

Holmes and Popovič in the 21st century: an empirical-bibliographical exercise

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RELATIVE RELEVANCE

Assessing the historical relevance of a scholar is a major undertaking which, of course, depends on the background and the perspective of the evaluator. An education in translation studies (TS) with a focus on linguistic equivalence would lead to a very different assessment of certain scholars rather than a kind of training that underlines the importance of postmodern and post-structural views. A researcher who has mainly published in a language unknown to the evaluator is more likely to occupy a less central position compared to someone who has published only in English. Hence, being aware of this aspect is necessary when dealing with a diachronic perspective on 20th century scholars such as James S. Holmes and Anton Popovič. Nevertheless, they both seem to have a rather stable position in TS historiography. When Popovič is mentioned in overviews of TS paradigms, it is often because of his shifts of expression (for instance in van den Broeck 1999, 204, or in Munday 2009) and/or his stylistic norms (for instance in Pym 2010, 68). The presence of Holmes is more salient in such overviews, but it is also related to a limited number of topics, such as the culture-boundedness of translations (Pym 2010, 70) or the discussion about the naming of the discipline referring to the arts and humanities (Kuhiwczak – Littau 2007, 5; Munday 2010/2016). Although the attribution of historical relevance is relative, a converging tendency seems to be present in history writing as well. If certain scholarly ideas or publications of an author have been quoted before, they are more likely to be selected again for later overview contributions, thereby ingraining those ideas and contributing to the process of canonization.

Despite the presence of these processes and limitations, this contribution does not focus on the (interpreted) afterlife of one of the ideas or paradigms developed by Holmes or Popovič. Its aim is limited, but clear: to what extent are these two translation scholars (and by extension: the Low Countries and the Nitra School) still present in the TS discourse of the 21st century? To what extent are their ideas and concepts, developed in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, quoted in TS still today? This quantitative and tentatively objectifying starting point will then be extended in a perspective that needs to be interpreted by the researcher: which of their ideas, concepts or theories are still mainly referred to by 21st century scholars in TS? Although the results of this

analysis do not claim to be exhaustive, because they are limited only to the present corpus, this study will draw on two invaluable tools in TS.

The first one is the *Handbook of Translation Studies* (*HTS*), a contemporary TS encyclopaedia containing overview articles on translation and interpreting research topics, which will be used for testing the diachronic component: to what extent, in which specific overview articles and in which contexts are the two scholars still present? The second tool is the online *Translation Studies Bibliography* (*TSB*, see Gambier – van Doorslaer 2016), including almost 30,000 scholarly publications in TS, which will be used for testing the presence of Holmes and Popovič in recent research (from 2000 onwards). At a time when TS has clearly reached a higher level of institutionalization and specialization, scrutinizing how two important names of the “first generation” of scholars are being dealt with is extremely fascinating. Moreover, despite working on the opposite sides of the Iron Curtain in Europe, these two scholars shared similar ideas and scholarly interests and belonged to a “group of translation scholars from then on gradually becoming internationally known, from the circuit Amsterdam-Antwerp-Leuven-Nitra-Tel Aviv” (Van den Broeck 2015, 321). In the light of these premises, to what extent would this group or school thinking (Low Countries, Nitra) and their shared features still be a topic in modern research?

THE DOMINANCE OF THE MAP

The *Handbook of Translation Studies* distinguishes itself from a traditional “history” of TS because it is made up of 174 thematic overview articles. Instead of adopting the perspective of one author looking at the whole discipline, the Handbook contains the contributions of a great variety of authors looking at their specific field of research from a more specialized point of view. For the purpose of this analysis, the updated, online version of the *HTS* was preferred to the printed volumes, published between 2010 and 2013.

Although they belonged to a similar research tradition and period in TS, there is a considerable quantitative difference in the presence of the two authors in the *HTS*. If Popovič appears in three of the overview articles, Holmes is mentioned in 26 out of 174 *HTS* contributions. Only in the article on pseudo-translation (O’Sullivan 2011) is Popovič mentioned in his own right, without a shared context with Holmes. By referring to his taxonomy of translation types, O’Sullivan points to Popovič’s concept of “fictitious translation” as the basis for Gideon Toury’s theorization of pseudo-translation. On the other hand, Anna Strowe (2013) refers to Holmes and Popovič together because of the important contribution they made in connecting normative translation choices to ideological choices. Furthermore, Dirk Delabastita (2010) explicitly acknowledges both scholars’ characteristic of innovative thinking in TS beyond the Iron Curtain, a very unusual practice in the Cold War era. At the same time, he already indicates the difference in international impact, which was due to the language in which Popovič (and Jiří Levý) wrote.

The same tradition went on to inform the literary translation research of the Czech scholar Jiří Levý (1926–1967) and the Slovak Anton Popovič (1933–1984), but unfortunately the international impact of their work remained rather restricted as a result of their untimely

deaths and, quite ironically, by the fact that their main monographs on literary translation [...] were never published in English. However, some of their ideas were picked up from behind the Iron Curtain and transmitted in the West mainly in the 1970s by the American-Dutch translation scholar James S. Holmes (1924–1986), whose small but highly readable and stimulating scholarly output was posthumously collected in *Translated!* (Delabastita 2010).

Although the presence of Holmes in *HTS* is quantitatively much more important, it is mainly due to the popularity of Holmes's map of the discipline. Especially in overview articles as in the *HTS* contributions, authors prefer to position their own topic or subdomain within the larger picture of the discipline. And, even for 21st-century researchers, the map created by Holmes still appears to contain the necessary structuring and comprehensive panoramic qualities for understanding the discipline. This is, for example, the case in the contributions on Applied Translation Studies (Rabadán 2010/2016), Common grounds in Translation and Interpreting (Studies) (Grbić – Wolf 2012), Empirical approaches (Künzli 2013), General translation theory (Dizdar 2012), Interpreting Studies (Pöchhacker 2010/2011), Translation criticism (Paloposki 2012), Translation history (D'hulst 2010), Translation policy (Meylaerts 2011), Translation problem (Toury 2011), Translation process (Englund Dimitrova 2010/2016) and Translation psychology (Jääskeläinen 2012/2016). Based on this abundant use of the map, it seems that Holmes's basic categorization is still valid. Despite later adaptations and partial additions to the map (for instance in Salevsky 1993, Toury 1995/2012, van Doorslaer 2007 and Chesterman 2009), Holmes's map is still an authoritative research tool. Its use in recent 21st-century research shows that, although the map was “[n]ot widely circulated until after Holmes' death, his paper has since had an enormous impact” (Munday 2010/2016).

Holmes's overriding importance in the naming of the discipline is also partly related to the solid structuring qualities of the map. His well-substantiated arguments for the use of “Translation Studies”, a denomination which was preferred to “translation science” or “translatology”, form part of his legacy and are mentioned in several *HTS* contributions. Assis Rosa (2010/2016) stresses “the choice of ‘studies’ as a means of explicitly affiliating the discipline to the arts or the humanities”; Gile (2012) contextualizes it as “the wish of a group of mostly Western literature scholars to conduct research on translation within a dedicated discipline”; Lambert (2012) interprets the “success story” of TS in relation to the common name; Schäffner (2010) highlights the innovation of the descriptive approach at that moment in history. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that almost all of the *HTS* contributions related to Holmes that have been mentioned up to now refer mainly or exclusively to his seminal essay “The Name and Nature of Translation Studies”. The innovative meta-reflective approach of this article has largely contributed to the canonization of Holmes. Moreover, its inclusion in the first two editions of Lawrence Venuti's *Translation Studies Reader* (2004, 2nd edition), is a sign of this recognition. On the other hand, this may also have played a role in the frequent quoting from “The Name and Nature”.

Rather exceptional are the *HTS* contributions that (also) concentrate on aspects other than the map-related or discipline-structuring aspects of Holmes's scholarly

production. In his contribution on comparative approaches, Koster (2011/2016) examines more closely the importance of Holmes's distinction between strategies and poetics, by using two other contributions by the same author. It is somewhat remarkable that almost just as innovative articles such as "Rebuilding the Bridge at Bommel"¹ or "Describing Literary Translation: Models and Methods" hardly seem to have had an afterlife compared to "The Name and Nature of Translation Studies". In his *HTS* article on poetry translation, Jones (2011) also adds a few texts by Holmes which are directly related to aspects of verse translation, hierarchies of correspondence and formal patterns.

Besides his specific contributions to the development and structuring of the discipline, several times Holmes is also presented as a pioneer, "a prime instigator of international co-operation in the field" (Munday 2010/2016), and this international network has had an "electrifying effect which contributed to putting Translation Studies on the academic agenda" (Delabastita 2010). In the historiography of TS, Holmes's network developed into what is nowadays generally referred to as descriptive translation studies. However, sometimes there are also geographically determined names used for this "school". Assis Rosa (2010/2016) mentions "the Polysystem Approach, the Manipulation School, the Tel-Aviv Leuven Axis, the Descriptive, Empirical or Systemic School, or the Low Countries Group" as synonyms.

A ONE-DIMENSIONAL LEGACY

This second part of the analysis investigates the bibliographic presence of Holmes and Popovič in the *TSB*. The analysis was conducted by taking into account only the titles, keywords and abstracts of the *TSB* publications of the 21st century, because they are supposed to contain essential information. Holmes's and Popovič's own publications were not considered, since the aim of this paper is to gain insights into their use by contemporary translation scholars. Since the *HTS* analysis adopted a perspective on their relation to network and school building, this aspect will be dealt with first. The term "Nitra" does not appear at all in the *HTS*, but is used twice in the *TSB* in the specific sense of a group of people sharing the same scholarly ideas. The first time it is mentioned in Gromová and Müglová (2011), where the modernity of the ideas of the Nitra School, in particular of Popovič's writings, is highlighted. The second time it is mentioned one year earlier in Gromová (2010), who discussed the past and the present of the Nitra Translation Studies Centre. Although the abstract of this publication states that the centre's research method taking into consideration the whole expressive quality of a text "was later to become known both in Slovakia and worldwide as the Nitra school", the *TSB* does not (or no longer?) show traces of use of the term "Nitra School" outside of Slovakia. Likewise, the occurrences of the use of "Low Countries" in this sense are scarce. Hermans (1999) refers to it explicitly in this way when he assesses the emergence of the descriptive and systemic model as one of the paradigm changes in the study of translation. Nevertheless, as his book was published in 1999, it falls just outside the period under scrutiny in this study.

Popovič appears in 14 abstracts of publications from 2000 onwards. The above-mentioned results of the *HTS* analysis – which show that he is mainly quoted

in his country of origin (the then Czechoslovakia) – are confirmed by the *TSB* findings. Only two of the 14 publications are not authored by Czech or Slovak scholars: one in Spanish (Matelo – Spoturno 2014, reconsidering Popovič's concept of self-translation) and one in Turkish (Işık Akdağ 2011, an analysis using Popovič's shifts of expression). Four of the remaining 12 publications are written by Jaroslav Špírk, the most productive scholarly author about Popovič in the analysed corpus. The work by Špírk (2014) is an English-language monograph which refers to Levý and Popovič as a basis and framework for the study of topics such as censorship, indirect translations, paratexts, the impact of political ideology on translation and the international book exchange between semi-peripheral European cultures (in this case, Czech, Slovak and Portuguese). Besides this relatively encompassing use of Popovič, more specific uses of his ideas and concepts can be found in Franek (2012, based on semiotic concepts for the study of the function of language in stylistics), Hrdinová (2011, on the negative shifts in translation of religious texts) or Špírk (2012, a micro-textual analysis with the help of the shifts of expression and the typology of metatexts). A recurring topic in several publications is that of the lack of international recognition of Popovič's work. At times, the prestige of his ideas (and of the Slovak School) is mainly situated in the 1970s and 80s (as in Kusá 2010), whereas in other cases the so-called new approaches or paradigms are critically received when their similarity with Popovič's theories is not noticed. An example is Jettmarová (2005), who considers the introduction of Bourdieu into TS irrelevant, because social agency was an integral part of the already existing TS paradigms proposed by Holmes and Popovič. In this respect, the article with the highest international impact was probably Špírk (2009), as it was published in the highly rated journal *Target*. It shows very clearly and convincingly the existing gap between the international and the local reception of Popovič, and consequently the totally different spread and use of his ideas and concepts.

In the West, Popovič has long been known only via the English summary of *Translation and Expression*, his *Dictionary for the Analysis of Literary Translation*, and a few articles in English and German, such as “Die theoretischen Probleme der Übersetzung” (1967), “Translation Analysis and Literary History” (1968), “The Concept ‘Shift of Expression’ in Translation Analysis” (1970), “Die Stellung der Übersetzungstheorie im System der Literaturwissenschaft” (1973), “Zum Status der Übersetzungskritik” (1973), and “Aspects of Metatext” (1976). In his home country, however, Popovič was noted primarily as the author of the following monographs on translation: *Poetika umeleckého prekladu. Proces a text* [Poetics of Artistic Translation. Process and Text] (1971), *Teória umeleckého prekladu: Aspekty textu a literárnej metakomunikácie* [Theory of Artistic Translation: Aspects of Text and Literary Metacommunication] (1975), and *Originál/preklad. Interpretatčná terminológia* [Original/Translation. Interpretation Terminology] (1983). He was consequently seen as an almost different persona (Špírk 2009, 5–6).

As far as Holmes is concerned, just as happens in the *HTS*, he is also much more present in the *TSB* abstracts than Popovič. The same period of study for Holmes yields 36 appearances. However, another parallel with the *HTS* analysis is even more striking: the absolute dominance of Holmes's map. In exceptional cases, authors base their research on Holmes's theories for the study of exoticization and natural-

ization (Chan 2001), of large corpora of translations in Brazil (Wyler 2005) or of textual processing models (Yuanjian 2002, 2009). But here again most of the 21st century research where Holmes is more frequently quoted refers to his map, which has stimulated a meta-discussion that is still highly productive in the discipline. Several authors scrutinize the map with a critical attitude and suggest smaller or larger modifications and alternative maps (for instance Vandaele 2015, Lee 2011, Chesterman 2009, Gambier – van Doorslaer 2009, Vandepitte 2008, Youlan 2005 – some of these were already mentioned in the *HTS* analysis). Others apply the map and its structuring principles to specific subfields such as translation didactics (Scarpa 2008) or to specific national or regional situations (Nouraey – Karimnia 2015). However, the picture is very clear: even though Holmes considered himself mainly a reflecting translator, his meta-reflection about the discipline of TS has undoubtedly bequeathed his legacy in the discipline.

CONCLUSION

This bibliographical exercise had a limited scope. It sought to use the *HTS* and the *TSB* as seminal tools of the discipline of translation studies to determine the presence of Holmes and Popovič in modern TS research. The conclusions are therefore necessarily related to the method and the tools that were employed. Although abstracts will always have certain specific features and, in some cases, will not be fully representative of the content, most of them are written according to a certain format, also because the *TSB* uses guidelines for abstract writing. The materials used may at least give a first indication about the bibliographical presence of the two scholars in modern research. This is also confirmed by the important parallels in the findings between the *HTS* and *TSB*.

From a quantitative point of view, Holmes is clearly more (and more internationally) present than Popovič, whose presence has a much more regional character. However, a closer look at the content of the use of Holmes shows that the quantitative difference is almost exclusively related to one topic and one publication: the Holmes's map as illustrated in "The Name and Nature of Translation Studies". Since its publication it has acquired a respected authority and is still used by many modern scholars as a starting point for meta-reflection about the structure and nature of the (inter)discipline. The inclusion of this essay in some seminal textbooks testifies to its authoritative status. As such, it is a case in point of the converging tendencies of history writing and canonization.

A second element which could explain the quantitative differences between Holmes and Popovič as well as the greater international distribution of the former, is an ordinary reality that seems rather paradoxical in the scholarly field of translation studies: publishing in English still outshines publications in all other languages, and today this tendency is even more widespread than in the era of Holmes and Popovič. As Špirk convincingly showed, many of Popovič's writings were and are "inaccessible to the wider professional public, as they have not been translated into English" (2009, 22). This aspect has led to a well-known situation in the international reception of literary authors, which holds true for academia as well: scholars can be seen in a very

different way in different areas depending on the selection and availability of translations.

NOTES

¹ In this article, he develops the cross of Holmes, distinguishing historicization, exoticization, naturalization and modernization in a more nuanced way than the foreignization-domestication opposition.

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Translation studies historiography. Maps. Meta-reflection. Historical relevance.
Bibliographical presence.

This contribution is a bibliographical exercise which aims at gaining insights into the presence of two “first generation” scholars in translation studies in 21st-century research. To that end, the analysis was carried out by referring to two valuable tools of the discipline, the Handbook of Translation Studies and the Translation Studies Bibliography. The research shows that James Holmes is quoted more frequently than Anton Popovič, but that this is mainly due to the popularity of the map of Holmes, as well as to the broader availability of his scholarly writings in English. Due to the lack of his publications in English, Popovič has gained higher popularity in his region of origin than in the international academic field.

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