

Translation and TS Research in a Culture Using a Language of Limited Diffusion: The Case of Slovenia

Nike K. Pokorn, University of Ljubljana

ABSTRACT

The article presents the seminal influence of translation on the development of Slovene language and culture. A historical overview of major translations in Slovene demonstrates the decisive influence of translation on the development of Slovene language, prose, drama, and poetry. The present state of interlingual exchange in Slovenia is briefly presented, in which translated literatures in certain genres represent more than a half of yearly publications. The article also focuses on another typical feature of Slovene culture that is shared by many other cultures using a language of limited diffusion: Slovene translators predominantly translate out of their native language if they want to meet the demands of the market. The article concludes with a brief overview of the main currents in Slovene TS research and ends with a plea, first launched by Koskinen in 2007, for a new direction in research that would be more explicitly oriented towards the needs of professionals and the general public.

KEYWORDS

Translation Studies in Slovenia, status of TS in society, language of limited diffusion, translation history, influence of translation on cultural development.

This issue of the *Journal of Specialised Translation* is partially dedicated to the presentation of Translation Studies (TS) research on non-literary texts in Slovenia. I hope that this selection of articles, albeit short and not comprehensive, will show the diversity of TS research in Slovenia, where translation has always been considered one of the most vital elements of Slovene culture. The Slovene focus on translation is not surprising because throughout most of its history the Slovene people were under foreign rule, and therefore the development of Slovene has been closely connected to all forms of intercultural and interlinguistic exchange.

Slovenia is located at the intersection of the Ugric, Germanic, and Romance language groups and their influence can be felt in many layers of Slovene culture. This language of just over 2 million speakers has always been cherished by its users as the most distinctive feature that separates them from neighbouring nations. Slovene is a South Slavic language written in the Roman (Latin) alphabet, closely related to Serbian, Croatian, Macedonian, and Bulgarian, but also with affinities to the West Slavic languages Czech and Slovak. Like most other Slavic languages, Slovene is heavily inflected, and it retains some features not found in any other standard South Slavic language, such as the dual number (for two persons or things) in nouns, adjectives, pronouns, and verbs, as well as the use of singular and plural. The language is also dialectally diverse: in addition to standard Slovene, which is used in speeches and writing, there also exist 46 markedly different dialects.

The history of the language is closely connected to translation: translations not only stand at the origins of standard Slovene, but also at the beginning of Slovene prose, poetry, and drama. The first extant examples of Slovene writing already show that translations had a seminal influence on the development and formation of Slovene language and literature. For example, the very first written record of Slovene, dating from about 1000 AD, is found in the *Freising Manuscripts*, which consist of a collection of translated German and Latin confessions and sermons that were used in the Western Church. Moreover, between the 10th and the 16th centuries the majority of writings in Slovene were translations or included translated passages. To name only the two most famous examples, the *Klagenfurt Manuscript*, dating from ca. 1362–1390, also closely connected to the Christianisation of the local population, includes partial Slovene translations of the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, and the Apostles' Creed, and the *Stična Manuscript* (NUK, Ms. 141) from 1482 includes among other texts Slovene adaptations of the German confession formulae (*confessio generalis*) and the Eastern hymn (*Christ ist erstanden*; see Glavan 2007).

The decisive influence of translation is found not only at the very beginnings of the formation of Slovene, but also during the Reformation, when Slovene prose was in many aspects formed on the basis of the first Slovene Protestant translations of the Bible (1584). Again the influence of German was prevailing: although the Slovene Protestants apparently used Erasmus of Rotterdam's Latin translation as the source text, they combined it with Luther's German version (see Ahačič 2007). Translation also stands at the beginning of Slovene dramatic works: the first complete Slovene comedy is a translation of *Die Feldmühle* by the Viennese Baroque playwright Josef Richter, which received its debut performance with added nationalist and anti-German content towards the end of 1789 in the Slovene professional theatre under the title *Županova Micka* (The Mayor's Daughter; see Kocijančič 2007). Finally, poetry was also shaped in many aspects through translations from German: for example, the greatest Slovene Romantic poet, France Prešeren (1800–1849), started by translating parts of Byron's *Parisina* before creating the first epic poem in Slovene in order to practise the genre. Similarly, before writing a ballad himself, Prešeren practised ballad writing by translating the pre-Romantic *Lenore* by the German poet Gottfried August Bürger from 1773 (see Stanovnik 2005).

This lively intercultural exchange was further encouraged by numerous dictionaries and glossaries that have accompanied the development of Slovene from the Reformation onwards. As early as 1592, Slovene joined the illustrious company of Latin, German, and Italian in the 1592 dictionary *Dictionarium quator linguarum* by Hieronymus Megiser, a lexicographer of German origin that cooperated with the Slovene Protestants and also worked in ethnically Slovene areas; this placed Slovene lexicography on firm foundations. Just a few years later, in 1607,

there appeared another practical bilingual dictionary and a communicative handbook, the small Italian-Slovene dictionary *Vocabulario Italiano e Schiavo* by Alasia da Sommaripa.

Another important period was the Enlightenment, when a Roman Catholic translation of the Bible in Slovene appeared and when Marko Pohlin's *Tu malu besediše treh jezikov* (a Slovene-German-Latin dictionary, 1781) and Ožbalt Gutsman's *Deutsch-windisches Wörterbuch* (a German-Slovene dictionary with a Slovene-German appendix, 1789) were published.

At the beginning of the 19th century a large part of the Slovene-populated lands were included in the Illyrian Provinces of Napoleon's French Empire (1809–1814). The French encouraged local initiative and favoured the use of Slovene as an official language. Although many of the changes did not survive the return to Habsburg rule, the period contributed greatly to national self-awareness. Thus, grammars of the language were published (starting in 1808), in 1843 Ljubljana (the capital of Slovenia) saw the publication of the first Slovene-language newspaper, and the end of the century saw the formation of the first Slovene political parties. These grammars standardised and codified Slovene, so that by the middle of the 19th century a standard written language was in use and monolingualism became an explicit national political demand. Consequently, the need for dictionaries increased, in particular those for the combination Slovene-German. Thus in 1833 Anton Murko, in 1850/51 Anton Janežič, in 1860 Matej Cigale, and in 1894/95 Maks Pleteršnik published German-Slovene dictionaries that also enjoyed great success with the general public and helped Slovene culture make a decisive move from bilingualism to monolingualism (see Stabej 2007).

When Austria-Hungary collapsed in 1918, the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was formed (later renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia), where Slovene's autonomy was mainly restricted to cultural affairs – Slovenes did, however, continue using Slovene officially. Although this new Kingdom left almost one-third of Europe's Slovene speakers in Austria and Italy, i.e. outside the boundaries of Slovenia, the most prominent Slovene artists, like Oton Župančič (1878-1949), started systematically translating into Slovene the canonised authors of Western literature such as Shakespeare, Dickens, Balzac, Voltaire, Pushkin etc.

After the German invasion of Yugoslavia in 1941, Slovenia was again partitioned between Italy that took the southwest, Germany that annexed the north, and Hungary that recovered Prekmurje, the easternmost part of Slovenia. Resistance groups sprang up which later joined Josip Broz Tito's Partisans in proclaiming a new Yugoslavia. Slovene thus became one of the three official languages of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, together with Serbo-Croatian and Macedonian, and it is now the official language in the Republic of Slovenia (Italian and Hungarian are also used officially in certain areas with Italian and Hungarian minorities).

The 20th century also saw the creation of bilingual dictionaries between Slovene and almost all major European languages, and the creation of the monumental monolingual dictionary of Slovene *Slovar slovenskega književnega jezika* (1970–1991). The late 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries, moreover, provided Slovenes with various bilingual and monolingual corpora such as the 621-million-word *FidaPLUS* reference corpus of Slovene (<http://www.fidaplus.net>: see Vintar below).

Translation thus actively contributed to the very formation of the Slovene language and literary production. Today translations also represent a very high percentage of Slovene literary production. This is relatively high for a population of just over 2 million people: between 1997 and 2003 an average of 715 literary works were published annually. In those years, the ratio between original works published in Slovene and translations from other languages remained fairly constant and extremely high: on average, 36% of all literary production in Slovene is in translation. Compared to the situation in neighbouring cultures (e.g., Venuti 1995) reports that in 1990 in Italy the share of translated literary works was 25%, in Germany 14%, in France only 10%, and in the United States merely 2 to 3%), Slovenia's 36% is a clear mark of the extreme importance of translation in the formation of Slovene culture. The situation is even more striking if one looks more closely at different genres: whereas the share of translated poetry remains consistently low at 11%, the share of translated novels is much higher, and in the same period between 1997 and 2003 steadily remains as high as 64%, which means that every year almost two-thirds of all published novels in Slovenia are translations (see also Terbovc 2005).

Today the trend of importing foreign cultures is also supplemented with the translation of Slovene literary and non-literary works into other languages. On the one hand, Slovene literary works are rarely translated into other languages: there are very few non-native speakers of Slovene, which is also inevitably reflected in the fact that there are few translations of Slovene contemporary and classic, canonised authors available in other languages. As in many other linguistic communities that find themselves on the margins in the global distribution of power, translation of Slovene literary works into foreign languages lies mainly in the hands of the source-text culture. Translators from Slovene into foreign languages are thus found among the few speakers of other languages that choose to live and work in Slovenia (many of them in academic circles), among Slovenes in immigration, or in Slovenia among Slovene native speakers. Often pairs of translators are formed, consisting of a native speaker of Slovene that translates the work into the target language and a stylistic advisor for the target language that works on the stylistic acceptability of the target text (see Pokorn 2005). Despite the ardent enthusiasm of many individuals and even state support in the form of the *Trubar Foundation* (see Blatnik 1995), which subsidises chosen translations of Slovene works into other languages, Slovene literature in translation is rare.

The situation is quite the opposite with translations of specialised texts into foreign languages. A recent survey of translation practice conducted by Nataša Hirci in 2003 showed that 89% of professional translators in Slovenia also translate into their second language, which is English in most cases (81% of all texts are English originals; English is followed by German, Italian, French, and Croatian). The survey also showed that 62% of translators that also translate out of their first language translate half again as much into their foreign language than into their mother tongue. The most often translated texts are technical, closely followed by contracts, business correspondence, legal texts, promotional texts, and EU texts. By 2003, 55% of professional translators in Slovenia used the internet and computer-assisted translation tools in their work (Hirci 2005, 2007). This percentage is now much higher, as shown through the market analysis carried out by Darja Fišer in her article below.

Because of the central role translation plays in Slovene society, the theoretical approach to translation is also very lively. This scholarly interest is partly reflected in the fact that Slovenia has two translation departments, one at the University of Ljubljana and the other at the University of Maribor. However, not all TS research is connected to academia, and such research was also underway before the opening of the first academic TS institution in Ljubljana in 1997. Already in the 1980s, various researchers working in a wide range of philological fields and in comparative literature devoted their work to the study of translation and translation-related activity. Thus the cultural turn was particularly influential in the study of literary translation (see, e.g., Grosman 1997), and various stylistic and genre-specific aspects of literary works were examined (see Mozetič 2000, Simoniti 1997). The history of western thought in TS (Pokorn 2003) was supplemented by the historical overview of Slovene literary translation (Stanovnik 2005). Slovene translation theory saw its expression in Vevar's (2000) theoretical approach to literary translation, in focus on directionality of translation, in particular on translation into L2 (Pokorn 2005, Hirci 2007), and in a specific Slovene form of a philosophical, hermeneutical approach to translation by Gorazd Kocijančič (2004). Because Slovenia is also a subtitling culture, many pioneering studies in media translation were conducted and subtitling remains a focus of scholarly attention (see, e.g., Kovačič 1998). The linguistic approach is manifold as well: the first Contrastive Linguistic Studies, which initially were predominantly carried out for the linguistic pairs Slovene-German and Slovene-English (see Grah and Klinar 1982, Klinar 1994), soon expanded to other neighbouring languages such as Croatian and Italian (Mikolič 2005, Požgaj-Hadži 2002) and were later supplanted by studies in contrastive discourse and genre analysis, which continue to provide important data for effective professional work (see, e.g., Pisanski's article below, and Schlamberger Brezar 2005). Last but not least, much scholarly interest in Slovenia now focuses on language technologies (see, e.g., Gorjanc 2005), on the implementation and

development of CAT tools (see Vintar below), and finally also on their impact on the professional life of Slovene translators today (see Fišer below).

Translation in Slovenia, as manifested through TS research, is not only a testimony to the silent presence of the foreign, but to the creative activity that almost always stands at the beginning of all changes and shifts in the development of Slovene language and literature. Because of the centrality of this phenomenon in Slovene culture, it is not surprising that TS research in Slovenia is attracting the interest of many scholars and, consequently, gaining a scholarly reputation. We can only hope that future TS research will also develop a public branch (see Koskinen 2007), i.e. focus more intensely on the service TS can provide for the public, and thus gain greater prominence for the general public as well.

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Nike K. Pokorn is Associate Professor in Translation Studies and Head of the Department of Translation and Interpreting at the University of Ljubljana. Her main research interests are Translation Studies, translation theory, ideology and translation, and translation of children's literature. Her publications include *Challenging the Traditional Axioms: Translation into a Non-Mother Tongue* and *Beyond Equivalence* (co-edited with Erich Prunc and Alessandra Riccardi).



E-mail: nike.pokorn@ff.uni-lj.si