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## Methods in Translation History: summer school Translation in History – History in Translation (September 2018)

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## Conference Report

### Methods in Translation History: summer school Translation in History – History in Translation (September 2018)

My participation in the 2018 edition of the ‘Translation in History – History in Translation’ summer school was motivated, on the one hand, by my interest in translation history, related to my research practice, on the other hand, by my enthusiasm and curiosity after the 2017 edition and the wish to further discuss the topic. The more explicitly defined focus on methods in translation history in 2018 and the way these relate to broader translation theory, seemed promising. More than most other international gatherings (that are, in my experience, often rather product-oriented), I find that summer schools foster the space and breeding ground for genuine, constructive exchange and the development of new ideas. I have also had the impression that the Vienna group – with its research projects, the summer school and its recent journal *Chronotopos* – is actively contributing to the creation of a space for (meta)reflection on translation history, which I hope will be continued and will contribute to the further ‘institutionalization’ of translation history as a legitimate sub-discipline of translation studies.

The guests Dilek Dizdar (Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz), Carsten Sinner (University of Leipzig), Michaela Wolf (University of Graz) and Christopher Rundle (University of Bologna) each gave a morning lecture and then a workshop-like afternoon session on different methodological approaches and issues. Furthermore, the Vienna organizing team completed the week with contributions on history and transculturality (Larisa Schippel), translation history and its contribution to translation theory (Tomasz Rozmyslowicz) and a workshop on source critique (Julia Richter). The covered topics were diverse, ranging from (meta)theoretical-oriented discussions, over critical (self-)reflection on the various possible ways of doing translation history, to concrete, practical applications of translation history. Some questions came up repeatedly, such as that of the interrelation between historical translation research (that is empirical) and translation theory, not only in Tomasz Rozmyslowicz’s

contribution, dealing specifically with this matter, but also at other points in time: for example when discussing the place and value of translation history in relation to translation studies, when touching upon questions of interdisciplinarity, or when discussing the added value of case studies, and related to that, representativeness – with Dilek Dizdar’s inspiring questioning of whether representativeness is actually something translation history should claim to do at all. What I also found particularly valuable was the critical reflection on the role of the *historical* in translation history, the ways in which translation history has been done in translation studies, and how it would seem meaningful to argue for a more active interplay with the field of History (from a translation studies perspective), especially with respect to methodologies, more particularly when it concerns dealing with sources (from selection over collection to interpretation).

Like many doctoral students, I have struggled with recurring existential questions (‘existential’ for my research praxis, at least) – such as self-reflexivity and positionality, how to delineate my object of study and based on what, where to find sources and what sources to use, how to interpret these sources, which conclusions to (not) draw from certain phenomena, how to deal with periodization, which methodological frameworks to use and whether or not to combine various methodological frameworks and traditions, which audience(s) to address and in what language to write my dissertation. Often, however, in the myriad of other decisions one has to make and in the haste of carrying out my project, these crucial questions partially get lost to make space for more practical considerations. Many a time I have wondered to what extent these choices I make and, for example, the sources I draw on, were directly resulting from my object of study, or on the contrary bound to the structures of a certain (political) economy of knowledge I situate myself in. The summer school not only brought my attention back to these essential questions, it also encouraged me to more decidedly (re)position myself in both the way I raise and answer them.

Although I believe it is quite obvious from the kind of research I engage with, that it relates to (what could be referred to as) translation history (as a subdiscipline of translation studies), this has not automatically implied for me that translation history would become my main frame of reference. Perhaps, that brings us back to the above-mentioned economy of knowledge production? It seems to me that in a way, as this has not proved self-evident for me; in fact, many research projects either do translation history without calling it that, or maybe even without conceiving of it as such. Instances of translation history have been omnipresent in various fields of research for a long time. Although its development as a subdiscipline of translation

studies is quite recent, as a practice, it is not new. This implies that although translation history has in fact been around for quite some time, it has not often been (recognized) in that capacity. Therefore, I wonder, is it not essential for those of us engaging with translation history to name it that, if that is what we (aim to) do? And does the act itself of naming it translation history then not also bring with a responsibility to use certain frameworks and to embed it in the field correspondingly? Maybe one of the first answers to the question of how to write translation history is to be found exactly there: in naming what we do translation history, thus calling into question the (somewhat invisibilizing) idea or assumption that there is something self-evident about it, or that it is an automatic by-product of something else. The above has undoubtedly been said and developed already by scholars more eloquent than myself, however, it is one of the insights brought about by the summer school that will stay with me.

I return to my research practice mostly with questions; however, I hope insightful ones. Maybe looking at our research through the prism of translation history could encourage us to rethink the narratives we are (co-)constructing? What could it mean for our research not to tell one story, but rather tell parts and versions of that story, or tell more stories and focus on certain aspects more than others, rather than ‘applying’ one unified methodology? It is my contention that often we might not give enough attention to the unstructured nature of our material, that we might be telling stories that are too much preconditioned by the methodologies we use, that we might not often enough allow for our material to ask back.

More information on the (annual) summer school ‘Translation in History – History in Translation’ in Vienna is available at: <https://summerschool-translation-history.univie.ac.at/>