

# The Leuven Catalogue

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Katrin Van Bragt, avec la collaboration de Lieven D'hulst et José Lambert. 1995. *Bibliographie des traductions françaises (1810-1840). Répertoires par disciplines* (=Symbolae Series A/Vol. 21). Leuven: Presses Universitaires de Louvain, 1995. xxvii + 1033 pp. ISBN 90 6186 707 X. 3250 BEF.

Meyvis, Ludo. 1996. *Bibliographie des traductions françaises (1810-1840). Répertoires et analyses électroniques. Biblio TF. Manuel*. Leuven: Presses Universitaires de Louvain. 15 pp. + CD-ROM. ISBN 90 6186 780 0. 3250 BEF. (Book + CD-ROM for 5000 BEF)

Here it is at long last: the fruit of some 17 years of bibliographical research, more than 1,000 pages of catalogued material, more than 12,000 entries, indices of authors and translators, and a CD-ROM version that enables all sorts of searches to be made, specific corpora to be extracted, multiple analytical graphics to be seen dancing on the screen, instantaneously, in colour, and with relative confidence in the quality of the research. This, I believe, deserves to become a milestone in the long-term development of empirical translation history. If I should have few minor quibbles to append, let them by no means detract from the basic fact that this is a very, very impressive piece of work. The researchers, especially Katrin Van Bragt, who did much of the hard slogging, merit our sincere gratitude.

Let me tentatively call the result a 'catalogue' since its aim is ostensibly to list *all* the translations published in France between December 1810 and 1840 (as opposed to a 'corpus', which I take to be a list constructed only for the testing of specific hypotheses). The fundamental source for this catalogue was the *Bibliographie de France*, an official compilation based on the French *dépôt légal* system by which printers in France were (and still are) obliged to deposit duty copies of their publications. The *Bibliographie de France* thus fixes temporal and geographical limits for this Leuven catalogue, at the same time as it offers reasonably homogeneous data-collection criteria for all genres and years, producing virtually complete coverage. The hard work has thus involved extracting the publications that count as translations, either because the titles say so, thus including pseudotranslations (I'll return to this), or because the texts themselves are '*traductions manifestes*', thus calling on the researchers to identify the source texts, making them ply through many bibliographies

of publications in other languages (I'll come back to this one too). In the process, the *Bibliothèque de France* was found to have “a small percentage of lacunae, imprecisions and contradictions” (van Bragt 1989: 174), which should mean that the resulting catalogue of translations is even more reliable than its source bibliography.

As such, the importance of the research cannot be limited to its actual object, translations into the French of the complex and turbulent early nineteenth century. True, valuable research with explicit limitations to French literary history has been based on previous stages of the Leuven catalogue (notably Lambert et al. 1984 and D'hulst 1987). However, the long-term impact of the published list, I suggest, should ensue from its methodological virtues with respect to relative completeness and computer accessibility.

Note that the catalogue can by no means claim to be the first of its size, since our century has actually seen quite a few respectably long lists of translations, mostly of work into German: take a look at Schlösser 1937, Fromm 1950-1953, Horn-Monval 1958-67, Bihl and Epting 1987, Quandt 1987-88, Hausmann 1992, and others, not to mention the *Index Translationum* (which I'd rather not mention, since I mistrust the apparent uniformity of its data-gathering processes). Yet almost all the historical catalogues select only one source-target directionality (French into German, German into French, etc.), making life difficult for anyone seeking an overall picture of how translation operates in a given society (what about the other source languages involved?). Worse, any attempt to combine the available catalogues has to jump through hoops to make the very different selection criteria compatible. The Leuven catalogue thus has the specificity of including translations from *all* languages into French, selected according to reasonably explicit criteria, allowing a global mode of analysis that is rarely possible on the basis of other historical sources.

The second great virtue of this catalogue is that its CD-ROM version can be manipulated virtually at will, producing quick corpora and allowing numerous methodological hypotheses to be tested. The programme comes in English, French and Dutch flavours; it requires a PC 386 or higher, at least 8 M RAM (it takes up 30 M of hard-disk space), Windows 3.11 or higher, and a colour screen with 800x600 definition. If you have all that, the CD-ROM enables instant visualization of the catalogued material according to authors, translators, male or female translators, titles, source languages, text genres, collections, publishers, printers, or combinations of these, as well as more playful possibilities such as seeking the distribution of key phrases from translational paratexts: I searched, for example, all mentions of *sous les yeux de* (translators who claim to have worked ‘beneath the eyes’ of their authors), just to tease certain theses about invisibility. More seriously, you can cut the cake virtually any way you like, at whatever level you like. Any bugs in the system (for instance, the number of items analyzable at one stroke is limited to 3,000, when the translations from English

are just over that number) can be ironed out or are easily circumvented (I just chopped the period into two).

Thanks to these two features, the catalogue should become a testing ground for future corpus-selection procedures. By this I mean rather more than envisaging further lists of this kind. Even if no more big translation catalogues are ever produced (which I hope is not the case), computer access to data of this magnitude can at least give us some idea about what we are dealing with in the case of smaller corpora: we can test methodological procedures concerning criteria of representativity, norms and divergences, and the limits of metatextual and paratextual definitions of translation, at least to the extent that one cultural context can provide clues about others. Until such methodological work is done in a serious way, intuition will continue to play a major role even within empirical research in this specific part of the humanities. This is of particular importance right now, for reasons that arouse something of a plea:

Anything we care to say about translations and translators inevitably refers to just some translations and some translators. Unless all translations are exactly alike (and unless we all agree on exactly what a translation is in the first place), the object we select conditions what we are likely to say about it. So, beyond speculations based on lowest common denominators, it is difficult to say much of importance without paying careful attention to where our data comes from and how it reaches us. Further, the more data we include in our object, the more generalizable our findings are likely to be. Unfortunately little of this very basic empiricism is entering current discussions about translation, first because few people seem really concerned about the status of their initial data, and second because good data are hard to find. The result is an abundance of scientific-sounding work based on remarkably sloppy corpus-selection procedures (for a survey of which, see van Doorslaer 1995: 251). An even more fundamental shortcoming is the assumption of instant generalizability, expressed in an absence of selection criteria and thus circular reasoning, looking only at translations likely to confirm the researcher's hypotheses (cf. the critique in Van Leuven-Zwart 1992: 93). Indeed, this lack of attention to corpus selection assumes quite frightening proportions when one considers the eminently rule-of-thumb processes underlying the spate of encyclopaedic works published recently or being prepared: when one strings together Delisle and Woodsworth's *Translators through History*, the Oxford *Guide to Literature in English Translation*, the Fitzroy Dearborn *Encyclopaedia of Literary Translation*, the Routledge *Encyclopaedia of Translation Studies*, the De Gruyter *Handbuch der Übersetzungswissenschaft*, the Stauffenburg *Handbuch für Übersetzer und Dolmetscher*, plus a few dictionaries here and there, it is clear that translation studies has been thrust into a stage of hurried consolidation, with all kinds of *summae* being compiled, all on the basis of quite mysterious selection procedures. Where, at the

bottom of this frenzied research, are the solid lists of translations and translators? How have the selections been made? And in the interests of whom?

Until these questions can be answered, we should exercise patience and build slowly from the few solid empirical sources available. Hence the importance of this catalogue. Hence, also, my desire that it be looked at seriously and used experimentally.

And the quibbles? Well, I quietly regret the exclusion of translations appearing in journals, which is where much of the political in-fighting surely took place; such material could have been presented (as in Fromm 1950-1953) but would certainly have required far more world and time. More seriously, an uncomfortable dose of subjectivity remains in the selective definition of ‘translations’ when, beyond paratextual criteria, the definers eliminate cases where translation has involved “changes of genre”, “distant imitations” or texts “inspired by...” (xii). Since I’m looking for a catalogue, I would like to find as much material as possible so that I, as user, can then decide what is or is not a translation for the purposes of testing my own hypotheses. True, the researchers here make their criteria fairly explicit (in van Bragt 1989 and the catalogue itself) and helpfully indicate where I can find some of the excluded material (notably Horn-Monval’s previous list of translations and adaptations for the French stage). Yet one might critically recall D’hulst’s claim that “si les objectifs du chercheur déterminent ses critères de sélection, n’importe quelle analyse du système demeure ‘incomplète’” [if the researchers’ aims are to determine their criteria of selection, any analysis of a system will remain ‘incomplete’] (1987: 17). What we find here is a fringe of cases where selection criteria are by no means independent of the aims of the research. Indeed, if we look just a little harder, we even find fortuitous exclusions propping up the miraculous limits of the system itself. Consider for a moment the fact that since the *dépôt légal* was a measure of state control operative only within the borders of France, the resulting catalogue must exclude French-language translations produced by publishers in the Netherlands, Switzerland, or other properly intercultural situations (the 1987 Bihl/Epting catalogue lists some 553 German works translated into French by Germans, many of them published in the Germanic states). This limitation is not minor: it might be hypothesized that the translations published outside France were precisely the most subversive. Yet the catalogue has preferred to inherit its completeness from a system of centralized state control over printing. Not gratuitously this same state power enables the researchers to present their object in terms of systems theory (ix-x). If we do indeed find a system (or even a systematized bibliographical item), it’s because someone had the power to put it where we could find it. And our new list can only further extend that power.

Although the Leuven catalogue certainly big and beautiful enough to be described as a catalogue, its selection criteria effectively reproduce those of a corpus designed to reinforce the basic tenets of system-based research. One of the tasks facing future

researchers might be to take such empirical bases beyond their constitutive assumptions.

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