



**Between Loyalty to the Original,
Customer Expectations and
Reader Orientation: Translators'
Understanding of Their Roles
Using the Example of the
German Translation of the
Slovenian Classic Book *Pot***

Między lojalnością wobec oryginału,
oczekiwaniem klientów a
zorientowaniem na czytelnika.

Tłumacze i ich rozumienie własnej roli
na przykładzie niemieckiego przekładu
kultowej słoweńskiej książki *Pot*

✉ **LARS FELGNER** ▶ lars.felgner@ff.uni-lj.si

SLAVICA TERGESTINA
European Slavic Studies Journal

ISSN 1592-0291 (print) & 2283-5482 (online)

VOLUME 28 (2022/I), pp. 254-280
DOI 10.13137/2283-5482/33715

This article explores what understanding of the translator's role should ideally underlie modern literary translations. It examines the extent to which functional translation models such as the Skopos theory, which place the expectations of the client and orientation towards readers above fidelity to the original, can be applied to the current professional practice of translating. Selected passages from the German translation of the Slovenian mountaineering book *Pot* will be used to illustrate how the analysis of the target audience can affect the translation process. By means of examples from the translation, it will be demonstrated that loyalty to the source text can be achieved not only by adhering to the wording of the original but also through deliberate changes (in the form of additions or footnotes). Against the background of the findings, contemporary literary translation will be defined as a purpose-oriented, creative, (self-)reflexive decision-making process focused on anticipated reader expectations.

LITERARY TRANSLATION,
POLYFUNCTIONAL TEXT, SKOPOS
THEORY, READER-ORIENTED
TRANSLATION, NEJC ZAPLOTNIK

Niniejszy artykuł poświęcony jest rozumieniu roli tłumacza jakie w idealnych warunkach powinno leżeć u podstaw nowoczesnych tłumaczeń literackich. Tekst poddaje analizie stopień możliwego zastosowania funkcjonalnych modeli translacyjnych w obecnych profesjonalnych praktykach tłumaczeniowych, np. teorii skoposu kładącej nacisk na oczekiwania klienta i zorientowanie na odbiorcę ponad wiernością oryginałowi. Wybrane passusy tłumaczenia na język niemiecki słoweńskiej książki górskiej *pt. Pot* przytoczone są tu dla zilustrowania sposobu, w jaki analiza docelowego odbiorcy może wpływać na proces tłumaczenia. Na podstawie przykładów zaczerpniętych z tłumaczenia zostanie wykazane, że wierność tekstowi wyjściowemu może zostać osiągnięta nie tylko przez trzymanie się brzmienia oryginału, ale także przez wprowadzenie celowych zmian (w postaci dopowiedzeń i przypisów). W tym kontekście współczesne tłumaczenia literackie zostaną zdefiniowane jako celowy, twórczy proces (samo-)świadomego podejmowania decyzji w oparciu o spodziewane oczekiwania czytelników.

TŁUMACZENIE LITERACKIE, TEKST
WIELOFUNKCYJNY, TEORIA SKOPOSU,
TŁUMACZENIE ZORIENTOWANE
NA CZYTELNIKA, NEJC ZAPLOTNIK

1 POT'S OUTSTANDING POSITION IN THE CANON OF SLOVENIAN MOUNTAINEERING LITERATURE

Since it cannot be assumed that the book *Pot* (The Path), to whose German translation *Der Weg* this article is dedicated, is known to non-Slovenian readers, a brief introduction and genre-specific classification will precede the theoretical and analytical parts. *Pot* was written by Nejc Zaplotnik, one of the greatest Slovenian alpinists of all time. In 1979, Zaplotnik and his climbing partner Andrej Štremfelj made mountaineering history by climbing the West Ridge of Mount Everest via a new route and by becoming the first Slovenians to stand on its summit. *Pot* was first published in 1981 and took the hearts of Slovenian readers by storm. It became an instant bestseller. It is fair to say that this book – just like the author, who unfortunately died far too early in an avalanche on Manaslu in 1983 – enjoys absolute cult status in Slovenia. The unbroken popularity and topicality of the book is evinced by the fact that by 2021 it had already been reprinted ten times and is one of the most frequently cited works on mountain-climbing themes in Slovenia. Generations of young Slovenian mountaineers have grown up with this book and were inspired at the beginning of their careers by the mountaineering passion and dedication that speak from it. It was also one of the most important sources of inspiration for the world-famous climber Marko Prezelj. For him and other young climbers of his generation, the book was ‘almost like a Bible’ (Prezelj).

Internationally, the book has not yet found such great resonance. Apart from my German translation, only Croatian, Italian and Polish translations exist to date. In the Anglo-American world, the book *Alpine Warriors* by the Canadian Bernadette McDonald, which provides a detailed insight into the rich history of Slovenian high-altitude

mountaineering through an intensive examination of some of the key figures in the local climbing milieu, clearly aroused interest. It is not surprising that numerous reviews of *Alpine Warriors* explicitly refer to *Pot*, as McDonald chose Zaplotnik as the connecting thread for her own book and included in her text several passages from *Pot* (translated into English by Mimi Marinšek Čadež). A milestone in the canon of Slovenian mountaineering literature, Zaplotnik's book ranks among the leading works dedicated to experiencing mountains and nature (see Škamperle). This assessment is shared by McDonald, who states that it really welded the Slovenian alpinists, who had previously often acted as lone warriors, into a group that could now unite behind the ideas of Zaplotnik, their spiritus rector.

2 MULTIDIMENSIONALITY OF POT IN TERMS OF GENRE

What is it that makes *Pot* so fascinating for the reader (and so difficult for the translator)? First of all, the book stood out pleasantly from the Slovenian mountaineering literature that was predominant until its publication and primarily focused on the heroic or documentary description of alpine adventures (which usually centred on conquering the summit). Miran Hladnik sees *Pot* as a work that is first and foremost literature and not a purely mountaineering, action-based account of experience. It cannot be categorised as belonging to any of the types of books previously known in this genre in Slovenia. It gains coherence and weight from its particular narrative perspective, which seeks to break away from the usual compositional determinant – the conquest of the summit (see Hladnik). At first glance, the chronological order and autobiographical character of *Pot* make it reminiscent of a kind of literary diary. But it is difficult to classify

it in terms of genre, as it is a very hybrid mixture of memoir, fiction and essay writing, travel and expedition reports, as well as dense descriptions of nature and gripping mountain-climbing narratives. In addition, the author's life story, which is synthetically constructed from the past (Zaplotnik's childhood) to the time immediately before the writing of the book, is repeatedly interspersed with reflective and retrospective interpolations, critical comments on the institutionalised form of Slovenian alpinism (meaning the Slovenian Alpine Club, its political instrumentalisation and its organisation of expeditions aimed at international recognition), and (at the end of some of the chapters) also by lyrical passages which raise philosophical questions and contain existentialist elements, revealing the author's psychological and, at times, spiritual maturing process. These existential reflections, stirring descriptions of moments of supreme happiness after a successful climb, as well as the unsparing, absolutely honest disclosure of the most intimate thoughts and feelings – including the dark and negative one such as Zaplotnik's self-doubt that flash up again and again – give the reader the opportunity to participate very directly in the adventures experienced by Zaplotnik and to enter into the emotional world of the writer and his mountain companions (see Škamperle).

In many passages, *Pot* is reminiscent of an autobiographical coming-of-age story narrated by a first-person narrator. Igor Škamperle (*ibid.*) uses the German term 'Bildungsroman', which I think is quite appropriate if one had to sum up the genre in one word. According to Jürgen Jacobs (14), the decisive features of the *Bildungsroman* structure are 'the development of the hero in a tense relationship to his environment and the tendency towards a harmonious state of balance'. The focus is on the protagonist's confrontation with 'different areas of the world' (*ibid.*), which contribute to his personal development

and gradual maturation. In Zaplotnik's case, it is above all the mountains, the subjective sensation of the objective circumstances of nature, as well as overcoming dangers and experiencing genuine comradeship (which can turn into ultimate grief when good friends are lost) on the arduous, sometimes death-defying path to the summit, which are those 'areas of the world' through which his personality and character are shaped. In parts, however, *Pot* also reads like a philosophical work aimed at the reader's personal development, like a guidebook for leading the most fulfilled and authentic life possible. In summary, we can say that we are dealing with a polyfunctional work of literature, a complex text which simultaneously fulfils several overlapping functions.

In the following sections, I will explore the question of how my understanding of the role of the translator underlies my translation of *Pot*. Then I will show, using selected comparisons of the source and target text, how this understanding has affected my translation of the most difficult passages.

3 THE MODERN TRANSLATOR AS MEDIATOR BETWEEN EXPECTATIONS OF CLIENT, READER AND AUTHOR

In his accompanying text to *Pot*, Viki Grošelj (in Zaplotnik 2006: 265), a close friend and climbing companion of Zaplotnik, writes that one should not change anything in this 'masterful text', that is, neither add nor omit anything. For the translator, this would mean translating the entire book word-for-word. The idea of such an invisible translator, who places him or herself entirely at the service of the original, is no longer tenable from a translation studies perspective, and this has been the case at least since Lawrence Venuti, who considers such invisibility unfair and impracticable (see Venuti). Unfair, because the

translator's contribution to the new, foreign-language text is not appreciated, and impracticable, because it simply cannot be concealed that another person is interposed between the author and the reader. The most recent research confirms the transformative potential of translations and thus also the visibility of the translator (e.g., Birgit Neumann for German as target language).

The paradigm shift in translation studies took place much earlier, namely, in the mid-1980s with the emergence of the Skopos theory (*Skopostheorie* in German), in the course of which the focus of research shifted from the source text to the target text, thus almost placing the translator in the role of co-author on an equal footing with the author. According to Katharina Reiß and Hans J. Vermeer (96), the core idea of *Skopostheorie* is that purpose is the 'dominant feature of all translation'. The function of translation is to do justice to the intended effect of the target text, which in turn depends on the interaction between translator, client and recipient. Accordingly, the translator is not the transmitter of the message of the source text; instead, the translator's task is to produce a recipient-oriented target text based on the translation assignment (see also Nord 1993: 9 f.). The translator as recipient of the source text, who has bilingual and bicultural expert knowledge and bears full responsibility for the production of the target text, takes centre stage.

Skopostheorie also entails a new understanding of the text. For a long time, the source text in its semantic, linguistic and stylistic form was considered sine qua non for evaluating translations, even more so for evaluating literary translations. With the emergence of purpose- and recipient-oriented translation concepts, other evaluation criteria than equivalence between source and target text came to the fore. The static understanding of the text (with a meaning fixed in advance) was

replaced by a dynamic one according to which meaning only emerges through the reception of a text. Heinrich F. Plett (80) sums up this reception-aesthetic view as follows: ‘So many recipients, so many texts.’ The idea behind this dictum is that every text has such great complexity that a single recipient cannot possibly understand all the hidden subtleties of meaning, connotations and allusions. Consequently, the translator is ‘only one of the possible interpreters, a recipient among recipients’ (Prunč: 155). For Vermeer, this leads to the radical conclusion that there can be no such thing as the source text as the basis for a translation and its evaluation. A source text does not exist as a timeless, unchanging instance, since it is always there only for an individual recipient who specifically interprets it at a certain point in time (see Vermeer 42). The text to be translated is nothing other than an ‘offer of information’. Accordingly, translation is ‘an offer of information in a target culture and its language about an offer of information from a source culture and its language’ (Reiß and Vermeer: 103). For translation, this means that it can be described as ‘an offer of information about an offer of information’ (ibid.: 67). But does such a dynamic conception of text not encourage arbitrariness? And can it be applied one hundred percent to literary translations?

In my opinion, the concept of fidelity to the original still has some right to exist and the purpose of a translation cannot be determined by extra-textual factors alone. This view is also shared by Christiane Nord, who brings into play the concept of loyalty, which she understands as the translator’s ethical responsibility towards all the actors involved in the translation process: the client, the target reader and the author. Since all parties have different expectations regarding the translation, the translator must ensure their compatibility by considering, for example, when producing the target text, that ‘the assignment

must not wilfully and knowingly run counter to the author's intentions' (see Nord 1993: 19). The guiding principles of translation practice are not only the intended functions of the target text, but also ethical translation standards such as accuracy and truthfulness, which are precisely laid down in various professional codes. On the basis of these translation norms, not all text transformations are permissible. When making translation decisions, the translator must therefore constantly weigh up loyalty to the author, the client's specifications for the assignment and the expectations of the target audience. The consequences of this complex web of interaction for professional practice can be illustrated very well by focusing on the translation of *Pot*.

As explained in the second section, the special nature of the reading experience is created by the blunt honesty with which Zaplotnik reveals his most intimate thoughts to us and by the stirring language he uses to describe his extreme climbing expeditions on the border between life and death. To provide the target audience with a similar aesthetic experience, I felt obliged to reproduce the peculiarities of Zaplotnik's language as authentically as possible in the corresponding text passages. Of course, the principle of fidelity to the original reached its limits in the case of translating the lyrical passages at the end of some of the chapters. The alienation effects of faithfully translated poetry would simply have been too great. Here I made use of a translation method which Jiří Levý calls the illusionist method. Characteristic of this method is that the translator aims to imitate the original, that is, to create the illusion in the readers that they are reading an original (Levý 1969: 31 f.). The maintenance of the illusion is based on the mutual (tacit) agreement between reader and translator to read the translated text as a (new) original. Of course, though the readers know that they are not reading the original, they

still expect the translation to be of the same quality as the original (ibid.). Thus, it is no longer a question of preserving the work itself but of preserving its value for the reader, without insisting that the degree of experience which the reader of the translation has must be the same as that of the reader of the original (ibid.: 32).

However, the final version of the target text does not come about solely as a result of the translator's intensive engagement (reproducing, adapting and altering) with the source text. The modern production conditions of translated literature also include the fact that the client has quite a big say in the process. After I accepted the translation assignment, my editor at the Swiss publishing house suggested that I modernise my translation of the forty-year-old Slovenian text and tailor it to the expectations of today's German-speaking audience. In everyday translation practice, this desire for modernisation is reflected in the fact that before the book is printed, the translator receives numerous suggestions from the publisher for corrections which are no longer tied to the target text but rather stem from the editor's desire for a more expressive and contemporary German idiom. Some of these corrections can be rejected by referring to the requirements of the original, but in many cases there are no good arguments for this or there is simply no more time for appropriate negotiations with the editor and one simply accepts the proposed solution.

And of course, as a translator, you also must have the interests and cultural backgrounds of the text users in mind. In my case, I anticipated readers who have a basic interest in mountaineering but not necessarily expert knowledge. In no case could I assume that they were familiar with Slovenia and its geography, culture, history and so on, and, forty years after his death, had ever heard of Zaplotnik.

The following example from my translation of *Pot* illustrates how the analysis of anticipated reader expectations can affect the translation.

3.1 Example of Reader-related Problem-solving Strategy

At a crucial point in the book, where Zaplotnik describes how he informs the expedition leader Tone Škarja by radio that he and his climbing partner have finally reached the summit of Everest, he uses strongly abbreviated language, expletives, Slovenian colloquialisms and dialectal expressions, probably to recreate the breathlessness and orality of the dialogue. Since the dialectal markers are closely linked to the source language culture and replacing the Slovenian dialect with German dialect was out of the question, as it would distort the readers' diatopic associations, I had to neutralise the oral expressivity of the original. This is a measure which also corresponds to the prevailing doctrine regarding language varieties in translation studies (see Sinner: 265). Besides, if I had wanted to keep the dialect, I would have had to choose a German dialect. None could really be justified. Had I chosen Bavarian to emphasise the Alpine and mountain reference, I could have been reproached for not having opted for an Austrian or Swiss variety instead. Once this option was ruled out, the only strategies left were complete neutralisation (translation of all Slovenian dialectal and colloquial elements through standard German), conditional neutralisation (translation through colloquial), translation through other diasystematic varieties (e.g., a specific sociolect) or development of an artificial language. Since, according to my textual analysis, the focus for the reader at this point should not be on the socio-cultural embedding of the dialogue but rather on the experience of the exchange of information via radio reduced to the essentials, the re-experiencing of the choppy language (due to the difficult transmission),

the breathlessness of the protagonists (due to the lack of oxygen and exhaustion) and the orality of the communication, I decided to translate the entire dialogue, which runs over several pages, into (dialect-free) semi-colloquial German. Here is a short example of a passage spoken, as it were, by Tone Škarja:

O ja, porkaš! Fnt! [...] Že prej sva mal zajokcala, k sva bla tmle pr žičnci, k sva slišala, da sta čez sivo stopnjo. No, sva rekla, zdej saj nazaj navta mogla pobrisat. Jebe... O ti bog! Krasno! Živjo!
(Zaplotnik 2006: 231)

Oh ja, verdammich [...] Junge! Vorhin, als wir bei der Seilbahn war'n, ham wir beide schon'n bisschen geheult, als wir gehört ham, dass'er über die graue Stufe rüber seid. Na, jetz' könn'se wenigstens nich' mehr zurück, ham wir gesagt. Scheiße noch eins! ... Klasse! Macht's gut, Jungs!
(Zaplotnik 2020: 266)

According to Nord (1989: 103–105), this is an instrumental, so-called corresponding translation, since the focus of the translator was not, as in documentary translation, to reflect the communication between the source text author and the source text audience but to achieve a corresponding effect (i.e., breathless orality and casual expression) in the German-speaking target audience. The accusation of disloyalty to the original can be refuted with the argument that the effect intended by the source text author takes precedence over the intertextual congruence between the source and target texts. Of course, one could ask whether this strategy is the right one and criticise it accordingly. But that is not the point here. What is of interest is how translational decisions are made pragmatically. Often, the translator proceeds according

to the process of exclusion. As a result of my textual analysis, I ruled out all other possibilities until only this one remained. And in this case, my decision was not dictated by the text alone but strongly influenced by the extra-textual criterion of desired reader response. However, my translation is also based on a certain calculation regarding the aesthetic preferences of the general German (not the Bavarian, Austrian or Swiss) target recipients, who would probably have been alienated by an Alpine dialect and overly colloquial expressions. And certainly, the desire to reduce my workload also influenced my decision to rule out the options of dialect and artificial language. Ultimately, I was guided in my decision by the principle which Levý (1981: 231) calls the ‘minimax strategy’: maximum effectiveness with minimum use of resources.

3.2 Translation as a Strategic and (Self-)reflexive Decision-making Process

The example in the previous section demonstrates that translation is not a mere passive linguistic transcoding but a decision-making process, and the translator is a professional who must take responsibility for his or her decisions. *Skopostheorie* suggests that these decisions are influenced by various extra-textual factors, first and foremost by the client’s specifications (translation assignment), the recipients’ prior knowledge, as well as their pragmatic expectations. Hans Hönig (1995: 116) goes even one step further and ties his concept of translation almost entirely to the translator who uses his or her cognitive abilities consciously and strategically. His credo is that the functioning of the construction of meaning depends on the intelligent behaviour of the translator during the reception, transfer and production phases. Instead of reflexively adhering to rigid translation rules, Hönig (1986: 230)

calls on translators to reflect on the text, the source and target cultural conditions, the available linguistic means and translation strategies, as well as – and this is what is new – their own personality. Based on insights from cognitive science, Hönig develops a model of translational problem-solving built on the individuality of the translator, at the centre of which is the consideration that translating must always be based on the ‘subject-bound nature of the processes of understanding’ (Hönig 1995: 100). Only when translators are truly aware that their actions are also based on their personality can they fully develop their creative potential; otherwise, they perceive the subjectivity of the mental processes influencing their decisions as a burden (*ibid.*: 61).

Hönig’s shift to the personality of the translator provides the next keyword which plays a decisive role for me in translation (especially literary translation): creativity. Translating without creatively changing the source text is not possible. This attitude is also shared by Paul Kußmaul (see Kußmaul). While not denying that source and target texts should be connected by certain invariances, Kußmaul argues that this connection is not established by slavishly clinging to the sacred source text; rather, it is established by consciously performing certain semantic and grammatical changes if the target culture and language make this necessary. These modifying procedures have long been established in translational practice. I am thinking here of variances such as transformation (e.g., adaptation of syntax due to norm constraints of the target language), transposition (e.g., transferring a word into another word class without noticeably changing meaning), explication (adding new information to make implicit meanings visible), adaptation (e.g., of culture-specific facts by replacing them with facts from the target culture), omissions (e.g., of irrelevant, misleading or redundant information) and paraphrasing. According to Kußmaul,

however, these variances are not a necessary evil of translation but the prerequisite for establishing an invariant relationship between original and translated text. I will illustrate this with two examples from my German translation of *Pot*.

3.2.1 *Explanatory Additions to Close the Cultural Knowledge Gap*

In the Slovenian text, one repeatedly finds references to Slovenian culture (e.g., certain customs, literature) and to the peculiarities of life in socialist Yugoslavia. At the beginning of the 1980s, when the book was first published, there was no need for special explanations in this regard for the Slovenian reader, since Zaplotnik was simply reflecting the reality of life at that time. The Slovenian reader most likely recognised and understood the references to the socialist reality of life, which sometimes had critical undertones (e.g., when Zaplotnik denounces the omnipresent lack of certain types of fruit or the political instrumentalisation of alpinism by party functionaries). Forty years later, this is no longer a matter of course in Slovenia, and certainly not for German-speaking readers who have not had these socialist experiences, unless they lived in the German Democratic Republic. The corresponding text passages could therefore not simply be translated word-for-word; changes were necessary to enable the target reader to have a reading experience similar to that of the Slovenian reader at the beginning of the 1980s.

In the first chapter of *Pot*, Zaplotnik describes how, during a hospital stay in his childhood, he was the only patient to get bananas and oranges rather than bread rolls like all the other sick children (because he suffered from coeliac disease). But he longed so much for the delicious rolls and the other children for his fruit that they opened a secret barter exchange behind the backs of the hospital staff: for two bananas

or for one banana and one orange each, Zaplotnik received one roll. Here is the beginning of this passage:

Spominjam se [...]. Takrat je bilo še težko za sadje, a bil sem do grla sit vseh pomaranč, banan in drugega opičjega futra[.]
(Zaplotnik 2006: 9)

Ich erinnere mich [...]. Im damaligen sozialistischen Jugoslawien war Obst noch ein seltenes Gut, doch mir standen die Orangen, Bananen und all das andere Affenfutter bis zum Hals.
(Zaplotnik 2020: 10–11)

In the Slovenian text (see underlined passage) one reads nothing more than ‘I remember [...]. At that time it was still difficult with fruit’. Zaplotnik could assume that his readers would be able to make sense of this sentence. With a literal translation, German readers would not automatically have known why it was difficult to obtain fruit back when Zaplotnik was a child. Therefore, I decided to add an explanation to this passage (see underlined passage in the target text which, in English translation, reads: ‘I remember [...]. In the then socialist Yugoslavia, fruit was still a rare commodity’) to compensate for the knowledge deficit of the target readers and to convey the cultural background. With the clear marking of socialist Yugoslavia as a bygone era, the target reader is of course deprived of the illusion of being mentally in the author’s time. But because of the great temporal distance (forty years after publication) and the introductory ‘Ich erinnere mich’ (‘I remember’), the German recipient reads this passage anyway as a look back at times long past (at least that was my assumption while translating).

In another passage, Zaplotnik describes how, after many completed ascents, he was finally accepted into the elite circle of Slovenian alpinists, which was a rather informal process at the time, concluded by the following ritual: the newly qualified alpinist is spanked by an experienced one. Here is the corresponding passage:

[L]e na sestanku je Mišo [...] ugotovil, da imam dovolj vzponov in da me bo treba preteptsti.

(Zaplotnik: 24)

Mišo [...] stellte bei einem unserer Treffen lediglich fest, dass ich genug Aufstiege gemeistert hätte und es daher an der Zeit sei, an mir die traditionelle Taufe mit dem Strick zu vollziehen.

(Zaplotnik 2020: 26)

Although in the source text it only says ‘da me bo treba preteptsti’ (‘that I will have to be beaten up’), Zaplotnik could assume that his readers know that this actually means the initiation ritual, since it is generally known in Slovenia and is practised in the mountains even among non-alpinists, for instance, when someone has climbed Slovenia’s highest mountain (Triglav) for the first time. German readers lack this background knowledge. Although it becomes clear in the further course of this passage that Zaplotnik has been spanked, the target reader would be left with the question of how this was done. To avoid any confusion, I decided to add the explicative ‘an mir die traditionelle Taufe mit dem Strick zu vollziehen’ (‘to perform the traditional baptism on me with a rope’).

Another very subjective, reader-related and intensive deviation from the source text is the use of footnotes. Since I used a lot of them in the translation of *Pot*, I feel compelled to justify this decision as well.

3.2.2 *Footnotes as a Sign of Loyalty to the Source Text?*

Normally, when translating literary texts, the unwritten law applies to avoid footnotes so as not to disturb the reader's reading process and to remain invisible as a translator to maintain the illusion that the translated text is an original. If the translator does resort to footnotes, critics see this as the translator's failure to find an adequate solution in the text itself. In numerous translation studies, footnotes are even regarded not as a translation technique but as a last desperate resort by the translator (see Sztorc: 145). Defenders of footnotes argue that in some cases it is only through footnotes that all the details of the source text can be reproduced, thus ensuring loyalty to the author in the first place. Like Weronika Sztorc (*ibid.*: 153), I take a differentiated position in this respect. In translating the passages where Zaplotnik wants to draw the reader into his book with his special, simple, naive and yet captivating language, I have largely refrained from altering the original and from providing footnotes. The same applies to the lyrical passages, where the language itself becomes the carrier of the message. Since the primary aim here was to make Zaplotnik's voice audible to the target reader, I saw loyalty to the original as the more important function compared to reader information and the readability of the text desired by the Swiss publisher. However, *Pot* is not a purely literary work. Zaplotnik also wants to inform and enlighten his readers in many passages of the text, so loyalty in this case can also mean providing the target readers with additional information which brings them to a level of knowledge which is comparable to that enjoyed by readers of the original. From the point of view of the reader-oriented and functionalist approach presented here, I consider footnotes to be useful when there is an obvious gap in knowledge which the readers of the original did not have and this gap cannot be closed

by adaptations of the text, as in the examples in the previous section. For the translator, this means anticipating potential questions from readers, matching them with the general intention of the relevant passage, and deciding on the basis of this analysis whether a footnote is warranted, and if so, what function it should serve. In the case of *Pot*, the decision on the use of footnotes was made easier for me by the fact that Zaplotnik himself uses a great many footnotes, 108 in total. These can be divided into the following functional categories.

Apart from the six footnotes with which he comments on his text, Zaplotnik uses footnotes to explain (listed by frequency): ethnological and religious or spiritual terms, for instance, ethnic groups in the Himalaya and Buddhist symbols (22 footnotes); geographical names, especially of places and mountains abroad (20); names of alpinists or nicknames of comrades (13); alpine terminology, especially for equipment or climbing techniques (13); technical terms for climbing-relevant mountain terrain or rock formations (13); foreign language expressions and quotations (10); climbing route names (8); political, historical events (2); and Slovenian geography (1).

My additional 120 footnotes can be assigned to the following functional categories: not generally known mountains, climbing routes, places, rivers abroad, particularly in the Himalaya (34 footnotes); full name of the person referred to in the text only by nickname (21); mountains, peaks and mountain huts in Slovenia (20); towns, villages, rivers in Slovenia and elsewhere in Yugoslavia (17); other information about Slovenia, such as customs and literary allusions (8); climbing routes in Slovenia not known to the target audience (6); own comments on, for instance, the translation (6); explanations of particularities of socialist culture (4); explanations of not generally known Buddhist and ethnological peculiarities in Nepal (3); and untranslatable Slovenian climbing jargon (1).

The purpose of many of my Slovenia- and Yugoslavia-related footnotes is to bring target readers up to the same level of knowledge as readers of the original and to save them a time-consuming search for places, mountains, peaks, Slovenian customs and literary allusions. This is particularly important in the passages where Zaplotnik invites, as it were, his readers into the Slovenian mountains, because the source reader, who knows many of the landscapes described and the local mountains from own experience, can relate to Zaplotnik's tours in his homeland a lot easier and accompany him mentally much better than the target reader, who lacks this spatial orientation.

Since the book is published by a Swiss publishing house specialising in mountain literature and one can therefore assume that it will be read primarily by people interested in Slovenian alpinism and its protagonists, I also thought it necessary to add the full names of the alpinists mentioned by Zaplotnik only with their nicknames. Zaplotnik is very inconsistent in this respect. Only in 13 out of 34 cases does he inform his readers who he is referring to by the nickname. In order not to create unnecessary questions among readers, I have supplied the missing 21 full names.

With my own 34 footnotes referring to non-Slovenian or non-Yugoslav geography (the focus is on the Himalaya), I have only consistently continued what Zaplotnik himself started with his 20 corresponding footnotes but practised somewhat haphazardly. As a reader of the original, one often wonders why Zaplotnik seems to randomly provide additional information on mountain ranges or peaks when describing hiking and climbing routes. No thought-out system is apparent in the Slovenian text. I wanted to remedy this deficit in my translation. However, apart from basic information (e.g., height of a peak and full name of a climbing partner) I do not provide any further encyclopaedic

or biographical information on all these places and persons. I consider this superfluous nowadays, because if the readers are interested in more background information they can easily find it on the Internet. Sztorc (147), who has taken a closer look at the function of footnotes in literary translations, concludes ‘that rather than supplementing the reader’s knowledge the translator’s task consists in indicating the elements which may require gaining additional information’. Most experts agree that translators who use footnotes to make themselves more visible are in fact misusing them, since the main function of footnotes is to fill gaps in knowledge. They should therefore be written as concisely and objectively as possible so as not to raise additional questions which go beyond the text itself (ibid.: 149). Although it may sound paradoxical, I share Sztorc’s conclusion that ‘genuine loyalty’ to readers can only be achieved by answering their potential questions (ibid.: 153). And in the case of *Pot*, I even see my footnotes as a sign of loyalty to the author, because, after all, I am just following Zaplotnik’s intention. He also wanted to provide his target audience with additional information with the help of his 108 footnotes.

A red line which I would not cross as a translator are footnotes that refer to poetic passages of the original and try to explain their (e.g., rhythmic) peculiarities. In my view, a target text which can only convey decisive qualities of the original by means of additional comments can no longer be considered a translation.

4 CONCLUSION

In the theoretical part of this article, a critical analysis of *Skopostheorie* shows that functionalist models which tie the production of the target text primarily to the expectations of the client and the target

readers fall short in describing the reality of literary translation. In practice, the fulfilment of ethical standards such as accuracy regarding content and linguistic expressivity of the original, to which the translator feels committed, as well as the translator's personality and creativity, which influence his or her decisions, play an equally decisive role.

The examination of the translation examples from *Pot* shows that the idea of the invisible translator, reduced to the role of a mouthpiece between two languages, can no longer be sustained. It also contradicts the professional self-image of modern literary translators, who are much more self-confident in their dealings with authors and publishers, because everyone involved in book production is aware that the success of a translated book depends on it working in the target language and finding an audience. The idea of unconditionally maintaining the identity of the original is challenged in today's practice by the postulate of orientation towards potential readers, who must be taken into consideration when translating because they are necessary for the success of a book on the market.

Given the polyfunctionality of literary mountaineering texts such as *Pot*, which pursue informative and other goals in addition to aesthetic ones, the translator also has the task of a cultural mediator, anticipating corresponding gaps in knowledge and supplementing the information relevant to the recipients in the target culture through additions or by means of footnotes.

Having a specific readership in mind, the communicative function that the translated passage of the text is to fulfil determines the manner of verbalisation and thus also the level of closeness to or distance from the original. The question whether I shall translate literally or freely (or rather take a middle way) can therefore never

be answered absolutely but always only situationally, in the sense of a specific problem-solving strategy.

Against the background of the above findings, contemporary literary translation can be defined as a purpose-oriented, creative, strategic, (self-)reflexive decision-making process focused on anticipated reader expectations.

And what about loyalty to the original? In this respect, it is certainly not enough to refer to non-committal ethical standards as laid down in various professional codes of conduct. There are many good reasons, especially in the case of linguistically very specific literary texts such as *Pot*, not to stray too far from the original. In the end, it always comes down to the ethical self-commitment of the translator and the question of whether he or she can adequately justify adding, omitting or changing (improving?) something.

I would like to conclude this article with the following question: Is equivalence between source and target text still the right criterion for measuring the successfulness of a translation? In translation studies, this is an extremely controversial concept. And what other evaluation criteria should be used to judge whether a translation is successful? Ultimately, as a university teacher in my translation classes, when I examine individual linguistic and stylistic translation solutions of my Slovenian students, I am dependent on justifying my assessments of their texts translated into German on empirically confirmed findings. And since discrepancies between the original and the translation can be empirically proven very well, the search for equivalence relations is (at least in Slovenia) still a much-practised teaching and evaluation method. ♡

References

- GROŠELJ, VIKI, 2006: *Spremna beseda. Pot*, by Nejc Zaplotnik. 5th edn. Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga. 265–77.
- HLADNIK, MIRAN, 1987: *Planinska povest. XXIII. SSJLK: zbornik predavanj*. Ed. Alenka Šivic-Dular. Ljubljana: Filozofska fakulteta, Oddelek za slovanske jezike in književnosti. 95–102.
- HÖNIG, HANS, 1986: *Übersetzen zwischen Reflex und Reflexion – ein Modell der übersetzungsrelevanten Textanalyse. Übersetzungswissenschaft – eine Neuorientierung*. Ed. Mary Snell-Hornby. Tübingen: Francke. 230–51.
- , 1995: *Konstruktives Übersetzen*. Tübingen: Stauffenburg.
- JACOBS, JÜRGEN, 1972: *Wilhelm Meister und seine Brüder. Untersuchungen zum deutschen Bildungsroman*. Munich: Wilhelm Fink.
- KUSSMAUL, PAUL, 2000: *Kreatives Übersetzen*. Tübingen: Stauffenburg.
- LEVÝ, JIŘÍ, 1969: *Die literarische Übersetzung. Theorie einer Kunstgattung*. Trans. Walter Schamschula. Frankfurt: Athenäum.
- , 1981: *Übersetzen als Entscheidungsprozess. Übersetzungswissenschaft*. Ed. Wolfram Wills. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft. 219–35.
- MCDONALD, BERNADETTE, 2015: *Alpine Warriors*. Victoria (BC): Rocky Mountain Books.
- NEUMANN, BIRGIT (ed.), 2021: *Die Sichtbarkeit der Übersetzung. Zielsprache Deutsch*. Tübingen: Narr.
- NORD, CHRISTIANE, 1989: *Loyalität statt Treue. Vorschläge zu einer funktionalen Übersetzungstypologie. Lebende Sprachen* 34, no. 3. 100–105.

- , 1993: *Einführung in das funktionale Übersetzen*.
Tübingen: Francke.
- PLETT, HEINRICH F., 1979: *Textwissenschaft und Textanalyse*.
Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer.
- PREZELJ, MARKO, 2008: Inspirations, Part VI: Marko
Prezelj. *Alpinist*. [www.alpinist.com/doc/web08s/
wfeature-inspirations-pot-prezelj]
- PRUNČ, ERICH, 2012: *Entwicklungslinien der Translationswissenschaft*.
Berlin: Frank & Timme.
- REISS, KATHARINA, and HANS J. VERMEER, 1984: *Grundlagen einer
allgemeinen Translationstheorie*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.
- SINNER, CARSTEN, 2014: *Varietätenlinguistik*. Tübingen: Narr.
- SZTORC, WERONIKA, 2018: Translator's Footnotes: The Territory
where Loyalty Is not Required? *Pragmatische und rhetorische
Determinanten des Translationsprozesses*. Ed. Beate Sommerfeld
et al. Berlin: Peter Lang. 145–55.
- ŠKAMPERLE, IGOR, 2011: Nejc Zaplotnik, alpinist in pisatelj. *Gore-
ljudje*. [www.gore-ljudje.si/-nejc-zaplotnik-alpinist-in-pisatelj]
- VENUTI, LAWRENCE, 1999: *The Scandals of Translation*.
London: Routledge.
- VERMEER, HANS J., 1986: Übersetzen als kultureller Transfer.
Übersetzungswissenschaft – eine Neuorientierung. Ed. Mary Snell-
Hornby. Tübingen: Francke. 30–53.
- ZAPLOTNIK, NEJC, 2006: *Pot*. 6th edn. Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga.
———, 2020: *Der Weg*. Trans. Lars Felgner. Zürich: AS Verlag.

Povzetek

V prispevku raziskujemo, kakšno razumevanje prevajalčeve vloge bi moralo biti idealen temelj za sodobne literarne prevode. Najprej na kratko predstavimo slovenski potopisni roman Nejca Zaplotnika *Pot*, na katerem temelji ta prispevek in ki je zunaj Slovenije malo poznan, ga umestimo v kanon slovenske gorniške literature in ga opredelimo kot polifunkcionalno literarno delo. V nadaljevanju v prispevku razmišljamo, v kolikšni meri je mogoče funkcionalne prevajalske modele, kot je teorija skoposa (nem. *Skopostheorie*), ki postavlja pričakovanja naročnika prevoda in usmerjenost k bralcu nad zvestobo izvirniku, uporabiti v sodobni prevajalski praksi.

V analitičnem delu izbrane odlomke nemškega prevoda *Poti* uporabimo za osvetlitev tega, kako sta recepcija ciljnega besedila in predvideno ciljno bralstvo vplivala na prevajalski proces. S primerjalno analizo izvirnega in ciljnega besedila pokažemo, da je zvestobo izvirniku mogoče doseči ne le z upoštevanjem same ubeseditve, temveč tudi z namernimi spremembami (v obliki dodatkov v tekočem besedilu ali pojasnil v opombah). V prispevku odpiramo tudi vprašanje, v kolikšni meri mora biti prevajalec zvest avtorju in njegovemu delu. Ugotavljamo, da sklicevanje na nezavezujoče etične standarde, kot jih določajo različni poklicni kodeksi, nikakor ne zadostuje. Zlasti pri jezikovno zelo specifičnih literarnih besedilih, kot je *Pot*, obstaja veliko tehtnih razlogov za to, da se od izvirnika ne oddaljimo preveč. V primeru *Poti* to še posebej velja za lirske odlomke na koncu nekaterih poglavij in za tiste dele besedila, v katerih naj bi nemško bralstvo tako rekoč slišalo avtorjev posebni glas z vsemi njegovimi jezikovnimi posebnostmi. V igri je prevajalčeva etična zavezanost, v zvezi s katero se zastavlja vprašanje, ali lahko prevajalec ustrezno utemelji to, kar doda, izpusti ali spremeni (izboljša?).

Na podlagi teh ugotovitev sodobno književno prevajanje opredelimo kot ciljno usmerjen, ustvarjalen, (samo)refleksiven in strateški proces odločanja, osredotočen na predvidena bralska pričakovanja.

Lars Felgner

Lars Felgner studied rhetoric, journalism and communication studies at the University of Tübingen, the University of Vienna and the San Francisco State University. In 2015 he received his PhD degree from the Faculty of Arts, University Ljubljana, by defending his doctoral thesis on The Importance of Non-verbal and Prosodic Aspects in Interpreted Medical Conversations. His main research interests are rhetoric as well as non-verbal communication and community interpreting. He works as a full-time lecturer at the Department of German with Dutch and Swedish, University Ljubljana, and teaches translation (language combination Slovene > German), modern German language, German for business and journalistic purposes as well as rhetoric. In addition to his teaching and research activities, he works as a freelance translator and public speaking trainer.