
Lost in Translation? – Half a century of translation studies on Czech universities

Lost in Translation? – Half a century of translation studies on Czech universities

The opening of *Lost in Translation? (Ztraceni v překladu?)*, an exhibition dedicated to the history of translation and interpreting studies, took place at the Institute of Translation Studies of Faculty of Arts of CU, on Sunday 10th November. Over three hundred graduates and teachers of translatology, as well as representatives of professional organisations – most importantly of the Czech Union of Interpreters and Translators – attended the event.

The history of the Institute of Translation Studies, a university-level centre that trains translators and interpreters in five languages (English, French, German, Russian and Spanish), began in 1963.

It was that year, when translation and interpreting studies were established at the University of 17th November (Univerzita 17. listopadu) in Prague for the very first time. “I must say, the team that was formed around the studies and was led by Professor Ivan Poldauf consisted of extremely capable people. They all took their job really seriously since they realised our country lacked this type of language studies,” recalls Jana Rejšková, graduate (1968) and teacher of translatology.

Translation studies had a special meaning at the University of 17th November, as the university educated mainly students from developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, whereas translation studies were intended for Czech and Slovak students only. In 1969, a relatively independent Institute of Translation Studies was established at the university, with a sister institution in Bratislava.

After the University of 17th November was dissolved in 1974, Translation Studies was transferred into an independent department of Charles University, whereas the sister institution in Bratislava fused in fact with various philological departments of Komenský University.

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of Translation Studies, the Institute of Translation Studies organised the exhibition *Lost in Translation?*, which focuses on three interconnected themes: history of translation and interpreting studies, memories of the graduates and the social-political context of being a translator or interpreter before 1989.

“Interpreting was quite a hazardous occupation. We got in touch with varying kinds of very confidential information on international level. Therefore, the State Security had a special division to check and spy on interpreters. They monitored our mail, who we made phone calls with, who we talked with, who we made friends with,” reads the memory of a seventy-two-year-old interpreter, Violeta Uribe, on one of the exhibition panels.

The exhibition presents quite a few other similar experiences. Together they complete an authentic picture of the history of the studies – studies somehow “lost”, studies for which a possibility of university education is of key importance. However short may the history of Translation Studies be, in comparison with other humanities, it shows us one thing particularly: numerous graduates of translation and interpreting, regardless of whether they attended the University of 17th November or Charles University, got to the top in their field. The memories of some of them, for example Dana Hábová or Milan Dvořák, may be observed at the exhibition of the Institute of Translation Studies in Šporkův Palace (Hybernská 3, Prague 1) until 30th June 2014.

The main sponsors of the exhibition *Lost in Translation?* are Directorate-General for Translation of the European Commission and European Commission Representation in the Czech Republic.

Translation:

Helena Hradilová is a student of Translation and Interpreting (Czech, English and German) at the Institute of Translation Studies of Faculty of Arts of Charles University in Prague. She is very fond of languages, meeting new people and getting to know other cultures, which is one of the reason she became a tutor of the Erasmus Club of Faculty of Arts at Charles University. To further support Erasmus students in exploring the Czech culture and student life at Charles University, she joined also iForum, which she sees as a great opportunity to maintain contact between students of different cultures and as a possibility to improve their journalism and communication skills.



Proofreading:

Poppy Gerrard-Abbott is an Erasmus student studying BA Humanities at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University and her home university is the University of Essex in England. She chose to write for the iForum to build on her journalism skills and meet other aspiring journalists; to grow closer to the social and creative life of Charles University and to learn more about Czech culture and life in Prague through attending local events and researching Czech issues and current affairs.

Poppy saw the iForum as an exciting opportunity to pursue her interests in politics, culture and history whilst meeting other Erasmus students. She thinks it's a very worthwhile and fun experience that has brought some exciting opportunities her way, extended her writing skills and her knowledge of the Czech Republic, and hopes Charles University continues to offer such placements to future students.