The case of the missing Russian translation theories

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Version 2. June 2014

Abstract: Translation Studies is performed through an international network of relations between largely isolated scholars, many of whom cooperate in order to create knowledge. The sparse nature of the relations, however, coupled with the difficulties of relatively opaque languages and hard-to-assemble materials, means that the cooperative production of knowledge is often fraught with difficulties: the network only vaguely discerns its international extension (rarely reducible to the West vs. the Rest) and has a very sketchy awareness of its own origins. Russian translation theories published between 1950 and 1953 constitute an acute case in point. Although highly innovative precursors of later theories of text types, purposes, and indeed of Translation Studies as a unified field, the formalist theories of Retsker, Sobolev and Fedorov were associated with the final years of Stalinism and were thus strangely cut off from the development of Translation Studies in most other languages. We recount our attempts to locate, construe, and make known the translation theories strangely trapped in a very particular time capsule.

Keywords: Russian translation theory; Translation Studies; translation history; knowledge networks; Fedorov

Incipit

Russian translation theorists, prior to and slightly after the death of Stalin in 1953, developed a translation concept that united foreignization and domestication, that named the priority of purpose, that recognized that how you translate differs according to the type of text you are translating, that developed a catalogue of translation solutions, that posited that translation was a fact of target cultures, and that was embroiled in a debate between literary studies and linguistics, one result of which was a proposal for an independent discipline in order to study translation.

If all that is true, how is it that our more narrowly Western translation theories attribute *Skopos* theory to Vermeer, text-type theory to Reiss, solution types to Vinay and Darbelnet, target-side priority to Tel Aviv and Vermeer, Translation Studies as a discipline to Holmes, and still prolong millennial binarisms that offer just two main ways of translating? Could we really have ignored the Russians so completely?

The following is an account of how we came to formulate the above, and why it is not the whole story.

October 13, 2013: Monterey

A quiet day at the office – time to dig out some unsolved cases. Maggie Hui in Hong Kong had that idea: to apply the Vinay and Darbelnet solution types to English-Chinese

translation. Let's see: the types are clear enough (loan, calque, literal translation, transposition, modulation, idiom-for-idiom, adaptation) and the default solutions for translating into Chinese are clearly transposition and modulation, rather than anything word-for-word. Now, why not rewrite the Vinay and Darbelnet typology so it works between English and Chinese? Yes, let's do that! And Esther Torres knows Korean, so she can tell us what works for Korean. And Monterey is not short of experts in Japanese…

October 15, 2013: Barcelona

Esther discovers it has been done already: Zhang and Pan (2009) explain how Dian-yang Loh (or Lu, as he would be transcribed these days) produced something like Vinay and Darbelnet's typology for translation between English and Chinese. That was in 1958, exactly the same year Vinay and Darbelnet were published. What? The Chinese Loh must have copied from the French linguists. We check with Maggie in Hong Kong, who finds a copy of Loh: no, there is no sign of anything French there, so no copying, and anyway, how could the two catalogues of solution types have been copied and published in the same year? But then, Loh does cite someone called "Feedorov [sic], A. B., Principles of Translation, Moscow", translated into Chinese in 1955. Could that explain why his translation solutions look a little like Vinay and Darbelnet's?

Later that day: There is no book called "Principles of Translation" by "Feedorov" – it was never fed into English, it seems. Esther nevertheless finds Andrey Fedorov's *Vvedenie v teoriyu perevoda* (Introduction to the theory of translation) at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, in the original 1953 edition, and she struggles with the Russian – no table of solution types is visible there, and nothing seems to be cited from French, so there is no visible connection with Vinay and Darbelnet, nor with their main guiding light in matters of comparative stylistics, Charles Bally. In the meantime, Maggie in Hong Kong finds the Chinese translation of Fedorov, which is of the first part only (the translators say they gave up because of all the foreign languages in parts two and three). So how could something like Vinay and Darbelnet have gone through Russian to get to China? There is no real evidence for it. The trail goes cold.

October 19, 2013: Monterey, Toronto, Kent State

Anthony finds an online article where Brian Mossop argues that Fedorov's 1953 work was the first book-length linguistic approach to translation. Anthony writes to Brian, to see if he has more information. Brian suggests we contact another Brian: Professor Brian Baer at Kent State, who can tell us what we want to know about Fedorov. Would Professor Baer happen to know whether the Chinese scholar's categories for translation techniques – which Loh also calls "ways" – came from Russian?

Brian Baer replies: "Brian Mossop recently suggested to me that I consider translating Fedorov's Introduction to Translation – he thinks it is important enough to be translated, especially given its influence in Asia; I'm not entirely convinced".

He will look at the book nevertheless.

October 27, 2013: Kent State

Professor Baer has looked though his copy of Fedorov (1953) and reports that he "does indeed use the term *put'* [path, way] throughout to describe what we could call strategies for solving specific challenges posed by the non-equivalence of grammatical and other categories across languages. Nowhere, however, does he provide a typology of *puti* the way Vinay and Darbelnet do".

      The trail grows even colder, as winter sets in.

December 12, 2013: Tarragona

Anthony is back in Spain. Our new doctoral student Nune suddenly reveals that she speaks Russian – it is her first language. Really? – and we thought she was Armenian. Anyway, back to that Fedorov thing! We get the book out of the Barcelona library again and B begins reading, properly. We start by checking the works Fedorov cites. Within a long list of names there is recurrent reference to Stalin, and someone called Sobolev. Who?

      Here he is: L. N. Sobolev, author of *Posobie po perevodu s russkogo yazyka na frantsuzskiy* (1952), a textbook for translating from Russian into French. So that might tell us about the French connection? The book is available from an online store in Moscow. We write there several times, but there is no reply. Who could blame them? Why would someone in Spain possibly want a 60-year old textbook about translating from Russian into French? You'd have to be crazy!

December 13, 2013: Montreal

Debbie Folaron in Montreal says she'll get the copy of Sobolev's 1952 textbook from the University of Montreal. Then snow and Winter Break get in the way, and we forgot that Debbie is actually at a different university in Montreal. But she gets the book anyway. We just ask for the Table of Contents, to see if it's a load of old rubbish. But Debbie will of course finish up scanning the whole book, for nothing in return. Why do academics do these kinds of favors?

      Soon we will have Sobolev 1952.

1953: Moscow. Translation varies with text types

Stalin dies in March. Shortly afterwards, Fedorov publishes his *Vvedenie v teoriyu perevoda* (authorized for printing on July 24, 1953). The fifth chapter is entirely on Stalin's "Marxism and Problems of Linguistics" ("Nasushchnye voprosy teorii perevoda v svete trudov I. V. Stalina po yazykoznaniyu"). Thanks to Stalin, says Fedorov,

> [t]ranslation theory has gained the chance to be treated with an authentically scientific linguistic approach, with the correct treatment of the central problems of linguistics. […] Before the appearance of Stalin's work on linguistics, these questions, which have priority not only in the sphere of philological science as a whole but also with regard to translation theory, were either not put forward or not

given the right solutions. It is evident that only in the light of Stalin's work on language can the problems of translation theory be solved. (1953, 97; trans. B, here and throughout)

We want to take the Stalin references in our stride, as things that probably had to be said at the time. But can we really do that? Here Fedorov clearly places translation theory within linguistics (this is the point that would soon become contentious), and he is unmistakably thanking Stalin for it (this is perhaps *why* it would be contentious). Read in purely political terms, however, Fedorov had just backed a dead horse.

And now we notice Fedorov's reference to a 1950 article by the same Sobolev, this time on "O mere tochnosti v perevode", which seems to talk about how exactitude in translation varies in accordance with three main text types: artistic, journalistic, and business. Fedorov gives his own version of the three text genres:

1. News reports, documentaries, and scientific texts, where the translator must pay careful attention to terms;
2. Publicity texts where the effect on the reader is what counts; and
3. Artistic (literary) works, where "it is important to reproduce the individual particularities of the literary text". (1953, 198, 256)

Why three text types? That's easy, perhaps: the German theorist Katharina Reiss (1971/2000) based her three main text types (expressive, conative, and referential) on the three linguistic persons, in a manner formulated by the German psychologist Karl Bühler (1934/1982). Sure enough, the first, second, and third persons are similarly visible in the types given by Fedorov (the first type is based on the third person, or things in the world; the second type is designed to have an effect on the second person, the receiver; the third type expresses the first person, the artist). But neither Fedorov nor Sobolev make any reference to Bühler, who is elsewhere noted as having had contacts with the Prague Circle but not directly with our Russians.

So the idea of connecting text types with translation solutions was apparently not initiated by Reiss in 1971, and not even by Fedorov in 1953. Now, where can we find this Sobolev 1950?

December 14, 2013: Tel Aviv

Anthony is looking for Sobolev's article, published in a collective volume in 1950. A copy is in Jerusalem (Israel is quite full of Russian books), and Anthony will be giving a lecture at Al Quds so he could look at the book on the return journey (in Israel you just take taxis everywhere). Then it snows, and snows. No way to get to Jerusalem, the roads are blocked, so no lecture, and no book.

Two days in a rain-ridden beach hotel in Tel Aviv. Time to rethink the Stalin connection. Could totalitarian authority perhaps have been good for translation? Recall that Hitler, in a *Führererlass* of 1940, was *in favor* of importing foreign linguistic forms, since the German language had to be developed so as to become a world language (von Polenz 1967/1979). This is logical enough: National Socialism needed nationalism, but not so much nationalism as to isolate the language from the advances of modernity. And

then we find Mao Zedong commenting in 1956 on whether cultural forms should remain national or could be imported: "Personally, I'm for very close translation of theoretical works because it has the advantage of accuracy. […] We should be very clear on this fundamental principle: It is also necessary to learn basic principles from the West. To insist that the scalpel must be in the Chinese style is absurd" (1956/1991, 102). Any totalitarian leader would logically want the best scalpel available, and so should we. Stalin, when you look at his 1950 articles on linguistics, was perhaps making the same political argument: do not be excessively nationalist or class-based; be prepared to risk impurity in language; incorporate modernity. Hence the interest of this frame for translation and its theories. And yes, Loh cites Mao (and Fedorov) approvingly, just as Fedorov cites Stalin (very approvingly).

Anthony asks Itamar Even-Zohar: Yes, says, Itamar, Fedorov was a student of Tynyanov's; he studied in Leningrad at the State Institute for the History of the Arts, which the Formalists had set up. Itamar sees Fedorov as a continuation of the Formalists. *Déjà vu*: we are repeating discussions had with Professor Even-Zohar in Tarragona in 2008, when we went looking for the Formalists' texts on translation and actually found very little (just a few articles and commentaries on Russian translations of Heine). In the end, that whole chapter was removed from *Exploring Translation Theories* – also because the scholars in Prague insisted that many good things in Translation Studies actually started in Czech and Slovak, and nowhere else. Things eastern have never been clear. When in doubt, cut it out (as surgeons are reportedly taught).

December 23, 2013: Cambridge

A bookshop in Cambridge, England, has the 1950 collective volume on a shelf: Ganshina, Klavdiya A., I. Karpov. 1950. *Voprosy teorii i metodiki uchebnogo perevoda* (Questions of the theory and methodology of educational translation). We order it. A Christmas present!

January 12, 2014: Tarragona

Esther is cleaning up our library. She finds a photocopy of Fedorov's 1953 book and comes in complaining: You made me borrow this book from the Barcelona University Library twice, and you've had it here for five years! Indeed we had, ever since those days when Itamar was here. Anthony had asked Serafima Khalzanova to look for "equivalence" in the book. No, she said, here Fedorov only talks about "adequacy", and since at that time we only wanted to know where equivalence theory had come from, Fedorov was not a person of interest. So we had left him on our own shelf, forgotten.

1953, Moscow: A complex translation concept

Now we look at Fedorov yet again, at what is meant by "adequacy" (*adekvatnost'*), interestingly glossed with the Russian compound *polnotsennost'*, "full value". So if there is a notion of equivalence in Fedorov, it is not a question of measuring values that are "equal" on some particular level or another, but of giving something that is the "full value" of the start text. Fedorov then describes "adequate translation" as "exhaustive accuracy in

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the transfer of the semantic content of the original and full functional-stylistic correspondence to it" (1953:,114). More fully:

> Adequacy of translation means transferring a specific relation between the content and form in the original by reproducing the features of the form or creating functional correspondence to those features. […] Adequacy of translation presupposes a certain balance between the whole and the parts, and especially between the general character of the work and the degree of closeness to the original in the transmission of each particular segment of it […]. (1953, 114)

A binary opposition creeps in here: "reproducing form" *or* "functional correspondence". This is nevertheless at a secondary level, allowing for "adequacy" to rise above the opposition. In the end, the remnant of binarism may be no more than the two directions in which translation solutions can be sought at phrase or sentence level, as in Vinay and Darbelnet. The above description would locate "adequacy" at the level of the text as a whole (in relation to its parts), suggesting that it is *not* in itself a term to be applied to each phrase-level solution when considered in isolation. As for the psychological tendency to binarism, when Fedorov comments on phrase-level solutions he usually formulates *more than two ways* of solving problems. If anything, he usually prefers divisions into three, as would befit Marxist dialectics.

Why should this idea of adequacy now be exciting? A tries to insist that Translation Studies is blocked by binarisms: not just the paradoxes of domesticating versus foreignizing translation, but the whole panoply of one-or-the-other choices by which scholars all sign up to fight for facile causes. Who would not support cultural openness? Who would not be in favor of plural interpretations? Such choices put us all on one side, ideologically, and thereby take us away from the harder problems of translating. In fact, the most dynamic ideas in Translation Studies are not about translating at all: they have more to do with what kind of cultures we want, and how those ideas on culture can produce hopes about translating. That is where the millennial binarisms have led us. If, on the other hand, you are genuinely interested in the act of translating, what you need is something more like the intelligent use of complexity. A position that says, from the outset, that translation produces just one quality, and that the quality is achieved in many different ways, is not easily rejected on ideological grounds. That very complexity, which necessarily ensues from the initial refusal of binarism, allows for a more subtle understanding of translation. At the same time, it sets up intellectual problems of a technical order, basically to identify the means by which translators solve problems. That kind of intellectual challenge is something we have not had in Translation Studies for decades.

Reading Fedorov, the first intellectual challenge is to sort out where this idea of "adequacy" came from. When glossing the term as "full value", Fedorov actually refers back to someone called Smirnov, the author of an encyclopedia entry published some twenty years previously, and wonderfully available online.

1934: Leningrad. Adequacy is equivalents plus substitution

Professor Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Smirnov (1883-1962) is a medievalist at Leningrad State University. Although he edited works by Shakespeare, Molière, Stendhal, Mérimée, Maupassant, and others (according to the online sites that all cite each other), he seems to have written little on translation save an entry in the official encyclopedia of "literature and folklore" dated 1934. Here he uses the terms "equivalent" (ekvivalent) and "adequate" (adekvatnyy) in the following way:

> An adequate translation conveys the author's entire intention (both thought-out and unconscious) as [realized by] a certain ideological and emotional literary impact on the reader, to match as far as possible – through exact equivalents [putem tochnikh ekvivalentov] or satisfactory substitution [ili udovletvoritel'nikh substitutov (podstanovok)] – all the resources used by the author with respect to imagery, color, rhythm, etc., these resources being considered not as ends in themselves but only as a means to achieve the overall effect. (Smirnov 1934)

The intriguing idea here is that a good ("adequate") translation combines both exact matches (which is the sense of "equivalents" here) and "substitutions".

Where did this idea come from? The encyclopedia entry is accompanied by a healthy bibliography that includes references to Fedorov (1927), Chukovskiy and Fedorov (1930), some other Russian works from the twentieth century, plus much nineteenth-century work in German. There is no indication of where this restricted sense of "equivalents" came from. Then again, this is surely a straightforward and innocuous usage: it applies only to situations where there is just one translation available, as in the ideal world of technical terms. The important point is the combination of "equivalents" and "substitution" as complementary items that together make up "adequacy".

June 20, 1950: Moscow

Pravda publishes Stalin's "Marxism and Problems of Linguistics" (easy to find online). This will change Soviet linguistics completely. Stalin argues that a language serves the nation as a whole, and that it is not a superstructure on the base as, he argues, N. Y. Marr had erroneously pointed out:

> Language is not a product of one or another base, old or new, within the given society, but of the whole course of the history of the society and of the history of the bases for many centuries. [...] Hence the functional role of language, as a means of intercourse between people, consists not in serving one class to the detriment of other classes, but in equally serving the entire society, all the classes of society. (Stalin 1950/1954, 5)

In the Soviet context, Stalin's intervention put paid to long-standing arguments against the formalist study of language, which included the likes of Charles Bally (the Geneva linguist from whom Vinay and Darbelnet worked). Thanks to Stalin, language could again be studied more or less on its own terms, including in terms of synchronic systems. Mossop (2013) suggests Stalin's pronouncement opened the way for what is

perhaps the first systematically linguistic approach to translation, in Fedorov (1953). The actual causal relations are nevertheless difficult to gauge. A simplistic reading (offered for example in Brang 1955/1963) is that, for as long as language was considered part of the superstructure, it could be handled as pure ideology and could thus be altered freely for ideological purposes – translators could freely make every text sound like Marx, for example, which might have suited Stalin's purposes marvelously. Following Stalin's decision, opines Brang (1955/1963, 398) "such changes are in theory no longer allowed". So why should Stalin want that? In sum, Brang's reading is far too simplistic, especially since Fedorov's "Stalinist" theory actually allows for the correction of "facts". It seems more plausible that Stalin's articles generally politicized linguistics, bringing the discipline to the center of intellectual attention, and thereby opening new opportunities. Viktor Vinogradov, a Russian linguist who had been sent into internal exile in 1934 and a sometime citer of Bally, was brought back by Stalin in 1950 and made Director of the Institute of Linguistics in Moscow (Fedorov cites him – he was a safe name at the time). According to one report (Cary 1957), a chair in Translation Theory was established at the Institute of Linguistics in the same year, 1950. Thanks to all this attention, so our story goes, Stalin created a moment where linguistics was well positioned to explain translation, and to do so in ways that need not be indebted to the dominant position previously held by literary studies.

Is this why Fedorov decided to look like a linguist?

1950, Moscow. *Skopos* theory *avant la lettre*

Immediately after Stalin's intervention in June, there is a minor outbreak of translation theories, as if the ideas had been there waiting for a moment to surface. The collective volume *Teoriya i metodika uchebnogo perevoda* (1950), which has at last arrived from the Cambridge bookshop, contains a few surprises.

L. N. Sobolev's "O mere tochnosti v perevode" (On the Measure of Exactitude in Translation) starts from the nuanced and complex claim that the degree to which a translation is "precise", "exact", or "accurate" (tochnyy) – also glossed as "truthful" (pravdivyy) (1950, 142) – varies in accordance with "the purpose of the translation [tseli perevoda], the nature of the start text, and the reader for whom the translation is intended" (1950, 143). This sentence is secretly exciting for those of us who went through debates about Vermeer's *Skopos* theory in the 1980s. Vermeer said that the way you translate depends on the *Skopos* ("purpose") of the translation, and here we find almost the same thing right back in 1950: Sobolev's term *tsel'* ("purpose") is indeed the standard Russian translation for the Greek philosophical term σκοπός (purpose, goal, target). Sobolev was announcing *Skopos* theory *avant la lettre*, perhaps. That said, his very next sentence steers into safer ports: "Therefore, it is convenient to consider specific criteria of accuracy separately, depending on the nature of texts: artistic, journalistic, and business" (1950, 143). One could argue, of course, that each text type encodes a kind of purpose, if not a kind of readership, so there is no necessary contradiction here.

In the same publication we find Yakov Retsker's "O zakonomernikh sootvetsviyakh pri perevode na rodnoy yazik" (On regularities in correspondence in translation into the native language), which argues that there are three kinds of translational relationship, basically on the level of terms and phrases: 1) equivalence, 2)

"analogue" correspondence, as in the case of synonyms; and 3) "adequate substitution" (adekvatnye zameny). Smirnov's two terms ("equivalents" and "substitution") thus become three. In this small system, "equivalence" clearly means a one-to-one relationship that is made obligatory by the language system (*langue*), while "analogue translation" covers the kinds of one-to-several relationships given in dictionaries, where the translator then decides between options on the basis of each situation. The third category, "adequate substitution", is where Retsker (1950) brings in a rather heterogeneous list of things that can be done: 1) concretization of undifferentiated and abstract concepts; 2) logical development of concepts, 3) translation through antonym, and 4) compensation. These are our Vinay-and-Darbelnet-type translation solutions, developing in a Russian tradition.

If we focus on no more than the technical problem of naming solution types, it is possible to see a small system developing as we move from Smirnov (1934) through to the more developed typologies of the mid 1970s (see Table 1). Fedorov does not actually give a typology of solution types in any one place (this is what threw us off the scent the first time around), although the forms "permutation" (word order change), "grammatical restructuring", "modification", and "adaptation" are dealt with at various places in his 1953 work. We can extend the table to include the typologies of Retsker and Barkhudarov in the 1970s, which indicate the extent to which a historical metalanguage was being developed.

Table 1. Possible development of solution types in Soviet translation theory

Smirnov (1934)		Retsker (1950)		Fedorov (1953)	Retsker (1974)	Barkhudarov (1975)
Adequacy	Equivalence	Equivalence		Transliteration Build from components	?	Transliteration Componential Explanation
	Substitution	Analogue		Similar function	Synonyms	Approximate
		Substitution	Concretization Development Antonyms Compensation	[Permutation Grammatical restructuring Modification Adaptation]	Differentiation Specification Generalization Logical development Antonyms Holistic transformation Compensation	Permutations Substitutions Additions Omissions

January 20, 2014

Debbie in Montreal sends the scan of Sobolev's course on translation from Russian into French (*Posobie no perevodu s russkogo yazyka na frantsuzskiy*) (1952). The bibliography makes it very clear that Sobolev was translating Russian literature *into* French. But this is not really a book of translation theory. There is a moment of brief excitement when we find Sobolev citing Charles Bally (1952, 91) – he actually recommends that students do the exercises in the second volume of Bally's *Traité de stylistique française* (1952, 396). So Bally was at least citable when Fedorov was

working on his linguistic approach. However, Bally's main work *Linguistique générale et linguistique française* (1932) was not published in Russian until 1955, two years after Fedorov's book and apparently without noticeable impact on translation theory.

Why should Bally be exciting? Anthony has become convinced that the Swiss linguist, unjustly remembered in English as little more than one of the "students" who published their notes on Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale,* provided the intellectual framework for most of Vinay and Darbelnet. If there was no direct connection between Vinay and Darbelnet and the Russians, then the connection might have been on the level of the previous generation. So we had been looking for Bally in Russian. And here he was, cited in Sobolev but not in Fedorov (both of whom read French).

Moscow, December 1954. A beginning for Translation Studies?

The Second Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers takes place (the first one had been in 1934). Rumor has it that Khrushchev has called for this congress in order to test the waters for the Congress of the Communist Party to be held in 1956, where he would definitively consolidate his power. The Writers' congress is basically about what to do with Stalin's legacy (here we follow Garrard and Garrard 1990). The plenaries by Ilya Ehrenburg, calling for greater individualism, and Mikhail Sholokhov, criticizing the system of official literature, were opposed by Konstantin Simonov, who sought continuation of a glorious literary tradition (most of the speeches are available online). There was a general confrontation between the lyrical and the public, liberals against conservatives.

Although general accounts of the congress make no specific mention of translation, it seems that part of those debates spilled over into discussion of Fedorov's 1953 book. Edmond Cary, commenting on the 1954 congress, notes:

> In a collection [of congress papers?] published the following year, literary translation is presented as belonging to literature. Where Fedorov had denounced a "literary" deviation, now his approach is qualified as "linguistic" deviation. His theory comes in for a heavy beating [...] (1957, 187)

If the basic argument is that literary translation belongs to literature, and should therefore not be subject to abstractions coming from other disciplines, there is surely room for respect and discussion: medical translation belongs to medicine, film subtitles can be dealt with in cinema studies, court interpreters are bound by the rules of each legal system (which they are). That is a legitimate debate. However, mutual accusations of "deviations", in a context strongly marked by Stalinism and decades of purges, is a rather more serious matter. Why were people arguing about linguistics versus literature?

There are other records indicating that Fedorov's 1953 book was criticized by literary theorists. In the fifth edition of Fedorov we read:

> The first edition [in 1953] attempted to position the general problem of translation (in all its variants) as a problem of linguistics. This direction and its categorical tone aroused many [...] objections and comments about the fact that not everything in the book had been perceived and interpreted objectively, and the author was also

attributed views that went far beyond the direct sense of his judgments, and accusations were made that he rejected the possibility of any other consideration of translation problems but the linguistic ones and that he had ignored multilateral relations between the theory of (literary) translation with literary and other human sciences. Some critics were also dissatisfied with the fact that different types of translation were compared within the book – news reports and information, research, and others – alongside literary works. Literary translation was perceived to be in some kind of danger, and the critics failed to see that the author had made the comparisons in order to establish the specificities of each of the types. (1953/2002, 5-6)

When we read the book now, it seems fair enough to compare different text types and the way translation fares in each. But here, in the context of the congress, there seems to be outrage that literature should even be compared with anything else. What was going on?

Retsker (1974, Preface) recalls that Ivan A. Kashkin, "one of the founders of the Soviet school of literary translation and educator of a whole galaxy of talented translators, accused Fedorov of 'formalism'". So what does "formalism" mean in the context of the 1950s? Was it simply a way of relegating Fedorov to a pre-Soviet Russia? Strangely enough, one sense of "formalism" seems to have involved a particular way of translating. This is the sense that we find Kashkin using the term in 1951, accusing formalists of separating form from content, with dire consequences:

In their deliberately arcane versions, formalist translators mutilated the Russian language, imitating the foreign language as a matter of principle even when there was no stylistic justification for it, such as a need to give a sense of local color or to highlight characteristics of direct speech. (Kashkin 1951, 2; cit. Levý 1963/2011, 16)

The worrying part is that this position was cited by Levý, in Czech and German, making it one of the few items that escaped from Russian, back in the day. Such literalist translators have certainly existed; some may have exerted revolutionary zeal in this way (as did Lu Xun in China, for example); they might have been language enthusiasts of the kind that Stalin was writing against. Or it could be, more probably, that Kashkin here is simply twisting Stalin's basic argument in order to further his own agenda – Witt (forthcoming) identifies his position as an attempt to formulate a correlative of Socialist Realism in the field of translation theory, promoting it as a "Soviet school of translation". Whatever the aesthetic and political motivations, no names appear to be given for these "formalist" translators, and Fedorov's linguistic approach (let alone Sobolev's and Retsker's) can scarcely be construed as justification of literalism. Indeed, reading Fedorov's text, even the 1953 hardline version, it is difficult to imagine his kind of formalism justifying, or indeed practicing, translations that ignore content, that fail to see the work as a whole, or that produce mindless mimicking of the foreign.

Geneva, 1957: Originality obscured by translation

Edmond Cary, a conference interpreter working for UNESCO, publishes an article on

Soviet translation theories. Cary is actually many things: co-founder of the very young journal *Babel*, co-founder of the Société Française des Traducteurs, co-founder and Secretary General of the Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs. A review by Cary has every chance of being read seriously.

Cary stresses the importance of translation for Soviet culture, not just because of relations with foreign cultures but also for the many texts that move between the numerous official languages within the Soviet Union. At the time, Cary tells us, the Soviet Union is the country with the world's highest number of translations per year. Cary takes note of Smirnov's 1934 article, although he renders "adekvatnost'" (adequacy) as "pleine équivalence", which seems not to be what Smirnov would have done, and then he uses the same translation in his summary of Fedorov. True, Smirnov and Fedorov did gloss "adequacy" as "full value", but neither of them were using the term "equivalence" in this way. Cary's quick translations hide the originality of the Russian project.

Cary appreciates the way Fedorov develops a translation concept that goes beyond purely literary concerns, and he accepts the important proposition that "each of these different types imposes different requirements on the work of the translator" (1957, 186). Yet he is unhappy with the idea that the "common denominator" of all these types of translation should be "linguistic". He seems to think that many other kinds of translation (dubbing, conference interpreting, children's literature) would somehow break the linguistic mold (it is not clear why) to the point where only truisms would remain. He is fundamentally upset that the translator's art, or even thought process, should be reduced to decisions between formal categories, and this is indeed the way he conceptualizes "linguistics", as nothing more than formalism (there would be a debate between Cary and Mounin over this point). The possibly revolutionary Russian ideas about text types are thus hidden under a very shortsighted misconception of linguistics.

Something similar happens in Cary's presentation of Sobolev's ideas from 1950. Cary does translate the key sentence: "The degree of exactitude in translation varies in accordance with the purpose [*la destination*] of the translation, the nature of the text translated, and the readers for whom the translation is intended" (trans. Cary 1957, 186), and he repeats this principle in his own course on translation (1985, 85). The French term "destination" is technically correct as a rendition of the "purpose" of a text, yet it is a rather literary term that could mean quite a few concrete things as well. Once again, the translation hides the revolution. In his extended commentary on Sobolev, Cary actually sees this "destination" principle as auguring a study on the different historical conceptions of translation, rather than a position with radically practical consequences concerning the social use of language. This then degenerates into an argument in which Cary sincerely regrets Fedorov's dogmatic ("undialectic") defense of translatability and the consequent abstractions in which general principles are applied to all kinds of translation.

Moscow, 1958 – Translation Studies as an "ingenious idea"

The Second Congress of Slavists in Moscow continues the debate over whether translation belongs to literature or linguistics. A report by Cary notes:

An extremely ingenious idea has been formulated. Instead of mechanically attaching the various aspects of literary language and ways of translating either to Linguistic Sciences or to Literary Studies (*literaturovedenie*), would it not be better to have a separate science? At first blush, one is tempted to smile and shrug one's shoulders: that would surely mean avoiding the problem rather than solving it. Upon reflection, though, one wonders if it would not be, given the current situation, the fairest position, the one that best accounts for the state of affairs on the ground. […] The Congress also inaugurated a special "linguistic-literary" section, the active contribution of which clearly justifies its existence. (Cary 1959, 19n)

So the idea of an independent Translation Studies might have been formulated in Moscow in 1958, in order to quell acrimonious debates between the partisans of literature and linguistics?

On the other hand, the idea of studying literary language in linguistic terms had surely been around since the Formalists of the 1910s. It is one thing to study literary language in formal ("linguistic" terms), but quite another to found Translation Studies as a joining of literary and linguistic scholars.

Geneva, 1959

The above citation is from Cary's very short review of Fedorov's second edition, which had appeared in 1958. Cary again notes the lively debates that had ensued between Fedorov's "linguistic opinions" and the Soviet "*littéraires*", observing that Fedorov's second edition had toned down some of the "rigorous but simplistic systematicity" (1959, 19). All of this wins Cary's approval, since Fedorov's work has become "more nuanced", "more complex". Cary strangely overlooks the subtitle that Fedorov had *added* to his second edition: *lingvisticheskie problemy* (linguistic problems) – Fedorov was by no means backing down.

In sum, one senses that Cary wanted the Russians and their debates to be more widely known but was affectively attached more to the literary translators than to the "linguists". He was not about to entertain any intrusion by progressive science. When all is said and done, he belonged to the heroic age of Western translation practice as an affair of people rather than texts (cf. Mossop 2013) – he was one of those prodigious polyglots who performed near-magical feats in the service of humanity. Let linguistics be applied to the machines; the mystique of the master was not to be touched!

Mont Blanc, January 24, 1966

An Air India flight crashes into Mont Blanc, killing Edmond Cary (Ballard 1985, 9). Tragedy cuts short the life of the most active and best-informed intermediary for Russian translation theory. So who was this interpreter, and why had he been so concerned with things Russian?

Edmond Cary, it turns out, was born in Saint Petersburg in 1912 with the name Kirill Znosko-Borovskiy (see Ballard 1985, 9-10 for further biographical details). His family moved to Paris after 1917 – which could be why he was not wholly in agreement with Soviet ideologies, and perhaps why he picked a petty fight with Fedorov about

linguistics as a "lowest common denominator".

For many readers who had no Russian (Mounin, for example, and the likes of Vinay and Darbelnet), Cary was the main source for knowledge on Russian translation theory. He was an authoritative and dynamic intermediary, and he would undoubtedly have done more if he had been given more years.

As it was, Cary's ultimately negative evaluation of Fedorov had repercussions elsewhere. The Czech scholar Jiří Levý (1963/2011, 5), for example, records only the "pointless and fruitless" polemics between Fedorov and Chukovskiy, between science and literature. The German theorist Rudolf Jumpelt (1961, 6), who worked with Cary in the Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs, picks up from Fedorov only the idea that linguistics might provide a banal "common denominator" (*gemeinsamer Nenner*) beneath all text types.

Darmstadt, 1963

Hans Joachim Störig publishes a ground-breaking anthology of theoretical texts on translation. He omits Fedorov and the Russian theorists because, he says, the Russian examples mean nothing to the German reader, and in any case "Fedorov's theoretical approach is fundamentally based in Stalin's pronouncements on linguistics and should these days hardly be of any significance in the Soviet Union itself" (1963, 384). So there was no official translation of Fedorov into German.

Störig does nevertheless reprint Peter Brang's article on the Soviet theorists, cited above. Brang (1955/1963, 388) makes the point that Fedorov was in fact reacting *against* a narrowly Marxist linguistics, following Stalin's pronouncements of 1950, which would seem to contradict Störig's dismissal of Fedorov just four pages earlier. Brang then offers a ten-page summary of Fedorov's book, including the three ways of dealing with foreign realia, and the three texts types, which Brang insists are derived from Stalin's theory of language as a treasury of key words – can anyone else find the connection? In Brang's summary, Fedorov is making general points about the different kinds of language used in the three text types, but it is not abundantly clear from his description that the way you translate depends on the text type. And there is nothing about purposes or translations doing anything on the target side.

Leipzig, 1968

Otto Kade in Leipzig refers to Fedorov many times in his book *Coincidence and Regularity in Translation* (which is Christina Schäffner's suggested title for *Zufall und Gesetzmäßigkeit in der Übersetzung*), and he cites him in Russian – Kade is implicitly writing for a reader who knows Russian. So will this be the bridge to the West? Kade (1968, 24) nevertheless openly regrets that Fedorov did not make the relation between content and form more dialectic. And a reader who knows no Russian is offered no clue as to what is being cited. The West Germans who later cite Kade (especially through Wilss 1977 and Koller 1979) do not cite the Russians. The Leipzig bridge did not allow much public passage.

Moscow, 1953 (reading what Fedorov actually wrote)

If one were to believe the general thrust of this reception process, Fedorov was espousing linguistics as the opponent of literary translation, using linguistic science to control the creativity of specifically literary translation, and perhaps justifying extreme literalism ("formalist translation"). His theory would be crude, undialectic, and a standing threat to standard Russian.

At this point we return to the text, to the written word that survives across history. Could we have read it so wrongly? One of the great promises of book culture is that, when all whispered and otherwise occasional calumnies have died away, the written remains, and someone might come along and ask what you meant. So we re-read the 1953 version of Fedorov, the one that had caused the furor, as the words of a man seizing opportunity yet speaking his truth.

First point: the conflict of disciplines and the birth of Translation Studies did not have to wait for the Congress of Slavists. It is clear enough in Fedorov's 1953 text:

> That is why one is so surprised at Prof. A. A. Reformatskiy when, in his article "Linguistic problems of translation" [1952] he asks "Is a science of translation possible?" and he answers, "No, such a science is impossible; translation practice can use the knowledge of many sciences, but cannot have a science of its own. This is the consequence of the diversity of translation types and genres". This argument is completely groundless. Indeed, it can be very difficult and complex to systematize and generalize the different forms adapted by the correlation of regularities between two languages when working with different genres and different types of material, but that does not mean it is impossible to carry out that task. (1953, 15)

In envisaging this science, Fedorov's starting point is that all kinds of translation deal with language – such is indeed their "common denominator". However, as the above passage makes very clear, the intellectual challenge of identifying the "forms of regularities" is by no means banal or common. And there is no suggestion that such forms will somehow be laws legislating the way all translators must act, let alone promulgating primitive literalism.

When negotiating the relations between linguistics and literary studies, Fedorov actually places literary translation *in advance of* linguistics, he says, so linguistics has to catch up. This might be no more than a trope of false modesty, or perhaps a wink at Stalin's criticism of Soviet linguists. In any case, it implicitly positions Fedorov outside of any traditional linguistics (how else could he see that it needed to catch up?), at the same time as it posits that literary translators are people that linguists can learn from (before the relationship might become the other way around).

So how can one explain the numerous extreme reactions *against* this proposal? Anthony asks Nune to translate and retranslate Fedorov's self-summary (1953, 98-100), a set of six general principles that might represent the basics of his approach. Here we comment on them one by one:

1. The translator has ideological responsibility for the quality of the translation, hence the requirement that the translation be truthful, in order to give the Soviet reader the full picture of the translated materials.

Read in a Stalinist context, this would appear to mean that the translator has to be very, very careful. If the work translated is contradicting established orthodoxy, then it should be noted as such: "truth" in this sentence can be interpreted here as the historical truth of dialectical materialism. Liberal literati were not likely to be enthralled.

2. The translation must use "complete language" rather than literalism, with no kind of violation of the mother tongue in favor of the start language. It should be noted that in practice one does find cases of literalism (or so-called "translationese") in which one finds both the start and target languages.

So how could anyone say "formalism" was about literalist translations? The notion of "complete language" harkens back to "full value", and thus to "adequacy". There is no question of one side against the other, even though Fedorov was certainly criticized in those terms.

3. Since the literary work has dialectical unity of content and form, its translation must concord with the start-text function [funktsiya] (of both separate elements and the work as a whole).

In principle, there are dialectic relations between form and content, and again between part and whole, and the motor that moves the dialectic is "function". This is the complex unitary concept of translation. Note, however, that this principle applies to specifically literary translation. So how can Fedorov be seen as somehow arguing against literature?

4. Since in the case of literature the start text is a single (meaningful, artistic) whole, where each separate element has its own meaningful (and also artistic) role and which, in turn, has a definite cultural background […], the translation must transfer the uniqueness of the original (the speech features of the given genre, the individual style of the author, the historical context), which would correspond to the meaningful and artistic roles fulfilled both by the original as a whole and by its individual features. This requirement is only fully feasible on the basis of analyses of the author's style in terms of linguistics, which is only starting to be developed by Soviet scholars.

Again, this is straight literary theory, followed by a note that translators might be helped by linguistic analyses of an author's style, once this kind of linguistics is properly developed. But that was surely the kind of analysis begun by the formalists in the 1910s (when the aim was to study the nature of literary discourse)?

5. Translation theory and practice should be approached through constant use of scientific data on the history of a nation, history of language, history of culture, history of literature, etc., i.e. the principle of studying phenomena in their interrelationships. This is also associated with the requirement to take into account the actual conditions and the purposes [tseli] for which the translation is

carried out, whether it is a literary translation designed for publication, a documentary-business translation, or an interpreting assignment.

This is more of the same. Science will solve linguistic problems, although "science" here means little more than collecting data and viewing them in a systematic way. This comes hand-in-hand with awareness that each translation is carried out under specific circumstances and for specific purposes, so there is no general rule other than this specificity. (Of course, this principle potentially contradicts the emphasis on the start-text function in principles 3 and 4, but no one was particularly arguing the point.)

6. The principle of translatability must be accepted, i.e. the possibility of a complete translation, which is only attainable because we do not proceed from individual elements […], but from the complex whole in which they are joined together and acquire their specific meaning.

This bit rankled Cary and Kade, but it is not easy to see why. If something cannot be rendered in its immediate context, it may be expressed somewhere else in the text as system, or on some other level, thanks to the traditional principle of compensation. Here, that principle is surely expressed in terms of the text as system, and in such a way that the translation process in such cases operates more on the level of function rather than form. In terms of linguistics, acceptance of translatability implies non-acceptance of the kind of rule-based systemic structuralism that would tend to deny translatability. In terms of history, however, this principle does seem to overlook the sometimes great divergences between different languages and different cultures, and it is perhaps ultimately defensible only as a "possibility", which is indeed the word Fedorov uses: if a phrase cannot be rendered in the here-and-now, we can still believe that it will be translatable at some future point in time, in a future set of circumstances.

In sum, apart from the first principle, it is difficult to see what the *littéraires* were so upset about. And it is very difficult to see Fedorov's text as a standard defense of any established linguistics.

24 November 1997, Saint Petersburg

Fedorov dies. His lifelong work on translation has been crowned with success, not just in the repeated re-editions of his 1953 book but also in the way Russian translation theorists have worked seriously on the "forms of regularities" that translators use when moving between languages: the standard typologies have been developed by Shveitser (1973, Retsker (1974), Barkhudarov (1975), and those who followed them. If there was a post-Stalinist struggle in the 1950s, there seems little doubt about which side won the long-term war in the field of translation theory.

So who was Fedorov, when all is said and done? Here is what we are able to piece together from various sources:

Andrey Venediktovich Fedorov (1906-1997) studied at the State Institute for the History of the Arts in Leningrad (Saint Petersburg), where the Formalists of the early twentieth century had created a program. He had been a student of Tynyanov, who had worked on the theory of cultural systems and wrote on Russian translations of Heine. Fedorov's interest in translation might be dated from 1927, when he published a paper on

"Problems of poetic translation", followed by a 1929 paper that also dealt with Russian translations of Heine. In 1930, at the age of 24, Fedorov appears as a co-author (or "collaborator") with Korney Chukovskiy in *Iskusstvo perevoda* (The Art of Translation) (see Leighton 1984, xxxii), which is resolutely about literary translation as what later versions of Chukovskiy's text call "a high art". Retsker reports that Fedorov gave lectures on translation theory at the Gorki Literature Institute in 1930. In 1934 Fedorov is named as the author of a 26-page *Teoriya i praktika perevoda nemetskoy nauchnoy i tekhnicheskoy literatury na russkiy yazyk* (The Theory and Practice of Translating German Scientific and Technical Texts into Russian). Shadrin (2011) reports that in 1940 Fedorov defended his doctoral thesis on "The Linguistic Foundations of Translation Theory" (Лингвистические основы теории перевода). That was followed by a book on literary translation in 1941. Fedorov was a translator at the Leningrad front during the war (Shadrin 2011). There might then be something of a gap between the focus on literary translation and Fedorov's 1953 book on general translation (although Fedorov's name is on a translation of Goethe's *Wahlverwandtschaften* in 1952). Fedorov then went on to author more than two hundred publications on the theory, history, and criticism of translation, on general and comparative stylistics, the history of Russian poetry, and the international relations of Russian literature. He was head of the Department of German Philology at Leningrad State University from 1963 to 1979.

Looking at the biography, some things do not make sense; they do not fit in. Most obviously, if Fedorov was a linguist, where did he receive training in linguistics? And in what kind of linguistics? Surely he was relying on little more than the Formalists' tools of identification, comparison, and the pursuit of interrelations? And then, if Fedorov was somehow opposed to literary studies, how is it that he spent his whole intellectual life working on literature, as a literary critic, literary historian, theorist of literary translation (particularly in his work with Chukovskiy) and indeed as a literary translator – from German he translated works by Heine, Goethe, Hoffmann, Kleist, and Thomas Mann, and from French he rendered Molière, Diderot, Proust, and Maupassant. And it is not as if he stopped literary translation in order to become an overnight linguist to please Stalin: in 1952, just one year before his book on translation, his name is on the translation of Goethe's *Wahlverwandtschaften*. And then, if his turn to linguistics is to be interpreted as no more than a political ploy to take advantage of Stalin's intervention in 1950, how do we explain Fedorov's doctoral thesis being on precisely this topic back in 1940?

The biography, like key passages from the text, suggests that a historical injustice has been done.

1950-1953, a time capsule?

Here is a theory. Prior to 1950, in the days of dark Stalinism, some scholars thought about translation in formalist terms, absorbing the kinds of systemic text analyses that would elsewhere be called stylistics. Immediately following Stalin's pronouncement on linguistics in 1950, those ideas appeared in print, accompanied by the necessary political praise. The ideas found their ideal moment. With Stalin's death in 1953, however, those same ideas were so strongly associated with Stalin and his legacy that they would be questioned both within and outside the Soviet Union, and thus never really move beyond Russian. Within Russian, it was easy enough to airbrush Stalin out of later editions and

reflections, allowing the formalist tradition to produce a series of theories and textbooks. Beyond Russian, however, the negative initial receptions sealed off the years 1950-1953, perhaps definitively. A little time capsule was formed, waiting to be discovered.

January 31, 2014

We are in Birmingham for a meeting. We learn that Brian Baer and someone in Sweden are planning to translate a collection of Russian translation theories into English. Anthony remembers that Brian Mossop had urged Brian Baer to do this, but the latter Brian had been less than enthusiastic, hadn't he?

Christina Schäffner kindly lends us her copy of Kade (1968), which we scan (Anthony has been looking for this book since 1979). But the scan misses key pages, which we will later have sent to us from Kyriaki Kourouni in Thessaloniki – it would be too embarrassing to mention the missing pages to Christina.

February 2, 2014

Nune and Anthony arrive in Barcelona airport, back from Birmingham. We just make the night bus to Tarragona, and we go to the back, where the bad boys sit. In the last minutes of email as the bus leaves the airport we get a message from Brian Baer. He is planning to do an annotated version of Fedorov 1953, plus an anthology of key texts that will "tell the story of the Soviet School of Translation" – all this with Susanna Witt of Uppsala University, who has a three-year research grant and has been working in the archives in Russia.

So our own research finished then and there – there were far better resources elsewhere.

As the night bus rumbled on we thought, not collectively:

Will anyone see the actors and networks? How about the material *assemblage*?

Apart from needing and enjoying ideas, one does these things for a certain sense of historical justice, which is also a shared guilt for the lack of justice. How often has Anthony written about translation theory as if these Russians had never existed! Nostra culpa. The great moral appeal of historical justice is that it might also be applied to us.

And we have only really been looking at the ideas that our more familiar theories discovered later. How many other ideas remain there in the Russian, hidden because we have not been looking for them?

Postscript: February 23, 2014

Brian Baer writes that the project to translate Fedorov et al. has not been welcomed by the prospective publisher. Is official Translation Studies really still so averse to anything that sounds like linguistics?

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