

Translations in the history of languages: From their position in historical corpora to their effects on language change

Nikolaos Lavidas <nlavidas@uoa.gr>

Workshop convenors:

Nikolaos Lavidas (Athens), Robert Crellin (Oxford), Hanne Eckhoff (Oxford), Dag Haug (Oslo)

Keywords: translations, diachrony, language change, contact, corpora

Workshop description and research questions

An account of language change that includes the role of translations is a challenge for any theoretical model. Recent studies have recognized a twofold relation between language change and translations: on the one hand, the study of translations can be part of a research methodology and provide vital data for the investigation of language change, and, on the other hand, translations can be seen as a trigger for language change of various types (Koller 1998; McLaughlin 2011).

The characteristics of translations as an important context of written language contact have been discussed in several studies on contact—for example, as related to ancient languages used for religious purposes (e.g., in the case of Sanskrit, Koine Greek, Latin and Classical Arabic). The role of translations is also obvious in the development of a language's prestige. The translation of ancient (especially Latin and Greek) works and of the biblical texts into late medieval and early modern European languages has been analyzed as an important factor for the emergence of the vernacular written languages (cf. Cornillie & Drinka 2019 [eds.]). Biblical translations, for instance, led to the realization that the vernaculars have all the necessary means of expressing the Bible. As a result, the publication of the Bible in the vernacular languages parallels the publication of grammar books in several northern European countries (Linn 2013). Certain grammatical and stylistic characteristics can be seen as related to the influence of translations in the standardization and establishment of the target language's prestige. Moreover, there is consensus that translations have been a major factor in the introduction of loanwords—for instance, in the case of the introductions of Latin loanwords into Early English (Lakoff 1972; van Hoecke & Goyens 1990; Delisle & Woodsworth 2012; Steiner 2008). Other studies have stressed that translations have transferred culture-specific concepts into various languages and cultures (Häcker 2011; Luraghi 2013 – cf. Luraghi & Cuzzolin 2007 on translations of Luke's Gospel into Latin, Gothic and Old Church Slavonic).

A thorough examination of the role of translations in the history of languages must confront several significant challenges. In our full workshop description we include research topics that the workshop papers are invited to consider:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1hxoyh0KeZZXpIDHuls48KTvIXqsOjOVmL4sm4g5WZPM/edit?usp=sharing>

Call for Papers:

We invite papers on all listed and related issues. Provisional abstracts (of no more than 300 words excluding references) should be sent to the workshop organizers, Nikolaos Lavidas (nlavidasuoa.gr), Robert Crellin (robert.crellinclassics.ox.ac.uk), Hanne Eckhoff (hanne.eckhoffmod-langs.ox.ac.uk), Dag Haug (d.t.t.haugifikk.uio.no), no later than November 10, 2022.

For the full workshop description, please visit our page here:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1hxoyh0KeZZXplDHuls48KTvIXqsOjOVmL4sm4g5WZPM/edit?usp=sharing>