

The language of Europe is translation – Umberto Eco (1993)

Igiaba Scego’s *Beyond Babylon* and Walid Nabhan’s *Exodus of Storks* would have remained closed to those of us unable to read Italian or Maltese, had these remarkable works not been translated into other languages. Whether it comes to contemporary works or the classics, translations are a main conduit for the exchange of ideas, world-views, and traditions. Given the diversity of languages on the European continent, translation is invaluable for fostering dialogue and mutual understanding across linguistic and national borders. In the **euro/lit** project, we investigate how European integration shapes the processes and networks that enable books to circulate beyond their place and language of origin.

1 / Background

Albeit being vital for cultural production and the exchange of ideas and, the world of literary translations is marked by profound inequalities between languages. A selected number of central languages – including English, French, and German – dominate the world of literary translations. These central languages command high literary prestige, a powerful publishing industry, and often a large population of (native) speakers.

Books emanating from the central languages frequently find wide distribution and are translated into a high number of more peripheral languages. In contrast, books written in languages that occupy a more peripheral position in the literary world rarely attract a high number of translations and often require an initial translation into one of the central languages to achieve wider circulation.

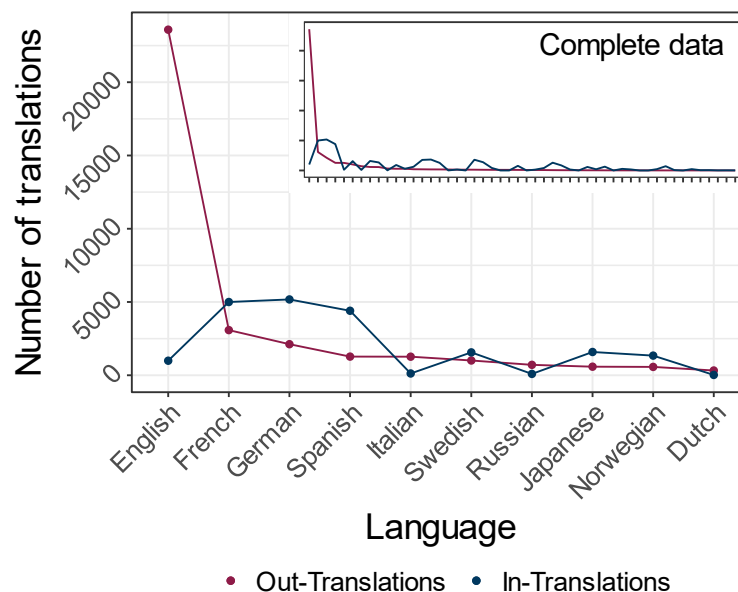


Figure 1 – Number of translations by language (Data: Index Translationum 2008)

Europe has been largely ignored as a frame of reference in empirical studies of literary fields and translations, even though Europe is a global leading hotspot of book exchanges. Existing research tended to focus either on national markets or on the global literary field.

We argue that Europe constitutes an important intermediate field between the national and the global. The European literary field and European cultural policies create opportunities but also specific constraints for authors, translators, and publishers – all of whom embedded in changing local, European, and global struggles. The precise nature and effect of these opportunities and constraints are currently unknown, however. Research is needed to elucidate (a) how national book markets respond to their integration into a European field and (b) how these processes of Europeanization impact the world of literary translations.

2 / What we do

euro/lit is a research project funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) that adopts a decidedly European perspective to address this knowledge gap. We contribute to a better understanding of (a) the dynamics of literary fields at the national, European, and global level and (b) the cultural integration of European societies. To be precise, **euro/lit** will tackle the following research questions:

- / What is the **magnitude of translations** to, from, and within Europe? Are national markets opening towards Europe? Is the European field closing itself off towards the global?
- / What are the **patterns of translation flows** within Europe? Do we observe a differentiation along language lines or a hierarchy of central and peripheral languages?
- / Are there **European mediators and gate-keepers** who channel translation flows between countries and languages? What are the interests, rules, and discourses that underlie their activities?
- / What is the **internal rationale** of the European literary field? Is the field governed by one integrated network and discourse? Or is the field fragmented along the lines of national markets, linguistic areas, and cultural legacies?
- / Which **external forces** shape exchanges in the European literary field? What is the role of economic, political, cultural, and social characteristics of national fields?

To answer these questions, we employ a mixed-method design that features qualitative interviews with stakeholders, document analysis, and quantitative analysis of book and translation statistics. With the help of the national libraries of countries across Europe, we collect data on book translation flows that will be subjected to social network analysis.

3 / Who we are

euro/lit is a research project funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), located at the University of Siegen (Germany). The project started in January 2022 and is funded for the period until December 2024. Please contact us if you have questions regarding the project or if you are interested in collaborating with us.

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