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The HISTRA digital platform:
Research on HIStory of TRAnslation

Abstract

HISTRA (HIStory of TRAnslation) aims to transfer to an electronic resource a bulky archive of file cards manually compiled by Dr. Santoyo, an expert in the field of Translation History, who registered bibliographical references of Spanish translations of English works from the 16th century until the 1980s. This process has been carried out with the help of an open source software tool entitled Koha, which is an integrated system for library management. The work methodology carried out in HISTRA guarantees an exhaustive bibliographic description of the references included and normalization of the registers, based on the Reglas de Catalogación, using the international format MARC21. HISTRA constitutes a robust platform for the retrieval of relevant information about translators and translated works, thus contributing to research in translation history, facilitating studies on the literary reception of works translated from English into Spanish, their authors and translators.

Keywords: History of Translation, HISTRA, English-Spanish, Koha, digital platform, bibliographical database.

The HISTRA digital platform:

Research on HIStory of TRAnslation

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HISTRA (HIStory of TRAnslation) aims to transfer to an electronic resource a bulky archive of file cards manually compiled by Dr. Santoyo, an expert in the field of Translation History, who registered bibliographical references of Spanish translations of English works from the 16th century until the 1980s. This process has been carried out with the help of an open source software tool entitled Koha, *which is an integrated system for library management. The work methodology carried out in HISTRA guarantees an exhaustive bibliographic description of the references included and normalization of the registers, based on the* Reglas de Catalogación, *using the international format MARC21. HISTRA constitutes a robust platform for the retrieval of relevant information about translators and translated works, thus contributing to research in translation history, facilitating studies on the literary reception of works translated from English into Spanish, their authors and translators.*

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Introduction: the origin of the project

The project presented here, titled HISTRA (HIStory of TRAnslation), advocates for the preservation of data on the history of translation in an organized and meticulous form as a means to do sound history of translation, and, as such, it focuses on creating a tool which can be of invaluable use. The project stems from the pioneering work of Dr. Julio César Santoyo, a prominent researcher in the field of Translation History, who compiled a manual catalogue containing bibliographical references of Spanish translations of English works from the 16th century until the 1980s. The data this catalogue contains are varied and hardly traceable today, since they are missing from other sources, which increases their value. As Santoyo rightly indicated, there are still many small pieces of tesserae missing from the mosaic which is the history of translation waiting to be analyzed and covered in order to have a complete image of the translation panorama throughout the centuries (SANTOYO 2008). Even though information contained in this catalogue has already been the basis for research studies on the

field of the history of translation (see, for example, FUERTES PUERTA 2012) we believe that its manual format prevents it from full exploitability. Therefore, the project aims to digitize this collection so that it can be conceived as an electronic resource for research into the history of translation, enabling the development of studies on the literary reception of works translated from English to Spanish and their authors and translators. It would also make it possible to undertake, among others, diachronic studies in the areas of publishing and the rise of new literary genres and it could be used as a tool for analyzing the changing demands of the reading public. Thus, we believe HISTRA can be the starting point for a fruitful and versatile database on translations and translators available to researchers anywhere.

Why a digital platform?

The study of the history of translation has traditionally relied on information provided by the historical context and both contextual and paratextual features of the translated texts together with the discourse on translation. Nonetheless, textual data constitute the main source of information of what translators actually did and that is why they should be taken into account and properly analyzed, since "data do not necessarily equate with knowledge and understanding" (WAKABAYASHI 2019: 138). Once the researcher has clearly defined the topic he or she wants to investigate, the next logical step is to search for reliable sources of information which will allow him or her access to the needed materials. This is when bibliographies, databases and catalogues are of great assistance: they constitute vast inventories of data which can help in the design of the research questions and also in the search of the registers which will lead to ulterior studies. As any other source, either an already existing bibliography, database or catalogue or one developed *ad hoc* by the researcher, they present limitations (see PYM 2009), but the assets they offer outweigh their possible bias and expedite the researchers' archaeological task, making them worth of consulting. A careful selection of the documents found in them constitutes a first step in the researcher's path but it must be properly complemented by a convenient understanding and interpretation of the data: "what you find, and especially where you find it, can condition not just your object of study but also, very significantly, the kinds of results you come up with" (POUPAUD et al. 2009: 265).

The first and foremost requisite they should comply with is availability and for this purpose digitization is key: the HISTRA digital platform constitutes a good example of an online database which, once completed, will serve as the departing point for several studies in the lines outlined above. The digitization carried out in HISTRA has the aim of developing the potential of the data contained in it and, at the same time, of allowing for collaboration and stronger engagement from scholars, apart from constituting a further step in the direction of the use

of digital technologies for posing/answering research questions otherwise difficult to envisage.

The HISTRA catalogue: some specifications and particular features The data in HISTRA, manually compiled by Dr. Julio César Santoyo and his collaborators, include information on translations (English-Spanish) from the 16th century until the 1980s framed in a catalogue in the form of handwritten cards. These paper cards feature information regarding the title of the work translated, the name of the translator, the author of the source text, the place of publication, the publishing house and the year of publication. The cards registered under the name of the translators are estimated to contain approximately 8,000 registers; the same number would be registered under the name of the author, which, on the whole, amounts up to around 16,000-20,000 documented works translated from English into Spanish.

The process of digitization of these data is a necessary step for their preservation and subsequent exploitation, as well as to allow for the inclusion of more data. This was the departing point of HISTRA, the digital platform hosted by the "Centro de Proceso de Datos" (Data Processing Center) at the Universidad de León (Spain) and accessible at this URL: http://histra.orex.es. The *Koha* tool is the one used for the digitization of the manual catalogue since it allows the storage and retrieval of information in a structured and systematic manner.

Koha is an Integrated Library System (ILS), which offers a simple interface for librarians and users and it is accessible from any web browser. The running is operated via web on a structure of two interfaces, one private (devoted to library management) and another one which is OPAC (*Online Public Access Catalog*) or online catalogue, for public access. This software complies with the standards for the bibliographic cataloguing: MARC21 (*Machine Readable Cataloging*).

Following the standards of MARC21, it is possible to give format to bibliographic registers, to authority records and also, to include additional data to those registers. The metadata that set up and structure data in MARC21 belong to three types:

• Labels: figures including three digits (from 0xx to 9xx) that identify the fields which compose a register and the kind of data stored under a specific label.

• Indicators: two characters used at the beginning of the fields, after the labels. They are variable and they include values that allow interpreting the information on the kind or function of the data in the field.

• Subfield codes: two characters preceding each element inside a field to identify and position it inside that field. A subfield code consists of: a delimiter, represented by the symbol $ and by an identifier (alphanumeric character).

The MARC21 format allows the cataloguing of registers in a structure readable by a machine which can interpret the data of a catalogued register. This provides the normalization of the data for their exchange with other systems. The use of standards such as MARC21 gives the bibliographic data stored in HISTRA using

Koha a structure which makes them easily interoperable, exportable and usable for other tools. Likewise, data are adapted to Web 2.0 or social web and its structure makes adapting to Web 3.0 easier, an objective which the HISTRA project has in mind after the cataloguing of the translated works is finished.

Working Method: what makes this catalogue stand out?

The first stage in the cataloguing of a register in HISTRA is the creation of the authority records which will be used in the bibliographic records. The Z39.50 search is configured to access, by means of a client-server protocol, the databases of the *CSIC* (gateway to the authority catalogue of the *National Library of Spain – Biblioteca Nacional de España* or BNE –, and the *Library of Congress*). If the authority searched for is spotted in an external database, it is imported; otherwise, a new authority record is created. At this stage, a rigorous control of authorities is carried out, thus avoiding duplicating (which could take place, for example, if pseudonyms are not correctly associated to the real name) and applying the same syntax to all the records, which contributes to data normalization.

All the translators are marked with the function code "trad." (inside the field label 100, subfield $e): this allows the posterior retrieval of authorities as translators or authors, being the identification of the translator in all the registers one of the added values of the HISTRA catalogue that many others lack. Thus, for example, the BNE catalogue, the most important in Spain, does not always indicate the function of translator as such, and on some occasions, this does not even appear as an authority linked to the bibliographic register. In the HISTRA database the fact that the authority indicated as a translator is also an author with his or her own creation in other contexts is not relevant information *per se*, but can be used for posterior research, as will be illustrated in the case study below (thus, for example, Jorge Luis Borges is of importance for the catalogue as a translator, which is the role indicated in the database). This is due to the fact that the catalogue only contains translated works and not original creations. The information on the translator is always checked with zeal, validating it against reliable information sources to make sure the authority is the correct one for the register in case. This is the stage where the incidence of having initials as the only reference in some of the manual cards is resolved, and the expanded name is registered in most of the cases. The associated fields are also treated as authority registers, thus accomplishing the normalization of the topics dealt with in the works of the catalogue.

The next stage implies the creation of bibliographic registers and their link to the authorities previously included. The catalogues used here are once again those of the BNE, *The British Library*, REBIUN, *WorldCat*, and *Library of Congress*.

The manual catalogue registers works which are not present in those catalogues, a fact which simply indicates the absence of a copy of the work. Our priority in HISTRA is to respect the information contained in the manual cards, but at this stage, the accuracy of the data is checked (mistakes could be due to spelling errors or to a wrong association of authorities to the work, something which, however, hardly ever happens). Besides, following Dr. Santoyo's wishes, if a previous edition of the work being registered is found, this should be the one recorded in the digital catalogue. All the possible translators of a work are searched for in the compilation of the digital catalogue, even those who worked after the mid-1980s, the end date of the manual compilation. Therefore, this is another added value of the digital platform, since it expands the information contained in the manual cards and creates an exhaustive database of both translations and translators.

The bibliographic registers in the HISTRA database always provide the author and title of the source work in English, together with the Spanish title of the translation, the place of publication, publishing house and year of publication. Besides, they include the physical details of the volume (even including images of the cover when possible, thus adding paratextual information), the collection to which the book belongs to (if pertinent), the topic/field of the work and the translator's name, marked with its corresponding code "trad." (which is very useful in the posterior checking stage). Registers are always marked as translations, recording in the label 041 (part of the control labels: all those contained under numbers 0xx) the original language of the work (English), subfield 041 $h, and the target language (Spanish), subfield 041 $a. The information in these fields is described according the standard ISO 639-2 (English=eng, Spanish=spa), promoting again standardization and normalization, our main aims in the digital bibliographic cataloguing process. Likewise, for all those registers imported from external bibliographic catalogues (such as the BNE catalogue), under the field 040 $d, HISTRA appears as the modifier center of the register. Thus, HISTRA assumes the responsibility of the final data recorded in each register.

All the additional information concerning the registers, either provided by the manual cards or discovered during the cataloguing process, is archived in the field devoted to notes in MARC21. The possibility of linking files to the works is also available, either for digital works or for files found in philological research carried out by the HISTRA team. The fields of the several registers are filled following the *Reglas de Catalogación* (1999) (Catalogue Norms), thus achieving a higher degree of data standardization.

Exploiting HISTRA: example of a study case

The querying of a catalogue or database is a vital point of any research and the possibilities of exploitation of HISTRA can lead to several research avenues. Here, we provide examples of some of the most interesting ones, such as the one

illustrated in the next lines: that of a case study focused on mass literature and, in particular, on science fiction works.

Mass literature is understood here as a sort of production whose main aim is to entertain the reading public and which presents no traces of literary or intellectual pretension. The registers included in the HISTRA catalogue in this section are split into the different genres that can be commonly spotted under it, such as, for example, crime novel, romantic novel, adventure novel or sci-fi. According to the BNE (Spanish National Library), science fiction can be defined as "un género narrativo que sitúa la acción en unas coordenadas espacio-temporales imaginarias y diferentes a las nuestras, y que especula racionalmente sobre posibles avances científicos o sociales y su impacto en la sociedad" = [a narrative genre which locates the action in some imaginary time-space coordinates which are different to the ones we live in and which speculates rationally over possible scientific or social advances and their impact on society].The selection of this genre is by no means random since it has always depended a great deal on translations in Spain.[1]

In order to obtain data for our study, a search is carried out in the HISTRA digital catalogue under the term "ciencia ficción" (science fiction) inside the field "tema" (subject). The number of results obtained from this search today (it is important to remember that the catalogue is a work in progress and it is being updated) is of 63 registers (May 31st 2021). Each one of them includes both the author and the translator thanks to the process of cataloguing described in the previous section. All the registers are carefully checked and the name of the translator is always included, being also registered as an authority.

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[1] As indicated in another study, "(…) las obras de anticipación, en letras hispanas, sólo han sido salvas al aire de unos pocos francotiradores, en modo alguno una corriente ininterrumpida y prestigiosa" (Martínez de la Hidalga 2000: 121) = [Science Fiction works, in the Spanish literary tradition, have been shots fired into the air by a few snipers, by no means a continuous and prestigious flow].

Fig. 1: *Screenshot of a search in HISTRA*

As can be seen in Figure 1, the left column of the interface shows the result of the search as a list of authors and translators, in this particular case those related to science fiction. HISTRA currently counts with a feature allowing the differentiated indexation of authors and translators and it enables the possibility of searching for translators as authorities in its advanced search mode.

Another important feature of HISTRA is the possibility of generating statistics from the data obtained in the searches. Visualization of the results of studies is a very important aspect since the options of maps, graphs or timelines can foster not only a more active presentation and questioning of results, but also facilitate public engagement (WAKABAYASHI 2019).

In this case, the platform gives the results in the form of charts, a very visual and easy to interpret way: as it can be observed in Figure 2, the author with a larger number of works in the database (18%) related to science fiction is Isaac Asimov, followed by others such as Philip K. Dick or Bob Shaw. The section devoted to "others" refers to the bulk of authors with only one work included in the catalogue.
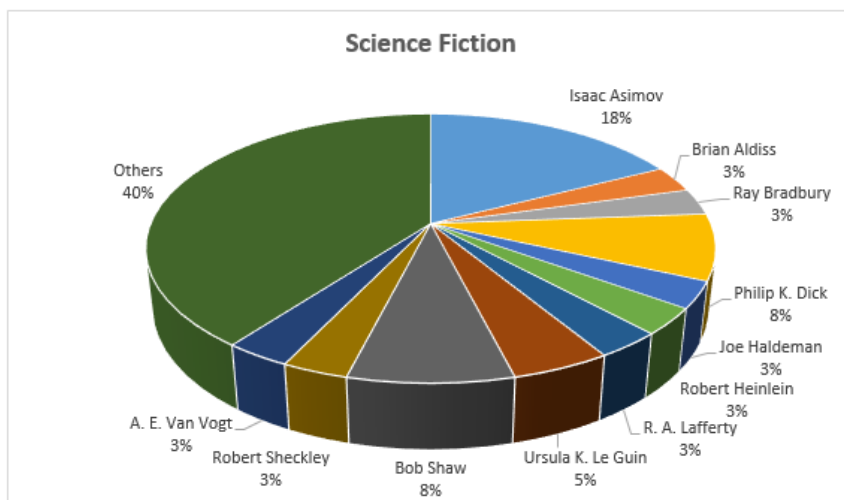
Fig. 2: *Science Fiction authors included in HISTRA*

Since the drop down list on the left also features the names of the translators, the creation of some statistics related to these is also a very interesting option, as can be seen in Figure 3. The names and percentages of the translators of science fiction works from the catalogue are reflected there, illustrating those with the higher number of registers translated: José M.ª Aroca (24%), Arturo Casals (10%) and Ana Goldar (8%).
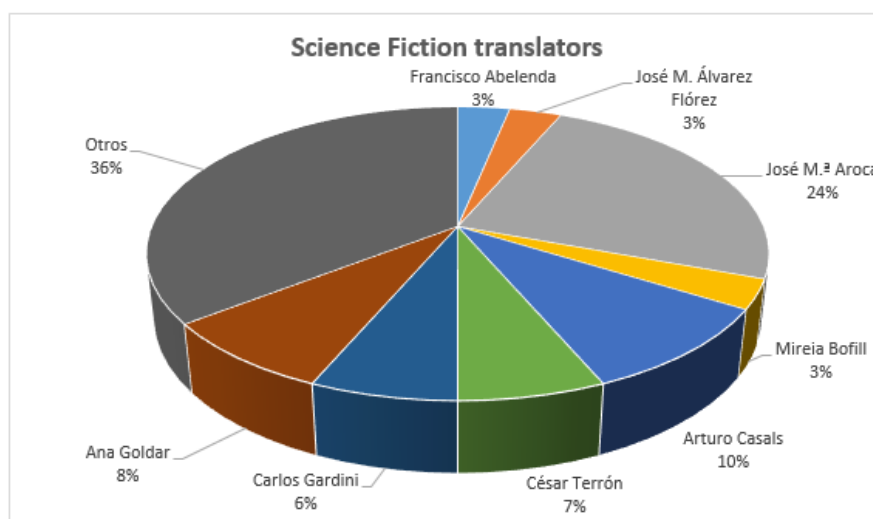

Fig.3: *Science Fiction translators included in HISTRA*

Considering that HISTRA associates authors and translators for all the registers included, for research purposes the fact of being able to obtain the interconnections between authors of the same genre and their translators is undoubtedly of great value. Thus, in the case under study here, and taking into account that Asimov was the author with more hits in the catalogue, a search for the translators of his works gave us the results shown in Figure 4.
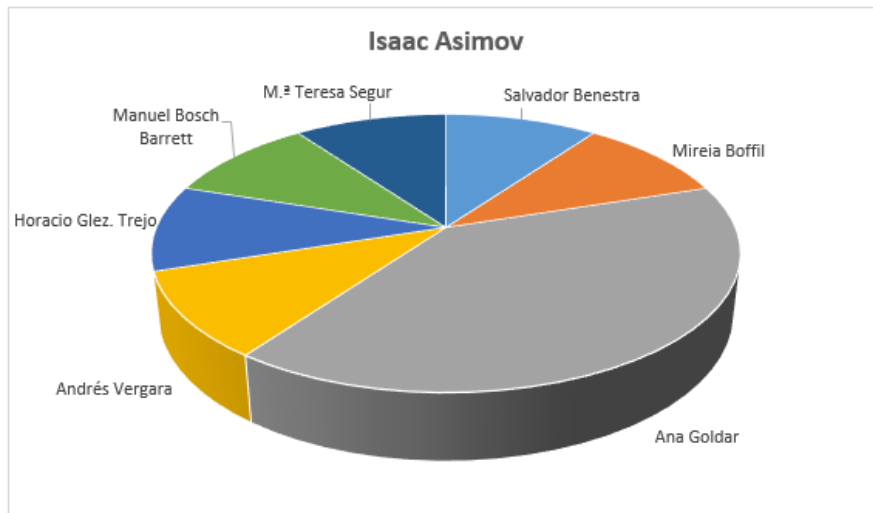
Fig. 4: *Isaac Asimov's translators*

If the researcher wants to extend the study, attention can be paid to the names of the translators for the genre and for Asimov in particular. One of the most prolific ones for science fiction, Ana Goldar, is also present in the specific case of Asimov. A deeper look into her translating work in the database leads to the conclusion that she also practiced her translation skills in other genres and beyond mass literature, translating authors such as Dashiell Hammett, Horace McCoy or even canonical ones, such as Graham Greene or Joseph Conrad (see Figure 5). All these interrelations can be traced in HISTRA thanks to the crosschecking of data inside the database and can be the starting point for a more in-depth study on specific translators' practices or works.
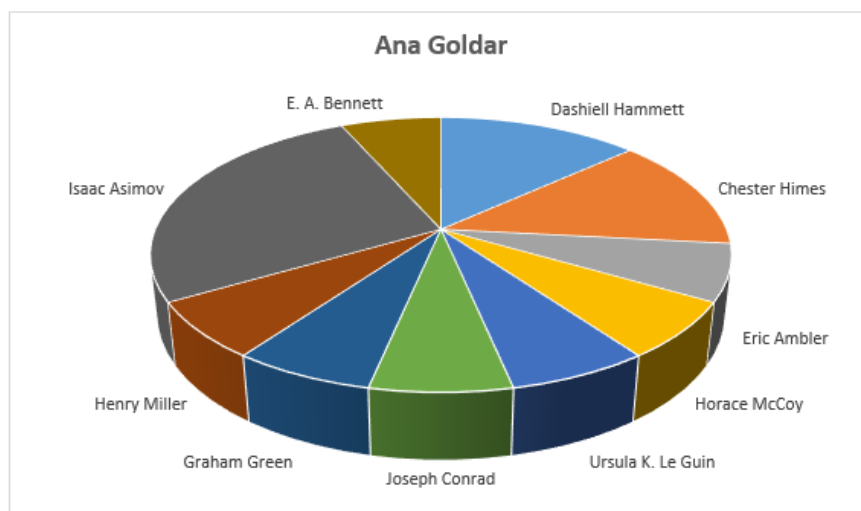
Fig. 5: *Authors translated by Ana Goldar*

Ana Goldar was a very prolific translator who emigrated from Argentina to Spain due to the political and cultural repression during the dictatorship in Argentina, which led to a crisis in the publishing industry with the consequence of exile for

many intellectuals. They sought exile in Spain even though the situation here was not much better (FALCÓN 2013: 62). A study of her translation career and the impact of exile seems therefore of utmost interest and the starting data for it could be extracted from the HISTRA database.

Another kind of study which could be carried out departing from the digital catalogue deals with the included translators who are also featured as authors. That is the case, for example, of the most productive translator of science fiction in the database: José M.ª Aroca. A search carried out under his name shows, similar to the case of Ana Goldar, the names of the authors he translated, most of them related to science fiction, as can be appreciated in Figure 6.
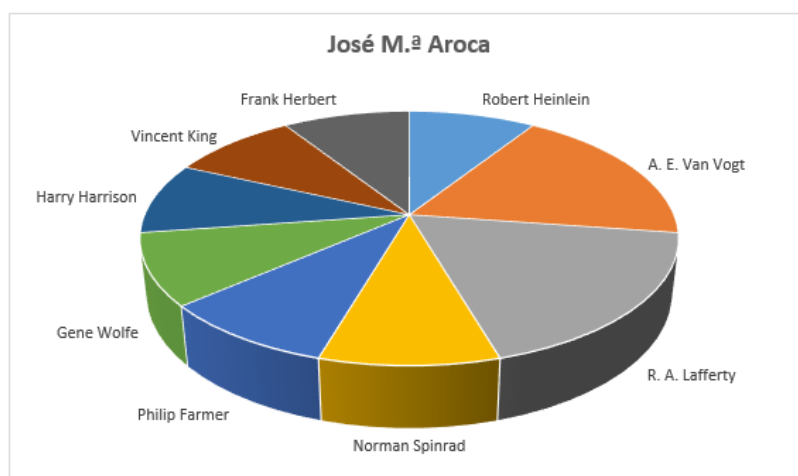
Fig. 6: *Authors translated by Jose M.ª Aroca*

The checking of these data against the information obtained from external sources to HISTRA about this translator's own production (see, for example, the data included in the library of "La tercera fundación" online) sheds light on the work of Aroca, who produced science fiction stories of his own. Thus, it is possible to even find his own production inside anthologies where the rest of the works are his translation, such as the case illustrated in figure 7 (devoted to the collection entitled *Antología de novelas de anticipación* in its volume 4).

This kind of production was nothing new for translators devoted to the same genre for a time, since they many times used translation tasks as their training field for their own works[2].This is undoubtedly one of the most compelling paths of research that can be followed after the search in HISTRA has been done, since it can complete the puzzle of the History of Translation in Spain by unravelling the translation practices at each historical moment.

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[2] This was the case, for example, of pseudotranslations published in mass literature in Spain during the aftermath of the Civil War: translators, using pseudonyms with similar phonetics to foreign names, used to publish their own productions in the field of mass literature in an attempt to offer them to the public as real translations, since they knew this would increase the sales (see GÓMEZ CASTRO 2005 and RABADÁN 2001 for more on this phenomenon).

Fig. 7: *Example of own production & translations in the same volume*

To be continued ...

As illustrated by the case study offered here, the digitization of the cards compiled by Dr. Santoyo, using tools which entail the standardization of the information certainly increases the possibilities of exploitation of the manual catalogue. The HISTRA catalogue is composed of translations into the Spanish language and it constitutes a robust source of information for the study of the History of Translation in our country. The translators' works are exhaustively controlled, identified and linked to the right registers by means of a rigorous control of authorities. Besides, the use of international standards such as MARC21 enables the exporting of the data for their posterior analysis with other

software. The catalogue is fit for Web 2.0 and the use of metadata offers the possibility of adapting it to Web 3.0, which in turn fosters the dissemination of the information and enhances collaborative work. Thus, this catalogue serves as the basis for interesting studies at a philological level, concerning either literary reception or focused on specific translators at a precise time in history: this connection can help "describe changes in literary trends, account for the regeneration of a culture, trace changes in politics or ideology and explain the expansion and transfer of thought and knowledge in a particular era", as Long indicates (2007: 63).

Research on History of Translation today poses new challenges to the field and makes use of the valuable help offered by tools such as catalogues and electronic corpora, since these have implied "(...) new potentialities to historiographic accounts of translation in a renewed and curious alliance between technology, linguistics and the social sciences" (PAGANO 2002: 131). Hence the need for a project such as HISTRA, in a joint effort for extending the work in this direction[3].

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[3] The project currently receives no funding from any public or private agency or sector and it is therefore at a temporary *impasse*, waiting to develop its full potential.

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