

# Catalan literature and translation in a globalized world

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The purpose of this report is to contribute to the debate on the state of literary translation both into and from Catalan in a globalized world. The importance of translation is generally acknowledged in all cultures, as a means to promote knowledge and as an element of construction of a culture and literature.

Josep Carner reminds us that, "All formal literature began with translation". This becomes even more necessary in the case of literature written in languages with few speakers, which needs translation not only to grow, but also to make a place for itself in universal literature. In the case of Catalan literature we often complain that works by our authors are not often translated into other languages, that Catalan literature needs to be translated into a bridging language that opens doors to other literature and to the world, and we argue about which is the true bridging language, Spanish? English? To what degree are Catalan authors translated into other languages? Into which languages are they most often translated? What mechanisms make a Catalan author more likely to be translated into another language? Does having a work translated into Spanish or English guarantee further translations? Does Catalan literature function with the same mechanisms as any other literature in a majority language? Do our cultural institutions take this situation into account? What percentage of books published in Catalan are translations from other languages? What support and correction mechanisms does the government provide to fill possible gaps and maximise literary circulation? How is translation experienced by those who make it possible: the translators themselves? What are the working conditions like for those that translate into and from Catalan? How is translation regarded? Are translations more or less prestigious than works written in Catalan? Is there a translation policy to cover possible historical gaps? Is it the industry and the market which dictate what gets translated, and how and when? Answers to some of these questions can be found in this report, or if not, at least an attempt has been made to clarify some situations that would undoubtedly go some way towards addressing certain needs, and to shape attitudes and policies aimed at introducing improvements in the situation and to help find and develop creative answers in this respect.

## Conclusions

Translations from Catalan into other languages.

1. 91% of all translations from Catalan are into Spanish.
2. Spanish, as a majority language, does not act as a bridging language to launch a literary work

onto the international scene. There are no indications that titles translated into English have subsequently been translated into other languages systematically. There are Catalan authors who have major international recognition without ever having been translated into Spanish or English.

3. There are a lot of titles written in English, but published in Catalonia. In addition, the vast majority of translations into Spanish are published in Catalonia itself.

4. Outside Spain, the language into which most Catalan works are translated into is French, followed by German. English occupies third place only.

5. Between 1998 and 2003, Catalan literary works were translated into 24 different languages.

6. The projection of Catalan literature abroad is mainly due to cultural or literary complicity and friendship between Catalan writers and foreign writers, translators or professors.

7. Successful Catalan literature exports have mainly been of narrative works, especially novels. In contrast, there is a long way to go before the work of poets is discovered abroad through the publication of complete works. Anthologies are, in many cases, no more than a testimonial feat, and can act as a further barrier to the complete reception of an author. Catalan essays are practically unheard of outside Spain.

8. Authors of children's and young person's literature had the most works translated from Catalan, especially those whose books have given rise to television cartoons.

9. Literary works written in a language like Catalan not only have to overcome the frontiers of a language with limited reach, but also have to find a place in a world that is increasingly devaluing demanding reading.

10. Cultural administration bodies do not always demonstrate enough imagination or planning to encourage and oversee knowledge of the Catalan literary corpus. This would be a good preliminary step towards good international circulation.

11. Rarely can a translator influence the retrieval and projection of important and demanding literary works, especially from the past.

12. It is extremely difficult to obtain information about versions of Catalan literary works published in other languages, and their quality, especially if the language concerned is far removed.

#### Universal literature in Catalan

13. Due to the completely bilingual population, any book can reach the Catalan public unhindered via a Spanish translation.

14. Catalan versions of texts that were originally published in Spanish have increased. This phenomenon can be interpreted as a greater recognition of the Catalan language or as a simple market strategy.

15. The presence of narrative and even poetry from overseas in Catalan is good, but the same cannot be said of essayistic writings and essays, which are still read in Spanish by Catalan readers due to the absence of Catalan versions.

16. Horizons have been broadened to include different languages (Central European literature, for instance) with translators who do not need to use a bridging language. But in Catalan there are

still absent languages and cultures.

17. Having Catalan translations of learned literature in all genres is also a way of increasing the value and giving force to the language.

18. Literary translation is highly valued in the arts world as here everyone is aware that foreign authors offer basic material for the Catalan culture.

19. There are no reliable statistics on the presence of world literature in Catalan. The Institution of Catalan Letters and, later, the Ramon Llull Institute have put together the TRAC catalogue of Catalan works translated into other languages, but currently there are no plans to take a detailed look at how literary works from other cultures are entering the Catalan culture.

The situation of the literary translator in Catalonia

20. Translation seen as nothing more than a step within the publishing process, anonymous translators because nobody knows them or recognises them even though they put their names to the translation, hurried, badly paid and very poor quality translations are often a reality in Catalonia.

21. Traditionally publishers have shown unwillingness to admit that the translator should benefit from any kind of intellectual property rights. It is only through legislation that they have been forced to change the criteria.

22. Catalonia has always had very good literary translators, mainly writers or university professors. The appearance of university degrees in translation has led to the incorporation of many graduates with theoretical training in translation, but few decide to dedicate themselves to literary translation.

23. There are still well-known translators in Catalonia but, as usually happens in the arts world, each one has had to build their own reputation through their own individual work and accumulated merits.

24. There is still no professional translators' association, and the few associations that do exist do not have a very strong presence.

25. The website of the Translation/Linguistic Rights Committee of Catalan PEN is a pioneering initiative in the field of literary translation.

26. In Catalonia prizes for translators are virtually non-existent, and very few include a money element.

Subsidies

27. Translation projects concerning key works of universal literature should enjoy special financial aid to ensure publication in Catalan and their consequent incorporation into the Catalan literary heritage. Thus, there should be a more explicit willingness to construct the cultural infrastructure of the country both from the government and from the publishing sector.

28. The Institution of Catalan Letters should promote the translation of all the key works of universal literature that have not been translated into Catalan in a more decisive manner, opening more possibilities.

29. Each year the Ramon Llull Institute grants subsidies to publishing houses for the translation of Catalan works and for initiatives related to the promotion and overseas circulation of Catalan

literature.

30. A relative abundance of subsidies has created a Europe-wide climate in which a publisher is practically never willing to publish a translation if it is not financed from the country of origin. Correction mechanisms that help to conserve the balance between imports and exports should be developed.

31. There is no systematic policy regarding literary translations from and into Catalan.

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Translated by Sarah Yandell