

## THE ROLE OF TRANSLATIONS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF WORLD CULTURE

The V World Congress of the International Federation of Translators held at Lahti in August 1966 has accepted the motion proposed on behalf of the Polish delegation to gather and publish under the patronage of FIT a book entitled “The Role of translation in the Development of World Culture”. In this book we would like to insert the statements of the most eminent philologists and connoisseurs of this problem, evaluating the weight and importance of the translators’ work in the past and at present.

As on behalf of the Polish Delegation the undersigned tabled the motion, they availed of the occasion and charged him with the realization of the project.

With the objective to collect the material a questionnaire was sent out comprising among others the following questions:

— Which first works translated into the language of your country have exerted the greatest influence on the development of culture in your country?

— Which important works have enacted a big role and exerted a great influence on the culture of your country during the XVIII, XIX and XX centuries?

— Does one find among the translators’ names those of your country’s great writers? Could you quote some interesting examples?

— Do you think that the role of the translations will further increase? Will the translations of the belles-lettres continue to prevail in the development of world culture?

Or do you reckon that in future the importance of the scientific and technical translations will steadily increase and that their meaning for the world progress will be bigger than the translations of belles-lettres?

— Of what importance is the knowledge of foreign languages for the development of world culture and making use of them independently from the translation?

In the last version of the questionnaire the following question has been:

— As there exists the necessity of further, equal development of world science and

technology do you think it is proper to support the efforts of many national and international institutions for example ISO (International Organisation for Standardization), which are endeavouring to make the technical and scientific terminology uniform and one-valued in all languages (especially the terminology of new inventions and discoveries) without violating their own national basic stock of words and rules of language? To what extent do you mean this process is necessary and realizable in the present partition of the world?

The material collected until now induced me to make a review of the more interesting statements to set up a provisional summary of what has been received and finally to draw some conclusions. I think it to be in the interest of all translators that our considerations should find repercussions at the proceedings of the approaching Sixth Congress of the FIT.

To begin with I shall quote some fragments of the statements demonstrating how important a role has been attributed by the experts of the subject—to translations.

Fred Robinson from the Stanford University while mentioning the translated works which brought the most substantial influence on the culture of the United States says, among others: “The Bible, the works of Aristotle, Plato, Greek and Latin poetry and philosophy, Italian and French literature of the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, 19c German philosophy—in short, all the great works which have moulded modern European thought have been read by Englishmen and Americans primarily in translation. It is hard to imagine what our modern culture would be if one removed all works which had been made accessible in translation”... From every period of English one can think of the names of important and influential translators: King Alfred the Great’s translations from Latin into English provided the beginnings of a coherent and continuous English culture, while other translators of the period, like Byrhtferth and Aelfric continued the tradition of translation. In the Middle English period, literary and theological translation was a major occupation of the greatest writers: Chaucer (many of whose best works are in effect loose translations from Italian, French, etc.) translated Boethius, scientific works, etc. Lydgate translated philosophical works from Latin, Italian, etc.”... “To write about famous translators in English is to write about the history of English culture.”

Here are the remarks of prof. Jean Fabre: “Parmi les traductions qui me paraissent

avoir eu une influence majeure sur la culture française en son premier développement et en son nouvel essor au 16<sup>e</sup> siècle, je me contente de mentionner:

- Vers 1260 *La légende dorée* de Jacques de Voragine (anonyme).
- De 1523 à 1528 *La Bible* traduite par Lefèvre d'Étaples.
- *Le courtisan* de Balthazar Castiglione (tr. Collin 1535).
- *Le Prince* de Machiavel (tr. Coppel 1553).
- Les Œuvres Morales de Plutarque traduites par Amyot (1572).

Among the 18 items (works) which according to the opinion of prof. Jean Fabre considerably influenced the evolution of French culture after the XVII century such works, first of all, must be mentioned as those of Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky's 'Crime and Penalty', Wladyslaw Reymont's 'Peasants'." The outstanding Soviet critic and linguist prof. Siemion Maszinski writes: "Already the oldest Russian literature was greatly influenced by foreign one, above all by that of Byzantium. The translations of liturgical books and all other works both of religious and laic character became the components of the written word of early Russia.

From the XVIII century on nearly every writer was at the same time a translator. In the course of the process of cultural exchange the national Russian literature became permanently enriched and perfected. In the XVIIIth century Shakespeare and the writers of Enlightenment began to be intensively translation. In the XIXth century the greatest poets and prosaists of Europe were translated still in their lifetime. Goethe and Schiller, Byron and Dickens, Balzac and George Sand were in Russia presumably not less popular and not less read than their original works in their own countries.

The well known translator of Slavonic literature into Danish Erik Horskjaer points out the essential importance of translations for small nations. He emphasizes that although quite a big portion of the population of Denmark possess a superficial knowledge of one or more world languages, the translations play an important part in cultural relations of that country, Taking direct reference to the role of translations in the growth of culture of his country Horskjaer writes: "Strangely enough the first translation of any big significance in Denmark was made from a work written by a Danish author—from Latin into Danish. In the end of the

12th century *Saxo Grammaticus*, the secretary of the archbishop Absalon wrote his monumental work *Gesta Danorum* (Deeds of the Danes) in excellent, nearby classical Latin. His manuscript was first printed in Paris 1514, and in 1575 the great humanist *Anders Sorensen Vedel* had his translation of this national document printed in Copenhagen in a highly developed Danish language—an important contribution to the Danish written language's constitution, still more important than the Bible-translations of the same century. Beside that his translations of Saxo was a milestone in the development of a specific Danish cultural tradition, which is nearby unbroken in a period of more than 1000 years. A hint of Saxo's role in the World's culture is the fact, that in his *Gesta Danorum* we find the very first version of the famous *Hamlet* legend, which *Shakespeare* used in his tragedy. *Anders Sorensen Vedel's* Saxo-translation never lost its value. It had a great influence on the rising romanticism in the beginning of the 19th century, and in 1917 it was reedited *in facsimile* in Copenhagen.”...

Speaking of the influence of translated works on Danish culture *Horskjaer* says: “In 1814 compulsory school-education was introduced in Denmark, and the political liberation in 1848 widened the reading public enormously. In the broad stream of translations—many of them, of course, of little value—we find a lot of excellent books. For instance *Pushkin* and *Lermontov* were translated already in the 1840s, *Gogol* shortly after. The big Danish realistic author *St. St. Blicher* made translations from English—most famous are his translations from *Ossian's* poems, whereas the founder of the Danish University Extension, the writer and psalmist *Grundtvig* opened the Anglo-Saxon poems for Danish readers.

At the end of the 19th century translations assumed a mass-character. All the great Russian writers—*Tolstoy*, *Dostoevski*, *Turgenev* etc. were nearby completely influence on the development of Danish realistic literature. The famous Danish poet and novelist *J. P. Jacobsen* started his literary career with a translation—*Darwin's 'Origin of Species'*—into Danish.

The brisk development of the working class in the century's end called forth a lot of translations as well from political works as *Marx* and *Engels* as literary works. *Gorki* became popular in the Danish people already from the beginning of his literary career.”

The assistant prof. Mrs. Hana Jechova speaks about the role played by translations in Czechoslovakian culture: “Comme la plupart des littératures européennes la littérature tchèque commence par des traductions. La traduction des textes sacrés surgit peu à peu du commentaire philologique et sous cet aspect, elle joue un rôle prépondérant dans la constitution de la langue littéraire. (Au moyen âge, les premières traductions tchèques concernent l’oraison dominicale, le Credo, les prières générales, les évangiles et les psaumes. Leurs traducteurs étaient anonymes.) Un peu plus tard, dès le commencement du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle, ce sont les traductions d’œuvres conçues et interprétées sous l’aspect esthétique qui représentent une grande partie de la production littéraire tchèque. Dans ce cas, il s’agissait souvent de larges adaptations avec beaucoup d’allusions relatives à la situation du pays et du temps. Le texte ou plusieurs textes combinés pris dans des littératures étrangères n’étaient qu’une inspiration évoquant la création originale. (On peut citer par exemple l’Alexandride tchèque conçue d’après le texte du Gualter de Castillion que le traducteur ou plutôt l’auteur a enrichi de plusieurs allusions profondes et significatives exprimant la situation tchèque du temps. Dans le domaine des belles-lettres, on ne distinguait pas précisément traductions et œuvres originales et les plus grand écrivains médiévaux considéraient la traduction comme la création artistique la plus noble et la plus respectable qui soit.)’ ... ‘Les traductions étaient d’une grande importance à l’époque précédant le mouvement de l’hussitisme – elles le préparaient d’une certaine façon.’ ... ‘Depuis la Renaissance, les traductions jouaient un rôle prépondérant dans tous les domaines de la création littéraire et leurs auteurs étaient parfois les premiers théoriciens tchèques de l’art de traduire et de l’art poétique en général’ ... ‘Il faudrait citer encore beaucoup d’écrivains dont l’ambition fut d’adapter pour le public tchèque les textes de diverses littératures européennes servant de base au développement de la pensée humaniste.’ ... ‘Ces traducteurs étaient en même temps les auteurs les plus célèbres et leurs traductions équivalaient des œuvres originales et se confondaient parfois avec la création authentique. L’activité dans le domaine de la traduction était parfois accompagnée des recherches scientifiques linguistiques ou du travail dans des maisons d’édition dont certains traducteurs et propagateurs de la littérature devenaient les propriétaires. La traduction était l’objet d’un vif intérêt et si elle servait parfois d’inspiration à la création

artistique originale, elle réveillait l'activité dans tous les domaines de la vie culturelle.'... 'Les traductions jouèrent aussi un rôle très important dans des époques postérieures : en aidant à imposer de nouvelles idées esthétiques et philosophiques. Les poètes les plus célèbres prenaient part à ces activités en collaborant parfois à des traductions collectives d'œuvres choisies de la littérature générale. Par exemple, les traductions des œuvres de Shakespeare attirent l'attention des traducteurs tchèques depuis la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle jusqu'à nos jours et elles servent souvent de point de départ à des disputes théoriques se déroulant sur le plan de l'histoire littéraire.'... 'Les traductions représentées par les meilleurs poètes (par exemple Jaroslav Vrchlický, J. V. Sládek, Eliška Krásnohorská etc.) continuaient à créer la partie importante de la production littéraire et on les considérait parfois comme des œuvres de la même portée esthétique que les poésies originales. (La traduction de 'Pan Tadeusz' par Eliška Krásnohorská jouait par exemple un tel rôle dans le développement de l'épopée tchèque à la fin du siècle.) Dans les moments dangereux pour l'existence du peuple, on cherchait parfois le soutien moral précisément dans les traductions des œuvres témoignant de l'indépendance de la pensée humaine. On peut citer par exemple l'introduction – manifeste des œuvres de Shakespeare pendant la Grande Guerre, les traductions de Mickiewicz et de Slowacki pendant la deuxième guerre mondiale etc.'...

It is also worth while mentioning the answers dealing with the reasons responsible for the increase of translations as well as with the development trends in belles-lettres and scientific literature also pointing out the significance of the knowledge of foreign languages.

Many answers to the questionnaire lay emphasis on the "unity of the world", on the "cultural union of the world" etc. which would imply that in the understanding of the persons inquired a translation is an intentional activity which should add to the speeding up of friendly relations among nations. Amid others it is the question of amplifying those works which the world leading translators have already undertaken and channeled through some branches of FIT, namely the process of coordination and possibly far going unification of the lexical units particularly the latest and newly emerging ones. Prof Jean Fabre from Paris writes: "Il convient de souhaiter que les œuvres de caractère strictement technique soient rédigées dans les divers pays dans une des langues d'usage international courant ou aussitôt

traduites dans une de ces langues par des moyens mécaniques. Pour les œuvres d'ordre littéraire mais aussi philosophique ou historique où le talent de l'écrivain et le génie d'un peuple ne peuvent s'exprimer que dans la langue nationale, il convient de développer des études qui permettront de leur trouver dans l'autre pays des traducteurs particulièrement qualifiés par leur compétence et leur talent."...

Walter May, the translator of Russian literature into English, writes: "The role of translation is bound to increase, because the world is growing smaller, and the links ever more closely bound. International activity is on the increase. To avoid world wars, world starvation, world epidemics, and so on international bodies have been set up, and the very word 'international' has become international. I judge that the part of artistic translations will decline, and that of scientific translations will increase, speaking relatively, of course. But there will be more translation in absolute terms. I think that the spiritual power of artistic literature is greater than the power of scientific works.

The knowledge of a foreign language is like a second pair of eyes or ears. One's whole horizon is enlarged, one's whole understanding of one's fellow-man is deepened and enriched. One sees oneself in perspective for the first time. There is an end of bigotry, of chauvinism, of flagwagging, patriotism, and there is a beginning of human cooperation and mutual help. The cultural treasures of other nations lie open before you. You are able to share the heritage of other nations, and to help them to share yours. Barriers separating peoples are thrown down, and suspicion gives way to understanding. The brotherhood of man becomes a realisable ideal. Co-operation replaces competition. In the world of literature, ideas become cross-fertilised, the experience of others can be usefully employed to mutual benefits standards of art can rise, new heights can be achieved together. Finally wars can be made virtually impossible when people know and understand one another and our common human problems."

Professor Julian Krzyzanowski from Warsaw says about the future of translations: "Translations of scientific and technical works are—ex definitionem—destined for the privileged, for the experts possessing scientific qualifications, so to say, for family fathers, but their wives and children will have their interests gratified by belles-lettres. If so, such



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translations are expected to grow more numerous and probably, as far as their quantity is concerned, they may overgrow scientific ones. But I repeat that not being a prophet I cannot figure to myself the life in 'a new and glorious world' confined only to the interiors of technical plants. In other words I do not think 'the ant-swarm' to be the ideal of a perfect human society (...) Literature is one of the arts differing from musical and plastic ones as it employs the material appropriate only for it, its substance being—the language. A painting in an Egyptian pyramid or on a Greek vase is more or less—which does not count much—comprehensible for every spectator; with a melody preserved for thousands of years would be likewise, whereas literary texts are dumb if we do not know their language and if we do not translate them into to-day's language, I should rather say into numerous languages. The skill of such transposition or transmission possible only in the shape of translations abolish the barriers of time and space and allows a to-day's reader to get an insight into the adventures of Odysseus or Eneas or even into those of the far early heroes of the Mesopotamian era, lets him know them as his long-ago ancestors and thus he begins to consider himself a descendant of men who lived thousands of years ago, had their own joys and sorrows like us and this is the deepest and the most substantial significance of the work of translators." Prof. S. Maszynski from the USSR says: "In my country translation activities after the October Revolution took enormous proportions. During the past half century nearly all foreign classics have been translated into Russian and more than often into the languages of the USSR nations. Presently 'the Library of World Literature' comprising 250 volumes is being prepared with great care by the publishing house 'Russian Literature'."...

... "As the growth of relations among nations as well as cultural exchange is bound to increase, the role of belles-lettres translations will permanently increase too. This process spreads out more and more distinctly. Along with that the culture of translations will no doubt augment because the artistic translation will always strive to compete with the original. It does not make sense to set scientific and technical translations against belles-lettres. Those are two separate processes which in no case exclude each other." «Nowadays the knowledge of foreign languages has a greater importance than ever. Our planet is getting more and more crowded. All nations independently of how far they live from one another felt themselves



neighbours and as such they must get to know themselves and be in contact with. As regards for example studies about literature one of the main tasks is the study of national literature in connection with the complicated process of the interacting influence of world literature. And this cannot be done without the knowledge of foreign languages.”

Eryk Horskjaer formulates the problem as follows: “In our days the translations have preserved and even developed their big role in our literary life. More than half the books printed in Danish now are translations. The Danish people is very open-minded and it follows with big interest the literatures of practically all countries and their political and social development.

The amount of translated technical and scientific literature into Danish is not overwhelming, as the students must have beforehand a rather solid knowledge of at least English or German. In the later years an increasing number of students have also taken up Russian—mostly in order to use the advanced Russian text-books and scientific materials.

I am therefore positive in my opinion, that the translations of belles-lettres will prevail in the time to come and make their big and noble contribution to the development of world-culture and to the increasing contacts between all the world’s peoples.”

From the interesting and long-drawn reasoning of the Assitant Prof. Mrs Hana Jechova with regard to the questions set out in the second part of the questionnaire worth mentioning are at least some fragments: “L’augmentation de l’intérêt pour traductions coïncide avec l’élargissement de la littérature en général. La liquidation de l’analphabétisme, les nouvelles formes de l’éducation scolaire, les moyens du colportage de la littérature, les nouveaux types des contacts internationaux réveillant le désir d’obtenir des informations concernant les autres pays etc.”...

“Pour l’avenir, on peut croire que le rôle des traductions va augmenter encore, mais leur forme devra s’adapter à de nouvelles conditions sociales et culturelles. Les changements vont, semble-t-il, se produire surtout dans le domaine des traductions scientifiques. Les traductions des textes scientifiques sont indispensables pour le développement de la science qui doit être internationale. Mais en même temps, on publie tant d’œuvres scientifiques qu’il est presque impossible d’être tout à fait au courant de tout ce qui se passe même si l’on se

limite à un étroit domaine scientifique. Dans cette situation, on ne peut compter qu'avec la traduction des œuvres les plus importantes, mais il faut prévoir un riche élargissement de la documentation scientifique exigeant des équipes de traducteurs parfaitement instruits du point de vue linguistique ainsi que scientifique.”

In spite of attaching a great importance to scientific translations, Mrs. Hana Jechova adds: “Les traductions des belles-lettres ont toujours constitué une grande partie de la production littéraire et il ne faut pas prétendre que leur rôle va diminuer.”

Here are the fragments of the statements of the late professor of hindu philology Mr Hiranmoy Ghoshala: “Translations of belles-lettres will definitely continue to prevail in the development of world culture. Translations of scientific and technical works will no doubt increase, but I am inclined to think that these will not take precedence over translations of belles-lettres. I think we are already getting glimpses of the coming times when the world will have surfeit of science and technique, and a New Age of true Humanism will dawn, making science and technique handmaids of Man and not his domineering mistresses.”... “The world getting metaphorically smaller and smaller, knowledge of foreign languages is proving to be more and more essential and urgent.”... “To my mind the conception of One World should not tend to liquidate national boundaries but to bind the world together with ties of tolerance and mutual understanding. In this translation of belles-lettres has, indeed, a great role to play.”

Dr Anders Osterling, president of the Noble Prize Committee, says among others: “I am certain that belles-lettres meet the world growing demand but I do not think we should expect in Sweden a considerable increase of translations as nowadays belles-lettres are mostly read in the original language (formerly it was read in German, now prevails English).”

Besides those cited above, in the questionnaire took part the following persons: prof. Kiparsky, dr M. Widnäss (Finland), prof. Ervino Pocar and the member of the Council of FIT: Linda Bertelli (Italy), prof. Brooks Otis (Stanford University) and director of the National Translation Center, Keith Botsford (USA), several years president of the Swedish Penclub, Mr Johannes Edfelt (Sweden), dr Endre Bojtár (Hungary), prof. G. Gatsche

Chiladze, the outstanding translators of Polish belles-lettres (USSR), an expert on the history of translations Alfred Pansini (Paris), an expert on the history of translations in Poland, dr Jadwiga Zietarska (Warsaw University) and others.

Nearly all participants in the questionnaire express their conviction that all translators belong to those men who should contribute to further realization of intellectual and cultural unity of the world irrespective of its lack in economical and political fields. How can translators beside their every-day work contribute to the acceleration of this important process?

The translators of the contemporary belles-lettres as well as scientific and technical literature come across great difficulties in determining the meaning of the quickly developing vocabulary (especially that of science and technics) in all fields of life, not to speak about dialects and slangs readily introduced into belles-lettres. Nation-wide dictionaries and those of foreign words grow quickly old as the new-appearing scientific and technical terminology cannot be found in them. How can one account for that? Why in spite of all efforts aiming at bringing people together, made by politicians in politics, economists in trade and tourism, activists in tourism—all of whom try to introduce even into everyday life popularly known international words—instead of bringing people closer, at least within the same linguistic families or groups, we permanently extend the tower of Babel and seclude ourselves for one another?

Linguistic science which came into being in the XIXth century undertook until now a lasting fight against all foreign words appearing in our national languages, like Germanisms, Gallicisms, Russicisms, maraconisms etc., incidentally clearing away many words which without detriment to the national language could enrich Polish language and make it more accessible for foreigners. Under the pressing influence of scientists reinforced by various national movements nobody until now has been courageous enough to declare himself in favour of a controlled and authorized acceptance of foreign words into national languages. In the meantime the world is plunged in a hard and chaotic fight. On the one hand national languages not only do not imbibe, but on the contrary, clear away the international vocabulary which has already been generally accepted in the national language and replace

it with artificial monsters making the vocabulary, already sufficiently complicated, more involved; on the other hand dictionaries of international foreign words in various national languages grow wild into unnatural proportions and particular foreign words owing to their utility do not let, in defiance of the purists, to be pushed out of the national vocabulary.

Violent fight for the national shape of all words in a native language played in some historical periods (especially in the XIXth century) a progressive role. But we must also keep in mind another process, namely that nation-wide language, owing to the development of communications as well as a result of the impact of radio, press, books, theatre, and TV succumbs to unification and previous differences originating from dialects and jargons disappear.

Let us draw some conclusions from the considerations dwelt upon until now. And so we can state:

1. The role of translations of literary, scientific and technical texts is for the world-culture of enormous importance, for the most part positive one.

2. The rapidly world-wide developing scientific and technical vocabulary, up to now estimated at 1,5 million words, raises colossal difficulties for all translators and delays the technical and economical development of mankind.

3. At present when the world is faced with the necessity of a great and universal scientific growth it must cope with the following tasks:

a) Speeding up the introducing of the international vocabulary, first of all in science and technics. It is the very same necessity that at some time caused the birth of the international language in pharmacy, medicine, chemistry, and mathematical symbols, communication codes, etc.

b) Along with the accomplishment of this process the lexical treasury of national languages must be taken into account, otherwise it will meet with strong resistance.

What has been done up to now in this respect and what are the hindrances standing in the way of hither to existing works of normalization and unification of a vocabulary on the international scale.

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) in Geneva called into being

in 1946 by the United Nations Standardizing Coordination Committee (UNSCC) cannot attain the expected results in spite of all efforts. In several countries two tendencies keep on winning:

1. The new-born terminology often takes such forms which are unacceptable for other languages, and

2. even in case a new word could be absorbed into a language in its original or near form, national institutions exercising control over terminology fix their own lexical unit often totally different.

Several organizations occupying themselves with the vocabulary begin to employ computers in order to break the terminological barrier. It seems that without new resolutions and recommendations of the international organizations at the UN and UNESCO level the unification of terminology will advance at a snail's pace.

This being so, the circle of Polish translators have decided to lay before the FIT and the UNESCO Committee the following postulates:

1. to appeal to scientists as well as to institutions exercising control over the new-emerging vocabulary for:

a) endeavouring to give to new inventions and discoveries synonymous names of such readings which could be accepted by possibly great number of languages without the necessity of applying a linguistic calque,

b) strict adhering by lexicological and lexicographical institutions to the principles agreed on by ISO and their national counterparts as regards the unification of technical and scientific vocabulary. Actual practise shows a great deal of discrepancies, making translators works as well as further development of science and technics difficult,

2. making an appeal to national institutions busy with the problems of scientific and technical lexical units that, without violating their own language, as much as possible be done by them to introduce into their vocabulary the new-emerging terminology in the reading closely nearing that given to an object or an idea by the country where the word appeared first,

3. issuing under the auspices of UNESCO a polyglot theoretical dictionary, which

demonstrating the etymological bond of the hitherto applied scientific and technical terminology, would facilitate further works of standardization and unification of the international vocabulary.

Apart from that it seems obligatory that all scientists individually as well as respective organizations pay more attention to that problem. On the other hand all translator organizations, especially the members of FIT, should, independently of their literary or scientific and technical main interests actively support the prevailing and future decisions of UNESCO, ISO and other competent international institutions with regard to standardization and unification of the scientific and technical terminology in order to speed up the exchange of scientific documentation and technical progress in the world.

In a permitting atmosphere, which new postulates and instructions of UN and UNESCO may create, linguists might also yield to the pressure of international organizations and making use of thousands uselessly stored scientific linguistic works treating of the past linguistic unity, so called “original languages” (protolanguages), and would join their efforts in order to attain the aims which, no doubt, to many of them since long have seemed logically well founded but which no linguist ever dared to touch due to the wrongly understood defence of national interest.

Car le mot, qu'on le sache, est un être vivant. (Victor Hugo)

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Source : *Babel*, vol. 18, n° 4, 1972, p. 21-28