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Impact of the Greek Diaspora on Translations of Modern Greek Literature in Slovakia

This paper presents some of the results of a PhD research concerning translations of Modern Greek literature into Slovak language. It will focus on the comparison of the translation activities in Slovak and Czech Republic. It is a well-known fact that there is an abysmal difference between the Czech and Slovak translation situation for what Modern Greek literature concerns. After the defeat of the communists in Greece in 1949, Czechoslovakia received thousands of Greek citizens who were stationed only in cities of the Czech part of the country. The first lectorate of Modern Greek was established at the Charles University in Prague in order to educate Greek children in their mother tongue. Textbooks and dictionaries in Czech language were published to help Greeks integrate themselves in the new environment. The situation in the Slovak part of Czechoslovakia was diametrically different. The absence of a Greek diaspora had a significant impact on Modern Greek studies and hence the production of translations from Modern Greek literature into Slovak.

Keywords: Modern Greek language, Modern Greek literature, translated literature, translations into Slovak language, Greek diaspora

Until now, only few works of Modern Greek literature have been translated into Slovak, much of it through another language. There is an abysmal difference between the situation in the Slovak and the Czech Republic. One of the main reasons is that there is a large Greek diaspora in the Czech Republic, which doesn't exist in Slovakia. In this paper, I will focus on the influence of the Greek diaspora on the receiving culture and literature and the conditions in which translation literature develops, if a diaspora does not exist.

At the beginning, it is appropriate to clarify the relations between the Czech and the Slovak Republic, which almost the whole century,

until 1993, formed one state, Czechoslovakia. In this state, two distinct national identities shaped in two different cultural environments which were largely interconnected but also separate. Both territories had different histories, development of literature and did not evolve as a homogeneous unit. They were also separated as far as the language concerns. Although most words are in fact different, they are largely similar, being cognates, which makes both languages mutually intelligible to a significant extent.

First of all, it is necessary to briefly describe how the Greek diaspora has been shaped in the Czech Republic. After the end of World War II, the political situation was completely different in Czechoslovakia and Greece. In Greece, the left was being suppressed by the extreme right, and in Czechoslovakia, the position of the communists was getting stronger. In 1948, Czechoslovakia secretly began supplying weapons and various materials to the rebel government and the rebel army in Greece, and subsequently received more than 3 800 evacuated children from northern Greece. After the defeat of the communist uprising in Greece, adults were also accepted and the number increased by another 8 200 Greek citizens. They were received amicably and were able to integrate into the Czechoslovak environment while fully preserving their national identity. All of them were located in the Czech part of Czechoslovakia, mostly in the cities of Brno, Karviná, Krnov, Šumperk etc.,¹ which had a decisive influence on the formation of a strong Greek diaspora in the Czech Republic, but not in Slovakia. This created an immense difference between the Czech and Slovak cultural environment. Such a significant discrepancy as between the Czech and the Slovak Republic regarding the initial conditions for the creation of translations does not appear in other languages.

The emergence of the Greek diaspora significantly helped in the development of Modern Greek studies and translations of Modern Greek literature in the Czech Republic. In the post-war years, the cultural exchange between Czechoslovakia and Greece slowed down, but the interest in Modern Greek in the Czech part of Czechoslovakia grew thanks to the large Greek community. In 1948, a lectorate of Modern

¹ HRADEČNÝ (2007: 662–663).

Greek was established at Charles University in Prague, at the Department of Antique Sciences, in order to prepare teachers to provide education for Greek children in their mother tongue. Dimitrios Papas, the author of the first Czech textbook for Greeks, *Η τσέχικη για Έλληνες*² (1954), became the first associate professor of Modern Greek language. His successor, Theodor Nedělka, worked on a Modern Greek-Czech dictionary,³ which was published in 1982.⁴ In 1990s, a prominent translator from Modern Greek into Czech Růžena Dostálová (1924–2014) managed to establish full university study programme of Modern Greek Philology at Masaryk University in Brno, thus creating favourable conditions not only for further development of students in the Czech Republic, but also an invaluable opportunity for Slovak students enthused for Modern Greek language and culture.

In Slovakia, Modern Greek started to be taught only in 1991 at the Department of Classical and Semitic Philology of the Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava, under the guidance of Peter Kuklica. After Jana Grusková obtained the position of assistant professor at the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University for classical philology in 1997 with a focus on Greek philology, she began working systematically with the support of professor Peter Kuklica on the development of Modern Greek studies in Slovakia. She established intensive contacts with neogrecists abroad, especially in the Czech Republic, with Růžena Dostálová and Catherine Franc-Sgourdeou. Significant professional assistance was also provided by neogrecists from the Institut für Byzantinistik und Neogräzistik of the University of Vienna, especially Maria Stassinopoulou. Classical philologists at the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University have been systematically striving for the development of Modern Greek studies for the last thirty years. In 2008, after many years of efforts, Grusková, in cooperation with the Embassy of the Hellenic Republic in the Slovak Republic, managed to establish a lectorate of Modern Greek at the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University, which is financially provided by the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. A lan-

² PAPANAS (1954).

³ NEDĚLKA (1982).

⁴ Cf. DOSTÁLOVÁ (2002), TSIVOS (2014, 2017).

guage course has been provided in four levels (two hours a week in four terms) by a native Greek lecturer.⁵ Nevertheless, because there was a lack of qualified academic staff, the conditions have never been favourable enough to establish Modern Greek philology as a programme of university studies. In the last two decades, Slovak students interested in studying Modern Greek philology used the opportunity to study in the Czech Republic and finally the first generation of qualified Modern Greek philologists started to take shape. Some of the graduates are also interested in translation – especially those who previously studied classical philology, usually at the Comenius University in Bratislava, where they first became acquainted with Modern Greek language and culture. Two graduates continue their doctoral studies and further expand their academic education, which is a promise for the future.

In eastern Slovakia, the theologist Ján Zozuľak, a graduate of orthodox theology in Greece, remarkably contributed to the spread of Modern Greek culture. Under his leadership, Modern Greek was successfully taught for several years at the Orthodox Theological Faculty of the University of Prešov. In collaboration with Erika Brodňanská, a graduate of the classical and semitic philology at the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University and a student of professor Kuklica, Ján Zozuľak prepared the study program Greek Language and Culture for the bachelor's degree⁶, although it was never put into practice. Ján Zozuľak is the author of the first Modern Greek-Slovak dictionary and the only Slovak textbook of the Modern Greek language. The interest in Modern Greek in eastern Slovakia is higher mostly because of the Orthodox believers, who use religious texts translated from Greek (Ancient, Medieval or Modern).

In both countries, in the same year (1998), an institution for supporting mutual cultural activities was founded: the Czech Society of Modern Greek Studies in the Czech Republic, based in Brno, and the Slovak Society of Modern Greek Studies in Slovakia, Bratislava. Both are members of the European Society of Modern Greek Studies and have been significantly contributing to promoting and spreading Modern Greek culture and literature. The Czech Society of Modern Greek Studies publishes

⁵ Cf. GRUSKOVÁ (2002).

⁶ ZOZULAK et al. (2011: 125–129).

every year the magazine *Neograeca Bohemica*, spreading Modern Greek literature. Except for that, there are several organizations associating Greeks living in the Czech Republic: the Club of Friends of Greece, which offers various activities, Greek women's association Lyceum of Greek Women, which promotes Greek folklore, Greek dance group Prometheus, the Association of Friends of Nikos Kazantzakis etc. Members of the Greek community are connected by the Association of Greek Municipalities in the Czech Republic.⁷ Only few hundreds of Greeks live in Slovakia including children. It is therefore natural that there are no such organizations in Slovakia. Cultural events are organized only sporadically by the Department of Classical and Semitic Philology at the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University or by the Embassy of Greece in Bratislava. Until 2015, the Society of Slovak-Hellenic Friendship 'Filia' was also active in this way.⁸

In the Czech Republic, there are many opportunities to learn Modern Greek language for the children of Greek origin as well as for the general public. The courses are offered by the individual Greek municipalities, by the Faculty of Arts of Masaryk University in Brno or by various language schools throughout the whole Czech Republic. In Slovakia, the options for those interested in Modern Greek are very limited. Since 2018, children of Greek origin can learn Modern Greek at the courses provided by the Embassy of Greece in Bratislava. Courses of Modern Greek for the general public are nowadays offered only at the local cultural centre in Bratislava. For many years until 2016 they were offered at the Department of Classical and Semitic Philology at the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University in Bratislava as well.

The existence of the Greek diaspora also greatly influences the translation activities of Modern Greek literature. Until 1989, during the communist era, there was a centralised effort in the cultural policy of Czechoslovakia to publish works of world-famous authors, but after 1989 there was a boom in commercial, bestseller literature, and the quality of translated literature declined.⁹ The changes of this period were also re-

⁷ HRADEČNÝ (2007: 670–671).

⁸ Its founder Titos Papadopoulos was its chairman for decades.

⁹ BEDNÁROVÁ (2015: 57).

flected in the publication of translations of Modern Greek literature. Although the economic situation after the division of the common state in 1993 was comparable in both countries, in the Czech Republic, Modern Greek literature continued to be published mainly thanks to the institutions supporting the Greek minority such as the Greek Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs, the Embassy of Greece, as well as the *Kosta ke Elenis Urani Foundation (Ιδρυμα Κώστα & Ελένης Ουράνη)*.¹⁰ Due to the non-existence of a Greek minority in Slovakia¹¹ the publishing possibilities are much more limited. There are no institutions in Slovakia aiming at supporting publishing translations of Modern Greek literature. Besides, as there has been no Greek minority in Slovakia, Greek culture and Modern Greek literature has seemed distant and obscure to Slovak readers, and therefore their interest in it has been very low. Since 1989 Slovak translations of the Modern Greek literature are published only exceptionally, on an ad hoc basis, based on personal preferences or acquaintances of the translator and author or for the particular needs of a specific institution.¹²

But a more important factor than change of the economic situation that influenced the translation production of Modern Greek literature in Slovakia was the absence of qualified translators. Whereas in the Czech Republic the Modern Greek studies already had been formed, translations of Modern Greek literature could have been created by the professional translators. Let's mention at least the first of them: František Štuřík (1895–1968), Milena Vieweghová-Opluštilová and Růžena

¹⁰ HRADEČNÝ (2007: 667).

¹¹ Only few Greeks lived in Slovakia in the second half of the 20th century. These were mostly graduates of Slovak universities who had little interest in promoting or translating Modern Greek literature.

¹² E. g. Mimis Androulakis' work *Shadows in Athens. Dream Dialogues at the Turn of the Millennium (The Dream. Σκιές στην Αθήνα/Tiene v Aténach. Snové dialógy na prelome tisícročí*, 1999) was translated on the basis of the personal knowledge of the author and translator, Odysseas Elytis' work *Worthy It Is (Dôstojné je...*, 2001) was translated on an as-needed basis for the civic association Studňa, works of three Modern Greek playwrights *Greek Drama. Nina Rapi, Giannis Mavritsakis, Dimitris Dimitriadis (Grécka dráma. Nina Rapi, Jannis Mavritsakis, Dimitris Dimitriadis*, 2019) were translated for the needs of the Theatre Institute in Bratislava.

Dostálová. In addition to the first translators, some Greek emigrants working in the cultural field were also active, e. g. Lysimachos Papadopoulos (1916–2000).¹³ In Slovakia, there was no way to get an education in the field of Modern Greek philology. Thus most of the works were translated through other languages (mainly French). The authors of Slovak translations directly from Modern Greek were the so-called ‘amateur’ translators, without philological and translation education, but with a warm relationship to Modern Greek culture, who learned to master the Modern Greek language and tried to cover the needs of Slovak culture in this regard. Due to a close proximity of Slovak and Czech languages, some of the Slovak translations were created in cooperation with Czech philologists as well.

By the time the first Slovak translation of Modern Greek literature was published, i. e. in 1960, a considerable number of works had been translated in the Czech Republic, directly from Modern Greek, not through other languages like in Slovakia until 1973, when the first Slovak translation directly from Modern Greek was published. In total, there are several times more Czech translations of Modern Greek literary works than Slovak ones.

However, it should be noted that one of the reasons why Modern Greek literature is translated in Slovakia to a lesser extent than in the Czech Republic is the proximity of both languages. At this point, it is necessary to explain the relationship between them.

The situation when the two languages of the two nations are so similar that the speakers understand them in detail and at the same time the differences between them make the speeches special, is unique. The proximity of Slovak and Czech is beneficial on the one hand, because thanks to Czech translations, Slovak readers can get to know works of world literature that have not been translated into Slovak. On the other hand, this proximity harms the Slovak market. Slovak translations are often understood as complementary to Czech ones, despite the fact that individual cultures need their own translation experience, because this is a basic need in their modern existence.¹⁴

¹³ HRADEČNÝ (2007: 666).

¹⁴ KUSÁ (2005: 79–80).

It has been assumed that Slovak translations of the works already translated to Czech have not been needed.¹⁵ However, otherwise there is no such tendency. Some works published in Slovak were consequently published in Czech, although in these cases the additional contribution was evident.¹⁶ It is very unlikely that Czech publishers would take into account the fact that a work was already translated into Slovak. On the other hand, it should be noted that some works by authors who have not been translated into Czech have been published in Slovak, in particular already mentioned ad hoc translations.¹⁷

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From the presented overview, it is evident that the arrival of Greek emigrants after the Second World War and the subsequent formation of the diasporic community was a decisive factor in the further development of Modern Greek studies, as well as in the dissemination and translation of Modern Greek literature.

Even though the conditions in Slovakia are much less favourable than in the Czech Republic, we must continue our efforts in translating the Modern Greek literature into Slovak, for there is still much work to be done. We have already started to create a translation concept which will include not only the greatest works of the most famous Modern Greek authors, but also other works of various genres so that Slovak readers get to know the character of the Modern Greek literature more comprehensively. It is necessary to proceed systematically, as well as to

¹⁵ This applies to translations from all foreign languages, not only Modern Greek.

¹⁶ For instance, in 1973 a selection of Giorgos Seferis' poetry was published in Slovak under the name *The Argonauts (Argonauti)*, in 2011 the author's entire work was published in Czech (SEFERIS [2011]). The same phenomenon can be observed in poetry of Konstantinos Kavafis and Odysseas Elytis, whose collections of poems were first published in Slovak (Kavafis' *Things Ended [Dokonané je]* in 1989, Elytis' *Worthy It Is [Dôstojné je...]* in 2001) and only later in Czech, but the Czech translations comprised more or different poems than the Slovak ones (KAVAFIS (1997, 2013], ELYTIS [2003]).

¹⁷ E. g. *The Third Wedding Wreath (Το Τρίτο στεφάνι/Tretí venček)* by Kostas Tachtsis (1984), *Vangelis' Lost World (Ιστορία μιας χαμένης γης/Vangelisov stratený svet)* by Aris Fakinos (1991) or *Once at a Station (Κάποτε σε ένα σταθμό/Kedysi na stanici)*, by Kostas Asimakopoulos (1983), who are also among the authors known beyond the borders of Greece.

deepen the relations with Greek cultural institutions in order to support the dissemination of Greek literature and culture in Slovakia. Thanks to the fact that the first generation of Slovak neogrecists who have studied in the Czech Republic has already begun to form, there is a hope for a forthcoming improvement in the near future. Furthermore, the Greek community in Slovakia is growing, which could also contribute to a wider interest in Modern Greek literature in Slovakia.

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