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Department of Translation Studies, University of Graz, November
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The conference “Translationskultur der DDR” (“Translation Culture of the German Democratic Republic (GDR)”) is the third in a row of events focusing on the topic of translation in the GDR. In June 2018, the 6th Germersheim Symposium took place at Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz with the topic „Grenzüberschreibungen – Übersetzer und Übersetzen in der SBZ und der DDR (1945–1990);“¹ this was followed by an “idea workshop” in November 2022, hosted by the Leibniz Society of Sciences in Berlin together with the Institute for Slavic and Hungarian Studies, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, with a smaller circle of participants under the title “Übersetzen in der DDR: Eine verflochtene Geschichte.”² Most recently, the Department of Translation Studies at the University of Graz organized the conference “Translationskultur der DDR” in November 2024, which is the subject of this report.

The term *Translationskultur*, originally coined by Erich Prunč, a longtime professor at the University of Graz, was a leitmotif for this conference. Prunč defined the concept as follows:

[...] I understand ‘translationskultur’ as the historically grown, self-referential and self-regulating sub-system of a culture that relates to the field of translation and derives from a dialectical relationship to translation practice. It consists of a set of norms, conventions, expectations, values and habitualized behavioral patterns that are socially established, controlled and controllable, and are shared by all agents actually or potentially involved in the translation processes within the respective culture. (PRUNČ 2024: 241)

The goal of the conference was to bring together research findings to help map out one or more translation cultures of the GDR. Another key objective for this conference was to pay more attention to specialized translation, as opposed to literary translation, which tends to receive more attention in research. Following opening remarks made by Hanna Blum, Larisa Schippel, and Pekka Kujamäkki, who shared a few memories of experiences in the GDR – including a discussion with the author Christoph Hein about his work *Der fremde Freund* –, the presentations held during the first day were mainly focused on specialized translation and interpreting topics, while those of the

¹ The conference title can be translated as “Writing Across Borders – Translators and Translating in the Soviet occupation zone and the GDR (1945–1990).”

² The title of the *Denkwerkstatt* can be translated as “Translating in the GDR: An Intertwined History”.

second day were mainly focused on literary translation. As the presentations were already grouped thematically by the organizer of the conference Hanna Blum, they are presented here in chronological order.

The first presentations were held by Anna Förster and Lydia Schmuck, who discussed the translation of French theory in the GDR. ANNA FÖRSTER (University of Erfurt) researched the translation (or non-translation) of French structuralists and poststructuralists in the GDR. In particular, she focused on the reasons why such texts were not published in East Germany, although neighboring countries in the Eastern Bloc such as Poland and Czechoslovakia did. While Förster was able to discern that ideological reasons played a role, she also identified reasons such as poor economic prospects as grounds for the lack of such translations in the GDR. LYDIA SCHMUCK (TU Dortmund University) spoke about the anthology *Aisthesis: Wahrnehmung heute oder Perspektiven einer anderen Ästhetik*, which was edited by Karlheinz Barck and published in 1990 by Reclam Leipzig.³ Among others, it includes essays by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. Based on Barck's archived correspondence, Schmuck traced the context and development of the anthology's composition and was able to prove that Barck actively engaged with Foucault's ideas and where his texts were placed in the anthology.

JULIA RICHTER (University of Graz) used archival material from the archives of Leipzig University and the Stasi Records Archive to research the Leipzig School and its international network. She examined relationships between the Leipzig School and universities in West Germany and found evidence of connections to universities in Egypt, Great Britain, and Czechoslovakia. Next, ANNE-KATHRIN ENDE presented the Oral History in Translation and Interpreting project at the Institute of Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies of Leipzig University on behalf of CARSTEN SINNER (Leipzig University). The project is a long-term study and focuses on reconstructing the history of translation and interpreting didactics and training at Leipzig University by interviewing contemporary witnesses. The presentation for this conference focused on the topics of the allocation of spots in the programs, the selection or assignment of languages of study, and study abroad periods.

HANNA BLUM (University of Graz) used Prunč's definition of translation culture as her starting point and advocated for using both oral and written sources to construct an *Alltagsgeschichte* of translation in the GDR. This method would allow for a broader focus, paying less attention to well-explored topics such as censorship and focusing more on agency and individual perspectives, allowing for a more democratic view of history. LARISA SCHIPPEL (University of Graz) presented her research on the *Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR* (German Academy of Sciences) as a translating institution and her outline of a model for identifying the profile of publishing houses as it pertains to translation. Schippel's model includes motives for translations, the genesis of translations, the status of translators, and the intended reception of translated works. She put her model to the test using the Akademie-Verlag as an example. The last presentation of the day was given by MANFRED SCHMITZ (Intertext), who gave an overview of

³ The title can be roughly translated as *Aisthesis: Perception Today or Perspectives of a Different Aesthetic*.

interpreting in the GDR, including interpreter training and payment models. His own work experience with the foreign language service *Intertext* added valuable context.

The second day of the conference, which mainly focused on literary translation and the agents involved with it, began with LUKAS JOURA (Humboldt University of Berlin/University of Potsdam), who spoke about the reception of works by the Ukrainian author Oles Hončar in East and West Germany. Joura's particular focus was on the novel *Sobor*, which was never published in the GDR. Joura was able to demonstrate that the novel remained unpublished due to ideological motivations, and that the reception of Ukrainian literature in both German states was decisively influenced by Soviet institutions.

Two presentations related to the *Schriftstellerverband der DDR*, the German Writers' Union, followed. The translator and interpreter VIKTORIYA STUKALENKO began by speaking about the relationship between the author and the translator in the GDR. She highlighted that translators and authors had equal status in the Writers' Union and that translators were legally viewed as creators and copyright holders of their translations under the applicable copyright law. On the basis of papers from the Writers' Union archive, located in the archive of the *Akademie der Künste* in Berlin, Stukalenko further showed that translators in the Writers' Union – including Günter Stein, Liselotte Remané, and Werner Creutziger – held lively discussions about translation theory. HEIDI R. ROTROFF (Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz) continued with a similar topic, first speaking about the biography and bibliography of the translator Werner Creutziger, who was very active in the German Writers' Union. She also presented the advantages for translators that came with being a member of the Writers' Union and discussed the organization of and ideological influences on the literary translators' section. Rotroff finished with a presentation of the content of the Writers' Union file on the translator and guest member Elga Abramowitz from Abramowitz' private archive.

The next three presentations centered around the translation of Chinese works in the GDR in relation to cultural policy. JIE LI (Northwestern Polytechnical University) presented research on two translations of the work *北京人*, which were published within a few years of each other: first in 1986 in West Germany as *Pekingmensen* and then as *Eine Welt voller Farben: 22 chinesische Porträts* in East Germany in 1987.⁴ Li compared the paratexts, the translation strategies, and the linguistic decisions made in the translations to discover the intentions and subjective decisions made by the translators in each case. BABETTE BERNHARD (University of Hamburg) presented the history of Sun Zhongshan's works in translation in the GDR.⁵ The translator Helga Scherner had

⁴ *Pekingmensen* [*Peking People/People in Peking*] was edited by Helmut Martin and published by Diederichs Verlag. The translator(s) could not be identified in this case as a personal examination of the book was not possible in the context of this report. *Eine Welt voller Farben: 22 chinesische Porträts* [*A World Full of Colors: 22 Chinese Portraits*] was published by Aufbau-Verlag in the GDR; Eva Müller was both editor and translator in this case. Additional translators named in the table of contents are Ines Gründel, Reiner Müller, Marianne Liebermann and Petra John.

⁵ Sun Zhongshan is perhaps better known as Sun Yat-sen.

already written her dissertation on him and suggested a translation of his works in 1965, though this was rejected by Reclam-Verlag. The project was only completed years later – in part because it then lent itself to political instrumentalization as an alternative to Maoism in China. XIAO LIU (Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz) discussed the publishing house Greifenverlag, which took on a leading role in the translation of Chinese literature in the GDR in the 1950s. Supported by a network of China experts such as Klara Blum, Johanna Herzfeldt, and Peter Hüingsberg, Greifenverlag had a great advantage in the competition for Chinese works.

The conference was concluded by three very different presentations. First, ANDREAS F. KELLETAT (Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz) spoke about the theory and practice of *Nachdichtung* in the GDR.⁶ He showed that the practice was highly valued in the GDR: it paid well, it was publicly discussed, and many GDR authors were active in writing *Nachdichtungen* and even included them in collections of their works. Kelletat further concluded that attitudes towards *Nachdichtung* were significantly influenced by the value the Soviet Union placed on them. PRZEMYSŁAW CHOJNOWSKI (University of Vienna) presented Karl Dedecius and Kurt Harrer, translators from the Polish into German. On the basis of an extensive amount of material from the Karl Dedecius Archive, which is located at the Collegium Polonicum in Słubice, Poland, Chojnowski paid particular attention to the biography and translation activity of Dedecius. Lastly, HOLLY BUSHMAN (Princeton University School of Architecture) spoke about the translation of ideas from architecture on the basis of the book *Umweltbürger und Umweltmacher*, translated from French into German by Lore Judt and published in 1982 by Verlag der Kunst Dresden.⁷ It contains essays by Claude Schnaidt, a proponent of functionalism in architecture who was also a staunch Communist with contacts to the GDR through Cuba. Bushman theorized that Schnaidt managed to translate functionalism – once decried as a capitalist concept – in such a way that it fit into Socialist ideology and became acceptable for the cultural policy of the GDR.

The presentations given throughout this conference covered a wide array of topics – from specialist and literary translation to institutions and publishing houses and the role and training of translators and interpreters. A common thread was the use of archival material, by now established as an indispensable primary source for research in translation history. In the context of this conference, archival research included not only official documents from state or governmental archives, but also papers from publishing house archives, university archives, and personal archives. Contemporary eyewitness accounts also played a role in the form of interviews and oral history. These methodical approaches facilitate a broader contextualization of topics in research in translation history and allow for a more diverse and vibrant history of translation in the GDR. This conference's presentations also included a large variety of agents in translation. In addition to a focus on literary translators in line with translator studies,

⁶ *Nachdichtung* generally refers to a practice in poetry translation in which the focus is not on literal translation but rather on conveying the tone, content, and other markers of the text in the original language. The term “free adaptation” more or less corresponds to the meaning of *Nachdichtung*.

⁷ The title can be roughly translated as *Citizens and Makers of our Environment*.

here, the role and agency of interpreters, publishing houses, universities, and government-related agencies were examined. The focus on the profession of translators and interpreters was particularly notable: from training to transitions to the profession to organizations such as the Writers' Union and the foreign language service *Intertext*. These multi-perspective approaches allowed for a differentiated view of translation culture(s) in the GDR and shed light on aspects that have not been paid much attention to up to this point. In general, the conference gave valuable impulses for further research into the history of translation in general, with the varied topics allowing for a mosaic-like attempt at the reconstruction of the translation culture(s) of the GDR in particular.

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Translated from German by Heidi R. Rotroff

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