

**Larisa Schippel, Julia Richter, Tomasz Rozmysłowicz & Stefanie Kremmel**

## Technical Infrastructures of Historical Translation Knowledge: A Call for the use of the Digital Library and Bibliography of Literature in Translation – or: Invitation to Communism

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## Technical Infrastructures of Historical Translation Knowledge: A Call for the use of the Digital Library and Bibliography of Literature in Translation – or: Invitation to Communism

Dear readers!

Without a doubt, the ongoing differentiation and consolidation of the distinct research branch of translation history within translation studies is a process that is not only gratifying to observe, but a process that should be advanced further. It manifests itself in the emergence of translation history journals, handbooks, research projects, summer schools, conferences, and networks. The recently held international inaugural conference of the *History and Translation Network* in Tallinn (25.-28.05.2022) is arguably such a milestone – a detailed report shall follow in a future issue of *Chronotopos*. Besides these institutional preconditions the expansion of research in translation history also requires specialized communication channels and platforms where problems and results can be presented and discussed. Furthermore, it depends on appropriate *technical infrastructures* that allow us to collect and store translation historical data in a central location and keep it available for future projects. Currently, we are faced with the simultaneously fortunate and unfortunate situation of growing numbers of translation historical studies on singular translation events. This increases our scholarly ‘translation knowledge’ about the historical multiplicity and variability of transcultural communication processes. At the same time, however, this knowledge is in danger of fragmenting and disintegrating into a multitude of unrelated individual studies or case studies. Some may consider this unavoidable or an epistemological problem of translation historical research. But we need not and cannot wait until the question of how to generalize translation-historical findings or how to narrate a *Great History of Translation* is settled once and for all. Instead, it makes sense and is warranted to at least assemble the bibliographical data on translations gathered in the numerous individual studies.

Knowing *what* was translated *where*, *when* and *by whom* is the starting point or basis for many translation-historical research endeavors. Such information can be collected independently of a particular research question, a particular theoretical approach and a particular methodological access and imported into a comprehensive database that is available to everyone interested in translation history. This database would be result of a truly collaborative community effort that brings together the output of individual research projects and is testimony to the productivity of translation-historical research. It is not necessary to be positivist to recognize the value of such an endeavor. But one should be a communist, that is in the sense of the scientific ethos as described by Robert K. Merton:

„Kommunismus“ im nicht-technischen und ausgedehnten Sinn des allgemeinen Eigentums an Gütern ist das zweite wesentliche Element des wissenschaftlichen Ethos. Die materiellen Ergebnisse der Wissenschaft sind ein Produkt sozialer Zusammenarbeit und werden der Gemeinschaft zugeschrieben. Sie bilden ein gemeinschaftliches Erbe, auf das der Anspruch des einzelnen Produzenten erheblich eingeschränkt ist. (MERTON 1972: 51)<sup>1</sup>

This is not only to say that each individual researcher is indebted to this legacy. Moreover, even the modest fruits of their labor are in turn to be understood as a product of social cooperation, owned by the *scientific community* as a whole. Against this background, the transfer of translation-historical data into a generally accessible database means fulfilling the scientific ethos, because it counteracts the tendency to treat data as the private property of individual projects.

Do we already have a database at our disposal that would be suitable to technically support translation-historical knowledge expansion and dissemination?

The *Index Translationum* can be understood as a project in this sense. The bibliography, which started operating in 1932 and was available digitally since 1979, has been a blessing for translation history. Unfortunately, UNESCO terminated the project and stopped its continuation. The fact that the project *Index Translationum* was discontinued just at the moment when it could have reached new dimensions of digital exploitability and analysis is very unfortunate from a translation history perspective. Obviously, it had some weaknesses and flaws, resulting from the way the data was generated (Cf. POUPAUD et al 2009, RICHTER 2020: 70-82)<sup>2</sup>, and also, the database was technically no longer up to date.

Translation historians are making a virtue out of necessity, and so digital bibliographical databases are being created in a wide variety of places to enable translation historical research. One of the first to take on this task and at the same time design it precisely to translation history needs was Erich Prunč with TraDok.<sup>3</sup> Currently, a wide variety of projects are collecting bibliographic data that allow for a differentiated and comprehensible presentation of individual topics. But after projects end, the collected data is in danger of ending up in so-called data graveyards and unusable for other projects, because of changing algorithm preferences and accelerated software development. Even if it were possible to keep them available, data structure are heterogenous and do not allow for translation-historical research that is transcultural in nature or wants to look at larger time spans.

Obviously it would be desirable to bring together the research output of different projects and as many researchers as possible in one database – communally/communistically, in the sense of a scientific community discussed above – and it is equally obvious that the task for bringing this data together lies in the hands of readers of *Chronotopos*.

We would therefore like to propose to you to make use of a database created at the University

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<sup>1</sup> Merton, Robert K. (1972) „Wissenschaft und demokratische Sozialstruktur“, in: Weingart, Peter (ed.): *Wissenschaftssoziologie 1: Wissenschaftliche Entwicklung als sozialer Prozeß. Ein Reader mit einer kritischen Einleitung des Herausgebers*. Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum Verlag, 45-59.

<sup>2</sup> POUPAUD, Sandra; PYM, Anthony & TORRES SIMÓN, Ester (2009): Finding Translations. On the Use of Bibliographical Databases in Translation History. *Meta* 54: 264–278. <https://doi.org/10.7202/037680ar>.

RICHTER, Julia (2020): *Translationshistoriographie. Perspektiven und Methoden*. Wien: new academic press.

<sup>3</sup> <https://itat2.uni-graz.at/pub/tradok/>

of Vienna as the basis for a general bibliography of translations: We are talking about the “Digital Library and Bibliography of Literature in Translation” (DLBT, <https://dlbt.univie.ac.at>), created by Herbert van Uffelen and adapted, amongst others, in coordination with members of the Digital Humanities for Translation History research group at the Centre for Translation Studies at the University of Vienna. The more researchers share their data with the DLBT, the more can be gained for a transcultural history of translation.

### **A decentralized structure**

The DLBT is managed in a decentralized fashion by members of the partaking projects. Each project has its own editorial staff that adds data independently and self-reliantly and digitizes texts and documents. The head of each project decides on how, when and where the data is provided. Consequently, the DLBT grows with the work done by the individual researchers. Each project works exclusively on their own bibliographies and libraries related to literary studies, language studies or the researcher’s field of specialization. Contributions to the overall project of the DLBT therefore occur indirectly and independently from other projects. However, although all data and digitized materials are processed individually, they are also interlinked, making the DLBT more than the sum of its parts. This setup has the potential of evolving into a database which is neither limited by borders nor time periods, and becoming an indispensable resource for future research on translation.

The DLBT can do everything that bibliography software of the latest type can do and much more, since it is specialized for the needs of translation history: One can collect, organize and structure bibliographic data, and create bibliographies. One can import (with duplicate check) and export in various formats. One can define relationships, including translational ones, between texts and make these relationships searchable and traceable. With the help of authority files for agents (VIAF, wikidata), information about translators is directly linked to the bibliographical entry.

The DLBT provides a set of tools to visualize and analyze the collected data. You can create statistics to show developments or make comparisons. Map tools enable the visualization of spatial distribution. Translation (hi)stories can be told by showing relationships, for example when relay translations or retranslations come about.

The DLBT also allows for easy analysis of translations. It allows source and target texts to be uploaded and analyzed using voyant tool, other tools will hopefully follow suit. All results, presentations and visualizations can then be exported to the projects’ websites or used in other ways.

### **Not only translations, but also documents of reception**

The DLBT can not only be used to collect digitized materials and bibliographical metadata of translations, but also information on physical characteristics of editions (covers, illustrations etc.) as well as sources documenting the reception of the texts and their effect on public discourse. Adaptations in other media (e.g. film, theater) can also be registered in the DLBT and made accessible via the digital library.

Currently the DLBT holds over 60 000 translations, adaptations, and reception documents and makes 24 000 digitized sources available to its users.

**Open Access and Sustainability**

The digitized resources of the DLBT are stored in PHAIDRA, the long-term repository of the Vienna University Library, and therefore permanently secured and accessible (© CC BY 4.0). The hardware is provided by Vienna University Computer Center of the University of Vienna, which is also involved in the development of the software.

We invite researchers of translations and their reception respectively their history to partake in the DLBT with their projects. The DLBT is suitable for undertakings of different magnitudes, starting from PhD projects to international research projects.

In case you should want to create a new bibliography or library, or simply make data available to the team of the DLBT for integration into the database, please contact the DLBT team via [dlbt@univie.ac.at](mailto:dlbt@univie.ac.at).

Let us contribute and make the results of translation history research accessible and usable long-term!

Your *Chronotopos* editors