

Susanna Witt, Stockholm University

Issues in Russian Translation History —> Issues in Soviet Translation History

Lecture 1. Why Should We Bother about Soviet Translation History?

Abstract

Translation Studies as a discipline within Western academia was for a long time very little concerned with translation traditions and translation reflection originating in areas outside of its Western European and Anglo-American focus. Over the past couple of decades this has changed significantly. A clear tendency within the field has been the broadening of geographical perspectives, both with regard to theoretical approaches and research topics.

Increasing attention has been devoted to non-European areas and traditions such as translation practice and theory in Asia, as well as in Africa and the Arab world (Tak-hung Chan 2004; Hermans 2006; Inggs & Meintjes 2009; Wakabayashi & Kothari 2009; Sato-Rossberg & Wakabayashi 2012; Cho 2016). Only quite recently, however, has what was for a long time Europe's "internal Other," namely the countries of the former Eastern Bloc, come into the field of vision (Baer 2011; Burnett & Lygo 2013; Schippel & Zwischenberger 2016; Baer & Witt 2016). The opening of archives following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 enabled research on the multifaceted, large-scale translation enterprises that were part of the Soviet project (Witt 2013; Khotimsky 2013; Sherry 2015; Zemskova & Ostrovskaya). It also sparked an interest in the sophisticated theoretical reflection on translation that developed during the early Soviet period but which for ideological reasons was repressed and thus rendered unknown to later Soviet translation scholarship, not to mention the Western TS context (Kalnychenko 2011; Baer 2020; Kalnychenko & Kolomiyets 2022).

In this lecture, I will trace the development of Soviet translation scholarship in the 1920s and 1930s with an eye to the dynamics of theory and practice. I will also pay attention to the varying significance of translation in the Soviet-Russian and Soviet-Ukrainian contexts, which both contributed to the body of theoretical works. The lecture will try to answer the question as to why we should bother about Soviet translation history.

Lecture 2. Through the Lens of Translator History: Lozinskii, Tarlovskii and Deich

Abstract

Following Anthony Pym's call for a "humanizing of translation history" (Pym 2009), there has been a steadily growing interest in "the translatorial subject." A substantial manifestation of such an interest is the volume *Literary Translator Studies*, edited by Vienna scholars Klaus Kaindl, Waltraud Kolb and Daniela Schlager (2021). In this lecture, I will explore what biographical optics might contribute to our understanding of translation in the Soviet Union, given that translators in the Soviet context to a high degree have been distinguished by what Pym (2009) defines as "multidiscursive involvement", "complex cultural allegiances" and "physical

mobility.” The lecture will feature three cases, exemplifying different categories of translators: Mikhail Lozinskii, a renowned translator of the classics of world literature (including Dante’s *Divina Commedia*); Mark Tarlovskii, a poet and translator of works by “the peoples of the USSR”; and Aleksandr Deich, a translator, editor, literary scholar and networker *par excellence*.

BIO-note, short

Susanna Witt is Professor of Slavic languages at Stockholm University and Editor-in-Chief of *Scando-Slavica*. Her research interests include Russian and Ukrainian literature and culture, Stalinist culture and Soviet nationalities policy, Soviet translation history and Slavic translation studies. Susanna Witt is the co-editor of *Translation in Russian Contexts: Culture, Politics, Identity* (Routledge, 2018) and has written extensively on various aspects of the history of literary translation in the Soviet Union. Her recent publications include “Translating Inferno: Mikhail Lozinskii, Dante and the Soviet Myth of the Translator” – a chapter in the volume *Translation under Communism* (Palgrave Macmillan 2022). She is also a practicing translator of Ukrainian prose and poetry into Swedish, the most recent example of which is Yulia Iliukha’s *Moi zhinky* [My Women] (*Mina kvinnor: Fyrtio ukrainska ögonblick*, Romanus & Selling 2025).