



Scholarly and professional communication in archives: archival traditions and languages

The differences between archival traditions have hindered communication between archival practitioners and scholars from different countries and traditions and have impacted on the success of international recordkeeping projects. Some of the concepts that underpin the current archival literature in English are difficult to translate, one of the reasons being that many other languages do not have a word for the concept of ‘records’. Even within the Anglophone professional community, concepts and terms differ (like-wise in the French-, German- and Spanish-speaking world and other language spheres). Records Continuum concepts, which have influenced the development of the international Records Management standard ISO 15489, are generally misunderstood outside of Australia. On the other hand, very little literature is available in English about archival theories and practices in non-Anglophone countries.

More research is needed on the impact of language and culture on recordkeeping traditions and practices. In this special issue of *Archives & Manuscripts*, we are seeking to develop our knowledge base by bringing together authors that represent different archival traditions and practices. This issue covers important aspects of the archival traditions in France, Italy, Slovenia, Finland, Iceland, Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Japan, and through the discussion of translations of the *Universal Declaration on Archives*, it brings insights from as far afield as the Dutch Caribbean Islands, the Philippines, China, Iran, Israel and the Arab world. In addition to these, contributions from Germany, Spain, Denmark and Canada were planned for this issue. However, due to increased workloads in the COVID-19 pandemic, the contributors were not able to submit their pieces.

From the very first relationships archivists endeavoured across political and cultural borders, coping with differences between archival traditions has been a major challenge. One of the schemes to facilitate communication between archival practitioners and scholars from different countries and traditions was (and still is) the creation of glossaries and dictionaries. These tools, more often than not, are also used to standardise terminology and practices and thereby contribute to further professionalisation.

Such standardisation and professionalisation was the ambition of Dutch archivists Muller, Feith and Fruin who composed the *Manual for the arrangement and description of archives* (1898).¹ Not only in chapter 6 ‘on the conventional use of certain terms and signs’, but throughout the book the authors strived to standardisation and uniformity in the arrangement and description of archives.

Shortly after the publication of the *Manual* the first translation appeared: a German edition translated by Hans Kaiser, and closely supervised by the Dutch trio. The translation into another language and into another archival tradition led to many, especially terminological questions. Some professional Dutch terms remained untranslated; for others an adequate translation could hardly be found. In his foreword Wilhelm Wiegand

defended the fact that the book was based on Dutch relationships and Dutch archival history, and not on German practices. Still, Kaiser referred here and there in notes to German examples, and sometimes he pointed out German deviations from the Dutch.

An Italian translation, by Giuseppe Bonelli and Giovanni Vittani, appeared in 1908. In their extensive foreword they explained to their Italian colleagues that Muller, Feith and Fruin restricted themselves to what was real and universal in our science. 'Certainly, one only has to open the book to notice on every page that it is written in the Netherlands, but the archivist, and he alone, immediately comprehends just as well that it is not written just for the Netherlands, but equally well for all countries,' *'non è scritto soltanto per l'Olanda, ma sì bene per tutti i paesi'*.² The Dutch examples are easily transformed into local examples. After all, what difference does it make: the archive history of any of the earlier Italian states is as different from another as from the Dutch province of Utrecht. The Italians had translated from the German version, not only because Dutch presented too many difficulties, but also because the German edition – revised and amended by the Dutch authors – was, as it were, a second Dutch edition.

Bonelli and Vittani had just as much difficulty with the technical terminology as Kaiser. Yes, minutes are what Italians know as *verbali*, dossier can be translated by *incarto*, but all those strange Dutch terms! *Vidimus* and *charter* are unknown in Italy. Bonelli and Vittani had contemplated excluding the whole of Chapter 6, but in the end decided to retain it. At some time, just as in the Netherlands, the prevailing uncertainty about the exact meaning of terms – strengthened by the diversity of local tradition – would have to be resolved. Bonelli and Vittani added many notes in which they pointed out differences in the Italian archival situation, and they permitted themselves more adaptations than Kaiser.

In 1910, just in time for the international congress of archivists and librarians in Brussels, a French edition appeared, translated by Joseph Cuvelier (who was working in the General State Archives in Brussels) and Henri Stein (of the Archives Nationales in Paris). Like their German and Italian predecessors, they were troubled by the terminology, which was at times made even more difficult by the differences between the French terminology used in France and in Wallonia. Thus, they adopted the term *retroactes* (section 18) from the Belgian terminology, even though this term was (and still is) not admitted by the *Académie française*. The term *lias* (section 86: A *lias* (file) is a series of papers strung together on a string) indicates something different from the French *liasse*, which is why Cuvelier and Stein introduced the disused word *fliasse*.

In the American edition (1940), most archival terms were given as an American equivalent. However much of the original meaning was lost. Thus, the word *oorkonde* (diploma) became: 'formal document', or 'formal instrument', sometimes 'charter'. What was the translator, Arthur Leavitt, to do with *archieff*? He argued that it could not be translated as 'archive', because English only really uses the plural form 'archives'. Instead of the term 'archive group' that was used in England, Leavitt took the term 'archival collection' as the equivalent for *archieff*. Leavitt recognised that a collection is understood 'in the sense of things brought together by collectors', but he felt that the adjective 'archival' adequately reflected the definition in section 1.

The English translation was translated into Chinese (1959) and Portuguese (1973). Translations into Bulgarian and Russian, based on the French version, appeared in 1912 and 1931, and an Estonian translation was published in 1998–2001. The *Manual* played

a significant role in the standardisation of archival terminology and archival practice. Not because people abroad could simply adopt the *Manual* indiscriminately – we have seen how much difficulty Dutch jargon gave translators – but rather it served as an example, to be copied in their own country.

In 1950, the first congress of the International Council on Archives (ICA) was held in Paris.³ One of the proposals put forward to the congress was the creation of an international vocabulary of archival terminology. The Italian State Archivist Emilio Re pointed out that this proposal would run into two practical difficulties (which even today haunt translators of archival terminology).⁴ First, in many countries there has not always been achieved a sufficient clarity and definite stabilisation of archival language; and second, in what language or languages should the terms be defined? On this last point, Re diplomatically sidestepped the question by suggesting that ‘the preference will be given to the language of the countries which possess the archives the most important for the history of humanity, and which have, consequently, a corresponding archival literature of universal importance.’

Nevertheless, the proposal for an international glossary came back at the second ICA congress, held in the Netherlands in 1953. The Dutch archivist Herman Hardenberg reported on the confusion in archival terminology. The uniformity of opinion he proposed was achieved with regard to the definition of *fonds d’archives* and, to a lesser extent, to the concept of the restoration principle. But for the rest, most participants – following Sir Hilary Jenkinson – considered international uniformity of terms and definitions impossible. Robert-Henri Bautier, however, thought that an effort should be made to arrive at precise definitions of the meaning of archival terms in the different languages. He referred to his proposal at the first congress to set up national terminology commissions, who would also deal with regional variations (Italy, Switzerland) and differences between French in Canada, Belgium and France. The second congress recommended to establish an ICA committee on the uniformity of archival terms. Meinert (Germany) suggested as languages French, English, Spanish, Italian, and German. On the proposal of Tihon (Belgium), Dutch was added, because of the importance of the archival literature in the Netherlands (Bautier had proposed Dutch too, in 1950). The members of the committee came from The Netherlands, France, Italy, the Federal Republic of Germany, the German Democratic Republic, Spain and the United Kingdom. In 1956 the committee decided to have each member compile a list of the 100 most used terms and their definitions in each language. In the end, French was chosen for definitions, with only equivalent terms (and no definitions) in other languages. These served as the basis for the first multilingual archival glossary ever published: Elsevier’s *Lexicon of archive terminology* (1964).⁵

In the first contribution to this special issue, Pauline Soum-Paris assesses the suitability of the Elsevier *Lexicon*, as well as that of three other tools: ICA’s *Dictionary of Archival Terminology* (1984), the *Vocabulaire des archives* published by the French Organisation for Standardisation (1986) and ICA’s *Multilingual Archival Terminology* database (2012–) to translate archival terminology from English to French. Whereas the *Lexicon* only covered six languages and the *Dictionary of Archival Terminology*, seven (with the addition of Russian), the *Multilingual Archival Terminology* database currently encompasses 24 languages, including several Asian languages, Arabic and Hebrew. However, Soum-Paris’ study shows that this increase in the quantity of languages has

not been accompanied by an increase in the quantity of archival terms translated or in the quality of the translations presented. She found that the translations offered in the first two tools were more accurate and clearer and that the listing of potential equivalent terms proposed in the latest tool requires from the users a deep understanding of the archival context of both languages that users of the tool are unlikely to have.⁶

Translating terms that do not have a direct equivalent in the target language is a particularly tricky problem when translating an archival text in several languages. In the second article, Claude Roberto, Karen Anderson and Margaret Crockett discuss translation problems encountered by the translators of the *Universal Declaration on Archives (UDA)*. Those translators faced the challenges of translating terms that may not exist in their language and of making them understandable by the general public in all the countries where the target language is spoken without altering the original meaning while keeping the translations short so that they would fit on the standard-size poster. Terms that were particularly problematic for the twelve translators surveyed included 'records' and 'archives', as well as 'memory' and 'open access'.

The next article also relates to multilingual translations of a single text. Fiorella Foscarini, Giulia Barrera, Aida Škoro Babić, Pekka Henttonen and Jóhanna Gunnlaugsdóttir examine how key archival terms included in the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) have been translated into Italian, Slovenian, Finnish and Icelandic, and discuss the reverberating impact that mistranslations of archival terms in European legislation can have on future legislation and archival practices in the countries affected.

In the following article, Liudmila Varlamova, Elena Latysheva, Orazgul Mukhatova and Dzmitry Varnashou consider how archival terminology evolved following the break-up of the USSR and how it has been influenced by ISO standards, in four countries. They look at four post-Soviet countries, Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine, which all have Russian-language versions of their legislation and standards, facilitating comparisons.

These four articles illustrate some of the problems encountered when translating the basic terms 'records' and 'archives' and the misunderstandings that may ensue. The *UDA* which was developed concurrently in English and in French uses the term 'records' as synonym to the French understanding of 'archives' (i.e. from the time of the documents' creation, without implying a selection), which may be confusing for English speakers, but the translators followed that understanding in their choice of terminology. Soum-Paris shows that the French translations for the word 'records' proposed in the *Multilingual Archival Terminology* database are unhelpful and can be misleading. The term 'records' was mistranslated in the Italian version of the GDPR, with the translators using a word ('registri') which in another context may mean 'records', but not in an archival context so that in that case an effort to achieve consistency within European legislation in fact resulted in a mistranslation. In Finland, on the other hand, it is the term 'archive' that was given in the local version of the GDPR a meaning not consistent with the local use of the term, which is impacting on the understanding of the roles played by records managers and archivists in Finland by imposing a clear distinction between their roles in a country where it previously did not exist. In the post-Soviet countries studied by Varlamova et al., the term 'records' used in ISO standards has been translated inconsistently, and the term 'documents', which in the USSR was understood as referring only to documents with

a historical value has started to be applied to documents kept as evidence under the influence of ISO standards, thereby taking on a new meaning.

However, translation of archival concepts is only one part of the communication problem facing the archival field. Archival concepts are embedded in archival traditions and there is a 'plurality of archival traditions with distinct epistemological, ontological, ideological [and] practical ... aspects at work within the contemporary professional archival and recordkeeping landscape.'⁷ Anne Gilliland defined archival traditions as the manifestations, behaviours and understandings resulting from the historical, cultural and socio-political lineage and influences, accumulated and evolving ideas, record- and memory-keeping practices, relevant juridical framings and requirements and experiences particular to a specific local, national or regional formalised professional archival environment'.⁸ The differences between archival traditions are not always obvious to casual observers, but they can lead to conflicts, misunderstandings and awkward compromises when trying to import in one country ideas that originated in a different archival tradition.

Comparative studies of archival practices in different countries will reveal key differences that have subsisted in each country despite the influence of foreign ideas. The last two articles in this issue illustrate how national archival ideas and practices may hinder the adoption of foreign ideas or survive the adoption of new theories and practices. Édouard Vasseur discusses the extent to which records management ideas have been accepted, adopted and acculturated in France. He argues that although the records management ideas originating from Anglophone countries are not incompatible with French practices, the existence of French archival theories that rejected the idea of a strict separation between records and archives and advocated for a different approach to the management of semi-current records is partly responsible for the resistance that records management ideas have encountered in France.

In the last article, Yo Hashimoto shows that although Japanese archival scholars claim to have been influenced by 'the West', their archival theories and practices include unique Japanese characteristics, in particular the practice by Japanese archivists to conduct fieldwork and produce sketches of archival collections before transferring them to an archives for preservation, and the principles of original form and equal treatment, which mandate the preservation of the whole collections (without appraisal) and equal treatment for archives wherever they originated from.

The problem of improving international and intercultural understanding in the archival sphere is particularly relevant to Australia given the important role that Australian archivists have played in the development of international recordkeeping standards. ISO 15489 was based on the Australian Standard AS 4390 Records Management. Yet, Australian archival theories are widely misunderstood. A major reason for this is the terminology used, which takes on meanings different from those commonly used in other Anglophone countries. Key terms such as 'records' and 'recordkeeping' have acquired special meanings in Records Continuum theory, as well as the term 'continuum', which is to be distinguished from a linear continuity between records and archives.⁹

Archival principles and practices relate to the conditions under which public and private records are being created and maintained.¹⁰ These conditions are not primarily administrative or driven by technology, but to a large extent socio-cultural.

Understanding these conditions is a prerequisite not only for understanding differences and commonalities in recordkeeping around the globe, but also for communicating with and learning from our colleagues. More studies like those presented in this special issue are needed to understand the complexities of archival traditions around the globe and to facilitate scholarly communications between archivists. We would suggest comparative studies of archival literature and practices in different countries, for example discussions of how the same literature is put in practice in different countries or regions. The profession would also benefit from a discussion of the impact of seminal works and/or key concepts from non-English speaking countries onto theories and practices in English-speaking countries. Finally, there is an urgent need for research on the problems of incommensurability of colonial and indigenous recordkeeping practices.

Notes

1. The following is a summary of Peter Horsman, Eric Ketelaar and Theo Thomassen, 'Introduction to the 2003 Reissue', in S Muller, JA Feith and R Fruin, *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives. Translation of the Second Edition by Arthur Leavitt, with New Introductions...*, Society of American Archivists, Chicago, 2003, pp. V–XXXIII. Reprinted as 'New Respect for the Old Order: The Context of the Dutch Manual', *American Archivist*, vol. 66, no. 2, 2003, pp. 249–70. Japanese translation by Hideyuki Aoyama in *Journal of the Japan Society for Archival Science*, no. 17, 2011, pp. 92–107; and no. 18, 2013, pp. 54–76. See also Eric Ketelaar, 'S. Muller, J.A. Feith, and R. Fruin', in Luciana Duranti and Patricia C Franks (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Archival Writers, 1515–2015*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, 2019, pp. 411–13.
2. Quoted in Horsman, Ketelaar and Thomassen, p. XXVII.
3. Eric Ketelaar, 'The Archivist's Creed, Task and Aim. Revisiting the first two international congresses 1950, 1953', in: F Daelemans (ed.), *Miscellanea in honorem Caroli Kecskeméti Archives et bibliothèques de Belgique*, numéro special 54, Brussels, 1998, pp. 241–51.
4. Margaret C Norton, 'The First International Congress of Archivists, Paris, France August 21–26, 1950', *American Archivist*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1951, p. 31.
5. Pauline Soum-Paris, "'La Tour de Babel", 35 years later: challenges and tools relating to the translation of archival terminology from English to French', in this issue.
6. For an analysis of the main archival principles presented in the *Multilingual Archival Terminology* in English, French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese see Natália Bolfarini Tognoli, José Augusto Chaves Guimarães, and Gilberto Gomes Cândido, 'The Terminological Dimension of Provenance Description in the Multilingual Archival Terminology – ICA: Some Translation Problems', *AIDAinformazioni*, vol. 34, no. 1–2, 2016, pp. 137–45.
7. Anne J Gilliland, 'Archival and Recordkeeping Traditions in the Multiverse and their Importance for Researching Situations and Situating Research', in Anne J Gilliland, Sue McKemmish and Andre J Lau (eds.), *Research in the Archival Multiverse*, Monash University Publishing, Clayton, 2017, p. 50.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 52–3.
9. Viviane Frings-Hessami and Sue McKemmish, 'Records Continuum', in Patricia Franks (ed.), *The Handbook of Archival Practice*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2021 (forthcoming); Viviane Frings-Hessami, 'Embracing the Diversity: Teaching Recordkeeping Concepts to Students from Different Cultural and Linguistic Backgrounds', in Katharina Toeppe, Hui Yan and Samuel Kai Wah Chu (eds.), *Diversity, Divergence, Dialogue, iConference 2021, Lecture Notes in Computer Science*, vol. 12645, 2021, pp. 541–50.

10. Theodore R Schellenberg, *Modern Archives. Principles and Techniques*, Society of American Archivists, Chicago, 1956, pp. 26–7.

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