

Digital humanities and big translation history in the Global South: A Latin American perspective

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31577/WLS.2021.13.3.10>

Big translation history (BTH) is a translation history that can be analyzed computationally, using digital tools to study massive data, from a transnational, relational, and large-scale perspective (Roig-Sanz and Fólica 2021; Fólica, Roig-Sanz, and Caristia 2020).^{*} This article reflects upon the metahistoriography of constructing a BTH by integrating two areas of knowledge in the humanities – digital humanities and translation history – in the transcontinental Spanish-speaking geographic space of Latin America and also Spain. It is divided in three sections: the first describes the emergence and singularity of the digital humanities (DH) in the Spanish-speaking space; the second studies how translation history has been developed as a sub-field of translation studies in Latin America and Spain, and the third one discusses the contributions that DH have made to the history of translation regarding a BTH approach. This point will be illustrated with my current research on the circulation of literature translated in the Ibero-American press from 1898 to 1959. From a BTH perspective, we can complicate methodological nationalism and move toward transnational studies that take linguistic diversity within nations into account, as well as the transnational character of languages such as Spanish and Portuguese. General categories such as “Ibero-America” and “Latin America” do not necessarily imply the existence of a homogenous or monolingual identity. Quite the contrary, BTH works with the tension between the general space and the historical-political circumstances traced to each of the national case studies, while refraining from generalizing about each specific, national editorial field. Rather, the goal of my research is to construct a transnational pattern of translation flows by comparing metadata from various national libraries’ catalogs.

DIGITAL HUMANITIES IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH: THE LATIN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

The Global South is a concept that was first used in the 1990s but has been more frequently employed in the social sciences and humanities as of 2004 to refer to the “other” geographic space encompassing areas such as Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, as well as Latin America. For the purposes of this article, the so-called Global South

^{*} This article is published within the framework of the ERC (Starting Grant) project “Social Networks of the Past. Mapping Hispanic and Lusophone Literary Modernity” (1898–1959), grant agreement No. 803860, led by Diana Roig-Sanz.

will be used to reflect on the Latin American experience within this framework and understood as a relative and relational term that transcends geographical boundaries, which allows for the inclusion of the former colonial power, Spain, despite its location in the so-called Global North. It is a well-known fact that the DH developed as a discipline in European and US academies, with a heavy Anglophone bias, both in the research technology and in terms of the publications presenting the research findings – mostly journals housed within publishing groups from the Global North. When it comes to DH’s leading publications, English not only prevails as a dominant language, but also as the only one, rendering scientific production from other linguistic areas invisible. The following table published by Anna Svensson (2014, 15) in a bibliometrics study on periodicals in the field shows Latin America’s scarce presence in DH journals.

Journal	Number of selected articles	Latin American subject	Author with Latin American affiliation	Latin American subject/ Author with Latin American affiliation
<i>Caracteres</i> 2012	42	7	4	2
<i>Computers and the Humanities</i> 1966–2004	918	10	0	0
<i>Language Resources and Evaluation</i> 2005–	230	2	5	1
<i>Digital Humanities Quarterly</i> 2007–	133	4	1	1
<i>Digital Studies/Le champ numérique</i> 2009–	47	0	0	0
<i>Literary and Linguistic Computing</i> 1986–	815+4	11+4	2+4	0+2
Total	2189	38	13	5

Total journal articles including a Latin American subject matter, an author affiliated to a Latin American institution, or both, from the first year of publication to 2013 (Svensson 2014, 15).

While the dominance of English in the DH field limits the potential for contributions from other languages or cultures, some researchers (del Rio Riande and Medeiros Pimenta 2019; Fiormonte and Sordi 2019) argue that the DH’s restrictive character simultaneously opens a space for new prospects in the “Humanidades Digitales” and “Humanidades Digitais” of the Latin American countries. These researchers seek to study the specific contributions of the DH written in Spanish, Portuguese, and peripheral languages in general, developing at the margins of the centers controlling the DH discipline.¹

According to Gimena del Rio Riande and Ricardo Medeiros Pimenta (2019, 3), the DH of the Global South champion linguistic and biocultural diversity, yielding the stage to languages beyond English and, as an extension, to different realities, methods, and cultural traditions. In this respect, I can cite projects protecting indigenous languages through digital tools, such as “7000 Languages”.² The term

Global South, which was coined by the North, has been resignified from these Souths as a geographically, politically, and imaginatively diverse space. The Global South functions as a metaphor, epistemological orientation (de Sousa Santos 2017; Mignolo 2018), and critical space for the localization of certain discussions (Mota 2017, 2).

Notably, the DH of the Global South aim to counter data pillaging. Rather than viewing the South as a mere provider of raw data, the DH champion the sovereignty of data. As such, the DH of the South's localization in a specific territory and their critical position regarding the creative, public use of open-source programs, open data, open access to findings, and the possibility of reusing and transforming the data, are the *sine qua non* of their existence.

While recognizing that most technology comes from the Global North, the DH researchers of the South advocate for its transculturated use (Rama 1984), with the creative reappropriation of technology. For instance, DH could be used for the Spanish translation and adaptation of the Taxonomy of Digital Research Activities in the Humanities,³ which originated in the Anglophone world. Furthermore, DH of the Global South seek to use the smallest number of digital tools needed to answer their research questions – namely, “minimal computing”⁴

Many in the DH publish their research in Hispanic journals such as *Revista de Humanidades Digitales* and *Artnodes*, or in more general ones on communications, technology, and the humanities, such as *Revista Digital Universitaria*, *Caracteres*, *El Profesional de la Información*, and *ARTyHUM*. These generally multilingual publications question English's monolingual paradigm.

In terms of the issues addressed in such journals, a review of the tables of contents of two specialized DH magazines from 2017 to 2021 shows that language and literature account for eight articles in *Artnodes* and 23 in *Revista de Humanidades Digitales*. In both magazines, only three articles address translation history (TH) from a DH perspective: Dolores Romero (2018a) presents the digital-libraries project known as Mnemosine,⁵ emphasizing women translators, while the other two articles address the building of databases on translation. María Remedios Fernández Ruiz, Gloria Corpas Pastor, and Miriam Seghiri (2018) study translations of African literature to the English using BDÁFRICA, a bibliographical database, while Alejandro Bia Platas and Jesús Javier Rodríguez Sala (2016) explain how a database and research-document repository were built for the TRACE project (Translation and Censorship). Though TH is far from dominant in Spanish-language DH publications, the digital turn is currently changing the study and constitution of TH archives (Algee-Hewitt et al. 2016).

TRANSLATION HISTORY IN THE SPANISH-SPEAKING WORLD

In the field of translation studies, the expanding digitization of texts has broadened the archive, posing new challenges to TH research. In this section, I will review Spanish-language TH literature in relation to the type of sources these works are currently using so that, in the next section, I am able to examine the potential contribution of BTH to the field. According to Luis Pegenauté's taxonomy (2010), research in

the Spanish-speaking TH field can base itself upon: (1) translation cataloging studies; (2) bibliographical repertoires on TH studies; (3) anthologies of translation thought throughout history; (4) compiling and editing translations; and (5) reference works. Two other useful categories are: (6) academic journals on TH; and (7) linked-data platforms allowing for relational and large-scale analyses of the aforementioned data sources.

1. Translation cataloging studies

Information can be traced to general bibliographic sources (such as the monumental *Manual del librero hispano-americano* by Palau Dulcet, 1923–1945); specific translation catalogs such as the UNESCO's *Index Translationum*, which registers translations published worldwide according to the data provided by each country since 1932; and the Mexican index of translations *Índice de las traducciones impresas en México*, launched by the exiled Spaniard José Ignacio Mantecón Navasal in 1964. Other relevant reference works include “libraries” with information on translators, such as Menéndez Pelayo's pioneering *Biblioteca de traductores españoles* (1952–1953), and Latin American ones such as the *Biblioteca chilena de traductores*, compiled by Toribio Medina (1925).

2. Bibliographical repertoires on translation history studies

Systematic, digital-access reference lists would include *Trades: Base de Datos de Estudios de Traducción* (Palomares Perrault 1999), with 1,800 references on research published in Spain from 1960 to 1994; *BITRES: Biblioteca de Traducciones Españolas* (Lafarga 2015), whose bibliographic list on TH in Spain includes around 1,200 references; and *BITRA: Bibliografía de traducción e interpretación* (Franco Aixelá 2001–2020) with 83,000 references on the field. In contrast to the first two, *BITRA* is updated regularly, making it the most complete database on Spanish-language translation studies. However, a thematic consultation on “Humanidades digitales” yields only one result: an article on the BDÁFRICA translation database cited above.

3. Anthologies on translation thought throughout history

Leaving works on specific authors aside, Luis Pegenaute (2010) compiles five anthologies published in Spain between 1987 and 2000, though he also mentions anthologies published for both Latin America and Spain (Catelli and Gargatagli 1998). More recent anthologies include the Latin American ones led by Gabriela Ádamo (2012), Nayelli Castro Ramírez, Ana María D'Amore, and Paula Andrea Montoya (2018), and Juan Arnau, Marina Bornas, Paula Caballero et al. (2013).⁶

4. Compiling and editing translations

In terms of translation publishing and compiling, certain platforms offer digital versions of translations, such as *Biblioteca Virtual da Literatura Universal en Galego*; *Traducciones y traductores de literatura y ensayo*, on 19th century Ibero-America, coordinated by Juan Jesús Zaro; and the *Bibliotecas de Traducciones Españolas* (2015) and *Biblioteca de traducciones hispanoamericanas* directed by Francisco Lafarga and Luis Pegenaute at *Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes*. While these platforms tend to include few translations (under 50), their materials might prove

interesting when compiling a corpus of translated literary texts upon which DH tools could be deployed – such as automatic word-frequency searches, stylometry, and topic modeling.

5. Reference works

Lastly, Pegenaute (2010) mentions reference works compiling general information on translators and authors, in terms of translations: Pegenaute's coproductions alongside Lafarga, *Diccionario histórico de la traducción en España* (2009) and *Diccionario histórico de la traducción en Hispanoamérica* (2013), as well as the Catalan *Diccionari de la traducció catalana* (Bacardí and Godayol 2011). Dictionary formats aside, when it comes to Latin America, works such as *Traductores y traducciones en la historia cultural de América Latina* (Pagni, Payàs, and Willson 2011) are worth mentioning as well.

6. Academic journals specializing in translation history or having published a special issue on translation history

In general, as Francisco Javier Vargas Gómez (2017) shows in his bibliometric study on 72 translation-studies journals in Latin America, research on literary translation tends to dominate the scene and is usually conducted within the limits of national literature, overshadowing other current topics, such as automated translation. This would explain the scarcity of research intermingling the contributions of DH and TH. To determine whether TH studies deploying DH methodologies even exist, I have reviewed the indexes of 12 Spanish and Latin American journals that have housed translation studies, over their last five years (2017–2021) of publication.⁷ While I found that the translation-studies perspective is by no means dominant, I could mention five articles whose interests could align with DH, either because of their large-scale, quantitative perspective, or because they use digital tools for data processing. I found quantitative studies with statistical information on the publishing market (Szpilbarg 2017), two lexicometric studies on *The Origin of Species* (Vandaele 2019; Acuña-Partal 2020), one relational database analysis on translations of *Little Women* (Hernández Socas and Giugliano 2019), and the digital publishing of a translation by Edith Nesbit (Romero 2018b). While the digital surge has irrevocably changed our practice as researchers, methodological frameworks are lagging – in fact, publications employing DH tools remain scarce in translation-studies publications.

7. Linked-data platforms

Lastly, I believe that linked data may prove a worthwhile resource for TH. These *meta* sources link data from different databases and repositories to generate knowledge from the connectivity among various sets of information that remain scattered to date, allowing us to better exploit said information. For instance, *Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes* houses 270,000 entries created using the standard MARC21 exchange.⁸

DIGITAL HUMANITIES CONTRIBUTIONS TO A SPANISH-LANGUAGE BIG TRANSLATION HISTORY

To organize discourse on translation history, Lieven D'Hulst (2010) proposes three distinct levels: history (based on factual events), historiography (which focuses on discourse in history, that is, on the ways history has been created over time),

and metahistoriography, namely “the explicit reflection on the concepts and methods to write history and also on epistemological and methodological problems that are related to the use of these concepts and methods” (2010, 398). The following section argues that DH can help to discuss TH’s metahistoriography, or its methodological and epistemological problems.

An emergent “community of practices” (del Rio Riande 2018) is currently exploring different historical aspects of translation history through a DH approach. In her project *DigiPhiLit*,⁹ Rocío Ortuño Casanova (2020) describes the challenges of exploring translation in the digital repository of Filipino periodicals (1880–1935) using Optical Character Recognition (OCR). Meanwhile, Joana Malta, Luís Crespo de Andrade, and Pedro Lisboa (2020) explore how foreign authors are cited in the Portuguese cultural magazines digitized by the project *Revistas de Ideias e Cultura*, applying a statistical model.¹⁰ Also notably, Ceyda Elgül (2019) uses a quantitative and relational perspective to study biographies translated into Turkish and published in books (1800–2020).

In what follows, I will examine the main features of current TH in order to determine which contributions DH could make to the development of a BTH in the Spanish-speaking world – especially in my current research framed into the project, “Social Networks of the Past: Mapping Hispanic and Lusophone Literary Modernity,” which I will briefly touch upon throughout this subsection, as well as in other similar research projects.

Looking back on descriptions of the field (Vega and Pulido 2013; Ordóñez López and Sabio Pinilla 2015), Spanish language TH is characterized by the following:

1. The monograph prevails over general publications, especially monographs on a certain translator, set of works, or specific period. In this sense, BTH can draw from information scattered across these monographs, tying them together with linked data by feeding data from non-homogenous sources into a single database, allowing for relational analysis. The database built by Hanno Ehrlicher, director of the Tübingen University portal *Revistas Culturales 2.0* on Hispanic-modernist and avant-garde periodicals, stands as a good example of a single database of numerous sources in which translation appears as a research category.¹¹

2. The study of translations (which generally involves comparisons to the original) has recently turned toward “Translator Studies” (Chesterman 2009), deploying a sociological and historical perspective. Using large-scale Social Network Analysis tools, BTH can create visuals for social networks among translators, understood as “cultural mediators” (Roig-Sanz 2018), alongside other agents, institutions in the editorial and cultural fields, and published translations. In terms of the network, this relational study can help visualize collective biographies instead of emphasizing a single agent, identifying actors who have been made anonymous by literary and cultural history. The *BIESES* project,¹² on writing by pre-1800 Spanish women, shows how these tools can be used in the literary field (not specific to translation studies) from the Social Network Analysis perspective. In Spain, I can also mention the work by Dolores Romero, from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, whose citizen-science proj-

ect¹³ aims to highlight women translators' trajectories as a way of enriching the data in the National Library of Spain's catalog.

Likewise, BTH can apply Name Entity Recognition (NER) processes to automatically detect persons or places on a large scale. In the Social Networks of the Past project, I use NER to locate authors and translators in periodical publications. Additionally, I apply several methods to group names that may refer to the same person based on graphical or phonetic similarity to reconcile these names against authority files like the Virtual Internet Authority File,¹⁴ in order to provide a unique identifier for each person, linking names to open databases so that they can be easily identified when reusing the data in other projects.

3. Tracing and consulting translator and translation archives is key to TH research. BTH can massively exploit these sources, which tend to be scattered, through the digitization of materials, image processing of digital objects, metadata extraction, text cleaning, and OCR for subsequent large-scale analysis. One of the goals of our project is to find translations and information about translators within the cultural Ibero-American press that have already been digitized by various print-media libraries and digital repositories. To this end, I aim to create a meta-catalog of digitized magazines and a text database to search for and process the texts printed in these magazines. More specifically, I aim to apply NER and other Natural Language Processing techniques to the texts to identify and link translators, authors, and work titles, as well as other relevant data, and to perform various analyses, including network analysis or topic modelling. Other similar projects using OCR for periodicals in the Hispanic area include *America Lee*,¹⁵ from Argentina, and the aforementioned *DigiPhiLit*.

4. In terms of research on TH as a whole, (mostly canonical) literature tends to prevail. However, given that BTH has no scale limitations, it can deal with broader archives and address various kinds of translations within a given catalog, including scientific, general-dissemination, and literary-translation texts, as well as texts by non-canonical authors. This could yield new kinds of analyses while decentering the literary canon and valuing authors and works that have been forgotten. In the project, I have studied the 15 most translated foreign authors with the greatest presence in the National Library of Spain catalog,¹⁶ as seen in Fig. 1. Though this graph focuses on globally renowned canonical authors, this relational image helps unveil a myriad of publishing houses and translators associated with said authors that were part and parcel of the editorial field from 1900 to 1945. In this case, I have identified the library's most-translated authors, as well as the nodes of their translators, and the publishing houses that printed their works.¹⁷

5. In TH, periodization is key to defining a corpus. Which criteria should we use? Historical and cultural criteria, or criteria specific to the work being studied or to data accessibility? BTH casts light on this problem and, when data is available, allows for broader periodizations than ever before. BTH also allows us to work in the *longue durée* from a transnational or global perspective. In the project, which includes both the Spanish-speaking and Lusophone areas, we have chosen two historical events

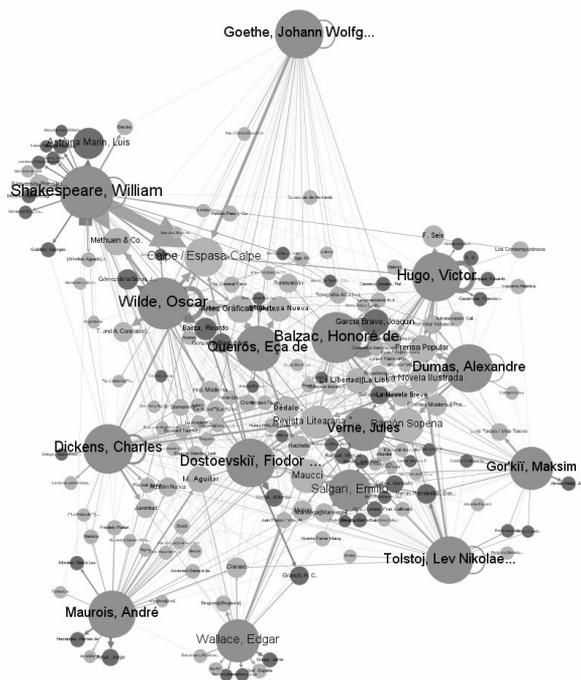


Fig. 1: Graph of the National Library of Spain's 15 most-translated authors (generated by V. Ikoff for our ERC project)

that proved key in forging the region's historical reality in relation to the Spanish empire and the loss of the colonies: Cuba's independence from Spain in 1898 and the Cuban Revolution of 1959. The latter has also been associated with the beginning of the Latin American boom in literature, which gave Spanish-language writing new international visibility.

6. Spatial demarcations are also key to keeping TH research coherent – this research is usually limited to the national or to a specific language within a nation. Regarding the Hispanic field, some researchers restrict their investigations to the Iberian Peninsula (Ordóñez López and Sabio Pinilla 2015; Pegenaut 2010), whereas others also address Latin America, given the shared language (Vega and Pulido 2013; Bastin 2008; Valdeón and Vidal 2019). Nonetheless, as mentioned in the introduction, there is a risk of having our research become too generalized while losing sight of the wealth of each specific context. From a relational perspective, I combine metadata from myriad sources: beyond digital national libraries, it includes transnational repositories such as the Iberoamerican Institute of Berlin and the Biblioteca del Patrimonio Iberoamericano.

7. When TH employs databases, it often uses databases designed for human consultation rather than for massive or relational automated consultations. For instance, the 19th-century translation catalog that Juan Jesús Zaro (2007) published in Andalucía offers relevant print-media documents as pdfs, but, unfortunately, this format

precludes the metadata extraction and reuse required for comparisons with other databases (csv is the most common format for data exchange, while the most common for ease of reading is txt). In my research, I propose building an interoperable database that can be openly shared with the community. Examples can be found in the sample of databases on Iberoamerican periodicals that my colleagues and I have previously published,¹⁸ as well as the finished project database *Revistas Culturales 2.0*.

8. Lastly, TH is also characterized by its interdisciplinarity – with links to the humanities, philology, literary criticism, sociology, cultural studies, and even the histories of science and religion – depending on the kinds of translations being analyzed. BTH reinforces interdisciplinarity in a more obvious way, incorporating technical know-how from the computational and information-systems fields. This reinforces the collaborative aspect of such research, with experts from different fields joining forces. Our research group includes members with training in philology, communications, engineering, data analytics, and complex systems.

CONCLUSION

In sum, big translation history aims to revise epistemological posits on how knowledge is generated and valued in the translation history field in the Spanish-speaking space, focusing on how to share, transform, and preserve knowledge as openly and interoperably as possible. In this crossing between big translation history and the digital humanities, we should avoid a certain naivete when understanding data as objects lacking interpretation (Moretti 2005), as we should be aware that interpretation is already present in data access, selection, and registry in digital humanities datasets. Interpretation is not merely relegated to the moment when the data is analyzed, but affects the entire research process, from its incipience. For analysts adopting the big translation history approach, data is both object of study and reference, which underscores the importance of managing a curated dataset (Bode 2017). In other words, we may either keep the conservative model that transposes the translator's alleged neutrality to the technological terrain, or, as Pym (2016) would advocate, we may choose to stop reinforcing dominant ideological spaces and open the discipline to new areas, objects, and methods guided by new epistemologies and paradigm changes as well as by new academic practices based on the constitution of interdisciplinary teams, data exchanges among research groups from various research centers, and the open publication of research findings. There is still plenty of interdisciplinary work ahead in translation studies. Projects crossing translation history with digital humanities in the Global South and, specifically, in Latin America remain scarce, not because the field is uninteresting, but because the field has only recently emerged. This nascent approach's potential could not only prove fruitful to work on digital archives, but also to research employing the transnational and large-scale perspective. Thus, we believe in the urgent need to train ourselves as big translation humanities researchers in order to exploit new research objects from a fresh methodological perspective.

NOTES

- 1 For a study of DH research groups in Ibero-America, see Ortega and Gutiérrez 2014; Toscano et al. 2020.
- 2 See <https://7000.org/>.
- 3 See <https://linhd.uned.es/uso-de-la-taxonomia-en-hd-de-tadirah-en-espanol/>.
- 4 This originated within a subgroup of Global Outlook: Digital Humanities within the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations, <https://go-dh-github.io/mincomp/>.
- 5 See <https://www.ucm.es/proyectomnemisine/rescate>.
- 6 For further development on research in the Latin American field, see Pagni (2014).
- 7 Namely, *1611: Revista de Historia de la Traducción, El Taco en la Brea, Estudios de Traducción, Ex-Libris, Hermeneus: Revista de Traducción e Interpretación, Lenguas Vivas, MonTI, Mutatis Mutandis, Quaderns, Sendebars, TRANS: Revista de Traductología, Transfer*.
- 8 See <http://data.cervantesvirtual.com/blog/2020/01/23/datos-enlazados/>; http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/portales/traduccion_hispanoamericanas/.
- 9 See <https://digiphilit.uantwerpen.be/>.
- 10 See http://ric.slihi.pt/Seara_Nova/ficha_tecnica.
- 11 See <https://www.revistas-culturales.de/es>.
- 12 See www.bieses.net.
- 13 See <https://comunidad.bne.es/proyectos/traduccion-de/>.
- 14 See Viaf.org.
- 15 See <http://americalee.cedinci.org/>.
- 16 The data may be accessed at www.datos.gob.es.
- 17 In the original full-color graph, these are marked in red (authors), green (translators), and purple (publishers), respectively. For further details on the graph, see Roig-Sanz and Fólca (2021 forthcoming).
- 18 See <http://hdl.handle.net/10609/86485>; DOI: 10.23728/b2share.eb5c468d3dc3401c8b2fb4605d868a00.

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Digital humanities and big translation history in the Global South: A Latin American perspective

Digital humanities. Translation studies. Big translation history. Spanish-speaking space.

Drawing from big translation history (BTH), which uses digital-humanities tools for the study of translation history from a transnational, relational, and large-scale perspective, this article develops a metahistoriographic reflection upon the ways translation history can be rebuilt in the Spanish-speaking space, using computational tools. To this end, I review how the sub-field of translation history has been constituted in Latin America and Spain, and I conclude by pointing toward the contributions that big translation history can make to the future development of translation history in a region that is framed in the so-called Global South. I will illustrate this point with my current research on the circulation of translated literature in Ibero-America (Spain, Latin America) between 1898 and 1959.

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