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TRANSLATION AND LITERATURES IN SPAIN, 2003-2012

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Over the course of the last two decades, the rise of Iberian Studies within the US academy has forced a reconceptualization of monolithic (and monolingual) understandings of national literatures that were (and still are) one of the hallmarks of Hispanism and other institutionalized disciplinary fields of cultural scholarship. One of the most obvious effects of this shift has been the vindication of previously marginalized languages and cultures as objects of inquiry, and the need to articulate epistemological models and practices that bring to light both their particular trajectories and the complexities of their coexistence and interaction. In this context, the success of Iberian Studies as a productive epistemological model will depend on the the formulation and implementation of theoretically-informed practices that would open new venues for the expansion of the material and disciplinary archives, which in turn may facilitate the discovery and articulation of new critical problems that the previous paradigm did not identify as such.(1) In this essay, I would like to focus on one of the areas in need of further exploration —the role of translation in the constitution of national literatures and, in particular, in the dynamics of interliterary relations within the Iberian Peninsula.

It is fair to say that the study of translation has remained in large part disassociated from the historical and critical analysis of literary production, that even at present, despite many claims to globalization, still remains profoundly marked by paradigms in which a direct (and often exclusive) relationship between language, literature and collective identity has been used to define a field in which the importation of literary production in other languages is often ignored or relegated to a relatively marginal position.(2) National literatures are articulated according to criteria of inclusion and exclusion that determine who and what belongs or not, with citizenship and language —understood as conditions framing the production process— being the categories most commonly used to establish its boundaries. The literatures of the Iberian Peninsula are no exception: each of them is circumscribed to that written in the relevant language by those who can be arguably regarded as members of the national collective (however disputable these categories may be). But this understanding assumes that the identity and impact of the literary object is determined by origin rather than circulation, by birth rather than life. It does not account for the complex trajectories set in motion by the mobilization and reception of works.

If translation globalizes the local and breaks down the boundaries of national literatures by facilitating the circulation of texts beyond its original context, it is also true that translation serves to localize the global —that is, makes available within local (or national) contexts that which originates elsewhere. Seen in this light, translation does not necessarily eradicate national systems or makes them inoperative, but it certainly complicates them. As David Damrosch has recently put it, “too often, literary historians and critics have treated translations as only an external backdrop against which a national tradition defines itself. [...] We will get a better sense of the real shape of national literatures if we think of them less in terms of national languages than of national markets” (2014, 351). Translation, as the instrument or agent that facilitates the presence of “foreign” materials, is indeed a major threat to essentialist understandings of national literatures as autonomous systems, which explains —as Juan Gabriel López Guix has pointed out— the resistance to recognize the fundamental role of translation in cultural life:

La apuesta de la traducción es, en última instancia, una apuesta antiesencialista [...]. En el fondo, la traducción impone una posición paradójica: siendo como es un elemento central en términos literarios y culturales, se erige al mismo tiempo en un centro que nos descentra, que nos obliga a enfrentarnos a nuestra limitación, incompletud e impureza, a convivir con la inestabilidad del sentido y a admitir la presencia y los aportes de lo ajeno. (2007, 17)

To study literature from the perspective of translation is an attempt to capture that impurity and complexity. If the focus on translation can play a crucial role in deconstructing the idea of national literature —although not necessarily the national frame of literary life—, it is particularly relevant in the case of the various literatures within the Spanish State, which according to UNESCO's *Index Translationum*, is among the top three countries in the world in the number of translations published (after Germany and, depending on the year, either after or before France), and has a literary production in various languages, linked together in large part by translation. One third of the literature that is printed and circulates in Spain is foreign literature in translation (mostly coming from English), and it is also with the help of translation that the majority of readers have access to the non-Castilian literatures of the Iberian Peninsula. In contrast, it should be noted that in the Portuguese literary system translation seems to play a less prominent role: Portugal is ranked 26th in the world in number of translations, and while statistical data about Portuguese book production is hard to find (or at least that has been the case for me), everything seems to indicate that of the 17,000 ISBNs given to books printed in Portugal every year between 2009 and 2013, only 6.3% were the result of translation.(3)

How can we go about assessing the extent of the co-existence of diverse literatures on the Iberian Peninsula? To map the impact of translation as a mechanism for inter-cultural mediation we need to assess the extent of the presence and diversity of other literatures within both the national languages and the national markets (which are often not monolingual). In his book *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History*, Franco Moretti has proposed the necessity and potential fruitfulness of a quantitative approach to the study of literary phenomena. "What would happen — Moretti asks— if literary historians [...] decided to 'shift their gaze' [...] 'from the extraordinary to the everyday, from exceptional events to the large mass of facts'? What literature would we find, in 'the large mass of [literary] facts'?" (2005, 3). According to Moretti, this type of *distant reading* can offer a view of historical and systemic relations that otherwise remain hidden in the type of *close reading* that has long been the fundamental methodological foundation of our discipline.

In order to view the literatures in Spain "from afar," as Moretti proposes, one possible approach is to analyze what is available in quantitative terms about book production.(4) For this study, I have used data provided by the Spanish ISBN agency for the period 2003-2012, the years for which we have the most detailed information about the literature published within the State, its thematic and linguistic distribution, and its languages of translation.(5) Some, but not all, of this information, is available in the annual reports (*Panorámica de la edición española de libros*) issued by the Ministry of Culture.(6) I would argue that this type of analysis is pertinent not only for what is often called the *sociology of literature* but also for the configuration or conceptualization of the literary as an object of study. Without an understanding of this material reality, we run the risk of losing sight of the context of creation, production, circulation, and reception in which individual texts operate and the systemic relations that make up the frame of existence of the social institution that we call literature.

Under the category of "Creación literaria", the Ministry of Culture includes ten sub-areas: one that combines literary history and literary and critical theory; four for Spanish and Spanish American literature (prose, poetry, theater, and other genres); and five for foreign literatures (French, German, English, Classics and other literatures). The statistics include data about the translation of works in these areas, both with regard to the language of publication and the language of translation. It is important to note that they do not include the production of children's or juvenile literature, which is reported under a different category.

What can we say, then, quantitatively speaking, about the literature produced in the Iberian Peninsula? The first observation is that what we may regard as *Spanish literature* —whether understood only as that in the Spanish language, or as the collection of literatures in the various languages of the Spanish State— is really only a part (undoubtedly important, but just a part) of the literature that is produced and circulates in the territory of Spain. As the top chart in Image 1 shows, the total production of literature in Spain (in all languages) in the years 2003-2012 can be divided between literature published in the original languages (that is, not in translation) and translated literature (whether from foreign or from vernacular languages). As a whole, two thirds (the 10-year average is 65%) of literary production in Spain is published in the original languages of the Spanish State, while about a third (35%) is literature in translation —the large majority from foreign languages, although a few titles are translations from other languages within Spain.

LITERATURE PUBLISHED IN SPAIN, 2003-2012

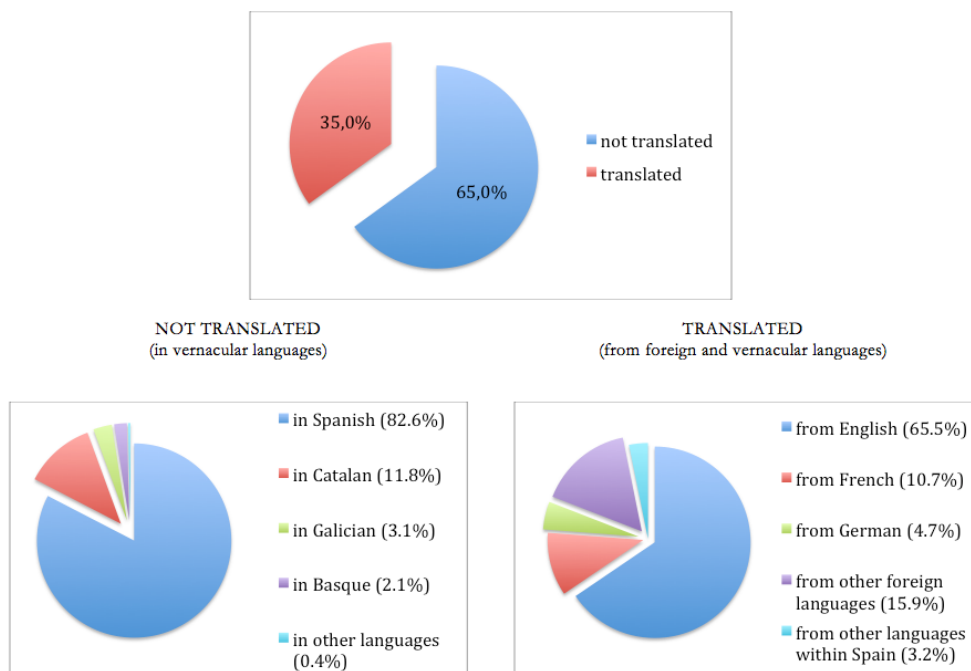


Image 1

In this 10-year period (as we can see under “not translated” literature), about 18% of what we may consider “Spanish” literature is actually literature published in other languages of the State: 11.8% in Catalan, 3.1% in Galician, 2.1% in Basque, and 0.4% in other languages (Aragonese, Aranese, and Asturian). With regard to translated books works of literature, we can see that most of them come from English (about 65%), followed by French (about 11%) and German (about 5%). A small proportion of literary books (3.2%) come from translations among the languages of the Spanish State.

Now, if we look at what is published in the various languages of the Spanish State, we can see in more detail how the phenomenon of translation intervenes in each of them. More than a third (36.3%) of literary works published in Spanish between 2003 and 2012 (Image 2) were translations, with English being by far the most important source language, with 68%, followed far behind by translations from French (10%) and German (4.6%). The presence of other Spanish literatures —translations from Catalan, Basque, Galician, Aranese, Aragonese or Asturian— account for less of 2% of the total number of translations.

LITERATURE PUBLISHED IN SPANISH, 2003-2012

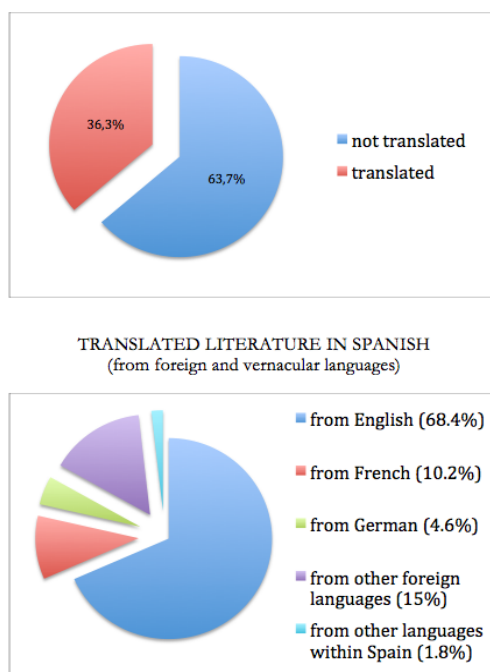
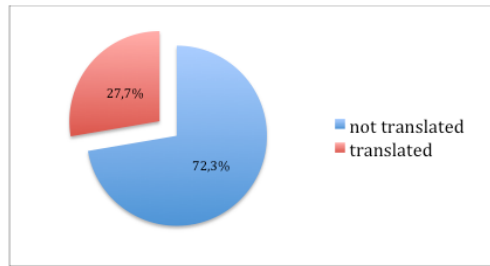


Image 2

Thus, as it is the case in any other language, a significant part of *literature available in Spanish* is not what we would normally regard as *Spanish literature*, but it undoubtedly shapes the ways in which Spanish-language readers experience

the world and cultivate their interests, expectations, and values.(7) Borrowing from Bernardo Atxaga’s definition of the Basque Country as “the place where the world adopts the name of Euskal Herria” [“el lugar donde el mundo toma el nombre de Euskal Herria”, *Obabakoak* 376-77], we could regard Spanish (or Basque, Catalan, or Galician literature) as the site where the various literatures of the world find expression in that language.(8)

LITERATURE PUBLISHED IN CATALAN, 2003-2012



TRANSLATED LITERATURE IN CATALAN

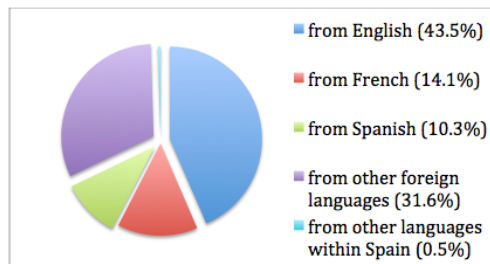
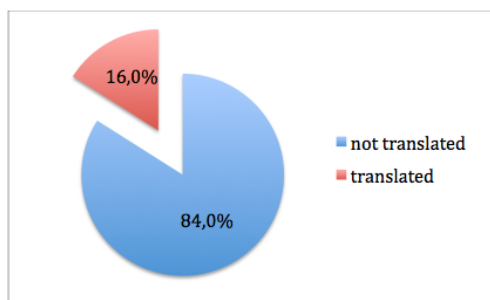


Image 3

There are interesting differences in the case of Catalan literature. As we can see in Image 3, 27.7% of the literature published during those 10 years in Catalan —I also include here that recorded by the Ministry of Culture as Valencian— was the result of translation. English is the most important source language (43.5% of translations), followed by French (14.1%), and —somewhat surprisingly— Spanish (10.3%). If we take a closer look at the data we see that, after English, French, and Spanish, the other sources of literary translations into Catalan are Italian (7.6%) and German (5.9%). Translations from other literatures within Spain (Basque, Galician, Aragonese, Aranese, and Asturian) are minimal: less than 1% of all translations —a total of 29 books (or, more properly speaking, ISBNs) in the 10-year period. Compared to the situation in Spanish, for instance, Catalan presents a more diversified system: in Spanish, 36.6% of literature is the result of translation, the vast majority (about 70%) of which comes from English, while French (10%) and German (4.6%) are distantly behind. In the case of Catalan, as we have seen, more than half of translations come from languages other than English.

LITERATURE PUBLISHED IN GALICIAN, 2003-2012



TRANSLATED LITERATURE IN GALICIAN
(from foreign and vernacular languages)

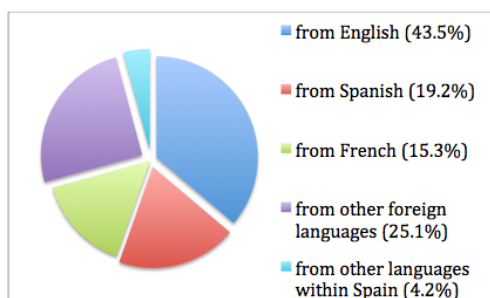
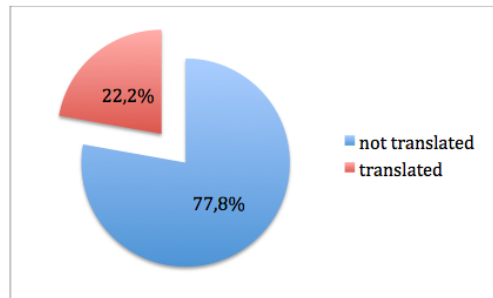


Image 4

In the case of Galician (Image 4), we see a larger production in its own language (84%) and less dependence on translated literature (only 16%). In terms of translation, we continue to see the importance of English (43.5% of all translations), and of French (15.3%), both similar to the percentages in Catalan. But what is perhaps most relevant is the strong presence of the other literatures of the State (about one fourth), with Spanish ahead of French, occupying the second place among literatures translated into Galician (19.2%).(9)

LITERATURE PUBLISHED IN BASQUE, 2003-2012



TRANSLATED LITERATURE IN BASQUE
(from foreign and vernacular languages)

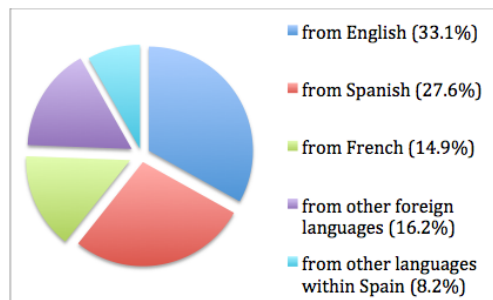


Image 5

Finally, literature published in Basque (Image 5): Here we see a similar situation as in Galician: the percentage of translated literature falls to 22.2%. In other words, compared to literature in Spanish and Catalan, Galician and Basque literatures are sustained, to a greater extent, by the literary production in their own languages. In terms of translations into Basque, we continue to see the importance of English (although the percentage within translated literatures falls here to 33%), and of French (about 15%), and the very strong presence of Spanish (with 27.6% of translations). Note again that, as in the case of Galician, in Basque literature Spanish occupies the second place among translated languages, after English.

As far as I have been able to determine, the situation is very different in the case of Portugal. The Portugal Instituto Nacional de Estatística does issue every year an *Anuário Estatístico de Portugal* and a volume with *Estatísticas da Cultura*, but these publications do not include data on book production, and the Associação Portuguesa de Editores e Livradores (APEL) provides only very general numbers of ISBNs given per year. According to the UNESCO *Index Translationum*, about 50% of the translations published in Portuguese every year correspond to books of literature, but —in the absence of more comprehensive information— it is unclear how we can relate this figure to the whole of literary production in Portuguese.(10)

In his book *Scandals of Translation* (1998), Lawrence Venuti points out in that in the international economy of the book, “asymmetry in translation” (88) is the norm: translation from other languages is insignificant within systems dominated by hegemonic languages, which function in such a way that they are practically autonomous from other literatures, while “minority” systems tend to be inundated with translations from hegemonic languages and function, therefore, within a varying degree of cultural dependence.(11) In the case of Basque, Catalan, Galician, and Spanish, translation from English is clearly dominant, but it is interesting to note that the Spanish language (allegedly the one occupying a hegemonic position within the State) is the one with a higher percentage of translations, while Basque and Galician (the two “minor” systems) do not rely as heavily on the importation of foreign works.(12)

I would argue that the prominent role of Spanish as *lingua franca* —and its coexistence with the other languages in situations of diglossia in parts of the territory— creates asymmetries that are different from those that operate in the international market. In the first place, translation from Spanish to the other languages is in principle not necessary to guarantee a work’s accessibility to the readers of the State, so the significant position of Spanish as source of translations into Basque, Galician, and (to a lesser extent) Catalan seems paradoxical. I believe (but this is something I cannot yet prove) the answer may be found in the bilingualism of those societies —and it would appear that works written in Spanish by Basque, Galician, or Catalan authors are translated into those same languages. Secondly, the fact that most foreign literary works are translated into Spanish (when seen as a whole, 93% of translations from English and 85% from French

circulating within the Spanish market are in that language) seems to suggest that for a large majority of readers in Basque and Galician (but not necessarily in Catalan), Spanish is the language of access to foreign literature. This is consistent with what Johan Heilborn has observed regarding the world literary system of translation: “The more central a language is in the translation system, the more it has the capacity to function as an intermediary language or a *&vehicular language*, that is, as a means of communication between language groups which are themselves peripheral or semi-peripheral” (2010, 5).

And finally, in the State’s bilingual markets, translation to Spanish can compete directly with a work in its original language. *Soinujolearen semea*, the 2003 novel by Bernardo Atxaga, is also available in the Basque Country in the Spanish language version, *El hijo del acordeonista*; and readers in Catalonia have at their disposal both the original Catalan text of *De Nador a Vic* (2004), by Laila Karrouch, and the Spanish version, *&Laila* (published by Oxford University Press in 2010).⁽¹³⁾ But, at least in these two particular cases, they would be mistaken if they think that the book they read in one language or the other is the same book.⁽¹⁴⁾

As it has been previously noted by many critics and scholars, translation has definite benefits for intercultural communication, but it also presents complications that cannot be ignored.⁽¹⁵⁾ Within the Spanish literary system, translations can be instruments that favor the displacement or even the silencing of difference. Laila Karrouch’s *Laila* is a case in point: even from the title, the Spanish version eliminates all references to the specificity of the geographical and cultural context for the protagonist’s experience.⁽¹⁶⁾ But translations can also serve to highlight and preserve difference: *El hijo del acordeonista*, as I have argued elsewhere (Santana 2009), is a text that cannot be read without being constantly reminded of the existence of the Basque language.

To conclude, what can we take from this review of the literary production and the presence of translation in Spain? I would argue, first, that to continue working on the study of a particular cultural system without problematizing the very notion of “national literature” represents a very selective approach that risks a serious deformation of the object of study. Secondly, this problematization is necessary not only to account for the interaction of diverse literary and cultural artifacts being produced originally in the various languages and cultures within the nation, but also because a significant part of the literature that circulates within the local space is foreign works that have been *nationalized* by virtue of translational practices. And finally, that Iberian Studies, by paying greater attention to the active presence within the literary system of works that are translated and/or imported, could and should open up the horizon of study to explore not simply the *national literature*, *the literature of*, but also *the literature in* —that which has been *nationalized* or appropriated by means of its production and circulation throughout the national market.

NOTES

(1) As Santiago Pérez Isasi argues, Iberian Studies articulates “a specific field of knowledge which encompasses a wide set of literary, artistic and cultural phenomena that cannot be properly understood and explained from a national perspective” (2013, 11).

(2) Among the factors that have facilitated this disregard for translations within Hispanic Studies in the US academy we have to consider the fact that (in contrast with other literary fields like Germanic or Slavic Studies), we have been able to conduct most of our teaching in the target language, and thus there has been little need for or attention to translations. The desire to provide cultural knowledge in or about languages other than Spanish (that is, in other Iberian and Latin American languages) has not only transformed the linguistic makeup of several academic programs, but also compelled us to turn to translations as a valuable tool to facilitate access to those cultures within the field. In this regard, Iberian and Latin American studies face challenges and demands that are significantly different from those of other literature programs.

(3) According to UNESCO *Index Translationum*, Spanish is the third target language for all translation activity in the world, while Portuguese is the eighth.

(4) A preliminary version of this study, based on the Spanish book production for the years 2008 and 2009, was presented in my article “Los mercados de las literaturas en España: La producción literaria.”

(5) I would like to thank the Servicio de Estudios y Documentación de la Subdirección General de Promoción del Libro, la Lectura y las Letras Españolas, and in particular Mar Álvarez and Juan Ramón Montealegre Martín, for providing me with the appropriate statistical information. For an analysis of literary translation in Spain for the years 1990-1998 and 1999-2003, following a different methodological approach, see Andreu van Hooff Comajuncosas (2001 and 2004).

(6) Other sources of statistical information about book production are the annual reports by the Federation of Spanish Publishers (Federación de Gremios de Editores de España) on the *Comercio interior del libro en España* and the *Comercio exterior del libro*, both of which based on the information provided by associated publishing houses. The data from these various reports and institutions does not always coincide, given that the universe covered by the ISBN agency is much wider than that of the federation of editors. While the Federation of the Spanish Publishers covers the production of a high (but not total) percentage of private publishing houses, “the editing agents that can request an ISBN can come from both public and private editing. The world of the ISBN, therefore, is very wide and covers all of the official organisms of the General Administration of the State, the Autonomous Administrations and the Local Administrations, such as Educational and Public Culture Institutions. In terms of private edition, it covers authors-editors that edit their own works and small, medium and large publishing houses” (*Panorámica de la edición española de libros* 2009, 7). For more information on the studies of the FSEG, see *Comercio interior del libro en España* 2009, 13-14. Another important distinction, which affects the statistics, is the one between the concepts of *title*, *book* and *ISBN* (*Panorámica* 2009, 9-10).

(7) In April 2015, Catalan-language newspaper *Ara* asked their readers for the five books they deemed “indispensable” in their own personal libraries. After more than 640 books were proposed in a first round of responses, a short list of 21 books —which included 8 (38%) works written originally in Catalan— was submitted for a vote. 3,947 people participated, and the top books were: *El petit príncep*, by Antoine Saint-Exupéry (with 16% of votes); *Cien años de soledad*, by Gabriel García Márquez (10%); *1984*, by George Orwell (9%); *La plaça del Diamant*, by Mercè Rodoreda (7%); and *&Jo confesso*, by Jaume Cabré (5%). See http://www.ara.cat/cultura/petit-princep-llibre-faltar-biblioteca_0_1340866097.html (accessed June 27, 2015).

(8) “The ‘national language’ itself is the medium through which original and translated works circulate together to form our ineluctably international national literatures” (Damrosch 359).

(9) However, these results have to be compared with those by Andreu van Hooff in his analysis of data for the 1999-2002 years, where he draws a very different picture: “el volumen de obras traducidas del sistema mayoritario [en lengua española] a los tres sistemas minoritarios [catalán, gallego, vasco] es muy escasa” (2004, 320).

(10) What we can gather from this sketchy information is that the Portuguese book production, about 17,000 ISBNs per year —compared to a yearly average of around 84,300 ISBNs in Spanish and 8,600 in Catalan during those same years (2009-2013).

(11) Aiora Jaka Irizar has also noted the importance of translation for minority (or minoritized) languages: “the more powerful and widespread a language, the smaller the percentage of translations in its total literary production” (2005).

(12) And we should also take into account that part of that literature published in Spanish in Spain is actually imported from Spanish America. It is impossible, using statistics from the ISBN, to distinguish between literature in Spanish from one side of the Atlantic or the other, but without a doubt, this presence of immigrant or imported literature exists and occupies an important space in the Spanish literary system.

(13) In many cases, as van Hooft has noted, translations into Spanish from other languages of Spain are distributed mostly within the same bilingual space, so that in the case of Galicia “una edición importante de traducciones para el mercado doméstico [...] refleja una situación de bilingüismo deficiente y en la que una parte importante de los propios lectores gallegos accede indirectamente y a través de las versiones castellanas a las obras de sus escritores paisanos” (2004, 326).

(14) For critical analyses of the Spanish translation of Karrouch’s *De Nador a Vic*, see Ricci (2010, 216) and Domínguez (2013, 107-109).

(15) According to Jordi Castellanos, translations can serve to universalize a culture —as was the case with Modernisme: “la primera gran manifestació del Modernisme es va fer al voltant d’un text traduït, *La intrusa*, de Maurice Maeterlinck, que va ser el centre de la Festa Modernista del 1893”— but “igual com la traducció és un instrument per a la construcció d’una cultura, para la seva universalització, també pot ser, malauradament, un instrument per a la seva destrucció” (2002).

(16) As Venuti has noted, “notwithstanding the fact that translation is summoned to address the linguistic and cultural difference of a foreign text, it can just as effectively foster or suppress heterogeneity in the domestic culture” (1995, 11).

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