Searching Chronicling America's Foreign Language Content Video Transcript

Using Online Translation Tools

Background

In collaboration with the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Library of Congress, the National Digital Newspaper Program in Ohio developed and produced a series of video tutorials to teach users how to work with foreign language newspapers available through Chronicling America. These build on the search skills demonstrated in the Using Chronicling America Podcast Series and Chronicling America Search Strategy Videos.

Using Online Translation Tools

Description	Watch this video to learn some tips for using online translation tools in order to access the information contained in foreign language newspapers on Chronicling America. You may also find this video helpful if you're working with other foreign language printed materials.
Host	Jenni Salamon
Duration	9:36
URL	http://www.ohiohistoryhost.org/ohiomemory/resources/search-help

0:01	Hi, my name is Jenni Salamon, and I work on the National Digital Newspaper Program in Ohio at the Ohio History Connection, formerly the Ohio Historical Society. In this video, I'm going to show you how to work with online translation tools in order to access information contained in foreign language newspapers on the Library of Congress's Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers website.
0:22	Chronicling America is made possible through a collaboration between the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Library of Congress and state partners like the Ohio History Connection. As of August 2017, the website has over 12 million pages of historic newspaper content covering 1789 to 1949. The digitized newspaper pages are freely available and keyword searchable and more content is added on a regular basis.
0:49	To date, there are nearly 20 languages represented by over 100 foreign-language newspapers on Chronicling America totaling more than half a million pages. Among these languages are German, Spanish, French, Czech, Finnish, Italian, Swedish and Slovenian, and more pages and languages will be added soon. By the end of 2018, Ohio will have 20 newspapers representing eight foreign languages on Chronicling America. Newspapers like these are an excellent resource for finding information about immigrants and their daily lives, businesses, politics, opinions and more.

1:27	If you want to do research in a newspaper published in a language you don't know how to read, you will need to use a tool or service to translate that material into your native language. There are a number of online and print resources you can use to do this, and I want to show you some tips and tricks that have helped me get the most out of these tools. Even if you aren't working with newspapers but with other foreign-language materials, you might find some of these tips useful. Please note that although I'll be referencing several resources throughout this video, I am not endorsing any particular tool over another.
2:04	So let's say you've identified a newspaper article you'd like to translate, whether you found it by browsing or by doing a keyword search. Before you plug any text into an online translation tool or start looking up words in a print dictionary, you need to know what language the original is in. Sometimes it's obvious—you might recognize certain words as being German, Spanish or Czech—but other times the differences between two languages are more subtle, such as minor differences between alphabets, verb conjugation or pronunciation. This slide shows clippings from two different newspapers—the words and font look very similar, but one is Danish, and one is German.
2:43	Slavic languages from eastern and southern Europe also share similarities and can be challenging for non-native speakers to differentiate. The word "nation" (nah--road) is the same in Croatian as it is in Slovenian, but bears an accent mark on the "a" in Czech and on the "o" in Polish. Chronicling America allows you to input your search terms without including accent marks, so if you do a search for a word that is the same across multiple languages and don't use the advanced search to limit your results by language, you need to consult the "About the newspaper" page from your search result to verify the language of the newspaper you've found.
3:18	This first result is from a Minnesota newspaper, and when I click on the link next to "About" underneath the title, date and page number for this result, I'll learn that this newspaper is Slovenian. When I click on this other result, from a Toledo paper, I'll learn that this newspaper is Polish.
3:37	It's very important to get this right so that your text will translate properly, but be careful! Sometimes newspapers may include articles in other languages as they are trying to serve multiple ethnic groups. If something isn't translating, see if the catalog record lists another language you can try. Some online translation tools can also auto-detect the language you're translating from.
4:00	I just mentioned that Chronicling America doesn't require that you include accent marks or special characters in your search terms—you can just use the English equivalent. But accent marks and special characters do make a difference when you are translating. See the example here, from a Polish language newspaper. With the special characters, all words have been translated into English; without, some words have not been translated at all, like "WORDS OF TRUTH" and "he made/he gave."

4:26	To input letters with accent marks or special characters, some online translation tools and browsers have tools that allow you to input the necessary letter from a keyboard that pops up. You can also use word processing software to insert the symbol into a document and then copy and paste that word or string of text into an online translation tool.
4:46	Whether you use an online translation tool or translate something manually, the grammar—word order, verb conjugation, inflection, plurals, gender, etc.—may not be perfect. If all you want is to get the gist of what is being stated, this may not be an issue, but if you need a word-for-word translation, or a grammatical error is changing the meaning of the text, then it may be helpful to learn some of the language's grammar rules. Consult websites, books or even someone who knows the language. If relying on the internet, make sure your resource is trustworthy—you may look at multiple websites to compare the information provided, or see if one site is better at explaining grammar rules than another.
5:24	You may also run into issues when translating specific words—perhaps you've misread a word on the document or the newspaper publisher spelled it wrong. Looking in a dictionary for a similarly-spelled word that fits into the context of your article may be more helpful then typing in a bunch of different variations of the word to your online translation tool.
5:45	Just like in English, other languages have slang, colloquialisms, idioms and phrases that are used to express particular ideas or thoughts. Sometimes these expressions make sense, and sometimes they do not. When translating from another language, you may land on a phrase that seems out of place, but is commonly used amongst speakers of that language. Look for resources (or speakers of the language) that can demystify these.
6:09	Related to this are highly creative and literary works—authors often use analogies and allusions in poetry and prose that may not make sense at first read, so a word-for-word translation of that type of work may be difficult without mastery of the language. In this case, see if you can find an existing translation of that work or a scholarly article that discusses it and its meaning.
6:30	When translating individual words, you may get different results than you would if you paired that word with another word or set of words in a phrase or sentence. It might be helpful to translate individual words and blocks of text to see if the meaning changes or becomes clearer.

6:47	You may be searching for a person or place, and often, these names and places will be the same in English as they are in the foreign language, but not always. There may also be variant spellings, just like there would be in English. The examples on the screen here show the Polish words for London and China, and the German word for Germany. Organization names may not always translate smoothly—while the German translation in the example is close, it does not exactly correspond with the official English name of the group provided in the same newspaper. Look for external resources about these groups, or other items that might have official titles, like laws, to see if you can confirm your translation or find a better one.
7:24	Another thing to keep in mind is that word use and meaning changes over time, so a word you find in a historic newspaper may no longer be in use and more challenging to translate to English. Likewise, you can translate your search term from English into a term that was not used yet (or not used the way you mean it) and retrieve irrelevant search results. Look for language resources online and at your library that can help you learn contemporary vocabulary that you can use. There may also be differences in word choice and spelling from region to region and paper to paper, just like in English-language papers. You can see on the slide that Czech has multiple words that mean "child" (just like we do in English—child, kid, tot), and even the word "Bavarian" in German can be spelled two different ways depending on how the term is being used. While you may not be doing family history research, genealogists have done a lot of work with older documents and their online forums may have insight into terms that were commonly used in newspapers and other sources during specific time periods and in particular areas.
8:25	I hope the basic tips I've provided are useful if you encounter challenges while translating historic newspapers. As I've already mentioned, there are numerous resources available that can help you even more. Visit multiple online translation services to translate the same item to help you get the most complete translation possible. You may also want to look at language help websites and books. Linguee, for example, doesn't translate materials word for word, but finds other places on the internet that have already translated them—this can be helpful for translations you've made that seem out of context. Other websites help you learn the language, and may be useful when your translation has grammar errors. You can probably find a number of websites that work for your learning style and research focus. And finally, for those translations that just aren't working, see if there's someone locally who can help you—a professor, a native speaker, a neighbor who happens to be a language expert—or hire a professional translator.
9:22	For more information about Chronicling America, and additional tutorials for using the website, please view the Ohio History Connection's Ohio Memory website and Chronicling America. Thank you for viewing my screencast!