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Tracing Cultural Transfer Through Multiple Translation Analysis. The Case of the Swedish 19th-Century Bourgeois Novel in German and Czech

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1. Introduction

Comparative literature has since some decades become more directed towards questions of transculturality, through for example postcolonial studies, translation studies and migration and diaspora studies (Presner 2011, 198). The field of translation studies, previously delimited to linguistic problems, now include the translatability of ideas and cultures rather than just texts (Apter 2006). In Critical Translation Studies the study of multiple translations is central (Venuti 2008). Digital methodologies, for example stylometry, have proven to be of use for understanding how texts travel across languages (Rybicki 2012, Patton & Can 2012), although this kind of translinguistic and transcultural approach is still rare within the digital humanities (Cheeseman et al 2012). Collations tools such as *Juxta*, *CollateX* and the *Versioning machine*, mainly used for studying text variation for philological purposes, can also be applied to compare different translations to the same language. For comparisons across linguistic borders, methods are still at a developing stage. In this paper we aim to combine perspectives from Critical Translation Studies with digital methodologies. As a part of the research project *Swedish Women Writers on Export in the 19th Century* we investigate how the Swedish bourgeois novel was reframed in Czech translations and cultural contexts. This case study uses parallel text alignment to analyse the transfer of one of the novels of the Swedish author Emelie Flygare-Carlén (1807–1892) from Swedish to German and from German to Czech.

Flygare-Carlén has not achieved any notable position in the Swedish literary canon, but is in fact the most commercially successful female authors of the 19th century in Sweden. She became a bestseller not only in Sweden but also abroad. Most of Flygare-Carlén's novels are translated twice, some of them three times. This raises questions of what exactly made this author attractive for audiences in other parts of Europe? One exceptionally interesting case is the surge of interest for Swedish literature, and Flygare-Carlén in particular, in Czech speaking regions during the later part of the 19th century. In the case of Flygare-Carlén's last novel, *The Merchant's House on the Cliffs* (original edition 1859), the first translation to Czech, *Obchodní dům v mořských skaliskách* was published in Prague 1872. It was made by Pavlína Křížková (1850–1923) a under the pseudonym of M. Chorušická. She was a prolific female translator of famous female authors such as Charlotte Brontë and Mary Braddon. In 1910, a new edition of *The Merchant's House on the Cliffs* was published by Bohumil Klika (1868–1942), a zoologist, palaeontologist, fictional author and translator. He translated among other works, *Around the World in 80 Days* and travel writing from different parts of the world.

What motivated the new translation in 1910 and what differences are there between the two Czech translations? Were they characterized by “domestication” or “foreignization” (Venuti 2008)? Can the differences tell us something about the change in the literary climate and taste of the Czech audience, a changed view of the Swedish novel, or even about translator's gendered interpretations of original texts? Křížková was a part of the early women's movement while Klika's translation of Flygare-Carlén might have been guided by his interest in folklore and foreign cultures.

2. Material, methodology and analysis

In this paper we investigate these questions through a digital collation of the two Czech translations. CollateX can be used to indicate substantial or recurring differences between the two Czech versions, and in what contexts and on what levels they appear. Both translations are indirect translations made from German and a comparison of all three versions might also reveal how the Czech translations differ from the German. Parallel text alignment is a commonly used method both in automatic creation of concordances and machine translation (Veronis 2000). Though the method is not new its application can be further developed to analyse translation as a reception of a literary text in another national, cultural and linguistic context.

The choice of the novel *The Merchant's House on the Cliffs* depends on it being subject to multiple translations, but also on the fact that it is a novel clearly embedded in a Swedish cultural and geographical setting, depicting a middle class family of merchant's on the west coast of Sweden – a very exotic setting seen from a foreign point of view, which comes with a rich local vernacular. The original Swedish edition is published in three parts, in total consisting of 1030 pages. The base text used here is a critical edition available on The Swedish Literature Bank. The first Czech translation has kindly been provided by as a text file by the National Library of the Czech Republic. The 1910 translation has been digitized by The National Library of Sweden and provided as a pdf. The OCR-process was not straightforward, since OCR software tends to have difficulties with the Czech accents. We have used two different OCR programs, Abby Finereader Pro version 12.1.1 (closed source) and Tesseract OCR version 3.0.3 (open source) and collated the result in order to identify recurring errors. The length of the novel excludes manual correction of the OCR errors and this can be compensated to some extent by using two different OCR engines. Consequently, if we make the assumption that the engines perform similarly on the different translation editions within one language we can pair-wise compare them and actually feed back the informed findings about the winning preferences. The German translation, *Ein Handelshaus in den Scheeren* (1859) is printed in blackletter and available as image files at Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek. In addition to the difficulties connected to OCR of blackletter, the image files are of poor quality. In the case of the Czech translations, turning down the resolution to 200 DPI Tesseract actually produced a better result. This was in contrast not the case for the German blackletter translation, for which the text came out in a generally better shape from Tesseract.

When sufficiently corrected text files were obtained we used CollateX to visualize differences between the Czech translations. Juxta turned out not to be able to handle the Czech accents, making comparisons very precarious. CollateX proved to be a better choice in this case. Because of the length of the novel, we aim at three levels of differences: 1) paragraphs – major changes in sequence, additions or exclusions 2) names of places and characters, indicating domestication or foreignization 3) an in depth investigation of a shorter section of the novel. The findings can then be checked against the German translation to reveal how the text is changed from the Swedish to the German and from the German to the Czech.

By using the results from several light-weight methods and aiming for good-enough-equivalents, e g ones that can inform any later step in the processing, the accuracy does not need to be overly high, definitely not near being satisfactory for a human, for each of

the additional methods. If we for instance combine word level comparison with the lemmatization level and potentially part-of-speech with sentence chunking and shallow parsing we can get word picture like segments to guide further equivalency findings. Also (semi-)automatic partitioning, currently being introduced into CollateX, could also be used to get at which parts of a text containing certain topics and compare that level with source, pivot and target language.

3. Future work

The visualization provided by Juxta and CollateX is not optimal for displaying differences between multiple translations of longer texts. A future development could be to refine existing visualizations and create others. Some work is already being done in this area (Geng et al). One condition for parallel text alignment is that the translations are fairly literal or “faithful”. However, the most interesting cases from a Critical Translation Studies point of view might be those who are not close to the original source – adaptations or rewritings of a work. In these cases topic modelling might prove to be a useful model. Polylingual topic models has been developed by Mimno et al (2009) for the purpose of discovering topics aligned across multiple languages in large text collections. This method might also be used to reveal how translations change texts on a more general level – do other topics appear in the Czech translations of Flygare-Carlén than in the German?

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