

## Book review

### Christopher Rundle, Anne Lange and Daniele Monticelli, eds., *Translation under Communism*

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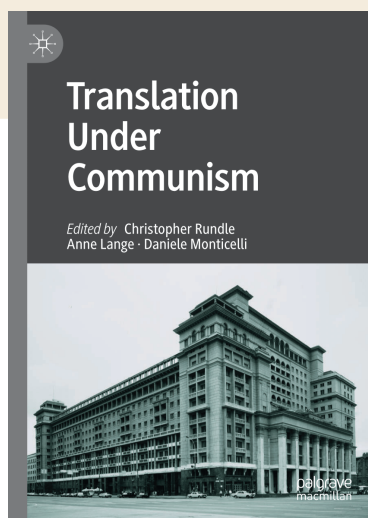
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The last decade has seen several book publications and a significant number of articles in English presenting developments in translation behind the Iron Curtain, and this interest is certainly not waning (cf. Baer 2011; Ceccherelli et al. 2014; Baer and Witt 2018; the list of articles would be too long to include here). The latest book addition to this body of work—*Translation under Communism*, edited by Christopher Rundle (University of Bologna), Anne Lange, and Daniele Monticelli (both Tallinn University)—offers a selection of perspectives on the role that translation played in the USSR and eastern European socialist countries during diverse periods under communist rule. The volume offers valuable analyses of translation policies and practices in concrete circumstances and well-described historical contexts. The editors emphasize the complexity of the roles translation played in various countries as well as for different agents, showing how the official party policies were often contradicted by what happened on the ground (30).

Depending on the focus of each chapter, the reader is introduced to the years of Stalinist rule and influence (the 1920s to 1950s in Russia and Ukraine, and then Yugoslavia), the brief Khrushchev Thaw following Stalin's death, the late socialist period (1975–1989 in Poland), the entire socialist period (in the USSR, Slovenia, Bulgaria, and East Germany), or just one year (1965 in Czechoslovakia). The combination of a variety of perspectives successfully illustrates the ways these countries and systems were different, while at the same time allowing the common pattern of ideological control to emerge. As the editors state in the introductory section of the volume,



special care is taken to avoid black-and-white descriptions of translation practices under communism and to portray the complexity of the scene.

The contributions in the volume exemplify applications of the multiple causation method in historical research on translation, which is based on a variety of archival resources: collections of literature, state documents, critical and bibliographical publications, editorial instructions and correspondence, protocols of translators' meetings, interviews, translators' memoirs, biographies, and personal diaries.

Most of the contributions conveniently start with an overview of the historical circumstances, helping the reader understand how individual contexts influenced both the similarities and differences regarding translation policies. The common pattern of shared practices thus appears: nationalizations of publishing houses, the Communist Party as the main instigator of cultural life, the perspective on translation as a means of inspiring a cosmopolitan outlook as opposed to a nationalist one in the reading public, and translators' and editors' self-censorship, most commonly induced by the general procedures that books underwent during the publishing process. On the other hand, the most striking differences are related to the level of freedom in the choice of books that could be translated, both during different periods of socialism and in different countries.

The volume is divided into four parts: the first presents the key features of translation and the history of communism, the second part is devoted to translation in the Soviet Union, and the third to eastern European socialist countries. The volume concludes with a response by Vitaly Chernetsky (University of Kansas).

In the second part, on literary translation in the USSR, the authors focus on the role of translation in the formation of the literary canon in a multinational society that aided the establishment of a Soviet identity (Nataliia Rudnytska, Ukrainian National University), early development of Russian translation theory through the changing perspectives of the theorist and translation critic Korney Chukovsky (Brian James Baer, Kent State University) and of the translator Mikhail Lozinsky (Susanna Witt, Stockholm University), and on how varied language policies affected the prevalent translation strategies in Soviet Ukraine for the duration of the Stalinist regime (Oleksandr Kalnychenko, Kharkiv National University, and Lada Kolomiyets, National University of Kyiv).

The third part deals with diverse translation issues and historical periods in socialist Yugoslavia (and Slovenia as its republic), Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Poland. The first chapter in this section, by Maria Rita Leto (D'Annunzio University), looks into the dynamic seven postwar years (1945–1952) of Yugoslavia (mostly in Serbia and Croatia) and the goals that the Communist Party realized by supporting the translation of literary, scientific, and scholarly texts. In a complementary contribution

by Nike K. Pokorn (University of Ljubljana), the focus is on the mechanisms of ideological indoctrination through children's literature, but also on cases of dissent through translation in Slovenia throughout the socialist period (1945–1990). Anikó Sohár (Péter Pázmány Catholic University) takes a view on the subversive role that fiction played throughout the period, marked by the longest-serving Hungarian socialist leader, János Kádár (1956–1989). The marginalized and therefore less regulated science fiction genre was an opportunity for disloyal authors and translators that were silenced by the regime and could not publish “serious” literature. Hanna Blum (University of Graz) sees the prosperity and good working conditions of the state-abiding literary translators in East Germany as indicative of the intention of the state to ensure that art and culture would support the socialist system, values, and beliefs. Igor Tyšš (The Institute of World Literature, Slovakia) presents the circumstances of Allen Ginsberg's deportation from Prague in 1965, also showing how carefully translators were monitored by the state at the time. As in the example of Slovenia, here again one sees censorship as inherent in the planning processes of the publishing houses. Krasimira Ivleva (independent researcher, UK) looks into which texts were translated in socialist Bulgaria from French and Russian from the mid-1960s until the 1980s. Both Tyšš and Ivleva turn to paratexts in considering the ways translators made new translations possible and how the reception of foreign literature was framed through reviews and prefaces. In the last contribution in this section, Robert Looby (Catholic University of Lublin) describes the positive and not-so-positive features of the “underground” translation of historical, political, and memoir prose, and to a lesser extent fiction, during the last fourteen years of socialist Poland. Looby also addresses the CIA involvement as a distributor of books behind the Iron Curtain (388).

In the closing chapter, titled “The Response,” Vitaly Chernetsky summarizes the role of translation during the periods and in the societies presented in this volume: it was to popularize foreign literature that ideologically agreed with socialism and to make canonical Marxist texts available in other languages. Chernetsky also relates the high quality of translation first with the development of translation theory, which prescribed the rules for producing good translations, and later with the rise of descriptive theory, which could explain why some translations were more successful than others. He addresses the change in the preferred choice of the main strategy in translation from foreignization, advocated by the Russian formalists in the 1920s, to domestication, which was characteristic of realist translations from the 1930s. Censorship and self-censorship are at the same time proofs and consequences of the state's interest in controlling the messages that travelled across linguistic boundaries, which gave rise to underground or *samizdat* publications in some countries. Another conclusion is that the translators that followed official policies were prosperous and had a good

social standing because the cultural and educational roles of translations were generally highly valued in socialist societies. He also comments on the deterioration of the status and practices of translation in the post-socialist societies due to the loss of state support, and he reflects on the role of the EU in supporting translation from languages other than English today. In addition to summarizing the main aspects of the contributions in the volume, Chernetsky also suggests further avenues of research that could improve our understanding of some of the phenomena under consideration.

The wealth of data presented in the volume almost lures the reader to compare the dates of first publications of the writers and works cited with the situation in the reader's own country, allowing for some intriguing comparative conclusions. In addition to offering informative insight into methods and frameworks of historical research on translation, the volume invites further inquiry into other under-researched historical contexts. In conclusion, *Translation under Communism* is intriguing reading matter, highly recommendable to translation researchers and history enthusiasts alike.

## References

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## About the author

Dr Borislava Eraković is Associate Professor at the English Department, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad (Serbia), where she teaches courses on legal, technical, journalistic, and literary translation, translation theory, and career development. She has authored two books, a number of articles, and chapters in edited volumes on social constructivism in translator training, the translation profession and theory in Serbia, and translation criticism. She has also translated fiction from English into Serbian and studies on Serbian folklore into English.