



Tatsiana HAIDEN

University of Copenhagen /
Austrian Academy of Sciences

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Miriam P. Leibbrand,
Tinka Reichmann,
Ursula Wienen
[eds.]

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Socio-cultural Aspects of Translation Quality Evaluations

Tatsiana HAIDEN

University of Copenhagen / Austrian Academy of Sciences

Abstract: In this article, I examine the concept of translation quality interpreted from the emic, or the insider's perspective, i.e., by various actors (specifically translators, authors, and the publisher) at the publishing company Paul Zsolnay Verlag in interwar Vienna. Focusing on the communication between the agents of translation, I examine the notion of translation quality in correspondences, how it was used, by whom and under which circumstances, and moreover how it can be interpreted based on the agents' interests, networks, status at the company and qualifications. Relying on the field theory of Pierre Bourdieu (1986) and the translation culture concept of Erich Prunč (1997), I show in this essay that the concept of quality was used a century ago as a social construct, as a means of manipulation and as a demonstration of power. Furthermore, I apply the method of *histoire croisée* (Zimmermann 2020, Werner/Zimmermann 2006), which addresses historical intercrossings from different time periods, but also the perspectives of different agents on the same subject or process. Indeed, multiple levels of interpretation have to be considered, I argue, when working with historical translations, professional communication and quality evaluations. Finally, I claim that, when speaking about different interpretations of quality, it is essential to take into account its socio-cultural nature.

Keywords: Translation quality, Agency in translation, Networks, Publishing translations, Paratext.

The further you go back in time and the more culturally diverse the situations you look at, the clearer it becomes that what we call translation in today's English has only limited currency. [...] So, when we engage in translation history we have to be prepared to step back from what we think we know as translation and to try and develop an eye for different cultural practices. (Hermans 2012: 10)

1 Case study and methodology

This article is part of a larger investigation into the translation culture of the Viennese publishing company Paul Zsolnay Verlag in the interwar period (see my PhD thesis: Haiden 2023b).¹ For this investigation, I consulted the company's partial archive² at the Austrian National Library (PZVA, the Paul Zsolnay Verlagsarchiv), authors' archives, different document registers (school registers, university certificates, baptism and birth certificates) and the peritexts (mainly book covers and the copyright pages) of the published translations. Moreover, I made a list of all the translations published by the company between 1924 and 1938, together with the names of the translators and source languages of the translated books. The present article, on the topic of translation quality, is based on this research and on some of its results (e.g., the classification of the translators at the company) and is mainly derived from the information found at the PZVA and from other private correspondences between the translators, the publisher, and the

1 The research was supported by International Research Center for Cultural studies (IFK), Vienna and Literar Mechana.

2 The archive is called partial because a part was destroyed during WWII.

authors. The idea of conducting an independent study on translation quality came to mind while working at the archive of the publishing company. It was clear from the letters that the concept of quality and how it was interpreted should be discussed in a separate paper. The socio-historical aspect of translation quality is so voluminous that, in this article, I will skip the text analyses. Instead, I will conduct a historical investigation that may serve as a productive background for further text analysis.

Evaluating translation quality is a complex process that must take into consideration several dimensions. In this essay, I examine the concept of translation quality specifically from the emic perspective (in Pike's 1954 understanding), i.e., how various actors at the Paul Zsolnay publishing company spoke about translation quality with each other in interwar Vienna. I consider agents who used the notion of translation quality differently in various circumstances in their correspondences³ and explore how their interpretations can be explained based on their interests and personal needs, status at the company, and qualifications. I focus on translators, authors, and especially the publisher.

Investigating the discourse on translation quality in its historical context is challenging, not only because of the lack of material but also because of the many possible interpretations of quality by agents placed in the historical context. For this reason, I apply the method of *histoire croisée*,⁴ which, according

3 Retrievable at the publishing company's partial archive at the Literary archive at the Austrian National Library between 1924 and 1938 (PZVA).

4 The method represents an intercrossing of opinions of different agents to a chosen subject or process, or perspectives from different time periods to the same event, or points from different disciplines to

to Zimmermann (2020), considers not only historical intercrossings from different time periods and societies, but also the perspectives of different agents on the same subject or process. At issue in the present case study is a contemporary perception of quality and the understanding of translation quality a century ago. In this way, I consider a modern (etic or external) perspective on translation quality as a social construct (Lauscher 2000), quality reviews from the 1950s and 70s about translations published in the 1930s, and the reflections of particular agents concerning translation quality from the 1920s and 30s (this being an emic perspective).

Applying the theory of social fields and the analysis of various forms of “capital” described by Pierre Bourdieu (1986), I will focus on the networks as a part of social capital in order to investigate power relations at the publishing company and the behaviour of the agents involved in decision-making. The Zsolnay publishing company created a unique system for working with translators within the company, which was based on the translator’s networks⁵. Relying on correspondences and peritext⁶ analysis, I have established three groups of translators

the chosen process, subject or event (see more in Zimmermann 2020, Werner/Zimmermann 2006).

- 5 I define network as a part of social capital in Bourdieusian understanding, based on social interactions (personal or professional) that can be exchanged to other forms of capital. The background for this understanding are Prunč (2008), who calls it “Beziehungsnetz” (net of relations) and Giddens (2000: 78) who sees networks as a part of social capital “that individuals can draw upon for social support, just like financial capital can be drawn on for investment.”
- 6 “[...] different accompanying elements—e.g., titles, prefaces, illustrations, diaries—surround and extend the text to present it to the world. These elements together constitute the paratext of a specific text. [...] (1) peritext may be found within the same volume or book as the text itself, (2) the epitext refers to paratextual elements outside of the book.

at the company: author's translators, publisher's translators and independent translators (see more in Haiden 2023b). Author's translators' main network was the author; they were chosen and often hired by the author. Publisher's translators were connected mainly to the publisher; they established new networks with the help of the publisher. Independent translators had no connections at the company and needed to establish new networks. This classification is crucial when considering the emic perspective on using the concept of translation quality in this article.

I will first discuss socio-cultural approaches to quality in translation studies and suggest that translation quality be seen as a social construct, namely, by looking at how the concept was used by different agents from the emic perspective. Afterwards, I will give a short historical overview of my study and discuss essential information concerning the Zsolnay publishing house. Then I will provide examples of how the concept was used a century ago, in the aim of lending evidence to my claim that the notion is socially constructed. Furthermore, I will comment on the situations in which the publisher used the idea of quality to either promote his favourite translators or dismiss undesired ones. Finally, I argue that translators profited from having their translation designated as good or were disadvantaged if someone defined their translation as bad or poor, focusing in this way on professional communication between the agents of translation.

Prefaces and footnotes are examples of peritextual elements; author diaries and interviews are examples of epitextual elements" (Paloposki 2022).

2 Translation culture and translation quality

Lauscher, speaking of translation quality (2000: 56), recommends working with evaluation judgement in translation studies. She underlines, however, that this is not welcome in many disciplines, and even in translation studies its application is limited: she states that the socio-cultural nature of translation and evaluation prevent us from extracting the defining characteristics of quality. Therefore, unlike in the natural sciences, it is impossible in translation studies to define the exact criteria of evaluation. Lauscher considers evaluation an action that is inevitably accompanied by intention, as one which has a final aim, and as one which depends on the subject and situation. She believes it is essential to identify the agents of the evaluation process, their aims, and the circumstances in which the evaluation takes place. On that score, therefore, I propose that, it might be helpful to look at how the concept of quality was used in the correspondences of this publishing company at the beginning of the 20th century, demonstrating who used the notion, how and with which aims, and which consequences these manipulations had for translators and translations.

Lauscher (2000) stresses that when one is evaluating, it is not important to find objective qualities but to recognise the importance of specific characteristics. Evaluation is first possible when there is social consensus about its use:

Es gibt keine einheitliche Auffassung darüber, was ein gutes Translat ist, und welche Merkmale des Translats zur Feststellung der Translatqualität herangezogen werden können. (Lauscher 2000: 61)

[There is no common understanding of what constitutes a good translation and which characteristics of the translation can be used to determine its quality. (My translation)]

In addition to there being no globally recognised parameters or universal criteria for defining translation quality,⁷ another problem, especially for historical case studies, is that it is difficult to establish the translator's language skills, define the translation functions, or evaluate the contract conditions. A further hindrance to defining quality objectively is that expectations of translation quality may differ from region to region, or from time period to time period. These expectations are part of translation culture, which Erich Prunč defines as follows:

Unter Translationskultur ist dann das historisch gewachsene, sich aus der dialektischen Beziehungen zur Translationspraxis entwickelnde, selbstreferentielle und selbstregulierende Subsystem einer Kultur zu verstehen, das sich auf das Handlungsfeld Translation bezieht, und das aus einem Set von gesellschaftlich etablierten, gesteuerten und steuerbaren Normen, Konventionen, Erwartungshaltungen und Wertvorstellungen sowie den habitualisierten Verhaltensmustern aller in dieser Kultur aktuell oder potentiell an Translationsprozessen beteiligten Handlungspartnern besteht. (Prunč 2008: 24–25)

[Translation culture is then to be understood as the historically evolved, self-referential and self-regulating subsystem of a culture that develops from the dialectical relationship to translation practice, which relates to the action of translation and consists of a set of socially established, controlled and controllable norms, conventions, expectations and values as well as the habitualized behavioural patterns of all partners currently or potentially involved in translation processes in this culture. (My translation)]

Indeed, he admits that every community, genre, or time period may have different ideas about translation quality. According to Prunč (2008: 34–35), every translation culture has its understanding of quality, and agents play a major role in forming the respective translation culture. Therefore, it is essential to consider the agents' background and aims while working with the

7 Though several attempts were made, e.g., by Reiss (Reiss/Vermeer 2013), Chesterman (2003), Schopp (2008), etc.

notion of quality. Prunč differentiates between several types of translation cultures based on the agents' power—whether authors-oriented, readers-oriented, initiators-oriented, translators-oriented, democratic or autocratic (see Prunč 2008: 26). In initiators-oriented translation culture, the publisher typically decides whether the translation is good or not. For a readers-oriented translation culture, the number of books sold might be considered a criterion for book success. In an autocratic translation culture, authoritarian or totalitarian governments dictate the rules. While a democratic translation culture is considered utopian, it is most suitable for modern Western European translation cultures. In this way, quality and competence criteria for the translators as well as text requirements are constructed within society and are based on the socio-political situation. Analysing translation culture and agents' motivations could help to establish quality and competence criteria for the chosen translation culture. They are interconnected. Norms related to the concept of translation quality, as well as translation cultures, change in connection with political and social changes. For this reason, the interwar period in Austria is a curious case: as a consequence of massive socio-political and cultural transformations, an initiators- and readers-oriented translation culture gradually transforms into an autocratic one within only 14 years (see Haiden 2023b).

I aim to identify what was considered a 'good' or a 'bad' translation a century ago and try to understand why. At this point, it is essential to remember the *histoire croisée* approach that requires dealing with the intercrossings in history. In this case, I will consider both agency and the chronological axes of evaluations. On the agency level, it is essential to consider the intercrossing of the agents' positions: who evaluated quality in the interwar period? What were their aims, networks and interests? Quality can be defined emically by internal actors (the fo-

cus of the present article) as well as etically by external ones, such as critics and reviewers. On the chronological level, we must take into consideration that there may be great difference between quality evaluation for a translation studies scholar of the 21st century and quality evaluation for a publishing house director living in the mid-20th century, one interested in financial success and in promoting his project. Recipients of this evaluation, too, differ strongly—for the company, it was mainly the translator who received feedback about his or her job, while for a translation scholar analysing a book from the past century, it is the Translation Studies scholarly community, his or her fellow researchers, who read the evaluation. For an example of translation and translation evaluation from different chronological periods, we might consider Erna Redtenbacher's translations of the writer Colette in the late 1920s. Köhler (1986) analyses the quality of Redtenbacher's translations, criticising her works for being imprecise and diverting from the original. Köhler compares two texts written half a century ago and makes conclusions based only on the text. This case study could well need more precise sociological data and yet, at the same time, it is an excellent example of the *histoire croisée* approach, i.e., looking at the text from different historical periods, albeit without taking into account the historical perspective of the translator and the evaluator.

In this way, it may be helpful for us to distance ourselves from the traditional understanding of a translation's quality and look more closely at the social context in which the discourse on translation quality occurs. We should immerse ourselves in the translation culture⁸ in which the translation production, communication and evaluations took place. This is the sugges-

8 A detailed description of the company's translation culture is presented in Haïden (2023b: 91–205).

tion of the present essay: that we analyse translation quality from an emic perspective, and that we consider the aims, networks, personal circumstances and ideas about translation quality of the agents who took part in the creation, spread and reception of these translations a century ago.

3 Translations and the Paul Zsolnay Verlag, 1924–1938

The Paul Zsolnay Verlag was founded in 1924 by Paul (von) Zsolnay, whose main aim was to create a publishing company of a new type and to solve the problems authors faced in the early 20th century. Paul Zsolnay was a member of a multicultural and well-connected family in Vienna.⁹ Their connections included famous writers, journalists and intellectuals. The family emigrated to Vienna from Budapest when Paul was a child. He later acquired a good command of English, as we can see from the correspondences. Thus Paul Zsolnay was well acquainted with at least four cultures and languages, and that helps explain why he introduced many translated books into his company's booklists (see Haiden 2023b: 119; Hall 1994: 23–29). According to Hall (1994: 248–250), the contemporaries criticised the company for publishing too much *Ausländerei* (cf. Hall 1994: 248–250).¹⁰ In fact, retrospectively, we can say that publishing translations was key to the company's success (cf. Haiden 2023b: 119). Furthermore, the company was known for its unique strategy of balancing collaboration with Jewish (and especially) female authors and translators, on the one hand, and gradually incorporating agents, including trans-

9 Though the family was considered Jewish in the interwar Vienna, the Zsolnays were converted Protestants (Hall 1994: 23–29).

10 Translated from German as “foreign literature.”

lators, who supported National-Socialist ideas, on the other hand (ibid.: 120; Hall 1994: 280–293). The company survived during the turbulent 1930s and 40s and still exists to this day, regularly publishing German translations of texts from Central- and East-European languages. The tendency was initiated in the 1930s by some of the translators (cf. Haiden 2023b: 129).

The Zsolnay publishing house was known in the community for its “quality of translations” (e.g., PZVA, 286/05 2.1. 286/B 542, letter from 04.01.1935). This is underlined in several letters to the publisher in the correspondence archive at the Austrian national library (e.g., letter from 04.01.1935 written by Mohrenwitz about the company’s good reputation in translating from the English language: PZVA, 286/05 2.1. 286/B 542). Since its beginnings in 1924, the Zsolnay Verlag evidently paid attention to the quality of translations, and there was a well-developed editing network (Hall 1994: 249). Speaking about the company’s translation policies, it is essential to underline that Zsolnay never intervened in textual issues—this remained the prerogative of the authors and translators (cf. Haiden 2023b: 158; Hall 1994: 249–260). More important to the company was the title of the translated book, which needed to be attractive to readers in order to guarantee financial success. For this reason, the company often changed the book titles to increase the book’s attractiveness in German-speaking countries, and that led to conflicts with authors and translators as well as discussions about translation quality. In fact, there were many heated discussions with translator Paul Amman about the titles of the books he translated into German. Zsolnay wanted the book to sell better, while the translator considered it more important to be faithful to the source text and original title. This is a further example of different perspectives on translation and thus on the aims and definition of translation quality. Hall mentions another example of translating ti-

ties: it is Colette's reaction to the German title of her book "*L'Envers du music-hall*". Interestingly, she did not blame her (= author's) translator Erna Redtenbacher for translating badly but had questions for the publishing company (PZVA, 286/B 570, folder Colette). It is possible that the title was changed after the translator handed in the translation:

[...] der Verlag »übersetzte« den Titel mit *Komödianten. Meine Gefährten und ich* in einer Ausgabe, die in einer Auflage von 5 000 Exemplaren auf den Markt gebracht wurde. In einem handschriftlichen Brief, der vermutlich aus dem Mai 1931 stammt, schrieb Colette: « Qui diable a pu vous donner idée d'appeler 'Comédiens' un livre où il n'y a même pas la silhouette d'un seul comédien? » Also: was, zum Teufel, ist Ihnen eingefallen, ein Buch, in dem nicht der leiseste Schatten eines Komödianten vorkommt, *Komödianten* zu nennen? Wenn der Verlag wegen eines Titels verlegen war, hätte er doch die Autorin um ihre Meinung bitten können. (Hall 1994: 305)

[...] the publisher "translated" the title as *Komödianten. My Companions and I* in an edition that was brought onto the market in a print run of 5,000 copies. In a handwritten letter, probably from May 1931, Colette wrote: "Qui diable a pu vous donner idée d'appeler 'Comédiens' un livre où il n'y a même pas la silhouette d'un seul comédien?" So: what the hell did you think of calling a book in which there is not the slightest shadow of a comedian *comedians*? If the publisher was not sure about the title, they could have asked the author for her opinion. (My translation)]

Another special feature of the professional communication between the publisher and his translators can be demonstrated by the fact that most letters in the company's archive are devoted to financial issues (cf. Haiden 2023b:122; Hall 1994: 7). Several letters mention the word 'quality,' albeit in reference to finances and advertisement. In each letter where translation quality is mentioned, the notion is evidently used manipulatively and subjectively (see examples further in this paper).

It is essential to note that having a specialised education was not a condition for qualifying as a translator. In fact, there

were probably no trained translators and hardly any places where they could acquire such a training. During the Habsburg Monarchy, according to Wolf (2015: 62–63), a considerable portion of the Viennese population was multilingual and for many of them (e.g. civil servants in courts) translating was a professional duty. Thus, there was still no immediate necessity for translation training. Furthermore, according to Wolf, the main criteria to become a translator in the court were not mediation skills or knowledge of the language, but knowledge of the law. Later on, in the 1950s (Pym 2014: 480), a person was considered a literary translator and could become a member of a translation union if he or she had translated at least one book, had had the translation published and had received money for his or her work. For these reasons, there were no clear criteria in the interwar period for relevant training to guarantee high-quality translations. This is supported by the correspondences of the Zsolnay translators who reflected on the translating process. Translators' ideas of how to translate were exclusively based on their own experience and personal aims and interests (cf. Haiden 2023b). At the Paul Zsolnay publishing company in the 1920s and 30s, 'quality' was measured not in terms of a specialised education—which differed greatly from translator to translator, as some translators were educated at home, while others had university degrees, or held PhDs in different areas—but by networks constituted by the translators in the field. Only in few cases did experience or the text play a critical role; there were many more cases in which the translator's networks and the number of books sold were decisive (see examples below). Sometimes, if the book had not sold well, the translator was accused of a producing "bad translation" or the publisher complained about the professional qualities of the translator.

4 Translation quality at the Paul Zsolnay Verlag, 1924–1938

Translatqualität und die Art, wie diese festgestellt wird, bestimmen den beruflichen und damit sozialen Status von Translatoren und ihre materielle Existenz. (Lauscher 2000: 55)

[Translation quality and the way in which it is established determine the professional and thus social status of translators and their material existence. (My translation).]

We must keep in mind, then, that the concept of quality is constructed, that the aims and personal circumstances of people who evaluate quality differ drastically, and that when we examine quality we are doing so as readers of the 21st century. Let us now probe deeper into the emic dimension of the understanding of translation quality at the Zsolnay publishing company one century ago. I will provide some examples of the discourse on translation quality, focusing on the agents' interpretations, these being inevitably connected to the three categories of translators I have suggested (cf. Haiden 2023b: 131–135): author's translators, publisher's translators, and independent translators.¹¹ I will first show how the concept of quality was used for each group of translators; later, I will focus on the problem of retranslations in the 1920s and on the reflections of the authors and translators themselves on the quality of translations.

11 The translator's nomination on the title and/or copyright pages is directly connected to the status of the translator in the publishing house and his or her networks in and outside the company. Usually, works by author's translators were defined as "*autorisierte Übersetzung*," by publishing house's (= publisher's) translators, as "*berechtigte Übersetzung*," and independent translators as "*Deutsch von ...*" (cf. Haiden 2023b: 131–132).

4.1 Discourse on translation quality and author's translators

With regard to translation quality, it is important to first discuss texts containing obvious grammatical errors and that deviate from the original. Most reviewers, readers or scholars consider these translations to be of low quality. In the correspondence archive of the company, it is possible to follow how the publisher dealt with such low-quality translations produced by an author's translator. Take the example of "*Rohübersetzungen*" (raw translations) of Dmitrij Umanskij, who translated from Russian into German. Objective arguments against his translations might be his young age and lack of experience in working with translations (as he was in his early 20s and had just graduated from the University of Vienna), as well as his questionable bilingualism and non-native-speaker level of the German language. In fact, he spent most of his life in Moscow. Furthermore, both the editor and the publisher complained of mistakes in his German texts. To improve the quality of the German texts, Umanskij hired an editor, Bruno Prashaska, who corrected the German texts, sometimes without ever having seen the original. At one point, Prashaska is critical of Umanskij's work (cf. Haiden 2023b: 175, based on the analyses of the Zsolnay Verlag partial archive). The editor of the collaborative translation, Richard Hoffmann, wrote to Zsolnay:

Die Übersetzung ist, wie Sie wissen, bloss Umanskijsche Rohübersetzung und bedarf einer längeren und gründlichen Feile ... für den ersten Teil des Romanes überhaupt keine künstlerische Übersetzung, sondern eine gewerbmässige eines Übersetzungsbüros vorzuliegen scheint. (Letter from Hoffmann to Zsolnay, 1929 in folder "Leonid Leonow" at PVZA)

[The translation is, as you know, merely Umansky's rough translation and needs a long and thorough polishing ... the first part of the novel

does not appear to be an artistic translation at all, but a commercial translation by a translation agency. (My translation)]

In 1928, an external reviewer, Ludwig Simon, criticised Uman-skij for having made several grammatical and stylistic mistakes in Leonid Leonov's *Der Dieb* translation (folder "Leonid Leonov" at PVZA). Felix Costa, the literary director of the Zsol-nay company, wrote to Dmitrij Uman-skij that *Der Dieb* would be published in autumn of 1928, but not his translation because it left much to be desired. Costa also stated that Uman-skij would receive less money for the translation than stated in the contract. Interestingly, Costa wrote several letters, and the company tried for a couple of years to reach a consensus with the translator. The company stopped collaborating with Uman-skij only after establishing direct contact with Leonov (as Uman-skij was Leonov's translator). They explained their decision formally by referring to Uman-skij's failure to meet deadlines and his questionable work, but the translator had by then been working for the company for almost five years. This is an example of how apparent problems with translation quality, which were initially ignored due to the translator's connections, ultimately led to his firing.

Uman-skij was an author's translator, which means he was protected by the author and that he enjoyed a certain professional freedom. His colleagues, Leon Schalit and Siegfried Schmitz, were in the same situation: their social capital allowed them to argue with the publisher without fear of losing their jobs.¹² They enjoyed the protection of the authors and were

12 See e.g., PZVA, 286/B 276 John Galsworthy 8.04.1924-30.05.1925, 286/B 277 John Galsworthy 4.07.1925-26.05.1926, 286/B 278 John Galsworthy 8.6.26-20.4.27, 283/B278 John Galsworthy, 1928, 284/B278 John Galsworthy 2 1 29-31 5 29, B 285 John Galsworthy 11 6 29-27 12 29, B 286 231 John Galsworthy 20 12 29-28 06 30,

often mediators between them and the publisher. Many author's translators were praised by the authors for the high quality of their translations. In fact, the letters at the archive show that being an author's translator, in addition to being a friend of the author, put Siegfried Schmitz, a translator out of Yiddish, in a privileged position. In his preface for *Von den Vätern Asch* (1930) underlines the importance of the friendship with Schmitz and his loyalty to Asch's works:

Seit einigen Jahren überdies in der ausgezeichneten deutschen Übertragung meines „deutschen Dolmetschs“ und Freundes Siegfried Schmitz, der sich *mit wahrhafter Treue meiner Werke* annimmt [...]. (Asch 1930: 332–333; emphasis added)

[For some years now, moreover, in the excellent German translation by my “German interpreter” and friend Siegfried Schmitz, who takes care of *my works with true fidelity* [...]. (My translation)]

Moreover, Schmitz, using the capital he possessed, insisted on publishing his translations, translator's notes and prefaces without any changes. For example, the translator sent a finished work, *Der Trast des Volkes* (1934), to the publishing house, noting that

Das Buch kann nur so sein, wie es ist. (Schmitz to Zsolnay, letter from February, 1934, PZVA, folder Schalom Asch)

[The book can only be as it is. (My translation)]

While this group of translators enjoyed professional freedom, the author inevitably dictated how the work should proceed and explicitly expressed his or her expectations of the translations—e.g., Paul Gerald gave several recommendations to Bertha Zuckermandl on how to translate his works from French (PZVA, 286/05, 2.1, 286/B 306, Paul Gerald 1924–1998). He also asked her to leave space between the lines in the

B 287 John Galsworthy 5 7 30–30 6 31, B 288 John Galsworthy 11 7 31–15 11 32, B 289 John Galsworthy 13/5/32 – 10/10/32.

translations so that he could add comments (Letter from 05.04.1930, Zuckerkandl to Zsolnay in PZVA, 286/05, 2.1, 286/B 306, Paul Geraldty 1924–1998). Author's translators had to obey the author's wishes and represent the author's interests at the company.

In case the authors had any questions or concerns about the translated text, they contacted not only their translators but also the publisher, and in that case, the company's response reflected the importance of the writer. In the case of famous authors, such as John Galsworthy, Paul Zsolnay answered personally and promised that next time the translation would be published as the author wished (PZVA, 286/05, 2.1, 286/B 306, John Galsworthy). In September 1931, John Galsworthy complained about the changed proper names in the published German version (stating that the translator was unaware of these changes), to which Paul Zsolnay immediately responded with apologies and promises that it would never happen again (PZVA, B288 John Galsworthy 11.07.1931–15.11.1932). In these discussions, the question of translation quality arose several times in the context of translation choices. For the author and translator, quality was connected to faithfulness to the original text; for the publisher, quality was measured by the number of books sold.

4.2 Discourse on translation quality and the publisher's translators

Translators of the second category, publisher's translators, were less free in their professional behaviour, but at the same time acted as internal decision-makers and/or editors and usually accumulated social capital through the publisher. Zsolnay always suggested to the new authors that they work with the publishing house's translators (e.g., Richard Hoffmann and

Marianne von Schön) and underlined that he guaranteed “the best quality of their translations” (PZVA, folders 286/05 2.1. 286/B 542). In this case, we see that the publisher promoted his translators, independently of the kind of translations they made. However, we notice that only those translators whose professionalism was proven over time, through good reviews and the number of books sold, became the company’s translators. For example, Richard Hoffman started his career at the Paul Zsolnay company as an independent translator and became the publishing house’s principal translator: between 1924 and 1938, he translated for the company 30 books from English, Russian and Italian (PZVA, folders 286/05 2.1. 286/B 542). Indeed, he was directly connected to the publisher and was actively promoted by him. Paul Zsolnay pointed to the high quality of Hoffmann’s translations:

Wir bemerken nach, dass die Übersetzung von unserem ersten Übersetzer Dr. Richard Hoffmann stammt und auch *den allerstrengsten Anforderungen genügt*. (Letter from Zsolnay to Unterhaltung und Wissens library from July, 1936 in PZVA 286/05 2.1. 286/B 542; emphasis added)

[We note that the translation was done by our first translator Dr. Richard Hoffmann and meets even *the most stringent requirements*. (My translation)]

In this case, there was a consensus about the quality of his works—readers and critics also praised him:

Mein Brief wäre nicht ganz, wenn ich nicht betonen möchte, dass meines Erachtens *die Übersetzung Hoffmanns direkt meisterhaft ist Eine so gute Übersetzung eines See-Buches findet man selten*. (Letter from Schopfer to Zsolnay about “Matrosen” from 1932 in PZVA, 286/05 2.1. 286/B 542; emphasis added)

[My letter would not be complete without emphasizing that, in my opinion, *Hoffmann’s translation is directly masterful It is rare to find such a good translation*. (My translation)]

An indication of the good quality of his work is the fact that Hoffman was the only person at Zsolnay who worked as a full-time translator (cf. Haiden 2023b: 188–189, PZVA, 286/05 2.1. 286/B 542).

Another example: Marianne von Schön started out as a publisher's translator but soon established a personal connection to Theodor Dreiser and translated several of his books into German—she became his translator (i.e. an author's translator). Not only did the publisher praise her translations, but also the author himself. He wanted only her to translate his works into German. Moreover, Schön's works received high evaluations in 1953 by an external reviewer, Wirzberger, who called her translations of Dreiser's works "alte zuverlässige Übersetzungen"¹³ and stressed that they needed no additional editing aside from modifying some Austrian expressions.¹⁴ In light of the fact that her works have been republished until at least 2009 (according to Index Translationum), one may conclude that her translations have stood the test of time and have been approved by several translation cultures.

13 Old trustworthy translations.

14 "Abgesehen von kleinen Änderungen, wie beispielsweise die Tilgung von Austriazismen in Maryanne Schöns (Wirzberger 1953: 255) Übersetzungen der Romane Dreisers aus den 1920er und 1930er Jahren, waren die Rezensenten gegenüber Kürzungen und Bearbeitungen sowohl der Übersetzungen als auch Originale überaus negativ eingestellt" [„Apart from minor changes, such as the substitutions of Austrian expressions in Maryanne Schön's (Wirzberger 1953: 255) translations of Dreiser's novels from the 1920s and 1930s, reviewers were extremely negative about abridgements and adaptations of both the translations and the originals“ (my translation)].

4.3 Discourse on translation quality and independent translators

The concern for quality was the main way the publisher justified not working with independent translators. Zsolnay blamed bad translation quality for a given book's failure in the region, underlining the importance of a 'good' translation for economic success. For instance, Dora Mitzki, an independent translator from Italian, translated a work by Paola Masino (*Monte Ignoso*, 1933). The book was apparently failure in Austria—few copies were sold. In a letter, Zsolnay clearly blames the poor quality of the translation for that failure:

Unserer Meinung nach ist auch *die Übersetzung zum grossen Teil an dem Misserfolg Schuld* – und müssen daher darauf bestehen, die Übersetzung dieses Buches nach unserem eigenen Ermessen an einen Übersetzer zu vergeben, mit dem wir seit vielen Jahren zusammenarbeiten. (Letter from Zsolnay to Bompiani about the translation of Dora Mitzki, July 1934, PZVA in 286/05 2.1.286; emphasis added)

[In our opinion, *the translation* is the major reason for *the failure* - and we must therefore insist on assigning the translation of this book to a translator with whom we have worked for many years. (My translation)]

The second book by Masino (*Periferia*, 1933), translated by the publisher's principal translator, Richard Hoffmann as *Spiele am Abgrund* (1935), likewise experienced little success. Still, its failure was not blamed on the translation. Instead it was assumed that the Austrian reader didn't appreciate the author. Indeed, one of the reasons for these different reactions to the translations by the publisher might well have been the very low symbolic capital of the first independent translator, Dora Mitzki, and the very high symbolic capital of the second, the publisher's translator, Richard Hoffmann.

The situation with the Jewish translator Käthe Gaspar may be taken as example of how the notion of quality was used

as an instrument of power. Käthe Gaspar started working for the Zsolnay Verlag in 1930 with her husband, Andreas Gaspar. They translated from Hungarian and provided mediation between the Zsolnay publishing company and Hungarian authors (cf. Haiden 2023b: 197; see PZVA, 286/05 2.1 286/B 598). They translated very quickly and proposed many new authors. (In the late 1930s, as those defined as Jews, they were in a difficult financial situation and needed more work.) In the beginning, Paul Zsolnay and Felix Costa were satisfied with Gaspars' translations, and the authors praised them.¹⁵ As tension and social pressure increased in 1938, the translations made by Käthe Gaspar were considered "stylistically poor,"¹⁶ and all contact with her and her husband was avoided. This happened after Zsolnay received a letter from the Chamber of Literature¹⁷ saying that the Gaspars were Jews and the company had to find other translators for Hungarian texts. Leber responded to the letter of the Chamber of Literature, noting that the only reason these Jewish translators were still at the company is that they mediated between the authors and the publisher. He also said they would inform the authors that working with these translators was no longer possible. He ensured that only one more translation by Käthe Gaspar would appear, but no more by Andreas Gaspar:

Wir erlauben uns – zumal uns auch ein diesbezüglicher Brief eines ungarischen Schriftstellers, der Ihnen anscheinend diese Mitteilung ... vorliegt, daraufhinzuweisen, dass wir mit diesen Übersetzern vom Verlag aus nur auf Wunsch der betreffenden ungarischen Autoren

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- 15 Moritz writes to Zsolnay about translations, and says that he *knows from his sources that the Gaspars are good translators* (see PZVA, letter from 26 Feb 1936).
 - 16 See PZVA, 286/05 2.1 286/B598, Letter from the Zsolnay Verlag to Käthe Gaspar, September 1938.
 - 17 See PZVA, 286/05 2.1 286/B598 Virgg Moricz, January, 1938.

Führung genommen haben und dass diese ungarischen Autoren – die übrigens in der gesamten deutschen Presse ungewöhnlich günstige Aufnahme gefunden haben – auch mitgeteilt haben, dass ihre Übersetzungsrechte durch Herrn Dr. Gaspar bzw. Frau Käthe Gaspar vertreten werden. Dieser Tatsache konnten und können wir als Verlag uns nicht entgegenstellen, da ja anscheinend schon langjährige Bindungen zwischen den Autoren und dem Ehepaar Gaspar vorliegen. [...] Im übrigen können wir Ihnen noch mitteilen, dass wir lediglich zur Herausgabe eines Buches, das durch Frau Käthe Gaspar übersetzt worden ist, verhalten sind und eine Übersetzung von Dr. Andreas Gaspar nicht mehr in unserer Produktion planen. (Hall 1994: 560 quoting Hermann R. Leber's letter to the RSK, Berlin, 15.03.1939)

[We take the liberty—especially since we have also received a letter to this effect from a Hungarian writer who apparently sent you this message ... we would like to point out that we have only contacted these translators at the request of the Hungarian authors concerned and that these Hungarian authors - who, incidentally, have been unusually well received by the entire German press—have also informed us that their translation rights are represented by Dr. Gaspar and Mrs. Käthe Gaspar. As a publishing house, we could not and cannot oppose this fact, as there are apparently already long-standing ties between the authors and the Gaspar couple. [...] Incidentally, we can also inform you that we are only committed to publishing a book translated by Mrs. Käthe Gaspar and are no longer planning a translation by Dr. Andreas Gaspar in our production. (My translation)]

This answer suggests that, in this case, the poor quality was merely an excuse to explain to the translators why the company wanted to stop working with them.

“Bad quality” was often used as an excuse to reject a translation. In the correspondence between Georg Schwarz, an independent translator, and Felix Costa in 1924 (PZVA, folder Claude Anet, letters between 21 May and 3 July 1924), there was a proposal from the translator to publish some works by Claude Anet, including *Ariane*. Having seen the translation, Costa emphasised that the translation contained “eine Reihe von stilistischen Unebenheiten und überflüssigen Schwerfälligkeiten” („a series of stylistic unevennesses and superfluous

clumsiness,“ my translation). This comment was rather untypical for the publisher. The few publishers’ comments on the translated text at the archive are rather general and seem more like excuses not to publish the translation or to continue working with this or that translator. Indeed, too many translated books were published during the first year, and the publisher did not want to publish more translations in 1924.¹⁸ Thus he used this as a reason to refuse to publish Schwarz’s book.¹⁹

5 Other factors influencing the discourse on translation quality

Apart from agency and agents, several aspects that define translation culture must be mentioned regarding the discourse on quality. During the interwar period in Europe, there was a boom of translations, especially translations from the English language (e.g., Rundle/Sturge 2010: 7–19). In some cases, several translations of the same book were produced, and there were still no established and recognised global or regional registers to systematise them. According to the correspondence from the dossier “Galsworthy”²⁰, the Paul Zsolnay Verlag had

18 In 1924 he published eight books, four of which were translations (see Haiden 2023b: 157, PZVA).

19 Nevertheless, the book was published in 1924 in Schwarz’s translation (see Haiden 2023b: 157).

20 PZVA, 286/B276 John Galsworthy 8.04.1924–30.05.1925, 286/B 277 John Galsworthy 04.07.1925–26.05.1926, 286/B 278 John Galsworthy 08.6.26–20.4.27, 283/B 278 John Galsworthy, 1928, 284/B278 John Galsworthy 02.01.1929–31.05.1929, B 285 John Galsworthy 11.06.1929–27.12.1929, B 286 231 John Galsworthy 20.12.1929–28.06.1930, B 287 John Galsworthy 05.07.1930–30.06.1931, B 288 John Galsworthy 11.07.1931–15.11.1932, B 289 John Galsworthy 13.05.1932–10.10.1932.

to refuse translations of Galsworthy's works from at least two translators (Elise Zacharias and Gerda Steiner). Furthermore, in 1929, Zsolnay informed Lisa Landau that the company found her translation of Galsworthy's book to contain numerous omissions, and so Leon Schalit would correct the translation (284/B278 John Galsworthy 02.01.29–31.05.29). This letter from 1929 confirms that the company wanted only Schalit as Galsworthy's translator in Austria and aimed to exclude all other translators. An even more complex situation happened to Louise Wolf, who translated one of the novels *from The Forsyte Saga* by John Galsworthy in 1913. This novel was retranslated and republished by Leon Schalit in 1925—under the note “bearbeitet von ...” (286/B277 John Galsworthy 04.07.1925–26.05.1926). Schalit explained that the book translated by Wolf had to be adapted to the current circumstances, even if the two translations were published only ten years apart.

Feedback from external agents, especially from those with high symbolic capital, was essential in the translator's accumulation of symbolic capital. This was an important component of network building. For instance, in the postcard Thomas Mann sent to Viktor Polzer,²¹ Zsolnay's translator of English texts, we see that Mann praises Polzer's translation of Calder-Marshall's book (probably *Wir haben gebeiratet*, published by Zsolnay Verlag in 1936):

I still owe you thanks for the unusual novel of Calder Marshall. An important, attractive book on which I spent pleasant hours not least on account of *the apparently excellent translation*. In the spring I hope to spend a few days in Vienna and would be glad to see you. Sincerely yours, Thomas Mann. (JANY, emphasis added) [The text of the letter is translated from German on the web page of the archive.]

21 See <<http://corsair.themorgan.org/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=193586>> (25.10.2024).

Another note about Thomas Mann, who praised Polzer's translations, can be found in Polzer's collection at the Jewish archive in New York:

[...] eine Leistung, die nicht nur von den Autoren selbst, sondern etwa von Thomas Mann anerkannt wurde: einer der seltenen Fälle, in denen *die Übersetzung besser ist als das Original*. (JANY, emphasis added)

This kind of feedback from external reviewers, especially if there were many of them, may be an indication that the translation was suitable to the translation culture. Another example of such feedback is the case of Paul Amman, an independent translator who translated works by Martin Maurice. Amman and the publisher received very positive feedback from the author.²² Moreover, Amman's translations sold unusually well, which the publisher emphasised and took as a sign of their high quality.

6 Conclusions

The examples I have provided show that, depending on the agent's situation and community, translation quality may be interpreted in different ways. It can be used as an instrument of manipulation, justification, or power. Indeed, the quality notion, one of the most subjective in the discipline (e.g., Schippel 2006: 7: "Die Beurteilung der Qualität einer Übersetzung, einer literarischen zumal wird immer subjektiv sein"²³), requires that we consider its socio-cultural nature and look at it from different perspectives, e.g., in terms of different agents or time periods. This leads to the view that translation quality assessment

22 "Your translation is wonderful", (Letter from Maurice to Amman from 6 June, 1929, PZVA, 286/B570 Martin Maurice 1929–1960).

23 "The assessment of the quality of a translation, especially a literary one, will always be subjective" (My translation).

belongs to a given translation culture, which implies a number of expectations with respect to a given translated text based on where and when the evaluating person lived. In this regard it is essential to analyse communication between the agents of translation. In the present essay, I have attempted to show how we can approach the idea of translation quality from an emic perspective, focusing on its socio-cultural aspect and considering its constructed nature and the matter of social immersion—an exercise that bears upon the translation cultures in which the translation was produced and evaluated. When interpreting quality, I suggest, it is necessary to make a clear distinction between the etic and emic dimensions, as well as carefully nuance the agents' speculation based on their personal interests and networks in the field.

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About the author: Tatsiana Haiden is now a postdoc fellow at the University of Copenhagen. She received her PhD in Transcultural Communication at the University of Vienna and a postdoc track fellow of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. During her PhD studies she was an IFK (International Research Center for Cultural Studies) junior fellow abroad at Oxford University, and a Literar Mechana Fellow. Her scholarly interests focus on translator's agency, networks, publishers as agents of translation, history of translation, translation culture, archival research, peritext analyses, translators and exile, publishing translations, histoire croisée, meso-history. Her recent articles include: (2024): "Peritext as a tool to measure translators' social capital". In: Raffi, Francesca / Perez, Emilia / Martinković, Matej [eds.]: *Bridge: Trends and Traditions in Translation and Interpreting studies*, Vol. 5, no. 2: *Paratexts as a Valid Component of (Re)translations*, (2024): "Der Paul Zsolnay Verlag – eine netzwerkbildende Plattform, 1924–1938". In: Weber Henking, Irene / Dietiker, Pino / Rougemont, Marina [eds.]: *Netzwerke des Exils: Übersetzen*. Berlin: Frank & Timme, pp. 165–180.

Contact: tatsiana@hum.ku.dk