

TRANSLATION THEORY IN THE SOVIET UNION  
BETWEEN TRADITION AND INNOVATION

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The historical background of Soviet translatology:  
a national identity from abroad

Translation is deeply rooted in Russian culture. The role of translation “can hardly be overestimated”<sup>1</sup> as it was crucial in shaping Russian cultural values.

The Church Slavonic itself, the language used by the translators of the Christian Byzantine literary heritage, was *par excellence* “a language of translations”.<sup>2</sup> In both morpho-syntax and phrase setting, Church Slavonic had its structure deeply modeled by Greek. Moreover, translations had a conspicuous function in thematically shaping ancient Russian literature with its religious focus.<sup>3</sup> As a fundamental vehicle of Christianization, Church Slavonic has been perceived in Russia as an emblem of orthodoxy;<sup>4</sup> in its diglossic antinomy to the secular, illiterate language, it acquired the status of both sacred and literary language, allowing thereby a semiotic association between the concepts of ‘translation’ and ‘high literature’. Church Slavonic had the same prestige and social consideration as Greek. Russian translators

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<sup>1</sup> M. Friedberg, *Literary Translation in Russia. A Cultural History*, University Park, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> M. Ju. Koreneva, *Istorija ruskoj perevodnoj literatury skvoz' prizmu razvitija russkogo literaturnogo jazyka*, in *Res Traductoria. Perevod i sravnitel'noe izučenie literatur*, ed. by V. E. Bagno, St.-Peterburg, Nauka, 2000, pp. 11-38, see p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> M. Colucci, R. Picchio, *La codificazione dei tipi letterari nella Rus' kieviana (secoli XI-XII)*, in Idd., *Storia della civiltà letteraria russa*, I, Torino, UTET, 1997, pp. 27-57, p. 32; V. N. Skibo, *U istokov stanovlenija perevodčeskogo dela v Rossii*, “Tetradi perevodčika”, 24 (1999), pp. 148-152.

<sup>4</sup> As Jurij Levin claims in his *Prelude* to his two-volume *History of Russian Translated Literature*, the source text itself was of no great interest to Old Russian ‘users’. See: *Istorija ruskoj perevodnoj chudožestvennoj literatury. Drevnjaja Rus'. XVIII vek. Proza*, I; *Dramaturgija. Poezija*, II, ed. by Ju. D. Levin, Köln-Weimar-Wien, Böhlau, 1995, 1996.

had the same social status of writers and there was the highest respect for translators as carriers of culture, which is an interesting aspect of continuity in all of Russian history until the end of the USSR. This might be considered the first, clear mark of distinction from the Western tradition.

In the post-Medieval history of translation, the most significant turning point occurred at the time of Peter the Great, when Russia eventually left its cultural self-isolation, opening itself up to European culture. A massive secularization of knowledge and education took place, which generated an exponential increase of translation activity.<sup>5</sup> Secular Russian also began to be used as a “language of translation”, gradually reaching a higher social status.<sup>6</sup>

Peter the Great realized that Russia’s ‘Europeanization’ would be possible only by translating texts of all kinds into a completely understandable language, providing the Russian language with new idioms and terminology. The tsar’s drastic reform of the alphabet used for secular purposes defined a double graphic system for printed texts – religious vs secular. The latter obtained its official cultural status.<sup>7</sup> Peter laid the basis for both a systematic work on Russian grammar and a definition of the patterns required in translation practice. In 1735, within the Russian Academy of Science, the *Rossijskoe sobranie* (‘Russian Assembly’) was established: it was the first professional organization of Russian translators, also involved in training future professionals.<sup>8</sup> The tsar himself was a translator and a theorist: he undertook a decisive fight against literalism, introducing in translation practice a proto-functional approach.

Catherine the Great was also personally involved in translation activity. In 1768, the *Sobranie, starajuščeesja o perevode inostrannykh knig na rossijskij jazyk* (the ‘Society for Professional Translation into Russian of Foreign Books’) was organized by the empress. During that time, most masterpieces of West-European and Oriental literatures were printed in Russian translations,<sup>9</sup> but also scientific and technical translations were commissio-

<sup>5</sup> V. M. Živov, *Jazyk i kul’tura v Rossii XVIII veka*, Moskva, Jazyki russkoj kul’tury, 1996, pp. 59-68.

<sup>6</sup> M. Ju. Koreneva, *Istorija russkoj perevodnoj literatury skvoz’ prizmu razvitija russkogo literaturnogo jazyka*, cit., pp. 15-16; V. V. Sdobnikov, O. V. Petrova, *Očerki istorii perevodčeskoj dejatel’nosti. Istorija perevoda v Rossii*, “Teorija perevoda”, 2006, pp. 5-66, see pp. 7-8.

<sup>7</sup> V. M. Živov, *Jazyk i kul’tura v Rossii XVIII veka*, cit., pp. 69-88.

<sup>8</sup> V. V. Sdobnikov, O. V. Petrova, *Očerki istorii perevodčeskoj dejatel’nosti. Istorija perevoda v Rossii*, cit., p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> P. Toper, *Tradicija realizma. (Russkie pisateli XIX veka o chudožestvennom perevode)*, in *Voprosy chudožestvennogo perevoda*, ed. by V. M. Rossel’s, Moskva, Sovetskij pisatel’, 1955, pp. 45-96, p. 47.

ned and supported, improving the development of Russian culture.<sup>10</sup> The technique of ‘domestication’, properly intended as ‘russification’, was the leading practice. The use of ‘intermediary texts’ was also frequent – translations into French and English were used by Russian translators as source text (ST),<sup>11</sup> and this practice lasted throughout the Soviet period (cases are reported when nothing existed beyond the intermediary-ST).<sup>12</sup>

As before, at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century, most Russian scholars and writers still seemed interested in determining the ‘correct’ translation technique and the useful parameters in evaluating professionalism.<sup>13</sup> The long-standing contrast between the supporters of ‘literal’ vs ‘free’ translation was firmly established and literary translations were largely discussed.<sup>14</sup> Russian translators mainly thought that only one of two options was available: either a target text (TT) is ‘literal’ and *of low aesthetic quality*; or it is ‘free’ and *of high aesthetic quality*. Besides these two options, *tertium non datur*. The axiom was that a TT ‘close’ to the ST implied a ‘distance’ from the target language. As an exception, Nikolaj Gogol’ grasped the third, missed option – the functional way to translation. The concept of ‘closeness’, expressed by Gogol’, reflects a farsighted functional conception: “That’s what I say to you about translations: sometimes one has to move away from the original, but with the special aim to be closer to him”.<sup>15</sup> Gogol’ understood that translation’s high quality is due to a merely apparent ‘distance’ that is in fact ‘closeness’; he hence unmasked the false paradox generated by the asymmetry of languages, equating the translator’s virtuosity with the *invisibility* of translation.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, the majority of Russian translators equated functionality with russification or imitation.

<sup>10</sup> P. Toper, *Perevod v sisteme sravnitel’nogo literaturovedenija*, Moskva, Nasledie, 2000, p. 56.

<sup>11</sup> M. Ju. Koreneva, *Istorija ruskoj perevodnoj literatury skvoz’ prizmu razvitija russkogo literaturnogo jazyka*, cit., p. 49.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. M. Friedberg, *Literary Translation in Russia. A Cultural History*, cit., pp. 173-174.

<sup>13</sup> Ju. D. Levin, *Ob istoričeskoj evoljucii principov perevoda (k istorii perevodčeskoj mysli v Rossii)*, in *Meždunarodnye svjazi ruskoj literatury*, ed. by M. P. Alekseev, Moskva, Akademija Nauk, 1963, pp. 5-63, p. 5; P. Toper, *Perevod v sisteme sravnitel’nogo literaturovedenija*, cit., p. 49.

<sup>14</sup> P. Toper, *Tradicija realizma...*, cit., p. 56.

<sup>15</sup> Letter to A. Maksimovič (April 20, 1834): N.V. Gogol’, *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij*, vol. 10, Moskva-Leningrad, Izd. Akademii Nauk, 1940, p. 311.

<sup>16</sup> The translator, he wrote, should be a so “transparent glass”, that the glass itself would not be visible (Ibid., 312).

Among the prestigious supporters of domestication, Aleksandr Puškin and Vasilij Žukovskij were the main figures. In recoding the unity of form and content Puškin saw the way a ST could become *national*, i.e. Russian.<sup>17</sup> His article about Milton's *Paradise lost* in Chateaubriand's translation remained, until the 1950s, "the source of any translation theory in Russia",<sup>18</sup> and Puškin's translations were regarded, for a long time, as unsurpassed models.<sup>19</sup>

Žukovskij was properly the 'hero' of the 'golden age' of Russian translation. Thanks to his versions of European poetry, foreign poems still today sound familiar to educated Russians,<sup>20</sup> but Žukovskij's works were not properly 'translations', but rather a sort of high level re-writing. In the Nineteenth century, the creation of a cultural bedrock for a solid national literature was a priority: translation was "a means of self-expression", and the difference between originality and translation still remained weak if not marginal.<sup>21</sup>

The claims by Puškin and Žukovskij were idealized and even misinterpreted by their fans as their model of 'free translation' was also intended "as a means of promoting democratic ideas, which would not have escaped official censorship in original works".<sup>22</sup> Translated texts were weakly controlled compared to original works, and they could be used "as a vehicle of dissent".<sup>23</sup> This is another element of continuity during all the Soviet times.<sup>24</sup>

Besides 'domesticators', in Nineteenth-Century Russia there were also supporters of 'literal' translations, whose main representative was the poet Afanasij Fet. He thought that translators should not recreate the aesthetic

<sup>17</sup> P. Toper, *Tradicija realizma...*, cit., p. 62.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, pp. 62-63.

<sup>19</sup> V. V. Vinogradov, *Stil' Puškina*, Moskva, OGIZ, 1941, p. 484. About Russian Nineteenth-century writers and translation cf. P. Toper, *Tradicija realizma...*, cit., pp. 56-96; V. V. Sdobnikov, O. V. Petrova, *Očerki istorii perevodčeskoj dejatel'nosti. Istorija perevoda v Rossii*, cit., pp. 26-46; Ju. D. Levin, *Russkie perevodčiki XIX veka*, Leningrad, Nauka, 1985.

<sup>20</sup> Ju. D. Levin, *Russkie perevodčiki XIX veka*, cit., p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, pp. 8-22; cf. also P. Toper, *Perevod v sisteme sravnitel'nogo literaturovedenija*, cit., pp. 64-65.

<sup>22</sup> V. N. Komissarov, *Russian Tradition*, in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, ed. by M. Baker, London-NY, Routledge, 2006 [1998], 541-549, see p. 545.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, although relatively few translations were controlled by censorship in the first two decades of the USSR (V. E. Bagno, N. N. Kazanskij, *Perevodčeskaja 'niša' v sovet-skiju epochu i fenomen stichotvornogo perevoda v XX veke*, in *Res Traductorica. Perevod i sravnitel'noe izučenie literatur*, cit., pp. 50-64, p. 50), "disrespectful references to Communism" or even "frank portrayal of sex" were suppressed (M. Friedberg, *Literary Translation in Russia. A Cultural History*, cit., p. 7).

potential of an 'original' text, but only a 'word for word' translation – they should neither think or feel, nor consider the sense, beauty, and style of the ST. His position was defined by Čukovskij as “anti-poetical” or “mechanical”.<sup>25</sup>

Although the dispute between the partisans of domestication and of 'literal' translation had a long life, at the end of the Nineteenth Century, some general Russian 'principles' about translation were, however, established and shared. First of all, it was the idea that a good literary translation is a part of the national literature. The progressive critic Vissarion Belinskij (who probably wrote on translation more than anybody else of his time, becoming the 'reference point' of Soviet criticism)<sup>26</sup> stated that literary translations into Russian are nothing but Russian literature. He considered translating the best way to improve the mutual knowledge of different peoples. This progressive idea was the core of historical continuity in the passage from pre- to Soviet time.<sup>27</sup>

On the eve of First World War, despite its highest level of illiteracy, Russia was the second country in the world (after Germany) in terms of printed books and most of them were translations.<sup>28</sup> During the 'Silver age' of Russian letters, a whole pleiad of celebrated poets-translators was at work. Although translating by dictionaries and intermediary texts, neglecting bilingual competence and training, the symbolists reinforced an immense respect for foreign texts and their translations:

Soviet translators did not start their activity in an empty space. Over centuries, during the evolution of Russian society and Russian literature, the principles had been set, which will be assumed by the best Soviet translators.<sup>29</sup>

#### A 'Powerful Translation Country': positive preconditions for theorization in the young Soviet State

The Twentieth Century was “the century of translation”.<sup>30</sup> Thanks to the increase of international contacts in every sector of social life, translation became a large-scale phenomenon. More than ever in the past, in the fields of

<sup>25</sup> K. I. Čukovskij, *Vysokoe iskusstvo. Principy chudožestvennogo perevoda*, St-Peterburg, Azbuka, 2011 [1964], pp. 97-99.

<sup>26</sup> P. Toper, *Perevod v sisteme sravnitel'nogo literaturovedenija*, cit., p. 83.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, pp. 83-91.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem, p. 108.

<sup>29</sup> P. Toper, *Tradicija realizma...*, cit., p. 95.

<sup>30</sup> A. V. Fedorov, *Iskusstvo perevoda i žizn' literatury. Očerki*, Leningrad, Sovetskij pisatel', 1983, p. 156.

business, technology, art, and science, an impressive quantity of translations was requested. Translators became professionals and, consequently, the qualitative standard of their performances required further systematic investigations of both translation's products and processes.<sup>31</sup>

Although, in the second half of the Century, the mentioned burst of translation activity occurred everywhere, in the USSR something unique and unprecedented took place earlier than in the other countries.<sup>32</sup> The phenomenal interest in translation reflected, as in the past, a stable bond between cultural communication and ideology. In Soviet Russia "a permanent artistic-ideological struggle of currents, ideological trends, and tastes was going on".<sup>33</sup> For the new multilingual Soviet country, translations were an essential means in improving cultural cohesion. In the period of Soviet expansion to the East (mostly during the Civil War), it became clear that the new State should be based on multiculturalism, with Russian as the *lingua franca*. On the one hand, different peoples with their different languages should have their cultural role recognized; on the other, Russians needed translations for two reasons – sharing the traditions of Soviet populations and promoting russification. To some extent, Soviet cultural policy was oriented to a paradoxical 'multicultural nationalism' – the social 'mission' was making the masterpieces of all the Soviet peoples resound in Russian.<sup>34</sup> In short, 'Soviet identity' too was built through translation. The general socialist optimism and the belief that all human cultures reflect universal features, implied the corollary of full translatability:

We state the possibility to translate, i.e. the *translatability* from any language into any other language, that sort of translatability able to improve the communication of all peoples. [...] Different languages reflect different ways to express thoughts, but the way we think is one, the laws of thinking are the same.<sup>35</sup>

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution, Vladimir Rossel's with his typical Soviet pathos, noted that, while in pre-Soviet times among the hundred and thirty peoples living in the Russian Empire only twenty had a written tradition, a decade after the Revolution, Soviet

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<sup>31</sup> V. N. Komissarov, *Perevodovedenie v XX veke: nekotorye itogi*, "Tetradi perevodčika", 24 (1999), pp. 4-20, pp. 4-6.

<sup>32</sup> K. I. Čukovskij, *Vysokoe iskusstvo...*, cit., p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> M. F. Ryl'skij, *Chudožestvennye perevody literatur narodov SSSR*, "Iskusstvo perevoda", Moskva, Sovetskij pisatel', 1986, [1954; transl. from Ukr.], pp. 85-118, see p. 98.

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem, p. 86.

<sup>35</sup> Ibidem, pp. 89-90.

books were printed in 61 different languages.<sup>36</sup> Making world classical literature available to the large masses of readers was one of the most important tasks of the cultural revolution of the 1920s.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, the huge work on translations all over the country implied a new interest in quality and professional training. This issue was first introduced in relation to an impressive translation project undertaken immediately after the October Revolution.

In 1918, Maksim Gor'kij conceived the ambitious project called "World literature", which was developed by the Petrograd Publishing house "Vse-mirnaja literatura" (the same name of the project itself). Soviet T-theory was born within this framework.<sup>38</sup> One hundred writers, poets, and translators joined the project;<sup>39</sup> their primary aim was a revision of all previous Russian translations of world masterpieces, extending the very concept of 'world-literature' to the written and oral heritage of all Soviet peoples.<sup>40</sup> In this urgent process of mass-acculturation, both aesthetic and linguistic qualities were fundamental.

The second step of Gorkij's enterprise included the organization of dozens of translators, providing them with the common rules to be applied to their work. At that time, no book on T-theory existed in Russian yet.<sup>41</sup> For this reason, a booklet was published (in 1919 and 1920) – *Principles of Literary Translation*. It was an instrument for improving quality and the formal consistency of translator performance:

These principles and tendencies [...] for all the further history of literary translation in the USSR had been a guideline in both the work of word-artists and the everyday work of publishing houses [...] *The day that booklet appeared is the day the Soviet theory of literary translation was born* [my Italics, LS].<sup>42</sup>

Gorkij's project developed around the figure of Kornej Čukovskij, who was also the author of the aforementioned booklet and can be considered as the 'grand-father' of Soviet T-theory:

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<sup>36</sup> V. M. Rossel's, *Sovetskaja mnogonacional'naja*, in *Masterstvo perevoda*, ed. by. V. M. Rossel's, Moskva, Sovetskij pisatel', 1973, pp. 3-12, pp. 3-4.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem, p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>39</sup> K. I. Čukovskij, *Vysokoe iskusstvo...*, cit., p. 5.

<sup>40</sup> A. V. Fedorov, *Iskusstvo perevoda i žizn' literatury. Očerki*, cit., p. 160.

<sup>41</sup> K. I. Čukovskij, *Vysokoe iskusstvo...*, cit., pp. 6-7.

<sup>42</sup> A. V. Fedorov, *Iskusstvo perevoda i žizn' literatury. Očerki*, cit., p. 161.

[...] I was requested to provide a synthetic and rigorous theory, able to cover the whole, huge problem. I was not capable to found such a theory, but I could develop some elementary rules, which could show translators how to work in the right way.<sup>43</sup>

Čukovskij was also involved in the organization of the first permanent ‘translation workshop’, which took place within the Publishing house. In his further and celebrated book *Vysokoe iskusstvo. Principy chudožestvennogo perevoda* (The High Art. Principles of Literary Translation) – first published in 1964, as a revision of the book *The Art of Translation* (1941) – Čukovskij wrote that, in the conditions of the Soviet system, literary translation was “a matter of national significance, a matter of vital interest to millions of people”.<sup>44</sup> The USSR needed a drastic improvement in popular education and a massive increase in cultural knowledge. While in pre-Soviet Russia the reading audience was limited to the *intelligencija*, whose representatives had some familiarity with the main West-European languages, the target of the extended program of mass-acculturation was the new working-class. Literature appeared as the main instrument to convert millions of illiterate, passive peasants and workers into the literate, aware people of a new multinational and multilingual power.

The high quality of literary translations was an important premise in pleading for Soviet translators to reach (as in former Russia) the same high social status of writers.<sup>45</sup> In their turn, best Soviet writers were directly involved in most translation projects, and the range of genres and styles of imported literature was impressively enlarged.<sup>46</sup> Even though the legal equality of translators and writers was officially stated only in 1954 at the II Congress of Soviet Writers, this goal was explicitly formulated during the first years after the October Revolution.<sup>47</sup>

The formulation and formalization of the main theoretical questions was the only way to obtain a guideline in checking the ‘equivalence rate’ of ST and TT. Hence, the key-topic of Soviet translatology became the concept of *interlinguistic equivalence*. Almost all Soviet theorists shared the idea that, because of their complexity, literary texts require more efforts to be translated

<sup>43</sup> K. I. Čukovskij, *Vysokoe iskusstvo...*, cit., p. 8.

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem, p. 9.

<sup>45</sup> V. M. Rossel’s, *Nužna istorija chudožestvennogo perevoda v SSSR*, in *Masterstvo perevoda*, ed. by A. B. Gatov, Moskva, Sovetskij pisatel’, 1964, pp. 53-62, see pp. 57-58.

<sup>46</sup> Ibidem, p. 60.

<sup>47</sup> “In the list of the literary professions, on a par with writers, poets, playwrights, and critics, also literary translators were included”: M. F. Ryl’skij, *Chudožestvennye perevody literatur narodov SSSR*, cit., p. 59.



and that their *aesthetic equivalence* has little to do with their *informational equivalence*; the latter was conversely considered the main parameter in evaluating scientific and technical translations. But *de facto* all agreed that *a*) any theory should be applicable to any kind of text, and *b*) that “generalization must be based on facts rather than on subjective speculation”.<sup>48</sup> Text-distinctions should be included in a unified theoretical model and consistence would be granted by the generality of the theory. For this reason, though Soviet T-theory started in the sphere of literature, the peculiarities of non-artistic texts could emerge by contrast. In defining what a text of art is, the specificity of other texts would be defined.

Another reason why the USSR offered a fertile ground for the improvement of T-theory was the fact that all translators considered their job to be a ‘national contribution’, a matter of social involvement. Since the first decade of its existence, the USSR became a “*velikaja perevodčeskaja deržava*”, a ‘powerful translation country’.<sup>49</sup> This conviction lasted from the beginning of the Soviet era to its end, and Soviet T-theorists exhibited the same high self-esteem of Soviet translators. They “seemed to detect no inconsistency in claiming that their school of translation – which continued pre-revolutionary Russian tradition – was the world’s very best”.<sup>50</sup>

Besides the aforementioned historical reasons, another factor was important in the prolific evolution of academic T-theory in the USSR – the birth of linguistics as a formal and experimental scientific field.<sup>51</sup>

#### From the dream of formalization to neuro-linguistics

Between the 1920s and the early 1930s, in the USSR “a radical turn in the evolution of the theoretical conceptions about translation occurred”.<sup>52</sup> While towards the end of the 1920s, Soviet translators had at their disposal the sole

<sup>48</sup> V. N. Komissarov, *Russian Tradition*, cit., p. 547.

<sup>49</sup> Id., *Sovremennoe perevodovedenie*, Moskva, ETS, 1999, p. 7; Id., *Russian Tradition*, cit., p. 546.

<sup>50</sup> M. Friedberg, *Literary Translation in Russia. A Cultural History*, cit., p. 7.

<sup>51</sup> V. V. Vinogradov, *Istorija russkich lingvističeskich učenij*, Moskva, Vysšaja škola, 1978, p. 331. A detailed history of Soviet linguistic translatology does not yet exist. Even in post-Soviet times, deplores Komissarov, many original and productive works of Soviet authors have not drawn the attention they would deserve (V. N. Komissarov, *Lingvističeskoe perevodovedenie v Rossii*, Moskva, ETS, 2002, p. 4). The success of Soviet research in the whole field of linguistics was possible thanks to the contribution of such brilliant and brave pre-Soviet scholars as, for instance, Aleksandr Potebnja. However, being written in Russian, most of the pre-Soviet and Soviet works remained unknown to the Western academic community.

<sup>52</sup> A. V. Fedorov, *Iskusstvo perevoda i žizn' literatury. Očerki*, cit., p. 159.

mentioned Čukovskij's booklet, in 1929, the first systematic handbook on translation – *Teorija i praktika perevoda* (Translation Theory and Practice) – was published in Char'kov by Aleksandr Finkel'.<sup>53</sup> He affirmed the principle that no theory can be formulated out of practice. In his further article *About some questions of translation theory* (University of Char'kov, 1939) Finkel' opposed the prejudices of untranslatability, arguing that logical, shareable reasoning ought to be merged with concrete data.<sup>54</sup>

Once the very question of translatability was overcome, the discussion was definitively oriented to translation quality and to the potential of Soviet translators, which was intended as immense. Of course, complex literary translations required peculiar *artistic* prerequisites that, besides language knowledge, translators could cultivate in their professional path – literary culture, creativeness, criticism, and familiarity with verbal techniques.<sup>55</sup> Yet, the turn towards linguistics was serious and, at some extent, definitive. In the 1930s and 1940s, translation became an object of formal, technical investigations, and the 'mechanical dream' took hold. At the end of the 1920s, the idea that any text is translatable stimulated the conviction that, once found the logical algorithms of language structure, the translation process will be soon accomplished by a mechanical device. In the USSR the 'mechanical dream' was thus cultivated before the digital era.

The first contribution to Soviet 'machine translation' was offered by Petr Smirnov-Trojanskij, an engineer whose impressive intuitions about language structures anticipated, by many years, the 'Chomskyan hypothesis'. In 1933, he submitted a patent for a pioneering project of a translation machine, which included the first theory of universal grammar in world history.<sup>56</sup> Many years

<sup>53</sup> A. M. Finkel' is well known in Russia for his translation of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*.

<sup>54</sup> A. V. Fedorov, *Iskusstvo perevoda i žizn' literatury. Očerki*, cit., p. 159.

<sup>55</sup> Ibidem, p. 163. Such phenomenal translators of those times such as M. Lozinskij, S. Maršak, Ju. Tynjanov, B. Jarcho undoubtedly shared all 'artistic requisites', but their bilingual competence was meagre if measured with current parameters.

<sup>56</sup> In fact, a couple of months before Trojanskij, the French-Armenian engineer Georges Artsrouni patented a similar 'mechanical brain' equipped with a multilingual dictionary. Not by chance, before emigration, Artsrouni was a student in Petrograd (cf. J. Hutchins, E. Lovtskij, *Petr Petrovich Troyanskii (1894-1950): a forgotten pioneer of mechanical translation*, "Machine Translation", 15 (2000) 3, pp. 187-221.; J. Hutchins, *Two precursors of machine translation: Artsrouni and Trojanskij*, <http://www.hutchinsweb.me.uk/IJT-2004.pdf> [last access, September 2014]) and could have been in contact with the same scientific environment as Trojanskij: "Artsrouni manufactured a storage device on paper tape which could be utilized for searching any equivalent in other languages" (A. Akbari, *An Overall Perspective of Machine Translation with its Shortcomings*, "International Journal of Education & Literacy Studies", 1-2 (2014), pp. 1-10, p. 2).

before Noam Chomsky theorized universal grammar, Trojanskij claimed that a deep structure is shared by all natural languages and that it should represent the logical system of parsing required in formalizing translation processes. Completely neglected for many years, Trojanskij's work was re-discovered in 1959 thanks to a brochure published in Moscow by the Academy of Science under the edition of Dmitrij Panov – *Perevodnaja mašina P.P. Trojanskogo. Sbornik materialov o perevodnoj mašine dlja perevoda s odnogo jazyka na drugie, predloženoj P.P. Trojanskim v 1933 godu* (The translation machine by P. P. Trojanskij. Papers on the machine for translating from one language into others, proposed by P.P. Trojanskij in 1933).<sup>57</sup>

Trojanskij's project was related to the high need of the USSR in rapidly translating texts when no bilinguals were available for certain language pairs: his machine would be the ideal instrument in translating from/into Russian from/into all the new Caucasian and Asian languages of the extended Soviet power.<sup>58</sup> Because of its technical complexity, Trojanskij's device was never concretely built, but some of its leading principles were deeply innovative in their explicit formulation of the universal principle of translatability. The first step of the procedure (logical analysis) would be transcoding a text A from its 'national grammar' into the machine-language (text A1) and would be delegated to a first 'monolingual translator'. The second step, the 'bilingual operation', would be the conversion by the device of A1 into B1. The final step concerned recoding B1 into B by a second monolingual, whose task would be 'translating' the machine-language into the 'national-grammatical' form of his native language.<sup>59</sup> The main advantages of the machine would be to overcome the lack of bilingual translators, producing simultaneously many translations into different languages with a lower cost of time and resources compared to exclusively human performances.<sup>60</sup> The crucial problem of this conception was the belief that grammatical structure *is* 'the language' (Trojanskij seemed to have no idea of language complexity).

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<sup>57</sup> It is possible that Panov's booklet about Trojanskij's invention was inspired by an article which appeared in "Voprosy jazykoznanija" in 1956, where Lev Žirkov presented Trojanskij's invention (cf. A. Marzano, *Il precursore della traduzione automatica P.P. (Smirnov-) Trojanskij e la sua macchina per tradurre*, Tesi di Laurea, 2000-2001, Università di Bologna, SSLiMIT, Forlì). Machine translation had been curiously a field of collaboration of Soviet and American scholars during most of the cold war years.

<sup>58</sup> Curiously, fifty years later Ryl'skij still spoke about the "historical mission of translating into Russian" (M. F. Ryl'skij, *Chudožestvennye perevody literatur narodov SSSR*, cit., p. 86).

<sup>59</sup> *Perevodnaja mašina P. P. Trojanskogo*, ed. by I. K. Bel'skaja, L. N. Korolev, D. Ju. Panov, Moskva, Akademija Nauk SSSR, 1959, pp. 7-8. The interlingual dictionary projected for Trojanskij's device was modeled on Esperanto.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 13.

When at the end of 1930s the idea that human translators would be soon replaced by machines took root in Russia, Soviet T-theory assumed a position opposed to the idealistic views expressed by such Western philosophers as Walter Benjamin and José Ortega y Gasset. In his article *The Task of the Translator* (1923), which later became a cult text of Western Translation Studies, Benjamin claimed that only certain texts are translatable and that a translated text (however “good”) is never comparable with its “original”, it is rather its “echo”.<sup>61</sup> In his turn, Ortega y Gasset (1992) considered unsolvable the paradox of translation (which, in his words, “doesn’t even belong to the same literary genre” as the TT) and looked at translation as a Utopian job doomed to failure. Briefly, Soviet T-theory very soon assumed an interdisciplinary position opposed to the anti-scientific ideology of most Western thinkers.<sup>62</sup>

In the middle of the 1950s (when Trojanskij’s work was re-discovered), the new-born computational intelligence moved the world attention towards ‘automatic’ translation, which became a master topic in both the USSR and the Western countries (particularly in the United States). Again, the difference was in the higher degree of dialogue among Soviet humanities, sciences, and technologies:

In the 1950s and in the first half of the 1960s, this new current of contemporary linguistics and cognitive engineering had a rapid evolution, absorbing in its sphere cross-disciplines. It was a period of euphoria, based on the idea that human intellect and ‘exact sciences’ have unlimited possibilities.<sup>63</sup>

The first-generation research in automatic translation overlapped in the USSR with the beginning of Chruščev’s ‘Thaw’ – the Soviet Union opened to Western science, partially overcoming the previous academic isolation. In 1958, the first Conference of Machine Translation took place in Moscow. This event can be considered the peak of Soviet optimism. Although literary translation was excluded from short-term tasks, some scholars affirmed that the difficulties with complex texts would be overcome in a not so distant future. This naïve belief was reconsidered in the next decade.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> W. Benjamin, *The Task of the Translator* [1923], in *Theories of Translation*, ed. by R. Schulte, J. Biguenet, Chicago-London, Chicago Univ. Press, 1992, pp. 71-82, see pp. 72-77.

<sup>62</sup> J. Ortega y Gasset, *The Misery and the Splendor of Translation* [1923], in *Theories of Translation*, cit., pp. 91-112, see p. 109.

<sup>63</sup> P. Toper, *Perevod v sisteme sravnitel’nogo literaturovedenija*, cit., p. 138.

<sup>64</sup> Ibidem, 138-140. In the middle of the 1950s, the so called ‘Georgetown experiment’ (an American-Soviet join project) took place: a machine translated into English a Russian scientific text (J. Hutchins, *The Georgetown-IBM experiment demonstrated in January 1954*, in *Machine Translation: from Real User to Research*, ed. by R.E. Frederking, B. Kathryn,

In the 1960s, Soviet T-theorists could eventually read the works by Eugene Nida, Georges Mounin, John Catford, and other prominent representatives of the dawning scientific T-theory in the West. This opportunity offered them a positive benchmark for the evaluation of their own achievements – Soviet T-theory was clearly competitive at a world level. Compared to Western research, it had a larger approach: “in the first half of the 1960s, many algorithms of syntax analysis were built at different degrees of completeness and power, moreover for many different languages”.<sup>65</sup>

As it was for Trojanskij, syntax was considered crucial in solving the computational puzzles of automatic translation. This interest gave birth to the movement of *structuralism*, which was directly involved with logics and applied mathematics. In 1971, introducing the Soviet edition of collected papers on automatic translation, Ol’ga Kulagina and Igor’ Mel’čuk claimed:

Machines translate from one language into another, but normally only in the limited conditions of a well-prepared experiment. Up until now, a practical automatic translation, able to enter common life, as it has been with tape recorders, microscopes or computers, does not yet exist [...] Automatic translation of the highest quality is, *in principle*, undoubtedly achievable – no theoretical or empiric considerations are known, which could conflict with this claim. Nevertheless, achievable in principle does not mean achievable in practice and in a very short time.<sup>66</sup>

Besides the development of computational linguistics, despite the ideological State control, Soviet research has excelled in the fields of both psycholinguistics and neurolinguistics. As closely related to T-theory, both disciplines deserve to be considered in the present review.

Among world-famous Soviet scientists, Lev Vygotskij and Aleksandr Lurija ought to be mentioned. They both worked together within the so called ‘Vygotskij’s circle’, which for two decades had been bringing together several representatives of Soviet culture,<sup>67</sup> setting the foundations for Soviet psy-

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Berlin, Springler, 2004, pp. 102-114). The possibility to translate Russian texts was an American strategic priority, due to “the lack of knowledge about activities in the Soviet Union” (Ibid., 103). Americans were so far from Soviet reality, that in some reports Russian is called “the Soviet language” (Ibid.).

<sup>65</sup> O. S. Kulagina, I. A. Mel’čuk, *Avtomatičeskij perevod: kratkaja istorija, sovremennoe sostojanie, vozmožnye perspektivy*, in *Avtomatičeskij perevod*, ed. by O. S. Kulagina, I. A. Mel’čuk, Moskva, Progress, 1971, pp. 3-25, p. 9; cf. also L. Nelyubin, *Machine Translation in the former USSR*, “Perspective: Studies in Translatology”, 5 (1997) 1, *Russian Translation Studies*, Special Issue ed. by N. Bushmanova, Museum Tusculanum Press (University of Copenhagen), 1998, pp. 125-138.

<sup>66</sup> O. S. Kulagina, I. A. Mel’čuk, *Avtomatičeskij perevod*, cit., pp. 21-22.

<sup>67</sup> A. Yasnitsky, *Vygotsky Circle during the Decade of 1931-1941*, cit.

cholingistics.<sup>68</sup> Soviet contribution to the cognitive aspects of human intelligence was influenced by the intellectual milieu of *fin de siècle* Russia. Great scholars, such as A. Potebnja and L. Ščerba (a student of the eminent Polish linguist J. N. Baudouin de Courtenay), provided the background of Russian *filologija* with a particular interdisciplinary orientation.<sup>69</sup> As claimed by one of the main Soviet T-theorist, Aleksandr Švejcer, “the detection of the psycholinguistic foundation of translation is a necessary premise for understanding its essence”.<sup>70</sup>

Stimulated by Roman Jakobson’s research on aphasias,<sup>71</sup> Lurija gave an immense contribution to the understanding of natural-language processing by human cognition. Particularly, by studying aphasic patients in the post-war period, he successfully realized how experience shapes human conceptualization and word *meanings*, and how the human brain is expected to organize its interconnected networks of sensory, procedural, and semantic memories. A new shocking picture emerged from Lurija’s research. Patients impaired in “language conceptualization” (*rečevoe myšlenie*) revealed to be able to process semantic and grammatical rules. Yet, while being able to refer words to concrete objects, they show no access to the whole conceptual, integrated information stored in memories. These patients demonstrated that the concept of ‘meaning’ is completely different from a naïve dictionary entry.<sup>72</sup> ‘Meaning’ appeared to be built by all memory circuits and linguistic processes

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<sup>68</sup> As specialists in the field of psychology, physiology, and neurology, they were particularly interested in language and memory brain activity.

<sup>69</sup> Vygotskij and Lur’ja were to some extent the heirs of the pioneering contributions by Potebnja, who prepared linguistics for its interdisciplinary bond with psychology, emotions, and aesthetic taste. Vygotskij’s *Thought and Language* is today a well-known masterpiece, but in 1862 Potebnja had written a forgotten work on “thought and language” (cf. A. A. Potebnja, *Mysl’ i jazyk* [1862], Moskva, Iskusstvo, 2010). He should probably be mentioned as the ‘forefather’ of Soviet linguistic T-theory for his contributions to verbal aesthetics and psycholinguistics, rather than for his only article on untranslatability, which was printed posthumously and with no revision (cf. A. A. Potebnja, *Jazyk i narodnost’* [1895], *Ėstetika i poëtika*, Moskva, Iskusstvo, 1976, pp. 253-285).

<sup>70</sup> A. Švejcer, *Teorija perevoda: Status, problemy, aspekty*, Moskva, 1988, p. 21.

<sup>71</sup> Jakobson was a Muscovite and, before leaving Russia, one of the founders of the Moscow Linguistic Circle. His first book on aphasias was published in 1941 in Uppsala (*Kindersprache, Aphasie und allgemeine Lautgesetze*) and translated into English twenty-seven years later (cf. R. Jakobson, *Child Language, Aphasia and Phonological Universals*, The Hague, Mouton De Gruyter, 1968).

<sup>72</sup> A. Lurija, *Travmatičeskaja afazija. Klinika, semiotika i vosstanovitel’naja terapija*, Moskva, Akademija Med. Nauk, 1947, p. 154.

appeared to be a relevant object of *cognitive brain abilities*. Bilingualism, the main requisite for translation, was clearly included.<sup>73</sup>

A contribution to Soviet psycholinguistics was also offered by the ‘two Leont’evs’ (father and son), Aleksandr Nikolaevič (who worked closely with Vygotskij and Lurija) and Aleksandr Aleksandrovič (a specialist in foreign languages and psychology, who published a set of useful handbooks for psychology and linguistics students).<sup>74</sup>

The role of Soviet psycho- and neurolinguistics in making T-theory a scientifically based discipline was fundamental:

Psycholinguistics became the starting point in studying both simultaneous interpreting, as a whole, and the psychological mechanisms involved in this kind of activity [...] It improved the evolution of translation theory as a scientific discipline, in order to understand a set of processes involved in translation activity, which could not be investigated with the sole means of linguistics.<sup>75</sup>

#### T-theory boom in post-war USSR and the Soviet postulate: no linguistics – no theory

In the Soviet post-war period, the lasting progress in formal, applied, and cognitive linguistics had a positive impact on T-theory, improving interdisciplinarity. In the 1950s, within the humanities, the approach to translation was still perceived in a prudent way if compared to the naïve enthusiasm of machine translation studies. In cybernetics, the optimism was due to a conception of natural language as a mere abstract code, as pure structure. Psycho- and neuro-linguistics led both scientists and literary scholars to rethink their postulates.

This fact marks a noticeable difference over Western (‘Bassnettian’) Translation Studies: gradually, the idea that linguistics is a *sine qua non*

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<sup>73</sup> The last contribution by Lurija (published post-mortem by his students) offers a summary of his revolutionary discoveries in psycholinguistics, explicitly based on Vygotskij’s theories (cf. A. Lurija, *Jazyk i soznanie* [1979], Moskva, Izd. MGU 1998).

<sup>74</sup> About the complex reconstruction of the origins of psycholinguistics in Russia and of the role of the Leont’ev family in the “Soviet narrative”, cf. A. Yasnitsky, *Vygotsky Circle during the Decade of 1931-1941: Toward an Integrative Science of Mind, Brain, and Education*, PhD, University of Toronto, Dep. of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, 2009, [[https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/19140/1/Yasnitsky\\_Anton\\_200911\\_PhD\\_thesis.pdf](https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/19140/1/Yasnitsky_Anton_200911_PhD_thesis.pdf) – cons. 22 sept 2014].

<sup>75</sup> I. V. Gurin, *Problema rečevoj kompressii v sinchronnom perevode. Podchody i metody Issledovanija*, “Filologičeskie nauki. Voprosy teorii i praktiki”, 1 (2008) 1, pp. 85-88, p. 85.



component of translation studies took place. In the USSR “the development of translatology brought to the leading position of linguistic theories”.<sup>76</sup> generalization, regularization, and the combined interest in linguistics and literary studies are the peculiarities of the Soviet-Russian school. The new labels given to T-theory in post-war Russia are symptomatic of its scientific orientation: *obščaja teorija perevoda* (‘general translation theory’); *nauka o perevode* (‘science of translation’); *perevodovedenie* (‘translatology’, cf. Russian *perevod*, ‘translation’); *traduktologija* (‘traductology’, cf. Latin *transduco*, ‘to transfer, to translate’); *translatologija* [or *transl’jatologija*] (‘translatology’, cf. Latin *translatio*).

The merging of linguistics with translation was favoured by different factors – the so called ‘informational boom’, the spreading of new translation typologies (such as interpreting, film dubbing, radio translation etc.), the need for an organized educational system, and the efforts in machine translation.<sup>77</sup> However, the theoretical orientation toward linguistics was due to the evolution of linguistics itself. Since the 1920s, in opposition to the formal, structural ‘microlinguistics’, Russian T-theory contributed to the development of the, so called, ‘macrolinguistics’.<sup>78</sup> The new field included psycholinguistics, pragmalinguistics, and sociolinguistics – the three pillars of a consistent T-theory. It became clear that, despite the indubitable importance of grammatical, lexical, and structural rules, pragmatics is the highest degree of language functionality and verbal communication. The pioneers of macrolinguistics intuitively grasped that phonology, morphosyntax, and lexicon were the necessary but not sufficient microlinguistic components in representing and resolving interlinguistic asymmetries.

Although some Soviet scholars tried to assert the priority of literary vs. linguistic perspectives,<sup>79</sup> the large majority of T-theorists agreed that namely macrolinguistics, with its multidisciplinary potentiality, is the very framework of any T-theory, including the literary one. The antagonism between literary and linguistic was actually marginal if compared to the Western countries, but a “pretty heated discussions aroused about the question, who should study

<sup>76</sup> V. N. Komissarov, *Perevodovedenie v XX veke: nekotorye itogi*, cit., p. 7.

<sup>77</sup> Id., *Sovremennoe perevodovedenie*, cit., pp. 13-16.

<sup>78</sup> Id., *Lingvističeskoe perevodovedenie v Rossii*, cit., p. 5.

<sup>79</sup> V. V. Sdobnikov, O. V. Petrova, *Očerki istorii perevodčeskoi dejatel’nosti. Istorija perevoda v Rossii*, cit., pp. 55-56. For instance, Aleksandr Reformatorskij excluded the possibility of building a *general* theory (as the linguistic approach suggested), arguing that different text-typologies require different theories (A. A. Reformatorskij, *Lingvističeskie voprosy perevoda*, “*Inostrannye jazyki v škole*”, 6 (1952), pp. 12-22, see p. 12).



Translation theory as an art, as a creative activity: the specialists of literature or of linguistics?”<sup>80</sup> All theorists considered that “in a conception of translatability, to the language must be given the role of a prominent factor, of an instrument with an immense aesthetical potentiality”.<sup>81</sup>

Under the influence of cybernetics, T-theory clearly reflected a striving for *regularities*. The discussion was opened in post-war Russia by Jakov Recker, who soon became the reference point for Soviet T-theory. His article *O zakonomernych sootvetstvijach pri perevode na rodnoj jazyk* (“On the regular correspondences in translating into a native language”)<sup>82</sup> overtly disclaimed the skeptical idea that subjectivity will prevent any possibility of generalization; conversely, it stated that whatever the text, whatever the languages, all translations have in common some procedures. Although the terminology was somehow naïve and partially inconsistent, nonetheless, Recker was the first theorist overtly speaking of ‘translation patterns’ – in Komissarov’s words,<sup>83</sup> Russian translatology “comes from Recker”. Yet, the manifesto of Soviet T-theory is the book *Vvedenie v teoriju perevoda* (An Introduction to the Theory of Translation, 1953) by Andrej Fedorov.<sup>84</sup> Lev Neljubin claims:

It was not until early 1950s that translation theory was acknowledged to be a part of linguistics. This became possible after the well-known discussion inspired by A. Fedorov’s *Introduction to the Theory of Translation* (1953). The author made challenging statements about the linguistic approach as a fruitful and indispensable strategy in translation theory.<sup>85</sup>

Fedorov’s book had an extraordinary impact and his authority as a T-theorist was unquestioned.<sup>86</sup> The author explicitly argued that linguistics is

<sup>80</sup> A. V. Fedorov, *Iskusstvo perevoda i žizn’ literatury. Očerki*, cit., p. 167.

<sup>81</sup> Ibidem, p. 179.

<sup>82</sup> Ja. I. Recker, *O zakonomernych sootvetstvijach pri perevode na rodnoj jazyk*, in *Voprosy i metodiki učebnogo perevoda*, ed. by K. A. Ganšina, I. V. Karpov, Moskva, Akademija Nauk, 1950, 156–183.

<sup>83</sup> V. N. Komissarov, *Lingvističeskoe perevodovedenie v Rossii*, cit., p. 24.

<sup>84</sup> Komissarov, the main historian of Soviet T-theory, seems to be also the best evaluator of Recker’s work. For instance, Sdobnikov and Petrova (*Očerki istorii perevodčeskogo dejatel’nosti...*, cit., p. 56), ignoring Recker’s article, claim that Fedorov’s book opened the scientific discussion of the 1950s.

<sup>85</sup> L. Nelyubin, *Machine Translation in the former USSR*, cit., p. 127.

<sup>86</sup> I. S. Alekseeva, *Koncepcija polnocennosti perevoda A.V. Fedorova v sovremennoj teorii i metodike prepodavaniya perevoda*, in *Pervye fedorovskie čtenija*, I, ed. by V. Ju. Golubev, St-Peterburg, SPbGU, 2000, 5–11, see p. 5. Fedorov’s fame is impressive all over Russia

a needed component of any theorization and that T-theory is a *linguistic discipline* fighting against the “lingua-phobia” (*jazykobojazn’*), which has been connoting Russian T-theory from its beginning.<sup>87</sup> Paradoxically, Fedorov was in fact a man of literature, unable to satisfy the formal requests of professional linguists, who accused him to be too literary-oriented.<sup>88</sup> He was not interested in applying the technical instruments of formal linguistics, he rather aimed at drawing attention to the primary role of *language* in human translation.<sup>89</sup> Curiously, his arguments seemed so persuasive, that some literary translators and writers erroneously interpreted his position as a denial of creativeness in translation.<sup>90</sup> However, his main theoretical limit might be found in his overly rough dualistic differentiation between translation as an “artistic activity” (human translation) and as a “job” (machine translation).<sup>91</sup> His position was actually ambiguous:

On the one hand, investigating literary translation, he insisted in revealing its subjective and creative aspects, but, on the other hand, he considered that fighting against these very aspects is the final goal of the theory.<sup>92</sup>

The literature vs. linguistics controversy was fostered by this ambiguity only for a few years. Soon for all Soviet scholars, Fedorov’s contributions assumed the role of a reference point: they clearly set and partially solved the major theoretical questions. Still today, Fedorov is considered the ‘pilgrim

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– many organizations, professional and scientific translation centers bear his name. Among them, it is worthy mentioning the “Fedorov Centre for Translation Studies” (FCTS), founded in 1999 within the Department of English Studies and Translation of St-Petersburg University. Since 2000, the Centre has been organizing the annual Conference “Fedorov Lectures” and publishing the related proceedings.

<sup>87</sup> A. V. Fedorov, *Iskusstvo perevoda i žizn’ literatury. Očerki*, cit., p. 179.

<sup>88</sup> V. N. Komissarov, *Lingvističeskoe perevodovedenie v Rossii*, cit., p. 26.

<sup>89</sup> Ibidem, p. 35.

<sup>90</sup> V. V. Sdobnikov, O. V. Petrova, *Očerki istorii perevodčeskoi dejatel’nosti. Istorija perevoda v Rossii*, cit., p. 56. At the third Congress of Soviet writers in 1959, the book underwent a hard criticism and, in its next edition, Fedorov argued that linguistics is a fundamental component in investigating translation, but it is not sufficient: T-theorists should consider both literature and linguistics (cf. V.N. Komissarov, *Lingvističeskoe perevodovedenie v Rossii*, cit., p. 26; cf. also A. M. Lejtes, *Chudožestvennyj perevod kak javlenie rodnoj literatury*, in *Voprosy chudožestvennogo perevoda*, ed. by V.M. Rossel’s, Moskva, Sovetskij pisatel’, 1955, pp. 97-119).

<sup>91</sup> A. V. Fedorov, *Iskusstvo perevoda i žizn’ literatury. Očerki*, cit., p. 173.

<sup>92</sup> V. N. Komissarov, *Lingvističeskoe perevodovedenie v Rossii*, cit., p. 29.

father' of the 'Soviet School of translatology'. His valorization of the *socio-linguistic* aspects of translation was fundamental:

The credit of Soviet translation theory had been and remains historicity, i.e. the attempt to investigate and describe translations taking into account such peculiarities of the source texts that depend on the time when they were created, on the language and the aesthetical principles of their time, and on the tasks the translators receives from their time.<sup>93</sup>

Despite his poor knowledge of microlinguistics, Fedorov notably affected the further evolution of the functional approach to translation (developed after him by the brilliant linguist Stepan Barchudarov). Fedorov also had an important role in defending the principle that only translators, not pure linguists, can theorize translation (in the Western countries this evident truism is still today under discussion).

Besides Recker and Fedorov, the major contributors to the first post-war period were Il'ja Revzin and Viktor Rozencvejg. Though Revzin wrote several works on translation as a single author, the two are famous for their combined work on the mathematical method applied to translation. Revzin and Rozencvejg have shifted the academic attention from translation products to *translation processes* and this approach had a strong impact all over the Soviet bloc. They laid the foundations for a radical conceptual change in T-theory, which had a reflection on the intuitions of the best Slavic scholars in the second half of the Twentieth century. Their article *K obosnovaniju lingvističeskoj teorii perevoda* ("Towards the Foundations of Linguistic Translation Theory"), published in 1962 in the prestigious Journal "Voprosy jazykoznanija" is to be considered a turning point for translation studies. According to the authors, T-theory should not be a "normative", but just a "theoretical" discipline able to "elaborate some critical evaluations of translation's qualities";<sup>94</sup> the comparative analysis of source- and target texts is not sufficient in building a general T-theory, because its object is *the process*; the latter is oriented towards one of two different outcomes: interpretation or translation.<sup>95</sup> Despite its umpteenth dualism (the authors thereafter accepted to rethink their position),<sup>96</sup> this concept was useful "to theoretically set possibilities and limits of machine translation as different from translations operated

<sup>93</sup> A. V. Fedorov, *Iskusstvo perevoda i žizn' literatury. Očerki*, cit., p. 169.

<sup>94</sup> I. I. Revzin, V. Ju. Rozencvejg, *K obosnovaniju lingvističeskoj teorii perevoda*, "Voprosy jazykoznanija", 1962, 1, pp. 51-59, see p. 51.

<sup>95</sup> Ibidem, p. 53 and f.

<sup>96</sup> P. Toper, *Perevod v sisteme sravnitel'nogo literaturovedenija*, cit., pp. 141-142.

by humans”.<sup>97</sup> In their following book, Revzin and Rozencveĵg assumed a position close to Chomskian generativism against the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis;<sup>98</sup> they disregarded the relevance of language in real communication (pragmatics), looking at translation in a perspective too distant from practice.

Since the bond between profession and theory, and the bottom-up perspective were a specificity of the Soviet School, the top-down approach by Revzin and Rozencveĵg had a little proselitism. In the middle of the twentieth century, the Soviet school aimed at a descriptive approach to T-theory, oriented to bottom-up rules and not to a top-down modality (as in Revzin and Rozencveĵg conception): since Gorkij’s enterprise, scientificity has been intended as *regularization*, not *regulation*.

In Soviet ‘scientific’ literature on translation, a multiplicity of linguistic approaches was developed together with the evolution of the different linguistic theories,<sup>99</sup> but, whatever the approach, Soviet theorists agreed with the general Fedorovian principle – no linguistics, no theory. During the last two decades of the Soviet State, the discrimination towards non-literary texts was overcome: the main representatives of this period, Stepan Barchudarov and Aleksandr Švejcer, looked at T-theory as a field extended to any kind of text typology, regulated by a social context, and based on verbal communication.<sup>100</sup> Fedorov’s early orientation towards functionalism, against literalism, was explicitly stated and formulated: “Only when the function of the source text and its place in the source culture is clear, is it possible to evaluate the single elements of the source text”.<sup>101</sup> Translating eventually appeared as a decision making process, consistent to text-typology and communicative context.<sup>102</sup> Interlinguistic asymmetry was rethought in the perspective of functionality. Barchudarov promoted a new concept of ‘equivalence’ intended as the parameter determining the precise functional correspondence of ST and TT. Although no precise definition of ‘equivalence’ was provided by him (Švejcer suggested that a distinction between *ekvivalentnost’* and *adek-*

<sup>97</sup> V. N. Komissarov, *Lingvističeskoe perevodovedenie v Rossii*, cit., p. 45.

<sup>98</sup> I. I. Revzin, V. Ju. Rozencveĵg, *Osnovy obščego i mašinogo perevoda*, Moskva, Vysšaja škola, 1964; V. N. Komissarov, *Lingvističeskoe perevodovedenie v Rossii*, cit., pp. 46-47.

<sup>99</sup> C. Montella, *Tendenze recenti della teoria della traduzione in Unione Sovietica*, “AION”, 1 (1979), pp. 1-14, see p. 8.

<sup>100</sup> Together with Fedorov, Švejcer can be considered the main reference point of today Russian T-theory (cf. also Tamara Kazakova’s article in the present volume).

<sup>101</sup> A. Švejcer, *Teorija perevoda: Status, problemy, aspekty*, cit., pp. 33, 36.

<sup>102</sup> Ibidem, p. 65.

*vatnost'* should be given),<sup>103</sup> in his book *Jazyk i perevod* (Language and translation, 1975) Barchudarov revealed his best intuitions in the direction of functional translation, further developing the concept of 'translation unit'.<sup>104</sup>

Besides Švejcer and Barchudarov, among the main contributors to Soviet T-theory since the 1970s, Leonora Čenjachovskaja is to be mentioned. Her well-known book from 1976, *Perevod i smyslovaja struktura* (Translation and the structure of sense) reflects a profound knowledge of linguistics from the viewpoint of an expert translator. Even today, this monograph is still impressive for its articulate contrastive (Russian-English) analysis of the utterance's thematic structure. Her work showed how structural asymmetries between two languages can be overcome through the recognition of *theme* (topic) and *rheme* (focus) positions and roles:

To preserve the sentence informational structure in translating from Russian into English means to build the expression in English in such a way that the notional groups, which in Russian express the theme/rheme functions, are preserved in translation.<sup>105</sup>

Finally, Vilen Komissarov deserves a mention as the main expert of Soviet translatology from the historical viewpoint. In Soviet times, he was himself a T-theorist, but his major contribution is recognized in his role of true *pass-seur* between Soviet and post-Soviet translatology; if a scientific heritage of immense value was saved from the ruins of ideological oblivion it was due to Komissarov's efforts, as both an historian and a professor of T-theory.

Focusing on the different ways the structural, cultural, and thematic asymmetries among languages can be resolved in translation, the aforementioned Soviet scholars showed that the support of linguistics is not required (as it frequently occurs in Western tradition) in order to emancipate translatology from literary studies, but rather to better understand the problems of literary complexity.

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<sup>103</sup> "‘Equivalence’ answers the question ‘Is there a correspondence between ST and TT?’, while ‘adequacy’ answers the question ‘Is there a correspondence between the translation decision and the given communicative situation?’" (A. Švejcer, *Teorija perevoda: Status, problemy, aspekty*, cit., p. 94).

<sup>104</sup> P. Zlateva includes Barchudarov's article "The problem of the unit of translation", but with no mention of its source and date (it is clearly translated into English). Considering that Barchudarov died ten years before Zlateva's book, the work probably dates back to the 1970s: cf. *Translation as Social Action. Russian and Bulgarian Perspectives*, ed. by P. Zlateva, London-NY, Routledge, 1993, pp. 39-46.

<sup>105</sup> L.A. Čenjachovskaja, *Perevod i smyslovaja struktura*, Moskva, Meždunarodnye otnošenija, 1976, p. 65. Developing the theme/rheme opposition, Čenjachovskaja introduced a more detailed conception of the topic/focus structure – she distinguished the *direma* (when only the focus is new to the recipient) from the *monorema* (when both topic and focus are new).

### “Masterstvo perevoda”

While Soviet linguists were improving the instruments of T-theory, all over the country literary research on translation was flourishing too. In the middle of the 1950s, an important periodical edition of collected papers on literary translation started in Moscow with the title “Voprosy chudožestvennogo perevoda” (“Questions of literary translation”); then (since 1959) it was published as “Masterstvo perevoda” (“Translation mastery”). This thirteen-volume collection – edited from 1959-1985 by Čukovskij (1963-1969), Rossel’s, and others – includes theoretical articles, contrastive text-analysis, reviews, but also bibliographic inventories and organizational information. As claimed by Rossel’s,<sup>106</sup> after the seventh volume appeared, “all theorists, critics and translators of the Soviet Union, who were studying how to improve translated literature”, participated in this series.<sup>107</sup> From the very brief insert printed in the back cover of each volume, one can immediately infer the high self-esteem of Soviet scholars and translators during these years. In 1962 edition, for instance, it is written:

In our country, translated literature editions have reached a huge proportion. With regard to printed translations, the Soviet Union is the leading country in the world. During the recent years, an army of thousands of literary translators into Russian and into the other languages of Soviet peoples has grown and is still growing. [...] Like the two previous books (*Masterstvo chudožestvennogo perevoda*, 1955, and *Masterstvo perevoda*, 1959), the present collection was conceived as a creative tribune for exchanges of opinion about the most important questions concerning both translation theory from the historical viewpoint (poetics, aesthetic principles, the question of realistic translation), and concrete translated works. Here, the information about recent years activities of translators and their organizations is also included. In the last part of the book a bibliography of the contributions on translation is given.<sup>108</sup>

It is interesting that the bibliography provided in each volume, also included foreign (Western and Slavic) countries. Moreover, some foreign articles were sometimes included in Russian translation. The enthusiasm around the collection was so high that Rossel’s could unrealistically state that “all over the world, there is no one organization, no one researcher in the field of literary translation who never used these books, who never quoted them”.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>106</sup> V. M. Rossel’s, *Sovetskaja perevodčeskaja škola v 60-ch godach*, “Slavica Slovaca”, 6 (1971), pp. 295-321, p. 313.

<sup>107</sup> It is remarkable for the presence of the contributions by the famous Slavist E. Etkind, an expert of poetry and verse translation, who in 1974 settled in Paris for political reasons.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. *Masterstvo perevoda*, V. M. Rossel’s (glavnyj red.), Moskva, Sovetskij pisatel’, 1962, p. 2.

<sup>109</sup> V. M. Rossel’s, *Sovetskaja perevodčeskaja škola v 60-ch godach*, cit., p. 314.

Since 1958, another important periodical publication started within the Institute of Foreign Languages “Maurice Thores”, which has been printed even in post-Soviet time: “Tetradi perevodčika” (The Translator’s notebooks). This journal had no scientific ambitions, rather it has been a sort of forum offered to the enlarged audience of Soviet readers.<sup>110</sup>

Within the literary field, particularly among the massive Soviet reading audience, the idea that the independent literary value of translation has a priority over the quality of linguistic functional equivalence, was dominant. This was probably the very element of contrast between literary- vs linguistic-oriented T-theory. In post-war USSR, the self-esteem of T-theorists was very high, but the self-esteem of literary translators was still higher – they were considered as extraordinary artists. For this reason, most literary translators reputed that their art should be an object of literary, not linguistic criticism: they found in Givi Gačėčiladze’s book *Chudožestvennyj perevod i literaturnye vzajmozvžazi* (Art translation and literary interrelations) a theoretical support.

Gačėčiladze, a well-known Georgian translator of Shakespeare, stated a position shared by a significant part of the Soviet literary intelligencija (writers and readers). He argued that the same criteria should be used in criticism of both original and translated literary text. He looked at language as a technical and irrelevant factor in translation, becoming one of the main representatives of the mentioned “lingua-phobia” shared by part of the Soviet literary intelligencija.<sup>111</sup>

From the functional perspective, there were and are many counter-arguments to the postulate that a translation might, or even should be ‘good’ per se, and not through contrastive analysis. This dubious axiom also implies the very questionable corollary that only ‘good’ works are translated.<sup>112</sup> Some

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<sup>110</sup> In post-Soviet Russia, the journal has been looking a bit more academic, but scientific accuracy is still lacking in most articles. In 1999, on the eve of the new millennium, the 24 volume of the journal “Tetradi perevodčika” was dedicated to the review of 20th century translation and T-theory. However, it does not concern specifically Russia, and it lacks source references (among the contributors, there are some of the leading scholars of post-Soviet translology – V.N. Komissarov, A.D. Švejcer, M.Ja. Cvilling, D.I. Ermolovič, L.K. Latyšev et al.).

<sup>111</sup> G. G. Gačėčiladze, *Chudožestvennyj perevod i literaturnye vzajmozvžazi*, Moskva, Sovetskij pisatel’, 1972.

<sup>112</sup> This largely shared opinion is perfectly represented in one of Sergej Dovlatov’s *Notebooks*’ sketches:

“Once, when I was the secretary of the writer Vera Panova, she asked me:



Soviet writers considered that the pre-requisite of literary translation was not the refined knowledge of both source and target languages, but rather of the sole native language.<sup>113</sup> In other words, when the translator is also a writer, their work should be evaluated as any other literary writing, not focusing on a comparative analysis on the transcoding process. In the light of today's viewpoint, it could be said that fortunately the attempts to separate literary-oriented from linguistic-oriented T-theory were not successful. T-theory actually became an academic field, finally independent from literary studies.

The increasing research in the 1970s and 1980s also implied a higher interest in the works of other Slavic scholars, particularly of the Czechoslovak and Bulgarian schools.<sup>114</sup> For instance, the monographs by Jiří Levý and Anton Popovič were translated into Russian, obtaining an immediate and lasting fame.<sup>115</sup> Both Czechoslovak scholars, who were familiar with Russian and Soviet T-theory, gave further evidence that the best theoretical outcomes

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- Who, in your opinion, writes Russian the best?
  - Probably I should answer: you. Yet I said:
  - Rita Kovaleva.
  - Which Kovaleva?
  - Rajt-Kovaleva.
  - Do you mean Faulkner's translator?
  - Faulkner's, Sallinger's, Vonnegut's.
  - That is, Vonnegut sounds better in Russian than our Fedin?
  - No doubt.

Panova reflected and said:

- That's so terrible!..

By the way, if I'm not mistaken, the following story happened with Gore Vidal. He was in Moscow. The Muscovites had been asking him about Vonnegut. They were crazy with his novels. Gore Vidal noted: - Kurt's novels lose terribly in the original..." (S. Dovlatov, *Zapisky knižki, Sobranie sočinenij*, IV, St.-Peterburg, Azbuka, 1999, pp. 211-212).

<sup>113</sup> But Ryl'skij wrote in capital letters that it is "elementary" that a translator "is obliged to know the language he translates from" (M. F. Ryl'skij, *Chudožestvennye perevody literatur narodov SSSR*, cit., p. 90).

<sup>114</sup> Although particularly innovative and original, the Polish theoretic contributions of the 1960s and the 1970s did not have the same resonance in the USSR as the Czechoslovak ones.

<sup>115</sup> In 1974, Levý's monograph *Umění překlada* (The art of Translation, 1963) appeared in Vladimir Rossel's translation from Czech (*Iskusstvo perevoda*). Curiously, the Jewish Hebrew family name Levý was recoded into Cyrillic as *Levyj* (which ironically sounds as "the leftist"). Popovič's *Teória umeleckého prekladu: aspekty textu a literárnej metakomunikácie* (1975) was translated by I. A. Bernštein and I. S. Černjavskaia (*Problemy chudožestvennogo perevoda*, edited by P. Toper).



can be obtained analyzing complex literary works, but from a holistic, macro-linguistic viewpoint.

### Interpreting Studies

The analysis of Soviet Interpreting Studies (IS) would deserve a separate work, as it is not a mere by-product of T-theory, but an autonomous research field with its specificity, strictly oriented to the task of improving interpreters' skills. For this reason, unlike T-theory, Soviet research on IS was mostly addressed to interpreting trainers.<sup>116</sup> Nonetheless, a brief review can be provided to summarize the specificity of IS in the USSR, where too, as in other countries, simultaneous interpreting obtained a *professional* status after its first official use at the Nuremberg Trials. Here, two teams were at work – the Soviet one and the team of the allies, but no one among the employed translators were specially trained as a simultaneous interpreter.<sup>117</sup>

In 1953 the Translation Section of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs was established, which represented the first step for ensuring a control on professional quality and ideological reliability of Soviet translators and interpreters. Since the 1950s, interpreting was more and more used in Soviet international events: the most significant cases were the Moscow Economic Conference in 1952 and the 6th Word Festival of Youth and Students in 1957.<sup>118</sup>

In the 1960s, the first Soviet academic courses started for the special training of translators and interpreters in the fields of diplomacy, international relationships, and the army. A decade later, three hundreds of the two thousands world interpreters were Soviet professionals. Most of them graduated in Moscow, mainly at the Institute “Maurice Thorez”, where excellent courses for interpreters have been active since 1962 to the USSR's dissolution.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> It is, however, interesting that in Russian only one word is used – *perevodčik* (‘translator’) – in referring to both professions, with the specification of *ustnyj* (‘oral’) *perevod* (‘translation’) in the case with interpreting. The specificity of interpreting as different from written translation was gradually accepted and formalized in the 1950s (cf. R. Černov, *Teorija i praktika sinchronnogo perevoda*, Moskva, Meždunarodnye otnošenija, 1978, pp. 46-47).

<sup>117</sup> A. P. Čužakin, *Prikladnaja teorija ustnogo perevoda i perevodčeskoj skoropisi*, Moskva, R. Valent, 2003, pp. 17, 26. According to Čužakin, in the USSR, a previous rudimentary practice of simultaneous interpreting was first introduced at the VI Congress of the Communist International in 1928, but isolated booths for interpreters started to be used only five years later, in 1933 (Ibid., pp. 15-16).

<sup>118</sup> Ibidem, p. 27.

<sup>119</sup> Ibidem, p. 28.

Concerning IS theoretical research, it started at the end of the 1960s in connection with the demand for a more qualified teaching under State control. The access to the profession required both high professional competence and ideological reliability – unlike written translation, interpreting failure was immediately detectable by the audience and any control had to be prior to performances.

Starting from the early 1970s, the achievements of Soviet psycholinguistics were applied to synchronism and memory skills in IS.<sup>120</sup> The interest of linguists and psychologists in simultaneous interpreting led IS to develop as a multidisciplinary field.<sup>121</sup> The mechanisms regulating attention, memory, thinking, sensory perception, compression, decompression, code-switching, prediction were the very core of Soviet IS.<sup>122</sup>

Soviet scholars showed a prevalent interest in the interpreting process, i.e. in the mechanisms involved in simultaneous de- and re-coding; in the ability to in-code in TT the whole ST information; in language-specific peculiarities; in experimental investigation.<sup>123</sup> The experimental research started in the mid-1960s – timed performances, pauses, *decalage*, prediction and focusing were investigated.<sup>124</sup> Of particular interest was also the discussion about the differentiation of simultaneous vs consecutive interpreting, with a special attention to the different memory routines used in synchronic processing and in consecutive ‘note taking’.

An important methodological question arises in analyzing interpreters’ training. In Soviet time, with regard to the languages spoken in Western countries, translators and interpreters had a strange kind of bilingualism: rarely could they study abroad or even freely visit foreign countries. They could learn languages in prestigious bilingual schools, but mostly (if not exclusively) with Russian native teachers. Future interpreters could rarely obtain

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<sup>120</sup> V. V. Sdobnikov, O. V. Petrova, *Očerki istorii perevodčeskoi deiatel'nosti. Istorija perevoda v Rossii*, cit., p. 320.

<sup>121</sup> I. V. Gurin, *Problema rečevoj kompressii v sinchronnom perevode. Podchody i metody issledovaniia*, cit., p. 85.

<sup>122</sup> The article by Ermolovič (1999) published many years after the USSR crashed, gives a detailed picture of the “psychological problems of translation” based on a long list of exclusively Soviet references (V. I. Ermolovič, *Problemy izučeniia psichologičeskikh aspektov perevoda*, “Tetrad perevodčika”, 24 (1999), pp. 45-62).

<sup>123</sup> V. V. Sdobnikov, O. V. Petrova, *Očerki istorii perevodčeskoi deiatel'nosti. Istorija perevoda v Rossii*, cit., p. 320-321.

<sup>124</sup> I. V. Gurin, *Problema rečevoj kompressii v sinchronnom perevode. Podchody i metody issledovaniia*, cit., p. 86.

a fully spontaneous, procedural L2 acquisition – L2 was mostly *learned* and processed with a scholastic effort, involving declarative memories rather than brain implicit circuits. Nonetheless, due to the lack of native (and reliable) speakers of other languages, Soviet interpreters were frequently called to simultaneously translate into L2. This had given them the opportunity to train their L2 performances very well. Active translation was indeed deeply used both as a pedagogical method in L2 training, and as an interpreting technique, equally practiced as passive translation. Training and practice led Soviet teachers and theorists to consider active interpreting as an advantage over passive translation (with L1 as the input language a perfect understanding is granted and all the mental efforts can be re-directed towards L2 output).<sup>125</sup> Soviet trainers considered that the key factor in interpreting competence was not an early bilingualism, but rather the skills obtained by training.<sup>126</sup>

Among the main Soviet researchers in IS, Rjurik Min'jar-Beloručev and Gelij Černov ought to be mentioned: the former as the author of the monograph *Obščaja teorija perevoda i ustnyj perevod* (General Translation Theory and Interpreting, 1980), the latter for his two well-known books, *Teorija i praktika sinchronnogo perevoda* (Simultaneous Translation: Theory and Practice, 1978) and *Osnovy sinchronnogo perevoda* (Foundations of simultaneous interpreting, 1987). About Černov's work, Komissarov underlines that his theoretical hypotheses were developed in close connection with translation practice, making his contribution intrinsically consistent and useful.<sup>127</sup> Unlike Černov, Min'jar-Beloručev's theory appears more confused and redundant in both terms and classifications, but it reveals that Soviet IS not only led to pioneering investigations, but aimed at reaching the same high academic and scientific status of linguistic T-theory.

### Semiotics merges translation

Another fertile ground for the improvement of Soviet T-theory was offered by semiotic studies, officially born in the 1960s within the Tartu-Moscow school, whose leaders, Jurij Lotman and Boris Uspenskij, became well-known scholars all over the world. Semiotics helped in re-addressing formal and psycholinguistic T-theory in the direction of macro-cultural analyses that

<sup>125</sup> The “Western school” gave (and gives) its preference for passive over active interpreting, considering a priority the quality of the output, including intonations and orthoepy.

<sup>126</sup> V. V. Sdobnikov, O. V. Petrova, *Očerki istorii perevodčeskoi deiatel'nosti. Istorija perevoda v Rossii*, cit., p. 81.

<sup>127</sup> V. N. Komissarov, *Lingvističeskoe perevodovedenie v Rossii*, cit., p. 156.

seemed closer to the humanities, but wider than the traditional philological and socio-historical studies.<sup>128</sup> Semiotics had indeed an enormous importance from the epistemological perspective, giving evidence that complex socio-cultural ‘systems’ find a reflection in human verbal *texts*. Moreover, Soviet semiotics represented the natural evolution of formalism under the light of informational theories, structural linguistics, and cybernetics.<sup>129</sup>

As early as in 1964, Il’ja Rezin published in the journal “Voprosy filosofii” an interesting article, *Ot strukturnoj lingvistiki k semiotike* (“From structural linguistics to semiotics”), revealing his knowledge of Western linguistic, philosophic and semiotic theories. This was an early attempt to overcome a certain rigidity of linguistic structuralism.<sup>130</sup> Semiotics offered a good epistemological support to the idea of translation as a *re-coding process*, but, at the same time, it prevented any naïve simplification of language complexity in its interconnection with life experience and human cognition.

This fruitful interdisciplinary interaction led to the concept of *psichosemiotika*, which was applied to T-theory by Tamara Kazakova in the mid-1980s:

Looking for semiotic analogy at the level of linguistic units, the translating system faces a peculiar category of psychosemiotic complications, which can be defined as interlinguistic [...]. The source language and target language units have different semiotic potentiality: even though they are consistent at the level of the linguistic meaning, consistence is lacking at the level of semiotic functions.<sup>131</sup>

Kazakova introduced T-theory to concepts, still today relevant, in all scientific models of translation, such as “stereotype”, “translation context”, “meaning re-construction”, “hierarchy” of text structure.<sup>132</sup> Kazakova’s main

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<sup>128</sup> Though Lotman wrote very little on translation, his name has been used to represent Russia in Western publications instead of famous Soviet T-theorists. As an example, no Russian scholar, except him, is quoted in *Contemporary Translation Theories* by E. Gentzler (2001).

<sup>129</sup> U. Eco, *Lezione e contraddizioni della semiotica sovietica*, in *I sistemi di segni e lo strutturalismo sovietico*, ed. by R. Faccani, U. Eco, Milano, Bompiani, 1969, pp. 13-31, see pp. 15-20.

<sup>130</sup> I. I. Rezin, *Ot strukturnoj lingvistiki k semiotike*, “Voprosy filosofii”, 9 (1964), pp. 43-53.

<sup>131</sup> T. Kazakova, *K opredeleniju teksta v teorii perevoda*, in *Problemy perevoda tekstov raznykh tipov*, red. A. D. Švejcer, Moskva, Nauka, 1986, pp. 6-21, see p. 11.

<sup>132</sup> T. Kazakova, *O psichosemiotičeskom aspekte perevoda*, in *Perevod i interpretacija teksta*, ed. V. A. Kucharenko, Moskva, Inst. Jazykoznanija AN SSSR, 1988, pp. 7-19, see pp. 8, 19.

contributions were published in post-Soviet time, but her early approach to T-theory gives evidence of the multifaceted potential of Soviet research.

### Achievements and limits of Soviet T-theory

To summarize, it can be said that, since its beginning, Soviet T-theory has drawn on the century-old pre-revolutionary tradition, developing in a few decades a complex science, interested in all text typologies and oriented towards interdisciplinarity in a psycholinguistically based framework. As in other Slavic countries, Soviet scholars tried to avoid the secular epistemological dualism, which since St Jerome's time affected Western T-theory, addressing their attention to translation processes. As for any science, its aim was not prescription, nor proscription, but description. Most T-theorists were able to overcome with few compromises the ideological constraints of Soviet censorship and ideology, focusing on the scientific consistency of their arguments. All Soviet scholars have supported the idea that the bond of T-theory with practice "was the natural, inalienable trait since the first steps of its development".<sup>133</sup>

Nevertheless, some flaws can be detected and partially generalized. In prevalence, they are due to ideological reasons, others are common to Western translation studies. Among the formers, Soviet T-theory showed a weak knowledge of complex formal linguistics by the very partisans of linguistic T-theory, and occasionally revealed a latent or explicit interaction of ideology. Until the 1970s, the identity writer/translator caused a delay in the definite overcoming of the opposition literary vs linguistic theories. Some representatives of the literary intelligencija had been rigidly promoting the "ridiculous idea" that T-theory is impossible or useless;<sup>134</sup> this was due not only to the influence of the pre-theoretical naivety of some eminent symbolists, but also to the fact that some writers used translating as a form of free writing.<sup>135</sup> As everywhere, Soviet T-theory suffered an impairing redundancy of terminology and concepts,<sup>136</sup> which violated the principle of Ockham's

<sup>133</sup> M. Ja. Cvilling, *Evristsičeskij aspekt perevoda i razvitie perevodčeskich navykov*, in *Čtenie. Perevod. Ustnaja reč'*, ed. by E. A. Rejman, Leningrad, Nauka, 1977, pp. 172-180, p. 173.

<sup>134</sup> A. V. Fedorov, *Iskusstvo perevoda i žizn' literatury. Očerki*, cit., p. 157.

<sup>135</sup> M. Friedberg, *Literary Translation in Russia. A Cultural History*, cit., p. 7; V. E. Bagno, N. N. Kazanskij, *Perevodčeskaja "niša" v sovetskiju epochu i fenomen stichotvornogo perevoda v XX veke*, cit.

<sup>136</sup> V. V. Sdobnikov, O. V. Petrova, *Očerk istorii perevodčeskoj dejatel'nosti. Istorija perevoda v Rossii*, cit., p. 69.

*parsimony*. Last, but not least, the formalist, idealist, and also Bolshevik struggle against ‘deep psychology’ caused a delay in studying emotions, perceptions, and psychological interferences in translation processes. Nevertheless, all things considered, Fedorov had some reasons to optimistically claim at the beginning of the 1980s that “more and more the idea is disappearing that, at some level, translation is a not completely solvable problem”.<sup>137</sup>

Things rapidly changed after the Soviet collapse. The fall of the social role of translators in post-Soviet Russia was due to multiple factors: mainly, to the introduction of the private copyright system and to the loss of the supremacy of humanities and art in Russian society. In Soviet time, literary translators had the same social and economic status as writers. Today, the social gap between writers and translators is the same as in the Western countries. Translation is now a badly-paid and mostly unskilled job, the audience is not interested in scientific texts anymore, but rather in simple popularization. The overall quality of translations is lower than in any previous period, so as the general philological quality of the editions.<sup>138</sup> The audience is increasingly unable to feel the gap with the lost standards. As stated by Torop through an apparent tautology “The quality of translations is lower when the attention to the quality of translations by critics and readers is lacking”.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> A.V. Fedorov, *Iskusstvo perevoda i žizn' literatury. Očerki*, cit., p. 158.

<sup>138</sup> In most books translated into Russian and printed in the Russian Federation, no reference is made to the ST title and the year of its publication.

<sup>139</sup> P. Torop, *Total'nyj perevod*, Tartu, Kirjastus, 1995, p. 35.