

LANGUAGE SPECIFICS IN DANTE'S *DIVINE COMEDY* AND IN ITS SLOVAK TRANSLATIONS

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ŠAVELOVÁ, Monika: Language Specifics in Dante's *Divine Comedy* and in Its Slovak Translations, 2026, Vol. 8, Issue 1, pp. 77 – 87. DOI: 10.17846/CEV.2026.08.1.77-87.

ABSTRACT: This study examines the linguistic and poetic specifics of Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* and their translation into Slovak, with a focus on *Inferno* and *Paradiso*. Drawing on Slovak translation theory, versology, and contemporary Dante scholarship, it analyses the semantic and phonetic functions of form, sound, and neologism in the original and their reconstruction in translation. The study highlights the unity of form and meaning as a key principle of poetic translation.

KEYWORDS: Dante Alighieri. *Divine Comedy*. Poetry translation. Slovak translation.

INTRODUCTION

The translation of poetry is undoubtedly an art form which requires a considerable amount of creativity in its aim of transposing all of the source text's qualities into the target language.¹ Since the 1940s, when high-quality poetic translations were made as a result of translation collaborations (typically between a scholar/researcher and a poet/versologist)², the complex transposition of all the qualities of the original became standard in Slovakia: a translation should aim not only for the transposition of style and language characteristics of the original text, but for the complete reconstruction of the original's features based upon an erudite philological, poetological, literary and historical analysis and exegesis, so that the translated text can again be read as an [original] work of poetry (Truhlářová 2014, 33). This approach to translation has persisted ever since and it is now expected that poetry is not translated as prose, in contrast to other national literatures where such a conception as a translational strategy is permissible and even common.

In the translation of poetry, the core components of poetics assume particular significance. These include metrical and rhythmic organization, euphonic features (such as alliteration and assonance), figurative structure, and linguistic components encompassing intonation, style, and semantics. The stylistic dimension represents the highest level of linguistic and poetological con-

1 Researchers in the field of Slovak translation studies, as well as translators stress the importance of understanding the process of translation as an art and the translator as its "co-author". See Vilikovský, Ján: *Preklad ako tvorba* [Translation as Creation] (1984), Zambor, Ján: *Preklad ako umenie* [Translation as Art] (2000).

2 Translation duos have existed in the Slovak literary environment since its earliest translation efforts, notably in the collaborations of Jozef Felix with poets Ján Kostra (Villon's *Malý testament* [The Little Testament], 1948), Ján Smrek (Villon's *Veľký testament* [The Great Testament], 1949), and Ivan Mojík (a selection of Villon's poems published as *Kodicil*, 1969). A key contribution of such creative partnerships was the closer alignment of translations with their originals, particularly with regard to both semantic content and formal features. This shift became especially evident in Slovak translations of Dante's works, notably *Nový život* [New Life] (1958) and, above all, the first two canticles of *Božská komédia: Peklo* [The Divine Comedy. Inferno] (1964) and *Očistec* [Purgatory] (1982), on which Jozef Felix and Viliam Turčány collaborated over several years.

cretization of a poetic work. As Miko (1973) argues, everything in a literary text contributes to its style. For both Miko and, subsequently, Popovič (1975), style is understood as the unity of theme and language, whose function is to foreground the semantic dimension of discourse and to convey meaning. Style is therefore intrinsically linked to semantics in the organization of a literary work. However, the hierarchical positioning of style above meaning, as proposed in Anton Popovič's theoretical works (1975, 1983), is today regarded as outdated and largely unproductive. Contemporary approaches emphasize the dynamic interaction between semantic and stylistic organization, with each alternately assuming a defining role depending on the specific text (cf. Valcerová 2006).

According to Slobodník (1990, 115 – 126), style is realized at the level of the sentence – or, in poetry, the strophe – rather than through individual lexical units; consequently, the sentence/strophe typically constitutes the basic framework within which the translation process is carried out, and to which the reconstruction of meaning is adapted. This principle, however, applies only insofar as lexical units do not perform a crucial textual function, as is the case in Dante Alighieri's (1265 – 1321) *Divine Comedy* and other works of the same period.³ Translation must therefore take into account factors such as the author's idiolect and other language-specific features present in the source text, as will be discussed further below.

The aim of this study is to foreground the relevance of Valcerová's claim (2006, 114) that formal elements such as rhyme, rhythm, and euphony acquire semantic value within poetic discourse and, in their specific contexts, attain importance equal to that of components traditionally regarded as meaning-bearing, such as the theme and motif. It is therefore essential that translations preserve the semantic salience of the original, which in poetry may reside precisely in its euphonic structure. Consequently, priority cannot be accorded to semantic content over formal elements, as such a dichotomy is untenable not only in poetry but in artistic writing more broadly.

SLOVAK PRE-THEORETICAL DISCOURSE ON TRANSLATION

The importance of the unity of form and content was emphasized in Slovak cultural discourse as early as the 1940s. The two most notable proponents of this idea were the translator and translation theorist Zora Jesenská (1909 – 1972), who translated primarily from Russian and French and, in collaboration, also from English and German, and later Jozef Felix (1913 – 1977), translator, editor, critic, and translation theorist working primarily with Romance languages. Owing largely to their work, scholarly reflection on translation during this period focused predominantly on translations from Russian and Romance languages. Among such contributions, the reflections of Jesenská and Felix stand out as particularly detailed, comprehensive, and systematic.

As Jesenská expressed, “what matters is the translator's mastery of their own language, which they need to command with virtuosity and bravura, recognize the subtlest nuance in meaning and form. Never settle [...] for the first word, the first solution that comes to mind! Rewrite and rewrite again, seek advice, listen to the writing so that it ‘sounds’ right. [...] The expression is what matters in art. [...] [It is] the capture of the subtlest, of the barely there, of what remains unsaid and trembles between the lines. The translator has to fully understand the aesthetic aim of the author in order to capture and recreate it in translation. That means to penetrate the style of the work, to live through the author's vocabulary, to understand its smallest vibration, to temporarily live through the author's emotions, their life, their thinking” (1946, 4; [1950] 1963, 172 – 175) (cf. Šavelová 2026).

3 For the perspective of literary theory and for the hermeneutic method, refer to Gagliardi, Antonio – Koprda, Pavol. 2016. *Podklady k hermeneutike stredovekej talianskej literatúry*. Nitra: Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre.

Felix's credo was "to remain faithful to the wording and meaning of the text" (1986, 562), that is, to build on solid foundations and to avoid arbitrary or incidental solutions in the translation of a particular author or work, as well as arbitrary conclusions in their evaluation and analysis (Juróvská 2014, 38). Felix therefore consistently emphasized the necessity of grounding translation in correct and precise interpretation, arguing that translation must be based on the deeper intention of the work (1962, 69; 1980, 104). In his view, a successful translation can only arise from accurate interpretation, understood as the correct grasp of the work's ideological and literary meaning (1977, 104). Accordingly, Felix maintained that the aesthetic value of a translation of a classical work is inseparable from accuracy (1987, 243). For this reason, translators are obliged to work with high-quality critical editions of the source text whenever possible. While Felix did not object to the use of existing translations as auxiliary tools, he insisted that translators must not remain under their influence (1980, 104).

According to Felix, the translation of classical works (and translation in general) demands the highest degree of accuracy (1962, 70). This requirement, however, does not entail slavish fidelity to the source text or literalism; rather, it involves drawing on the precise and profound meaning of the original, as otherwise translation would be indistinguishable from adaptation. It is therefore not individual words that should be translated, but ideas and "poetic emotions" (1962, 69). Characteristically, Felix places strong emphasis not only on respect for lexical meaning and the preservation of atmosphere (a so-called *kolorit*, colour), but also on the formal, rhythmic, and visual features of the text, such as sound and word arrangement. These include alliteration, assonance, deliberate dissonance, the use of repetitive, hoarse, or harsh sounds, rhyme, sibilants, double consonants and consonant clusters (2005, 311, 317, 337 – 339, 348), as well as neologisms, polysemous expressions, syntactic structures, and wordplay.

In Dante's work in particular, it is essential to emphasize the compositional principle based on the unity of content and form. Felix (2005, 305) recognizes that Dante employs words to evoke specific phenomena and that the rhythmic organization and overall sound structure of his verses are subordinated to this expressive purpose. Felix therefore pays careful attention to the preservation of wordplay and demonstrates awareness of the full range of stylistic features and specificities of the text, such as the author's fusion of distinct stylistic principles within the speech of a single character (cf. Felix 2005, 339). The translation by Felix and Turčány seeks to reproduce these elements in translation to the fullest extent permitted by the Slovak language. Where certain features cannot be retained, Felix explicitly signals their significance through paratextual commentary at points crucial for interpretation.

It can therefore be concluded that the above-mentioned Slovak translation theorists approach the literary work through the prism of the specific features of the author's oeuvre, with particular emphasis on authorial originality. Consequently, if a poet assigns particular meanings to certain lexical items – what may more broadly be described as a poetic idiolect – this specificity must be respected in translation; otherwise, serious distortions of the author's ideas, language, poetic imagery, and the poetic work as a whole are likely to occur (Felix 1962, 68 – 70).

EUPHONIC SPECIFICITIES OF VERSES

In certain functional cases, the poem's euphonic organization can be integral in conveying its meaning. In such cases a translator must conceive the euphonic aspects not as arbitrary or independent of the work's meaning but as its indivisible components. Dante's *Divine Comedy* demonstrates how crucial the full understanding of a literary work's structure is in reconstructing the

production of meaning within a particular authorial poetic. It manifests for example in respecting the interconnectedness of the phonetic and the visual, which contains an allegorical-symbolic dimension⁴ in Canto VII of *Inferno*.

Drawing on both the original text and the interpretations of multiple danteologists, the Fourth Circle is guarded by Pluto. While his appearance remains opaque, he is described as wolfish with a rough, rasping voice that grows increasingly terrifying as his words turn into growling and snarling. His inhuman, bestial nature is presented through this imagery. We can hear the echo of his voice throughout the entire canto: besides the purposefully “raspy” and “rumbling” phonetic organization of verses, it is especially in the rhymes, with their double, “rough” arrangements of consonants (rhymes such as *aleppe – chioccia – seppe – nocchia – abbia – roccia – labbia – lupo – rabbia – cupo – fiacca – lacca*, etc., Inf. VII).⁵ These doubled, intervocalic consonants are difficult to transpose into Slovak as they do not reproduce a raspy sound. Because of this, the Slovak translator Viliam Turčány (drawing on Felix’s commentary) often replaces them with either a more intense concentration of consonants or by inserting a syllabic *r* or *l* into a word.

Dante creates a harsh atmosphere: “*Quali dal vento le gonfiate vele / caggiono avvolte, poi che l’alber fiacca, / tal cadde a terra la fiera crudele*” (Inf. VII, 13 – 15). The translators were aware of these features, and Turčány versified them within the limits and possibilities of the Slovak language: he tried to capture the phonetic interplay in the canto through an emphasis on liquid and guttural consonants, and the use of a “dark” *u* (a term used by Felix and Turčány): “*Jak vzdutá plachta zhúžvaná sa upne / kol stožiara, keď zdrúžganý sa zrúti: / tak zrazu na zem kruté zviera rupne*”.⁶ Following the original, the Slovak translation presents a “complete system” of “raspy” rhymes (*zvrieska, zrezka, dneska, stvrda, krotším, nezabfda, zrúti, hřby, svrbí, skřsa, prú sa, dřca, prikopřca*, etc.).⁷ Similarly, the translators wanted to make clear the differences between stylistically diverse parts of a single canto in a manner resembling Dante, for example in the passage about Fortuna (v. 70 – 96).

Similarly, in the Canto III, Dante himself suggests that the phenomena depicted be conveyed through the choice of words within the tercets, notably the overall character of the piercing, dark, wailing, and moaning acoustic chaos that defines Hell. This soundscape simultaneously constitutes the antithesis of the “sweet harmony” that will characterize both the atmosphere and the verbal expression of the subsequent canticles, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*. Dante subordinates the rhythmic organization and the entire sound structure of the verses to this expressive intention. In his commentary, Felix draws attention to the distinctive instrumentalization of the “sharp”, piercing sound of the vowel *i* (“*Quivi sospiri, pianti e alti guai*”, v. 21), the accumulation or even a direct “collision” of words with similar phonetic qualities (“*pianti e alti*”, v. 22, “*cominciar ne lagrimai*”, v. 24, “*parole di dolore*”, v. 26), and a range of internal inconsistencies within the verses, such as interrupted rhythm, enjambment, and overlapping verse structures. The translation takes all of the above factors into account to the extent permitted by the linguistic resources of Slovak.

4 The idea was briefly discussed in Popovič’s *Teória umeleckého prekladu* [Theory of Literary Translation] (1975) and has since been developed further by Zambor (2012, 186 – 192).

5 Danteologist A. Momigliano even considered this to be a “phonetic transcription” (in Felix 2005, 316). Dante also uses the doubling of consonants to produce raspy-sounding rhymes in his “rime petrose” as well as in other places of the *Comedy* (*seno – senno – pieno*, cf. Purg. XXII, 22 – 23).

6 In this study, verses that pertain specifically to the phonetic properties of either the original text or its translation are deliberately left untranslated, as their semantic content is irrelevant for the purposes of the present analysis.

7 All citations from the *Inferno* in this study are taken from: Alighieri, Dante: *Božská komédia. Peklo* [The Divine Comedy. Inferno] (2nd, revised edition). Translated by Viliam Turčány and Jozef Felix, with commentary by Jozef Felix. Bratislava: Spoločnosť Dante Alighieri Bratislava, 2005.

Felix emphasizes that he and the translator Turčány sought to work in a manner analogous to Dante's own compositional approach, so that both the imagery and the language of the Slovak version of *The Divine Comedy* would be functionally and aesthetically appropriate. To this end, the translation employs a comparable instrumentalization of verse ("Tu výkriky! Tu kvílenie! Tu vytie" v. 22), similar "collision" of words ("rôzne, hrozné", v. 25, "zvuk a rúk", v. 27, "tvorí tu huriavk", v. 28, etc.), a similarly interrupted rhythm, enjambments, and overlapping verse structures, etc. (Felix 2005, 305 – 306).

Canto V is likewise exceptional in terms of Dante's verbal artistry. Throughout the opening part of the canto, Dante employs striking brevity, deliberately "hoarse" rhymes, and an effort to evoke (or at least suggest) the specific atmosphere of this circle, in which a hellish storm roars and thunders, violently sweeping the lustful sinners. The Slovak translation takes these features into account, reproducing, for instance, "hoarse" rhymes (*chrčí – vrčí – tvrdší*), deliberate dissonances, assonances, and alliterations such as "*sem k súdu súri dušu previnilú*" (Inf. V, 15 – 22).⁸

Canto XIII is also notable for its specific rhythmic and phonetic organization, with a strong presence of rough, grating words (*parole aspre*) containing doubled consonants or clusters of consonants with a particular emphasis on *r* and *s*, as well as sharp, piercing *i* sounds: "*Non fronda verde, ma di color fosco; / non rami schietti, ma nodosi e 'nvolti; / non pomi veran, ma stecchi con tòsco. / Non han sì aspri sterpi né sì folti / quelle fiere selvagge che 'n odio hanno / tra Cecina e Corne-to i luoghi còlti*" (Inf. XIII, 4 – 9). These stylistic components played a significant role in Turčány's versification. His Slovak translation contains verses with an analogous emphasis placed on this syllabic typology as well as an attempt to transpose the "phonetic interplay of two adjacent words", for example "*zelene – len*", "*snet – spleť*", "*hustá húšť*". With this stylistic approach, Dante suggests to the reader the nature of the entangling, gnarled infernal grove in this Circle: "*Nie zelene — len čern sa leskne zlostne; / nie rovný snet — len spleť a plno hrčí; / nie ovocie — len jedovaté ostne! / Tak hustá húšť, že drsnejší a tvrdší / sa ani kraj tam pod Cecinou nezdá, kde divoká zver bočí od chatrčí*" (Inf. XIII, 4 – 9).

Dante also makes frequent use of the so-called etymological figure of contemporary rhetoric, which consists of the repetition of sounds derived from the same lexical root, often in combination with alliteration ("*Cred'io ch'ei credette ch'io credesse*", v. 25). Felix (2005, 338) notes that this figure is often perceived today as an overt and aesthetically ineffective form of wordplay; in Dante's time, however, it belonged to the repertoire of so-called "high" style. In this context, beyond its merely decorative function, it also serves to convey Dante's psychological state of confusion. Awareness of such stylistic specificities is therefore crucial for the translator: these are not random, superficial, or self-indulgent sounds or wordplay, but highly functional devices motivated by deeper expressive and semantic purposes.

The suicide victims punished in this circle are attacked by Harpies, which incessantly tear at their wounds and compel them to articulate their suffering in a grotesque manner, as if their speech emerged through hissing blood and they spoke through their bleeding. Dante seeks to evoke the hissing and stuttering quality of the suicides' utterances directly through the sound structure of his verses, notably by accumulating double consonants and, in particular, sibilants: "*stizzo... charso sia scheggia rotta usciva insieme parole e sangue*". Awareness of Dante's unmistakable artistic intention led the translators to construct verses in Slovak that reproduce a comparable

8 Similar instances of wordplay are likewise addressed in the translation. For example, the expression *cherchi cheruti*, reinforced by its rhyme with *querchi* ("cross-eyed"), is partially rendered through the Slovak wordplay "*z rádov radia sa*" (Inf. VII, 38 – 39). The pair *arrostarsi – sarresta* is also translated by means of compensation, that is, relocated to a different textual position as *prestane – prestená* (Inf. XV, 37 – 38). In Inf. XXI, 53 – 54, Dante's sarcasm based on wordplay is likewise transposed in the Slovak translation; a comparable strategy can be observed in Inf. XXV, 33. For further examples of alliteration, see Inf. XXV, 4 – 6.

sequence of sounds: “jak čerstvá trieska, odtrhnutá v kričí, / čo zozadu, keď zapáli sa spredku, / i vzduch i miazgu vypúšťa a syčí” (Inf. XIII, 40 – 44).

The importance of phonetics in the composition of *Inferno* is also visible in Canto XIX, permeated by the blaring of a trumpet (Italian *tromba*, Slovak *trúba*), found in the rhyme of the original verse 5. It is captured in the translation in the same verse, but not at its end as a rhyme. Additionally, the trumpet sound is carried onto the internal structure of the canto's verses: from its first strophe there is a notable euphonic consistency and arrangement (the Slovak translation appears to achieve a stronger euphonic effect here than the original, but this can be understood as a compensation for those places where the original euphony has been lost or weakened, an “expressive weakening” to use Anton Popovič's term) especially in the cumulation of sibilants (the first *terza rima* contains 9 of them, the translated version 15).

As emphasized by Zambor (2012, 186), Turčány sought to select verses that sounded similar or even identical to those of the original. Although the word *trúba* (“trumpet”) does not appear in a rhyme position at the end of the verse, the translation instead employs a euphonic, though formally imprecise, vertical internal rhyme (*trúba* – *tumba*), realized through assonance recurring within the verses (Inf. XIX, 12, 18, and 30: *tu jak* – *slúžia* – *tuná*). It is likely that *trúba* was deliberately not placed in final rhyme position in order to align with Turčány's personal poetics of strict rhyme.

The vowel *u* (*ú*), which evokes the sound of trumpeting, is anticipated as early as the third verse (*núkate*) and subsequently recurs at least once in each of the first ten strophes, either in a stressed syllable or in a position where a metrical accent is expected. As Zambor (2012, 187) explains, expressions such as “*vystúpili*”, “*ó, múdrosť*”, and “*okružlych*” are placed at the beginning of iambic verses, where the accent is expected on the second syllable containing the vowel *ú*. A perceptive reader is thus likely to recognize the deliberate and purposeful deployment of this vowel.

In addition to harsh rhymes, Canto XXVIII also displays a pronounced effort to structure individual verses in a stark acoustic manner, most notably through lexical choices that frequently feature the consonant *r*, for example: *poria, parole, dicer, ora, per narrar, per certo verria, nostro sermone, comprender, ancor, fortunata terra, per li Troiani, e per la lunga guerra, scrive, non erra, per contestare a Ruberto Guisardo, e l'altra ancor, bugiardo, senz' arme, Alardo, etc.* Felix (2005, 385 – 386) cautiously suggests that Dante's use of the name Ceperano in these phonetically calibrated verses was not accidental, as some Dante scholars have argued. Rather, Felix proposes that the toponym was selected primarily for its acoustic value, with Dante deliberately privileging artistic and sound effects over strict historical accuracy (on the grounds that no battle took place there and thus no one could have “gathered the bones” of fallen soldiers, as stated in the text).

LEXICAL-SYNTACTIC MEANS OF EXPRESSION

Turčány's translation reflects the linguistic diversity within the *Comedy* and strives to preserve the poetic innovation and interpretative richness of its language. Dante's neologisms such as “*s'inluia*” (Par. IX, 73, meaning “to become one with somebody, to both be them and be theirs”) and “*t'inmii*” (Par. IX, 81, meaning “that you would become me, unite yourself with me”), rooted in and derived from the Italian pronouns “his” and “mine”, are transposed into Slovak using the same principle, as “*jehovie sa*” (v. 73) and “*vmoji*” (v. 81). The meaning of these words within the text is also elaborated on by another translator and researcher, Pavol Koprda (2020a, 382) in one of his notes on the translation: Dante's neologisms meaning “to enter into you as to become the same as you are”, capture not only a strange entering into another being, but also the “becoming someone”

together with another person through a perfect union of two natures. The neologism “*indracarsi*” is given an equally expressive verb in the Slovak, “*dračiť sa*” (Turčány’s translation of the *Paradiso*, 1986) – to make a dragon of oneself, to act like a dragon (“*Dravý a drzý rod, čo hneď sa dračí*”, Par. XVI, 115).

Koprda’s interpretation of *Paradiso* (2020) differs conceptually from that of Turčány in that it is defined by a strong emphasis on exactness. Drawing on contemporary philosophical scholarship, it proposes the reading of *The Divine Comedy* as an eschatological work concerned with the deepest meaning of human existence, examined within a historically situated philosophical framework. Dante integrates Ancient Greek, Christian, and Arabic philosophical traditions, drawing on the works of Averroes, Aristotle, Avicenna, and numerous Christian texts. At the same time, he employs his own conceptual constructs, reinterpreting and transforming these sources to create a comprehensive ideological superstructure underlying the poem. In particular, during the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, currents such as Averroism were regarded as heretical by the Church, compelling philosophers and poets to adopt various textual strategies to conceal such ideas within their works (cf. Šavelová 2024a).

In this sense, the *Comedy* is closely related to mystical texts (like those by Catherine of Siena, Jacopone da Todi, John of the Cross) characterized by their descriptions of *theosis*, the unity with God and knowledge of divinity, as inherently “*ineffable*” (known as the poetics of ineffability).⁹ Kučerková and Režná (2014, 8) argue that the thematization of these mystical experiences necessarily brings with it a poetic searching for a “new language” that could capture their uniqueness. Dante touches upon this subject in his 13th letter to Cangrande della Scala where he writes that the intellect perceives many things for which we lack words. Even though Dante is not primarily thought of as a religious author, the conceptual foundations of the *Comedy* are rooted in Christian themes – a man’s journey through Hell, Purgatory, and finally Paradise where he glimpses God.¹⁰

The textual strategies used by Dante that serve as a covert approach to the forbidden themes of Averroism while also attempting to capture an ineffable experience – the vision of God and union with Him – are many and include: the use of neologisms (for example “*s’invera*” in Par. XXVIII, 39, meaning “to change into truth, to become truth”; “*s’infutura*” in Par. XVII, 98, meaning “to be made future, to become future”); the use of regional dialects, Latin, and other languages; ambiguous and polysemantic words, syntax and stylizations; ambiguous phraseological expressions; and the hidden direct or indirect citations from many literary, biblical, theological, mythological and philosophical notable works. Koprda (2020b, 102) states that Dante, instead of simply playing with words and their fluctuating imagery, develops a broad palette of symbolism that required the use of an unusual, diverse language. It is also important to remember that the *Comedy* was written in Italian vernacular (*volgare*) which had not yet been officially codified.

Dante’s neologism of “*indovarsi*” (Par. XXXIII, 138) is interpreted as a synonym of “*indiarsi*” (to become divine). Koprda purposefully makes the text more explicit and therefore uses both synonyms in the translation so that the meaning of the verse could be grasped more easily (“*ako sa vboží v kruh, doň vtvárne*”, these neologisms, derived similarly to Dante’s, mean “to become a divine form, to take on a divine shape”). A similar process of derivation is used in the verb “*in-*

9 Recently in the conference proceedings entitled *The Figurativeness of the Language of Mystical Experience: Particularities and Interpretations*, edited by Antonio Barnés and Magda Kučerková. Brno: Masaryk University Press, 2021.

10 Dante also writes about ineffability and human feebleness in face of the supernatural in Par. I, 5 and 127 – 129; XV, 37 – 41; XVIII, 8 – 10; XIX, 64; XXIII, 40 – 45; XXIV, 25 – 27; XXX, 25 – 27 and 118; XXXI, 57, 136 – 138; XXXII, 91 – 93; XXXIII, 7, 57, 58 – 60, 67 – 75, 92, 97 – 99, 106 – 108, 121 – 123, 139 – 141 and 142 – 144.

susarsi (“*t’insusi*”, Par. XVII, 14) that is used to describe the “position” held by Dante’s ancestor Cacciaguidda in paradise: (this is translated to Slovak as “*vhoriš hore*”, meaning “to burn onto the above, to burn up”, where the use of two adjacent words both having both rooted in the word “hore” accentuates the nature of his position (this is possible because of the similarity between the Slovak “hore”, meaning “up”, “above”, and “horieť”, meaning “to burn”). Some other neologisms derived similarly from verbs are “*inciela*” (the infinitive of “*s’incielarsi*”, Par. III, 97, “to get into heaven”) and “*’mparadisa*” (the infinitive of “*s’imparadisarsi*”, Par. XXVIII, 3, “to get into paradise”).

From a linguistic perspective, it is interesting that Koprda, in his attempt to approach the work’s historical context through language, chose in some places to use the regional dialect of Nitra, the development of which can be tracked back to the times of Great Moravia, making it more capable of conveying an “ancient” mode of thought.¹¹ Some words, or their roots, are derived from this dialect in an attempt to reproduce Dante’s creative employment of Italian vernacular languages, Latinisms, antiquated syntax or various wordplay within the language of the *Comedy*. Examples of the words that use the Nitra dialect are: “*nesti*” (Par. XIII, 139), a variant of the standard Slovak “nechci”, meaning “to not want”; “*k perku*” (Par. XV, 90) meaning “decoration” (this word is a variant of the Slovak word “pierko” – a diminutive form of “feather” – young unmarried women give decorative feathers to men as a signal of their interest; they are also worn by the bride, the groom and their wedding guests as it symbolises love, commitment, and joy, although rosemary is often used instead of feathers nowadays); “*bele*” (Par. XV, 121), a variant of the standard Slovak “bdie”, meaning “to keep awake”; “*strežie*” (Par. XXII, 82), derived from the vernacular “strežiť”, “strežat”, meaning “to closely watch, to mind, something or someone” (found in the word “postriežka”, meaning “to lie in wait while hunting” as well as being a name for the place where one does so); “*snet*” (Par. XXVII, 120), meaning “twig” (“konárik” in standard Slovak); the expressions “*sa legárila*” (Par. XXVIII, 35) and “*sa krúha*” (Par. XXVIII, 36), the former being a regional dialect for “being slow, being lazy” and the latter meaning “to wriggle, to squirm” (a variant of the standard “krútiť sa”); the word “*buda*” (Par. XXX, 24), as a form derived from “byt” (meaning “to be”); “*chľíslo*” (Par. XXVIII, 37), as a variant of the standard “chrstlo”, meaning “to splatter or to splash.”

Koprda’s translation also employs words created by either poetic shortenings or creative “rewritings”, for example “*lecidačo*” (Par. IX, 81) meaning “whatever” (“hocičo” in standard Slovak) or “*vtedá*” (Par. XXVIII, 75) meaning “then” (“vtedy” in standard Slovak), and others. In general, Koprda’s usage of expressive idiolectal forms in his translation draws from marginal layers of vernacular vocabulary, historical lexical devices, stylizations, and compositions that express a particular historicity which the reader can perceive.

To contextualize the emergence of Slovak translations of *The Divine Comedy*, it should be noted that Jozef Felix prepared extensive source materials for the poet Viliam Turčány, often consisting of several dozen pages of highly erudite commentary for a single canto. Their collaboration continued until approximately the midpoint of *Purgatorio*, after which Felix’s death left Turčány to complete the translation independently. This shift had a noticeable impact on both the scope and content of the paratextual apparatus, as well as on the translation itself. In comparison with Felix and Koprda’s translations, the paratext accompanying Turčány’s *Paradiso* is considerably more limited in extent. Moreover, unlike Felix, Turčány does not cite any sources, which complicates critical analysis of his work and obscures the motivations underlying his specific translation choices. His translation thus tends toward a largely literal rendering of Dante’s text, in some instances approaching word-for-word translation. Although Turčány does offer occasional explanatory remarks (sometimes brief or seemingly unsystematic), it remains difficult to identify a coherent methodological framework guiding his translation strategies, as no references to other

11 Koprda is native to this region and is closely familiar with its dialect, as attested by his dictionary *Slovník slepčianskeho nárečia* (2nd, revised edition). Nitra: UKF, 2018.

commentators are provided. Furthermore, Turčány does not draw attention to passages that are controversial in their interpretation.

From a purely poetic perspective, however, there is no doubt that Turčány's work is distinguished not only by a high degree of sophistication, inventiveness, and "historical patina," but also by an inimitable style and a remarkable ability to evoke emotions from past centuries through graceful, elevated, often playful, and innovative language. Turčány's poetry and translations alike are characterized by a search for common ground – an intellectual and poetic universe linking his homeland with the wider world – and by a sustained emphasis on humanity's place within that space.

CONCLUSION

From the translator's perspective, a fundamental criterion in the literary translation of poetry – particularly poetry from earlier periods – is the reinforcement of interpretation through a thorough contextualization of the work within the historical and cultural framework in which it was produced or to which it is otherwise connected. This includes the circumstances of the poem's creation, the facts and realities it evokes, as well as its motivations and sources of inspiration. Such contextual embeddedness must be preserved in translation; otherwise, both the poem itself and the perception of the poet risk distortion. At the linguistic level, it is essential to recognize the dynamic interaction between a work's semantic core and its stylistic configuration. At times, semantics may be the dominant factor, while in other cases stylistic considerations prevail; consequently, their relationship cannot be hierarchized and must always be assessed in relation to the specific text being translated.

Contemporary Slovak translators of poetry usually seek to reproduce the full range of characteristics present in the source text as faithfully as possible. This approach constitutes a significant positive development, yet it places considerable demands on the translator both as an interpreter and as a poet, that is, as one who recreates the text in poetic form. At the same time, literary translation must remain sensitive to historical phenomena, which the original text captures in its own distinctive manner, as well as to the historical contexts of works originating in more or less distant periods. Engagement with a wide range of international (and, to a lesser extent, domestic) scholarship – an approach characteristic of Jozef Felix's translation practice in the previous century – has today become an almost indispensable requirement in the process of translating poetry into Slovak. While such engagement offers clear benefits, it also entails certain risks, particularly in cases where multiple interpretations are possible which may lead the translator away from the author's original intention. This risk is especially salient in the translation of works from earlier stages of literary development, where the complexity of philosophical, literary, political, social, and ideological contexts should not be marginalized if the translation aims to convey the author's intended meaning.

Slovak translations of *The Divine Comedy* are characterized either by linguistic historicization, as exemplified in the translations by Felix and Turčány, or by the deliberate use of specific language types and constructs, as in Koprda's translation. In the latter case, words rooted in, or directly drawn from, regional dialects enable the translator to reconstruct the historically situated language of the original text. Both approaches are linguistically distinctive and, in different ways, recreate for the reader the experience of engaging with a historical mode of writing. They also consider Dante's use of neologisms and their semantic function within the text; where direct translation is constrained by metrical or rhythmic limitations, their significance is emphasized in the accompanying paratext.

This historicizing approach gives rise to a notable paradox, as the Italian original – apart from occasional uses of Occitan or passages in Latin – is written in a modern, playful, and inventive language. This quality is nonetheless reflected in the Slovak translations, reinforcing the view that translation is an art form requiring not only a comprehensive understanding of the original in its broadest linguistic, poetological, and cultural contexts, but also a considerable degree of creativity and innovation.

As noted above, translation theory and the principles governing literary translation must take into account the historical context of the source text in a manner that does not obscure the author's authentic message and the specific ways in which it is expressed. When the author's intention cannot be fully conveyed directly in the target text, compensatory strategies become necessary. One such strategy, which has proven both acceptable and beneficial for readers, is the use of paratexts. Through this form of interpretative expansion, readers are able to engage in a distinctive dialogue with the work, its author, and the translator.

SUMMARY

The article explores the linguistic, stylistic, and poetic specificities of Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* and their transposition into Slovak, focusing on the *Inferno* and the *Paradiso*. Grounded in Slovak translation theory and hermeneutic approaches to medieval literature, the study emphasizes the inseparability of semantic and formal components in poetic discourse. Special attention is paid to euphonic organization, rhythm, sound symbolism, neologisms, and authorial idiolect as meaning-generating elements. Using analyses of Slovak translations by Jozef Felix, Viliam Turčány, and Pavol Koprda, the article demonstrates different translation strategies of linguistic historicization, compensation, and creative innovation. The findings confirm that successful poetic translation requires deep contextual interpretation, a sensitivity to historical language, and the use of paratexts where direct transfer is constrained. Translation is thus presented as both a linguistic and creative act.

This work was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under the Contract no. APVV-20-0179. This work was supported by the research project VEGA 2/0092/23 *Translation and translating in the history and present of the Slovak cultural space. Transformations of forms, status and functions: texts, personalities, institutions*.

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