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International Seminar “Researching Translation History in Central and Eastern Europe”

On May 16 and 17, 2024, the international seminar “Researching Translation History in Central and Eastern Europe,” organized by Magdalena Heydel, Zofia Ziemann, and Natalia Roguz, was held at Jagiellonian University in Kraków. The seminar was part of a larger initiative with a story dating back to 2021.

In 2021, a group of researchers, including Chris Rundle (Bologna), Michaela Wolf (Graz), Anne Lange and Daniele Monticelli (Tallinn), Hilary Footitt (Reading), Vicente Rafael (Washington), and others, launched the History and Translation Network (HTN), an open network that “addresses all scholars and practitioners who are interested in how history is entangled with translation and translation with history.” The network’s name reflects the premise that a universal history of translation does not exist; rather, every act of translation is rooted in history and may contribute to historical narratives. The HTN aims to promote interdisciplinary dialogue among its participants and provide a platform for collaboration “with as little superstructure and bureaucracy as possible.”

In 2022, the HTN held its inaugural conference at the University of Tallinn titled “History and Translation: Multidisciplinary Perspectives.” After the event, Magdalena Heydel and Daniele Monticelli decided to create a work group within the HTN focused on translation in Central and Eastern Europe. The work group’s aim is to explore the specifics of literary translation in this region, where different national and linguistic communities share some historical experiences but have also evolved under diverse conditions and have sometimes questioned their belonging to the region. The 2024 Kraków seminar was the first meeting of this newly established work group.

The seminar was designed as a platform for exchanging ideas. Participants provided abstracts of their papers, as well as links to relevant publications and other sources, beforehand, enabling fellow researchers to prepare for the discussion. The organizers also generously allocated ample time for each presentation.

The seminar opened with a keynote lecture by Chris Rundle. Drawing inspiration from works on the philosophy of history, he argued that the history of translation and interpreting should be relevant to history as such and be a part of it. He emphasized that translation-studies researchers adopting a historical perspective should see themselves as historians first and adopt the discourse of historiography. Like historians, translation-studies scholars should use sources, not datasets; produce narratives, not results; embed translation in historical contexts; and define their target audience.

The post-lecture discussion addressed the nature of translation studies and their institutionalization.

The keynote lecture was followed by presentations of large-scale projects on the history of literary translation in various countries across Central and Eastern Europe. Nike K. Pokorn (Ljubljana) introduced the *History of Slovene Literary Translation*, published in two volumes in 2023, its aims, structure, and the challenges faced by its editors.

Maris Saagpakk (Tallinn) presented the ongoing project “Translation in History. Estonia 1850–2010: Texts, Agents, Institutions and Practices,” focusing on gathering quantitative data, as well as the challenges of launching a new database and the new opportunities it brings. Daniele Monticelli, who spoke about the same project a day later, addressed the challenges of writing Estonian translation history. These challenges include periodization criteria, balancing analytical and historical perspectives, and the narrative strategies to be adopted.

Agnieszka Podpora (Kraków) introduced the project “A Century of Translation: Translators and Their Work in Polish Literature after 1918.” She also spoke about teamwork within the project database and discussed the importance of making bibliographic data translation-centric. The following day, Joanna Sobesto (Kraków) and Magdalena Heydel presented their qualitative research conducted within the project, offering papers on translation discourses in interwar and postwar Poland.

Literary translation during World War II was the subject of the joint presentation of Joanna Madejczyk, Magdalini Pappa, Alexandra-Teodora Mandra, and Margherita Caputo, who work at Nantes University within the TranslAtWar research project under Christine Lombez’s supervision. Their paper discussed the specifics of literary translation in wartime Poland, Greece, Romania, and Italy.

Several scholars presented their personal projects on translation in history. Nataliia Rudnytska (Kyiv), who explores the history of translation into Ukrainian since the nineteenth century, spoke on the ideological asymmetry in Ukrainian translation at the turn of the nineteenth century, including the asymmetrical representation of foreign literatures and authors and the asymmetrical choice of different translation methods based on the ideological status of the target texts. Philipp Hofeneder (Graz), who joined the session online, noted that research projects on translation in history are often limited to one source or target language. He outlined the framework of his project, which examines translation flows in the Habsburg monarchy between 1848 and 1918. The aim of the project is to collect and evaluate data on translations from and into Ukrainian within the Habsburg monarchy. This approach, according to Hofeneder, helps overcome the equation of language and territory and allows us to view literary translation as part of knowledge transfer in a multilingual context.

Brian Baer (Kent, US) presented his project exploring the effects of Western historicism on translation. He demonstrated that nineteenth-century English-language

literary anthologies often overlooked translations associated with earlier stages of a nation’s development. Baer emphasized that within the translation discourse, historical consciousness became explicit in the second half of the nineteenth century, with some translation approaches being considered more advanced than others.

Several papers at the seminar focused on the history of translation between specific languages. Oleksandr Kalnychenko (Kharkiv and Banská Bystrica) discussed strategies of translating Russian literature in Soviet and post-Soviet Ukraine, while Anna Agapova (Brno) focused on the dynamics of translations of Czech prose into Russian between 1992 and 2022.

Anna Cetera (Warsaw), Tatiana Bogrdanova (independent researcher), Snježana Veselica Majhut (Zagreb), and Eva Spišiaková (Nitra) contributed papers on more specific translation cases and their historical contexts, while Zsófia Gombar (Lisbon) discussed the censorship of translated literature in socialist Hungary.

The seminar concluded with remarks by Daniele Monticelli, co-organizer of the Eastern and Central Europe work group within the HTN. He thanked the local organizing committee for the hospitality and the meticulous organization of the seminar and outlined perspectives for further research and future work group activities. Monticelli suggested that a series of lectures on national histories of translation and an educational project on censorship in translation would be desirable. He also mentioned the possibility of several cooperative projects within the work group, including investigating translation during times of radical change and exploring the role of Russian literature in the process of colonization.

Throughout the seminar, participants demonstrated their careful handling of data, often difficult to reconstruct in its entirety. Contrary to Chris Rundle’s call, these were often datasets rather than sources, but in analyzing their data, participants did create narratives reflecting the network of relationships where translation acts and translation flows were essential links.

The HTN and its Eastern and Central Europe work group are open to new members, both senior and early-career researchers, including PhD students.

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