

Untiring Efforts in a Pivotal Role: A Tribute to Ivana Čeňková

Among academic disciplines, interpreting studies is still a rather small and specialized field, even though it has made impressive progress since its formative years half a century ago. Back then, in the 1980s, academics with a scholarly interest in interpreting were still a tiny and widely dispersed group, its members typically working on their own within their national context and not necessarily aware of each other's efforts. Moving from west to east across the globe, names like Brian Harris in Canada, Margareta Bowen in the United States, Daniel Gile in France, Ingrid Kurz in Austria, Laura Gran in Italy, Heidemarie Salevsky in Germany, Andrzej Kopczyński in Poland, Bistra Alexieva in Bulgaria and Masaomi Kondo in Japan might come to mind – and, for sure, Ivana Čeňková in what was then still Czechoslovakia, on the western fringe of the Soviet sphere of influence. This geographical and geopolitical position in the very heart of Europe also proved highly significant for Ivana Čeňková's academic career, which has connected me with her for over three decades. It is that career to which I would like to pay tribute in this *laudatio*. Even more so, however, I relish this opportunity to also celebrate Ivana as a colleague and friend whose warm personality has always been as radiant as to hide from view the enormous amounts of hard work and untiring efforts that she has devoted to our field and community.

Very soon after the fall of the Iron Curtain, I had the good fortune to visit the Institute of Translation Studies at Charles University with Mary Snell-Hornby, who had made it a priority as the first incumbent to the newly created Chair of Translation Studies at the University of Vienna to reach out to colleagues in Central and Eastern Europe. Entering the building in Hybernská street to meet Zuzana Jettmarová and Ivana Čeňková, we walked past a pile of coal used to heat the classrooms in the long-neglected late-Baroque Sporck palace. Poor conditions, no doubt, but all the more impressive the scholarly achievements we came to learn about. To begin with, the aptly named Institute of Translation Studies (*Ústav translatologie*) had existed for nearly 30 years while its Vienna counterpart was still struggling to shed its designation as a translator and interpreter training school. Moreover, our colleagues in Prague were launching a scholarly book series, *Folia translatologica*, when the Benjamins Translation Library was only just getting off the ground. (A volume based on the Central European Symposium hosted in Vienna in late 1991 was published as *Folia translatologica* Volume 1.) Only dedicated teamwork and leadership could explain such accomplishments under difficult circumstances, and here again Vienna, with its single professor pushing for scholarly progress in the face of entrenched traditionalists, could only look up to Prague. It was obvious that Ivana Čeňková was playing a crucial role, not least in all matters pertaining to interpreting, which was and still is my special academic interest. And so I was thrilled to learn about her academic magnum opus about simultaneous interpreting, published in 1988. Though written in Czech, with only a two-page abstract in French accessible to me, *Teoretické aspekty simultánního tlumočení* gave a clue to Ivana's research as well as to her unique role in bridging East and West.

Although hard to imagine today, it would have seemed logical at the time to have the abstracts at the end of her book only in French and Russian. These happened to be Ivana's working languages as an interpreter, but of course their significance went much further. As I was to learn only much later, from research done by one of my MA students for her thesis on the life and work of interpreting scholar Ivana Čeňková (Kubes 2013),

Ivana had spent some of her childhood in Belgium, learning Russian as well as French, and later, while training to become an interpreter in Prague in the 1970s, studied abroad with both Ghelly Chernov in Moscow and Danica Seleskovitch in Paris. To anyone with a basic understanding of the field of interpreting studies during its formative years, Ivana's unique role in linking the theoretical foundations of the Paris School with Chernov's psycholinguistic approach and quantitative research will be readily apparent. And had her work, like Chernov's, been published in English, her international reputation as a leading interpreting scholar would have been much more readily established. But Ivana did not work for international fame; she worked for the field and for the profession. In service of the latter, she was active in many initiatives of the Czech professional association JTP, for which she compiled a bibliography of publications on interpreting in 1995. She was also a founding member of ASKOT, the Czech association of conference interpreters, and worked to promote the status of conference interpreting in her country, which she also did most splendidly through her work as Vaclav Havel's interpreter over the course of ten years. As an academic, on the other hand, she remained committed to doing original research, on such topics as quality and directionality, particularly in relation to return and relay interpreting, on which she authored key publications (Čeňková 2015). But however much could be said about Ivana Čeňková the scholar, even more should be said about her efforts and achievements as an educator on a number of levels.

Training the next generation of Czech interpreters would naturally constitute the core of Ivana Čeňková's educational mission, and one which she accomplished over some three decades. Here again, though, the way in which she went far beyond meeting expectations deserves special recognition. In a field that has long been characterized by a distinctly professional – or even vocational – orientation, Ivana Čeňková the educator did not stop at imparting professional knowledge and skills but kept pushing for the highest of academic standards. This is reflected most clearly in the numerous empirical Master's thesis projects completed under her supervision (see Čeňková 2001). Many of these have been brought to the attention of the global research community thanks to their listing in Daniel Gile's *CIRIN Bulletin*; others have been made available as chapters in a collective volume edited by Ivana Čeňková (2008) as Volume 10 in the *Folia translologica* series. Twenty years after the publication of her book mentioned above, that collective volume bears a title that could also be seen as epitomizing Ivana's commitment to the advancement of teaching and research at her alma mater and beyond. *Prague Translation Studies: the Next Generation* celebrates 45 years of translator and interpreter education at Charles University, Prague, and showcases five research projects by MA students, three of which focus on simultaneous interpreting.

Among the many convictions I fully share with Ivana is the crucial importance of high-quality MA-level research as a foundation for advanced (doctoral) research in our field. Needless to say, Ivana's efforts in this regard have produced a number of excellent young scholars, in effect ensuring that there will be a next generation of interpreting researchers at the University of Prague, or wherever they may decide to go.

Ivana's commitment to high-level research training notwithstanding, her success in grooming the next generation is probably even more tangible in the profession, in at least three different ways: One has to do with the European Master's in Conference Interpreting (EMCI), in which she played a leading role for over two decades. This is linked,

secondly, to her indispensable contribution to the efforts by EU institutions to prepare for the Czech Republic's accession in 2004, making sure that there would be enough highly competent conference interpreters in the Czech booth. Thirdly, and less visibly perhaps, Ivana also played a pioneering role in setting up training for interpreters in community settings, which is yet another facet of her university career for which I consider the two of us kindred spirits.

It should be evident from these few paragraphs that their author feels a strong sense of communion with the colleague to which this *laudatio* is dedicated. With regard to the discipline of interpreting studies, it is the shared conviction and lived experience that combining scholarship and professional practice as well as academic research and teaching is possible, and indeed vital, for our field, and that interpreting must be viewed and embraced in a broad sense that accommodates the imperatives of high-level diplomacy as well as the communicative needs of individuals who do not have a sufficient command of the society's language. It has been a privilege for me that this common ground has been shared over the years not only in abstract terms. Ever since that first visit to Prague, there have been opportunities for our shared academic commitments to become complemented by an amicable relationship. Aside from meeting at many conferences, not least the ones organized at Charles University in Prague, those friendly relations were deepened, for instance, during my week of teaching a theory course in Prague at Ivana's invitation in 2008 and in particular by her stay at the University of Vienna in the framework of Erasmus staff mobility in 2019.

As a conclusion – to every year of hard work, Ivana's Season's greetings are no less unique than her lifetime of achievement: a warm personal message, emailed right on Christmas Eve, accompanied by a photo that captures the wintry mood at the family's countryside cottage. Judging by her enormous workload and outstanding dedication, Ivana could not possibly have taken sufficient advantage of that peaceful and relaxing place over the years. On the occasion of her seventieth birthday, it seems justified to hope that she will be able to do so a bit more in the years ahead, for which I would like to convey my very best wishes.

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