

A response to the response

Anthony Pym\*

*Intercultural Studies Group, Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona, Spain*

\*Email: [anthony.pym@urv.cat](mailto:anthony.pym@urv.cat)

Print version online here:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/9Rx3mrYYIXa4H7xBb4R4/full>

I extend sincere thanks for the additional information on a question that our article left fundamentally open: our critic sends an account of where Fedorov got his linguistics from. Electronic pre-publication is an effective way of extending a network, and in this case it has clearly been productive.

Since our article is about the ways in which the collective history of Translation Studies is constituted, rather than a collection of random details, let me comment on a few of the methodological principles involved.

Pre-publication has actually brought in quite a few responses. The most significant is mentioned in the article: Oleksandr Kal'nychenko pointed out the role of Ukrainian translation theorists; I replied with thanks, mentioning that our article was the background for a chapter in my forthcoming book on translation solution types; I sent him a draft of the book; I received no less than ten pages of additional information, some of which I have used, much of which I haven't, and parts have given rise to further discussion. That has been a productive exchange within a growing network.

Our critic here opines otherwise. He has not wanted to comment privately on the forthcoming book (I sent the manuscript to him as well); he prefers public indignation. And so his information arrives decorated with claims that "factual statements" need to be "rectified" (no instances are actually named), that there are "flaws" (again, none are indicated, unless an open question can be wrong), and that we have produced an "unwilling distortion" (which implies that the critic somehow has access to an undistorted, true history, about which outsiders can only be taught by insiders). This last, essentialist assumption is what most irks, both socially and methodologically. That is the issue to be tackled.

Of course, comparatists get this sort of thing all the time. As we conduct intellectual raids across multiple borders, the keepers of singular cultures regularly call us to order. I sense I am going to cop a lot more in the same vein, since the forthcoming book also deals with Chinese, Czech, French, German, Slovak, Spanish, and Japanese, and experts from all those backgrounds are sure to complain. So let me address the main issue now, before the deluge.

There is at least one precedent. Julio-César Santoyo (2002) complained in much the same way when reviewing my historical case studies of translators' intercultural histories in Hispanic history (Pym 2000). He was ostensibly upset, among much else, because I forgot to mention the first written translations done in the Iberian

peninsula, because I gave undue weight to the Medieval coexistence of religions, and because I had little praise for what other historians call the Golden Centuries. What really niggled, I suspect, was that I was not writing the linear history of a sedentary culture, with mention of a glorious first, then chronological accumulation of all other facts, which together might summate quantitative splendor – oh yes, Spain has done and said many things! Apparently oblivious to my previous work on historiographical method (Pym 1998), Santoyo did not care to see that the case studies had little to do with linear progression: they concerned transitory figures working in complex situations on shifting borders – a history of moving translators and scholars rather than of sedentary cultures. He, like our critic here, picked up the odd fact and fired it across my bows in the most public way possible, bolstering his status as repository and guardian of the national past, rather than actually seeking correction in print, and certainly not entering into debate about why his national past might not be mine. I was writing one book; he was reading another; one learns to live with that, then as now.

Our critic here also deploys that old trick for the discursive creation of expertise, argument by bibliography (see Pym 1996 on how to create expertise). He lists ten works that apparently we should have consulted, which implies that we did not know about them. But hang on, I edited one of those books (by Peter Fawcett) and had actually seen enough of the others (in English and German) to realize they did not concern our paper. So what's going on here?

Our paper focuses on some rather precise ideas: priority of purpose, text-type determination, and an independent discipline for translation, all formulated in Russian in the 1950s, all ditched in westward transit. That is what our paper is about. It concerns that very specific period, a very specific set of ideas, and why those ideas did not effectively move out of Russian. Now, I fully appreciate that most of those ideas had been developed beforehand, mostly not by Fedorov (I have never said otherwise), but the detailing of origins was by no means the concern of our paper; we were not attempting a nationally linear history of accumulated facts. And the precise ideas that interested us remain curiously absent from the ten books our critic has mustered (and yes, I have now checked them – Sobolev merits a bibliographical footnote in the German volume, and that's all). As in Santoyo, books full of national facts seem to have been enlisted as some kind of quantity that can legitimize the knowledge owned.

Strangely enough, one of those ten listed books, Zlateva's *Translation as Social Action* (1993), should have done precisely the job we set out to do in our article. André Lefevere's chapter introductions therein repeatedly assert that "Russian and Bulgarian translation theorists" were *ahead* of the West with respect to the study of translation as a social and psychological phenomenon, since those theorists gave attention to translators' personalities and situations. But neither Lefevere nor the texts in the volume (some of them by major theorists) mention the specific ideas we are concerned with. Worse, when you read that volume, there is no indication of when or where the texts were published; you are not told who was Russian and who was Bulgarian; you find no indication of what terms were actually being used in Russian and Bulgarian; you are informed that the editor and translator Zlateva has taken many liberties, but you can only assume the extent of the

airbrushing. In sum, that book proffered the image of a homogeneous apolitical and ahistorical body of knowledge, somehow developed by theorists devoid of personalities, situations, or relations with regimes. Translation might indeed have been social action for Zlateva, but translation *theory* obviously was not. I read the book in its day and found it boring.

Our critic offers a similar image of homogeneous apolitical origins, irrelevant to our topic. It is clear from any of Fedorov's texts, particularly the work done in his twenties, that his training mixed formal concepts about language with literary history. We say as much in our text; that is not in dispute. What concerns us is not the *origin* but the way the terms "linguist" and "linguistics" were manipulated in a highly political way in the 1950s and 1960s (along with "formalist", which is another history), in a Russian debate that *opposed* "literary translation" to "linguistics" so clearly that every foreign account of the period bemoans the fact. The term "linguist" was used ideologically to position Fedorov on just one side of that debate, opposing literary studies, in the 1950s, and *that* is the thing that does not fit in with the biography, *that* was the great historical injustice. So I extend thanks for confirmation of the obvious, but our problem was quite simply elsewhere.

The problem actually continues, which is why it is worth commenting on. When I consulted several experts on the possibility of translating Fedorov into English, I was told he was not the one we should translate, because "he was a linguist". One expert advised we would do better to render Kashkin, a theorist of literary translation. A prospective publisher distanced the same project as a return to outdated linguistics, about which we apparently know enough already (he cited a similar booklist, including Zlateva, which seems to have turned Western readers away from Russian linguistics). The problem with the term "linguist" is still very much with us, in English. That's what most concerned us. The recent present, not the past of origins.

I offer one small example of how an intercultural history (*histoire croisée*, if you like, but the example should be eloquent enough) might differ from what interests national experts. Our critic tells us that Fedorov studied under "Lev Shcherba, Iurii Tynianov, Viktor Vinogradov, and Viktor Zhirmunskii", and the list is followed by a note on Shcherba and a reminder of Roman Jakobson's interdisciplinarity (as if we didn't know). Kal'nychenko, in his ten-page commentary, mentions "Lev Scherba, the student of Jan Baudouin de Courtenay, Viktor Vinogradov, and comparativist Viktor Zhyrmunsky, who wrote both on language theory and on translation [...]. Zhyrmunsky is Tynianov's cousin." Larisa Schippel, dealing with this topic at the *Going East* conference in Vienna in December 2014, gives the same list but adds the linguist S. I. Bernstein. And a fourth account was available to me, as mentioned in our text: Even-Zohar noted only Tynyanov. So which of these four experts should we follow? The one with the most intimate details? The one who can point to the most genius or historical resonance? The one who best illustrates that language and literature can be studied together (which is indeed an important point to stress)? The one who is most Russian? The list of names, with the common order of presentation, is freely available online in the introduction to the fifth edition of Fedorov (2002: 3): "Как филолог [yes, as a

philologist] он сформировался под влиянием таких блестящих ученых, как Л. В. Щерба, Ю. Н. Тынянов, В. В. Виноградов, В. М. Жирмунский”, and the addition of Bernstein, following the same order of names, is also online in a text called “Translation at the St. Petersburg State University at the turn of the millennium” (1999/2000). One suspects the common *Vorlage* was an academic record of some kind. More important, each account focuses on what most interests the narrator; each selects the names to be highlighted. And my particular interests are such that just one name sets off fire alarms, for me, but not necessarily for anyone else: Viktor Vinogradov. Why? Because I am told Vinogradov’s approach to stylistics borrowed in part from the Swiss linguist Charles Bally, and Bally’s approach to stylistics, I believe, was the brains behind Vinay and Darbelnet and thereby much of the mainstream vocabulary we use to talk about translation in the West. That is another story (wait for the book!), but an intercultural history should at least be able to ask questions like these: What if a stylistics of variation and *affectivité* influenced thought on translation in both East and West, in a connected way? What if the things that now seem separate were working from the same basic issues, with obscured historical links? The Bally connection is not likely to interest anyone in Russia (nor anyone in English-language linguistics, where he remains a virtually unknown figure), but it could be of great concern to the history of a cross-national discipline like Translation Studies.

An intercultural history must be brave enough to ask its own questions (I could be barking up the entirely wrong tree, but I have to try), no matter how often it is then accused of distorting someone else’s past. The tracing of such influences involves a certain zigzag linearity; it can detect particular intercultural communities of thought; but the lines and the communities tend not to be those of any one nation.

Our critic says we overestimate the role of politics. So what would the correct estimate be? When Vinogradov was banished in 1934, Bally’s stylistics was similarly shunned, and it was only after Stalin’s pronouncements in 1950, when Vinogradov returned to the light, that we find the Francophone translator and theorist Lev Sobolev not only announcing a *Skopos* principle in 1950 but also recommending in 1952 that his translation students do the translation exercises written by... Charles Bally. That is why the Sobolev volume, our Christmas present from Cambridge, was so secretly exciting for me, but need not be for anyone else. That is why there is not just one true history without “distortions”. We all bring different questions to the data. Even the archeologists, who pretend only to accumulate facts in order to sit on them, have their personal agendas: the facts stored by a Ukrainian, for example, are remarkably unlike those cherished by a Russian.

Our critic says we should have consulted Russian experts, notably himself. So why didn’t we? Well, the connections are weak: I did meet with Komissarov in Italy once, and rather less happily with Lvovskaya in Spain, but that’s all for the face-to-face. I did an email interview for the Fedorov Papers some years ago, but then I heard nothing about it (was it ever published?). A lot of trails go cold as you move east. Second, we don’t really know whom to trust. As indicated by the debates over who is or is not a “linguist”, the repercussions of old divisions have not entirely died down, and one naturally tends to mistrust those who rush forward to volunteer information. And third, as indicated in our text, investigations of the kind we

attempted are now possible because of the availability of *texts*, mostly in electronic form. That is why our research immediately came to an end when we learned that there was a project working from the *archives*, from written records, rather than from mediated opinions. We stopped when we knew someone would do our job better.

To be sure, the documents are not true unbiased history – far from it, they are stored and distributed in accordance with many partisan interests. But they do offer access to voices beyond self-proclaimed experts in search of aggrandizement.

## References

- Fedorov, Andrey V. 2002. *Osnovy obshchey teorii perevoda. Lingvisticheskiye problemy* [The general theory of translation (linguistic problems)]. 5th edition of *Vvedenie v teoriyu perevoda* [Introduction to the theory of translation]. St. Petersburg State University Faculty of Philology. Moscow: Filologiya tri. <http://goo.gl/wnWPvI>. Accessed January 13, 2015.
- “Translation at the St. Petersburg State University at the turn of the millennium”. 1999/2000. *Fedorovskiye Chteniya* [Fedorov Papers] 1, reproduced in *Yazyk i literatura* [Language and Literature] 7. Unpaginated. <http://goo.gl/bScd3N>. Accessed January 13, 2015.
- Pym, Anthony. 1996. “Ideologies of the Expert in Discourses on Translator Training”. In *Problems and Trends in the Teaching of Interpreting and Translation*, edited by Mary Snell-Hornby and Yves Gambier, 139-149. Misano: Istituto San Pellegrino.
- Pym, Anthony. 1998. *Method in Translation History*. Manchester: St Jerome.
- Pym, Anthony. 2000. *Negotiating the Frontier: Translators and Intercultures in Hispanic History*. Manchester: St Jerome.
- Santoyo, Julio-César. 2002. Review of “Negotiating the frontier: Translators and intercultures in Hispanic history” by Anthony Pym. *Target* 14 (1): 185-188; Spanish version in *Trans: Revista de traductología* 6 (2002): 288-290.
- Schippel, Larisa. 2014. “Travelling Concepts? oder von „Eisernen“ und „gläsernen“ Vorhängen und anderen Hindernissen”. Paper presented to the conference *Going East: Discovering new and alternative traditions in translation (studies)*, University of Vienna, December 12-13, 2014