

An analysis of the role played by translation in minority languages: Welsh and Breton compared

Robert Neal Baxter

Universidade de Vigo. Facultade de Filoloxía e Tradución
Campus das Lagoas-Marcosende
36310 Vigo
jstefanlari@yahoo.com
ORCID: 0000-0001-9484-5001



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Abstract

There is general agreement in the burgeoning literature on the subject that translation plays a key role in minority languages, fulfilling a variety of functions, including bolstering the literary canon. This leads to a prevalent assumption that this veritable entails a dependence on translation that renders minority languages 'weak'. Following a theoretical review of the literature and a brief presentation of the languages, this paper discusses the results of a study based on a broad-based, original dataset representative of the wide range of literature currently available in Breton and Welsh. The paper concludes that a portrayal of minority language literary systems as 'weak' is overly simplistic and fails to address and attempt to explain the factors underpinning the complex and often contradictory dynamics played by translation both within and between such languages.

Keywords: minority languages; translation; Breton; Welsh; literary system

Resum. *Una anàlisi del paper de la traducció en les llengües minoritàries: comparació entre gal·lès i bretó*

Hi ha un acord general en els estudis, que van proliferant, que expliquen el paper clau de la traducció en les llengües minoritàries: hi compleix una varietat de funcions, incloent-hi reforçar el cànon literari. Això fa assumir predominantment que aquest fet comporta realment una dependència de la traducció que fa que les llengües minoritàries siguin «febles». Després de revisar teòricament aquests estudis i de presentar breument les llengües, en aquest article es discuteixen els resultats d'un estudi basat en un conjunt de dades original i ampli que representa un bon ventall de literatura actualment disponible en bretó i gal·lès. L'article arriba a la conclusió que representar els sistemes literaris de llengües minoritàries com a «febles» és massa simplista i no aborda ni intenta explicar els factors que sustenten la dinàmica complexa i sovint contradictòria de la traducció tant dins com entre aquestes llengües.

Paraules clau: llengües minoritàries; traducció; bretó; gal·lès; sistema literari

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1. Introduction

The term ‘minority languages’ is open to different interpretations, especially within the context of translation studies (e.g. Venuti 1998: 135), where it has even been used to describe full-fledged national languages such as Dutch (Linn 2006), on the grounds that they are spoken by few people than ‘major’ languages such as English with many more speakers and a much greater global reach. Other similar terms such as ‘less(er) translated languages’ have a much broader scope, also englobing languages such as Latvian (Folaron 2015) and even Arabic (Branchadell & West 2005), referring to the relatively lesser extent to which they are translated into ‘major’ languages.

In order avoid any possible confusion, this paper deals exclusively with minority regional languages as defined in the generally accepted definition contained in Article 1 of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages:

[languages] traditionally used within a given territory of a State by nationals of that State who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the State’s population; and different from the official language(s) of that State; it does not include either dialects of the official language(s) of the State or the languages of migrants. (Council of Europe 1992)

Cronin (2020: 334) notes that “the relationship between translation and minority languages has been an area that has attracted increasing interest since the turn of the century”, with notable contributions by Cronin (1995, 2003, 2020) himself and Branchadell (2011). This can be seen as part of the wider ‘sociological turn’ in Translation and Interpreting Studies (Angelelli, 2014), pioneered by Gambier (2006) and Wolf & Fukari (2007) and notably developed by Diaz Fouces (2001, 2005) in collaboration with and others, e.g. Córdoba Serrano (2018), Parada (2006), Monzó (2010) and others (Diaz Fouces et al. 2020).

A general consensus has emerged regarding the central role translation plays in minority languages, described as a central and inescapable fact of their economic, scientific and cultural life (Cronin 2020: 334). Above and beyond its core role of enabling interlinguistic communication, thanks to their significant linguistic and sociolinguistic impact (Belmar 2017: 37), translation and interpreting have been shown to fulfil a range of other functions in the case of minority language, serving as a useful tool for language revitalisation in general (Belmar 2017: 38-39) and status planning in particular (Baxter 2012, 2022).

Another key function involves bolstering the literary canon, especially involving prestigious world classics, harnessing the substantial symbolic value associated with such works appearing on the shelves of bookshops side-by-side with editions in the local majority language, thus granting it a legitimate public space in the wider linguistic landscape.

The preoccupation with translation as a means of refreshing and boosting the literary canon is a constant running through many minority languages, notably during the national and cultural and literary throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. This remains a recurrent theme in the case of Breton, with modern-day translated literature still appealing explicitly to the heyday of the *Gwalarn* literary journal (1925-1994) and its prolific co-founder, Roparz Hemon, who looked to translation as a way of bolstering a modern canon:¹

Ul lodenn eus hol lennegezh eo an troidigezhioù. En eskemm dibaouez a zo bet atav etre ar yezhoù hag ar sevenadurioù ez omp bet, evel an holl bobloù gwasket, o tegemer kalz muioc'h eget n'hon eus roet. Goet hon eus avat ar boued chouket ennomp, ken eo deut da vezañ hor mad-ni, o kreskiñ hon nerzh hag hor yec'hed. En hol lennegezh arnevez ez eus bremañ ur pleg – hag a zo diwar zibab – d'an troidigezhioù. (Per Denez 1997)

This importance of this particular function has led certain authors to couch it in terms of an over-reliance on translation, effectively rendering minority literatures 'weak'. As originally articulated by Even-Zohar (1990: 80-81), such weakness involves a theoretical inability to function by confining themselves to their own repertoire alone. Through the work of Toury (1985), this central tenet of Polysystems Theory has exerted a notable influence on several researchers in the field, especially – but not exclusively – involved with Galizan, such as Cruces Colado (1993), Luna Alonso (2006), Rodríguez Rodríguez (2009) and even as recently as López Gaseni (2019).

This supposition is contentious for several reasons. Hermans (1999: 109) raises the objection that 'weakness' is only construed to relative to a 'stronger', dominant system and eludes any clear objectively quantifiable measure. This inevitably begs the question of what proportion of translated works published in any given minority language constitutes an 'over-reliance', a fundamental query raised by Bassnett (1998: 127).

It also belies the fact that literary systems are far from homogenous entities, with different and sometimes even contradictory internal dynamics. The aim of this paper is not only to empirically test the pervasive assumption that 'dependence' on translation can be taken as a gauge of weakness on the part of minority languages literary systems but also to explore, compare and attempt to explain

1. "Translations are part of our literature. In the constant exchange that has always gone on between languages and cultures, just like all oppressed peoples, we have taken in far more than we have given out. Nevertheless, we let this yeast rise, turning it into a source of sustenance, making us stronger and sturdier. Our modern literature involves a deliberate trend towards translations" (Author's translation).

the actual internal dynamics of the role played by translation at different levels of two linguistically related yet sociologically very distinct languages minority language literary systems, namely Welsh and Breton, analysing any differences which may arise in the light of their differing sociolinguistic contexts.

2. The Welsh and the Breton Languages

Together with Cornish, Welsh and Breton form the Brittonic subgroup of the modern Celtic languages, the latter being the only Celtic language still spoken on Continental Europe.

Welsh is the Celtic language with the largest number of speakers and one not considered endangered by UNESCO (Moseley 2010). According to the latest official data provided by the 2011 census (Office for National Statistics, s.d.), the Welsh-speaking population was 19.0 % (562,016 people), while other estimates by the Welsh Government (s.d.) indicate a considerably higher rate of 29.7 % (899,500) for 2021. Significant pockets of speakers are also to be found in England (approx. 110,000) and notably Argentina (approx. 1,500-5,000), in the area of Patagonia known as *Y Wladfa* ('The Colony').

The launch of the Welsh television channel S4C on 1 November 1982 following sustained campaigning on the part of *Cymdeithas yr Iaith* (The Welsh Language Society) marked an important milestone. Following on from the rather timid Welsh Language Act of 1967, today – paradoxically – Welsh is in fact the only language in the United Kingdom (including English) to have official legal status, accorded with the passing of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure in 2011. Since 1980, the number of children attending Welsh-medium schools has increased, and the number enrolled in Welsh bilingual schools amounts to roughly a quarter of all children today. In 2019, the Welsh government unveiled *Cymraeg 2050*, its strategy designed to raise the number of Welsh language speakers to one million by 2050 (Welsh Government 2017). As of 2012, the language has been overseen by the Welsh Language Commissioner, a Welsh government office charged with promoting and facilitating language use and upholding speakers' rights.

By contrast, Breton has no official status, despite being recognised as a 'language of France' by the General Delegation for the French Language and the Languages of France (DGLFLF). Following a sharp decline from the mid-19th to early 20th Centuries for a variety of reasons (see Abalain 1999; Grifffon 2008; Gwegen 1975), the number of speakers fell to a mere 213,000 in 2018, i.e. 5.5 % of the population according to the Breton Language Office (Ofis Publik ar Brezhoneg, s.d.), thus rendering it "severely endangered" (Moseley 2010). The Deixonne Law passed in 1951 lifted the ban on teaching certain regional languages and article 75-1 introduced into the Constitution in 2008 gingerly recognises regional languages as part of the heritage of the Republic. However, the government continues to refuse to ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages signed in 1999 and Article 2 of the Constitution was modified in 1992 to stipulate that French is the sole official language. Nevertheless, recent years have seen a significant rise in adult learners and a notable growth

in pupils attending bilingual education, rising to 19,765 pupils in 2022, up by 429 pupils on the previous year (Ofis Publik ar Brezhoneg, 2023). Breton has also gradually gained increased public visibility through the work carried out by the Breton Language Office (*Ofis Publik ar Brezhoneg*) set up in 2010, charged, amongst other things, with overseeing the *Ya d'ar brezhoneg* ('Yes to Breton') initiative designed to foster language promotion in collaboration with local authorities. Apart from extremely limited slots on France 3 Bretagne, no dedicated public broadcasting service is available in Breton, although the *Brezhoweb* initiative launched in 2006 provides an on-line channel entirely in Breton.

In both cases, this positive evolution has led to a steady increase the number of people, especially young people, literate in both languages, thus broadening the potential demand for literature of all kinds, including translations. The specific link between the introduction of a minority language into the formal education system and translation as a means of rapidly expanding the size and scope of the literature available to children and young people is has been reported for other such languages (Lamas 2008).

3. Methodology and Corpus

The study is based on data compiled from a range of major publishers based on their own current on-line catalogues together with other reliable, up-to-date on-line sources described below, covering a representative set of the works currently available as of November 2022 in Welsh and Breton, including both fiction and non-fiction, discounting bilingual books for the sake of simplicity. In order to maintain a modicum of coherence between the two languages, school textbooks (mathematics, geography, chemistry books, etc.) and other non-book items (games, cards, posters, etc.) were excluded from the study. However, graded readers designed specifically for learners were included as they represent an important subgenre, especially in the case of Welsh, often written by well-known authors. Albeit less-well developed, a similar subgenre also exists in the case of Breton.

Every effort was made to render the corpora as homogeneous as possible in order to allow for a meaningful comparison between the two literary systems analysed. However, any attempt to further level the differences that inevitably arise would only serve to effectively distort a faithful analysis of the true nature of the differing dynamics at work within each system. Indeed, it is precisely such differences that are of interest here, belying the idea that literary systems associated with the umbrella term 'minority languages' can automatically be assumed to display an across-the-board (over-)reliance on translation, thus contradicting their over-simplistic characterisation as 'weak' *per se* as postulated by Polysystems Theory.

The following provides a detailed breakdown for each of the publishers analysed in declining order based on the number of books in each case, first for Welsh (Table 1) and then for Breton (Table 2).

Y Lofa is a generalist publishing company which describes itself as "Wales' foremost publishing press". Gwasg y Dref Wen and Gwasg Garreg Gwalch were

included as prime examples of smaller – albeit well-known – generalist companies. Atebol specialises in books for schools, including textbooks as well as other reading material. The long-standing publisher Gwasg Gomer (est. 1892) was not included on the grounds that its stock is now carried by Y Lolfa and Atebol who bought the publishing arm of the company in 2019. Despite the limited number of companies surveyed, the sample was deemed to be representative by dint of the number and range of titles covered. No further publishers were added in order to avoid an even more disproportionate disparity in comparison with the total number of works available for Breton. Table 1 provides a breakdown ranked in descending order of the works in Welsh:

Table 1. List of works compiled for Welsh

| Publisher (source) | |
|---|-------|
| Y Lolfa (https://www.ylolfa.com/) | 2,223 |
| Gwasg Garreg Gwalch (https://carreg-gwalch.cymru/) | 437 |
| Atebol (https://atebol.com/) | 218 |
| Gwasg y Dref Wen (https://drefwen.com/) | 221 |
| Total | 3,099 |

Owing to the considerably lower production in Breton, a larger number of companies varying considerably in size was used to yield an acceptable overall number of titles, which still fell considerably short of that for Welsh. The list includes a range of several well-established generalist publishers, including Tiembann ar Skolioù (The Schools Publishing House, TES), akin to Atebol, set up via an agreement between the French State, the Region of Brittany and the Breton Departments with the aim of providing material for use in schools. Keit Vimp Bev (est. 1982) and An Here (est. 1983), which ceased operations in 2005 but whose titles remain widely available making it a key reference in the world of contemporary Breton-language publishing, both specialise in literature for children and young people and are inextricably linked to the need created by the growth of the *Diwan* Breton-language schools initially launched in 1977. For Breton, the study drew on the catalogues available on the constantly updated websites of the associative Kuzul ar Brezhoneg (KaB) and the commercial Klask.com, which together provide excellent coverage for Breton language publishing as a whole. Table 2 provides a breakdown ranked in descending order of the works catalogued for Breton taken from eleven different companies.

Table 2. List of works compiled for Breton

| Publisher (source) | |
|--|-------|
| Keit Vimp Bev (https://klask.com/) | 204 |
| Al Liamm (https://brezhoneg.org/bz/) | 179 |
| An Here (https://brezhoneg.org/bz/) | 146 |
| Mouladurioù Hor Yezh (https://brezhoneg.org/bz/) | 142 |
| TES (https://klask.com/) | 103 |
| An Alarc'h (https://brezhoneg.org/bz/) | 86 |
| Al Lanv (https://brezhoneg.org/bz/) | 69 |
| Hor Yezh (https://brezhoneg.org/bz/) | 68 |
| Sav-Heol (https://brezhoneg.org/bz/) | 57 |
| Skrid (https://klask.com/) | 41 |
| Skol Vreizh (https://klask.com/) | 28 |
| Total | 1,123 |

The next stage involved painstakingly identifying and sorting translated works along with their respective source languages. This task proved surprisingly more arduous than first anticipated, as the necessary information is not always readily available on the publishers' and other affiliated sites, calling for frequent recourse to other sources, notably the National Library of France and the National Library of Wales. In this respect, the commercial site Amazon was also extremely useful inasmuch as it made it possible to compare book covers in other languages in the event of doubts regarding the source text or whether a title was in fact a translation or not.

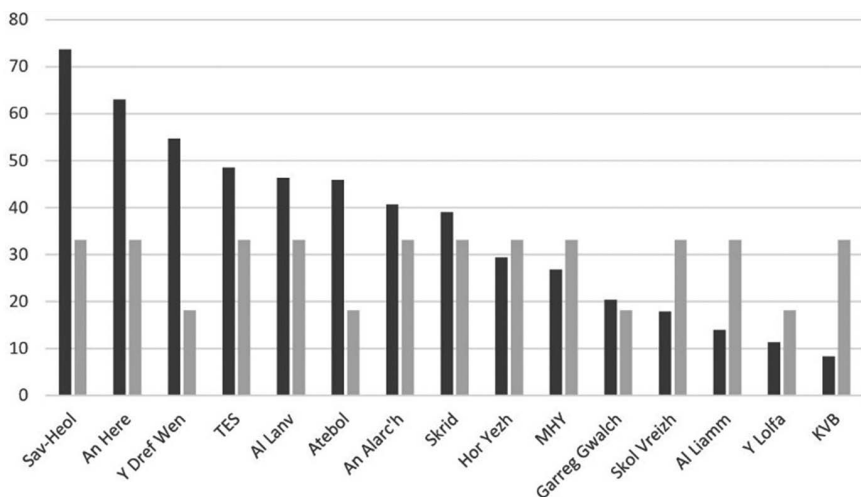
4. Results

A precursory analysis reveals that for Breton the total average for translated works accounted for approximately one third of all the works published (33.13 %, i.e. 372 out of 1,123), whereas for Welsh the figure represented less than a fifth (18.13 %, i.e. 562 out of 3,099). Whilst this would initially seem to indicate that the Breton literary system appears significantly 'weaker' than its Welsh counterpart based on the sheer number of publications overall and when taking the proportion of translations as a simple benchmark, it begs the question of what degree of 'dependency' on translation is to be taken as an indicator of systemic weakness, as both cases fall clearly below fifty percent, with native production far outweighing imported translated works.

Furthermore, such a simplistic across-the-board average ignores the internal complexities of both systems which, on closer inspection, reveal considerable disparities regarding the proportion of translated works between publishers, with some companies barely reliant on translations, whilst others well overstep the half-way mark. This disparity is particularly salient in the case of Breton, with the difference ranging from between less than 1 % and nearly three quarters.

Table 3. Percentage of translations by company (In descending order. Welsh publishers in italics)

| Company | Total works | Translations (number) | Translations (percentage) |
|----------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Sav-Heol | 57 | 42 | 73.68 % |
| An Here | 146 | 92 | 63.01 % |
| <i>Gwasg y Dref Wen</i> | 221 | 121 | 54.75 % |
| TES | 103 | 50 | 48.54 % |
| Al Lanv | 69 | 32 | 46.38 % |
| <i>Atebol</i> | 218 | 100 | 45.87 % |
| An Alarc'h | 86 | 35 | 40.70 % |
| Skrid | 41 | 16 | 39.02 % |
| Hor Yezh | 68 | 20 | 29.41 % |
| Mouladurioù Hor Yezh | 142 | 38 | 26.76 % |
| <i>Gwasg Garreg Gwalch</i> | 437 | 89 | 20.37 % |
| Skol Vreizh | 28 | 5 | 17.86 % |
| Al Liamm | 179 | 25 | 13.97 % |
| <i>Y Lolfa</i> | 2,223 | 252 | 11.34 % |
| Keit Vimp Bev (KVB) | 204 | 17 | 8.33 % |

Figure 1. Percentage of translations (dark bar) relative to the respective average (light bar) for each language

Non-fiction books play a marginal role, which might be taken to indicate that translation is seen as a part of the literary system *sensu stricto*: only 6.7 % in the case of Breton (Number of works: Adult 15 adult + 8 younger readers), but higher for Welsh at 14.23 % (Number of works: Adult 36 + 44 younger readers), with the difference possibly attributable to the larger overall number of publications in

Welsh, which offers greater leeway for a wider variety of genres. It is interesting to note that a non-negligible number of non-fiction books published in Welsh (i.e. 17 in total) deal with mental health issues, especially age-related Alzheimer and dementia, reflecting the large number of people aged 65 and over especially concentrated in the Welsh-speaking area of North Wales (Welsh Government 2020), with translation serving as a means of filling this need quickly and reliably (i.e. by qualified writers).

One of the immediately most striking differences is the source languages. In the case of Welsh, almost all the translation are from English, barring two notable examples from French, namely the classic *La Peste* ('The Plague') by Albert Camus and the equally classic Tintin comic *Le Crabe aux pinces d'or* ('The Crab with the Golden Claws') by Hergé, which together account for a mere anecdotal 0,36 % of all of the translations.

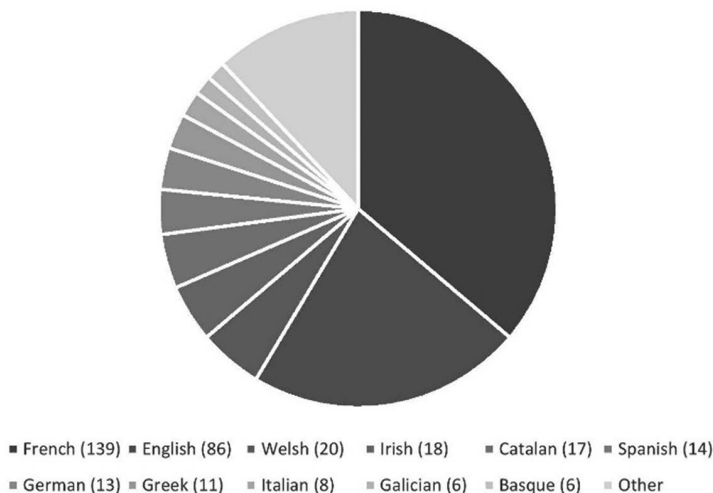
It is interesting to note that well-known classics and bestsellers of literature for young and teen-aged readers in English are translated *en masse* into Welsh, especially by Atebol and Gwasg Garreg Gwalch, e.g. *The Famous Five* (10 out of 21 titles available), *The Secret Seven* (5/15) and *The Far Away Tree* (all 4 titles available) both by Enid Blyton, *Horrid Henry* by Francesca Simon (18/24), 15 titles by the well-known performer and writer David Walliams, the *Fame School*, *Heart Magazine* and *Stadium School* series by Cindy Jeffries (17), *Little Princess* (7) by Tony Ross (7), *Oliver Moon* by Sue Mongredien (3) and 6 books by Children's Laureate, Michael Morpurgo, including the famous *War Horse*. Above and beyond the literary merit of these collections and the relative ease involved in finding competent translators from English, the decision to translate them could be accounted for by the need to create a common cultural bond between Welsh- and English-speaking children in Wales so that the former do not feel 'left out' or excluded from 'mainstream' (i.e. predominant English-language) culture. The same logic may also be seen to apply in the case of the wide array of children's non-fiction books by the current Archdruid, Myrddin ap Dafydd, amongst others, available separately in both Welsh and English rendering it impossible to discern which of the two is the source text, often – although not exclusively – Welsh-themed. Similar Welsh-interest dual edition books also exist for adults covering history, nature, traditions and crafts, etc.

It should be noted, however, that this influx of literature translated from English by no means detracts from the production of original works in Welsh, thus undermining the argument that largescale importing necessarily renders a literary system weak.

By contrast, the Breton literary system is radically different regarding the array of source languages, with a sweepingly broader range of twenty-four different languages in total, namely (in descending order, number of works in brackets): French (139); English (86); Welsh (20); Irish (18); Catalan (17); Spanish (14); German (13); Modern Greek (11); Italian (8); Galician (6); Basque (6); Other (46), viz. (in descending order): Danish (4); Hebrew, etc. (Bible translations) (4); Russian (3); Ancient Greek (3); Russian (3); Bengali (2); Chinese (2); Dutch (2); Armenian (1); Frisian (1); Georgian (1); Icelandic (1); Occitan (1); Portuguese (1); Scottish Gael-

ic (1); Yiddish (1). The six compilations include Arthurian legends, poetry, plays and two volumes of short stories by key classical European authors, ranging from Euripides, Marlow, Pushkin, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Hoffmann and Grimm, all part of the pioneering work of by the prolific Roparz Hemon, together with a compilation of love stories translated from various European languages, including Swedish published in the anthology *Pa ne varver ket en aner...*

Figure 2. Main source languages (Breton)



Although some common themes can be discerned, it is clear that an entirely different dynamic is at work here, with translation playing a substantially different role in the Breton and Welsh literary systems. Unlike Welsh, there is a general tendency towards translating world classics, e.g. Italo Calvino, Cervantes, Arthur Conan Doyle, Gabriel García Márquez, Homer, Kafka, Shakespeare, Robert Louis Stevenson, Jonathan Swift, Stefan Zweig, etc., together – albeit to a lesser extent – with popular best-selling authors such as Steven King. In a display of what Diaz Fouces (2005: 8) refers to as “unplanned planning”, several authors, e.g. Peter Tremayne (3 works) and Petros Markaris (5) also appear to be the result of the translators’ personal tastes (see Baxter 2021). This dynamic typically associated with minority languages geared to increasing the prestige canon with the added advantage of not having to pay rights has intensified over recent years via the financial aid program (see Baxter 2021).

It is unsurprising that English should account for such a large share given its place as the major world language. Although French clearly leads the way, as does English in the case of Welsh, there are notable differences. While Breton does translate Breton-interest books and books originally written in French by Breton-authors (e.g. *Un recteur de l’île de Sein* by Henri Queffélec and *Les ploucs* by Youenn C’óic), this common trend is also in tension with a completely different dynamic.

Breton often imports works from the classic French canon, e.g. *Colomba* by Prosper Mérimée, *La Chèvre de monsieur Seguin* by Alphonse Daudet and *Le Misanthrope* by Molière. Unlike Welsh, beyond simply bolstering the canon and rather than creating a common culture, as most – if not all – adult readers will already be familiar with the works in the original, the aim seems to symbolically place Breton literature on a par with whilst at the same time rendering it autonomous of French and any other world literature, symbolically rendering French equally ‘foreign’. This could be taken as an indication of translation strengthening rather than weakening the Breton literary system.

It is notable that minority languages figure prominently as source languages, with Welsh, Irish and Catalan together accounting for 18.82 %, rising to a fifth when taking into account other less often translated minority languages such as Basque, Occitan and Scottish Gaelic, well ahead of major languages such as Spanish and German. This is attributable to two inter-related factors: first, a sense of ‘kinship’, especially with other Celtic languages with more highly developed literary systems; and second, thanks to the grants made available by the *Generalitat* (Catalan Autonomous Government) for translating books written in Catalan in a bid to make the literature more widely known on a par with other major languages, which had a very notable impact on An Here.

It would seem almost churlish to suggest that exposing Breton-speaking readers to works translated from languages to which they would otherwise most likely not have access via French, especially underexposed minority languages literary systems such as Basque, Catalan, Irish or Welsh, somehow necessarily constitutes a systemic ‘weakness’. It would seem fairer to frame this, on the contrary, in terms of an additional asset that only serves to enrich and strengthen the Breton literary system. What this indicates is that whether ‘reliance’ on translation (however that is to be quantified) is to be seen as a weakness or a strength is clearly open to debate, calling for a more nuanced, granular analysis of the different tensions and dynamics at work at any time withing the different layers of any given minority language literary system.

Finally, to apprehend the complexities of the internal dynamics involved, it is interesting to examine the relative weight played by translated works for adults as compared with those aimed at children and younger readers. As reflected in Table 4, in both cases the overwhelming proportion of translated works are destined for children and younger readers, most notably in the case of Welsh:

Table 4. Percentage of translations by age range

| | Children and younger readers | Adults |
|--------|------------------------------|--------|
| Welsh | 89.3 % | 10.7 % |
| Breton | 60.8 % | 39.2 % |

This can be accounted for by a sudden need to quickly fill a void, for example when minority languages are introduced into schools, as has also been noted for other minority languages, for example: “Galician children’s literature was formed

between 1968 and 1978, thanks to indigenous works and to the contribution of translations” (Domínguez Pérez 2011: 14). Works for young children are also quick and easy to translate as they involve less text than adult literature and are less complex.

However, once again, on closer inspection the picture is far from clear across the board. First, despite its preeminent position at certain times, translation by no means necessarily ousts or eclipses domestic production. For example, the Welsh early-reading series *Rwdlan* first published in 1983 by the prolific author and language activist, Angharad Tomos, has burgeoned into an iconic figure of many a Welsh-speaker’s childhood, with its own spinoff television series on the Welsh-language channel S4C. As already noted, several well-established authors also contribute to what is a healthy original body of work for children in Welsh, whereby it would seem at best unfair and at worst factually incorrect to describe the system as a whole as ‘weak’ in this key respect.

Turning to Breton, the contrast between the two publishing houses specialising in literature for children and younger readers, An Here and Keit Vimp Bev, both launched in the early 1980s with the aim of satisfying the sudden upsurge in demand created by the growth of the *Diwan* schools, couldn’t be starker regarding their reliance on translations. When discounting the small fraction of titles aimed at adult readers, for Keit Vimp Bev only 7.8 % are translations, as opposed to 63.4 % for An Here. In other words, while the latter relies overwhelming on translations, the former relies primarily on domestic production, actually making a concerted effort to promote homegrown literature, including by many younger writers, with the *Priz ar Vugale* and *Priz ar Yaouankiz* (2004) awards for young people’s and children’s literature originally composed in Breton and run in collaboration with the association Féa since 2007 and 2004 respectively. As such, it does not do justice to the system to describe it as ‘weak’ simply on the grounds that on average there is a certain propensity towards translation – perhaps no greater in comparative terms than major languages – which, it should be remembered, falls short of the 50 % benchmark, thereby not adversely impinging upon the on-going creation of a homegrown literary canon.

5. Conclusions

One can only concur with the general consensus in the field to the effect that translation fulfils a key role for minority languages, serving as a useful tool for revitalisation and status planning, notably by bolstering the canon with prestigious world classics. However, a more fine-grained analysis reveals that this role is multifaceted and susceptible to variations within any given literary system, be it that of a majority or minority languages. It should, therefore, always be understood in the light within the scope of specific periods of development and in relation to specific aims, such as the need to respond to a sudden upsurge of demand for children’s literature with the introduction of such languages into the mainstream curriculum. The choices of individual publishing companies and especially the public financing policies that prevail at any given moment can also been

seen to have a significant bearing on what is published and are liable to change over time.

This study shows that the translation dynamics at work within the two minority language systems analysed are indeed internally complex and at times even contradictory depending upon the specific sociolinguistic factors at play at any given time. What this means in practice is that it is impossible to generalise not only concerning individual minority language literary systems but, all the more so, when comparing translations patterns across different systems grouped together under the all-encompassing umbrella term ‘minority languages’.

Certain minority languages do indeed rely heavily on translation in order to bolster their literary canon at a specific phase of their development. For example, Cornish, currently undergoing a process of revitalisation, has a very limited pool of several hundred speakers (not all of whom are fully proficient) to draw on in order to generate a significant body of original fiction and thus relies on translation, essentially from English, to supplement the limited number works originally produced in Cornish.² Nevertheless, the findings of this study provide concrete evidence that corroborates the misgivings expressed in this regard by Bassnett (1998: 127), rendering it meaningless to make sweeping claims concerning the supposedly inherent ‘weakness’ of minority language literary systems as a whole based upon their assumed across-the-board (over-)reliance on translation, failing to address the complexities within and the comparative differences between them.

Indeed, it could be argued to the contrary that translation can actually be taken as gauge of strength as and when it does not overshadow or detract domestic literary production:

Un gwrthwynebiad i gyfieithu llenyddiaeth i'r Gymraeg yw y gall y testunau cyfieithiedig gymryd lle llenyddiaeth Gymraeg wreiddiol. Yr wrthddadl yw bod cyfieithu yn gallu arllwys ‘gwaed newydd’, fel petai, i'r iaith y cyfieithir iddi, gan ei chyfoethogi. Mae hyn yn arbennig o wir, efallai, am iaith leiafrifol. (Kaufmann 2009: 89)³

If indeed minority literary systems such as Welsh and Breton are deemed to be by means ‘weak’, then it is primarily a reflection of the minority status of the languages themselves in both sociolinguist (official status, presence in compul-

2. Monolingual original fiction represents a mere 10 (18.2 %) out of the total of 55 titles currently available in Cornish, including 10 bilingual works where the Cornish text is also clearly a translation from the English. The vast majority is made up of translations from English (89.9 %), with an emphasis on adult and children’s classics (e.g. *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, *The War of the Worlds*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *The Wind in the Willows*, *Winnie the Pooh*, *Treasure Island*, etc. (Sources: Everttype Publishing <<https://www.everttype.com/cornish.html>>; Kernewegva <<https://www.kernewegva.com/lyvrow.html>>; Kowethas an Yeth Kernewek <<https://cornish-language.org/shop/>>; The Cornish Store <<https://thecornishstore.co.uk/shop/cornish-books/>>).
3. “One objection to translating literature into Welsh is that the translated texts can take the place of original Welsh literature. The counter-argument is that translation can pour ‘new blood’, so to speak, into the language it is translated into, [thus] enriching it. This is particularly true, perhaps, of a minority language”. (Author’s translation)

sory education, etc.) and purely quantitative terms, i.e. a reduced potential readership entailing inevitable financial constraints affecting the viability of publishing in general.

However weak the two systems discussed may apparently seem, they nevertheless appear able to maintain what could be described as an increasingly robust state of ill-health, within which translation plays an important, multifaceted role.

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