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Searching for articles and book reviews on Slavic languages and literatures via the Internet: possibilities and problems

Preliminary remarks

The topic of this report is closely connected with my work of planning a Portal to Slavic languages and literatures inside the Virtual Library Eastern Europe (ViFaOst).

I´ll deal here with that part of scholarly literature which has traditionally been excluded from library catalogs but contained in bibliographies and indexes of periodicals − i.e. journal articles, book articles and book reviews.

Concentrating on online means of information I´ll leave out of consideration printed bibliographies, although till nowadays they are of great importance, especially for the older literature.

In the following survey of relevant online information means I will not refer to search engines, even if they are becoming more and more interesting for finding scholarly articles.

The survey is divided into 5 parts:

1. **Online-bibliographies with specific focus on Slavic languages and literatures**
2. **Area-oriented bibliographical databases on Eastern Europe as sources of information on Slavic languages and literatures**
3. **Some general bibliographical databases of literary criticism and/or linguistics and their relevance to Slavic studies**
4. **Various means of multidisciplinary bibliographical information**
5. **Virtual Subject Libraries and bibliographical information**

1. Online-bibliographies with specific focus on Slavic languages and literatures

Unlike in other fields of philological studies, there is no comprehensive bibliographical database of international character available in the field of Slavic studies, neither with regard to one particular Slavic language nor with regard to all of them. (English studies, for instance, have at their disposal the "Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature" (ABELL), Germanic philology disposes of the "Bibliographie der deutschen Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft" / BDSL.)

But there are a lot of bibliographical databases as well as bibliographical Web-pages available to subfields or special subjects of Slavic studies, and their number seems to increase steadily.

Some examples for bibliographical databases and Web-pages in the field of Slavic studies are:

- **Online-Bibliographie der deutschsprachigen Slavistik (Olbislav)**
- **Bibliografija na bălgarskata ezikovedska literatura (1998-2004)**
- **Vladimir Nabokov. A Bibliography of Criticism**
- **Databaze západoslovanských literatur v českých překladech 20. st. (1)**

As a rule, special bibliographies also include non-monographic material. Their quality varies considerably, but many of them are of remarkable value. They are scattered widely on the Internet and are therefore often scarcely to be found. Subject guides to information resources as the guide of the Slavic and East European Library of the University of Illinois giving high importance among others to the category of bibliographies in print and electronic format are therefore not only useful but indispensable. (2)

It is still worthwhile to mention here the **OLC (= Online Contents) Slavistics** which informs on articles and book reviews from journals and series. But one has to know very well how to use an online contents means, otherwise it won´t be very helpful. Up till now OLC Slavistics is freely accessible only to academic institutions in Germany, but via ViFaOst (http://www.vifaost.de), concretely spoken, the Portal to Slavic languages and literatures (http://www.slavistik-portal.de) inside ViFaOst, there will soon be a free access for academic institutions in other European countries too - at least till the middle of 2006 but perhaps also later on.

OLC Slavistics has existed for nearly 5 years now (there has been a printed version before). Its main purpose is to offer *actual information*, but a considerable number of records already date back to the year 2000 and before, allowing some retrospective information too. By now OLC Slavistics comprises about 280 periodicals relevant to studies on Slavic languages and literatures as well as 20 periodicals on Slavic ethnology/ethnography and the number of periodicals is still increasing. The majority of the periodicals are of East European origin. E-journals are not included what seems to be a problem in my eyes. A list of periodicals will soon be available to users and, surely, it would be useful to offer OLC Slavistics also as a personalized alerting service on e-mail basis in the future.

OLC Slavistics can be used separately, but, strictly speaking, it is only a segment of the multidisciplinary Online Contents-database (3) offered by the German library union GBV / Gemeinsamer Bibliotheksverbund (http://www.gbv.de). There is another segment of the OLC-database which is interesting for slavists, called OLC Eastern Europe. It comprises periodicals referring to that area, inclusively those concerning Slavic languages and literatures.

If somebody wants to search for articles and books simultaneously he or she could use the most ample catalog of the GBV, named GVK-PLUS, which covers all the online catalogs of the GBV-members as well as the OLC-database. Since GVK-PLUS contains the records of quite a lot of journal articles on Slavic studies and includes several library catalogs being of considerable importance to this research field (among them the main catalog of the Berlin State Library, StaBiKat), the effect of using GVK-PLUS won´t be much lower than using a comprehensive online-bibliography on Slavic studies which - as I pointed out before - does

not exist. But the problem is that GVK-PLUS as well as the OLC-database is freely available only to the member-institutions of the GBV.

2. Area-oriented bibliographical databases on Eastern Europe as sources of information on Slavic languages and literatures

There are several bibliographical databases devoted to Eastern Europe as a whole (East-Central and South-East Europe being included) or to parts of it. They are either multidisciplinary or they concentrate on a special discipline such as history. Regarding to the degree in which they cover publications relevant to Slavic studies, they differ considerably. But I suppose that all these databases are of some value to students and researchers in the field of Slavic studies, particularly to those being inclined to cultural studies.

I´ll concentrate here upon the two rather well known bibliographical databases **ABSEES** and **EBSEES** (American respectively European Bibliography of Slavic and East European Studies) leaving out of consideration other also interesting ones.

ABSEES and EBSEES have reflected Slavic and East European studies in the USA, in Canada and some West European countries for some decades. Since the end of the 1980s they have been confronted with fundamental changes in Eastern Europe, with new relations between East European countries and the Western world and with the problematization and reorientation of Slavic and East European studies. Besides that, they had and have to grapple with a rapidly changing information world. Especially EBSEES is by now in a process of examining and redefining its role and performance (4).

But despite all their problems ABSEES and EBSEES represent information sources which are important to Slavic studies. I presume that both databases cover quite well the scholarly literature, monographs as well as non-monographic literature, being of interest for Slavic studies and appearing in the countries engaged in the bibliographies (however, some gaps may be found, for instance in the coverage of book articles and reviews (5)).

At present, ABSEES online comprises about 62 000 records, EBSEES online about 92 000. They have been turned into online-instruments in the 1990s and the literature covered by them dates back to the beginning of that decade. The European database is freely accessible, whereas the American database is only available for subscription fee. ABSEES online is already striving intensively to offer fulltext information, the European database is just beginning to do the same.

For many years now, the contact between the collaborators of the two bibliographies has been very close. In 2001, when EBSEES underwent thorough changes, the collaborators of the European database decided to adopt ABSEES´ subject headings list and principles of indexing. By now there are two databases of EBSEES, one covering the literature from 1991 to 2000, the other the literature from 2001 onwards. Surely, this is not very comfortable for users and the producers of the bibliography are therefore working on the implementation of simultaneous searches in both databases.

3. Some general bibliographical databases of literary criticism and/or linguistics and their relevance to Slavic studies

Bibliographical databases belonging to this group can be important for slavists if they cover publications on Slavic languages and literatures to a greater extent. There are several databases for which this could be said but I will take a look at only 4 of them, namely:

- **MLA International Bibliography (MLAIB)**
- **Bibliographie Linguistique / Linguistic Bibliography (BLonline)**
- **Baza dannykh po literaturovedeniiu (BD liter) of the Institut nauchnoi informatsii po obshchestvennym naukam / INION and**
- **Baza dannykh po iazykoznaniiu (BD lingv) of the INION.**

All these databases cover books, book and journal articles as well as book reviews, MLAIB and the INION-databases also cover dissertation abstracts.

MLAIB is a basic component of bibliographical information for nearly all philological studies. In comparison with other bibliographical databases it covers a rather long period, from 1963 onwards. More than 4 400 periodicals are currently indexed and the number of citations amounts to over 1,7 million. The proportion of citations already linked with fulltext information is remarkable. At present, the database, available only for a license fee, is offered by 7 providers, among them EBSCO and OCLC (FirstSearch).

BLonline, produced and distributed by the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague, covers all branches of linguistics and all the languages of the world. The database, freely accessible on the Internet, contains all the entries of the printed volumes of the Bibliographie Linguistique / Linguistic Bibliography for the years 1993-2001 and is increasingly covering more recent literature. The number of periodicals indexed amounts to about 2 300. (There is an interesting report about the printed bibliography and the online-version by S. Tol, see http://www.kb.nl/blonline/essay.html.)

The two INION-databases belong to a set of 8 bibliographical databases of humanities and social sciences (6) which are offered by 3 distributors, among them INION itself. Unlike the two others – the Research Library Group (RLG) and Integrum (7) – INION also offers free access via a "guest-status". There are some limitations attached to this status but searching works quite well. All versions allow simultaneous searches in several or all databases but, besides that, they differ considerably with regard to their using facilities. Since some time INION, like many other information providers, is endeavouring to offer also fulltext information to references in its bibliographical databases.

In the INION-version the two databases BD liter and BD lingv contain about 255 000 respectively 208 000 references, dating back to 1986. It is not possible to say how many journals are indexed for the two databases as the figures I have at my disposal refer either to the set of 8 databases (the RLG-version contains a list of about 12 500 journals being indexed for the 8 databases) or to the entirety of periodicals analyzed by INION (about 20 000 to which INION offers the database "Spisok periodicheskikh izdanii, obrabatyvaemykh v INION").

Trying to assess the relevance of the 4 databases in regard to Slavic studies I examined the lists of periodicals as far as possible and posed some test-queries. Yet the methods I used are not fully suited for finding an answer to the relevance question and, besides that, they are not very exact. Therefore it is not possible to draw any definite conclusions from what I found out. Nevertheless the findings may hint at how relevant the examined databases are to slavists.

A look at the lists of periodicals

Looking at the list of periodicals of MLAIB I found out that it covers about 200 periodicals (from about 4 400) referring directly to Slavic and/or East European studies. These 200 also include almanacs and cultural or literary magazines as well as periodicals published in Slavic speaking countries and devoted generally to philology. Periodicals on Slavic ethnology and on Baltic languages and literatures are not reckoned among the 200. About 2/3 of the periodicals are published in Eastern Europe and their language is Slavic.

Using similar criteria for BLonline´s list of periodicals as those applied to the MLAIB list I can state that the proportion of periodicals with more or less evident regard to Slavic studies is remarkably higher (it amounts to somewhat over 300 of about 2 300 periodicals). As for the INION-databases I can´t say anything with certainty. But, of course, the number of periodicals relevant to Slavic studies will be rather high.

It may be still worthwhile to compare the 200 periodicals of the MLAIB list with the periodicals covered by OLC Slavistics which I mentioned earlier. The comparison shows that the degree of overlapping is not very high (nearly 30%) and that about 200 periodicals of the OLC Slavistics list do not figure on the MLAIB list, whereas about 125 periodicals of the MLAIB list do not appear on the list of OLC Slavistics. Thus I suppose it would be useful to consult the two bibliographical instruments complementarily if one needs thorough bibliographical information about articles published within the last few years.

Inquiry into the databases

Results of the test-queries

Query	Number of hits in:		
	MLAIB (1963 -) (EBSCO)	**BD liter + BD lingv** (1986 -) (Integrum)	**BLonline** (1993 - 2001; ongoing)
Pushkin, A. S.	**3 179**	**7 472**	*no search
Tsvetaeva, Marina	**435**	**1 184**	no search
Vaudeville + Russian literature	**19**	**29**	no search
Narbikova, Valeriia	**11**	**19**	no search
Russian literature	**52 956**	****51 103**	no search
Russian language	**17 745**	**40 239**	*****9 890**
Russian language + word order	**98**	**68**	**14**
Andrukhovych, Iurii	**12**	**16**	no search
Ukrainian literature	**18 927**	****3 034**	no search
Ukrainian language	**4 511**	**2 237**	*****4 404**
Aleksievich, Svetlana	**7**	**33**	no search
Belorussian literature	**1 641**	****1 159**	no search
Belorussian language	**1 425**	**1 316**	*****796**
Dabrowska, Maria	**45**	**3**	no search
Polish literature	**11 065**	****1 651**	no search
Polish language	**4 987**	**4 963**	*****13 170**
Polish language + phonetics	**59**	**79**	**138**
Nemcova, Bozena	**42**	**7**	no search
Czech literature	**4 348**	****434**	no search
Czech language	**2 998**	**1 566**	*****5 041**
Czech language + syntax	**573**	**76**	**214**

*   I chose „no search" in cases when a comparison between BLonline and the two other databases didn´t make sense.
** The real number of hits will be considerably higher for "Russian literature", for other Slavic literatures probably somewhat higher. (8)
***This value I got from Sijmen Tol of BLonline who, however, pointed out that the real number of hits will be a little lower.

Interpreting the results of the test-queries I´ll state the following:

• With regard to Pushkin and Tsvetaeva the two INION-databases, taken together, surpass MLAIB by far reflecting the fact that in Russia (and the former Soviet Union) quite a lot of books, articles etc. have been published about the two renowned Russian poets.

• The results of the general queries to "Russian literature" and „Russian language" confirm the assumption that the two INION-databases include a mass of records to Russian philology. Particularly impressive is the number of hits to "Russian language" (as object) compared with the corresponding number of hits in MLAIB of which the coverage period is about twice as long as that of the INION-databases.

• With regard to the INION-databases it is noticeable that the number of hits concerning other Slavic literatures than Russian is relatively small, except for Belorussian literature.

• As for BLonline, the relatively big number of hits to the general question on singular Slavic languages (as objects) is remarkable, especially for Polish, Czech and Ukrainian. The number of hits to the more detailed questions on "Polish language + phonetics" and "Czech language + syntax" is notably high too. This corresponds to what I found out about the rather high proportion of journals covered by BLonline and being of special relevance to Slavic studies.

• A closer examination of the hits referring to the questions on "Russian literature and Vaudeville", "Valeriia Narbikova", "Svetlana Aleksievich", "Iurii Andrukhovych", "Maria Dąbrowska" and "Božena Němcová" showed that the references in the INION-databases and MLAIB do not overlap very much. As for other queries with more hits, I can´t say if it is the same - probably it is.

• Not only BLonline but also the INION-databases in the Integrum-version are lacking of more actual references. However, I noticed that the INION-databases offered by INION itself are somewhat more complete and more actual than in the Integrum-offer. MLAIB seems to be rather actual.

What could be deduced from the inquiry for the use of the databases?

• For questions on Russian, Ukrainian or Belorussian literature it will be useful to consult MLAIB and the INION-databases, in particular the database of literary criticism, complementarily, but with regard to Polish or Czech literature, may be also to other Slavic literatures, it seems that the INION-database of literary criticism is not particularly ´productive´.

• For questions on Slavic languages and linguistics it might be worthwhile to use the 3 databases – MLAIB, the INION-database of linguistics and BLonline – complementarily.

4. Various means of multidisciplinary bibliographical information

Bibliographical databases, online periodical indexes and online contents means of multidisciplinary character

As a rule, databases of this kind comprise also scholarly literature, books and/or periodicals, being relevant to Slavic (and East European) studies. But in most cases the proportion of these publications might be relatively small. As regards periodicals, often only the most noted will

be covered. Therefore the multidisciplinary databases may be useful for students and researchers in the field of Slavic studies mainly as instruments for acquiring some first bibliographical information on a special theme. As examples, I´ll mention **Arts and Humanities Search** (AHSearch) (9), **FRANCIS**, the French database of humanities and social sciences, **Internationale Bibliographie der Zeitschriftenliteratur** (IBZ), **ZETOC**, the online contents tool of the British Library, and the **Online Contents-database** (OLC) offered by the German library union GBV. The OLC-database will probably become more and more interesting for slavists, as I pointed out in the first part of the report.

Scarcity of online indexes to the older periodical literature

What is still lacking very much is online bibliographical information of the older non-monographic literature. There are only few databases of considerable historical depth, for instance **Humanities and Social Sciences Index Retrospective** (covering the years 1907-1984) or the **Periodicals Contents Index** (PCI, covering the last two centuries). The majority of databases, however, do not go back further than to the 1990s or 1980s.

As far as I can see, there is also a sensible lack of such means in regard to Eastern Europe and Slavic speaking countries.

Periodical articles and online national bibliographies of Slavic speaking countries

Sources of great value to slavists are, of course, online national bibliographies of Slavic speaking countries. Continuing the tradition of printed bibliographies they cover as a rule not only books but also periodical articles, sometimes also newspaper articles, dissertation abstracts, book reviews and other materials. (As examples I´ll cite here the database of the **Russian National Bibliography** with its various series for periodical articles, newspaper articles etc. covering the years 1994-2004 (10), and the Polish database **Bibliografia Zawartości Czasopism**, covering the years 1996-2004).

It can be expected that also further retrospective parts of the national bibliographies will be offered online in course of time what will certainly improve the situation of retrospective information about non-monographic literature too.

Bibliographical databases devoted to book reviews

Compared with journal articles book reviews often play a subordinate role in printed or online bibliographies. This is not so much the case for MLAIB, the bibliographical databases of INION and BLonline, as I noticed when I was preparing this report.

For thorough searches it may be worthwhile to use, besides other means of information, also databases specifically devoted to book reviews, for instance **Letopis´ retsenzii**, produced by the Russian Book Chamber, or **Internationale Bibliographie der Rezensionen** (IBR) which is a large-scale database amounting to nearly 1 million references, but, of course, Slavic studies don´t play a bigger role in it.

Book articles and online library catalogs

Concerning book articles which sometimes are also a bit neglected in online bibliographies I will point to a very interesting development of library catalogs – a development which can be put under the rubric ´catalog enrichment´. Quite a lot of libraries have begun to scan tables of

contents of collective works (Sammelbände) and ´normal´ books too. In their catalogs they offer the scanned pages together with the bibliographical references. If they did one more step making the scanned pages searchable it would considerably improve the information about book articles.

5. Virtual Subject Libraries and bibliographical information

Virtual Subject Libraries belonging to the rapidly increasing sphere of scholarly Internet portals have been developed in Germany since 1998. The Virtual Library Eastern Europe (ViFaOst) and the Virtual Library Slavistics which will build up a Portal to Slavic languages and literatures inside ViFaOst represent 2 of them. (11) The offer of bibliographical information which can be gained from online library catalogs and bibliographical databases is a constituent part of Virtual Subject Libraries, others being a subject gateway to Internet resources, information about relevant institutions and events, the organisation of access to fulltext documents etc.

The survey of online information means which are suited for bibliographical information of non-monographic literature and, at the same time, relevant to slavists has shown that there are quite a lot of interesting databases. They differ in many respects, some of them partly overlap each other. Each one has its peculiar limitations in regard to the coverage period, the countries or languages of publications covered, the actuality of information, the conditions of access etc.

The Virtual Library Slavistics together with ViFaOst will contribute to make this situation more transparent and less troublesome for slavists. Bringing together a considerable number of important databases (online library catalogs, bibliographical databases, online contents means etc.) and implementing the possibility of simultaneous searches they will assure that bibliographical information will be as efficient as possible for their users.

As a rule, Virtual Subject Libraries don´t produce any databases but function as intermediaries of databases which are produced by other institutions or organizations. So, if there are lacking online bibliographical means of the older literature, as I stated earlier, there will be an information gap in the future Virtual Library Slavistics too. The same is true for fulltext offers, for instance of periodicals. But, of course, Virtual Subject Libraries, in close connection with their scholarly community, can animate other institutions or organizations to digitize relevant materials – and they should do it.

Besides ViFaOst and the Portal to Slavic languages and literatures of the Virtual Library Slavistics, there are other Internet portals as well as database services which are interesting for specialists in the field of East European and Slavic studies. Especially considering the aspect of bibliographical information I´ ll point to portals of prominent libraries (for instance the National Libraries of East European countries) and important library unions. As for database services, I´ ll mention the offers of non-profit organisations as OCLC or the Research Library Group (RLG) and of commercial providers as EBSCO, Integrum and the Central and East European Online Library (CEEOL).

All these portals and database services are steadily getting broader and more refined. Thus it will be a challenge to ViFaOst and the Virtual Library Slavistics to develop a peculiar offer to their users containing information of high quality and - as far as possible - free of charge.

Notes

1. The URLs of the cited databases and Web-sites are:
    http://www.slavistik.uni-potsdam.de/cfdocs/bibliographie/
    http://www.ibl.bas.bg/bibliography_bg.htm
    http://www.libraries.psu.edu/nabokov/biba.htm
    http://search.slu.cas.cz/

2. See „Introduction to Slavic Information Resources" (http://www.library.uiuc.edu/spx/class/toc.htm)
on the website of the Slavic and East European Library of the University of Illinois at Urbana
Champaign. The guide combines thorough descriptions of relevant print and electronic information
resources.

3. The OLC-database is produced by SwetsBlackwell and quite a lot of libraries in Germany (Sonder-
sammelgebietsbibliotheken) are contributing to it.

4. There is a recent and very informative report on EBSEES by Jenny Brine, Lancaster University
Library, held at the ABDOS-Conference 2005 in Bern:
http://www.stub.unibe.ch/sobabdos/abdosdocuments/EBSEESpresentationBerne2005.ppt

5. It must also be mentioned that the European database covers monographs from Germany only up to
1995.

6. INION and the two other providers offer databases respectively segments of one database to the
following subjects: Economics/Demographics; History; Linguistics; Literary Criticism; Philosophy;
Religion; Science; State and Law.

7. RLG offers the set of the 8 INION-databases under the name ´Russian Academy of Sciences
Bibliographies´, in Integrum they can be found under the heading ´Bibliotechnye fondy´ → INION.
INION itself offers the databases on its Web-site under ´Produkty i uslugi´ → Poisk v elektronnykh
katalogakh.

8. In MLAIB I used the ´Subjects-All´ search field for Russian and the other literatures, in the INION-
databases I searched with the phrases "russkaia literatura", "pol´skaia literatura" etc. which are also
keywords (kliuchevye slova). But with regard to Russian literature one also finds the keywords
"russkaia zarubezhnaia literatura" and "sovetskaia literatura" which are used partly together with
"russkaia literatura", partly without it. The cited number of hits includes only those records which are
additionally indexed with "russkaia literatura". Besides that, the references to publications about
authors of the various Slavic languages include sometimes in addition to the name of the author also
the keyword of the respective literature, sometimes not. Mainly in the case of Russian authors the
addition of the keyword "russkaia literatura" is often lacking, but this phenomenon plays a certain,
though minor, role in the case of the other Slavic literatures too. The cited number of hits includes
only those records that are additionally indexed with the keyword for the respective literature.

9. With regard to their content ´Arts and Humanities Search´ and ´Arts and Humanities Citation
Index´ of the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) are identical.

10. I am referring here to the version of the „Russian National Bibliography" which is offered by East
View Information Services.

11. Nowadays there are more than 30 Virtual Subject Libraries in Germany, see
http://www.vascoda.de → Über uns → Partner → Angebote.