

# Best Practices Report on Promotion of Translations

This report was first issued in English back in 2007, but its observations on the international state of affairs with literary translations still hold valid today. While some of the organizations or people mentioned are no longer in the book sector, and in the meantime new players had come up at the scene, the conclusions of the analysis and the main issues remain credible. At the time of its first release, the report gathered significant attention from around the world, not just because it is forwarded by Paul Auster, but because it presents a comprehensive picture of the main issues and forces at play that determine the state of translations. Esther Allen's essay on English language as "an invasive species" has not lost its power today and remains a reference for anybody concerned with the social and political aspects of translation policies and politics.

A note on the authors included in the current extract:

*Paul Auster* is a renowned and bestselling American author, and director *Esther Allen* is a writer and translator who currently teaches at [Baruch College \(CUNY\)](#). *Carles Torner* is a poet and a writer who also worked for the *Institut Ramon Llull*, which aims for the international promotion and translation of Catalan literature. *Simona Škrabec* is a [literary critic](#), essayist and [translator](#).

With the kind permission of the publishers, here we offer an extract from the report that is available in full at PEN International:

[http://www.pen-international.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Translation-report\\_OK-2.pdf](http://www.pen-international.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Translation-report_OK-2.pdf)

**TO BE TRANSLATED OR NOT TO BE**

**PEN / IRL REPORT ON THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION OF LITERARY TRANSLATION**

**Esther Allen (ed.)**

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# Foreword

## Paul Auster

Dostoevsky, Heraclitus, Dante, Virgil, Homer, Cervantes, Kafka, Kierkegaard, Tolstoy, Hölderlin, and scores of other poets and writers who have marked me forever—I, an American, whose only foreign language is French—have all been revealed to me, read by me, digested by me, in translation. Translators are the shadow heroes of literature, the often forgotten instruments that make it possible for different cultures to talk to one another, who have enabled us to understand that we all, from every part of the world, live in one world.

I would like to offer a salute and a declaration of thanks to all these men and women, these translators, who toil so selflessly to keep literature alive for everyone.

# Introduction

## Esther Allen

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In Act I, Scene III of *Richard II*, the Duke of Norfolk is banished from England—sent into exile “never to return.” Curiously, his first thought on hearing this harsh sentence pronounced is not of family or friends but of the English language, the only language he has spoken in the forty years of his life. To leave England, in 1595, was to leave English. Norfolk contemplates going forth into a world where his speech will be unintelligible, his very words cast into a dark dungeon, his aging mind incapable of beginning anew with some other language:

*Within my mouth you have engaol'd my tongue,  
Doubly portcullis'd with my teeth and lips,  
And dull, unfeeling, barren ignorance  
Is made my gaoler to attend on me.  
I am too old to fawn upon a nurse,  
Too far in years to be a pupil now:  
What is thy sentence, then, but speechless death,  
Which robs my tongue from breathing native breath?*<sup>1</sup>

In the 400-odd years since Shakespeare wrote these lines, the terms of Norfolk’s lament have been almost wholly reversed. Today, the speaker of English has a better chance of being understood in more places across the globe than the speaker of any other language. Today, it is the person who does not speak English who risks exclusion—not merely social exclusion but exclusion from the ability to survive in the global economy: “speechless death” indeed.

Since 1921, when the PEN Club was founded in London, the transmission of human thought across linguistic and national boundaries has been among its central concerns. “Literature, national though it be in origin, knows no frontiers, and should remain common currency among

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Ostler, who cites this passage in his study of the language history of the world, *Empires of the Word* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005) points out that when Shakespeare wrote this speech, there was only a single British colony, the one founded by Sir Walter Raleigh in Roanoke, Virginia in 1586, the fate of which was unknown to anyone in England at that point (p. 477).

nations in spite of political or international upheavals,” reads the first line of the PEN Charter, which adds: “PEN stands for the principle of unhampered transmission of thought within each nation and among all nations...” In that spirit, International PEN and the Institut Ramon Llull of Barcelona, with the collaboration of a number of writers, translators, cultural diplomats and specialists in the field of translation, assembled the present report in order to ponder what might be done to perpetuate the age-old conversation that is literature and promote the free and ready circulation of literary works across the globe at a time when, to paraphrase the Irish writer Colm Toibín, the world’s richest language, in economic terms— English—is also one of its most impoverished when it comes to taking in the literary wealth that exists beyond it. Rather than acting as a true lingua franca to facilitate communication among different languages, English all too often simply ignores whatever is not English, mistaking the global reach and diversity of the world’s dominant language for the world itself.

This report therefore begins with the assessment of the unprecedented global scope of English and the current state of literary translation in the English-speaking world and particularly in the United States that will be undertaken in the first chapter. Then, by contrast and as context to the situation of English, the second chapter comments on responses from PEN Centers across the globe to a questionnaire about literary translation sent out by International PEN. To provide further points of comparison, the report presents in the third chapter six case studies from different parts of the world to describe what could be called the “translation economy” of each region: the Netherlands, Argentina, Catalonia, Germany, China and France. The subsequent chapter on experiences on literary translation describes the successful initiatives of a number of PEN Centers to address the need for more translation into English, as well as significant efforts by other institutions, both public and private, to engage with this issue in ways that can make a difference. Finally, the conclusions try to summarize the main findings of the report and offer a general view of literary translation in today’s world. Three distinguished writers, Paul Auster, Narcís Comadira, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, have contributed literary depth to what might otherwise have been a lamentably technocratic document by composing texts on the subject of translation especially for this report.

Our heartfelt thanks to the generous community of people across the world who have participated in meetings, conferences and panel discussions on this report and whose energy, intelligence and erudition have contributed to it greatly: Marc Dueñas, Larry Siems, Caroline McCormick, Kata Kulavkova, Roberto Calasso, Elisabeth Pellaert, Amanda Hopkinson, Raymond Federman, Boris Akunin, Steve Wasserman, Sònia Garcia, Misia Sert, Yana Genova, Alexandra Buchler, Kate Griffin, Siri Hustvedt, Ma Jian, Francesc Parcerisas, David Damrosch, and, in memoriam, Yael Langella.

# 1. Translation, Globalization, and English

Esther Allen

## 1.1 English as an Invasive Species

While estimates of the number of English speakers vary, one frequently-cited figure for the number who speak it as a first language is 400 million. In the Welsh ecolinguist David Crystal's account, the number of those who speak it as a second language is also around 400 million.<sup>2</sup> When those two figures are added to the rather more nebulous number of people who are currently learning English and have achieved a minimal level of competence the total is well beyond a billion. Indeed, while it is common knowledge that Mandarin Chinese is the first language of the greatest number of people on earth (also well over a billion), that no longer seems to be a wide enough reach for the Chinese themselves. In a speech given in Beijing in 2005, Gordon Brown, the UK finance minister, predicted: "In 20 years time, the number of English speakers in China is likely to exceed the number of speakers of English as a first language in all the rest of the world."<sup>3</sup>

Whether or not Mr. Brown's prophecy comes true, it's clear that a variety of factors—ranging from the expansion of the British Empire which began just after Shakespeare wrote *Richard II* and continued over the course of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, to the development in the United States of the technology that made the Internet possible—have conjoined to make English the seemingly indispensable language of globalization as we know and experience it today. In addition to being spoken in its birthplace in the UK, English is the primary language of the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland and more than two dozen other countries, as far flung as Nigeria, Jamaica, and Fiji. And in a dozen countries more—such as the Philippines, India, and South Africa—English plays an official role in government alongside one or more other languages. More than 85% of the world's international organizations use English as an official language. But it is the recent expansion of English as a second language in the European Union that attests, perhaps more compellingly than any other statistic, to the language's current status and future growth. In 1999, David Graddol noted that since 1990, English-language competence on the European continent had risen sharply, to the point that over 100 million people, almost a third of the European Union's population, were speaking it as a second language.<sup>4</sup> Graddol's finding that in 1994 10% of European continentals over the age of 55 knew

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<sup>2</sup> David Crystal, *The Language Revolution* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2004), p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Reported in "New Dawn in a Shared Language," by Andrew Yeh, *The Financial Times*.

<sup>4</sup> See Graddol, "The Decline of the Native Speaker," in Graddol, David and Ulrike H. Meinhof, editors, *English in a Changing World* (Milton Keynes: Catchline, 1999), pp. 57-68; cited by Ostler, *op. cit.* p. 516.

some English while 55% of those between 15 and 24 did, speaks volumes about what can be expected for the future.

The current position of the United States as the world's economic and military superpower has clearly played a role in the global consolidation of English, as has the seemingly infinite appeal in the global marketplace of US cultural products. However, as Nicholas Ostler extensively documents in his "language history of the world," *Empires of the Word*, not every empire is successful at imposing its language on the regions over which it holds sway, and US imperial power alone may not be quite enough to explain the unprecedented spread of English. Several linguists have theorized that this global appeal may have to do with factors internal to the language itself—its comparative simplicity, to begin with. "English inflections are tidy and relatively easy to learn compared with heavily inflected languages and those that have other complex morphological variations," writes Edward Finegan,<sup>5</sup> who goes on to point out that in the United States, 88 of the hundred most frequently written words are monosyllables. On the other hand, the vast absorptive capacity of English's lexicon, which throughout the history of the language has been incessantly ingesting words from hundreds of other languages, has also been identified as a possible source of its power—a hypothesis that should perhaps give pause to those who seek to protect other languages from an influx of English words. Furthermore, several linguists have conjectured that there may be a fundamental link between the Subject-VerbObject (SVO) grammatical structure—which is characteristic not only of English but also of a number of other languages in widespread use, such as Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish—and the basic processing mechanisms of the human brain. In this theory, SVO languages would be inherently more processable than other kinds of languages, and therefore more useful and appealing to a wider variety of speakers.

Still, the most obvious explanation for the current might of the English language remains the current might of the United States of America. The linguist and translator Michael Henry Heim has offered another way of thinking about that connection by positing that the global appeal of US language and culture emerges out of the country's history.<sup>6</sup> Heim points out that the internal culture of the United States, with the presence, from the nation's beginning, of people from across the globe—Africans, native Americans, immigrants from all parts of Europe and Asia—made it "a harbinger of global culture, a globalized culture before its time." In order to assimilate so many, the United States had to develop a common language and culture—"common," Heim laments, not only in the sense of intelligible to all, but also in the sense of

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. his article "English," in *The World's Major Languages*, ed. Bernard Comrie (Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 79-82.

<sup>6</sup> In a speech titled "Passive Imperialism," delivered to the Global Fellows Program of the International Institute at the University of California at Los Angeles, on November 23, 2004.

what would be intelligible to the lowest common denominator. Ostler, however, offers a different and less nation-specific explanation, declaring that from the Reformation to the present, historically and culturally, “English is associated with the quest to get rich, the deliberate acquisition of wealth, often by quite unprecedented and imaginative schemes. This quest has sometimes had to struggle with religious and civic conscience, and the glories of patriotism, but has largely been able to enlist them on its side. In general, it has been the ally, rather than the rival, of freedom of the individual. English has been, above all, a worldly language.”<sup>7</sup>

In an article delivered as the 2002 St. Jerome Lecture in London’s Queen Elizabeth Hall, which she dedicated to the memory of the late W.G. Sebald, Susan Sontag mused on the fate of the many young people in India who work in “outsourced” call centers for IBM, American Express and other giant corporations, fielding queries in English from consumers in the United States who have dialed a toll-free number, often without realizing that their call was going through to New Delhi, Bombay or Bangalore.<sup>8</sup> Not only must the call center workers have a near-perfect command of English, they must also become accomplished imposters, able to fake every aspect of a “normal” North American identity that would be identifiable over the telephone. “[T]hese cheerful voices had first to be trained for months, by instructors and by tapes, to acquire a pleasant middle American (not an educated American) accent, and to learn basic American slang, informal idioms (including regional ones) and elementary mass culture references (television personalities and the plots and protagonists of the main sitcoms, the latest blockbuster in the multiplex, fresh baseball and basketball scores, and so on), so that if the exchange with the client in the United States becomes prolonged, they will not falter with the small talk and have the means to continue to pass for Americans.” Many anxiety-riddled seekers of technical support in the United States can testify that not all call center workers in India have been driven to these lengths of impersonation; it is possible to dial in to an Indian call center and realize that one is speaking with an Indian. Still, it is clear that the widespread use of English India inherited as part of the mixed legacy of its colonial history has given it a real edge in the current global economy.

The prosperity that knowledge of English can bring has not gone unnoticed in many parts of the world. “If we combine our academic knowledge with the English language,” Puntsag Tsagaan, Mongolia’s Minister of Education told the New York Times in early 2005—not long after Mongolia’s newly-elected government had announced it was getting rid of the Cyrillic alphabet inherited from Soviet domination and making Mongolia a bilingual country, with English as its

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<sup>7</sup> *Empires of the Word*, p. 517.

<sup>8</sup> “The World as India: Translation as a passport within the community of literature,” *Times Literary Supplement*, June 13, 2003.



second language—“we can do outsourcing here, just like Bangalore.” South Korea has gone to great expense to establish six “English villages” inhabited primarily by native speakers of English, where students pay for a total immersion experience. Meanwhile, citing as its model the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries, where bilingualism with English is nearly universal, Chile has embarked on a plan to make itself bilingual with English within a generation.<sup>9</sup> Called “English Opens Doors,” the Chilean government’s program, announced in 2003, makes English education mandatory from 5th grade onwards and seeks to ensure that all graduating students have a decent, basic command of English.<sup>10</sup> Spanish, like Chinese, is among the top five most widely spoken languages on the planet, and it’s a further key indicator of English’s global meta-domination that it has become necessary not only to people who speak languages of limited diffusion, but also to those who speak the world’s major tongues. In painfully sharp contrast to the Chilean drive for bilingualism is the “English only” movement in the United States, where a vociferous group of nationalists is eager to claim that English is under some kind of threat from minority communities within the US that speak Spanish, Chinese or other languages.<sup>11</sup>

Bilingualism in and of itself is no threat to the existence of a language, whatever the nationalists may say; many examples of routinely multilingual societies whose members have moved with ease through several languages for centuries can be cited. And yet something is now threatening the existence of languages across the globe to a degree unprecedented in human history. To explain this situation, the standard postcolonial assumptions about language and political domination may turn out to be less useful than a new paradigm arising from the natural world. Ecolinguistics, the new field that has arisen in response to this crisis, takes its metaphors from biology rather than politics, and studies language communities rather than nation-states. For the ecolinguists, the global system of human languages is best viewed as an ecosystem— and a terrifyingly imperiled one within which fully half the species are endangered. David Crystal reports that of the 6,000 languages currently in existence, half will have died out within the next century. “It turns out,” he writes, “that 96% of the world’s languages are spoken by just 4% of the world’s people.”<sup>12</sup> Only 600 of the world’s languages are not presently in danger.<sup>13</sup>

This crisis has aroused a great deal of concern in the communities where the imperiled languages are spoken, among linguists, and among certain international organizations. International PEN

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<sup>9</sup> All the information in this paragraph is taken from James Brooke, “For Mongolians, E is for English, and F is for the Future,” *New York Times*, February 15, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> See [www.foreigninvestment.cl](http://www.foreigninvestment.cl)

<sup>11</sup> For a particularly egregious example of such thinking, see Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We?* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004),.

<sup>12</sup> *Language Revolution*, p. 50.

<sup>13</sup> Two excellent sources of further information about languages on the verge of extinction are the website of the Foundation for Endangered Languages, based in the UK ([www.ogmios.org](http://www.ogmios.org)) and the website of the Endangered Language Fund, based in the US: [www.ling.yale.edu/~elf/](http://www.ling.yale.edu/~elf/)

and its Translation and Linguistic Rights Community are proud to have been among the primary forces behind the 1996 “Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights”—also known as the “Barcelona Declaration” after the city where it was signed—which, taking as its model the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, seeks to “encourage the creation of a political framework for linguistic diversity, based upon respect, harmonious coexistence and mutual benefit.”<sup>14</sup>

Yet such initiatives, valuable as they are, have had limited impact on the population at large, particularly within the English-speaking world. Language is generally acknowledged to be humankind’s greatest achievement, and each language embodies a human community’s unique perception and experience of the world, all of it lost forever when the language is lost. Nevertheless, people are consistently far more worried about the preservation of animal species or paintings, statues and buildings than they are about the preservation of other peoples’ languages. The Greeks coined the word *barbaros*—“barbarian”—to refer to all who did not speak Greek and whose languages were deemed by the Greeks to be a single, undifferentiated, incoherent stammer: a “babble.” It seems always to have been true that most people have a very difficult time valuing languages they themselves do not speak. The infinitely complex shimmer of logic, music, allusion, tradition and idiosyncrasy that constitutes a language for its own speakers is, from the outside, pure gibberish or, worse still, the indecipherable secret code of an enemy. Myths in many cultures view language diversity itself as a kind of punishment and depict an idyllic pre-Babel universe of monolingualism and peace. Such myths retain their influence. “Most people,” Crystal notes, all too correctly, “have yet to develop a language conscience.”

The demise of half the world’s languages cannot be blamed on the rise of English alone, for many languages of wide diffusion including Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Chinese and Arabic have supplanted smaller local languages across the globe. However, there has never before in human linguistic history been anything quite like the current ascendancy of English, and there is no telling where it could lead. “Will the influence of English be so strong that it will permanently change the character of all other languages? And could English kill off other languages altogether? A world in which there was only one language left—an ecological intellectual disaster of unprecedented scale—is a scenario which could in theory obtain within 500 years,” Crystal warns.

This forecast may not seem quite as menacing as other, more immediate threats to the planet such as global warming. Yet when we move the discussion of this issue from the world itself into

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<sup>14</sup> See [www.linguistic-declaration.org](http://www.linguistic-declaration.org)

the world of literature, the monolingual dystopia feared by those who are concerned about vanishing languages is much more nearly upon us. It is particularly painful to observe that when it comes to literature the global language does indeed behave more like an invasive species than a lingua franca, resisting and supplanting whatever is not written in itself, speaking in the loudest of voices while failing to pay much attention at all to anything said in any other language. The preamble to the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights calls for “respect for the ecological balance of societies and for equitable relationships between all languages and cultures.” But as the global power of English is compounded year by year, the inequity of its relationship to other languages becomes increasingly problematic. In a paper recently presented at an International PEN gathering, the Slovene writer Andrej Blatnik asked: “Where to export? In the UK, only 2% of the books on the market are translations, in the US 3%. But in Turkey it is 40%, in Slovenia 70%. Only when the voice of someone else is heard can “free choice” begin. Who loses from these statistics? Those who do not have a choice or those who cannot be chosen?”<sup>15</sup>

## 1.2 World Literature and English

Literary writers have long strived to free themselves from the constraints of national and linguistic boundaries and participate in a global conversation without political, linguistic, geographic or temporal limits. For many, this attempt lies at the very heart of the meaning of the word “literature.” In 1827, Goethe remarked to his youthful amanuensis Eckermann, “National literature is now a rather unmeaning term: the epoch of world literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach.”<sup>16</sup>

Linguistic plurality is an essential component of this idea of literature. Literary scholars notoriously find it difficult to agree, but if there is one point on which they do converge it is the crucial importance to literature of traffic among different languages. The Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin viewed what he called “polyglossia”—the interaction of different languages—as fundamental to the origins of literary thinking itself, and particularly crucial to the development of that most heterogeneous of modern genres, the novel: “Only polyglossia fully frees consciousness from the tyranny of its own language...”<sup>17</sup> Other critics from Raymond Williams to Jorge Luis Borges have had other ways of putting it, but all agree that circulation among different languages via translation is the very lifeblood of literature. “Left to itself,”

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<sup>15</sup> Translated by Maja Visenjak-Limon.

<sup>16</sup> Cited from Eckermann’s *Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens* (1835) by David Damrosch, in *What is World Literature?* (Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin. *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. By Michael Holquist, trans. By Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin : University of Texas Press, 1992, p. 61.

Goethe went on to say to Eckermann, “every literature will exhaust its vitality if it is not refreshed by the interest and contributions of a foreign one.”<sup>18</sup>

Such movement among languages must depend on translation and the work of translators. Whatever the success of a given educational system in promoting multilingualism, few people will master as many as three or four languages in their lifetimes, much less the 600 or so not currently endangered, or the 3,000 that are predicted to survive the contemporary mass extinction, so any defensiveness about reading literature in a language other than that which it was originally written is highly misguided. Attitudes towards, support for, and interest in translation within a given literary community are a crucial indicator of that community’s willingness to belong to what Pascale Casanova, in an important recent book, has called *La république mondiale des lettres*.<sup>19</sup> Casanova’s metaphors are taken from economics rather than biology: in her account, each language is a kind of currency, and these currencies clearly have very different values on the global literary marketplace. She is one of the first literary critics to fully address, from the perspective of language, “the unequal status of the players in the literary game and the specific mechanisms of domination that are manifested in it.”<sup>20</sup>

Because of its position as the global language, the second language of choice across the planet, the situation of English within this global linguistic economy or World Republic of Letters is unlike that of any other language. A work translated into English does not simply reach an audience of native speakers—it reaches a global audience. Therefore, a work translated into English has a much greater chance of going on to be translated into many other languages. And even without such subsequent translation, a work originally written in or translated into English will have access to the largest book market on the globe, and can be read by more people of different linguistic backgrounds, nationalities and cultures than a work in any other language. English is the world’s strongest linguistic currency. The question of translation into English therefore affects not only the English-speaking world but the entirety of world literature. This is strikingly admitted by Pascale Casanova herself in her introduction to the English translation of her book: “I am pleased that this book, aimed at inaugurating an international literary criticism, should itself be internationalized through translation into English. In this way, its hypotheses will be able to be scrutinized in a practical fashion, and its propositions debated at a truly transnational level, by the various actors in international literary space.”<sup>21</sup> Though she doesn’t say it in so many words, her meaning is clear: those who seek access to a “truly transnational level” of discourse can gain it only via English.

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<sup>18</sup> Damrosch, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> Editions du Seuil, 1999; English translation, Harvard University Press, 2004.

<sup>20</sup> Casanova, 352.

<sup>21</sup> Casanova, XIII.

From this perspective, the grave and oft-noted failure of English to take in literary works from other languages via translation becomes all the more crucial. English's indifference to translation is not merely a problem for native speakers of English who thus deprive themselves of contact with the non-English-speaking world. It is also a roadblock to global discourse that affects writers in every language, and serves as one more means by which English consolidates its power by imposing itself as the sole mode of globalization. For those of us who still care about literature, the threat thus posed is a fearsome one. If world literature, in Goethe's sense of the term, comes to consist entirely, or even primarily, of literature written in English, then is there really such a thing as world literature anymore?

A knee-jerk anti-globalization posture all too often encountered within universities in the English-speaking world blames the English language per se for this situation, and views those who translate into or out of English as agents of the language's imperial hegemony. This kind of thinking is worse than silly—it is potentially extremely harmful. The real issue is not the English language itself, or its global scope, but the cultural forces within the language that are resistant to translation. The difficulty of crossing between languages—what International PEN President Jiří Gruša has called “the pain of communication”—is something the English-speaking world has been rather successful at avoiding: it's so much easier and more practical to remain monolingual and let the rest of the world learn your language than to take on all the trouble, effort and expense involved in multilingualism and translation. Far from being agents of English's imperial hegemony, the translators who work into and out of English have taken the difficulty of linguistic diversity upon themselves, thereby making it possible for people to continue to read and write their own languages without losing access to that lion's share of the global conversation which now takes place in English. By using the global lingua franca as a medium to connect different languages rather than a replacement for all other languages, translators are helping solve the problem of the world dominance of English, not perpetuating it.

The very difficulty of finding reliable figures about what is translated into and out of the language is symptomatic of the obstacles that literary translation faces in English. In many countries across the world bookstores and book reviews revolve around two categories—works produced nationally and those brought in from other languages and cultures. And, as the various case studies and responses from PEN Centers around the world included in this report will attest, many governments have agencies that keep close tabs on the number of their books translated into other languages as well as the number of books translated into their own languages. In contrast, the major English-speaking countries increasingly tend to disregard altogether the category of what was originally written in languages other than English. Bowker, the primary collector of statistics on the publishing industry in the United States, stopped publishing statistics on translation when it switched from one database to another in the year 2000. That is

to say, it continued to publish figures for children’s books, home economics, religion, sports, and travel—but ceased to take note of which books originated outside of English.<sup>22</sup>

A news release issued by Bowker in October of 2005 did allude to the issue of translation.<sup>23</sup> According to that report, the total number of new books published in English worldwide in 2004 was 375,000—a rather daunting figure, certainly far greater than the number of books published in any other language. “The English speaking countries remain relatively inhospitable to translations into English from other languages,” the report stated. “In all, there were only 14,440 new translations in 2004, accounting for a little more than 3% of all books available for sale. The 4,982 translations available for sale in the US was the most in the English-speaking world, but was less than half the 12,197 translations reported by Italy in 2002, and less than 400 more than the 4,602 reported by the Czech Republic in 2003. Almost three quarters of all books translated into English from other languages last year were non-fiction.” These figures become more vividly illustrative when we remember that while Italy has a population of 55 million, and the Czech Republic of just 10 million, the number of people whose first language is English is close to 400 million.

While the figure of 3% of all published books is already alarming, the situation is in fact much more serious than that statistic would indicate. The vast majority of the translations included in this category are non-fiction works of a non-literary nature (computer manuals, etc.), and while such forms of exchange are certainly valuable, when the figures for the literary world are viewed separately, a far starker picture emerges. In 2004, the total number of adult literature and fiction titles in translation published in the United States was 874.<sup>24</sup> And even that figure is misleading. A 1999 study of translation by the National Endowment for the arts gathered its figures from reviews published in all the country’s literary magazines, no matter how small. The NEA study found that of a total of 12,828 works of fiction and poetry published in the United States in 1999 (as reported by Bowker), only 297 were translations—that is, only a little over 2% of all fiction and poetry published, and far less than 1% of all books published. A closer look at those 297 titles further reveals that the list includes many new translations of classic works. While such retranslations are unquestionably a vital aspect of literary culture, one would have to subtract the newly translated Homers, Tolstoys and Stendhals from the total number of translations published in order to gain a true picture of how overwhelmingly the odds are against

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<sup>22</sup> For example, see the statistics on US Book Production on Bookwire, one of Bowker’s portals: [www.bookwire.com/bookwire/decadebook\\_production.html](http://www.bookwire.com/bookwire/decadebook_production.html)

<sup>23</sup> “English-Speaking Countries Published 375,000 New Books Worldwide in 2004,” Bowker News Release. October 12, 2005, New Providence, New Jersey. Media contact: [dteague@teaguecommunications.com](mailto:dteague@teaguecommunications.com)

<sup>24</sup> Personal communication from Andrew Grabois of Bowker, March 9, 2005.

any living literary writer who does not write in English having his or her work published in English.

In his 1995 book *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, Larry Venuti found that from the 1950s on, the percentage of translated books in the United States has been, on average, 2%-4% of all books published each year, with an upsurge to 6%-7% during that 1960s.<sup>25</sup> That upsurge bears out Eliot Weinberger's contention that the United States has been most interested in translated literature during its period of post-colonial cultural formation in the 19th century, and during later periods of widespread discontent with its own culture and government such as the 1960s and, perhaps, the present moment.

The truly alarming dimensions of the problem emerge with the most striking clarity in a study published in July 2006 by the Center for Book Culture which focused on fiction alone, from the modernist period to the present, excluded retranslations and anthologies, assembled figures for the last five years, and then broke them down country by country. Here it's clear that the odds against being translated into English that confront individual writers in flourishing literary cultures such as Argentina are almost hopeless: out of the hundreds of writers who populate the country's vibrant literary environment, fewer than one per year (and not necessarily a living one) will see one of his or her books translated into English<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> (Routledge, 1995). See also Venuti's *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (Routledge, 1998), for slightly more recent statistics.

<sup>26</sup> The data appeared in the 5th of a series of commentaries on the difficulties of funding translation into English by John O'Brien of the Dalkey Archive Press, published in *Context: A Forum for Literary Arts and Culture*; [www.centerforbookculture.org/context/no19/translations\\_5.html](http://www.centerforbookculture.org/context/no19/translations_5.html)

## Translated Fiction Published in the United States, 2000-2006

Country: Language	Translated to english in last 6 years	Average per year
Albania: Albanian	3	0.5
Argentina: Spanish	5	0.8
Belgium: Flemish	1	0.2
Bosnia & Herzegovina: Bosnian	1	0.2
Brazil: Portuguese	7	1.2
Bulgaria: Bulgarian	1	0.2
Chile: Spanish	6	1.0
Croatia: Croatian	6	1.0
Cuba: Spanish	12	2.0
Czech Republic: Czech	12	2.0
Denmark: Danish	5	0.8
Ecuador: Spanish	1	0.2
Estonia: Estonian	1	0.2
Finland: Finnish	1	0.2
France: French	52	8.7
Germany/Austria/Switzerland: German	36	6.0
Greece: Greek	8	1.3
Hungary: Hungarian	7	1.2
Iceland: Icelandic	1	0.2
Italy: Italian	39	6.5
Latvia: Latvian	0	0
Lithuania: Lithuanian	1	0.2
Macedonia: Macedonian	1	0.2
Mexico: Spanish	8	1.3
Netherlands: Dutch	18	3.0
Norway: Norwegian	12	2.0
Peru: Spanish	2	0.3
Poland: Polish	13	2.6
Portugal: Portuguese	6	1.0
Romania: Romanian	3	0.5
Russia: Russian	29	4.8
Serbia and Montenegro: Serbian	8	1.3
Slovak Republic: Slovak	1	0.2
Slovenia: Slovene	2	0.3
Spain: Catalan	2	0.3
Spain: Spanish	12	2.0
Sweden: Swedish	7	1.2
Turkey: Turkish	6	1.0
Uruguay: Spanish	4	0.7

Source: Center for Book Culture, [http://www.centerforbookculture.org/context/no19/translations\\_5.html](http://www.centerforbookculture.org/context/no19/translations_5.html)

The most complete source of information about literary translation into English<sup>27</sup> is the journal *Annotated Books Received*, which can be consulted on-line at [www.literarytranslators.org/abr.html](http://www.literarytranslators.org/abr.html). Published by the American Literary Translators Association (ALTA) and the Center for Translation Studies at the University of Texas at Dallas, *Annotated Books Received* started out in 1983 as a section of *Translation Review*, ALTA's scholarly journal, which listed literary translations of all kinds from any language into English published in the previous year. In 1994, ALTA began publishing the list as a separate supplement to the *Review*.

<sup>27</sup> Currently (June 2014), the most completed database of literary translations into the US is the one developed by the University of Rochester at an annual basis since 2008, <http://www.rochester.edu/College/translation/threepersent/index.php?s=database>



Annotated Books Received offers little in the way of statistical analysis, but rather contains complete information about every published, book-length literary translation that ALTA has become aware of, be it fiction, literary theory, poetry, drama, letters, or some other form of literary scholarship. Published twice a year, Annotated Books Received is by far the best source for detailed information about what is being translated into English. A quick glance at the most recent edition, Volume 11, No. 2, for 2005, bears out the dim prospects for translation into English of the hypothetical Argentine novelist cited above. Under Spanish, ABR lists a grand total of five translations, three of them works by classic, long-dead writers, one a volume of poetry by a young Spanish poet, and last, *The House of Paper*, a novel by Argentine Carlos María Domínguez, published by Harcourt. And that's it.

A more hopeful outlook emerges from an intriguing recent study done by Michele Maczka and Riky Stock of the German Book Office in New York City which tracked only the figures for translations reviewed in the influential US publishing industry magazine *Publisher's Weekly*, convincingly deemed by the study's authors to be the most accurate reflection of "what is significant on the [US] book market today."<sup>28</sup> They were told by *Publisher's Weekly's* editor-in-chief, Sara Nelson, that the magazine pays special attention to translation, reviewing 60% of all translated books submitted, as opposed to only 50% of all fiction, and 25% of all non-fiction. "In 2004," Maczka and Stock found, "there were 132 translated titles reviewed out of a total of 5,588 reviews (about 2%)." In a surprising and encouraging shift, however, that number rose to 197 out of 5,727 (about 3.5%) in 2005—an increase of 50%.<sup>29</sup>

English is far from being the only language to have a problematic relationship with translation. A recent article in the *Korea Times*, an English-language publication, lamented that Korea had failed to adopt the "massive cross-cultural project" which Japan systematically pursued during the Meiji Restoration in the 1860s, leaving Korea's advance into modernity far behind Japan's.<sup>30</sup> *Are Translators Traitors?* a new book by Korean scholar and translator Park Sang-il, deplores the "shameful" quantity and quality of translations in Korea—two problems from which English could certainly also be said to suffer. Moreover, much recent writing about the Arab world, most particularly a 2002 report issued by the United Nations Development Programme, has focused on the paucity of translation into Arabic and the need for a great deal more of it. However, in the Arab world, translation is widely viewed as a key step towards modernization, as the many initiatives undertaken by a variety of Arab governments to support translation, documented in a

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<sup>28</sup> "Literary Translation in the United States," in *Publishing Research Quarterly* (June, 2006).

<sup>29</sup> Further general statistical information about the global translation economy and English's place in it is provided by UNESCO in its *Index Translationum*, which provides cumulative bibliographical information on books translated and published in about one hundred of the UNESCO member states since 1979.

<sup>30</sup> "Is Korean Language Doomed?" by Kim Ki-tae, *The Korea Times*, January 20, 2006.

report on translation in the Arab world by the Next Page Foundation, attest.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, in Korea, Park Sang-il fears that “indifference to the importance of translation could impoverish the cultural ground [of Korea] and in the end threaten the viability of our mother tongue.”

English, by contrast, does not, for the moment, face any such threat if it largely ignores most other languages. As we’ve noted, translation into English means that a book is more likely to be translated into many other languages, as well,<sup>32</sup> making the issue addressed in this report a matter of great concern to the segment of the global literary audience that wishes to remain interconnected with as many different language groups as possible. But what does English itself lose or risk by its failure to translate? Aside from the selfevident political and social dangers to an empire that fails to pay attention to the rest of the world, an increasing provincialism also poses a threat to the literature of the United States. At a panel discussion organized by PEN American Center to address issues of translation and globalization, Roberto Calasso the distinguished mythographer and director of the Italian publishing house Adelphi Edizioni, 50%70% of whose list consists of translations, pointed out some very serious literary consequences of such indifference to literatures not written in English.<sup>33</sup> The Austrian writer Thomas Bernhard has had an enormous impact on generations of writers all over the world, including English speaking writers. And yet, Calasso noted, only a limited number of Bernhard’s many works are available in English, and much of his work, including some essential books, has yet to be translated. English speaking writers are therefore in the situation of being superficially influenced by a writer to whose work they have only limited access.

This brings us to a key aspect of the problem of translation into English: the American university’s devaluation of translation as a form of literary scholarship. Translation has been among the most fundamental scholarly activities for millennia, but many contemporary American universities do not view it as a sufficiently significant or original form of endeavour. This trend away from translation has had some remarkably perverse consequences. It’s a far safer career move for a US academic to write, in English, a monograph on an author whose work has never been translated into English than to translate that author’s work into English. Faculty

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<sup>31</sup> “Lost or Found in Translation: Translations’ support policies in the Arab world,” a report commissioned by the Next Page Foundation in Sofia, Bulgaria, gives an extremely helpful context to the aforementioned UNDP report and takes serious issue with some of the figures it cites. See [www.npage.org/news/arabrep.html](http://www.npage.org/news/arabrep.html)

<sup>32</sup> See, in this respect, the comments on the importance of translation into English made by many PEN Centers (in response to the International PEN Questionnaire on Translation and Globalization) in Chapter 2 of this document.

<sup>33</sup> The panel took place in April of 2006, as part of PEN American Center’s second annual international literary festival, PEN World Voices: The New York Festival of International Literature. Participants on the panel were Roberto Calasso, of Adelphi Edizione in Italy, Boris Akunin, the wellknown detective novelist and former deputy editor of the Soviet and post-Soviet magazine *Foreign Literature*, Amanda Hopkinson, head of the British Centre for Literary Translation at the University of East Anglia, Richard Howard, a distinguished translator from the French into English, Elizabeth Peellaert, a distinguished translator from English into French, and Raymond Federman, a scholar and writer. The panel was moderated by Steve Wasserman, former editor of the Los Angeles Times Book Review.

members who continue to publish translations sometimes do so under pseudonyms, for fear of seeing their scholarly reputations tainted, or simply leave the translations off their curricula vitae when career achievements are being evaluated. Other scholars who publish “too many translations” may fail to receive tenure or ever to gain employment at all. “The great scandal of translation,” said translator and critic Gayatri Spivak at a 1994 Columbia University conference titled “Translation Matters” “is the obliteration of the figure of the translator.”

“The Academy [in the United States] has made it perfectly clear that translations are virtually worthless when it comes time for tenure and promotion,” translator Alyson Waters, managing editor of Yale French Studies, recently stated in an interview with French translator Elisabeth Peellaert.<sup>34</sup> The situation, Waters adds, may be changing with the growth of the field of Translation Studies, though for the moment a literary scholar in the United States is far better off writing about translation-related issues than actually practicing literary translation itself. The American Literary Translators Association has addressed the situation by publishing a useful pamphlet called “Translation and Tenure” to help junior faculty members gain respect for their work as literary translators among their colleagues.<sup>35</sup>

In recent years, even some university presses, which had been among the best sources of translations in literature and the human sciences, have announced that they will no longer publish translations, or are severely cutting back on the number of translations they publish. While this has had an impact on literary translation, it has led to a particularly troubling situation in the social sciences. Not only within the United States, but across the globe generally, social scientists have come under ever-increasing pressure to write in English, whatever their first language might be – the same pressure to which their colleagues in the “hard” sciences succumbed some time ago. Concerned about the situation, the American Council of Learned Societies launched the Social Science Translation Project which brought together translators, editors and social scientists to discuss problems arising from the translation of social science texts. The group has now issued a series of guidelines for the translation of social science texts, as well as a document titled “A Plea for Social Scientists to Write in Their Own Languages.”<sup>36</sup> Noting that “social science concepts and the terms used to convey them are shaped by the characteristics of the language in which they are originally produced and, consequently, by the cultural and historical experience of the users of that language,” the

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<sup>34</sup> Published in *To My American Readers*, a free magazine published by the French Cultural Services, the Villa Gillet of Lyon and PEN American Center on the occasion of the 2006 PEN World Voices: The New York Festival of International Literature. See [www.frenchbooknews.com](http://www.frenchbooknews.com)

<sup>35</sup> See <http://literarytranslators.org/promo.htm>

<sup>36</sup> See [www.acls.org](http://www.acls.org)

“Plea” deplores the “increasing homogenization and impoverishment of social science discourse” resulting from “the growing hegemony of a single language.”

Writing to one of the leaders of the ACLS Social Science Translation Project in response to the “Plea,” Bente Christensen, a vice-president of the International Federation of Translators and a member of Norwegian PEN wrote, “Here in Norway, we fight to have some university books written in Norwegian and not only in English. The students do not really understand what they read. I have seen that many times. They repeat the concepts in English, but when I ask them to explain what it is in Norwegian, they get confused.” “When we speak English,” Amin Maalouf told an audience at the International PEN Congress in Tromsø, Norway in 2004, “we sometimes feel that our words are superficial, that the meaning does not go very deep. For any writer or anyone who sets out to compose a written document of any kind, the choice of language is deeply personal and unique; many writers have chosen to express themselves in languages other than their native tongue for a wide variety of reasons. However, not only literary writers, but increasing numbers of people across the globe are pressured to carry out the most important aspects of their academic and professional lives in a language that is not fully theirs, because otherwise their work would simply be ignored.”<sup>37</sup>

There have been a number of positive trends with regard to the publication of literary translation in the United States over the last two or three years (as the very recent figures from Publishers Weekly mentioned in the study by the German Book Office above show), and much will be said about them in the fourth chapter of this report. But there is also a deeply entrenched tendency within many sectors of the US publishing industry to view literary translation as unsaleable. “America Yawns at Foreign Fiction” read a memorable headline in the New York Times on the subject of the US reception of translated literature.<sup>38</sup> Of course, literature itself is faring none too well within the US book market these days; literary fiction and non-fiction and, especially, poetry, often seem to be little more than a kind of fringe on the margins of the vast machine that churns out massive numbers of “book-shaped objects” (to quote Steve Wasserman, former editor of the Los Angeles Times Book Review) that have little or no lasting cultural value. Literary translation is the narrowest of fringes on the edge of that fringe, and while there are some publishing houses that have maintained an admirable degree of commitment to it, many other houses avoid it or view it as a kind of charitable endeavor, at best.

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<sup>37</sup> For an extensive and very useful discussion of the effects of globalization on translators working primarily outside of the literary and academic worlds, with special emphasis on minority languages, see Michael Cronin’s excellent *Translation and Globalization* (Routledge, 2003).

<sup>38</sup> Written by Stephen Kinzer, the article was published on July 26, 2003.

The translated book that does get published then faces the problem of reviews and marketing. Only in rare instances involving Nobel Prize winners or writers whose global renown is fully consolidated have publishers in the English-speaking world invested the kind of pre-publication advances in translated books that make them then commit large amounts of money to promoting them after publication. The first-time novelist who writes in English may well have a publisher with a half-million dollar investment to recover, and therefore a book tour, extensive advertisements, and all the other perks that may (or may not) push a book to the top of bestseller list. But the novelist whose work is coming out in English translation for the first time is very unlikely to be given any of those marketing and publicity resources. And while some reviewers are merely nervous about discussing translated books because they don't have access to the original language the books were written in, others feel no qualms about expressing an attitude of open disdain to the practice of literary translation itself. In an article in the highly regarded literary and cultural magazine *The Atlantic Monthly* titled "Why we review the books we do," Benjamin Schwarz, book review editor of the magazine, mentions that *The Atlantic* publishes few reviews of translated books.<sup>39</sup> Anticipating a charge of "parochialism," Schwarz acknowledges that this is "half-right": "We tend to focus on prose-style in our assessment of fiction. It's obviously far more difficult to do so when reviewing literature in translation, because both the reviewer and the reader of a work encounter not the author's writing but the translator's rendering of it. Hence we run fewer pieces on translated works." The prose style of some translations is indeed flawed, but then so is the prose style of many works originally written in English; the use of such a pretext as grounds for paying less attention to world literature is highly suspect, to say the least. Roberto Calasso has described much of contemporary US culture as a "lethal mixture of provincialism and imperialism," and such an attitude on the part of book reviewers can serve as an excellent example of what he means.

But that is far too grim a note on which to conclude. The English-speaking world, particularly in its major cities, is by no means the monolingual place that a reader with no experience of it might imagine after reading this report. Amanda Hopkinson, director of the British Centre of Literary Translation, points out that children show up in the London city schools speaking more than 350 different languages at home. Anyone who has ever ridden the New York subway has plunged into an environment probably as multilingual as any on earth. But if that same subway rider goes back up to the street and strolls into a bookstore, she'll find little there that can help her win entry into the alien tongues that were ringing in her ears a few seconds earlier—almost everything there will have been written in English. The challenge, for the English-speaking world, is not to become multilingual — we already are, and beyond Mikhail Bakhtin's wildest

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<sup>39</sup> *The Atlantic Monthly*, January/February 2004.

dreams – but to translate the polyglossia of our schools, streets and subways onto our bookshelves.

There are many translators, editors, publishing houses, agents, teachers, academics, institutions, and organizations that remain deeply committed to bringing international writing into English. There is a lot to do, but there is also a lot to build on. The level of translation into English seems to have reached an extreme low point from which there was nowhere to go but up, but the pendulum does seem to be swinging back towards translation with surprising momentum. A very encouraging number of new initiatives have emerged in the last few years from outside and within the English-speaking world, particularly within the United States, and the results are already making themselves felt. So many people are now committed to making the globe's linguistic invasive species into a means by which languages can communicate with each other that there must surely be very good news to come. International PEN and the Institut Ramon Llull respectfully submit this report to that large community of bridge-builders, hoping it will be useful to them in the task we are all jointly undertaking.

# Literary Translation: The International Panorama

by **Simona Skrabec**.

**Literary critic, translator and member of the Catalan PEN Center**

The previous chapter covers the situation regarding literary translation in English-speaking countries, with particular reference to the United States. By contrast, this chapter gives an overview of the main trends in literary translation internationally, although it takes into consideration the problem discussed in the first chapter, namely the decline in translations from other languages into English.

The argument to be developed here is based on questionnaire replies received by PEN International from PEN centers around the world. The replies received from the UK, Australia, New Zealand, and to some extent the Philippines furnish complementary information on the complex situation in the English language publishing field. With regard to the thriving free market for books in Asia, apart from the report on China, the only other data received are from Japan and these are of a general nature. The questionnaire replies enable a comparison to be made between the reports on France, The Netherlands, and Catalonia with the data furnished by the Flanders PEN center and opinions from countries in Central and Eastern Europe (Lithuania, Hungary, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Macedonia). In addition, some of the comments by the San Miguel de Allende PEN Center (Mexico) shed light on the situation in South America (contained in the report on Argentina). All replies from PEN centers to the questionnaire on translation may be read in their entirety on the website Diversity ([www.diversity.org.mk](http://www.diversity.org.mk)).

## 2.1 Projection abroad

### The lack of statistics

One of the main differences in the replies received from the centers concerns the availability of statistical data. It is surprising that several centers state they do not have reliable data on which works have been translated into foreign languages. It is worth considering this issue since the lack of information is not attributable to negligence by the questionnaire respondents.

The main reason for this dearth of information is the lack of appropriate bodies for gathering and publishing such data. However, one can also understand why certain bodies in other countries do not enjoy the importance they do in most European States. The countries lacking data are Mexico, The Philippines, and New Zealand. Mexican literature is written in Spanish, while New Zealand literature is written in English. That is why promoting the literatures of these two countries abroad is not solely undertaken by local governments, given that the languages in

which they are written makes it easy for them to reach wide audiences without having to resort to translation. Furthermore, the authors do not necessarily have to seek publishing houses in their own countries. This means that agreements to translate their works may be reached abroad, thus greatly complicating data-gathering on translations for these countries.

This raises a thorny issue. Can one say that Mexico and New Zealand have their own literary cultures? There are many literary cultures throughout the world that share languages, however it is often difficult to establish their bounds. The subject tends to be highly politicised, raising issues of cultural identity. It also poses practical problems – for example, can an author long “exiled” in Europe and who has published most of his works abroad be said to form part of the literary tradition of his native country? It is not surprising that many governments simply duck the issue when drawing up statistics.

In the following section, the clear-cut responses made by the UK and Australian PEN Centers regarding the domestic market for books in English will help clarify some of the issues in this immense monolingual market.

In the Philippines, the issue is more complex given that the country has various local languages and a big literary output in both English and Spanish. Producing statistics in such a complex linguistic context would be a nightmare for government. On the other hand, the lack of reliable data in Mexico, New Zealand and The Philippines can also be explained by the fact that these countries tend to take less part in literary exchanges than is the case in Europe.

### **European literary promotion abroad**

In Europe, the attitude towards literary promotion abroad is completely different. The Belgian government provides highly detailed statistics on literary output in Flemish and the promotion of Flemish works abroad. Slovenia takes a similar stance, providing a detailed catalogue on the Internet of all the country’s works published abroad.

The responses by PEN centers allow one to produce a map showing the frequency of literary exchanges, which is confirmed in the six cases studied in the second part of this chapter. Europe, with almost thirty languages, is the area with the strongest links when it comes to world literature. These exchanges are complemented with frequent translations into Chinese and Japanese (Asia’s main languages) and into those in Indo-China (e.g. Vietnamese, Malay, and Korean) and some Indian languages. There are no translations into African languages and – surprisingly – none of the PEN centers mentioned a work translated into Arab.



### **English as a “useful intermediary”**

This situation is very different for English-speaking authors, who do not need to translate their works to reach a mass market. One should also bear in mind that in many countries where English is not an official language, a rising number of readers spurn translations and buy books in the original English. This is particularly true in The Netherlands. It is also so to a lesser extent in Scandinavian countries. Even so, a best-selling novel in English has reasonable prospects of being translated into thirty languages and – if it is a runaway hit – into non-European languages too.

Lithuania’s PEN Center highlighted an occurrence that while common, is seldom so clearly illustrated as in this country’s case. Most of the nation’s literary translations into English are made in Lithuania. All the questionnaire respondents stated that they considered translation of works into English as key to their country’s projection abroad but that access to the English-language book market appeared practically impossible. The expression “useful intermediary” used by Lithuania’s Laimantas Jonusys thus seems particularly appropriate. Books are translated into English despite their slender chances of ever reaching English-speaking readers. Rather, the aim is get the attention of intermediaries who might foster their translation into languages (such as French and German) that are much more open to foreign writers.

### **The lack of English translators**

An even more important factor determining the poor showing of the literature from smaller nations on the international scene is the dearth of people capable of competently translating from the foreign language into English. This is illustrated by the lack of questionnaire responses covering the great languages of European literature (French, German and Italian). Put baldly, there is a clash between minority languages on the one hand and the all-pervading presence of English on the other. It is small wonder then that the Macedonian PEN Center complaint of the lack of translators was mirrored by the English PEN Center’s comments regarding the urgent need to train translators in minority languages.

The presence of modern languages in the UK is so sparse that Amanda Hopkinson, Director of the British Center for Literary Translation, considers there are “languages in danger of immediate extinction”. Universities around the UK have scrapped various languages from their philology departments. Translators of Greek and Latin were educated at private schools. By comparison, the vast majority of translators who have sufficient command of modern languages are either the offspring of immigrants or Britons who have spent a long time abroad. According to the UK PEN Center, there is no chance of attaining sufficient command of foreign languages in British schools and universities – something that is cause for great concern.

## **The imbalances caused by subsidies**

The differences between the European countries that took part in the survey are notable. The economic problems faced by Macedonia mean the nation lacks the subsidies needed to promote its literature abroad. Foreign publishing houses expect translation to be funded by the country of origin. Europe's poorer countries have been forced to face the unpleasant truth that the market for literary translations mirrors a nation's economic clout rather than its publicising skill or the intrinsic merits of its literature.

## **2.2 Acceptance of translated literature**

### **The internal structure of English-speaking markets**

The proportion of translated works as a percentage of the whole varies considerably among countries. As noted in the first chapter, there are very few translated works in the United States. In the UK, the most optimistic statistics indicate 6% of books are translations but this includes technical and non-fiction translations. Literary translation only makes up 2% of total output.

In Australia, things are even worse. Barbara McGilvray and collaborators in Sydney indicate that fewer than half a dozen books are translated each year. The President of the New Zealand PEN Center noted that readers and even literary critics are often unaware that they are reading a translation, given that the fact is not highlighted. Furthermore, many of the books sold in the country are published in the UK, US, or Australia and most of the literary works found in New Zealand's bookshops and libraries were also published abroad. New Zealand publishers exert practically no influence over literary translation policies.

The Australian respondents also noted the pitiful state of literary publishing in the country. The Australian market for translated works is dominated by imports from the US and UK. Furthermore, the Free Trade Agreement between Australia and the US has opened the floodgates to dumping, with American booksellers selling remaindered items very cheaply. The same American approach to bookselling is found—albeit in a milder form—elsewhere in the English-speaking world. It is fostered by publishing house alliances and multi-national firms. Sometimes the relationship is a reciprocal one—for example the case of “Penguin India” or Heinemann's short-lived “Africa Series”. However, more often than not it involves joint printing, re-packaging, and world-wide distribution.

The English PEN Center confirms the practice of selling the same book at different prices. Books are sold at full retail price in wealthy countries and are later dumped in poorer nations. In South Africa, British encyclopedias are dumped at a tenth or a hundredth of their original price to prevent the appearance of pirated versions on the black market.

Both the publishing and retail sides of the book business in English-speaking world are dominated by conglomerates and chains. Two multinationals – the German Bertelsmann group and the French Hachette group have the lion's share of the publishing market. Both groups focus on best-sellers. Authors receive vast sums for such works. However, there is also a new trend in the UK – non-author best-sellers. For example, even a firm like Bloomsbury has stooped to publishing ghost-written autobiographies of football players and fashion models. This is the “literature” of the masses with a vengeance and nothing, it seems, can detain its juggernaut career through the industry. The most translated works are detective stories or tales of an erotic, even pornographic nature. One should note here that such works are not considered great literature but rather exotic foreign variations on a theme.

The Greek and Latin classics are being republished in English, often in new translations. An example of this is the Macmillan series or the collections published by Oxford University Press and Penguin. This interest is partly explained by the fact that Plato and Marc Aurelius are not around to insist on authors rights, making the publishing of these works a lot cheaper. On the other hand, the teaching of Latin and Greek has undergone a dramatic decline and so there is no longer any market for such works in their original languages.

In the Australian PEN Center's view, this aspect is of key importance. Australian readers have a strong herd instinct but the book business – particularly in the case of independent publishers – depends on readers acting as individuals. Accordingly, the market gives translated poetry and literature short shrift.

### **The complexity of post-colonial countries**

Another feature of English-speaking countries, particularly Commonwealth ones, is their complex ethnic make-up. The New Zealand PEN Center drew attention to this aspect. Whatever their origin, immigrants are expected to learn English. However, Maori is the country's other official language. Accordingly, there are translations between English and Maori. The government has also assumed responsibility for publishing textbooks in Samoan, Maori Kuki Airani in the Cook Islands, and in the Tongan and Niuean languages. However, only a very small proportion of this material may be considered to be of a literary nature.

The Chinese community living in New Zealand publish their own newspaper and have recently brought out English translations of Chinese poetry. The Croatian community has published a small number of literary texts in Serbo-Croat and English. This situation, in which a dominant language co-exists with others – including native ones – in a society shaped by constant immigration is also to be found in many other countries with a colonial past.

In Britain, a similar situation can be found in London's primary schools in which some 350 languages are spoken in the city's playgrounds. There is also growth in the writing and publication of poetry among immigrant communities in their languages of origin, and renewed interest in Britain's other native tongues although in the case of Scots Gaelic, the focus is mainly on the spoken language. However, literary translations are on the rise for Welsh and these are supported by the Welsh Language Society (Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg) in the form of subsidies for writers, translators, and publishing houses bringing out works either solely in Welsh or in bilingual format.

In this context, one should note the comments made by Isagani Cruz, National Secretary-General of the PEN Center in The Philippines. Literary texts in French, German, Japanese, Malay, Spanish, Thai, and other languages are routinely translated into Philippine local tongues. However, translation to and from English did not begin on any large scale until American colonial rule came to an end. Many key English literary works were then translated into local languages, particularly Tagalog. Translations from English picked up again after the Second World War. English was also the bridging language providing access to other works of literature. An example here is the translation from English to Tagalog of Saint Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince*, which proved a bestseller.

The first translations to English were made by Americans, such as the one of Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere*, written in Spanish—which is the most popular work in The Philippines. By contrast, there are few translations into English of Philippine literary works written in local languages. This is because very few English-speaking specialists who can read those languages. Thus the cultural traffic is very much one-way. Whereas Philippine readers have read a great deal of English literature, there are few if any British and American writers who have read any Philippine works.

### **Europe: interest in the literary setting**

The other extreme of the foreign literature spectrum can be found in small and medium-sized European nations. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, Flanders, Hungary and Macedonia, almost half of the new books published each year have been translated. The main feature here is that most of the translated works were published by small firms with fewer than 150 new titles a year and in which the number of copies sold is always fairly modest.

In Lithuania, with a population of a little over 3 million, the average print run is 2,000—although some bestsellers reach 30,000. In Slovenia, with just 2 million inhabitants, print runs of translated books may lie anywhere between 20 (poetry collections) to 25,000 (*The Da Vinci Code*). Most fiction titles sell between 1,000 and 1,500 copies, and 400-600 copies for quality fiction. However, short print runs are not confined to small countries. Lucina Kathmann,

Secretary of Mexico's San Miguel de Allende PEN Center noted that very few books are sold in general and that editions seldom exceed 3,000 copies.

Kata Kulavkova, President of PEN International's Translation and Language Rights Committee in Macedonia noted a positive feature of these tiny literary markets. Translations of universal literature follow a strategic plan aimed at filling libraries. This approach is of key importance for publishers since demand from libraries helps offset the impact of short print runs on book prices. Kulavkova's analysis is also applicable to other small and medium-sized European countries in which policies fostering translations are of key importance in advancing and enriching the national language. Translations also open a window on the world, spreading knowledge of foreign literatures, cultures and traditions. The educational function performed by literary translations explains the practice of publishing fragments by contemporary foreign writers in magazines, the press, and other media.

János Benyhe, Secretary-General of the Hungarian PEN Center and a renowned literary translator, noted that his country had a long tradition of high-quality translations. Hungary in particular epitomises a fundamental trait of all translations. The fact that Magyar does not belong to the Indo-European family of languages has meant translation into and out of the language requires a considerable amount of literary re-creation. The challenge for translators is thus much greater than for, say, a translation from English to German or from French to Italian. The best Hungarian writers have spent a great deal of effort in translating the world's greatest works of literature. Happily, there is currently something of a boom in literary translation in Hungary.

### **Europe's linguistic patchwork**

Clearly, English-speaking nations are not alone in borrowing from other cultures and languages. However, mainland Europe is even more complex in this regard and in some cases ethnic factors can have a decisive impact on policy decisions regarding the import and export of literary works. Once again, the Macedonian case is highly instructive. Government subsidies are shared out on an ethnic basis and in accordance with previously agreed criteria rather than on the basis of literary merit. When national literature is spoken of in Macedonia, this covers not only works in Macedonian but also in Albanian. It is not always clear whether it only covers works written by Albanian speakers in Macedonia or whether it also embraces ethnic Albanians in Kosovo and Albania itself. The government's equitable share-out of subsidies means that over 25% of the budget is automatically earmarked for translation into and out of Albanian. This means the subsidy available for translating into and out of Macedonian is proportionally reduced. Promotion of Macedonian works abroad is likewise affected.

The Belgian government also provides government support for two literatures. Both extend beyond Belgium's frontiers— in the case of French, it embraces one of the world's richest literary traditions, while Flemish is part of the Dutch-speaking area that extends into the Netherlands. According to Isabelle Rossaert of the Flemish PEN Center, without access to the Dutch market the Flemish publishing industry would be confined to a very small area. While there are tensions between the Walloon (i.e. French-speaking) and Flemish literary communities, they are much weaker than in Macedonia where two languages contend for a very meagre budget.

According to Ferida Duraković, the state of the book market in Bosnia-Herzegovina is disastrous. The market is very small and publishing books in short print runs is very expensive. Moreover, people can barely scrape enough money together to buy text books, let alone literary works. Publishers are trying to broaden their markets to embrace other Serbo-Croat speaking countries (Croatia, Serbia, and Montenegro). However, since all these countries are economically and politically in much the same situation, the immediate prospects for such a strategy are poor. Publishers in the region have taken timid steps to widen markets.

Before the Yugoslav Civil War, Bosnia and Herzegovina had an association of literary translators that worked fairly well in the country. The association fell apart during the war and translators now act on their own initiative. There is no State plan for carrying out literary translations of important works. Furthermore, the civil war has left deep scars and poor-quality translations are made by groups or individuals with an ideological and/or ethnic axe to grind. Only a few good translations surface abroad (of works by Miljenko Jergović, Dževad Karahasan, Abdulah Sidran, Meša Selimović and Mak Dizdar). The state provides no support whatsoever.

The Bosnia PEN Center argues that Bosnia-Herzegovina is an invention of the Dayton Peace Accords, which are merely an attempt at nation-building. Accordingly, no government strategy can realistically be expected regarding languages, national literatures, or free markets. Political factors make literary exchanges with neighbouring countries and with the rest of the world well-nigh impossible.

### **The position of literary translators**

Although translated works are not always bestsellers, an excellent network of libraries in Macedonia and similar countries ensures that such works will be available to readers for decades. It also means that translations are of a very high quality and that translators enjoy social prestige, even though their work is often poorly paid.

Here, one should note that the position of translators is not so very different in the UK. Amanda Hopkinson in London commented: "Most of us do not change and continue translating well

despite being badly treated”. Even so, translators in Britain are in an enviable position if we compare them with their counterparts in Australia. The questionnaire response from that country noted: “Translation is generally considered necessary for providing services to immigrants. Accordingly, over the last half century it has gained a social services slant.”

In her case study of the situation in France, Anne-Sophie Simenel states that translators can expect to earn €2,925-3,375 Euros for a 150-page work, as an advance against an average royalty of 2%. In Britain, 4,423 would be paid for the same work and in Australia 3,700. Translators working in Holland could, according to the figures supplied by Bas Pauw in his case study, expect up to €6,712 Euros for that same 150 pages, between the standard fee from the publisher and a translation grant available to them. Figures for other countries are 2,100 Euros (Slovenia); 1,300 Euros (Macedonia); 1,000 Euros (Hungary) and 945 Euros (Lithuania). Thus rates vary widely.

### **Present challenges**

All the PEN Centers replying to the questionnaire agreed that the international climate is now more receptive towards their literary works. Some of the centers noted that bodies promoting the nation’s literature abroad had decisively contributed to extending the country’s sphere of influence. The Lithuanian PEN Center stressed that this broadening of horizons played an important role in changing the political climate in Europe ending The Cold War; facilitating the EU entry of former Communist countries; and changing perceptions of Eastern Europe.

Despite some serious concerns, the PEN center replies are generally optimistic. Even so, the globalisation of book markets bodes ill for literary works. All too often, the interest in the literary output of other countries is little more than a taste for the exotic. Members of the Australian PEN Center dryly noted that “The UK and US cast a long shadow over Australia’s pastures” and that this was why Australians were only interested in works with “a big dose of Australian landscape”.

A similar phenomenon applies to works from Eastern Europe. Most of the books published in the United States speak of the victims of Communism, censorship and repression, and the economic slump in Eastern Europe that followed Soviet withdrawal. “There’s no point in importing love stories or other frivolous fare from far-off lands no matter how well they are written because we’ve got plenty of that stuff here”, ironically noted Andrej Blatnik, Secretary of the Slovenian PEN Center.

The English PEN Center notes the increasing number of translations but in the fiction field these include best-sellers like the Harry Potter or the Miss Marple series. Translation of English essays or poetry is much more sporadic. For example, the works of Andrew Motion, a renowned contemporary English poet, have never been translated.

Which country has greater choice—the UK in which only 2% of books are translated from other literatures, or Brazil where translations account for almost 90% of the books published? Neither extreme seems desirable. British readers live in a country in which it is very hard to find translated works and discover a foreign culture. On the other hand, Brazilians read authors from many countries but their own writers are not translated into many foreign languages. Despite the progress made, mutual ignorance is likely to last for a long time yet. One can therefore say that the need for literary translation is as great as ever and in some cases is an acute one.