

# Translation ethics under Communism

**Christina Schaeffner**

*Aston University*

Until the end of the Cold War in Europe around 1990, many translation scholars in the former communist countries characterised translation and interpreting as ideology-dependent phenomena of communication which reflect interests of social classes. Translation and interpreting were seen as essential for building a socialist/communist society and for succeeding in the class struggle with a bourgeois ideology. Translation theory was systematically linked to and justified by Marxism-Leninism, and the work of translators was identified as a political task. As part of developing a Marxist-Leninist theory of translation (or more widely: language mediation as a cover term to translation and interpreting), a profile of a socialist translator/interpreter was constructed. This profile included requirements such as having a Marxist-Leninist worldview, representing socialism, translating/interpreting objectively and in line with the historical truth, and act in conformity with the ideology of the communist party. Such role requirements indicate a highly politicized understanding of professional ethos. This presentation will illustrate the consequences such a view of ethics had for translator training and for the work of professional associations. It will also illustrate how translators/interpreters engaged with ethical conflicts they encountered and reflect on translation ethics among dissident groups. The presentation will be based on literature (scholarly publications, textbooks, publications by professional associations such as codes of conduct) and interviews with professional translators and interpreters with first-hand experience of working in a communist country. It will be illustrated mainly with reference to the German Democratic Republic, the Soviet Union, and Bulgaria. This presentation forms part of on-going research into aspects of translation theory and practice in former communist societies. Building on sociological approaches to translation as the conceptual framework, the presentation intends to contribute to the history of Translation Studies (also Ceccherelli et al 2015, Schippel & Zwischenberger 2017).

## References

Ceccherelli, Andrea, Costantino, Lorenzo & Diddi, Cristiano (eds) (2015) *Translation Theories in the Slavic Countries* [Europa Orientalis. Studi e ricerche sui paesi dell'Est europeo, vol. 25]. Salerno: Università di Salerno.

Schippel, Larisa & Zwischenberger, Cornelia (eds) (2017) *Going East: Discovering New and Alternative Traditions in Translation Studies* [Transkulturalität – Translation – Transfer, Bd. 28]. Berlin: Frank & Timme.