



**Muguraș Constantinescu, Daniel Dejica, Titela
Vîlceanu (Eds), *O istorie a traducerilor în limba
română secolul al XX-lea***

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Reviewed by

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Initiated by Ștefan cel Mare University of Suceava, *O istorie a traducerilor în limba română* [A History of Translations into the Romanian Language] (hereinafter also as ITLR [HTLR]) has proved a highly ambitious and complex project aiming to cover the history of translations into Romanian from the 16th to the 20th century and thus to contribute to the effort of bringing to attention the role of translations in both world and national cultural and intellectual heritage. As stipulated on the project webpage,¹ the ITLR [HTLR] research focuses on Romanian translations published within the Romanian provinces (Moldavia, Wallachia, Transylvania, Bessarabia, and Bukovina) or outside the Romanian borders, within other Romanian-speaking cultural areas. The research is supervised by the project coordinators, Prof. Muguraș Constantinescu and Prof. Rodica Nagy.

The complexity of the project resides in both qualitative and quantitative aims which should address the need for such a history in the Romanian culture. Setting to cover a history of translations into the Romanian language, the project itself promises to diachronically dive into a history of their contexts (social, cultural, political, diplomatic), of translators and translators' perspectives on the very process of translation, as well as into a history of mentalities, of the Romanian literature (genres and sub-genres), of the evolution of the Romanian literary and scientific language, culture, and civilization. In the preface to the first volume, Prof. Mircea Martin (2021: 32–33) calls HTLR an integrated history, approaching its objective from multiple perspectives, while going beyond a linguistic and

¹ <https://itlr.usv.ro/>.

literary approach, offering sociological and statistical tools, methodological criteria, theoretical and terminological references.

The far-reaching project research should “fill in a gap in Romanian culture” (2021: 1349) and concretize in the publication of four volumes, spanning 7-8 years, bringing together an impressive number – over 200 – of researchers from Romania, Spain, Germany, Greece, and France: two volumes cover the 20th century, one volume deals with the 19th century, and one covers the 16th–18th centuries, the series to be published by the beginning of 2026 at the latest.

The first volume – *O istorie a traducerilor în limba română în secolul al XX-lea* [A History of Translations into the Romanian Language in the Twentieth Century] – was published in 2021 by Editura Academiei Române and was coordinated by Prof. Muguraș Constantinescu, Prof. Titela Vâlceanu, and Prof. Daniel Dejica. It is built on a six-chapter structure which follows translations as grouped by time blocks, literary and non-literary fields. Each chapter includes an introductory section followed by theoretical considerations, a section titled *Exempla*, and selected bibliography; the last part of the volume offers a multilingual presentation of the ITLR [HTLR] project, a list of publishing houses and collections, indices of translators and translated authors.

In its six large sections, the first chapter concentrates on contextualizing 20th-century translations into Romanian from a linguistic, literary, historical, sociocultural, and geopolitical perspective, zooming in on the impact of external circumstances on the translators’ activity and the way in which the translator’s status and role have been viewed throughout the century (Morar 2021: 47). The chapter also traces the complex relation between translation and censorship, translation and ethnic, political, and linguistic minorities, and it focuses on the dynamics of mentalities and translations, on the tools the researcher operates with.

The section on censorship, for instance, offers a multifaceted approach, examining, among others, the constraints imposed on the translated text or the impact of ideology and censorship on translations during the communist period; political regimes are presented as limiting the freedom of expression, impacting the availability of source texts, or even influencing/prioritizing the choice of source language texts.

The researcher’s working tools are dealt with in the last section of the first chapter. The reader learns about the work of the Romanian Academy members to catalogue materials and the challenges they needed to face in the absence of basic bibliographic tools. The section includes individual studies which dwell on works translated from exotic languages, such as Korean, Afghan, Latvian, etc., or on chronological dictionaries of novels translated in Romania up to 1989 and between 1990 and 2000 respectively.

The second chapter examines the translator’s social and professional status, with the information organized in various sections, out of which we enumerate:

“The Translator in the Romanian society”, “Bilingualism and biculturalism. Self-translators – Bilingual writers”, “Cultural institutions supporting translations into Romanian”, “The translator’s tools”. In the first pages of the chapter, reference is made to the vague distinction between the translator and the interpreter within the Romanian 20th-century landscape, to the precariousness of their status within the legal framework, to relevant associations and the need for increased efforts to gain well-deserved recognition.

In “Bilingualism and biculturalism. Self-translators – Bilingual writers”, further emphasis is placed on self-translation as having a paradoxical status within the literary field, as well as the field of translation studies, with no traditional hierarchy between “the sacred original and the translation” (Eiben & Hetriuc 2021: 283).

The next two studies integrated in the second chapter of the book list a number of specialized courses and degrees at universities in Timișoara, Cluj, Iași, and Bucharest, as well as cultural institutions which have supported translations into Romanian, consequently increasing the visibility of writers and their cultures of origin, strengthening relations between countries and enriching target cultures (Brânzilă 2021: 304).

The study on the translator’s tools dwells upon dictionaries, glossaries, and lexicographic reference works (some of them authored by translators themselves) that translators working from English, French, and Spanish into Romanian could make use of. The second chapter also lists a generous number of detailed individual portrayals of translators, revolving around the very idea that their work needs to be understood as contributing to the preservation, revitalization, (inter)national visibility, and impact of languages and literatures.

The key institutions responsible for disseminating translations through publication represent the topic of the third chapter. Publishing houses are brought to the foreground, initially presented from a historical perspective (the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, the interwar period, the communist and post-communist periods). Focus is thus laid on the contexts that supported the flourishing of publishing houses and their activity (Crăciun 2021: 509), on cultural journals (two case studies: “Secolul 20”, “Romanian Review”), collections (“Biblioteca pentru toți”, “Opere fundamentale”), bilingual editions, translation anthologies, which functioned as tools “necessary for the accessible presentation of literatures, of literary themes or for authors’ portrayals, in the absence of extensive translations in the respective space” (510).

In the fourth chapter of the ITLR [HTRL] volume, translation is once again brought to the forefront as part of the national heritage, defining the dialogic potential of a culture, as Muguraș Constantinescu asserts (2021: 649). Detailed studies look at the theory and practice of literary and non-literary translation throughout the 20th century from the perspective of Romanian translators,

terminologists, linguists, researchers, literary historians, and critics, with the stated purpose of revealing the complexity of the multifaceted process of translation, its identity as both art and science.

The process of translation as a complex cultural phenomenon is thoroughly framed in the first study of this chapter, where one follows the beginnings of translation studies and the “adventure” of earning the status of a fundamental well-established branch, with the translator perceived as “a vehicle of values, meanings, and ideas” from source to target languages/cultures/heritages, “a negotiator” of meanings, “a promoter” of words which become bridges that connect individuals/communities/cultures, “a mediator” between intercultural communication contexts or situations (Boldea 2021: 651–652). A further study concentrates on comparative literature and translation / translation studies, underlining the complicated yet constructive dynamics of their coexistence. The studies included in this chapter trace back the evolution or the development of translation from “a Romanian translational discourse” (1900–1945), as Petraru labels it (2021: 672), to translation studies (the latter half of the 20th century), which became a cardinal (academic) field of research. References to theoretical frameworks, translational norms, specialized terminology, translation typology and requirements, re-translation, translator’s voice (intertextual, paratextual, extratextual levels) and status, even self-translation and audiovisual translation are included and expanded on, offering the readers a complex choice of research(ed) paths to follow while witnessing the continuous process of (re)defining translation.

With the theoretical aspects having been insisted on in the previous chapters, the fifth and the sixth chapters concentrate more on important contributions, significant translators and their work, on a chronological “factual exploration of the history of translation since Antiquity and through the Middle Ages” (Cotrău in Constantinescu et al. 2021: 1352) to modernity.

Antiquity is approached in its two cardinal facets – Greek and Latin –, whereas the Middle Ages analysis provides literary translations from French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, English, and German. The exempla section of the fifth chapter offers its readers portrayals of important Romanian translators whose contributions are highly relevant and impactful within the Romanian cultural landscape: George Coșbuc, Eugen Tănase, Virgil Tempeanu, Romulus Vulpescu.

The sixth chapter (with two subsections) is dedicated to poetry. In its subchapters, it tackles aspects of interest from the dialogue between poetry and translation / translation studies within the Romanian cultural landscape and the given period (1901–2000): “Translations and re-translations in the poetry of previous centuries”, “Translations of contemporary poetry”, “Poetry anthologies”, “Translator-poets” (Lucian Blaga, Aurel Rău, Eta Boeriu, Ștefan Augustin Doinaș), “Contemporary ideas on translating poetry”. As Bican and

Duinea (2021: 1052) assert, the furthered case studies mirror and are relevant for the coexistence through translation of the Romanian culture with other cultures, as well as for the elements which encumbered translational cultural transfers.

The volume *O istorie a traducerilor în limba română în secolul al XX-lea* [A History of Translations into the Romanian Language in the Twentieth Century] is a valuable tool for the specialized readers, but also for the curious ones who need to contextualize translation accurately, become fully aware of its complexity and crucial importance in the process of identity construction, be it individual and/or collective, social and/or cultural.

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