Chronotopos
A Journal of Translation History

Garda Elsherif, Andreas Gipper, Caroline Mannweiler, Diego Stefanelli

Introduction: Scientific Translation in the Early Modern Period

1/2023
DOI: 10.70596/cts140

Herausgegeben am / Éditée au /
Edited at: Institute of Applied
Linguistics and Translatology
(IALT), Leipzig University
ISSN: 2617-3441

Zum Zitieren des Artikels / Pour citer l'article / To cite the article:
Elsherif, Garda; Gipper, Andreas; Mannweiler, Caroline; Stefanelli, Diego (2024): Introduction: Scientific Trans-lation in the Early Modern Period, *Chronotopos* 5 (1), 5–6. DOI: https://doi.org/10.70596/cts140

Garda Elsherif, Andreas Gipper, Caroline Mannweiler, Diego Stefanelli

Introduction: Scientific Translation in the Early Modern Period

This special issue is based largely on a research project on scientific translation that was part of the German Research Foundation's Priority Programme "Translation Cultures of the Early Modern Period" (SPP 2130). The editors' contributions emerged directly from this project and are essentially based on the same corpus of texts. They were complemented by two external contributions (Fischer and Lukenda). The DFG project focused on scientific translations from English, German and Italian into French in the 17th and long 18th century. This period marks the birth of modern science, and French was something like the lingua franca of scientific communication. The project focused on translations in book form, which were systematically recorded for the period in question. Our corpus comprises a total of 633 texts from the years 1600 to 1815, including 356 translations from English, 158 from German and 119 from Italian. The corpus has undergone certain adaptations in the individual contributions in order to meet the requirements of the respective research interests. In terms of content, our corpus includes publications from the fields that essentially correspond to the later classes of the *Académie des sciences*: Sciences mathématiques: Mécanique, Astronomie, Géographie, Navigation, Physique générale, and Sciences physiques: Chimie, Minéralogie, Anatomie et zoologie, Art vétérinaire, Médecine, Botanique, Économie rurale. Of course, the boundaries between the various disciplines are not always clearly drawn in this period, and the categorisation of texts in the scientific field is sometimes problematic. This is typically the case in the field of scientific travel literature. Here, highly serious geological, zoological and botanical studies are often juxtaposed with observations of more 'touristic' or anecdotal interest. This observation also applies to the field of medicine, which makes up an important part of the corpus, but took longer than the other sub-disciplines to submit to the experimental-scientific paradigm and clung longer than others to a kind of pre-modern discourse and the authority of the classical *auctores*.

If our translation bibliography therefore only includes book translations, which in many respects confer special visibility and guarantee translators a special position within the scientific community in which they operate, it is also clear that the emergence of periodical scientific publications from the middle of the 17th century onwards had a massive impact on the production of translations. The early scientific journals emerged not least as translation platforms intended to ensure the rapid circulation of scientific knowledge. A quantitative survey of this translation production

has not yet been attempted, and could only be carried out at great expense due to the large number of periodical publications in Europe. Nevertheless, with the contributions of Caroline Mannweiler and Robert Lukenda, journals have found their rightful place as translation agencies in this focus issue.

The academy system proved to be a second important translation agency in the early modern period. Academies such as the *Académie des sciences* required translations for their internal work and also promoted and evaluated translations, which were then published with their label as a seal of quality (cf. Elsherif). At the same time, the publications of scientific societies throughout Europe are the subject of several demanding translation projects. There are, for example, translations of the *Philosophical Transactions* into Latin and French, and a major project such as the *Collection académique*, which aims to make the entire production of the European scientific societies available in French. This is an example of the close connection between vernacularisation and the formation of national scholarly communities on the one hand, and a large-scale translation activity on the other, with the help of which the universal claims of the modern sciences and their character as a major transnational project were put into practice (cf. Gipper).

If the early modern period proves to be the cradle of modern scientific translation, it is not least because of the emergence of a new type of translators who generally saw themselves as part of the scholarly community to which they were addressing themselves. Translation and the translator turn out to be part of an essentially synchronous scientific communication context. The dominant model of translation is that of horizontal translation, which takes place between languages that tend to have a similar cultural and linguistic prestige. This fundamentally distinguishes such translations from, for example, the numerous Plinius-Volgarizzamenti of the Renaissance. Translators no longer felt a primary obligation to an author, but to a scientific discourse to which they contributed by commenting on texts, checking experiments and results and correcting them where necessary. In this respect, translations at this time took on an important function of quality assurance. As Diego Stefanelli's prosopographical contribution shows, translators during this period therefore generally required specific knowledge of the discipline and in many cases used their translation work as a means of entering an academic career. As a rule, translators legitimise themselves through their specialist knowledge and their competence in the source language, but not through any kind of linguistic-translational qualification.

The complementary papers deal with two important aspects of the mediating role of French as a scientific lingua franca. On the one hand, how German-speaking research (especially in the fields of mineralogy and chemistry), which became increasingly important from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards, was transmitted to France through translation (cf. Fischer), and, on the other hand, how the position of French as the lingua franca of the sciences was articulated in a neighbouring country such as Italy, where the French influence was particularly strong in the eighteenth century (cf. Lukenda).

Fischer's contribution is an impressive and very detailed demonstration of how the French translation market, which was traditionally extremely Paris-centric, had a unique geographical relay with regard to German-language research in Alsace, with its natural centre Strasbourg. Lukenda's contribution, on the other hand, takes a sideways glance at the early 19th century and examines the role of academic journals in Italy as translation agencies in the conflicting fields of academic internationalisation and the emerging nation-state movement.