Explanatory Notes to/on Additional Chapter

Zuzana Jettmarová, December 2009

See also Jettmarová in attachment (article printed in 2008; here in a version under revision)

**Czech Structuralism (linguistics and aesthetics/semiotics)**

The two lines developed simultaneously on the same theoretical and methodological background and cooperated – i.e. aesthetics employed linguistics. Although Prague linguistics became known and influential abroad, Prague structuralist aesthetics/semiotics did not. But it was especially the wider aesthetic strand (subsuming literature) that served as the theoretical and methodological framework for Levý’s history of Czech translation (1957), his theory of artistic translation (1963/1969/1983/1998) and general theory and methodology of translation (articles written in the 60s and printed as a collected volume in 1971).

The theory and methodology of Prague aesthetics were very elaborate at that time, as nowhere else (the proof is in reading e.g. Mukařovský – his *Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Facts*, or *Structure, Sign and Function*, or *The Word and Verbal Art: Selected Essays by Jan Mukařovský* that all came out in the 70s; the first book is an exemplar of sociology in aesthetics – aesthetics without sociology is unthinkable).

In 1940 Mukařovský said: “At the present state-of-the-art, the development of structural aesthetics is a phenomenon of Czech science; although there are partially similar phenomena to be found in other nations, none of them have methodological foundations elaborated with such a consistency; moreover, the issues of artistic structure have been uniquely conceived as the issues of the sign and meaning. “ (Mukařovský 2007: 21-22)

So, if anything can be representative of Levý’s background then it is this Prague structural aesthetics/semiotics rather than only linguistics.

**Czech Structuralism (functionalism)**

The label „functional“ made this structuralism different from other structuralisms around (cf. American descriptivism). An element (itself being a structure) has a function (connected with its value) within the higher-level structural whole delimited by its positioning against other structural elements as well as against the whole (system). Apart from the traditional Saussurean linguistic focus on langue, they ventured into the realm of parole and established a direct link between function/value and the society, distinguishing the collective and the individual as active agencies. This way not only language and its change, but any discourse became inextricably bound with „users“, and vice versa. This approach was facilitated by the integration of Buhler’s functions (soon developed into four by Mukařovský, who added the aesthetic function, and later by Jakobson, who used the then popular informatics and developed a system of 6 functions, reducing, in a way, the aesthetic function to poetics / resembling the Russian formalist „deautomation“, more or less conceived as a property of form/, while the Czechs were aware that it is not the form but also the formed content in relation to both norms and the receiver what is at stake. In addition, the concept of aesthetic function of an artwork was kept as a central one and elaborated, while poetics stood for a narrower concept (artistic stylistics) as one component of aesthetic function. Aesthetic function is a complex phenomenon (e.g. we have artistic and non-artistic aesthetic functions,
aesthetic and non-aesthetic functions; artistic function may become non-artistic and vice versa etc.). Aesthetic function is a semiotic, dialectical and phenomenological category anchored in spatiotemporal coordinates.

Form and content: The difference is that with focus on form you look at the language (it is prominent), while an art work communicates a wrapped content. Moreover – you need to integrate the factor of interpretation, necessarily involving human dispositions and values acquired in the social context on the background of individual faculties (rational, emotional and volitional) and activities.

What happens to structures qua communicates? They change with every interpretation (perception, translation), and so does the receiver or translator with any perception of any stretch of discourse.

What is crucial in the functional theory of communication? (1) There is no function of an artifact without people for whom it was made (and it is a social being with a slot in a social structure). The communication act does not exit (or is incomplete) without reception. The result is value (on the scale + - 0 -).

**Czech Structuralism (descriptivism and explanation)**

The Czechs radically and explicitly distanced themselves from positivism (as they were constructivists), so any equation here is wrong. Mukařovský and Levý (now in English translation in Králová - Jettmarová 2008) explicitly address this difference (the Czechs were not after linear causality).

They were descriptivists in the sense of being non-prescriptvists in building their „science“ aiming at explanation – or to put it better – for „understanding“, but they refused positivist causality and many more – they were, among other things, phenomenologists and dialecticians, and they saw products as social processes (so a product is never static). This is a real rift. Therefore, putting the Czechs together with the polysystem in respect of descriptivism may be all right only with regard to the role attached to empiricism in the building of science (but even here there is a difference – the Czechs subscribed to the zig-zag Method and were not positivist determinists), for example. No positivist causality, no essentialism and the like are to be found in the Czech approach. This is why they substantially differ from Russian formalists too, not considering the difference in their approach to immanentism (evolution of autonomous systems and their change). It is a real pity that this branch of structuralism is so little known, however, this fact should not be the reason for its misinterpretation .

**Norms and agencies, axiology:** Problems with norms, their detachment from particular agency (like the difference between the polysystem and skopos)? The Czechs did not have this problem – in their conception they integrated both aspects. Looking at the product in a processual way links both the levels of context – the lower level as in Skopos (the Czech sources here were Buehler /like in skopos, then informatics and cybernetics among others/) and the higher level as in polysystem (for details see Jettmarová attached). So both individual purpose and socio-cultural function were there like 2-in-1. But there was also a differential added value, so to say: all phenomena were conceived as phenomenological and dialectical, as synchrony built on diachrony (tradition) and already becoming part of diachrony, as a
dialectical combination of necessity and accidence, etc. and this makes a real difference as it explains the role of the individual in systemic changes (evolution of structures).

**Prescription – description – evaluation:** In science, the Czechs sought understanding, explanation. Because they had social „value“ built into their conception, axiology was an integral part as a socio-historical category on three distinct levels: the level of the lay receiver, based on subjectivity and intersubjectivity (individual and collective reception of the work of art), the level of „criticism“ (reflecting reception by a distinct social group) and the metalevel of studying either level.

**A theory for practice, the translator’s self-reflexivity and commitment:** a discipline may be supposed to contribute to the improvement of practice by offering acquired knowledge, but this does not mean that this is the sole purpose of the discipline – there are disciplines not primarily designed for their utility but the purpose of extending knowledge about the object studied. The Czech aesthetics had this utilitarian value, and you can also see that Levý dedicated his *Art of Translation* (planned to come out in English next year) to translators in order to improve their practice through knowledge and (self-)reflexivity. The same applies to Anton Popovič’s *Theory of Artistic Translation* (1975), which exists in Slovak, Hungarian, Serbo-Croat and Italian versions. While Levý says that the ideological standpoint of a translator is an omnipresent phenomenon, Popovič elaborates a whole system of the translator’s standpoints and attitudes (some of them are presented in his English *Dictionary*... from 1976).

**Czech Structuralism and Russian Formalism (roots and influences)**

It is a misrepresentation to speak of Czech structuralism and the underpinnings of Levý’s theory as a strand that developed from Russian Formalism. It developed on its own roots and absorbed a whole number of influences. In semiotics the roots were Czech formalist. Mukařovský (2007: 2-22) in 1940 recounts the following sources or influences: Russian Formalism, surpassed, among other, by the conception of structure as a complex of signs, the German aesthetician B. Christiansen in the initial period, theoretical discourses of artists (representing symbolism in poetry, impressionism in painting and functionalism in architecture); in philosophy it was namely Hegel (his dialectics of antinomies and contradictions within a structure and in its evolution), Husserl (the structure of the sign and its relations); in psychology namely Buehler; in history and methodology of art namely the Czech L. Dvořák (noetic aspects of artistic structures); in linguistics, absorbed by aesthetics it was namely A. Marty, the Czech V. Mathesius, A. Meillet, Saussure and the Geneva school, the Czech J. Zubatý. I will add Catnap’s logical positivism (the Vienna Circle), and Ingarden’s phenomenology of literary structure (the Polish Ingarden was Husserl’s disciple), Marxist dialectical conception of historical evolution (motivated by Hegel), Durkheim’s sociology, theory of modeling, theory of information, cybernetics. Elsewhere Mukařovský traces back the Czech aesthetic tradition to the 19th century Romanticism. Mukařovský himself directly followed Otokar Zich’s dynamic conceptualization of an artwork, which was a reaction to the previous Czech formalist thinking.

As regards the relationships between the Czech strand and Russian Formalism, it is symptomatic what Mukařovský says about it in his Preface to Shklovski’s Czech translation of the Theory of Prose (published in Russian in 1925) and elsewhere.
Having explained the coexistence of different competing norms, Mukařovský (2007: 104) explains their mutation over time through their dialectic character, namely through their application. On explaining Russian Formalism (ibid.: 2007: 503) he remarks that the Russians had to overreact – exaggerate the role of formal structure at the time they tried to put through their programme as an antithesis in reaction to the standing theory exaggerating the role of the content. He also points out a resemblance between Shklovsky and the established Czech Herbartian structuralism, but abstains from any speculation about personal contacts, only mentioning striking conceptual resemblances indicating that Shklovsky used Czech formalism as a springboard, while ironically making the first Russian step to overcome formalism on the way to structuralism embracing both form and content. However, when Shklovsky says in his foreword that he deals with immanent (intrinsic) laws of literature, i.e. metaphorically with the technique of weaving and the quality of thread, and he is not interested in the situation on the world cotton market or policy of trusts, Mukařovský (ibid. 506-507) adds the Czech specific structuralist view that distances both approaches:

The difference between the positions of current structuralism and the quoted formalist thesis may be put this way: the “technique of weaving” is in the focus of interest today, however, it is obvious that one must not avoid considering the “situation on the world cotton market”, because the development of weaving, even non-metaphorically, depends not only on the development of the weaving technique (i.e. intrinsic law in the evolving structure), but also on the needs of the market, on offer and demand; mutatis mutandis the same applies to literature. This opens a new vista in studying history of literature: it can consider both the continuous evolution of poetry’s structure based on constant re-grouping of elements, and external influences … univocally shaping each of its stages. Every literary fact thus appears as a resultant of two forces: the intrinsic dynamics of the structure and external intervention. The fault of traditional literary historical studies was that they only accounted for external interventions and so deprived literature of its autonomous evolution; the one-sided view of formalism, on the other hand, situated literary events in a vacuum … I tried to suggest that the field of literary sociology is fairly accessible to structuralism ..

Structuralism … is neither limited to the analysis of form nor in contradiction with the sociological study of literature … but it insists that any scientific inquiry shall not consider its material a static and piecemeal chaos of phenomena, but that it shall conceive of every phenomenon as both a resultant and a source of dynamic impulses, and of a whole as a complex interplay of forces. (Transl. ZJ)

On continuity in the development of Czech structuralism between the 20s and present day situation – see Jettmarová in attachment.

Mojmír Grygar (Czech structuralist who worked at the University of Amsterdam between 1969 – 1993) says that Russian semiotics in the 60s drew primarily on domestic formalist sources but was influenced by Czech structuralism, only that for ideological reasons this fact could not have been stated. Leading scholars in Tartu and Moscow (Lotman, Ivanov, Toporov, Uspenski) made use of Prague’s research results in linguistics and literature, theory of art and semiotics. (Grygar 1999: 21-22)

All in all, the Russian Formalist ideas may have moved from Russia but as such they never reached Levý. What reached him from Russia was, for example, Kolmogorov’s mathematical theory of probability as Levý was also interested in mathematical theory of verse; in paying a lip service to the regime Levý occasionally referred to Russian theoreticians like Gachechiladze to make up for dangerous western references to e.g. Quine or Sapir and Whorf, or the numerous references to western versology. In terms of theoretical and methodological background he was very well off with his home structuralism and the empirical background he himself had built through extensive research of translation history and the thinking on translation (both published in a two volume work in 1957) over the course of the development at home and, to a degree, in other European countries. An exceptionally gifted researcher and
thinker as Levý was, he went on to seek generalizations exceeding the space of a nation or a
culture – his noetic categories of subject/objectivity (1957) have retained their explanatory
power until now when identity, world literature and globalization are frequently spelled out.

**Prague vs. French structuralism (cf. Jettmarová attached)**

*Czech Translation Studies (Levý) as a strand of Russian formalism – see above*

*Czech Translation Studies (Levý) as a strand of descriptivism – see above*

**Slovak Translation Studies (Popovič)**

Popovič followed Levý in the development of a theory of artistic translation on a general
structuralist background. In his ambitious project of building the foundations of an
independent discipline he comes close to Holmes – or vice versa (there are some striking
affinities – see Jettmarová in Károly). However, he and his team managed to develop theory,
methodology, bibliography, empirical research, terminology, historiography of the discipline
in Slovakia – that is all relevant aspects of a new discipline.

What is relevant here? Although Slovak structuralism, with roots in Czech structuralism, drew
additionally on Russian Formalism and semiotics, as well as on Polish structuralism and
Viennese positivism, Popovič and Miko, the founders of the Nitra School kept the
communicative approach integrated in their theory and methodology, and thus in this way
differed from the Slovak mainstream in humanities and could avoid its formalist and positivist
slant to a degree.

**The Shift.** A shift can only work on the background of what remains the „same“, i.e. on the
Slovak conception of the invariant and variant (going back to Levý and having incidental
affinities with one of Toury´s postulates as well). Another affinity is the functional definition
of translation based on theory of modeling (a translation is a functional model of its original,
and in this respect its functional equivalent it is taken as a (functional) substitute or
representation of the original – this functional equivalence that is miles apart from
„sameness“; but looking at the structure itself there is something invariant and something
variant) – both in relation to the original and in combination with the interpreter/s´
interpretation (be it translator and/or receiver). Toury´s equivalence is this invariant (core) but
regardless of the phenomenological and thus dynamic and dialectical aspect of interpretation.
So there is a difference.

Popovič makes a distinction between the procedural shift and the resulting
change/modification, classifying shifts into constitutive and individual. Miko, on the other
hand, presented his theory of the system of expression that was integrated into Popovič´s
theory of artistic translation. Miko´s theory was meant as a contribution to stylistics – he held
that style is systemic (level of langue) and conceived of it not in the traditional linguistic
terms, but as a unity of form and content. So, Popovič´s shifts are formulated in terms of
Miko´s stylistic categories materialized in texts. For example, if some Russian style is
conventionally more pathetic than the matching style in Slovak, the constitutive shift that
might be expected is either a lower level of pathos conforming to domestic conventions, or
the same level (copying the conventions of the source), or even a higher level of pathos as an
individual shift highlighting this feature (if for example, the translator sees it as typical for the
text or author).

**The Tendency.** The hypothesis of translator’s tendencies (now known as universals) dates
back to the 60s. They are outlined in Levý’s article *Will theory of translation be useful to*
available in English. Popović was not concerned with these tendencies, although they reflected in individual shifts (directly as the general categories of stylistic leveling or foregrounding etc.).

**Russian translation theory** – its course of development was less straightforward and closely bound to socio-cultural developments in the post-revolutionary Russia and its course to communism. The problem was the trafficking between Soviet literatures of so diversely developed and underdeveloped literatures and languages while Russian was to be the umbrella lingua franca. So the earlier contributions to the theory of translation were those dealing with literary, i.e. artistic translation (Kashkin, Chukovsky), then later, a strong focus was placed on translation teaching.