

# AN ANALYTICAL AUDIT OF TWENTY YEARS OF LITERARY TRANSLATION INTO BRETON

**Robert Neal Baxter**

Universidade de Vigo

baxter@uvigo.gal

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9484-5001>

[Received 20/04/20; accepted 13/06/20]

## **Abstract**

After presenting the key role played by translation in strengthening the literary canon of minoritized languages, this paper goes on to provide a detailed overview and analysis of the past twenty years of Breton literary translation since the turn of the millennium, covering a variety of aspects ranging from the overall evolution over time, target publics, the genres and the authors selected for translation, the range of source languages and the translators themselves, integrating a gender-based outlook whenever necessary. Taken as an integral part of the publishing sector, comparisons are drawn throughout regarding originals published in Breton for the same period. Particular emphasis is also laid on gauging the initial of the Literary Translation Program as a means of determining and potentially redirecting the overall strategy for literary translation going forwards.

## **Keywords**

Breton; literary translation; planning; minoritized language; qualitative analysis

## **0. Introduction**

This paper seeks to provide a detailed presentation and analysis of the past twenty years of literary translation into Breton, spanning the period 2000-2019 (both inclusive), covering works aimed at both adults and young adults. The study explores a variety of aspects ranging from the overall evolution of the sector over time in comparison to the wider publishing sector in general, the target publics (adults vs. young people), the genres and the authors selected and/or eligible for translation, the range of source languages and the translators themselves, including a gender-based perspective as and when appropriate.

The period under study is sufficiently extensive to provide a long-term overview revealing general trends despite any minor fluctuations, whilst at

the same time highlighting any major deviations (troughs and more especially peaks), indicative of future directions and trends.

On the premise that translation is an integral part of the wider publishing sector as a whole for minoritized languages such as Breton (see below), comparisons are also drawn throughout regarding originals published in Breton for the same period. Special attention is also paid to the impact of the Literary Translation Program launched in 2013 with a view to gauging to what extent it has a potential to determine and redirecting translation strategy in this field going forwards.

In order to fully appreciate the context within which the study is set, it is first useful to provide a brief account of the current situation and status of the Breton language.

Breton is the only modern Celtic language spoken in Continental Europe and, as part of the Brythonic branch, is directly related to Welsh and Cornish and more distantly to the Goidelic languages spoken in the Isle of Man, Ireland and Scotland.

For a variety of reasons, including the onset compulsory schooling in French and active repression of the part of the French Republic, the language underwent a significant decline in the number of speakers as of the mid-20th Century onwards, falling from over a million speakers in 1950 to no more than 213,000 speakers in 2018, i.e. 5.5% of the population in the 5 Departments of historical Brittany according to a recent official survey carried out by the Breton Region (see Rannvro Breizh/Région Bretagne 2018), although the spread is extremely uneven throughout the territory and across age groups.

Unlike Welsh or Irish, Breton still lacks any official recognition or status and even timid moves towards normalising its use in the public sphere still continue to bear the brunt of active hostility and overt repression on the part of the powers that be, be they the apparatus of the French State itself or its elected mouthpieces in Brittany, as clearly demonstrated by the recent court battle that raged over the refusal to allow a child to be registered with the Breton name *Fañch* on the grounds that the ‘un-French’ letter ‘ñ’ threatened the unity of the State<sup>1</sup>.

However, flying in the face of the ongoing opposition, there has been a steady growth of interest in the language that has been enjoying a slow yet sure process of language regeneration and revitalisation over recent decades as testified to by the year on year exponential growth of children attending bilingual classes, rising to over 18,000 pupils in 2018 (i.e. approx. 2% of all pupils in Brittany), with 73% of people were favourable to more Breton being taught in schools and according to the same survey cited above.

Breton is also more visible in the public sphere thanks to a large extent to the setting up of the *Ofis Publik ar Brezhoneg* (‘Public Office for the Breton Language’) in 2010, responsible, amongst other activities, for launching and overseeing the *Ya d’ar brezhoneg* (‘Yes to Breton’) initiative designed to engage civil society and local administration in promoting and stimulating the

---

1 For a complete account of the case and sources, see: [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Affaire\\_Fañch](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Affaire_Fañch)

use of the language in daily life. There has also been a significant upsurge of interest in adult language learning, now liable for regional funding<sup>2</sup>.

All of these factors led to a surge the number of people literate in the language, thereby broadening the potential demand for literature of all sorts in Breton, including translations.

### 1. Translation and minoritized languages

In common parlance, translation is more often than not taken to be exclusively synonymous with its communicative function, i.e. enabling speakers of one language to access works written in another language with which they are unfamiliar. While this is indeed often the case, such a reductionist view does not account for the multiplicity of other possible functions that translation can and does perform, many of which are especially salient for minoritized languages:

even as a communicative activity, translation is not always associated with a lack of understanding. When a given company makes the decision to have its advertisements or the labels of its products translated into the minority language of a state, such decision [*Sic.*] is not motivated by the inability of the recipients to understand the major language (García González 2002, p. 107).

Drawing on Polysystems Theory initially devised by Itamar Even-Zohar as a means of explaining internal cultural complexity and the interplay between cultures especially with regard to language and literature and translation as intercultural exchange and later further developed by Gideon Toury, seminal studies in the field (e.g. Cruces Colado 1993; Fernández Rodríguez 1995) and later research have underlined the central role played by both translation (Luna Alonso 2006; 2012, p. 23-26; Zabaleta 2002) and interpreting (Baxter 2013) for minoritized languages. In such cases, translation can be seen to contribute to status raising by bolstering their own “weak” literary systems (Toury 1985, p. 3) via importing literary works from other systems, especially high prestige works from what is often refer to as the canon of “universal literature”.

This is best understood within the scope of the so-called “cultural turn” in Translation Studies which took place in the 1980s (Liu 2012; Snell-Hornby 2006, p. 47-67) and more specifically the “sociological turn” (Angelelli 2014), also variously referred to as ‘socio-translation’ (Gambier 2006, p. 2007) or the ‘sociology of translation’ (Wolf & Fukari 2007). This new paradigm provides a powerful interdisciplinary framework to explore and gain insights into the sociocultural role played by translation as an integral part of or a tool potentially furthering wider language planning efforts for minoritized languages (Diaz Fouces 2005). Indeed, if as St.-Pierre (2005) states, the role played by translation as a cultural practice in general can hardly

---

2 For the mission statement of the LTP, see: <http://www.brezhoneg.bzh/156-opab.htm>

For a detailed description of the *Ya d’ar brezhoneg* initiative, see: <http://www.brezhoneg.bzh/82-ya-d-ar-brezhoneg.htm>

For more information on support for adult learning, see: <https://www.bretagne.bzh/actions/langues-regionales/breton/se-former-langue-bretonne/>

be overstated, then it is all the more so in the case of minoritized languages and their associated cultural systems.

There is, in fact, a long-standing tradition of translating as a means of reinforcing and broadening the base of the Breton literary system, whilst at the same time exposing it to outside influences in order to renew it stylistically and thematically, stretching as far back as the *Gwalarn* generation (*Skol Walarn*) named after the literary magazine of the same name first launched in 1925 (See Favereau 2003), which saw translation as an integral part of its mission of “creat[ing] a new Breton literature that could be counted among international Modernist literatures.” (Denez & Hupel 2011)

Notable examples of outstanding translations from this period produced by authors in their own right include (in chronological order): *Riders of the Sea* by Synge (trad. Youenn Drezen, 1926); *The Queen of Spades* (*Пиковая дама*) by Pushkin (trad. Roparz Hemon through English, 1928); *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Merchant of Venice* by Shakespeare (trad. Yann-Loeiz, 1927); five stories from *The Decameron* by Boccaccio (trad. Roparz Hemon, 1931); *Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe (trad. Roparz Hemon, 1934); *Reynard the Fox* (*Reineke Fuchs*) by Goethe (trad. Jakez Riou, 1936); *The Shadow of the Glen* by Synge (trad. Youenn Drezen, 1938); *Macbeth* by Shakespeare (trad. Roparz Hemon, 1941); *The Mayor of Zalamea* (*El Alcalde de Zalamea*) by Calderón de la Barca (trad. Youenn Drezen, 1942).

Following a presentation of the methodology used, including the selection criteria for the data pool of publishing companies included in the study, this paper goes on to present and analyse the translations published in Breton between 2000-2019 in comparison with originals over the same period, examining a series of different aspects set against the backdrop of language policy for minoritized languages, where translation is taken to be an integral part of the wider publishing sector.

## 2. Methodology

The data compiled and analysed cover works of literary fiction targeted exclusively at adults and young adults. In order to maintain the internal coherence of the data set, graphic novels, which account for an insignificant fraction of the translations published over this period, were also excluded from the pool, alongside titles aimed at young and very young children.

Also with a view to maintaining the coherence of the data pool, only complete works are included in this study, i.e. excluding excerpts and other fragments translated into Breton such as those which feature regularly in such well-known literary journals as the bimonthly *Al Liamm-Tir na nÓg*<sup>3</sup>, first published in 1946 and currently running to over 400 issues, with a section dedicated specifically to translations, following on in the *Gwalarn* tradition, which would merit a separate study in its own right.

---

3 See the official company website: [www.alliamm.com](http://www.alliamm.com)

As no database is as yet available for Breton translations on a par, for example, with the pioneering *Galizan Translation Library*<sup>4</sup>, it was necessary to compile the corpus analysed manually based on a series of reliable primary and secondary online sources.

The primary sources used were as follows, always deferring to the Breton-language version of the sites whenever available:

### 2.1. Primary sources<sup>5</sup>:

- *Kuzul ar Brezhoneg (Bodad aozadurioù sevenadurel brezhonek)* [‘The Breton Council. Consortium of Breton Cultural Associations’]: This site run by the Cultural Consortium set up in 1952 includes an extensive and up-to-date catalogue covering 14 publishers of books, magazines and CD-DVDs for all ages primarily in Breton but also in French and English, with a total of 916 books available in Breton, including literature as well as works of non-fiction and dictionaries and grammars;
- *Klask. Stal ar brezhoneg* [‘Search. The Breton Shop’]: This commercial on-line site offers a very wide array of Brittany-related books and CD-DVDs published by 76 companies (of which, however, 51 only include between 1 and 5 titles) in both French and Breton, with an extensive range of Breton literature, non-fiction, dictionaries and language-related titles for readers of all ages.

These two primary sites were used in conjunction with the individual editors’ own official websites as necessary, with occasional reference to the following secondary sources in order to complete any information or works found to be lacking in the primary sources:

### 2.2. Secondary sources<sup>6</sup>:

- *COOP Breizh*: The website of the long-standing and well-known cultural company founded in 1957 by the *Kendalc’h* confederation

---

4 *Biblioteca de traducción galega* (Bitraga): <https://bitraga.gal/>

5 The sites in question are to be found at:  
<https://www.brezhoneg.org/br/catalogues>  
<http://www.klask.com/>

6 The sites are:  
<https://www.coop-breizh.fr/1030-livres-en-breton>  
[https://br.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roll\\_al\\_levrioù\\_e\\_brezhoneg\\_troet\\_diwar\\_yezhoù\\_all](https://br.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roll_al_levrioù_e_brezhoneg_troet_diwar_yezhoù_all)  
[https://br.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roll\\_al\\_levrioù\\_brezhonek\\_troet\\_diwar\\_yezhoù\\_all\\_hervez\\_ar\\_bloavezhioù](https://br.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roll_al_levrioù_brezhonek_troet_diwar_yezhoù_all_hervez_ar_bloavezhioù)  
[https://br.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roll\\_an\\_droourien\\_vrezhonek\\_hag\\_al\\_levrioù\\_troet\\_ganto](https://br.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roll_an_droourien_vrezhonek_hag_al_levrioù_troet_ganto)  
<https://catalogue.bnf.fr/index.do>

of traditional music and dance circles. It specialises in production, publishing and literary and musical distribution, showcasing books and other items related to Breton and Celtic culture, including a broad selection of Breton language books of all kinds organised by genres and target age groups in its 'Books in Breton' catalogue section, with a subsection dedicated specifically to 'Translations of Classical Works'.

- *Wikipedia*: The Breton version of the well-known collaborative, open encyclopaedia provides a series of three very useful entries, affording a wealth of detailed and organised information concerning the year, genre and source languages of translated works as well as information on the translators themselves, namely:
  - 'List of the Breton books translated from other languages'
  - 'List of the Breton books translated from other languages by year'
  - 'List of Breton-language translators and the books translated by them'
- *Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BnF)*: The searchable on-line database of the General Catalogue of the National Library of France. By law, a copy of every work published in the French State must be deposited and should, therefore, in theory be available for consultation in the catalogue irrespective of the language. The records generally include details of the translator and the source language whenever available.

### 2.3. The publishing companies selected

This study is limited exclusively to translated literature aimed at adult and young adult people. As such, therefore, certain well-known publishers were excluded from the study on the grounds that they publish works primarily or exclusively for young and/or very young children, including most notably, for example, Sav-heol, Bannoù Heol. Works of this kind were also excluded from the publishers included in the study as and when applicable.

The companies retained for the study (see Table 1) are well-established and renowned in Breton-language circles and are taken here to be representative of the sector as a whole by dint of the relative contribution that they make to the field of Breton literature in general, i.e. both original works and translations, in terms of the sheer volume and number of works they produce.

The primary pool of publishing companies analysed is as follows:

- *An Alarc'h*: Established in 2003 specialising in books in and related to the Breton language with a large proportion of translated titles.

- *Aber*: Attached to the literary revue of the same name launched in 2000, publishing exclusively in Breton with a large proportion of translated works.
- *Al Liamm*: The longest standing company specialising in Breton-language literature originally attached to the literary revue of the same name (see above), publishing exclusively in Breton.
- *Al Lanv*: Attached to the monthly magazine of the same name that first appeared in 1980, publishing exclusively in Breton.
- *Hor Yezh*: Established in 1980, specialising exclusively in Breton-language literature. It is unrelated to the Breton-language linguistic journal of the same name.
- *Keit Vimp Bev*: Set up in 1982, specialising in Breton-language literature aimed at children and younger readers (including comic albums) and older learners. The data collected in this study excludes all works for children and people under 15 based on their catalogue sections. This company also responsible for the weekly paper *YA!*.
- *Skrid*: Initially created as a collection within the *Hor Yezh* company, it now operates as a publisher in its own right, producing books exclusively in Breton.
- *Skol Vreizh*: Set up by the *Ar Falz* association founded in 1932, specialising in Breton language and culture. Although publishing primarily in French, it also offers a large selection of books in Breton.
- It was also deemed necessary to include a series of isolated translations considered to be significant by dint either of the prominence of the title in question and/or in order to represent the number of sources languages more faithfully which were published by other companies generally specialised in fields other than Breton language literature and which would otherwise have been excluded from the study. The translations and companies in question are as follows:
  - Published by *Le Temps/An Amzer*, a small publishing house set up in 2010 publishing primarily in French, with some Breton and Gallo:
  - [English] *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* by J. K. Rowling (trad. Mark Kerrain, 2012)

- [English] *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* by J. K. Rowling (trad. Mark Kerrain, 2017)
- Published by *An Treizher*, a small company set up in 1997 specialising primarily in in theological works in Breton:
- [Russian] *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man* (*Сон смешного человека*) by Fyodor Dostoyevsky (trad. André Markowicz & Yann-Varc'h Thorel, 2006)
- [Russian] 2000 *The Twelve* (*Двенадцать*) by Alexander Blok (trad. Koulizh Kedez & André Markowicz, 2000)
- Published by *Apogée*, a company established in 1991 publishing literature and non-fiction primarily in French, but also offering a small selection of mainly non-fiction works in Breton:
- [Chinese] *Soul Mountain* (*靈山*) by Gao Xingjian (trad. Yann-Varc'h Thorel, 2010)
- Published by *A.R.D.A.*, a seemingly otherwise inexistent company apparently based in Argenteuil.
- [English] *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien (trad. Alan Dipode, 2001)
- Published by *Sav-Heol*, a company set up in 1991, now specialising exclusively in Breton-language books for learners and children:
- [French] Selection short stories by Guy de Maupassant (trad. Mark Kerrain, 2018)
- [Galizan] *Winter Letters* (*Cartas de inverno*) by Agustín Fernández Paz (trad. Mark Kerrain, 2013)
- Published by TIR (*Travaux d'Investigation et de Recherche*), set up in 2007 by the Breton Department of the University of Roazhon (Rennes) 2, specialising in language and literary research:
- [German] *Night songs* (*Nachtgesänge*) by Friedrich Hölderlin (trad. Aleksandr ar Gall, Bernez Tangi, Gwendal Denez & Jean-Frédéric Kirjuhel, 2015)

Table 1 provides a company-by-company breakdown of the books published in Breton in alphabetical order for the period in hand, including both original works and translations, with the percentage of translations indicated in

brackets for each company. Originals published by the six, secondary-source companies marked by an asterisk were not taken into account for comparative purposes in this study.

	Originals	Translations
An Alarc'h	37	25 (40.3%)
Aber	23	8 (25.8%)
Al Liamm	59	11 (15.7%)
Apogée	*	1 (-)
A.R.D.A.	*	1 (-)
An Treizher	*	2 (-)
Al Lanv	12	16 (57.1%)
An Amzer	*	2 (-)
Hor Yezh	26	24 (48%)
Keit Vimp Bev	122	11 (8.3%)
Sav-Heol	*	2 (-)
Skrid	10	9 (47.4%)
Skol Vreizh	39	7 (15.2%)
TIR	*	1 (-)

Table 1: Original and translated works of fiction published per company (2000-2019).

Bearing in mind the differences in the overall volume of books published by each company in absolute terms, what this table clearly reveals is that the proportion of translations varies widely from company one company to the next, with some considerably more reliant on translations than others, e.g. *Skrid* (15.1% above the mean at 32.2%) and *An Alarc'h* (8% percent above the mean). In the case of *Al Lanv* (24.8% above the mean), the number of translations published totals more than original works. At the other end of the spectrum, by comparison, the percentage of translations is considerably lower for *Skol Vreizh* (17.1% below the mean) and especially *Keit Vimp Bev* (24.0% below the mean).

### 3. Analysis

This study focuses exclusively on literary works of fiction, which account for the bulk of the translations published over the period analysed (93.1%), as opposed to a mere 9 works of non-fiction (6.9%), 4 of which were published in the same year (2015). Translated works of non-fiction cover several topics, ranging from classics such as Primo Levi's *If This Is a Man* (trad. Serj Richard, 2015), Martin Luther's *Sola Fide* (trans. Gérard Cornillet, 2016) and political activism (*Désobéir: le petit manuel* by Xavier Renou,

trans. Dewi Siberil, 2015) to Breton history, with a two-volume bilingual work on the Celts<sup>7</sup>.

Following a general presentation of the evolution of the number of translated works as compared with originals over the two decades under discussion and a description of the *Literary Translation Program* (LTP), this paper goes on to analyse several specific aspects, namely: the target publics (within the stated scope of the study); the genres, authors and the works selected and/or eligible for translation; the source languages; and an insight into the translators involved. As and when applicable, a brief gender-based analysis is also provided.

### 3.1. General overview

Fig. 1 shows the overall trend for the Breton-language publishing sector (fiction only) as a whole, for the twenty-year period in hand. The lull experienced between 2000 and 2004 was followed by an exponential spike in 2005 for both translations and originals, albeit significantly more so in the case of the latter. Thereafter, the gradual upwards drift stabilised with other, lesser spikes in 2013 and 2016, in this case slightly more pronounced for translations than for originals, before finally trailing off slightly in 2019 after the initial boom.

The fact that translation can be seen to run more or less in parallel to the evolution of original works published in Breton clearly indicates that translation is an integral part of the Breton-language publishing sector as a whole. It also becomes apparent from this comparative graph that while the proportion of translations varies across companies as noted previously (see Table 1), the overall proportion of translation remains generally stable as a proportion of publishing as a whole in the sector.

---

<sup>7</sup> *Ar Gelted kozh 1. An ergerzhout hag ar c'henwerzh / Les celtes 1. Les moyens de communications et le commerce* and *Ar Gelted kozh 2. Ijinerezh, labour-douar ha sevelloened / Les Celtes 2. Techniques, agriculture et élevage*, based on the notes originally written in French by Meven Mordiern in the mid-20th Century and translated into Breton by François Vallée (a.k.a. Abherve), republished in book form in 2015 and 2017 respectively.

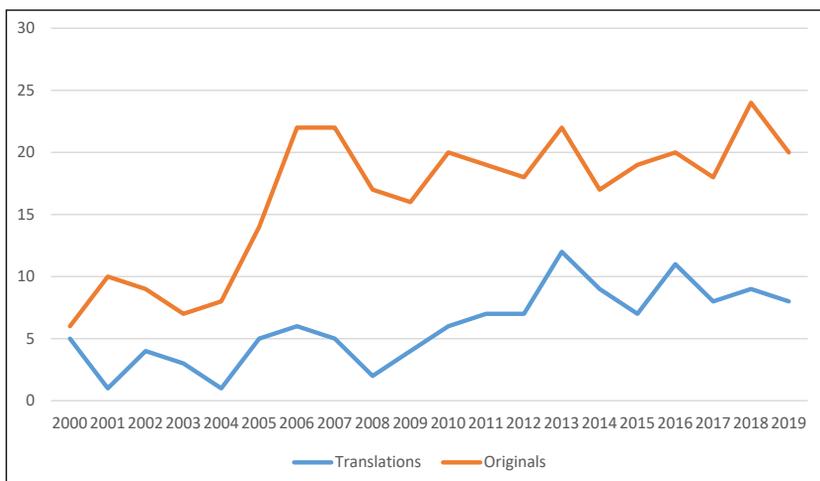


Fig. 1. Year by year breakdown of original and translated works of fiction (2000-2019).

Significantly, the spike registered in 2013 coincides with the first translations published with the backing of the *Literary Translation Program* (*Programm treiñ lennege*)<sup>8</sup>, run under the auspices of the Office for the Breton Language (see above). To date, the Program has financed 29 translations<sup>9</sup> spread over a range of companies, accounting for over a third (38%) of all of the translations published over the period analysed. It is also worth noting that this spurt mirrors a similar, albeit less significant, growth in the number of originals supported by Rannvro Breizh /Région Bretagne (Brittany Region) which predates the translation program<sup>10</sup>.

Very much in line with the endeavour to bolster the literary canon through translation whilst at the same time facilitating direct access to world literature without having to resort to French, the stated aim of the Program is to “consolidate the place of Breton as a language of communication and cultural expression. The Breton-speaking readership, and especially young people, must be able to be familiar with world literature directly through Breton. Focusing on translation will inevitably enrich the Breton language and in the long-term will encourage people to create of new works in Breton.” (Author’s translation).<sup>11</sup>

8 For full details of the Program and the works eligible for support, see: <http://www.brezhoneg.bzh/71-programm-trein-lennege.htm>

9 Two of which are not included here are the graphic novel *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi and the non-fiction work *If This Is a Man* by Primo Levi

10 For full details, see: <https://www.bretagne.bzh/br/aides/fiches/edition-ouvrages-breton/>

11 “Lañset eo bet ar programm-mañ abalamour da ziazezañ plas ar brezhoneg evel yezh kehentiñ ha yezh a sevenadur. Dav eo d’al lennerien vrezhonek, ar re yaouank peurgetket, gallout ober anaoudegezh gant lennegezh ar bed-holl war-eeun dre ar brezhoneg. Ma vez

As far as the source languages are concerned, of the 131 works designated as being eligible for support through the Program (see Fig. 2), most are in English, accounting for almost a half (63 works: 48.1%), followed a long way behind by French (19 works: 14.5%), almost on a par with Spanish (17 works: 13.0%) and German (9 works: 6.9%).

This is to an extent echoes the results yielded by the analysis of the works actually translated for the period in hand (see Fig. 3), although other source languages eligible for support remain as yet unattended (namely Albanian, Arabic, Basque, Czech, Japanese, Norwegian, Portuguese), probably owing to a dearth of translators available.

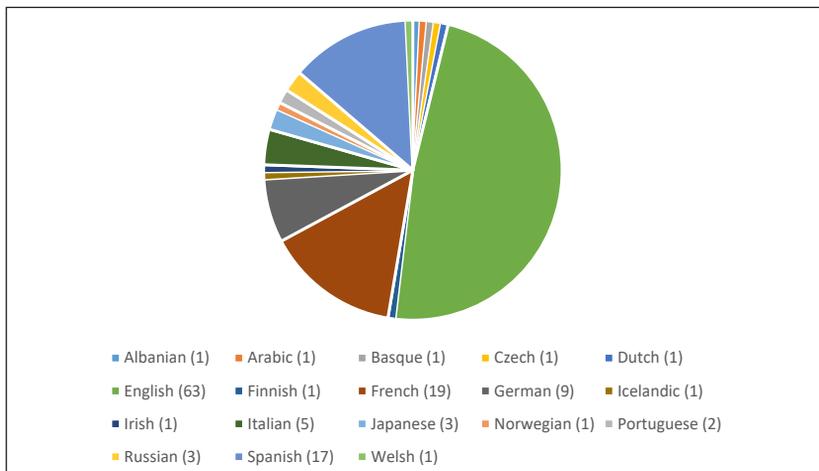


Fig. 2. Breakdown of the source languages of the works eligible for support through the Literary Translation Program

It is perhaps surprising that given their cultural and historical affinity the list includes only two works originally written in any of the other Celtic languages, viz. Welsh (*Un Nos Ola Leuad* [*One Moonlit Night*] by Caradog Pritchard) and Irish (*An Béal Bocht* by Brian Ó Nualláin<sup>12</sup>), although the latter appears to have been in actual fact finally translated from the English version *The Poor Mouth* (trad. Kristian ar Braz, 2014).

Nor does Modern Greek feature in this list despite the number of works translated from this language and, therefore, the apparent availability of at least one active translator.

---

lakaet ar pouez war al labour treiñ-se e vo pinvidikaet ar brezhoneg a-dra-sur ha war hir dermen e vo broudet an dud da grouiñ oberennoù nevez e brezhoneg.”

12 (Anglicised: Brian O’Nolan). This work was published under the pen name Myles na gCopaleen, although the author is perhaps better known by his pseudonym Flann O’Brien.

### 3.2. Target public (age groups)

Bearing in mind that books aimed specifically at young children were excluded from the study, as far as the target readership age is concerned, although it is hard to establish a hard and fast distinction between the adult and younger adult target publics when a reading-age is not specifically indicated (as in the case of certain series published by Keit Vimp Bev), the data compiled reveals that the overwhelming majority (67%) of the translations published are targeted primarily at an adult audience, with only one quarter aimed at a clearly younger readership, with the remaining 8% deemed to be of indeterminate appeal, amounting to a total of 6 works in all, such as *Animal Farm* by George Orwell and *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens.

These figures differ slightly from original works published in Breton for the same period, where the percentage of works targeted at a younger audience is slightly higher at 39.4%, with only fractionally over one half specifically aimed at a clearly adult audience (57.5%), the remaining 3.1% being for an indeterminate age-group. This may be a result of the kinds of books deemed eligible for backing by the LTP that are aimed almost exclusively at an older readership.

### 3.3. Genres

Classic works of prose fiction, both historical, canonical ‘national’ classics as well as more modern and recent classics (in the broadest sense of the word, i.e. internationally very well-known works), mainly although not exclusively targeted at an adult audience, feature prominently in the list of the works translated, ranging from as Shakespeare (*Macbeth*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliette*), Molière (*The Misanthrope*) and Cervantes (*Don Quixote*) on the one hand, to the likes of Albert Camus (*The Stranger*), Franz Kafka (*Metamorphosis*, *The Trial*), Oscar Wilde (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *The Canterville Ghost*), Arthur Conan Doyle (*The Hound of the Baskervilles*), Agatha Christie (*And Then There Were None*, *Murder on the Orient Express*, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*) and J. K. Rowling (*Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*), on the other.

In all, works of this kind account for a significant 42.1% of the works translated over the twenty-year periods analysed. This is very much in line with the list of titles deemed eligible for support via the LTP, comprised chiefly of renowned modern works essentially in novel form, with a light sprinkling of canonical, ‘national’ authors (i.e. Molière and Shakespeare).

Prose, particularly novels, accounts for the bulk of the translations published over the period analysed, with poetry representing a mere 5%. As such, poetry is effectively significantly underrepresented in translation when compared with the figure for original works of poetry published in Breton for the same period, which is almost double at 9.2%. Poetry features even less prominently on the list of works liable for support through the LTP, with the single notable exception of the prose poetry fables *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran.

Finally, it is also worth noting that while plays account for only 3.7% of the original works published, this percentage rises significantly to

9.2% in the case of translated works, including works such as *Ubu the King* (*Ubu roi*) by Alfred Jarry, translated by the Breton playwright, author and actor Goulc’han Kervella (2008). However, these also include several classics, including Ancient Greek plays such as the reedition in 2003 of Youenn Drezen’s 1928 translation of *Prometheus Bound* (*Προμηθεὺς Δεσμώτης*) by Aeschylus, which may alternatively ranked as ‘Classics’ rather than plays *per se*. Nevertheless, by way of contrast, plays do not figure at all on the list of works eligible for support through the LTP, except in exceptional cases of classic works by ‘national’ authors, namely Shakespeare and Molière.

On the other hand, however, the proposed LTP list does contain six graphic novels, e.g. *Footnotes in Gaza* by Joe Sacco, *Maus* by Art Spiegelman and *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi (trad. Tual Kerrain, 2015), which are, as noted previously, a highly under-translated genre in general.

All in all, by focusing on modern literature primarily in the form of the novel, the LTP can be seen to mark a distinct shift of direction in translation policy with regards to the previously unplanned practice in the sector. And while the implantation of the LTP does not actually impose its strategy on the publishing/translation sector at large, it is likely that it will, thorough its official backing under the aegis of the Public Office for the Breton Language, have an impact on the sector which may or not be decisive in the long run.

### 3.4. The authors

Including collective volumes, the translated works cover a total of 99 different authors. Most of the authors chosen for translation only have one of their works represented, with the following notable exceptions (in descending order):

Peter Tremayne (5)  
Tadhg Mac Dhonnagáin (4)  
Laurence Lavrand (4)  
Petros Markaris (4)  
William Shakespeare (4)  
Agatha Christie (3)  
Italo Calvino (2)  
Anne Guillou (2)  
Franz Kafka (2)  
Jack London (2)  
J. K. Rowling (2),  
Robert Louis Stevenson (2),  
Oscar Wilde (2)  
Stefan Zweig (2)

It would usually be fair to assume that the level of representation of any given author as expressed by the number of their works selected for translated, especially in the case of such a limited market as that dealt with here, is a reflection of their importance as authors in some way (classics, popular authors and best-sellers, Nobel-prize winners, etc.).

Nevertheless, this proves not necessarily to be the case. In certain instances, the motivation behind the decision to translate multiple works is clear, as in the case of the popularity of the Harry Potter books, the fame of Agatha Christie (boosted by numerous adaptations for film and television), or the standing of the likes of Kafka, Calvino, Stevenson or Shakespeare as classical references of ‘universal literature’.

In some cases, however, it is due to the translation of a series of books by the same author, as in the case of Tadhg Mac Dhonnagáin. In other cases, it appears to be motivated by the personal tastes of the translator, as in the case of Peter Tremayne and Petros Markaris, both of whom are systematically rendered into Breton by the same translators and neither of whom could be seen to be either extremely well-known authors or authors representative of modern English and Greek literature respectively. It may or may not also be significant that, irrespective of the quality of the works themselves, Laurence Lavrand also happens to be the sister of the head of the company responsible for publishing the translations of her works.

This situation can be seen as a result of a lack of conscious planning or “unplanned planning” (Diaz Fouces 2005b, p. 8) within the sector which initiatives such as the LTP could help redress with a view to rationalising translation in Breton.

As far as the gender of the authors is concerned, taking into account that several works have multiple authors whereby the total number of authors does not correspond exactly to the number of works translated, works by women authors only account for 15.2%. Although the world of Breton-language literature is generally male-dominated, the figure for translations is considerably lower than that for original works, where women represent 19.5% of all of the authors published over the 20 period. This would tend to confirm the hypothesis that women writers are confronted by a double filter in becoming selected for translation: firstly, in the initial publishing phase, where women writers are underrepresented in general, and then again in the translation phase where even more fall by the wayside<sup>13</sup>.

### **3.5. The source languages**

In order to determine the predominant languages and cultures drawn on for translation purposes and their consequent likely relative impact on the overall Breton literary canon, this section analyses the sources languages in which the works were originally published, which may or may not necessarily coincide with the actual language of the source text used for the Breton translation in the event of mediated translations which are minimal.

---

13 This has also been shown to be the case for other languages, notably in the preliminary as yet unpublished results of a study underway for Galizan covering a thirty-year period conducted by the author of this paper, where the double filter hypothesis is also posited as a possible explanation for the glaring underrepresentation of women writers in translation.

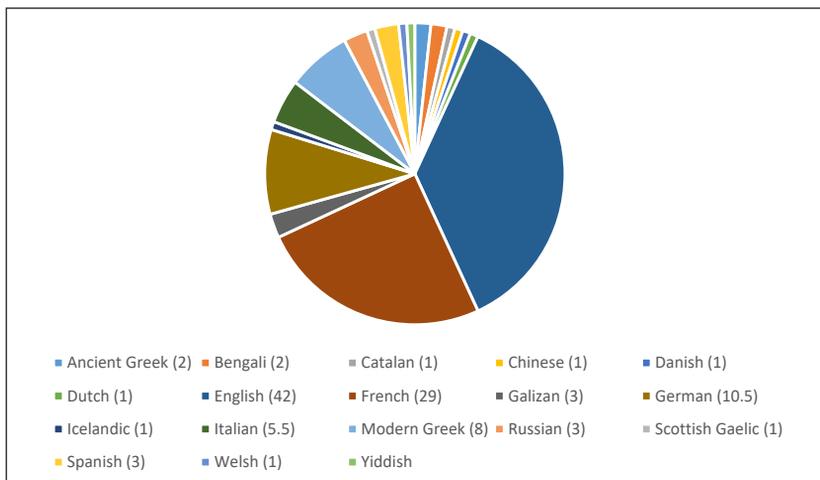


Fig. 3. Breakdown of the sources languages for translations published (fiction only).

It is perhaps hardly surprising that English leads the way given its place as the dominant world language today, accounting for a third of all of the works translated. However, it is somewhat more surprising that French is the second-most translated source language, albeit a considerable way behind English, given that all latter-day Breton-speakers would be capable of accessing the works in the original. In this instance, rather than serving a communicative necessity or bridging an intercultural gap, translation clearly forms part of wider set of language planning tools intended to create a literary corpus enabling Breton-speakers to be potentially wholly independent of French. The symbolic significance of translating French literature into Breton, thereby effectively shortcutting the dominant language entirely, cannot be understated.

It is also surprising that, given the affinity between their respective nations, so few books are translated from the sister Celtic language, with all of the works translated from Irish belonging to the same series of literature for younger readers by Tadhg Mac Dhonnagáin (all translated by Padrig an Habask, 2018) and with only one title from Welsh, also for younger adults, namely *Iawn Boi? ;-)* by Caryl Lewis (also translated by Padrig an Habask, 2007). Nor are these languages represented any more prominently in the LTP list (see above Section 3.1).

It is also noteworthy that, despite its status as a major world language, Spanish should account for a mere 2,5% of the published translations spanning the entire twenty-year period with only two works in all, namely: *No One Writes to the Colonel (El coronel no tiene quien le escribe)* by García Márquez (trad. Aleksandr ar Gall, 2017) and the double volume containing *Three Militiamen (Iru Gudari)* by Estepan Urkiaga Basaraz (a.k.a. Lauaxeta) mediated via the Spanish translation by Manuel de la Sota (a.k.a. Txanka) and *The Mayor of Zalamea (El alcalde de Zalamea)* by Calderón de la Barca (trad.

Youenn Drezen, 1942, reed. 2017). This figure is also strikingly low when compared to the position it occupies amongst the list of books eligible for support through the LTP, ranked third behind English and French at 13.0% (see Fig. 2).

On the other hand, however, Modern Greek, which is wholly absent from the LTP list, features relatively prominently in the translations actually published, all translated by Alan Botrel, four of which are by the same author, Petros Markaris. There are also two translations from Bengali, namely *Phatik Chand* (ফটিক চাঁদ) by the filmmaker and author Satyajit Ray and *The Home and the World* (ঘরে বাইরে) by the classic author and first non-European Nobel-prize winner Rabindranath Tagore, both carried out by Yann Varc'h Thorel (2007 and 2018 respectively). Bengali is an unusual source language for minoritized languages and this appears to respond to the tastes and availability of a translator.

What this situation tends to indicate is a lack of planning within the translation sector as it stands which appears to respond as much – if not more – to the tastes of individual translators and publishers as to any overarching strategic rationale.

As it seems likely that, given its relative impact so far, the LTP will have an ever-greater bearing on the translation sector going forward. While this has the benefit of strategically planning the sector, it is also important to note that while list of titles recommended for translation by the Program does in theory open up to new source languages (e.g. Japanese, Portuguese, Norwegian, Arabic, Basque), it remains to be seen whether translators for these languages will become available, having proved to be unforthcoming to date. On the other hand, there seems to be no real reason to ignore other languages such as Bengali, Galizan and Greek for which active translators are available and who could be profitably employed in order to provide the Breton-speaking readership with broader access to world literature, whilst at the same time as strengthening and widening the base of the Breton literary canon.

### 3.6. The translators

Last, but certainly not least, an overview of this burgeoning sector would not be complete without a brief examination of the people responsible, i.e. the translators themselves.

In total, 61 names are cited as the translators of the works analysed, including both translators of multiple works and those involved in joint translations. However, it should also be stated that there are clear indications that an certain number (no more than three or four) were not actually actively involved as translators into Breton themselves, ostensibly serving instead as linguistic advisors vis à vis the source text, e.g. Batia Baum working with Koulizh Kedez in the case of Yiddish, Art J. Hughes in collaboration with Alan Botrel and Gwendal Denez in the case of Irish or María Lopo working with Alan Botrel, Gwendal Denez and Herve Bihan in the case of Galizan. However small their number, this does nevertheless have a bearing on the overall gender balance as noted below.

Although a certain number of translators work with more than one language, for example Mark Kerrain (English, French and Galizan), Olier Biguet (French and English) and Serj Richard (Italian and French), others are clearly identified with one specific language. In fact, while there is logically a greater array of translators working with the main source languages owing to the sheer volume of books published, certain names still stand out by dint of the number of works translated by them, most notably Kristian Braz for English (7 works) and for French Herve Lossec (4 works). Similarly, other names are clearly linked to specific languages, e.g. Gérard Cornillet and Alan Botrel responsible for most of the German and all of the Modern Greek works respectively.

Two of the translators are also singularly noteworthy for specialising in a particular author, thus ensuring stylistic continuity, namely: Mark Kerrain, responsible for translating the first two instalments of the Harry Potter saga (see above Section 2.3) and Jean-Michel Mahe, who translated five works, all by Peter Tremayne.

What this tends to indicate is a move towards a growing specialisation on the field which can only be positive for the translation sector by providing ever-more experienced translators. Notwithstanding, as is often the case prior to the establishment of a fully professionalised translation sector, several of the translators are also well-known Breton authors in their own right, thus potentially endowing their translations with a high literary quality, including both contemporary authors and reissued translations by more classical authors, for example (in alphabetical order): Mich Beyer (1948-), Pêr Denez (1921-2011), Youenn Drezen (1899-1972), Goulc'han Kervella (1951-), Jakez Konan (1910-2003), Yeun ar Gow (1897-1966), and Jarl Priel (1885-1965), the latter involving a self-translation of his work originally published in French under the title *Le Trois-Mâts Errant* (translated as *An Teirgwern Pembroke* in Breton in 1959, reedited in 2002). Reissues of earlier translations can clearly be ascribed to the literary renown of the authors responsible.

Finally, as far as the gender of the translators is concerned, women are clearly very few and far between, with only 14 out of a total of 61, amounting to less than a quarter (23%). This figure falls even further when discounting the names of people apparently serving as advisors rather than translators *per se* (see above), dropping still further in that case to a mere 19.3%.

#### 4. Conclusions

Despite a lack of official recognition aggravated by concerted efforts to curb and even actively suppress the public usage of the language, the ongoing process of language revitalisation and recuperation has spurred an upsurge in the pool of potential readers literate in Breton, leading in turn to a burgeoning demand and an upturn in growth in the number of works of fiction published in Breton, rising most sharply over the latter part of the period analysed (2000-2019).

Despite individual variation between the eight publishing companies examined in this study concerning their relative reliance on translation, the overall trend in the translation sector over the 20-year period in question can be

seen to mirror this upswing in offer and demand for original works, indicating that translation is an integral part of the publishing sector, in line with the premise that translation serves to strengthen and bolster the literary canon of minoritized languages such as Breton. This hypothesis is further borne of out by the weight given to classics on the one hand, following on in a long-standing tradition designed to put Breton on a par with other fully-fledged modern languages, and the number of works translated from French, which cannot be accounted for by the communicative function of translation.

The Literary Translation Program (LTP) rolled out in 2013 by the Public Office for the Breton Language has proven to have played a key role in the spurt registered, resulting in a notable sway over the works and authors selected for translation, stressing modern-day classic of world literature, with a heavy emphasis of English as the primary source language. Given its impact to date, it seems likely that the Program will continue to exercise an ever-greater bearing on the translation sector going forward.

While the sector still appears to respond to the tastes of individual translators and the publishers themselves, the implementation of the LTP can be seen to have the benefit of contributing to a greater rationalised planning of the translation sector, it is also worthwhile noting that while its list of titles eligible for support does in theory open the way for new, hitherto untranslated language source languages, it remains to be seen whether translators for these will in fact materialise. Conversely, there is no real reason to exclude other languages from the list for which translators are available and which would only help broaden the base of the Breton literary canon.

There are also indications of an incipient professionalization of the translation sector where, alongside the traditional authors cum translators, a number of translators are emerging specialising in specific languages, including the major source languages.

All in all and against great odds, it seems to be fair to conclude that the future looks if not bright than at least considerably brighter for Breton publishing as a whole, thanks in part to the translation sector.

## **Bibliography**

- ANGELELLI, C.V. 2014. *The Sociological Turn in Translation and Interpreting Studies*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- BAXTER, R.N. 2013. "Interpreting and minority language planning and policy: Galician as a case study". In *Language Problems & Language Planning*. Vol. 37(3), p. 227-248.
- CRUCES COLADO, S. 1993. "A posición da literatura traducida no sistema literario galego". In *Boletín Galego de Literatura*. Vol. 10, p. 59-65. <http://hdl.handle.net/10347/1796> (Consulted: 18/03/2020).
- DENEZ, G. & HUPEL, E. 2011. "An Attempt to Renew Breton Literature". In Boon, Erin, Conley, Cassandra & Harrison, Margaret (eds.) *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium, 29 (2009)*, p. 70-80. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2011.
- DIAZ FOUCES, O. 2005a. "Translation policy for minority languages in the European Union: Globalisation and resistance". In Branchadell,

- Albert & West, Lovell Margaret (eds.) *Less Translated Languages*, p. 95-104. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2005.
- DIAZ FOUQUES, O. 2005b: “Políticas de traducción en Cataluña y Galicia”. In VV.AA. *Cinquième Colloque sur la traduction, la terminologie et l’interprétation à Cuba et au Canada (Décembre 2004)*. Ottawa: Conseil des Traducteurs, Terminologues et Interprètes), 2005. [http://www.cttic.org/ACTI/2004/papers/Oscar\\_Diaz\\_Fouques\\_Politicas\\_en\\_Cataluna\\_y\\_Galicia.pdf](http://www.cttic.org/ACTI/2004/papers/Oscar_Diaz_Fouques_Politicas_en_Cataluna_y_Galicia.pdf) (Consulted: 18/03/2020).
- FAVEREAU, F. 2003. *Lennegezh ar brezhoneg en XXvet kantved: Breiz Atao hag ar re all el lennegezh (1919-1944)* [Breton Literature in the 20th Century: Breiz Atao and the other in literature (1919-1944)]. Montroulez (Morlaix): Skol Vreizh.
- FERNÁNDEZ RODRÍGUEZ, Á. 1995. “O papel da traducción no sistema lingüístico e literario nacional: o ámbito galego”. In *Grial. Revista Galega de Cultura*. Vol. 128, p. 541-554.
- GAMBIER, Y. 2006. “Pour une socio-traduction”. In Ferreira Duarte, João, Assis Rosa, Alexandra & Seruya, Teresa (eds.) *Translation Studies at the Interface of Disciplines*, pp. 29-42. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2006.
- GAMBIER, Y. 2007. “Y a-t-il place pour une socio-traductologie ?”. In Wolf, Michaela and Fukari, Alexandra (eds.) *Constructing a Sociology of Translation*, pp. 205-2127. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2007.
- GARCÍA GONZÁLEZ, M. 2002. “El paper de la traducció en la normalizació de la llengua gallega”. In Diaz Fouques, Óscar & Joan Costa (eds.) *Traducció i dinàmica sociolingüística*, p. 55-84. Barcelona: Llibres de l’Índex, 2002.
- LIU, X. 2012. “The cultural turn in translation studies”. In *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology*. Vol. 20(2), p. 249-253.
- LUNA ALONSO, A. 2006. “Hizkuntza gutxituetako itzulpena. Galiziera” [Translating minoritized Cultures. The Case of Galizan]. In *Senez. Itzulpen aldizkaria*. Vol. 30, p. 151-165. [http://www.eizie.eus/Argitalpenak/Senez/20061220/luna/11%20Ana\\_Luna.pdf](http://www.eizie.eus/Argitalpenak/Senez/20061220/luna/11%20Ana_Luna.pdf) (Consulted: 18/03/2020).
- LUNA ALONSO, A. 2012. “Marco de referencia teórica. Conceptos clave”. In Fernández Rodríguez, Áurea, Galanes Santos, Iolanda, Luna Alonso, Ana & Montero Küpper, Silvia (eds.) *Traducción de una cultura emergente. La literatura gallega contemporánea en el exterior*, p. 23-42. Bern: Peter Lang, 2012.
- RANNVRO BREIZH/Region Bretagne. 2018. *Enquête socio-linguistique : qui parle les langues de Bretagne aujourd’hui ?*. <https://www.bretagne.bzh/br/actualites/enquete-socio-linguistique-qui-parle-les-langues-de-bretagne-aujourd'hui/> (Consulted: 18/03/2020).
- SNELL-HORNBY, M. 2006. *The Turns of Translation Studies: New paradigms or shifting viewpoints?*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

- ST.-PIERRE, P. 2005. "Translation in an era of globalization". In Kar, Prafulla & St.-Pierre, Paul (eds.) *Translation, Reflections, Refractions, Transformations*, p. 162-172. New Delhi: Pencraft, 2005.
- TOURY, G. 1985. "Aspects of translating into minority languages from the point of view of translation studies". In *Multilingual. Journal of Cross-Cultural and Interlanguage Communication*. Vol. 4(1), p. 3-10.
- WOLF, M. & FUKARI, A. 2007. *Constructing a Sociology of Translation*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- ZABALETA, J.M. 2002. "Traduction et normalisation linguistique". In *Senez. Itzulpen aldizkaria*. Vol. 24, p. 181-192.