considered rather small) without more complex impact studies and replicated research

reflecting development from a diachronic perspective would be premature. These results, however, might provide the basis for future research which would give more insight into the changing contexts and conditions in the profession. These have been on the move recently, as suggested by other surveys on the AVT market in the country (Jánošíková and Perez 2018; Rondziková 2019), which point out rapid changes in translation practice leaning towards an increased provision of subtitling, with new clients and video media distribution systems (e.g. video on demand – VOD), new AVT specializations, and changing working conditions. Similar implications are indicated by the results of the presented survey, showing that the highest proportion of the translators participating in the survey are paradoxically active in interlingual subtitling, with a significant representation of this mode in the case of AV translators with a higher income proportion from AVT. Future studies of professionalization will therefore need to take this aspect into closer consideration, and systematic mapping of the changing landscape will be required. This reflection for now indicates the position of AV translation and translators within the professionalization processes as defined by Tseng (1992), shifting from specialized quality training towards the formation of networks enhancing the status of Slovak AV translators.

As this comprehensive look at the AVT field in Slovakia shows, the status of the AV translator has been predominantly determined by the trends in economy and language policies which confirms our tentative hypothesis that political change and formally endorsed ideology has less of an impact on the status of the translator/interpreter than the particulars of political economy and language policies. The growing professionalization answers both the demand for Slovak versions of AV works, initiated by national language policies and the changes in the market with new emerging AV providers and formats (VOD). At the same time, the current development of the field and growing attention paid to AV translators – when compared with the marginal position poetry translators occupy in the public sphere – confirms the dependence of the status of translators and interpreters on overall economic trends. It is these that determine the most efficient media to be used to catch and shift the attention of the recipient as one of the most crucial commodities in neoliberal capitalism.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this article challenge us to incorporate the prism of local and global political economies more deeply into our thinking on translation and interpreting and in doing so, to answer the plea made by Stefan Baumgarten and Jordi Cornellà-Detrell (2019) and question the cultural narratives that structure our methodologies – in our case, mainly the weight we ascribe to the fall of state socialism. In an attempt to more accurately understand the observed tendencies, we might need to introduce different explanatory models and use alternative concepts, such as the specifics of “state capitalism” in Central Europe (Tamás 2004; cf. also Makovický 2016) which actually saw the emergence of neoliberal ideas and practices “in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as a response by domestic political and economic elites to the deepening economic and political crisis of Soviet-style state capitalism” (Fabry 2019, 3).

Besides language and cultural policies, economic forces seem to have had the most pronounced impact on the social status of translation and interpreting agents in Slovakia. Under these circumstances, with the increasingly “synergic relationship between culture and the economy” (Bonet and Négrier 2018, 64), the translator of receptively demanding (especially contemporary and avant-garde) literature has been pushed into the background. Despite the fact that translation and interpreting studies in Slovakia has paid significant attention to the translation of poetry from the 1960s almost to the end of the century, the visibility of the translator, when seen from the point of view of the published reviews, has generally been low in the past 50 years: in the intervals of 1964–1968 and 2007–2017, as little as 12 and 11% of the analyzed reviews respectively contained remarks on the translators. The absence of a dramatic change in the economic conditions of the poetry translators – as suggested by the analysis of interviews with four of these agents – seems to confirm the dominance of the economic specifics of the region (advance of neoliberal practices) over its officially proclaimed ideology. What seems to matter, based on a look at the interpreter’s position towards the client’s political agenda, is the ability to adjust to the changing market. This is equally illustrated by the case of the audiovisual translator in Slovakia. What does have an impact on the number and social status of interpreters and translators, besides the forces of the market, are specific language policies that might (in certain periods and regions) work against economic factors, at least on the surface. However, in order to draw any more definitive conclusions, further research into other interlingual exchange subfields (professional translation, community interpreting, localization etc.) and a deeper and more complex interpretation of the findings from the point of view of political economy is necessary. This article hopes to inspire such approaches.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The authors would like to thank the interviewees for their willing and helpful participation in the research and the reviewers for their thoughtful comments and efforts towards improving the manuscript.
- <sup>2</sup> In the use of the notion of the field, we draw on Bourdieu (1983). By subfield we understand the particular domain with its specific rules and agents in which translation and interpreting activities take place.
- <sup>3</sup> The selection of these subfields was based on the current accessibility of data and authors’ research focus.
- <sup>4</sup> We see cultural space as a “space where memory is shared and where certain texts that deal with that memory are conserved” (Kabalen de Bicharia 2013).
- <sup>5</sup> The translator’s subservient role that pushes him/her into invisibility has received significant attention from TIS (cf., e.g., Venuti 1995).
- <sup>6</sup> In 1956, the journal *Mladá tvorba* was established. It served as the main tool of spreading ideas about new literary genres and works. Tyšš (2017) lists a range of methods how these poets and poetry translators subverted the regime and camouflaged politically sensitive discourse.
- <sup>7</sup> The authors would like to thank Katarína Bednářová, who provided them with information on the number of translated literatures.
- <sup>8</sup> For ideology, we have in mind a general (political) worldview, which influences the actions of people. We look at it through the concept of patronage as defined by André Lefevere (1992).

- <sup>9</sup> When talking about the identity of translators and their perception of society, we mean mainly the tension between the professional and personal ethics as Chesterman (2018) mentions it. Hostová in the edited volume *Translation and Identity Trouble* (2017) provides a platitude of examples on such clashes. This area however, requires a deeper qualitative research into translators' personal values and their decisions made in the text.
- <sup>10</sup> Critical feedback to literary translations can be studied from various perspectives. Here we were mainly concerned with the amount of attention devoted to the translator and translation in these paratexts. Further qualitative analysis would enable us to put the findings into discussion with other existing studies (cf. overview in Maier 2009; Paloposki 2012). We chose to take a look at translations of American literature (for the period 1945–1968) and translations from English (for the period 2007–2017) because it most strongly embodies one side of West versus East opposition. A similarly designed probe into the reception of translations from Russian might bring different results which might be put into comparison with our data. However, at the same time, after 1989, the number of translations from Russian is significantly lower (cf. Pliešovská in this volume), therefore the data might not be able to satisfactorily express the present situation.
- <sup>11</sup> For a detailed analysis of the translator's image in printed periodicals between 1993 (when the independent Slovak state was founded) and 2017 see Laš 2019.
- <sup>12</sup> The Ján Holly Prize is an award given to literary translators for the best translation into Slovak.
- <sup>13</sup> Such an approach to reviewing translations is, however, rather common in other cultures as well – similar situation has been observed in other countries (cf. Fawcett 2000; Paloposki 2012; Vander-schelden 2000).
- <sup>14</sup> There were 402 book translations of poetry published in 1989–2008 (Hübner 2010, 140).
- <sup>15</sup> We view the translators of poetry as agents functioning in one field (the literary field), whose professional identity is composed of a combination of several overlapping habitus.
- <sup>16</sup> Especially the Ján Hollý Prize for literary translation (see note 12).
- <sup>17</sup> Three of the translators stated that, with some small exceptions, they pick the authors and poems for translation themselves, the fourth one estimated she initiated the projects half of the time.
- <sup>18</sup> We were not looking specifically at the 1990s when the field was adjusting to the new situation.
- <sup>19</sup> The use of Slovak as a state language was regulated by article 6 of the constitutional law of 27 October 1968 which asserted that the Slovak language was equal to Czech in creating laws and in use on all government levels ("Ústavný zákon..." 1968).
- <sup>20</sup> If not stated otherwise, all translations are by the authors. In the original: "nedostatečně [jsou] využívány možnosti, které máme ve vnitřních bázích a bázi vizových cizinců, kteří přijíždějí do ČSSR buď jako turisté nebo v rámci obchodních, kulturních, vědeckých i společenských styků s protějšky v ČSSR."
- <sup>21</sup> In the original: "Důvěrníci jsou vybíráni [...] z řad spolehlivých čs. občanů, členů KSČ i bezpartijních, kteří dobrovolně na podkladě *vztahu vzájemné důvěry* jsou ochotni podle svých možností a schopností sdělovat kontrarozvědce dílčí poznatky informačního charakteru nebo poskytovat jim nutnou pomoc a služby."
- <sup>22</sup> Certainly, the position of interpreters during state socialism differed from that of translators. While political loyalty and compliance with the regime of the former group was one of the predispositions for entering the profession, translators were less monitored – e.g. in many cases, translation was activity pursued by authors who were banned from publishing their original work and it also often happened that translators who were not allowed to do their work officially, continued translating under a name of a colleague. Similarly, both professions are not and were not in the past homogenous groups either. However, while we were trying not to overlook the specifics of each subfield in our analyses, we are also trying to identify common tendencies.
- <sup>23</sup> In 1995, the Act of the national council of the Slovak Republic on the State Language of the Slovak Republic which controls the use of Slovak language in legislation, government and public sphere entered into force ("Zákon národnej rady..." 1995).
- <sup>24</sup> The personal interview was conducted on 16th December 2019.
- <sup>25</sup> The survey "Audiovisual translation: translation competences and specialized training (practitioners – Europe)" was conducted in 2018–2019 by Emília Perez. The total number of respondents was 304, representing 25 European countries.

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## The economies of interlingual intercultural transfer: Towards a complex picture of translators and interpreters in Slovakia

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Sociology of translators and interpreters. Political economy. Slovakia. Language policies.

The article focuses on agents facilitating translation and interpreting and provides a sociological probe into the particulars of interlingual intercultural transfer in Slovakia on the background of political and economic specifics of the region. The observed tendencies seem to point to the fact that in the past half century, despite the changes brought about by the Velvet Revolution, the social standing of translators and interpreters has been less determined by officially proclaimed ideologies than economic forces. From the legislative point of view, language policies have had a significant impact on the phenomena in question.

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PhDr. Martin Djovčoš, PhD.  
Department of English and American Studies  
Faculty of Arts  
Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica  
Tajovského 40  
97401 Banská Bystrica  
Slovak Republic  
martin.djovcos@umb.sk

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Mgr. Ivana Hostová, PhD.  
Institute of Slovak and Media Studies  
Faculty of Arts  
University of Prešov  
Ul. 17. novembra 1  
080 01 Prešov  
Slovak Republic  
ivana.hostova@unipo.sk

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Mgr. Emília Perez, PhD.  
Department of Translation Studies  
Faculty of Arts  
Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra  
Štefánikova 67  
949 74 Nitra  
Slovak Republic  
eperez@ukf.sk

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Mgr. Pavol Šveda, PhD.  
Department of British and American Studies  
Faculty of Arts  
Comenius University  
Gondova 2  
811 02 Bratislava 1  
Slovak Republic  
pavol.sveda@uniba.sk