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## EUROPEANISATION, WESTERNISATION OR GLOBALISATION OF THE BOOK MARKET IN POLAND? EVIDENCE FROM TRANSLATION FLOWS IN POLAND (1980-2022)

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### Abstract

The article provides evidence for the opening of Polish culture in the last four decades, focusing on incoming translation flows, i.e., the books translated from foreign languages to Polish. It answers the question of whether the circulation of cultural goods has followed the same pattern as the economy, i.e., a shift towards Western European influences. It shows, with quantitative data completed with qualitative data, that the Polish culture has opened up to Western culture but also to an increasingly global culture. The article explains the differences between both databases used for the research. The evidence further demonstrates that the sociology of translation influences the geography of translation flows.

### Key words

Sociolinguistics • geolinguistics • cultural geography • sociology of translation • translation flows • Index translationum • Polish National Library • graph analysis • Poland

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## Introduction

At the end of the Cold War more than thirty years ago, the consecutive opening of borders in Europe had radical consequences on the trade of goods and services in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). First, the collapse of the former Eastern bloc with the end of the COMECON<sup>1</sup> resulted in the fall of the Russian economy and the brutality of shock therapy in many countries. Second, these countries have entered since then a double process of globalisation and europeanisation: the effects of globalisation, defined as the opening to new flows of information, goods, investments and services on a large scale occurred at once, at the very beginning of the 1990s. Soon after came the effects of Europeanisation. Europeanisation is a complex notion: it has been defined as a process of diffusion of formal and informal norms from the EU to future member states and to local authorities (Hamedinger & Wolffhardt, 2010; Radaelli, 2001). But it is also an object of research for social scientists aiming at understanding what are the effects of EU accession on societies, economies, territories. We understand the word “Europeanisation” in this way in this article. Three decades after the fall of communism and two or fewer decades after their accession to the EU, what prevails, between globalisation and Europeanisation? As far as trade and investments are concerned, economic integration is mainly turned to Europe: nowadays, exports and imports of countries of CEE with other countries of the EU account for about two-thirds of their trade, which is much higher compared to most Western European countries (Eurostat). The flows of investments are more global as far as private foreign direct investments are concerned, although European sources also prevail (Bohan, 2009; Rytter Sunesen et al., 2018; Andrei & Andrei, 2022); and of course, public investments from the Cohesion policy strengthen European footing. Nevertheless, processes of globalisation should not be studied merely as economic

concerns, but also as cultural ones (Appadurai, 1996). In the geographical literature, a lot has been written about globalisation and Europeanisation of CEE in the light of public policies, systemic transformations, and economic flows underlying these processes (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005; Bafoil & Beichtel, 2008; Lepesant, 2011), but much less has been written about the same trends measured through cultural flows. Do cultural flows confirm a prevailing trend in Europeanisation, or are they more global? It is not possible to answer this question on a large scale. It has been chosen to examine it on the basis of cultural flows which may be quantified and which allow to answer partially this research question. This article analyses the trends of cultural circulation in Poland, by focusing in the book market of Poland, more precisely the translation flows from 1980 to the present time, while also considering the impact of Europeanisation and/or globalisation. It asks the following questions: how many books have been translated in Poland every year? What is the share of books translated from foreign languages? Which languages are the dominant ones? How and why has the hierarchy of languages of translated books been changing? What do these answers reveal about the cultural openness of Polish culture and its evolution?

To answer these questions, three hypotheses are put forward:

1. Cultural flows are not disconnected from other flows; culture is also an economic activity, and it is connected to diplomacy. Cultural circulation participates in the situation of a given country on the international scene.
2. Translation is driven both by public policies and private mechanisms. Public policies can support translations through specific funds and programs. However, the market economy also leads the supply and the demand. Private actors such as publishers and even translators might play a significant role.

<sup>1</sup> Council for Mutual Economic Assistance.

3. Languages of CEE are peripheral because of the number of their speakers and their linguistic originality (especially the Finno-Ugric). They are more vulnerable in the context of globalisation.

This article first presents the state of the literature about translation flows from the perspective of social sciences, focusing on Europe, CEE countries, and Poland; in the second part, the article examines and critiques the available sources for measuring translation and describes its methodology. The third part is devoted to the results of the research, followed by the conclusion.

## Translations in sociology and geography of culture

### Translation studies, sociolinguistics, geolinguistics: How far does space matter?

Translation is rightly considered an important focus not only for linguistics but also for social sciences. Since the beginning of the 1970s, "translation studies" has encompassed a diversity of fields, bringing together an interdisciplinary approach to language, from linguistics to sociology, political sciences, psychology, etc. (Holmes, 1972).<sup>2</sup> As a combination of several of these disciplines, sociolinguistics is defined as *"the study of language in relation to society, and it draws on insight from sociology, anthropology, and social psychology as well as insights from other areas of linguistic studies"* (Malmkjoer, 1991: 415). In sociolinguistics, the spatial dimension often matters. Pierre Bourdieu is well known for having analyzed linguistic interactions as economic exchanges in a symbolic "market of languages," driven by dominant relationships between speakers. This domination effect is sometimes related to the geographical position of the speakers; for

instance, he describes the contrast between linguistic practices, accents, and patois (commonly called "regionalism") and the more formal, legitimized practices and places of language use (Bourdieu, 1982: 40-41). The spatial dimension has also been considered in sociolinguistics through analyses of the effects of migration on language and the use of multilingual repertoires, globalisation, etc. Another part of sociolinguistics focuses on languages more than on speakers and uses concepts that are mostly rooted in the conceptual vocabulary of geography and spatial analysis. Louis-Jean Calvet writes about an "ecosystem" of languages, each one evolving in its "milieu" (Calvet, 1999); he also uses the physical concept of a "gravitational model" to explain the relationships between languages. Similarly, Abram de Swaan talks about a "worldwide constellation of languages", highly ordered and hierarchical (Swaan, 2001). Therefore, these authors distinguish between "central" or even "hypercentral", and "peripheral" languages. Researchers in comparative literature also note the domination effects between languages, between "centers" and "peripheries," often ascribing such domination to "imperialism" within the framework of "post-colonialism" (Phillipson, 2000). Interestingly, some authors explicitly refer to the role of space when explaining the choice of books which are translated: *"One of the most common of these circuits relates to geography and geographic proximity with editors opting for books from neighbouring or nearby countries"* (Vimr, 2022a: 291).

In the context of globalisation, the understanding of the role of translations in the sociology and the geography of culture is crucial. In 1999, Johan Heilbron claimed that the sociology of translations is a *"promising domain for the study of the cultural world-system"* (Heilbron, 1999: 440). Sapiro stresses how translation studies are also embedded with geopolitics. She states that *"the translation depends on a space of international relations, constituted by the existence of nation-states and linguistic groups linked together by relations of competition and rivalry. (...)"*

<sup>2</sup> The linguistic part of the state of the art will not be addressed here, although the majority of literature in translation studies is about the technics, ethics and methods of translation as a linguistic; it will focus mainly on sociology and geography of languages, e.g. sociolinguistics and geolinguistics.

*To understand the act of translating, we must first analyse it as part of a system of relations between countries, their cultures, and their languages. In this system, economic, political, and cultural resources are unevenly distributed, giving rise to asymmetrical exchanges that reflect relations of domination*" (Sapiro, 2008: 29).<sup>3</sup> This is why, in this asymmetrical market, to refer once more to Bourdieu, it has been shown that translation flows are likely to move from hyper-central languages such as English to peripheral or semi-peripheral ones (Barré, 2010). To put it in other words, not every culture "imports" translated literature: *"Established literature tends to rely less on translation, while newly evolving literatures or literatures in a state of flux are likely to translate more"* (Bassnett, 2014: 85).

### Europe as a center of translations

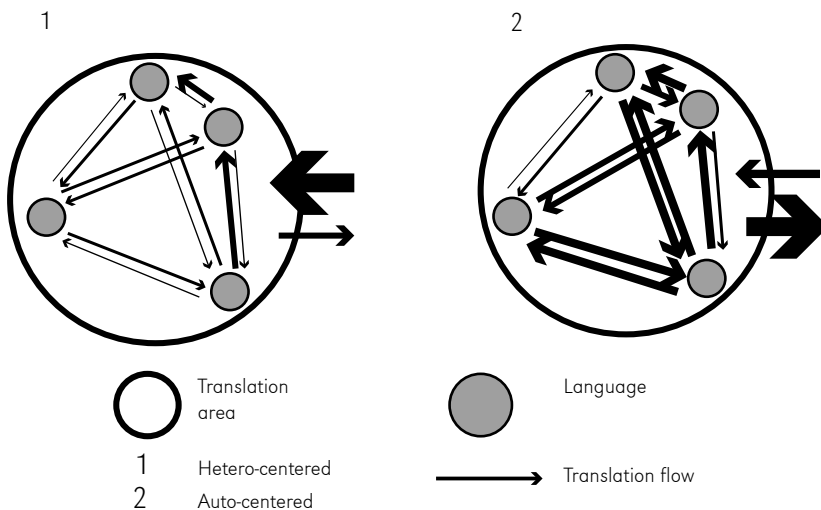
In translation studies, much research is conducted on a regional scale. This is the case for Europe, which has sometimes been defined as the "continent of translation": it played a major role in the formation of this market, and, specifically in the context of globalisation, *"it remains the region having the highest diversity and density of exchanges"* (Sapiro, 2009). This is not a new situation; Europe once collected 81% of all published books in 1927. At that time, French and German literature were the most translated in the world, especially in young nation-states. After the Second World War, and especially the Treaty of Rome, the translation studies about Europe have mostly addressed translation policies within European institutions.

<sup>3</sup> *"La traduction dépend d'un espace de relations internationales, constitué à partir de l'existence des Etats-nations et des groupes linguistiques liés entre eux par des rapports de concurrence et de rivalités. (...). Pour comprendre l'acte de traduire, il faut donc, dans un premier temps, l'analyser comme imbriqué dans un système de relations entre des pays, leurs cultures et leurs langues. Dans ce système, les ressources économiques, politiques et culturelles sont inégalement distribuées, ce qui engendre des échanges asymétriques reflétant des rapports de domination"* (p. 29) Translated by the author of this article.

The multilingualism policy of the European Economic Community, and now the EU, is a political choice, designed to avoid a single common language. Translation, therefore, occupies a central place in European culture (Barret-Ducrocq, 1992), because it serves the democratic goals of unity and peace while maintaining the diversity of its nations (Touitou-Benitah, 1998: 359). The policy is also embedded in institutional practices for internal communication (Orban, 2011); however, despite this pro-multilingualism policy, *"actual practices – and presumably its underlying ideologies – are increasingly predicated on monolingualism in English"* (Leal, 2022).

### Translations in Central and Eastern European countries and especially in Poland

Some regions of the world are defined as "translation areas" because the countries inside them follow a common pattern as far as translation is concerned; this is precisely the case in Central and Eastern Europe (Popa, 2004, Chalvin et al., 2019). This can be explained by the history of this region and the conditions for the emergence of national identities in the nineteenth century, with the People's Spring. Nation-building was then supported by politics, but very often also by grammarians, poets, terminologists, etc. Emphasizing the existence and the power of national languages, this movement led to the birth (or rebirth) of sovereign nation-states after 1918. In the CEE countries, languages from which some texts were translated include the following in succession: Greek, Latin, German, French (in some countries like Romania), English, and finally Swedish. While Russian was the primary source language for translation in the nineteenth century, in the second half of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century, the cultural horizon opened up through increasingly more translations from other major languages, including translations between Polish and Czech. This openness is interpreted as an entry into modernity in the Interwar period (Chalvin et



Adapted from: Chalvin, Antoine. 2011. « Comment écrire une histoire aréale de la traduction? » In *Between Culture and Texts. Itineraries in Translation History*, Antoine Chalvin, Anne Lange, and Daniele Monticelli. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

**Figure 1.** Hetero-centered and auto-centered translation areas

Source: Adapted and translated from Chalvin (2011).

al., 2019). At this time, “big” languages such as German, French, and Russian were used to translate literature from the Far East, Scandinavia, and America. Translation played a specific role in communist regimes. Because it could be used to build bridges from and to other cultures, it would remain under the control of political authorities (Popa, 2010). In the former Soviet Union, as Brian James Baer recalls, “*the use of translated literature as a vehicle to comment critically on contemporary society formed part of what Vladimir Shlapentokh referred to as a ‘second culture’, on an intelligentsia subculture within soviet society*” (Baer, 2009: 231).

Some authors consider CEE as “translation area[s]” since “*There are strong similarities in the way translation is practiced and the cultural role it plays*”<sup>4</sup> that make this region different from Western Europe and the Russian area (Chalvin et al., 2019: 7). But as Chalvin

observes over the long-term, translation flows from and to this region are dissymmetric and form what he calls a “hetero-centered” area (Fig. 1). Incoming translation flows prevail on the opposite; the volume of internal translation flows within the area is moderate, because the languages concerned are semi-peripheral or peripheral. In an “auto-centered” translation area, such as Western Europe, translation flows are mainly directed outside, but few texts are translated from languages outside the translation area. Some literature suggests that internal translation flows inside CEE have diminished, and thus this region is increasingly hetero-centered. Using regression analysis, Abramitzky and Sin demonstrate that “*communist translations from Western languages rose when Communism fell, whereas translations between Communist countries fell*” (Abramitzky & Sin, 2014). They estimate that the decline of translations inside the Communist bloc declined by a factor of three between 1980 and 2000.

In this area, Poland is often considered differently (Heydel & Ziemann, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> “On peut y observer de fortes similitudes du point de vue des modalités d’exercice de la traduction et du rôle culturel joué par celle-ci” (translated by the author).

On the one hand, most authors consider that among the Eastern bloc, the control on editorial activity was less severe, and intellectual links with the West were easier due to, among other factors, the Polish diaspora (Popa, 2010; Chalvin et al., 2019). On the other hand, the Polish language enjoyed a privileged position within the former socialist countries in Europe, according to Zbigniew Rykiel, for two reasons. First, because scientists and, more generally, intellectual elites could maintain links with the West, the Polish language was used as a *lingua franca* by intellectuals from the rest of the Eastern bloc. Second, Polish was also used in the world of espionage for officers of NATO countries such as Germany and Denmark (Rykiel, 2000).

## Sources and methodology

### Sources available on the global scale: Index Translationum (IT)

The analysis of translation flows relies upon statistical data, which is available on an international or national scale. The only existing international database has been provided by UNESCO since 1932, under the name of *Index Translationum* (IT). It originates from the compilation of data transmitted by the national depository of each country. This database contains information about the translation flows to and from dead or modern languages. It allows one to select translation flows entering various criteria (Šajkevič, 1992; Barré, 2010). Originally published in paper yearbooks since 1932, it is now available online, but it has been less frequently updated in the past 15 years. IT has been used by several scholars, who have pointed out some faults: countries do not always have the same definition of a book; the validity of data varies over time (Šajkevič, 1992; Barré, 2010), between countries (Abramitzky & Sin, 2014) or even for a single source (Heilbron, 1999); the scientific literature is not a single category (Sapiro, 2009); non-official translations such as *samizdat* are not taken in account (Abramitzky & Sin, 2014); IT lacks a critical presentation of its own sources (Calvet, 2007); and finally,

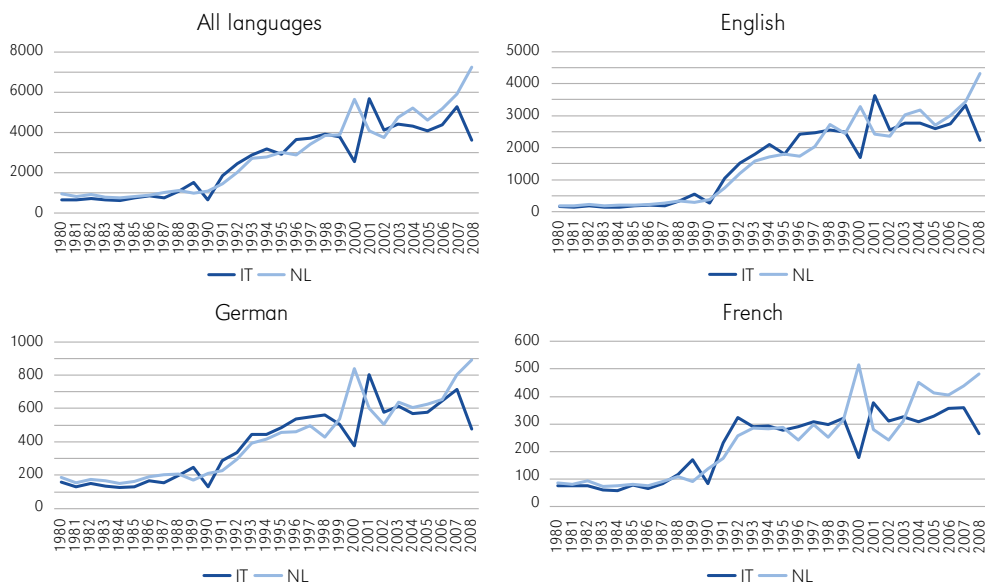
it does not allow one to measure the impact of translations according to the number of copies of each title (Sapiro, 2010). But even so, IT has been used in sociolinguistics because it is the only data allowing one to study translation flows on the global scale, as Barré or Calvet did, or on the regional one, as Sapiro or Abramitzky and Sin did. Scholars focusing on translation flows out of the IT have applied varied statistical methods, such as network analysis (Barré), regression analysis (Abramitzky and Sin), indexes of translation inspired by the gravitational model (Calvet), or other calculations. It is thus possible to draw some information out of IT, using it cautiously, in an *"indicative manner to highlight structural patterns"* (Heilbron, 1999: 433) or to put it in other words, *"mass phenomena occurring in the book translations market"* for which IT *"seems to be accurate or relevant"* (Seweryn, 2016). Another possibility is to focus on one country or language and to compare data from IT with other sources. This is what has been done in this article in the case of Poland.

### Sources available on the national scale: The Polish National Library (NL)

The control source of data is a yearbook published by the Polish National Library (NL) since 1955 under the name *Polish Publishing in Figures* (Ruch wydawniczy w Polsce, 2004-2022) available online since 2004. It deals with books (format types, categories, place of publication, language of publication and origin, number of copies, and translations from Polish and to Polish) and the periodicals. Compared to IT, the validity of this date is more reliable. Nevertheless, it does not present precise data about translation flows from all languages, as opposed to IT, which is exhaustive; instead, only main languages are collected. Therefore, depending on the period when they appear on the market, translation flows from rare languages appear in the yearbook and then disappear after some years. These data are transmitted to UNESCO to record in IT; some scholars consider that about 10% of books are not sent to the NL

(Korczyńska-Derkacz, 2006). It is estimated that up to 1989, this rate was only 2% due to the centralized organization of the market by mostly public publishers (Sadowska, 2004). Those yearbooks have been used by scholars analyzing the change in the volume and the types of publications in Poland since 1991, focusing on translated books to Polish (Musioł, 2011), more specifically for “Belles-lettres” (Sadowska, 2012) or scientific books (Korczyńska-Derkacz, 2006).

As mentioned above, figures in IT differ from the same information provided by the NL. Looking at the number of titles translated from all languages to Polish and repeating the exercise for single languages (Fig. 2), one observes that the trends are more or less the same in the 1980s. But then, when there is an “accident,” it appears at least with one year of delay in IT. For the French language, the discordance of data is prevalent in the years 1990-2001. IT overestimates translation flows in the 1990s, but after that, the information becomes more chaotic as the figures decrease for all languages, whereas the number of translations grows in the NL data.



**Figure 2.** Translation flows to Polish seen by Index Translationum and National Library

Source: Authors' elaboration, 2023 (sources: IT and NL).

## Methodology

Although the figures of IT have to be used cautiously, since the database allows one to export large series of figures, a graph analysis has been provided to measure the inscription of the Polish book market in the circulation of books. Data was collected only until 2008 because updating officially stopped for many countries after this year. Translations are then defined as links between languages; and for the whole period 1979-2008, the incoming translations to the Polish language (for books published in Poland only) could be analyzed employing graph analytics using the software Gephi (Bastian et al., 2009). The data was modeled as a graph, where nodes represented languages, and edges represented the number of translations between language pairs, which then allowed us to identify patterns and insights into the role of translations in the Polish book market. The choice of graph analytics was motivated by its ability to reveal relationships within complex networks (Newman, 2010). By representing the translation data as a graph,

**Table 1.** Interviews with translators

|                                   | T01                      | T02              | T03                       | T04        | T05                            | T06                | T07        |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Dates of activity as a translator | Since 1989               | Since 2007       | Since 2001                | Since 2008 | Since 2019                     | 2007-2019          | Since 2001 |
| Gender                            | M                        | F                | F                         | M          | M                              | F                  | F          |
| Language skills                   | English, Russian, Dutch, | English, Chinese | English, French, Italian, | English    | English, Russian, Czech,       | Russian, Ukrainian | English    |
| Most translated languages         | English                  | English, Chinese | English, French,          | English    | English, Russian               | Russian, Ukrainian | English    |
| Types of translations             | Literature               | Literature       | Literature, Commercial    | Literature | Literature, including academic | Literature         | Literature |
| Fulltime translator               | Yes                      | Yes              | Yes                       | Yes        | Yes                            | No                 | Yes        |

we could understand the centrality of different languages and detect communities of closely connected languages.

As for the NL, it has been chosen to enlarge the scope of figures back to 1980, with the aim of better estimating how deep the change was after the fall of the People's Republic of Poland. Only incoming translations were selected, although some books translated from Polish to foreign languages were published in Poland. However, these selections do not constitute any "outgoing" flows since they were published on the domestic market. In order to measure the influence and spread of Polish culture, it would have been necessary to look into entering translation flows from Polish to other languages in many countries. IT would be the best instrument for this aim, but as seen *supra*, this database is too fragile, and the NL does not allow one to measure outgoing translations from Polish to other countries, although this issue is of great importance to assess fully the inscription of Poland in the cultural circulation within Europe and the rest of the world. For both sources, we focused only on the number of titles published each year, keeping in mind that the volumes of copies show another reality.

To understand better what those figures show or hide, some translators were interviewed, all of them translating to Polish

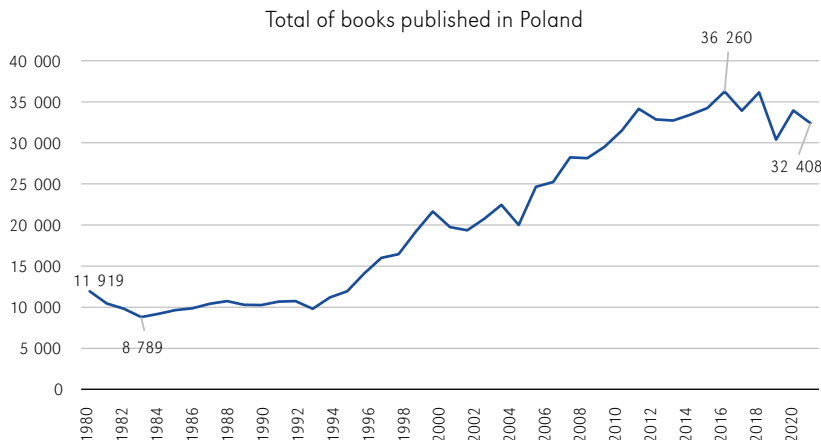
almost exclusively (Tab. 1).<sup>5</sup> This "qualitative" approach of translation is not intended to counterbalance the quantitative one, which is the main entry of this research. But statistics about translation do not, for example, distinguish the numerous possible geographical origins of books written in English. Participants were questioned about their personal professional practice, but also about their perception of the evolution of translation in Poland, as well as about their opinions on Europeanisation or globalisation of the book market in Poland. Translators were contacted with the "snowball" method and help from the Association of Literary Translators which worked as a medium point since its website (<https://stl.org.pl/>) contains a kind of directory of translators. The sample of translators was chosen in order to get translators working with different language skills, having different practices of translation; most of them have been working in the present century.

## Results

The analysis of translation flows is provided below, thanks to the quantitative and qualitative data collected. First, translation flows are analyzed in terms of volume, and second, in

<sup>5</sup> Some of them only sometimes translate from Polish to other target languages, but very rarely.





**Figure 3.** Total of books published in Poland (1980-2022)

Source: Authors' elaboration based on *Ruch Wydawniczy w liczbach*, Polish National Library (the same source as in the case of Figures 4, 5, 6, 7, 8).

terms of directions. Finally, the article addresses the issue of what drives those trends.

### Volumes of translation flows to Poland from 1980 to 2022: The openness of the book market

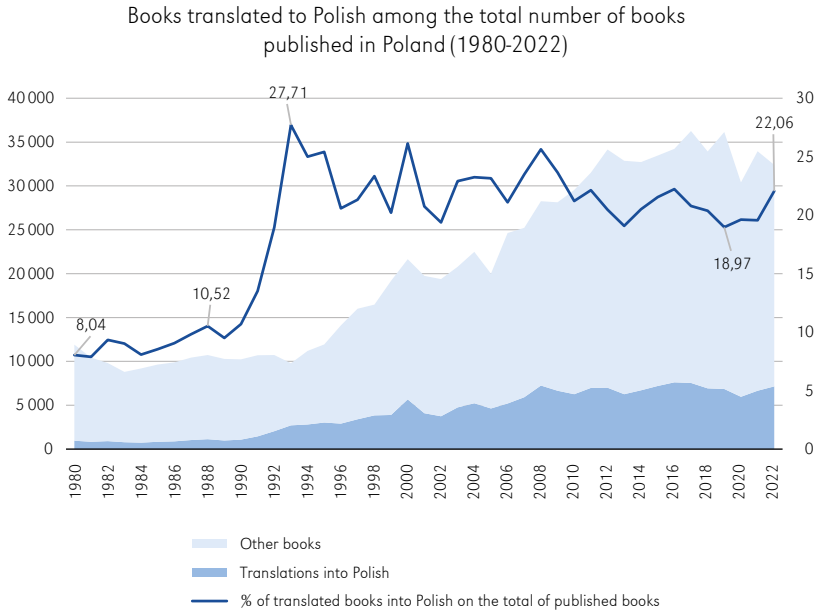
Overall, the Polish book market increased its momentum from 1980 to 2022, as shown in Figure 3: the total number of published books, which was quite stable in the 1980s, has been constantly growing after a rapid acceleration in 1993. (The steady increase did not begin immediately in 1990; as mentioned by Korczyńska-Derkacz, the first years of the post-communist era were very unstable for the market.) This growth culminated between 1999 and 2000 (+ 12%), then was more irregular between 2001 and 2007 before a second period of growth until 2017. That year, up to 36,260 books were put on the market. It has been declining again up to now (32,408 published titles in 2022).

From this total, from 1% to 3% of the books are translated from Polish to foreign languages, and they are not included in this research.<sup>6</sup> The incoming translations, i.e.,

books translated from foreign languages to Polish, represented a growing part of the book market (figure 4). In the whole period 1980-2022, out of 893,246 books, 178,458 (equivalent to 20%) were translated from foreign languages. Interestingly, the cultural opening of the book market, measured by the volume and share of translated books, shows that it is not due to the "post-socialist" political turn: it had begun at the end of the 1980s. Indeed, 958 books were translated into Polish in 1980, increasing to 1,129 in 1988 (+15%). But the volume of incoming translation flows exploded after 1991, peaking at 27.7% of the total number of books published in 1993. In other words, the average annual growth of translated books in Polish was 29% between 1989 and 1993, whereas the total number of published books was stable, even declining some years during this period. The existing literature explains the opening of the Polish book market in the 1990 by both economic and cultural effects of systemic transformations. On the one hand, the national framework consisting of some big publishers and hundreds very small non-professional ones

lished in Poland in foreign language (totally or partially) are not included either, because their volumes are very weak.

<sup>6</sup> Books "partially" translated to Polish, books pub-



**Figure 4.** Books published in Poland and in-coming translations by year (1980-2022)

collapsed, and a new publishing market emerged, with many private publishing houses, in a context of commodification of the book. On the other hand, the audience was very impatient to discover (or rediscover with new translations) foreign literature, including new genres within the popular literature (Korczyńska-Derkacz, 2006; Musioł, 2011). But at that time, the division between old and new publishers did not mean that some were specialized on translation and others not (Skibińska, 2010). The rhythm of translation is

then more varied, but the share of translated books remained relatively stable between 20% and 25% in the 1990s and to 2012. The year 2000 was exceptional, not only because 21,647 books were published, but also because translated books constituted a large part of this total (26% of translated books). The market for translated books seems more fragile after the year 2008 and slowed down to the level of 19% in 2019. It has recently returned to 22% in 2022.

**Table 2.** Books published in Poland and translated books by decades (1980-2019)

|                 | Total of published books | Translated books into Polish | Other books | Share of translated books (%) |
|-----------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|-------------|-------------------------------|
| 1980-89         | 90,826                   | 8,105                        | 82,721      | 8.9                           |
| 1990-99         | 121,412                  | 24,244                       | 97,168      | 20.0                          |
| 2000-09         | 221,338                  | 50,375                       | 170,963     | 22.8                          |
| 2010-19         | 326,776                  | 69,125                       | 257,651     | 21.2                          |
| Total 1980-2019 | 760,352                  | 151,849                      | 608,503     | 20.0                          |
| Total 1980-2022 | 893,246                  | 178,458                      | 714,788     | 20.0                          |

Source: Authors' elaboration based on Ruch Wydawniczy w liczbach, Polish National Library

Considering the same decades (Tab. 2), the volume of translated books tripled between the 1980s and the 1990s (from 9,082 titles to 27,148), but the highest openness of the book market occurred in the first decade of the twenty-first century, with more than 22% of titles on the book market being in-coming translations.

### Directions of translations flows to Polish

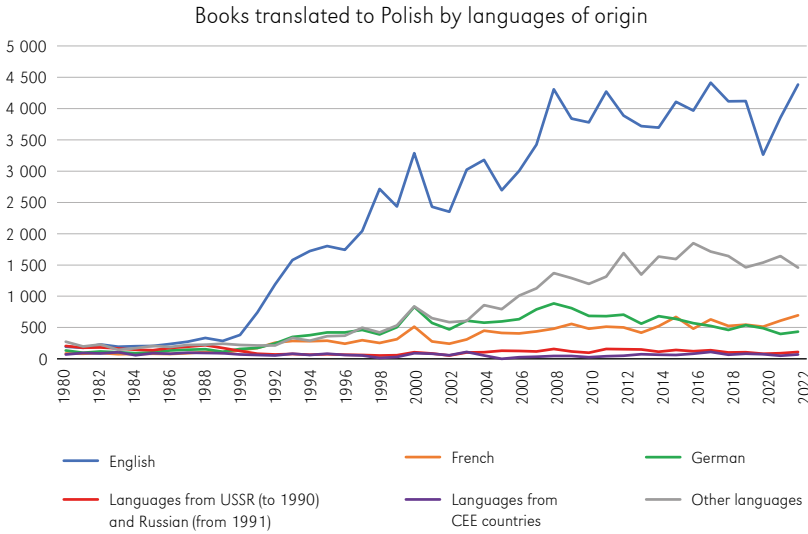
Having shown to what extent and when the Polish culture opened up to the world, we will now ask from what directions translation flows made this possible. The origins of translations to Polish were quite indistinct in the 1980s as shown in the Figure 5. The flows of incoming translations are weakly hierarchized during 1980 and 1988: translation flows from English account for only 25% of the total, followed by languages from the USSR (20%), German (13%), French (10%). But it changed suddenly in the next decade to favor English to the present day (Fig. 6). The share of translated books translated from English (Fig.7), which was slowly growing in the 1980s, jumped from 28.5% of the total of translated books in 1989 to 58% in 1992. Nevertheless, since then, the books translated from English have remained relatively stable at this level, except for a peak in 1998 (70.6%). One can also notice that the year 2000 was exceptional for more or less all languages (+45% of translations from English, +63% from French and German, +143% from Italian, etc.). That means that foreign literature contributed to the general peak of editions in the year 2000. It is an effect of the liberalization of the market of edition in the 1990s, as said by many translators: *"Sometimes I look at a book, I look who published it, and I say Gosh, I've never heard of them, even if I am on this market for years, so it's a very competitive and very volatile market"* (T01).

Among books translated from English, half are literature<sup>7</sup> (Musioł, 2011), and this is

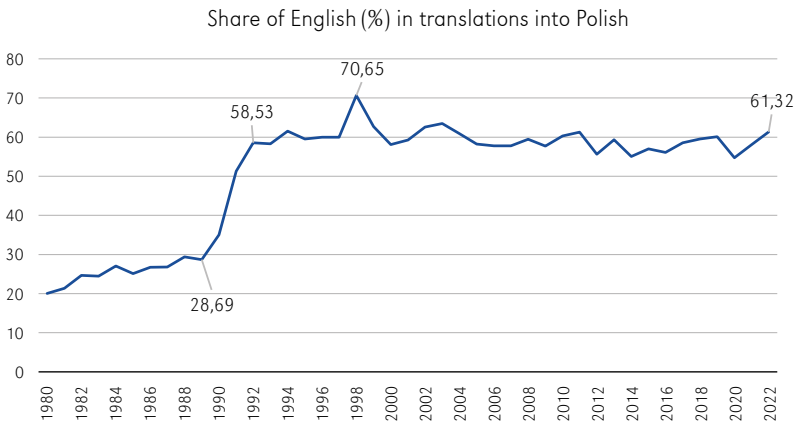
not completely new. In 1932, in Poland, 30% of books translated from foreign languages came from English and reached 47% in 1945-47 (Chalvin et al., 2019). In recent decades, according to translators who have been interviewed, this huge growth of English is an effect of various factors: the fall of communism (*"When communism fell, we finally got a free market here, and people were very hungry for foreign literature, mostly thrillers; people were devouring these books, they were so hungry to get it; at that time, it was like a piece of the West that we never had before. It's like drinking Coca-Cola so to speak."* [T01]), the globalisation of literature (*"Most of the bestsellers like international bestsellers, they tend to be English language, and they tend to be what gets translated"* [T02]), and the competition on the book market (*"It's just that the Polish publisher wants the book to be published exactly at the same time as the original in the US. So, the writer is writing his or her book, and the translator is translating at the same time in a way"* [T01]). Thus, the Polish book market, as far as literature in English is concerned, seems to be now "up to date": *"With English especially, the market is so big...It's usually quite difficult to find a book that has not been already noticed by the publishers and by the agents, because they go to the festivals, the fairs like in Frankfurt or wherever. They are in touch between themselves like all the agents, so they know about the outcoming books before the books are even published"* (T02).

Of course, books in English may come from different cultures and countries. Depending on their own experience, translators have different opinions on this subject. More lean towards US English: *"The interest of Polish publishers is more concentrated on the American market than on the British one"* (T05), especially in the segment of popular fiction. Some think it is balanced: *"If you look at the book market, and you do some kind of statistic, there would probably be a similar number of books from the US versus other English-speaking countries"* (T01). One translator speaks about *Westernization* of Poland

<sup>7</sup> The rest is made of scientific literature, scientific popular literature, handbooks.



**Figure 5.** Translation flows to Polish from 1980 to 2022



**Figure 6.** Share of English (%) in translations to Polish from 1980 to 2022

through English: “English became a lingua franca in the twentieth century mostly. We’re living in the Western culture, and this Western culture is mostly presented by the English speaking people” (T07). Others think that there is a mix between “English English” and Scottish, Irish, Canadian, and so on” (T02). One of them translated all books from a Jamaican author, “including expressions in patwah, a very specific kind of English” (T01). The domination of English can also be attributed to translations of books originally

written in “rare” languages which got into the Polish book market through their English version: “Many years ago, for different reasons, one reason is monetary, one reason is probably the difficulty with finding translators who speak very ‘obscure’ languages, you would have for example a Romanian novel, and it would be translated from the English translation, because someone in England has already decided that this book is good, and then someone in Poland would say ‘Oh, they published it in English, so it’s probably good,

let us publish it in Polish'. But they wouldn't try and find a Romanian language translator; they would give it to an English translator [...] And that's the same for Chinese. So many Chinese books were translated from English" (T02). Finally, literature translated from English can also be produced by authors who do not write in their mother tongue: "It's not just the English and Americans who write in English. There are also authors of different languages who decide to use their second native language, or the one they learned as an adult, to increase their readership" (T03).

Looking closer at the translation flows excluding English, traditional "major" languages have been competing in the Polish market during the last decades (Fig. 7). From 1980 to 2022, more books were translated from German (14,144 or 9.9% of the total of translated books) than from French (11,196 or 8.2%). Nevertheless, the trajectories of both languages are different: first, German literature has been coming up rapidly in the 1990s and surpassed the French language for more than twenty years. However, German slipped around 2015 from second to third place, behind French. The recent success of French literature is primarily due to the international

popularity of French comics and graphic novels. A Polish translator had to translate one of those books in August, even though it was set to be published in France in October. As she says, "I have only come across this situation where the publication of the translation directly followed, or even preceded the publication of the original in the case of American bestsellers" (T03).

Interestingly, in the twenty-first century, the major growth of translations comes from "other" languages; it reflects the "import" of foreign literature at various times on the Polish book market, each one having its own trajectory. First, literature from "the North" arrived from Sweden and Norway in the 1990s, and the rate of these incoming texts increased extremely rapidly after 2007. Similarly, the Japanese culture, through literature, entered at the beginning of the century and exploded in popularity after 2010. Overall, from 1980-2022, translations from the Japanese language accounted for 1.78% of the total of translated books, but in 2022, this figure rose to 5.13%, which almost matches the percentage of German literature (and much more than Swedish or Norwegian). One can observe in the Polish youth "a fascination with

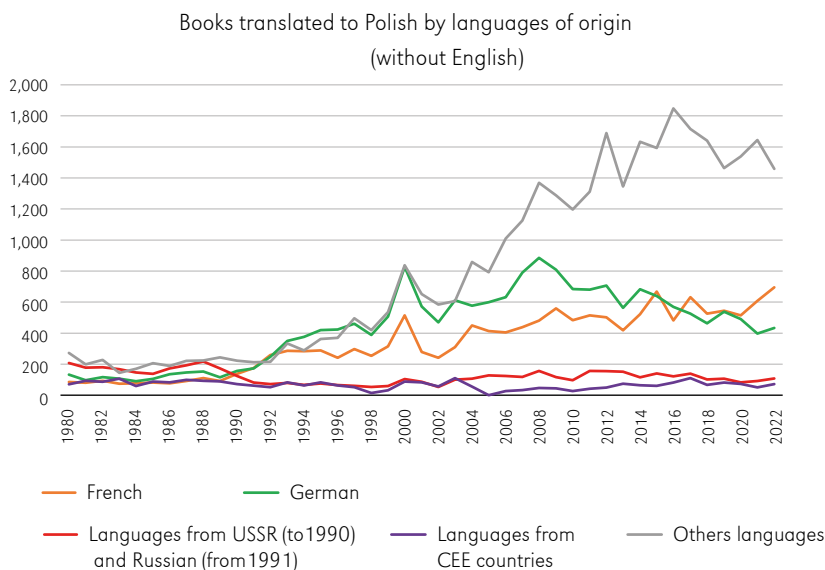
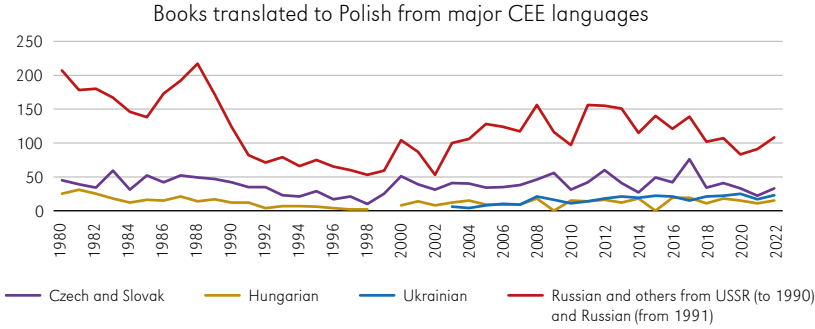


Figure 7. Translation flows to Polish without English (1980-2022)



**Figure 8.** Major translation flows to Polish from CEE languages

*Japan, Chinese culture, manga, etc., and you can see a bit of Asian influence in their way of life*" (T03).

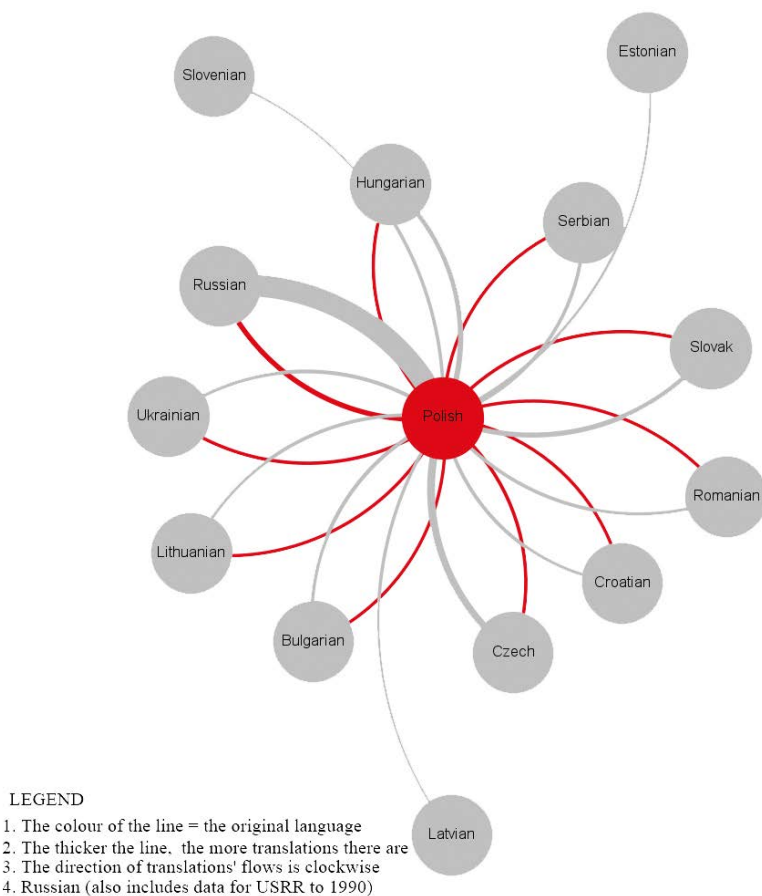
Coming now to translation flows from Central and Eastern European languages, as shown in Figure 7, translations from the USSR languages were slightly more important than those from English in 1980 and 1981.<sup>8</sup> One observes in Figure 8 a short growth of languages from the USSR in the second half of the 1980s. After 1990, the NL identified the Russian language separately. The decline of translations from Russian to Polish began in 1987, mirroring a trend: the decline of translations from Russian preceded the fall of the Soviet Union, this decline being more pronounced when looking at translations inside the USSR and in Russia itself than translations towards other countries (Seweryn, 2014). There was a small upswing of translations from Russian to Polish in the first decade of the twenty-first century, until 2012, which is mainly due to translations of belles-lettres, including contemporary Russian literature (Musioł, 2011). But all in all, from 1980-2022, this group of languages accounted for only 1.8% of translations to Polish, whereas it accounted for 19% in the first decade 1980-1989.<sup>9</sup> The demand for translations from

Russia was focused in the last decade on "contemporary literature, popular literature, SciFi, crime stories, fantasy...because of the Polish history in the 20th century, we had almost all Russian classics translated into Polish, in very good classical, good translations" (T05), and "there was an attempt to promote Russian culture in Poland around the year 2010, but it did not last more than a few years; they did not manage to make it last" (T06); and of course, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 makes the future much uncertain: "There is no translation from Russian right now because of the geopolitical situation; it has disappeared completely" (T05). Inside the CEE region, it is not possible to isolate data for all languages because the NL selects major flows each year, so some years appear as "empty," for many languages (e.g., Bulgarian, Serbo-Croatian, Belarus, etc.). While translation flows from Czech, Slovak, and Hungarian languages are quite stable, some "new" flows appeared recently (Lithuanian, Ukrainian). The most popular languages from CEE, which were translated to Polish in 2022, are Russian (108 titles), Czech (33), Ukrainian (23), and Hungarian (15) (Fig 8). This "regional" preference for languages from neighboring countries can also be observed through the IT source, as shown in Figure 9.

To summarize the various origins of translations from 1980 to 2008, according to IT, the scope is quite broad, but the domination of English appears clearly (Fig. 10).

<sup>8</sup> For those two years, 362 books were translated from English, and 385 from languages of the USSR.

<sup>9</sup> 1,170 books were translated from languages from the USSR on a total of 9,119 translated books from all languages between 1980 and 1989.



**Figure 9.** Translation flows from and to Polish within CEE languages (1980-2008)

Source: Authors' elaboration based on *Index Translationum*

### Public policies vs market, community vs invisible translators: Drivers of translation flows in Poland

This section explains which factors drive the directions of translation flows: first, public policies and private mechanisms; second, a sociological turn in the profession of translators.

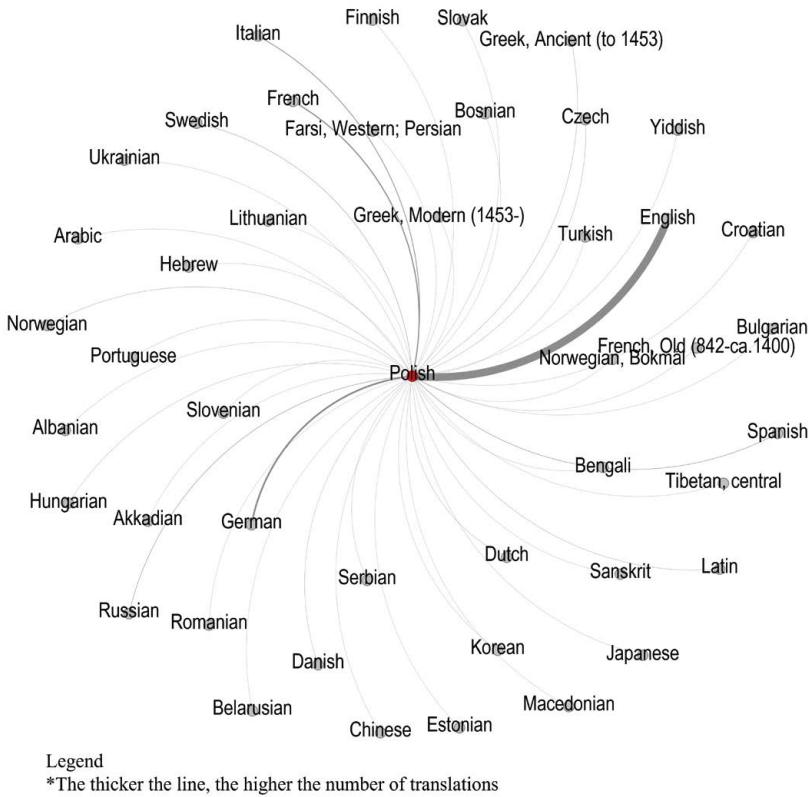
Public initiatives aiming at supporting the translation of foreign books into Polish are ancient. In the People's Republic of Poland, huge projects of translations such as Joyce's *Ulysses*, and the complete works of Shakespeare were published in the collection called

the National Library.<sup>10</sup> Similar collections dedicated to translated literature were launched in 1968.<sup>11</sup> After 1989, they were threatened by their lack of rentability in the new economic context. Therefore, two of them were transferred to the Ministry of Culture (Chrobak, 2015).<sup>12</sup> More importantly, support for incoming translation flows in Poland comes from

<sup>10</sup> Biblioteka Narodowa.

<sup>11</sup> like "Współczesna Proza Światowa" in the Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, or "Proza Iberoamerykańska", since 1971.

<sup>12</sup> PIW (in 2017) and Biblioteka Narodowa-Ossolineum in 2013.



**Figure 10.** Translations to Polish (1979-2008)

Source: Authors' elaboration based on Index Translationum

outside; the EU finances translations with the program Creative Europe (2024), and many countries do the same for their own literature (France, Germany, Spain, etc.). This is a part of the diplomacy of culture (Vimr, 2022b). Of course, not every country can afford to fund such grants, or, even better, permanent cultural institutions abroad. Among other activities, these institutions are likely to provide financial support for translations of books. The UK and the US do not need to make this effort; however, a translator quoted grants for translations from English coming from Ireland. Some newcomers appear in this domain. China has been more seriously promoting its culture and grants translations directly from Chinese, but translation flows

from Chinese are still standing at a very low level. From 1980 to 2022, they represent only 274 books, 0.19% of the total. Ukraine has also been recently financing the *Translate Ukraine* program (Publishers Weekly, 2023). The country “launched about five years ago a kind of diplomacy of culture, and promoted translations of books, films, but the priorities have changed with the beginning of the war” (T06)

Apart from these public initiatives, the market itself is the major driver of the supply of translation. Currently, it is dominated by books in English, specifically products from pop culture, the “popular literature.” It began with the liberalization of the 1990s and did not disappear: “*The nineties were crazy times*



in terms of the book market. Everything has changed, and the book market also opened and needed at the very beginning to accommodate all these Western popular trends that weren't so present in Poland. And everything was translated from the West, from English, mostly American (...). This predominance of Western popular fiction which started with the explosion of freedom, free market, and democracy, has continued" (T04). But at the margin, this market is evolving towards a more globalized literature: "On a grand scale, [the place of English] is not reversible; it's connected to world culture; in the sphere of popular fiction it's mostly English. But on a smaller scale, without looking at the numbers, at least in the 'high-brow' literary fiction, there is another trend among publishers. There are a lot of smaller publishers who shift from English literary fiction to other fields. Even though it's a difficult market for a publisher, there is a tendency to make those other literatures more visible" (T04), including texts from Sweden, Norway, Finland, South America, African countries, etc.

Inside the market, the organization of publishers and translators as a collective actor should be examined. The aim here is not to provide an in-depth sociology of translators in Poland (Piecychna, 2019; Słowik, 2023; Stowarzyszenie Tłumaczy Literatury, 2022), but to understand how far changes in this profession could have influenced translation flows in the last decades. In the early 1990s, the liberalization of the publishing market turned the translation profession upside down. From 1990 to 2003, 20,599 new publishers were registered, out of which 1,688 were individuals (Sadowska, 2004). In 2004, 90% published fewer than 10 titles (Korczyńska-Derkacz, 2006).<sup>13</sup> This double process of fragmentation and volatility is confirmed by

most translators: "In the late 1990s, it was still a period of transformation; it was just a new field that people could invest in. It's just like 'Hey, no one is doing this; let me do this!'(...). I remember, there were many small publishers, and a lot of them did not survive" (T02). Some of them focus on the translation of niches, such as the so-called "Lilliputian publishers" focused on literature for children translated from French and Italian (Bieracka-Licznar & Paprocka, 2016). The number of translators also grew together with the supply, although it is impossible to get an exact figure. Today, the world of translators is deeply polarized. On the one hand, seven associations defend the rights and interests of translators who organized themselves into communities. Among them, the Association of Polish Translators (Stowarzyszenie Tłumaczy Polskich) was founded in 1981 and boasted 2500 members in the early 2000s. The Association of Polish Literary Translators (<https://stl.org.pl/>), founded in 2010, currently has about 400 members; it has set up a social media forum through a Facebook group that its members use to consolidate the community. They organize face-to-face meetings because "literary translation is a very solitary job" (T02). In 2022, 34% of its members reported getting more than 75% of their income from translations (Stowarzyszenie Tłumaczy Literatury, 2022); they are full-time translators. They noticed an "increasing awareness of the readers; people are paying more attention to this work" (T02). They feel more confident with their publishers, and their conditions of work have been improving in the last few years. On the other hand, an army of "invisible" (T04) and "interchangeable" (T02) translators got onto the market thanks to the liberalization and might work in very different conditions; in some segments of the market: "Popular literature, it's often by people we have no idea of, who they are, how they work. Because these people are invisible. They are not active, they are not online, on our forum, they don't show up at our meetings, and they are not members of our association. And it's very hard to reach them.

<sup>13</sup> In 2022, according to the Polish National Library, 106 "big" publishers (producing at least 60 books) together published 14,541 book (in average they published 137 books, the best record is 462), but meanwhile an unknown quantity of "other publishers" put on the market 17,973 books, e.g. 55% of total books (Ruch Wydawniczy w Liczbach, 2022).

So, the market in a sense is not uniform, and often, big publishers that publish a lot of popular fiction, are not that concerned with good conditions" (T04). Popular literature works very differently for translators: "Sometimes we hear really incredibly low rates that are being offered. It's actually hard to believe. It's two and a half times lower than the average (...) But since these publishers don't go out of business, apparently, there is someone who does it" (T04). And it works mostly for translations from English, which have been driving the market. This turn has occurred around the second decade of the twenty-first century. Indeed, the status of translators that was judged as vulnerable in the beginning of the century (Skibińska, 2010) is considered nowadays as much better, at least for a part of them.

Nevertheless, this heterogeneity and diversity of publishers in Poland is assessed as having a positive impact on the diversity of translations: "We are lucky enough, compared to some Western countries, not to have a hegemony of big publishing conglomerates. We do have quite an active field of small to medium publishers who are more willing to take risks. We have a good cross-section of world literature. If you are interested in literatures other than American or English, you can get what's the most valuable at least" (T04). The structure of the publishing market, less concentrated than in other countries, can thus explain that, as we have observed, the main trend today is the growth of "other" languages in the translated books: "Over the last 10 or 15 years, a number of young publishing houses have specialized in world literature and small languages (Slavic, Asian), and they are quite popular. Their books are featured in magazines, not just dedicated to books, but also in mainstream magazines. We're more open, and there are more readers who are interested in literature from Japan, Ukraine, and elsewhere" (T03).

Furthermore, in this polarized environment of translators, the best-established ones, thanks to their professional organizations, feel more confident and can suggest to publishers

translations from original "rare" languages rather from an intermediate English version: "In our Facebook group, sometimes, someone will come and say 'Hey, this publisher came to me and he wants me to translate this book from English, but this was originally written for instance from Italian.' And translators themselves have started replying to the publishers that it may be better to find an Italian translator. So, translators themselves have started to sometimes say no to this kind of job because they know that ultimately, it's better for this particular book and it's better for us as a professional group when we show solidarity to each other" (T02). This shows a turn towards a real globalisation of Polish culture: "The Polish market is a global one. We have very specialized publishing houses, which are translating Asian literature. It's still a marginal thing, but it's there. In the last ten years, it happened that we translated books from Asian or even Scandinavian books from English or German. It was very popular. It's a mind frame of the nineteenth century. But now, it's not a standard" (T05).

## Conclusion

If Europe is the continent of translation, then Poland is definitely a European country. Its share of translations in the total book market, which has been stabilized at a level of about 20%, is much higher than in other countries. In 2022, the level in France is only 16%, 14.6% in Germany, 12.1% in Spain, 11.2% in Italy, and 1.5% in the UK (in 2021). Nevertheless, Poland is surpassed by other countries of CEE like Hungary (34%), Czech Republic (33%), Latvia (24.5%), and Bulgaria (22%).<sup>14</sup> Poland contributes to the reputation of CEE as a hetero-centered area of translations.

The spatial structure of translation flows has been undergoing a huge change. On the

<sup>14</sup> Sources: Czechlit (Czech Republic), Syndicat National de l'Édition (France), Börsenverein (Germany), Hungarian Statistical Office (Hungary), Italian Publishers Association (Italy), Statistics Portal (Latvia), Ministry of Culture and Sports (Spain), Official Publishers Association (UK).

one hand, English quickly became the first language from which books were translated since the early 1990s, and it is still dominating the market. But its position has been stabilized at about 60% of all translated books. Putting together translations from English, French, German, and other European languages, it is obvious that, generally speaking, the Polish book market is widely open to the “Western” culture (not only European). But as statistics and translators themselves say, especially in the present century, the trend is moving towards a more “global” culture: first, books from English come from countries other than the UK and the USA. Second, many cultures have gained entry into the Polish book market at different times (from Japan, Scandinavian countries, and China). Interestingly, Polish culture opens itself to globalisation not solely under the mainstream influence of American culture, but in its own way. The arrival of the *danmei* culture in Polish is a good example of the popularization of a genre directly from Chinese to Polish, without the English pivot language.

The translation flows from CEE (including Russian) to Polish accounted for 27% of the total translations from 1980 to 1990, but for

only 1.94% from 1991-2022, which confirms that this translation area is more and more “hetero-centered” according to Chalvin’s definition. Internal flows are weak; they were still dominated by Russian until 2022, then by Czech literature, but in very recent years, they opened to “new” languages such as Ukrainian.

The recent empowerment of translators who have formed some communities most likely influenced the geography of translation flows in the last two decades. Translators are more involved in the editing process, they care about their visibility, and play a positive role in the openness of Polish culture, encouraging direct—and better—translations from original “rare” or new languages instead of translations of the same books from English, especially in “high” literature. Outside these communities, and in other areas of editing, the wild market seems to operate in a separate world.

Editors’ note:

Unless otherwise stated, the sources of tables and figures are the author's, on the basis of their own research.

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