
Book Circulation through Translation in a Multilingual State: The Case of Belgium

⊙ Elke BREMS, Reine MEYLAERTS, Stéphanie VANASTEN

KU Leuven, KU Leuven, UCLouvain

Abstract: This paper examines intra-national translation flows in Belgium over a 50-year period (1970–2020), focusing on how books circulate between two of the country’s official languages, Dutch and French, within a plurilingual literary space. By applying a “Big Translation History” approach, the study reveals the influence of language status, location, genre, actor roles, and publishing practices on translation dynamics. Notably, Belgian publishers control a significant portion of the market for comics and children’s literature, demonstrating a distinct national production culture for these genres, whereas a prestigious genre like the novel is to a large extent in the hands of dominant neighboring states that share the same language (France and the Netherlands). The paper nuances the traditional center-periphery model in Translation Studies and suggests that intra-national translation flows are influenced not only by global language hierarchies but also by other factors such as genre and publishing location, providing a richer understanding of cultural exchange in multilingual states.

Keywords: Big Translation History, database, book translation flows, multilingual states, genre, publishing, Belgium

CLC: I564 **Document Code:** A **Article ID:** 2096-4374(2025)01-0107-13

DOI: 10.53397/hunnu.jflc.202501011

Introduction: Belgium as a Plurilingual Literary Space

The Francophone Belgian author Hergé, pseudonym for Georges Remi, is nowadays internationally renowned for his *Tintin* comic strips. Hergé started his career in the 1930s with the comic strip *Quick and Flupke*, which also became very popular and successful. The adventures of the protagonists Quick and Flupke, two young boys, are gags that take up one page. They largely take place on the streets of Brussels, the Belgian capital. When *Quick and Flupke* was first published in a Francophone Belgian newspaper in the 1930s, it showed evidence of the bilingual (Dutch-French) character of Brussels: Hergé wrote in French but he also used some typical code-switching between French and Dutch.

Elke Brems has shown that the first Dutch translations of *Quick and Flupke* maintained the code switching (Dutch-French) of the French original, while more recent French editions and Dutch translations from the 1990s have become monolingual versions. This development is representative of the intertwining of national and international factors in the export of local c.q. national cultural products on the global publishing market. It shows, among other things, the enormous influence of Belgium's neighbors that share the same language: the Netherlands in the north for Dutch and France in the south for French. For those two neighbors the specific bilingualism of the strip was too "Belgian" and thus hampering sales in these countries and, beyond them, in their corresponding linguistic communities. This example addresses the question of how to reconcile research on (intra)national objects of cultural production with their (inter)national circulation through translation, taking into account the diversity of cultures, multilingual contexts, and specific identities. How can we map, analyze and better understand this multilayered cultural exchange between linguistic and cultural communities, not from abstract meta-categories, models or systems, but from the ground up?

Since the 1970s a series of (ongoing) political reforms has given increasingly more autonomy to each linguistic community, thereby loosening the ties between Belgium's French-speaking communities in the South and Dutch-speaking communities in the North and reducing the impact of the Belgian (bilingual, federal) level.



Figure 1. The Three Language Communities in Belgium ("Belgian Institutions")

This process of successive mutations of the Belgian state has created new political entities, such as the regions (Flemish Region, Brussels Capital Region, and Walloon Region) and the Dutch-speaking, French-speaking, and German-speaking communities, with strong identity issues at stake, and has changed their relations with the citizens, with the central federal state, and with each other. These broader political (and institutional) developments, with consequences for cultural policy, increasing autonomy and financial leeway in cultural matters, among other things, have also had an impact on Belgian book culture, or rather book cultures in multilingual Belgium.

Using the concepts of Tristan Leperlier (“Plurilingual Literary Spaces” 185–203), we can label the officially trilingual federal state of Belgium as a plurilingual literary space (Dutch in the north, German in the east, and French in the south), located at the crossroads of larger (Dutch, French, and German) international linguistic areas and harboring several literary languages. Leperlier defines linguistic areas as “dynamic international spaces revolving around one language, and organizing a system of dependencies between local spaces. These local spaces are typically national, hence why the linguistic areas are international” (“Linguistic Areas” 133–134). In the case discussed in this chapter, Flanders and Francophone Belgium are part of a much larger, respectively Dutch and French, international linguistic area. Flanders forms a periphery of the Dutch international linguistic area: it depends on its literary center, Amsterdam in the Netherlands, where the main publishers for the Dutch-speaking market are based. Similarly, Francophone Belgium forms a periphery of the French international linguistic area: it depends on its literary center, Paris in France, where the most prestigious publishers for the Francophone world are based. “Writers of the peripheries will tend more to consider the linguistic area as a significant geography and invest their *illusio* into it, while writers of the centres [...] will tend to forget the existence of a linguistic area beyond their national literary field” (133).

Leperlier distinguishes an international linguistic space or area from a field. “A ‘field’ is unified by the same *illusio*, the same main stake of competition, which is strongly objectified by institutions. It is very often the defense and illustration of a sense of national ‘identity,’ which is sometimes confused with a linguistic stake” (“Plurilingual Literary Spaces” 190). In a plurilingual literary field “the language issue is of structural and symbolic importance” and there is “debate about which language can legitimately be used to express the nation” (191). In contrast, a plurilingual literary space is less structured than a plurilingual literary field. Plurilingual literary spaces such as Canada, Belgium, Spain, or Switzerland, according to Leperlier, are characterized by the territorial segregation of languages, with a “very large degree of cultural independence to their ‘regions’ [...] or ‘communities’” (192). In such plurilingual spaces language remains “a structural but secondary issue” (192): nevertheless, in order for books to circulate within the plurilingual space, translation between the languages of the different communities is required in order to reach all citizens of that country, especially when there is a lack of mutual knowledge of each other’s language, and to establish, at least to some extent, a collective book culture. In other words, in these plurilingual spaces, translation is an important dimension of national book production. In this article we shall focus on Belgium as a laboratory to test the role of intra-national translation as an important dimension of book production in multilingual states. We will adopt a diachronic perspective and follow its evolution over the last half a century (1970–2020). Our research questions, analyses, and observations can be applied and tested in other, similar plurilingual spaces such as Canada and Switzerland, but also South Africa, Spain, Portugal, or several other multilingual countries around the world.

Big Translation History: A New Database on Intra-Belgian Translations

To understand the Belgian plurilingual literary space and its components, the study of intra-Belgian literary translation flows between Dutch and French can be insightful. This is precisely what the project BELTRANS aims to do.¹ Starting from the question “Do Belgians have access to each

other's books in translation?" BELTRANS studies the untold history of (literary) translation flows in Belgium between French and Dutch in the period 1970–2020. It analyses intra-Belgian cultural transfers as an indicator of the mutual (lack of) knowledge and the mutual perception of each other's literature in a period of increasing regionalization of the state, which led to different constructions of regional, cultural, and national patrimonies between Belgium's linguistic and cultural communities.

To this end, we have gathered, linked, and enriched data on translations of books by Belgian authors, until then typically dispersed in various collections and repositories. Although much of the workflow consists of automatic data integration, manual curation was needed to improve the quality of the data sets (for instance to avoid duplicates and make correlations possible). Thus, we have created a database with FAIR data on contemporary Belgian authors and their works in French and Dutch translation in order to be able to do a quantitative analysis of intra-Belgian literary translation flows. In this regard, BELTRANS is not only an electronic bibliographical database, using state of the art technologies in Computational Sciences and Digital Humanities. It is also situated in the area of Big Translation History (BTH), a term coined by Diana Roig-Sanz and her team and referring to "translation history that can be analyzed computationally." BTH is an innovative domain within Translation Studies: "In the field of translation studies, digital research in the analysis of translation history remains scarce, and we are only beginning to understand how digital tools and quantification can be applied to the study of translated literature and literary translation flows" (Roig-Sanz and Fóllica 232).

Roig-Sanz and Laura Fóllica refer to the importance of creating new databases in order to avoid possible bias, preconceived ideas and lacunae in existing databases: "BTH projects already belong to a new generation of researchers who are aware of the dangers of reinforcing previous ideas by using only readily available sources. The Empires were very good at creating data, but we remain ignorant of much data that is not readily available, and of voices that have not yet been heard" (235). BELTRANS has taken up this challenge, which means that for the first time in a multilingual state like Belgium, it has collected data from the ground up, creating what Christine L. Borgman calls a "knowledge infrastructure" for cultural transfer and (literary) translation flows. It is important to be aware of the pitfalls and challenges of databases. "Whether in science, humanities, business, or government contexts, data are a human construct. People decide what are data for a given purpose, how those data are to be interpreted, and what constitutes appropriate evidence. [...] Data exist within knowledge infrastructures that govern how they are created, managed, used, and interpreted" ("Lives").

The knowledge infrastructure of BELTRANS is Belgian: it consists of the biggest Flemish university (KU Leuven), its francophone sister university (UCLouvain) and one of the last strongholds of Belgian federal institutions (the Royal Library) in a project funded by Belgian Science Policy. The fact of being funded by Belgian Science Policy is all the more relevant when considering that Science Policy is, apart from some small exceptions, a federalized policy domain in the hands of Flanders or Wallonia. Thus, such a prototypical Belgian collaborative infrastructure for the study of intra-Belgian translations informs inevitably our research object: although the collection of the data itself was not political in nature, the knowledge infrastructure we have created, from the very beginning, questions the often-mentioned linguistic and cultural gap between communities and takes a stance by betting, through a data-intensive approach, on (inter)relations and (inter)connections, i.e. on what passes from one to the other and, in this sense, brings them into possible contact. Certainly, the significance and potential of such a (translation)

database results from the knowledge infrastructure of a specific project group. It also depends on the research questions one wants to tackle, on how data integration is automatized, on how large data sets are formatted and algorithmically modelled, on what analyses can be derived from them or not, and finally on how methods of information visualization of our data can influence knowledge production and interpretation (Drucker).

The development of our database was based on a number of sound criteria that can be applied to the construction of similar databases all over the world. To this end, we combined five central criteria, namely language, nationality, location, time, and genre.

In terms of language, we focused on Dutch and French, both as source and as target languages, because they are the most widely spoken official languages within Belgium, and subsequently the most widely represented languages when it comes to intra-Belgian translations. With “intra-Belgian” we refer here to translations between French and Dutch of books by a Belgian author, irrespective of the nationality of the translator. Moreover, these two languages play a central role in the controversies between language communities.² For this project we therefore did not take into account German, even though it is Belgium’s third official language. We also did not include the many non-official languages that are spoken within Belgium either (e.g. English, Arabic, Turkish, Congolese languages ...).

While bibliographic records allowed us to identify books as translations, they often did not specify the source publication. To analyze translation flows (c.q. intra-Belgian translation flows), it is however required to link structured data of all translations to their original works. This is also the only way to determine which networks or factors (translation grants, literary awards, etc.) have played a role in the production of translations.

We moreover needed to define what we counted as “translations.” First, most records concerned translation in the classical sense of two separate books (source and target) that we could link. However, in very few cases, we also found anthologies that in a single publication bring together texts from various sources translated from Dutch into French or vice versa, or bilingual publications in (at least) French and Dutch, containing in a single material unit both the original and the translation. Finally, we were confronted with some book publications that we considered “parallel” publications, because they were published simultaneously in two languages, often did not mention that they are translations, and we could not identify the source language publication with certainty.

For “nationality,” we focused on Belgian authors publishing in Dutch or French, and we defined a Belgian author according to the current legal deposit legislation in Belgium, namely as an author who has Belgian citizenship (without taking into account domicile).³ We filtered “authorship” according to the following four roles: author, illustrator, scenarist, or publishing director.⁴

In terms of location, we included books by Belgian authors translated into either French or Dutch and published in Belgium by publishers based in both language communities, as well as by publishers based abroad, in accordance with the Belgian law on legal deposit, mainly in the Dutch or French international language area. Indeed, due to their belonging to the periphery of these international language areas (see above), Belgian authors are often published outside of Belgium (e.g. the Netherlands, France, Switzerland or Canada), and subsequently distributed within Belgium (Meylaerts, “Au-Delà Des Oppositions” 93–117). A “Belgian” book was thus defined as a book by a Belgian author and published anywhere in the world. The identification of publishers worldwide was a task which turned out to be more complex than expected and which asked for some manual curation work too.

In terms of time, we start in 1970, at the time of the first reform of the Belgian state, which created the cultural communities. The five following steps of the state reform (1980, 1988–1989, 1993, 2001, and 2014) further strengthened the federal entities and gradually modified the relations between the communities. We have therefore set our *terminus ad quem* at 2020 in order to cover all translations published in both languages during this period (including older source texts). A long period of 50 years makes it possible to identify diachronic developments in intra-Belgian translation flows (e.g. average time between original and translation, retranslations), but also to add the perspective of chronological changes in the various specific factors and parameters under study.

In terms of genre, as Gisèle Sapiro has shown, the chances of being translated vary not only according to source language (dominant languages such as English have more chances of being translated) but also according to genre (98). In general, dominant genres such as novels are normally published in literary centers. Here we focused on translations (French into Dutch and Dutch into French) of Belgian books belonging to five different genres: novels, children's literature,⁵ comics (including graphic novels), poetry, and non-fiction (including history), thus covering the categories "literature" and "history"⁶ of the Belgian national bibliography. To fully understand the dynamics within a plurilingual literary space, it is important to compare different genres. Each genre has a specific internal dynamic and a different position and symbolic capital in relation to other genres. Applied to Belgium this means, for example, that we did not want to restrict ourselves to novels because as the genre with the highest symbolic capital and with a dominant position in comparison to other genres, novels are typically mainly published by French or Dutch publishers. As a result and to answer the dominance of Paris or Amsterdam, Belgian publishers have mostly turned to genres that are not so interesting from a commercial point of view (such as poetry) or to less prestigious but more popular genres such as comics or children's literature: genres that are, however, widespread, internationalized, or linked to Belgian cultural heritage.

To complete the corpus and analyze the translation flows, the different editions of the translations had to be identified and grouped. Therefore, it is necessary to not only consider the so-called manifestation level, but also to perform a clustering to identify works and expressions of manifestations, according to the IFLA Library Reference Model.⁷ According to this model a work is "the intellectual or artistic content of a distinct creation," i.e. "an abstract entity that permits the grouping of *expressions* that are considered functional equivalents or near equivalents. A *work* is a conceptual object, no single material object can be identified as the *work*" (Riva et al. 21). George Simenon's *Maigret et la jeune morte* is a work. An expression is "the specific intellectual or artistic form that a *work* takes each time it is 'realized'" (23). It is in other words "an abstract entity distinct from the carriers used to record it" (23). The Dutch translation by Rokus Hofstede of Simenon's *Maigret et la jeune morte* entitled *Maigret en het dode meisje*, copyright 2016 is an expression of Simenon's *Maigret et la jeune morte*. And, finally, a manifestation "results from the capture of one or more expressions onto a carrier or set of carriers. As an entity, a manifestation represents the common characteristics shared by those carriers, in respect to both intellectual or artistic content and physical form" (25). *Maigret en het dode meisje* translated by Hofstede and published by De Bezige Bij in Amsterdam in 2016, ISBN 9789023495604, is a manifestation. Different book editions of the same title thus fall under manifestations and can in our database be clustered together in order to consider translations on work level. This *stemma codicum* ensures not only enriched and structured data but allows more sophisticated comparative analyses (for instance of authors with few translations but many editions, and authors with many translations

in just one edition). Finally, it should be noted that our corpus includes a large number of series translations and translated titles that can be grouped into series, particularly in the genres of children's literature, comics or even novels, to mention only the famous Maigret series by Simenon, but also editorial collections such as paperbacks or thematic collections.

Big Translation Data: Intra-national Flows in Plurilingual Environments

Based on these criteria and the methodological finetuning, our database contains metadata on ca. 15,000 translations (on the level of manifestations). Importantly, these data “have no value or meaning in isolation. They can be assets or liabilities or both. They exist within a knowledge infrastructure—an ecology of people, practices, technologies, institutions, material objects, and relationships. All parts of the infrastructure are in flux with shifts in stakeholders, technologies, policies, and power” (Borgman, *Big Data* 4).

In the following we will, based on the database, zoom in on some distinctive features of these intra-Belgian translations. As these intra-Belgian translation flows took place within the Belgian plurilingual space between 1970–2020, they form an important dimension of Belgian national book production, its constitutive parts and its evolution in the last half-century. However, the database does not allow us to quantify the proportion of these translations in relation to the total book production in each language area (French or Dutch) on the publishing market.

A first striking result concerns the proportion of translation flows (in- and ex-translation) and the translation direction.

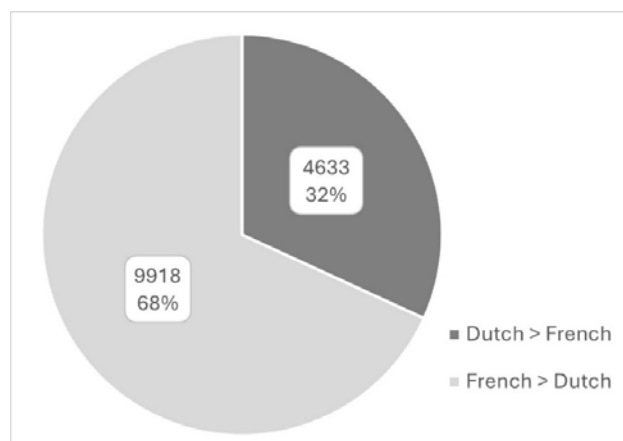


Figure 2. Intra-Belgian Book Translation Flows (Literature and History) 1970–2020

The translation flow (for all five genres together) of Belgian literature from Dutch to French is one-third of the total number of literary translations titles and the translation flow from French to Dutch is two-thirds. So, speakers of Dutch could read twice as much translated Francophone-Belgian literature than vice versa. Overall, over 50 years, Francophone readers have less access to Neerlandophone-Belgian authors (Vanasten and Brems). These proportions correspond to the international status of those languages: French is a more central language than Dutch, and thus the

French-speaking area imports far fewer literatures in translation than the Dutch-speaking world (Heilbron; Heilbron and Sapiro; Sapiro). We also know that the translation market for incoming translations is much larger in Dutch than in French (Heilbron and Van Es; Schoenaers 124). Dutch imports, French exports (Meylaerts, “Kleine Literaturen”). This is a characteristic that goes for the whole world market of translations: translation flows mainly from central languages to peripheral languages. Central languages tend to export while peripheral languages tend to import. In other words, intra-Belgian book translation flows reflect the larger world market of translations. Still, previous research has also shown that the proportion of intra-Belgian translations is higher than the proportion of Dutch-French/French-Dutch translations as a whole (Meylaerts, “Kleine Literaturen”). In other words, as our data show, in the Belgian plurilingual space, translation proves to be an important dimension of national book production.

If we then compare the translation flows for the five selected genres (novels, children’s literature, comics, poetry and non-fiction [including history]), it is fascinating to see how the two flows (French-Dutch vs. Dutch-French) show major differences.

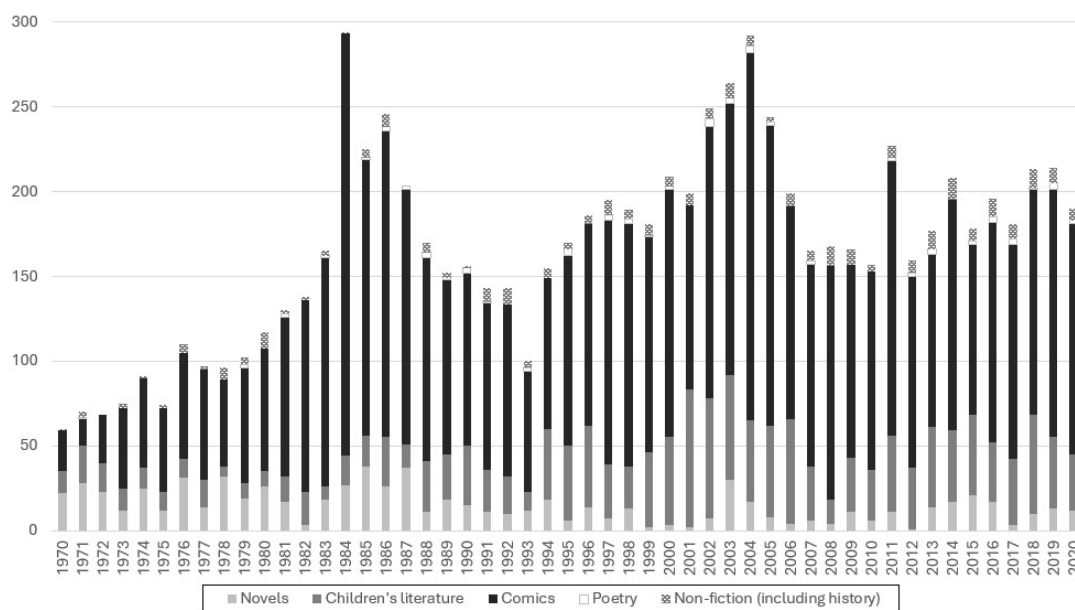


Figure 3. Intra-Belgian Book Translations from French into Dutch per Genre (1970–2020)

The majority of books translated from French into Dutch between 1970–2020 are comics, followed by children’s literature. In other words, the genre that francophone Belgium exports most successfully to Dutch-speaking Belgium is comics. The second place is occupied by children’s literature, another genre with less consecration power than novels in the literary field.

As far as the flow of translations from Dutch into French is concerned, while between 1970 and 1990 Dutch-language comics were also the genre most frequently translated into French, from 1995 onwards it was children’s literature that took over this position. This is shown in Figure 4.

Especially from the 2000s, French translations of Dutch-language children’s literature are booming. Incidentally, these two charts also show how small the share of poetry, non-fiction (including history) and novels is compared to comics and children’s literature, and this in both directions. Poetry translations in both directions are negligibly small.

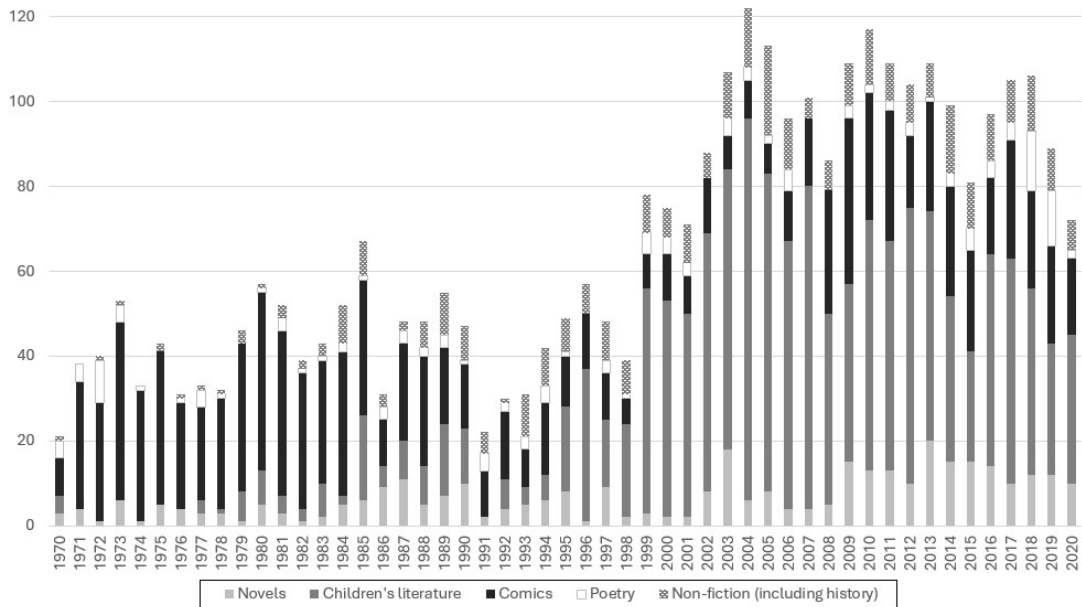


Figure 4. Intra-Belgian Book Translations from Dutch into French per Genre (1970–2020)

When measuring the proportionality of the two dominant genres within the intra-Belgian translation flows in both language directions (see Fig. 1), 59.5% of all the books of Belgian authors in French translated into Dutch are comics and 16.44% children's literature, while for Dutch translated into French 23.8% are comics and 30.3% children's literature. This means notably that for the Dutch-speaking community in Belgium during the period 1970–2020 almost 6 of the 10 books coming from francophone Belgian authors were comics. The other way round, one third of the books circulating in French-speaking Belgium coming from the Dutch-speaking north of the country were children's literature.

Looking at the place of publication, our database shows that for the whole of our corpus, for both translation directions (Dutch to French and French to Dutch), 74% are published in Belgium.

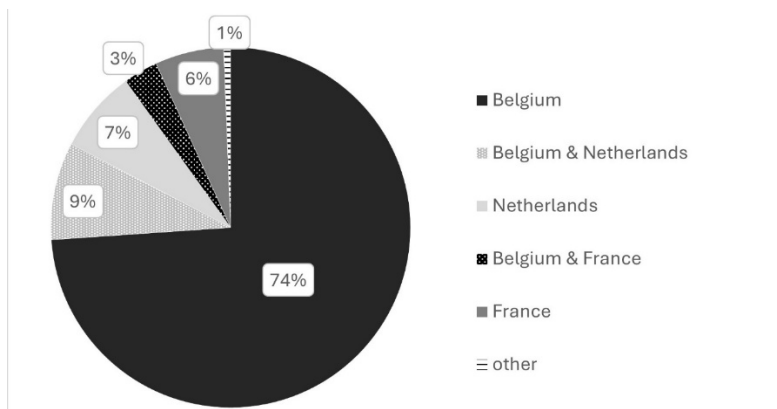


Figure 5. Country of Target Language Publisher for Intra-Belgian Book Translations (Literature and History) 1970–2020

A quarter of the intra-Belgian translations are published abroad, mainly the Netherlands and

France. Those countries thus occupy a large place in Belgian book culture. It is important to repeat (see also above) that this is also the case for book publications that are not translations. Moreover, quite a few publishing houses which we labeled as Belgian belong to international conglomerates, mainly from the Netherlands and France, which increases the place that these neighboring countries occupy in Belgian book culture, and which adds to their power. This confirms the necessity to adopt a transnational perspective to study intra-national translational dynamics.

However, if we combine the criteria “place of publication” and “genre” looking for “significant geographies” (Laachir et al.), we observe big differences between the genres of comics and children’s literature on the one hand, and for instance novels on the other hand, as shown in the figure below.

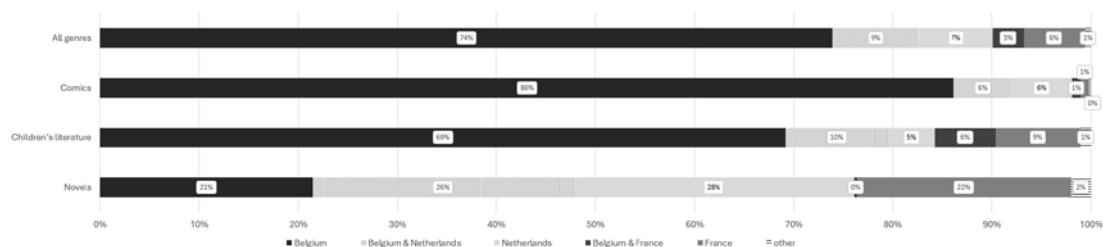


Figure 6. Countries of Target Language Publishers for Intra-Belgian Book Translations per Genre (1970–2020)

An average of 86% of translated Belgian comics books in both language directions are published in Belgium. In other words, during the period 1970–2020 Belgian publishers largely controlled the intra-Belgian translation market for Belgian comics. In both language directions, we see that between 1970–2020 the production of comics in Dutch and French translation is for at least 50% in the hands of just a handful of big Belgian comics publishers: Standaard (including its imprint Erasme) for the Dutch-language comics market, Dupuis and Le Lombard for the French-language comics market.

For intra-Belgian translations of novels, the situation is completely different, with big differences between language directions. More than 70% of Dutch-language novels translated into French are published in France and almost half of French-language novels translated into Dutch are published in the Netherlands. That share becomes much larger if we include books published by Belgian publishers that belong to international conglomerates. In other words: Belgium itself plays a minor role in the publication of intra-Belgian translated novels. The publishing book market for novels, in both language directions, is clearly dominated by French and Dutch publishers. Because novels are the most high-brow genre with a long-standing tradition, the Belgian publishing market, which is younger, smaller, and weaker than in the neighboring countries (France and the Netherlands), cannot compete.

The situation for children’s literature by Belgian authors is quite different between 1970 and 2020. An average of 69% of translated children’s literature in both language directions is published in Belgium. If Belgian publishers seem overall largely represented in the intra-Belgian translation market for children’s books, however, we note again significant differences between the two language directions. Within the top 20 publishers, Dutch-language children’s literature translated into French relies for 50% on French publishers, while French-language children’s literature in Belgium relies on foreign publishers for only a third.

For children’s literature as well as for comics, within the top 20 publishers, a significant number of Belgian publishers are active in both translation directions (Casterman, Zuidnederlandse Uitgeverij,

and Mijade for children's books; Standaard, Dupuis, Le Lombard, and also Casterman for comics). This means that the same publisher is responsible for source and target books. This is mostly a process of in-house translation (for reasons of translation rights and economic profitability) and it emphasizes even more the geographical positioning of these genres within Belgium as "Belgian" genres, as the translation flows detailed per genre already showed. In other words, it is fair to speak for both genres (children's literature and comics) of a Belgian national book culture and production. For novels, this practice of in-house translations is almost non-existent, and for poetry it is also very rare.

Conclusion

We took the case of Belgium to examine intranational translation flows as an important dimension of book production in multilingual states over a long-term perspective of 50 years, looking at how books in two of the country's official languages (Dutch, French) circulate and facilitate a common background between different language communities within one country. Given the close links between the dynamics of intranational translation and the international publishing market, we considered intranational translation production within a plurilingual (literary) space, which brought into focus the cultural autonomy of the language areas involved. As stated by Aneta Blackledge and Adrian Pavlenko "in multilingual settings, language choice and attitudes are inseparable from political arrangements, relations of power, language ideologies, and interlocutors' views of their own and others' identities" (1). However, in order not to simply mirror our research object, it is important to focus not only on the obvious factors of language and place. Our question was also whether intranational translation in plurilingual contexts can show alternatives to the often-mentioned center-periphery model in (literary) Translation Studies, which positions in a rather deterministic way the long-term and global hegemony of some (hyper)dominant languages over (semi)peripheral languages. Can intranational translation dynamics offer context-dependent alternatives for other paths of cultural exchanges, and how?

Using a Big Translation History approach, which for the first time makes available new data on previously invisible phenomena in a specific knowledge infrastructure, we observed that language position worldwide remains an important conditioning factor in the quantitative repartitioning of in- and ex-translations between the two investigated language directions. Like the rule of thirds in photography, Dutch-language literature in French translation occupies one third of the picture of the Belgian translated book landscape, while the other two thirds are left to French-language literature in Dutch translation, which means that over the past 50 years the Dutch-speaking people in Belgium have had more access to the book culture of the other language community than vice versa. The fact that central languages (such as French) export more and import less means that the intranational authors of this dominant language community have to compete more in translation with the large international market of this dominant language, and that they are at a disadvantage in terms of intranational translation dynamics compared to less dominant languages (such as Dutch). Qualitative research on these data shows that subnational and language-bound cultural policies can be identified as an important power factor influencing translation flows, especially for some languages and genres.

Our analysis of intranational translations shows that to map translation flows, one should not only consider the weight of a language in the world language system, but also other factors such

as location, in the sense of “significant geographies,” in our case Belgium, where three quarters of the books in our corpus were published, and also genre. Indeed, genre turned out to be an important factor for possible intranational connections, able to deviate from certain globalization models and from the symbolic logic of consecration of the literary field. For two thirds of the Belgian francophone literature in Dutch translation, the picture is clearly dominated by comics, followed by children’s literature as the most translated genre, and the other language direction shows (with one third) a dominance of children’s literature since 1995. Focusing on additional parameters such as the role of publishers and actors, especially when combined, can help to better map the dynamics of intranational translation in its specificity. For children’s books and comics in translation, the Belgian publishing market controlled almost 70% to more than 80% of the market respectively between 1970 and 2020. This is clearly not the case for novels, for which the intranational translation of Belgian authors is mostly in the hands of foreign publishers. For children’s literature and comics, a few Belgian publishers have been able to establish themselves as leaders in the French and Dutch translation markets, so that for both genres one can clearly speak of a national Belgian book culture for the last 50 years. Another notable phenomenon is that of in-house translation, which accounts for between 14% and 20% of intra-Belgian translations of comics and children’s books published by the top 20 publishers.

Our analysis here has focused on the question of whether Belgians have access to each other’s books in translation, and we have taken into account data collected on language, actor roles, place of publication, publisher, and genre over time. But our database will also allow other studies to be carried out that can shed light on important dimensions of intra-Belgian translation flows. Gender analysis, for example, can shed light on the relationship between gender and genre, and gender and actor roles (see e.g. Baxter and Vassallo). We see, for example, that male authors make up three-quarters of all actor roles, while women make up almost half of all translators. And while children’s literature seems to be a genre in which women are well represented, comics have been a very male genre for the last 50 years.

Ethnic diversity in translation flows is another important issue of intranational cultural exchange within multilingual states. However, our data do not allow for an analysis of this factor, as this would require collecting other types of identification for Belgian authors than just their Belgian nationality. Our attention to citizenship and the main languages involved in intra-Belgian book culture inevitably made the presence of different ethnic communities invisible in the data.

Notes

1. See www.kbr.be/en/projects/beltrans/. We would like to thank Ann Van Camp and Sven Lieber of KBR for their indispensable help in realizing this article: supplying the graphs and proofreading our data analyses.
2. For some background on linguistic struggles in Belgium, see e.g. Vogl and Hüning.
3. Law of 8 April 1965, “Loi instituant le dépôt légal à la Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique,” art. 2, *Moniteur Belge/Belgisch Staatsblad*, 18 June 1965. See www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/eli/loi/1965/04/08/1965040838/justel#Art.2.
4. We rely here on the MARC21 Code List for Relators, described by the Library of Congress on www.loc.gov/marc/relators/relaterm.html.
5. This label refers to the entire range of books for young people, from picture books to young adult literature.

6. Excluding, within “History,” the subcategory “Geography.”
7. See repository.ifla.org/handle/123456789/40.

Works Cited

- Baxter, Robert Neal. “Sideline Women in Translation: The Galician Literary Sector as a Case Study.” *Perspectives, Studies in Translatology*, vol. 29, no. 5, 2021, pp. 691–705.
- “Belgian Institutions.” *Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles*, budget-finances.cfwb.be/en/about-us/belgian-institutions/.
- Blackledge, Aneta, and Adrian Pavlenko. *Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Contexts*. Multilingual Matters, 2003.
- Borgman, Christine L. “The Lives and After Lives of Data.” *Harvard Data Science Review*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1162/99608f92.9a36bdb6>.
- . *Big Data, Little Data, No Data: Scholarship in the Networked World*. MIT Press, 2015.
- Brems, Elke. “Road Block in the Streets of Brussels. Hergé in Translation.” *The Translator*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2013, pp. 105–124.
- Drucker, Johanna. *Vizualisation and Interpretation: Humanistic Approaches to Display*. MIT Press, 2020.
- Heilbron, Johan. “Towards a Sociology of Translation.” *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 2, no. 4, 1999, pp. 429–444.
- Heilbron, Johan, and Gisèle Sapiro. “La traduction comme vecteur des échanges culturels internationaux.” *Translatio: Le marché de la traduction en France à l’heure de la mondialisation*, edited by Sapiro, CNRS Editions, 2008, pp. 25–44.
- Heilbron, Johan, and Nicky Van Es. “Fiction from the Periphery.” *Cultural Sociology*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2015, pp. 296–319.
- Laachir, Karima, et al. “Significant Geographies.” *Journal of World Literature*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2018, pp. 290–310.
- Leperlier, Tristan. “Linguistic Areas of Literature: Between the World and the Nations.” *Pascale Casanova’s World of Letters and Its Legacies*, edited by Gisèle Sapiro and Delia Ungureanu, Brill, 2022, pp. 129–146.
- . “Plurilingual Literary Spaces.” *Francosphères*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2021, pp. 185–203.
- Meylaerts, Reine. “Au-delà des oppositions binaires national/international, traduit/non traduit: Les relations littéraires hier, aujourd’hui et demain.” *TTR Traduction, terminologie, rédaction*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2009, pp. 93–117.
- . “Kleine literaturen in vertaling: Buitenkans of gemiste kans?” *De aarde heeft kamers genoeg: Hoe vertalers omgaan met culturele identiteit in het werk van Erwin Mortier*, edited by Lieve Jookan, et al., Garant, 2009, pp. 33–49.
- Riva, Pat, et al. *IFLA, Library Reference Model: A Conceptual Model for Bibliographic Information*. IFLA, 2017.
- Roig-Sanz, Diana, and Laura Fólica. “Big Translation History: Data Science Applied to Translated Literature in the Spanish-Speaking World, 1898–1945.” *Translation Spaces*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2021, pp. 231–259.
- Sapiro, Gisèle. *Qu’est-ce qu’un auteur mondial? Le champ littéraire transnational*. Seuil, 2024.
- Schoenaers, Dirk, et al. *Vertalen in de Nederlanden: Een Cultuurgeschiedenis*. Boom, 2021.
- Vanasten, Stéphanie, and Elke Brems. “Une nouvelle vague littéraire flamande en Belgique francophone.” *Les plats pays*, 26 Apr. 2024, www.les-plats-pays.com/article/une-nouvelle-vague-litteraire-flamande-en-belgique-francophone/.
- Vassallo, Helen. *Towards a Feminist Translator Studies: Intersectional Activism in Translation and Publishing*. Routledge, 2022.
- Vogl, Ulrike, and Mathias Hüning. “One Nation, One Language? The Case of Belgium.” *Dutch Crossing*, vol. 34, no. 3, 2010, pp. 228–247.