

Addressing power imbalances in research and translation studies

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Translation studies. Power hierarchies. Academic positionality. Ethical research. Inclusivity.

The upheavals of recent years have underscored the depth of global interconnectedness, with events like the COVID-19 pandemic, advancements in AI, and armed conflicts prompting swift and unpredictable economic and social changes worldwide. In particular, the discussion delves into the power dynamics within academia, the unequal positioning of researchers in the global knowledge market, and the fundamental right of translation within economic relationships. Drawing from a conference held in Bratislava, Slovakia, in September 2023, this article addresses issues of translation and interpreting-related power dynamics against the backdrop of contemporary political, economic, and cultural developments. Speakers from diverse backgrounds explore how academia can respond to prevailing power hierarchies and disparities in visibility, and whether such structures can be challenged or altered. The discussion extends to the subjectivity inherent in research, including sources of funding, national affiliations, and personal values. Ethical considerations surrounding researcher positionality and appropriating research topics are scrutinized, with a focus on inclusivity and participation. The article emphasizes the importance of considering diverse perspectives and ensuring representation in research teams, particularly when studying topics related to minority groups. Overall, the dialogue offers insights into navigating power dynamics within academia, advocating for ethical research practices, and promoting inclusivity in scholarly pursuits.

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IVANA HOSTOVÁ

Events of the past few years have shaken numerous paradigms, highlighting the extent of global interconnectedness. The swift dissemination of COVID-19, groundbreaking advancements in AI, and alarming armed conflicts, among other occurrences, have catalyzed rapid and sometimes unpredictable economic and social transformations on a global scale. These events have evoked strong emotions, significantly influencing political sentiments worldwide.

Current events have also sparked a debate in the humanities regarding the unequal recognition of research originating from diverse regions and linguistic backgrounds. In response to the Russo-Ukrainian war, fields such as Slavic studies, East European studies, Eurasian studies, and translation studies have shifted their focus to Ukraine while simultaneously endeavoring to decolonize knowledge production. By challenging existing infrastructures and fostering internal collaboration, “peripheral” cultures (Heilbron 1999) can generate research that benefits both local and international audiences which are notoriously difficult to reach for cultures which struggle to extricate themselves from relative obscurity. The urgency of cooperation, hospitality, and ongoing interaction in addressing complex societal issues – within the realm of translation studies – and outside it is critical.

Surges and dips in positions of languages and literatures in intricate webs of cultural flows and hierarchies and the search for the reasons behind these shifts are topics frequently discussed when attempting to understand and explain power relations in regions that have experienced pronounced totalitarian regimes and navigating the unequal interactions in knowledge exchange requires actors entangled in these networks and/or engaging with them to account for their position in these landscapes – and in the research process.

This multi-perspective article is based on the discussion held at the conference “Translation, Interpreting & Culture: Virality and Isolation in the Era of Deepening Divides” held in Bratislava, Slovakia in September 2023, and addresses issues pertaining to translation and interpreting related power dynamics in the light of current political, economic, and cultural developments, including the issues of (new) isolation, rewriting, and the effect of virality in the current political, economic, and cultural situation. The panel wished to tackle the challenges posed by power hierarchies within academia, the unequal positioning of researchers within the globalized knowledge market, and the notion of translation as a fundamental right within the framework of economic relationships.

In what follows, three speakers with different geographic, economic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds approach the question of how research and academia might respond to prevailing power hierarchies and disparities in visibility, and whether such structures can be challenged or altered. This inquiry pertains to disrupting the prevailing order that disproportionately favors powerful entities over weaker ones, such as dominant languages, economically robust nations, well-developed literary traditions, historically significant regions, and research originating from prestigious universities, which may be more accessible (also production-wise) to scholars from privileged economic backgrounds.

Besides these issues, Daniele Monticelli from Tallinn University, Oleksandr Kalnychenko from V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University and Matej Bel University, and Martin Djovčoš from Matej Bel University approach the issue of how the subjectivity inherent in research (sources of funding, national affiliations, and personal values, etc.) influences the researcher's approach. They explore the ethical dimensions of researcher positionality and analyze criteria to define boundaries when appropriating research topics, aiming for inclusivity and participation. In this respect, topical issues also concern the question of whether it is appropriate for researchers to investigate the literature and cultural aspects of minority groups to which they do not belong and if so, what ethical considerations should be taken into account (e.g. should research teams be composed of members from minority groups when studying topics related to those groups?).

Finally, discussants also explore the question of when translation to or from a language with a limited number of (often bilingual) speakers is necessary and what implications the act of (non)translation has. They approach the issue of translation in the context of linguistic minorities and economically disadvantaged groups. These often receive information primarily in the majority language, since depending on translation in such cases can delay or impede access to crucial information. On the other hand, the absence of translations into minority languages risks eroding linguistic identity and cultural heritage. While volunteering may serve as a form of resistance, its long-term viability is tied to individuals' economic realities. Balancing the imperative to translate with individual economic needs over extended periods presents a complex problem that needs to be addressed on an individual basis.

DANIELE MONTICELLI

Isolation and virality in the digital age

I think that before we start using notions such as “isolation”, “virality”, or “connectedness”, we should reflect on the way in which the new digital condition, that informs our lives, has changed the sense of these notions and the relations between them. Even more than in the context of the present wars in Ukraine and Gaza, we have experienced it in a particularly painful way in the context of another crisis – the Covid-19 pandemic. During the lockdown we were pushed into an unprecedented situation of isolation and, at the same time, hyper-connectedness. We spent many hours a day behind the screens of our computers, participating online in many events that we probably would never have physically attended, expanding our networks and connections. But we could not, I think, evade a feeling of isolation and loneliness, which for many people (particularly young people) has been a rather traumatic experience with a negative psychological impact. So, what does isolation really mean in a world where we spend an increasing amount of our time in a digitally mediated environment? How does this reshape human relations and connections? What does it mean to break out of isolation in such a context? To have thousands of followers, views, digital friends on the internet, or maybe rather to shut down our computers and get out to meet people in the real world?

It is interesting to consider what isolation and virality mean also from an academic perspective. Academic institutions have long ceased to work as isolated ivory towers. Research has become for the most part a cooperative enterprise also in the humanities and societal impact and knowledge exchange are fundamental criteria for research funding decisions. However, the present situation of permanent crisis is quite challenging for scholars, because even if we have broken out of isolation and feel a responsibility to address these crises, research is by nature a slow enterprise and it implies distance from the phenomena we study.

I believe that most of us have experienced in this respect as scholars and students in the humanities a certain hopelessness when facing the crises of our times. On the one hand, the attempt to decelerate and create the distance needed for research and understanding is constantly frustrated by the tidal waves of constantly new crises which we are immediately asked to take a position on, say something smart, and hastily rethink our research topics in order for them to continue to be relevant. But clearly a full and committed immersion into the crises makes it difficult to work, to think and to study. So, a certain degree of isolation and disconnectedness seems to be a necessary condition for research.

Isolation and decolonization in academia

The war has made the issue of isolation a particularly painful one in another respect too. Namely, while as scholars we have always promoted the values of dialogue and openness, we have now been called to enforce isolation. After Russia invaded Ukraine, some Estonian universities made the decision of excluding Russian and Belorussian student candidates from admission. With many other Estonian and international colleagues, we initially protested against this discrimination, arguing that many of those prospective students were probably young people fleeing their country due to opposing Putin's regime and the war. Why should we isolate them too? Now, more than two years have gone since this terrible war started, and I am not so sure about this argument: we have chosen a side in the war and we should do all in our power to internationally isolate its enemy and diminish its influence not only in world economics and politics, but also in culture, sports, and academia, focusing at the same time on supporting Ukrainian students and colleagues.

That's why I think we should push further in the decolonization of Slavic and East European Studies. It is not a question of "erasing" Russian culture, but of 1) critically revisiting its imperialist and aggressive aspects, just as was done for German culture after World War II, and 2) giving space and voices to the many other cultures, literatures and languages in Eastern Europe that have been until now at best considered as satellites or "little brothers" of Russia. This is an important opportunity to break out of isolation for Eastern and Central Europe as a whole and we should not miss it.

Translation: building bridges and affirming difference

Finally, recent crises have become also an occasion to rethink isolation and connectedness from the perspective of translation. In the minds of most of us, translation is pre-eminently understood as a builder of bridges, which brings cultures and

people closer to one another. This comes from our commitment with intercultural dialogue and openness to diversity as universal values. We are at present increasingly understanding that translation is not only this, as it has historically had different and also opposing functions. It has been and continues to be also an instrument to affirm cultural and linguistic identities, not a bridge, but rather a gatekeeper, which maintains the distance between the source and the target culture and language. This was the case for instance with translation from Russian into the Ukrainian in the 1920s and 1930s. The very fact of translating marked the difference of the Ukrainian language from the Russian one and the difference of Ukrainian cultural identity from Russian cultural identity – here translation both establishes and maintains a distance. That is why Ukrainian translations of Russian works, Russian-Ukrainian dictionaries and more generally books in Ukrainian were suspicious to Tsarist as well as Soviet authorities, which aimed to erase differences, making of Ukraine a “little Russia” in which translation from Russian was superfluous and harmful. Thus we must learn to notice and appreciate the cases when translation functions as a gatekeeper and generator of difference and identity (isolation in a sense) as much as we notice and appreciate the cases in which translation builds bridges, enhance connections, crosses differences.

Toward academic equality

I think we should always address the issue of privilege and marginalization in all the situations in which we are involved as scholars as well as human beings. And we should commit with equality not in the Soviet and socialist sense, but rather in the perspective of radical democracy, as it has been suggested, for instance, by the French philosopher Jacques Rancière (1991). For Rancière, equality is a presumption that we are asked to verify in every social relation (academic relations included). This verification always starts from the exposure and dispute of some wrong and inequality (specific privileges and marginalizations), that must be corrected in order for the presumption of equality to be confirmed. So equality is never a final achievement, but rather this infinite process of verification which addresses always new forms of privilege and marginalization.

As for academia, I think there is no copyright on research topics – we are all free to choose any topic, even if someone other is already working on it. But of course, we cannot ignore other work in the field, and the best way to take it into account is to start a cooperation between scholars working on the same topic. Research is a collective enterprise and we all are dwarves standing on the shoulders of giants, so it is bad that we have come to understand ideas as some kind of private property. The fundamental issues for me here are stability, inclusivity, and accessibility of research. First, in order to avoid privileges and marginalization and to secure the sustainability of research teams and fields, we need much more base funding for research in Europe, as competitive project-based research is unstable and unequally and unreasonably distributed. The majority of money for research projects does not go to the universities with the best scholars and ideas, but to the ones with the best project writers and research support structure. Second, we need universal accessibility to all research

outputs. The present open access system is a scandal as it transfers a huge amount of research money to academic publishing corporations and it is often a privilege of the richer universities, which have also the best libraries and access to the most expensive research databases. For the moment, grassroots and free sharing (including “pirate” initiatives like Sci-Hub and Libgen) is a good way of counterbalancing such inequalities, but for the future we need a new copyright system, which would grant to all of humanity unlimited and free access to all research publications. This is the prerequisite for real equality of opportunities in the academia.

The need for translation

Sometimes it makes sense to speak of the necessity of translating some text – think, for instance, of the necessity of making the laws and regulations of a given country accessible to linguistic minorities living in that country. But for instance in the case of literature, it is not so much a matter of necessity as it is of cultural richness. As we well know, literary translation not only makes a foreign text accessible to people who do not read in foreign languages, but it has always played an important role in the development of target languages and cultures too. In general, as a kind of general principle, we could say that the more linguistic variations of a certain text we have, the better. A translation is always a particular way of interpreting a text, a particular view of that text, so every new translation in principle enriches also the initial source text.

As for policy makers, I think they have the certain duty to grant translation wherever it is necessary in order to respect linguistic rights and the principle of linguistic equality. The key issues here are resources and quality – that is, policy makers have to understand that not every person who knows a foreign language is a translator/interpreter, they have to set up qualification and quality standards and be ready to spend enough money for translation and interpreting services. Volunteering is always good, as it is nice when people directly engage in community activities, and all are happier. But this cannot replace public services and professional interpreting/translation. So, when volunteering, we should at the same time commit to the struggle to raise awareness of policy makers on linguistic rights and the need to invest public money in language services, which includes investing money in the training of interpreters and translators at universities and other institutions.

As for literature, I think that we also need state policies here, which would counterbalance the mere logic of the market. State funding of culture should include support for the translation of important texts with a possibly limited readership.

OLEKSANDR KALNYCHENKO

Power hierarchies in academia

In translation studies, addressing existing hierarchies in power and visibility is crucial for fostering a more equitable and inclusive scholarly landscape. In this connection, we can discuss gender, racial, and ethnic hierarchies, postcolonial translation... But the issue I want to focus on is that translation studies often grapples with the tension between global knowledge centers (predominantly concentrated within Western academic institutions) and local knowledge (indigenous practices and

thinking on translation). Power imbalances are about whose knowledge is privileged. If we want to challenge Western-centric views of translation, we need to make other – politically previously non-Western – perspectives distinctly visible.

In the 1920s, researchers in several countries later belonging to the Eastern Bloc initiated systematic research into translation, while the West's conceptualization of translation gained momentum after World War II. However, Europe's division into capitalist West and communist East created barriers to scholarly exchange, driven by geopolitical, linguistic, and ideological disparities. Eastern and Central European nations developed their own translation traditions, but unfortunately, many key texts from this region remain untranslated in Western languages. As a result, global academic audiences have limited access to these crucial works. Despite occasional contacts, Western knowledge of Eastern and Central European translation theories remains incomplete (with a focus primarily on the Russian and Czechoslovak schools). Meanwhile, the scholars from the 1950s and 1960s in Eastern and Central Europe laid the groundwork for the translation studies of the 1970s, even if their influence has been overlooked (for details see Kalnychenko and Kolomiyets 2024). So it is crucial to recognize the impact of Eastern and Central European theoretical schools on each other and acknowledge their contribution to the field of translation studies.

According to a 2020 study by Brian James Baer, the standard narrative of the discipline's history, where TIS (translation and interpreting studies) remains predominantly represented as a Western scholarly tradition originating in the 1970s, constitutes a 'mythhistory'. Baer highlights a crucial aspect often overlooked in the dominant narrative of TIS: the geographical diversity of its origins. For instance, this dominant discourse disregards the fact that translation studies had already been introduced as a formal academic subject at the university level in Kyiv and Moscow in the early 1930s (Kalnychenko and Kamovnikova 2020; Kolomiyets 2020).

It is true that recently Central and Eastern European translation scholarship has been gaining international attention, shedding light on theoretical approaches and translation traditions that were previously overlooked in Western discourse (see, e.g., Schippel and Zwischenberger 2017). In this regard, "Nothing Happened: Translation Studies before James Holmes", a conference held at UCL, London, 9–10 November, 2023, and co-organized by the UCL Centre for Translation Studies and School of Slavonic and East European Studies, was symptomatic, as is the anthology *Translation Studies before James Holmes: A Critical Reader*, being compiled under the editorship of Kathryn Batchelor and Iryna Odrekhivska.

A good example of a work that aims to avoid Western and Anglo-American bias in TIS and to explore non-Western thinking on translation as vital components of global TIS history is the *Routledge Handbook of the History of Translation Studies* (Lange, Monticelli, and Rundle, 2024).

It also has to be stressed that scholarship is practiced at the local, national, and transnational levels, all worthy of analysis. Knowledge on translation is produced locally but validated globally. And as long as national systems of higher learning exist, one should take into account national scholarly traditions.

In the early 1970s, there were several programmatic suggestions for a separate discipline that would study translation. Thus, in 1971, Viktor Koptilov mapped literary translation studies in his article “Perekladoznavstvo yak okrema haluz filolohii” [Translation studies as a separate branch of philology], holistically elaborated in his 1972 book. Anton Popovič, in the same year, outlined his conception of the discipline to study translation, introducing his classification of translation theory as a discipline (Popovič 1971; expanded in his 1975 book). However, James Holmes’s mapping as presented in his English article “The Name and Nature of Translation Studies” (1972) became foundational, in no small part due to its visualization by Gideon Toury (1995). Thus, the presentation of a scholarly work is of paramount importance and serves as an advantage in spreading ideas (see Djovčoš and Perez 2017).

Trajectories traced by theories

Research ethics in the humanities encompasses considerations of the situatedness and geopolitics of knowledge, as well as the complexities surrounding knowledge translation or non-translation and the manner in which knowledge is conveyed. The issue of research ethics in TIS covers several aspects. These include the presumed “Western” identity of translation studies and the dominant “Western” thinking in the theorization of translation (see, e.g., van Doorslaer and Naa-ijckens 2021), the researcher’s positionality and associated power dynamics, as well as the awareness that knowledge is formed and adopted differently in different languages. By the positionality of the researcher, one means the social and political context that creates their identity in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability status and describes how their identity influences, and potentially biases, their understanding of and outlook on the world. It is also desirable to consider different languages and cultures in translation research. Additionally, ethical considerations arise when disseminating research findings and sharing research data (see, e. g., Mellinger and Baer 2021).

It is not for nothing that one of the functions of the history of translation studies is to establish historical justice. It so happened that during the 20th century the works of Ukrainian translation scholars written in Ukrainian were subjected to a double erasure. On the one hand, since the mid-1930s, when the Bolsheviks adopted the position of Russian chauvinism, it became politically incorrect to refer to and quote Ukrainian publications in the USSR, as “Ukrainian nationalism” was proclaimed by Stalin to be the main enemy of the Soviet power. On the other hand, the Cold War confrontation did not contribute to the dissemination of information in the West about the findings of Ukrainian translation scholars. Here is just one example. Professor Oleksander Finkel of Kharkiv University, the author of the first monograph in Eastern Europe on translation theory, *Teoriia i praktika perekladu* (The theory and practice of translation, 1929b), was perhaps the first scholar anywhere to treat the topic of self-translation in a systematic way. In August 1928, as a 29-year-old researcher, he wrote the article in Ukrainian, “H. F. Kvitka as the Translator of His Own Works” (13,438 words), which was printed the following year in a scholarly collection to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Ukrainian writer Hryho-

rii Kvitka-Osnovyanenko. 33 years later in Leningrad, Finkel published the article in Russian, “Ob avtoperevode” (Eng. trans. “On Autotranslation. (Based on Material Relating to Hryhorii Kvitka-Osnovianenko’s Authorial Translations)”, 2021; 7,184 words), which is, in fact, a self-translation of his own 1929 article (Finkel 1929a). It is to this 1962 Russian article that Anton Popovič referred both in his seminal work *Teória umeleckého prekladu* (Theory of literary translation, 1975) and in his *Dictionary for the Analysis of Literary Translation* (1976, 18), containing the entry on auto-translation, which introduced the concept in English-speaking countries. However, for some reason, none of the authors of English-language articles on auto-translation (later referred to as self-translation) in various encyclopaedias and handbooks had noticed for more than 30 years that the definition of this concept in Popovič’s dictionary contains Finkel’s name in parentheses. It was only in the last decade that references to his writings on auto-translation appeared in *The Bibliography on Self-translation* maintained by Eva Gentes (2023), and an English translation of Finkel’s 1962 article by Mercedes Bullock was published in the journal *Translation and Interpreting Studies*. It would seem that historical justice has been done. However, this is not entirely true, as the English-speaking readership was introduced to the translation of the 1962 Russian article. When comparing the Ukrainian article of 1929 (Finkel 1929a) and the Russian article of 1962, one can see that both texts describe the same research based on authorial translations by Kvitka-Osnovyanenko, use the same numerous examples, letters, and nearly the same argumentation, with several paragraphs self-translated literally. Yet the 1929 version is twice as long and provides more details on Kvitka’s personal and social motives to translate his own works; it also pays closer attention to theoretical issues. In his 1962 Russian article, Finkel quite clearly avoids discussion of any socially provocative issues, such as ethnic bilingualism, problems of stylistic differences between the Russian and Ukrainian languages, and socially distinct readership, as well as issues of censorship. Hence, although it has a more clearly delineated structure, the 1962 article lacks the young Finkel’s observations on power relations. We can only hope that the first version will eventually be translated into major languages, that it will truly enter international circulation as the classic work that it is. Then we can truly say that justice has been done.

“Minor” versus “major”

The influence of languages’ majority or minority status on translation practice is a fundamental point. Minority-language cultures heavily rely on translation for their informational demands, their economic, scientific, and cultural life. As Michael Cronin (2020) has remarked, the concept of minority in TIS is a dynamic and relational one. This emphasizes the fact that all languages have the potential to be minority languages. Even major world languages, like Mandarin, can occupy a peripheral position in specific domains such as science and technology. A language may be marginalized due to invasion, conquest, or subjugation by a more powerful group. Ukraine under Russian rule in the 1800s can serve as a quintessential case of such a suppression in modern culture, especially during the repressions and prohibitions of Ukrainian publications in 1863–1905. Thus, in accordance with the Valuev

circular of 1863 to the censorship committees, “the authorization of books in Little Russian with either spiritual content or intended generally for primary mass reading should be ceased” (quoted in Miller 2003, 264). Tsar Alexander II’s Ems Decree of 1876 completely banned the printing of any translations into Ukrainian as well as any import of books translated into that language. The only parallel to this language ban that I am familiar with is the ban of the Irish language under Oliver Cromwell in the 17th century. Yet, in 1882, Mykhailo Starytsky published his translation of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* as a separate book in Kyiv. How did he do it? The writer’s daughter Liudmyla Starytska-Cherniakhivska admitted in a letter to Ivan Franko (16 December 1901) that the Ems ban had been circumvented with the help of a hundred-ruble bribe to the Kyiv censor Leimitz. To increase the likelihood of obtaining permission to publish in Russia, translators would occasionally send several versions of their translated texts under different names and pseudonyms to different censorship committees at the same time. A strategy to circumvent censorship was the publication of translations of foreign works as original works of Ukrainian literature. For instance, Borys Hrinchenko had to turn Leo Tolstoy’s novella *The Prisoner in the Caucasus* into the story *The Black Sea Men in Captivity*. One other way to circumvent the ban on printing translations into Ukrainian was to publish the books abroad and then smuggle them into the Russian Empire.

All of these ways to bypass censorship barriers mean that we should take into account the non-systemic aspects of the context and the unpredictable interference of random events, that we should not ignore the fundamental importance of interpersonal relations, i.e., net of relations, acquaintances, schoolmates, neighbors, etc. in which people made favors in exchange for other favors bypassing generally accepted rules and laws in the intercourse with, e.g., censorial agencies, as Daniele Monticelli (2020) has demonstrated recently when he described such useful connections: the person responsible for reading the Estonian translated literature book series proofs at Glavlit (the Soviet censorship agency) was one of the Editor-in-Chief’s university classmates which allowed for the obstacles of Soviet censorship to be lessened.

Translation can play an important role in nation-building for subjugated peoples by establishing boundaries between cultures. Whereas in the early 1920s, the common view was that translations of Russian belles-lettres into Ukrainian were a pointless waste of means and effort, as an average Ukrainian reader could read any work of Russian literature in the original, the late 1920s witnessed abundant Ukrainian translations of Russian prose, which pointed to the separateness of the Ukrainian language and culture (see Kalnychenko and Kolomiyets 2022). Recently, Lada Kolomiyets and I have been researching Russian-Ukrainian literary translation over the past hundred years (before 1917 there was practically no fiction translated from Russian into Ukrainian). This study (Kolomiyets and Kalnychenko 2024) proves that Russian-Ukrainian translation has both bright and dark sides. On the one hand, there are translations of Russian poetry by neoclassicists in the mid-1920s, philologically accurate translations of the collected works of Gogol and Chekhov, and other achievements of the Ukrainian translation school, which emerged in the late

1920s and early 1930s and was theoretically justified accordingly; on the other hand, through the Russian language and translations from Russian, the Soviet cultural space was established, which was deliberately isolated from the world cultural space and was supposed to replace it, contributing to the Russification of the Ukrainian language and the provincialization of Ukrainian literature.

When an empire disintegrates and national boundaries are redrawn, it can result in a shift where a previously dominant language becomes a minority one. The case of Russian in Ukraine after the breakup of the Soviet Union serves as an example of this phenomenon. Moreover, after 24 February 2024, Russian ended up being completely excluded from the public sphere in Ukraine. The overall rejection and denunciation of Russian literary products is now, for many in Ukraine, not just an aesthetic choice in a struggle for cultural identity. It is an existential necessity.

MARTIN DJOVČOŠ

The topic of this discussion, as suggested by its title, is virality and isolation. Nevertheless, despite the different vocabulary, I believe that once again we are talking about one of the key issues pertinent to translation studies at least since polysystems theory in the 1970s – namely the relationships between centers and peripheries. The issue might not be new, but like many other social phenomena connected with different distribution of power, it remains topical. The problem of inclusion and exclusion (of people, ideas, paradigms) has been reframed here to reflect the changing, and (although I hate to use this buzzword, the reality it names has become ubiquitous) digitalizing world. It is clear, though, that the central idea – the unequal distribution of power – remains the same, although mechanisms change. With new information and knowledge – often, unfortunately, also pseudo-knowledge – reaching global audiences literally instantly, it may become very hard to navigate the world and follow all relevant new developments. In this situation, rationalism can prove useful even today and indeed may be crucial now more than ever if we are to be able to critically evaluate rights and wrongs.

On marginalized ideas

One of the key issues here, as suggested in the introductory remarks, certainly is striving for the empowerment of marginalized groups, as the effort to give voice to the voiceless (authors, cultures, texts, organizations) has long been one of the main goals of translation and translation studies. However, I would like to speak about marginalized ideas. Ideas travel, they are not national, but can be prevented from spreading or be marginalized by nationalism/imperialism and get rediscovered again once circumstances change – e.g. when ideological restrictions are removed. One current example of this is the rediscovery of (older and current) research of translation and interpreting that originated in Ukraine and its dissemination in English (such as the publications by Kalnychenko 2023; Kolomiyets 2023; Shmiher 2014; or Odrekhivska 2021). This shift is not about ideas having existed or not, but about whether or not they have reached their audiences. Once ideas find a perceptive audience, they

may even go viral and create a new center which may lead to a revision of canonical ideas and rewriting of translation history. In the case of translation and interpreting in Ukraine and other post-totalitarian countries, this would mean freeing the history of narratives imposed on the territories dominated by the Soviet hegemony, which colonized memes of translation on this side of the Iron Curtain. I remember a conference in Kharkiv in 2019, where to my amazement scholars were talking about things I never heard before. Although most of the presentations were in Ukrainian, I was able to grasp their main message. From some presentations on translation history, it was quite clear that through reconstructing historical patterns in translation practice and agenda during the Soviet Union, one could expect the 2022 invasion to happen. After the invasion, the international translation studies community has finally become more perceptive to what they have to say. And here I wonder, does it really take a war for marginalized groups to be listened to? I also wonder how many interesting ideas there are for us to learn from in other countries that, at the moment, we do not think of listening to. All knowledge is fragmented, therefore one needs to be very careful when formulating “generally valid” statements. However, I would like to make myself very clear: ideas/narratives/stories belong to all, they are not national and they need to travel or as Vanessa Andreotti (2021) would say, dance with people in different contexts.

Empirical activism

We are talking here also about drastic and hardly “followable/predictable” changes. I believe that translation studies, particularly the examination of translation history, has the potential to forecast future developments. Translation serves as a litmus test for societal changes and advancements. It requires constant reinterpretation of facts based on new information as Karl Popper and Thomas Bayes invite us to do. The real fun of our research lies therein. Research is not static; it is extremely dynamic. As Taras Shmiher mentioned in his recent lecture in Banská Bystrica (2023), history deals with interpretation of facts. However, identity bias will always influence the process, which will, despite the effort, never be objective. And yet, I advocate for data-driven interpretation. In other words, we need to draw a strict line between activism/wishful thinking and empiricism. In my opinion, activism should always be based on empirical data. I have been engaged in an ongoing discussion with Christopher Rundle on what to do once we know or think we know something. As a brilliant historian of translation (not a historian of translation studies) focusing on fascism and para-fascism, he has a lot of knowledge about mechanisms which drive and fuel the system. Indeed, quite clear patterns are visible. What do we do when we see the same (or very similar) pattern recurring today? To know does not mean to stay impartial and quiet. Knowledge is responsibility, and translation carries a lot of knowledge since one of its main goals is to spread it (to whichever purpose this knowledge may serve).

Breaking out of isolation for translation studies as a discipline also means to abandon our comfort zones and internalize power asymmetries which, as I mentioned before, are very dynamic categories.

Deconstructing echo chambers

In other words, Andrew Chesterman's crucial question (e.g. 2011) still remains very relevant: so what? What is the ultimate goal of our efforts? Historical justice? I recall one conversation with a colleague some years ago, when I said I was sick of looking for who was "the first". He said that I may be right, but it is about looking for historical justice. I understand it as doing justice and recognizing those who were previously silenced. However, it is crucial to remember that achieving historical justice does not entail rewriting history according to our preferences. That would again mean we give our wishful thinking a superior role, and that must not happen. People frequently perceive what aligns with their desires, and scholars are not exempt from this tendency (e.g., confirmation bias and availability heuristics). Thus, we create these echo chambers where we feel comfortable. Deconstructing these chambers is what breaking out of isolation really means to me. Thus, I strongly advocate against all forms of anti-intellectualism in service of any ideology.

The issues under discussion here are only a fragment of the translation market. Significant? Probably not. Major? I doubt it. Interesting? Definitely. But let us not forget about everyday translators and interpreters and their work which, I dare say, forms the majority of the translation market and habitus and subtly shapes societies at large. Indeed, the social transformative power of translation is remarkable. For example, before 1989, literary translation formed the core of the translation market in Slovakia. Universities also focused mainly on teaching literary translation, as that was seen as the high art of translation. Certainly, it is important to note that since Slovakia, or rather Czechoslovakia, belonged to the Soviet sphere of influence, publications primarily focused on "friendly" languages and cultures – i.e. politically aligned ones. After 1989, the situation changed dramatically. Not only did the translated languages change (shifting from Russian to English), but also the nature of translation and social demand underwent dramatic changes. A shift towards "pragmatic translation" could be observed, and literary translation began to lag behind, mainly from an economic perspective. Nowadays, as Klaudia Bednárová-Gibová and Mária Majherová (2021) aptly note, literary translation has become a semi-profession. This has also been confirmed by research I conducted with Pavol Šveda (2023), showing that only 1% of translators in our sample (350) make their living solely from translating literary texts. However, up to 26% of translators and interpreters in our sample say they sometimes translate books for publishing houses. Oddly enough, based on the research, it seems that most literary translators are content with their social status and satisfied with their work. This means that we find ourselves in a rather paradoxical situation where an abundance of symbolic and cultural capital does not necessarily lead to higher economic capital. In Slovakia, this is also the case for other workers in the cultural sector. Thus, literary translation seems to be more about cultural activism than anything else. Up to 90% of translators mainly depend on technical translation. That being said, it appears that in the future, and even today, a professional translator/interpreter will be the individual who can effectively combine various translatorial activities (such as literary texts, audiovisual translation, technical translation, post-editing, interpreting, etc.) as effectively as possible.

In general, I would say that there is a call for the emancipation of the translation profession, which subsequently needs to integrate into the wider ecosystem of humanities. I think that we all need to calm down a little bit, take a deep breath, rethink our priorities, and then act accordingly. Slavoj Žižek (2009) warns that we are facing pseudo-activity, the urge to “be active,” to “participate”, to mask the Nothingness of what goes on. He adds that people intervene all the time, “doing something”; academics participate in meaningless “debates,” etc.; but the truly difficult thing is to step back, to withdraw from it all. Thus sometimes doing nothing is the most violent thing to do. Therefore, I call for evidence based, data-driven, and possibly rational activism.

CONCLUSION

Against the backdrop of current events, this discussion addresses the issue of unequal recognition of research done in areas that are not at the center of international attention. Research originating in locales which are globally less visible, and knowledge produced in underrepresented languages, struggles to gain the same recognition as research produced in academic centers. This disparity marginalizes different perspectives and perpetuates a cycle of invisibility for these cultures within the global knowledge economy. In order to gain a more accurate understanding of the world and interactions within it, translation studies, among other disciplines, need to challenge existing power imbalances. This can be done by employing different strategies, including the promoting of inclusivity and more intense collaboration.

An important issue that emerged in this article is how to address our time of multiple crises from an academic as well as an ethical perspective. The most challenging aspect here is how to maintain the ability to see the complexity of phenomena in a situation in which we are also called to make inevitable choices that require some degree of simplification. In this respect it is interesting to observe different academic reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian aggression toward Ukraine. During the COVID-19 crisis, academics have, on the one hand, supported public policies for the containment of the virus, providing in some cases dubious “scientific evidence” grounded on insufficient data. On the other hand, academics have criticized unnecessary restrictions to the freedom and rights of people, in some cases involuntarily fueling conspiracy theories about power abuses. Only retrospectively, we are becoming able to evaluate the truths and shortcomings of these different approaches. In the same way, the Russian aggression to Ukraine splits the international academic community between the ones who unconditionally stand with Ukraine and the ones who instrumentally invoke “complexity” to claim that Russian interests should also be taken into account in order to end the war.

These differences bring to the fore the situatedness of knowledge and the embeddedness of the researcher in the culture and society where she works. Thus, scholars based in Eastern Europe obviously have a different perspective on the war than, for instance, scholars based in Slavic studies departments of US universities. Though this is probably inevitable, we should still maintain the necessary openness for international academic dialogue, instead of far too easily dismissing opinions and research results which diverge from our own. In the case of translation studies, it seems that we

are positively moving from past simplifications based on binary oppositions (source vs. target, foreignization vs. domestication, adequacy vs. acceptability) to more complex and historically-based approaches which study translation in specific cultural contexts.

The discussion also highlighted the interconnectedness of virality and isolation within translation studies. Analyzing power dynamics between centers and peripheries, marginalized ideas and empirical activism may be helpful in deconstructing echo chambers and fighting anti-intellectualism – a plague sweeping over the Western world. Marginalized groups and ideas must be heard since they are by no means national, although are often rooted in national contexts and one has to bear in mind the impact of historical injustices on shaping widely accepted narratives. Therefore, there is an increased need for evidence-based activism in the field. Translators face a lot of challenges in balancing cultural, symbolic, and economic capital. Rational activism based on empirical data within translation studies seems to be able to navigate the complexities of our ever-changing digital world.

The interplay of knowledge and power shapes and is shaped by what is translated, which is possibly most apparent in the translation of texts in social sciences and the humanities, including translation and interpreting studies. The translation of scholarly texts is integral to knowledge production, not merely an auxiliary process. It profoundly influences the field, emphasizing that translating academic work is a scholarly endeavor deserving recognition and assessment. Despite the numerous English-language handbooks and anthologies on translation studies published in the last two decades, Eastern and Central European tradition is still often overlooked. Taking into consideration the geographical diversity of the discipline's origins, even delayed translations can repair historical inaccuracies.

Translation in the humanities should be carried out not only into the languages of global distribution, but also into the native language, which is perhaps not so widely used. This is necessary not only for the dissemination of ideas, which is extremely important in itself, but also for the formation of national terminology.

Ultimately, fostering a more inclusive and diverse academic landscape is essential for addressing the challenges posed by global crises. By prioritizing ethical considerations and embracing nuanced approaches, we can better navigate the complexities of our interconnected world, ensuring that all voices contribute meaningfully to our collective understanding.

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