

Literary Translation from Basque: A Study of Contemporary Translation Flows

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Abstract

Smaller languages have fewer speakers than major languages, are less commonly taught as a second language and are often attributed a lower status. At the same time, translation is at the core of their everyday activity. Focusing on the outreach of contemporary Basque literature, the study presented here permits us to reflect on literary exchanges from a smaller language context and to assess cultural policies for the promotion of Basque literature abroad. The paper first considers the specificities of the multilingual context in which the source literature is set, the minority nature of the language, and the usual translation flows in the global literary system. By observing quantitative data on literature translated from Basque, our research seeks to identify new trends in the exportation of Basque literature in recent years. In addition, it aims to shed light on the role of agents participating in the translation process, such as translators, publishers, and institutions for the promotion and dissemination of Basque literature. The paper offers revealing information about significant elements that benefit the circulation of translations, such as grants for translations, translator training programmes, and literary prizes.

Keywords

Basque literature, translation from Basque, cultural diplomacy, export, cultural promotion

1. Introduction

A significant proportion of literary translation takes place between major languages, and some of those languages play a vital role in international cultural exchanges. According to Heilbron & Sapiro (2016: 378), “translations are massively made from a very small number of languages”. Smaller languages have, by definition, fewer speakers than major languages, are less commonly taught as a second language, and are often attributed a lower status. At the same time, translation is at the core of their everyday activity. Translation enables communication, enriches languages and opens the doors to new readerships.

The development of policies to enhance and promote national culture can involve both import and export strategies (Heilbron & Sapiro 2018: 184). Importing works from other cultures helps broaden and enrich the literary corpus of a language, and can be considered as a tool for cultural development. Export policies have been used as a tool for cultural diplomacy with the aim of exercising soft power (Heilbron & Sapiro 2018: 185) and enable smaller languages to gain a certain cultural visibility at international level. By studying literary translation from Basque, this paper seeks to reflect on the implications of asymmetric relations to other language communities, and on the need for structured cultural policies.

The paper offers an overview of the outreach of contemporary Basque literature. It first considers the specificities of the multilingual context in which the source literature is set, the

minority nature of the language, and usual translation flows in the global literary system. Peripheral languages are not frequent source languages in literary exchanges, as “book translations are overwhelmingly made from English and a small number of other central languages” (Heilbron 2020: 136). By contrast, examining translation flows and translation politics within a smaller language context gives us a better idea of the difficulties that agents participating in literary exchanges have to overcome.

The paper then analyses the latest data on the catalogue of Basque literature in translation (ELI Catalogue).¹ The catalogue depicts the outreach of Basque literature by observing production data, chronological trends, and resources for promotion and/or translation. Apart from updating quantitative data offered by previous studies (Manterola 2014; 2016a), this paper seeks to identify new trends in the exportation of Basque literature in recent years, and to shed light on the role of agents participating in the translation process, such as translators, publishers, and institutions for the promotion and dissemination of Basque literature. A thorough knowledge of the translation flow from Basque leads to a reflection on the literary exchanges that occur from a smaller language context and an assessment of cultural policies for the promotion of Basque literature abroad.

2. Literary translation from small languages

Translations are a small proportion of the books published in European literatures; according to Grutman (2015: 4-5), the European average is around 15%, though that figure varies greatly between countries and languages. Considering the book production in 2017 in Spain, translations made up 21.1% of the books published, though that percentage increases to 25.4% if we consider only the literary field, and to 47% for children and young adults’ literature (Franci 2020: 94). Literature translated into Catalan accounts for 18-25% (Comellas 2016: 134) and literature translated into Galician for 20% (Galanes 2016: 159). Far from these figures is translated literature in the United Kingdom, which in 2019 rose from its long-time level of 3% to 5.5% (Franci 2020: 94). Translations in France, on the other hand, account for 10 and 18%, and the figure for Germany is similar. This is a small proportion compared to Spain, Italy, the Netherlands or Scandinavia (Grutman 2015: 5). The disparities in the data suggest that each country and each language community have a different permeability for foreign literatures and that that permeability even varies from one literary genre to another. Moreover, the openness of a culture is linked to its position within the “global language system” (De Swaan 2001). The more central the international position of a language is, the lower the translation rate *within* that language is (Heilbron & Sapiro 2016: 381). Translation is a power differential, as the hierarchical relationships that are established between source and target cultures imbue the translation flows.

The “world system of translation” (Heilbron 2010: 1) makes up an organised network of interrelations (Comellas 2021: 51). According to Heilbron & Sapiro (2007: 96), “translation flows are highly uneven, flowing from the center toward the periphery rather than the reverse”, and “communication among peripheral languages very often passes through the intermediary of a center”. The vast majority of translations are produced from hyper-central or central languages, while peripheral languages export little (Heilbron & Sapiro 2016). In order to address these asymmetries, official bodies provide financial and administrative support for the

¹ <https://www.ehu.eus/ehg/eli/>.

exportation of their cultures. Translation support policies are common practice in small-language literary markets (for more detail see e.g. Heilbron 1999; Hacoen 2014; van Es & Heilbron 2015; Vimr 2020), and they serve not only to disseminate and promote their literatures but also to improve the perception of culture in their own countries.

The types of cultures and languages involved in the literary exchange condition the nature of the transfer. Dependence is a common feature of asymmetrical relations, and it shows up in different ways: the hegemonic culture may be the main source –in intranlation– and/or target –in extranlation (Ganne & Minon 1992)– in literary exchanges; there may be difficulties in developing direct relations with some target languages, resulting in the need to use an intermediate language; there may be a lack of demand from the target cultures, etc. A relatively short written tradition, the lack of official status in some parts of the territory and a limited number of speakers are signals of the dependence of Basque language on major languages. The Basque language cohabits with Spanish and French on the two sides of the Pyrenees, respectively, and its sociolinguistic situation can be defined as peripheral (according to Heilbron’s classification, 1999) or dominated (according to Casanova’s terminology, 2004). More than half of the residents of the Basque Country have no knowledge of the Basque language; they are monolingual Spanish or French speakers. That is why translation into Spanish for non-Basque-speaking citizens of the Spanish Basque Country and translation into French for those of the French Basque Country gives them access to the literature produced by their own countrypeople. At the same time, translation enables its dissemination among readers in the rest of Spain and France and also among foreign readers. Therefore, it is important to point out that translating is not necessarily synonymous with exporting abroad.

Translating a literary work created in a small language into a more central language “exponentially expands the potential number of readers” (Gimeno Ugalde 2021: 33). Accessing world literature is supposed to be more effective when a minority-language work is translated to the hyper-central language English. But, as Heilbron (2020: 141) points out, the world literary system has not just one but several centres, and “authors of peripheral or semi-peripheral language areas have the strongest chances of being translated in a cultural centre that is not *too* dominant and that is geographically ‘close to home’”. As concluded by studies on literary exchange between Iberian literatures or Iberian Translation Studies (Gallén *et al.* 2010; Fernández *et al.* 2012; Gimeno *et al.* 2021), there is a close relationship between the literatures within the Iberian peninsula, which make up a regional space for circulation that has been defined as an “Iberian inter-literary (poly)system” (Casas 2003: 73 in Gimeno Ugalde 2021: 21), a “specific interliterary community” (Đurišin 1984, 1993; Domínguez 2010), and a “gravitational model” (De Swaan 2001) in which Spanish is at the core of the intrastate literary relations. Quantitative data offered in this paper support this statement.

Domínguez (2010) proposes a useful theoretical basis by revising frequent translation phenomena or phenomena related to translation within specific interliterary communities presented by Đurišin (1993). Domínguez applies those concepts to the polysystem theory (Even-Zohar 1990) and analyses them within the Spanish literary polysystem. Frequent translation phenomena within specific interliterary communities include: 1) self-translation; 2) bi- or polyliterarity; 3) bi- or polynationality; 4) translation reception at two dimensions; 5) second hand translation; 6) intermediation functions of translation; 7) complementary function of translation; 8) intraliterary translation; 9) later integration of literary translation. As it will be shown in the following sections, some of those phenomena are present in contemporary Basque literary extranlation.

The specificities of the multilingual context in which the source literature of this study is set, the minority nature of the language (i.e. fewer speakers, less widely taught as a foreign language and differences in origin from its neighbour languages), and usual translation flows in the global literary system shape the cultural exchange under study. In the sections below, translation flows and translation policies are examined to gain a better understanding of the agents involved in the literary exchange and the factors that contribute to the cultural exchange.

3. A general overview of literary translation flow from Basque

Basque book production has been limited during centuries, since the first book was published in 1545. According to Torrealdai (1997a), between 1545 and 1699 were published 52 books in Basque; between 1700 and 1875 the amount increased to 671, and between 1876 and 1935 it kept the upward trend with 1,422 books. The production of the 20th century was influenced by General Franco's dictatorship between 1936 and 1975 which undermined the book industry in minority languages in Spain. The production of books reinforced after 1975, at the same time as Basque became official and the Basque cultural system developed. Between 1976 and 1995 a total of 10,248 books were published in Basque, 3,771 of which were translations (Torrealdai 1997a). Published books mainly included textbooks and children and young adults' literature. The production has had an increasing trend since then: in 1995 1,305 books were published (Torrealdai 1997b), in 2000 1,519 books (Torrealdai 2002), in 2005 2,016 books (Torrealdai 2007), in 2010 2,023 books (Torrealdai 2012), in 2015 2,353 books (Torrealdai 2017) and in 2020 2,569 books (Eizagirre 2022).

Translation has been part of the Basque literary system since its inception. Without translations from other languages Basque literature would not exist in its current form. According to Torrealdai (2019), the overall average for translations in the book production in 2017 was 35.5%, but if we observe it per genre, we see that the proportion of translations in books for children and young adults was 74%, whereas in books for adults was 22.5%.

In addition to intranlation, exporting is necessary for a literature to survive.² The Basque literary system has developed since the mid-twentieth century and has a relatively short written tradition. One goal during the incipient phase in the 20th century was to achieve cultural prestige through translation into major languages (Olaziregi 2017: 550).

Observing the number of translations in both directions in the Basque book industry can help measuring the circulation of translations. According to the NorDaNor database,³ until 2020 7,116 books were translated into Basque, while 1,475 books were translated from Basque. Index Translationum⁴ records a similar proportion of translations, although its figures are lower: 3,908 translations into Basque and 999 books translated from Basque. This means that translations into Basque outnumber those from Basque by three to one. Such relation is frequent in smaller languages.

² Diffusion into other languages is a long-standing necessity and many scholars (such as Mitxelena, Vélez de Mendizabal and Sarasola) think it is the means to ensure the survival of the Basque language and literature (Manterola 2014: 64). As Olaziregi states (2009: 659), "the Basque *intelligentsia* has been convinced of the importance that translation into other languages has for the survival of the Basque language and the professionalization of Basque writers".

³ <https://nordanor.eus/>.

⁴ <https://www.unesco.org/xtrans/bsform.aspx>.

Below, we address literary translation from Basque from a quantitative perspective. Data have been extracted from the ELI Catalogue, that is, the Catalogue of Basque Literature in Translation which is available in the webpage of the Basque Institute of the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU). It compiles bibliographic references of literary translations from Basque into other languages. For the purpose of this study, consulted data are limited to books published until 2020, which sum a total of 1,478 entries.

According to Olaziregi (2020: 121), it was in the 1990s that the policy for translating and exporting Basque literature began to take shape, with the aim of raising it to a similar position of neighbouring literatures. This happened at the same time as Basque publishing houses began to publish translations from Basque into Spanish, which had until then only published books in Basque. As found in previous studies (Manterola 2014), translations from Basque were almost non-existent given the limited output of Basque literature until the re-establishment of democracy after the death of dictator General Franco in 1975. That is why export of Basque literature begins to increase from the 1980s. In fact, the publication of translations shows an upward trend from that date onwards: between 1981 and 1990, 67 translations were published, between 1991 and 2000, the figure was 365, between 2001 and 2010, there were 547, and between 2011 and 2020, there were 420. The trend has changed in the last ten years, due especially to the onset of the recession of 2008, which also affected the literary industry.

Table 1. Chronological perspective of literary translations from Basque

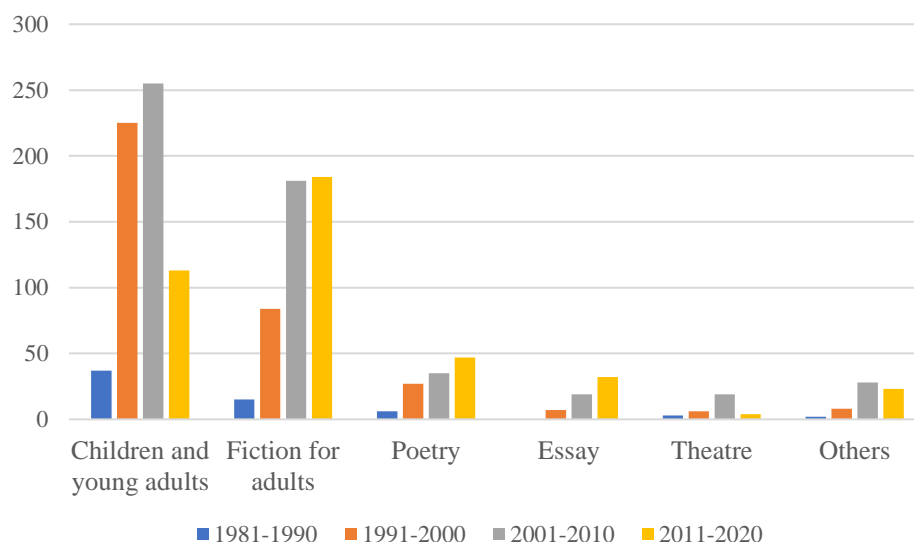
Decade	Number of Translations
1981-1990	67
1991-2000	365
2001-2010	547
2011-2020	420

In terms of genres, there are two that stand out over the rest: literature aimed at children and young people (45.32%) and fiction for adults (36.45%). In comparison, poetry (9.5%), essays (4.12%) and theatre (2.65%), among others, are seldom translated. As sociologic studies on Basque book industry show (Torrealdai 1997, 2002, 2007, 2012, 2017; Eizagirre 2022), textbooks and books for children and young adults are mostly produced in Basque, two thirds of the book production is destined for children and young adults.⁵ If we limit the data to literature, books for children and young adults constitute between 23 and 28% of the book production in the period 1995-2020 and literature for adults between 11,5 and 19%. Fiction (novels and short stories) is the main genre within literature for adults (between 54,4 and 66%), poetry is much less produced (between 10 and 17,9%), while theatre, essays and other genres are more marginal, although an upward trend has been identified in essays in recent years. The core place occupied by children's and young adults' books within Basque literature is reflected in exports, since almost half of the translations produced are intended for that audience. The number of translations rose from 1980 to 2010, but has since fallen. However, a look at the percentage of what was translated in each decade reveals that children and young adults' literature has been losing weight in exports: it accounted for 55.22% of the export in the 1980s, rising to 63.01% in the 1990s, but it began to fall first to 46.98% in the 2000s and then to 26.9%

⁵ Consulted data include not only literature books but all book production in Basque.

in the decade from 2010 to 2020 (see Figure 1).⁶ The changing trend identified in exports is not mirrored in imports, which remain stable at around 65%⁷ (Manterola 2021).

Figure 1. Chronological evolution of extratranslation by literary genres⁸



As shown by Figure 1, the translation of fiction for adults had a notorious increase in the 2000s and it maintained almost at the same level in the next ten years, around 180 books. Translations of poetry books and essays have an upward trend, and the last decade has been the most productive. Translations of theatre and other genres such as memory books, biographies, travel books, comics, etc. are generally less translated and, as we can see in Figure 1, they had an increase in the 2000s but less translations were published in the next ten years.

As previous studies have found, Bernardo Atxaga is still the most translated author in terms of the overall number of translations, but in recent years other authors have been making headway. In fact, the most translated books in the last ten years include works by Kirmen Uribe (*Bilbao-New York-Bilbao*, *Mussche*, *Elkarrekin esnatzeko ordua*), Bernardo Atxaga (*Zazpi etxe Frantzian*, *Nevadako egunak*), Harkaitz Cano (*Twist*), Miren Agur Meabe (*Kristalezko begi bat*) and Katixa Agirre (*Atertu arte itxaron*, *Amek ez dute*). The incursion into the Spanish market of young female authors such as Uxue Alberdi, Miren Amuriza and Danele Sarriugarte through independent publishers such as Consonni and Reikiavik is also worth mentioning; Karmele Jaio and Eider Rodriguez reach the Spanish market through more renowned publishers such as Destino (*La casa del padre*) and Random House (*Un corazón demasiado grande*) respectively.

The number of target languages is increasing over time. The data compiled in the ELI Catalogue until 2010 put the number of languages into which there had been at least one translation of Basque literature at 38, but in the following ten years the number increased to 47. However, there are considerable differences among them. 13 languages received at least 10

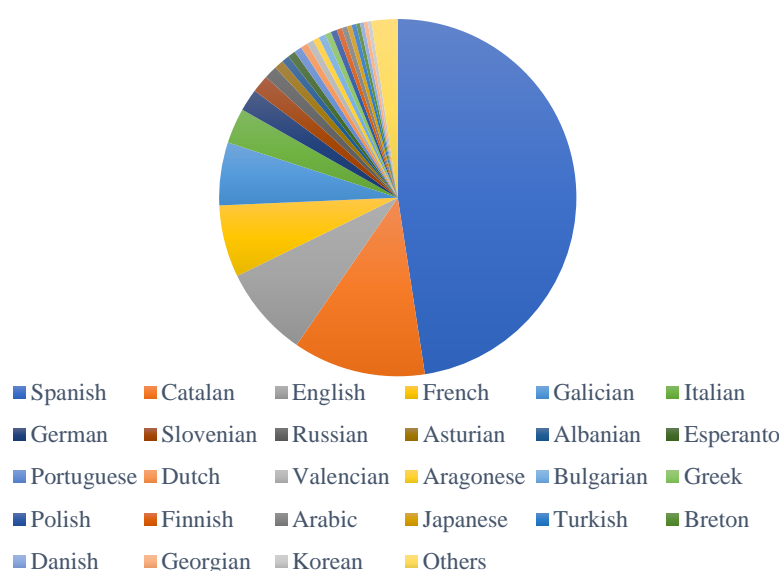
⁶ The percentage of intrastate translations of children's and young adults' books has decreased in the last ten years, as translations into Spanish, Galician, Catalan, Aragonese and Asturian have fallen to 68.4% from the 73.7% of the previous ten years.

⁷ For a comparative perspective on import and export in Basque literature, see Manterola 2016a.

⁸ The category "Others" includes religious texts, memory books, biographies, travel books, etc. A total of 28 lost cases have been counted.

translations from Basque. Target languages can be divided in two groups: languages spoken within Spain (Spanish, Catalan, Galician and Asturian) and foreign languages (English, French, Italian, German, Slovenian, Russian, Albanian, Esperanto and Portuguese). Spanish is the main target language, accounting for with almost half of the translations, and 24 other languages have published five or fewer translations. Furthermore, translations into languages spoken within Spain account for 65.8%, which indicates the importance of intrastate translations compared to foreign translations. According to the report on the economic value of editorial translation published by ACE Traductores (2017), the vast majority of translations published in Spain (82.8%) have a foreign source language. Next come translations from a domestic language into a foreign language (8.4%) and then translations between domestic languages (8.8%). However, the data compiled for this study show that translations into Spain’s domestic languages have decreased in children and young adults’ literature: in the 1980s the overwhelming majority of translations into Catalan and Galician were destined for that target audience, but at the turn of the millennium the trend changed and between 2011 and 2020, the proportion is 27.5% in translations into Catalan and 42.1% into Galician. Translations of children and young adults’ literature have not had as much prominence in Spanish, where they account for 30% in the last ten years.

Figure 2. Target languages for translations from Basque⁹



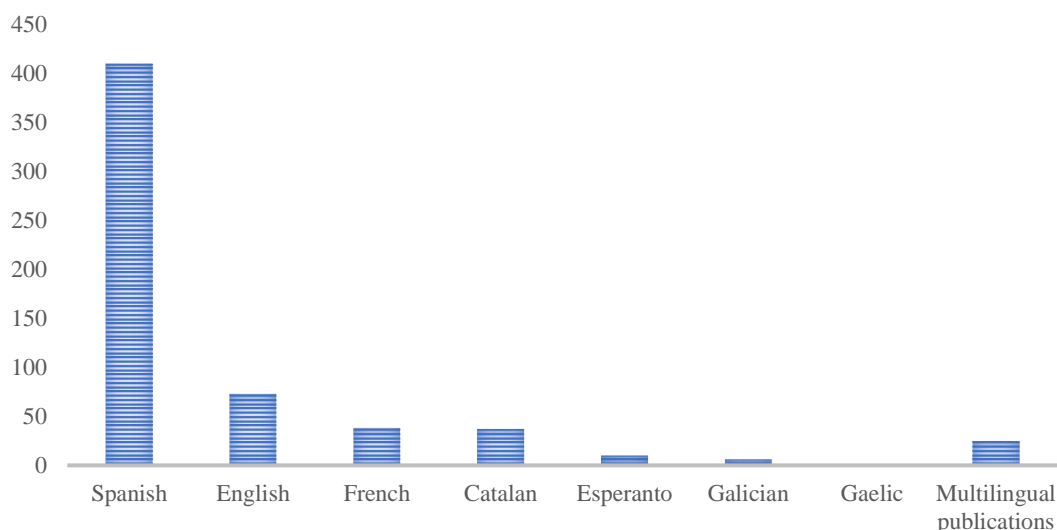
Some foreign languages have translated a considerable number of books from Basque in the last decade. Slovenian, for example, was the target language of 5 books translated from Basque until 2010, but between 2011 and 2020, 18 books have been translated into that language, most of them books for children and young adults published by Malinc. Bulgarian is another language where there is growing interest in Basque literature: until 2010, it was the target language of just 2 works translated from Basque, but in the following 10 years 6 more

⁹ The category “Others” includes languages into which five or less books have been translated. It includes Serbian and Swedish with 4 translations; Czech with 3; Aranese, Estonian, Hungarian, Croatian, Romanian and Ukrainian with 2; and Amharic, Braille, Chinese, Frisian, Friulian, Gaelic, Lithuanian, Macedonian, Norwegian, Persian and Welsh. The figure does not include additional 32 multilingual publications with translations into 3-6 languages.

books were translated. Macedonian, Chinese, Georgian and Lithuanian are new languages into which books from Basque have been translated in the last ten years.

The data on places of publication collected reveal that slightly more than 60% of all the books translated from Basque have been published outside the Basque Country, with the main places of publication being Madrid and Barcelona in Spain, and other European cities such as Paris, Bordeaux, Berlin, Frankfurt, Rome, Milan, Sofia, etc. Spanish is the most frequent target language for translations published within the Basque Country, followed by English and French. In fact, 57.26% of all translations into Spanish were published by a publisher located in the Basque Country, and the proportion is even slightly higher in the case of English, at 60.5%.¹⁰ In the case of French the proportion is less representative at 37.5%. Translations published in Spanish or French by publishers located in the Basque Country are mostly distributed domestically and thus primarily targeting the writer’s countryfolk. Some books might attract the attention of readers outside the Basque Country, which is why it is not easy to distinguish between intraliterary translations¹¹ and translations created for a foreign public. In this sense, extranlations may conceivably reach foreign readers, even if they have been produced within the Basque Country.

Figure 3. Target language of translations published within the Basque Country



An exhaustive analysis of publishers —their size, their position in the target cultures, etc.— would require consulting additional data to those collected in the ELI catalogue and it would take more space than we have in this text, so only a few details are presented here. Most books by Basque writers tend to be published by small publishers: few writers manage to publish at highly prestigious, widely-distributed publishers. Atxaga, Elorriaga and Uribe, for example, had their works published by major publishers in various countries after winning the Spanish National Award (Matxain 2020).

¹⁰ Excluding one, all other English translations published within the Basque Country were bilingual editions in Basque and English intended for children published by Gara and/or Baigorri.

¹¹ From a polysystemic perspective, translations published by publishers located in the Basque Country – frequently sold exclusively within the Basque Country– could be considered as intraliterary or intrasystemic translations (Domínguez 2010: 73).

In recent years the publishing market has been changing and more and more publishers have translated books from minority languages. I will mention some that have published several translations from Basque in the last ten years. The Welsh publisher Parthian books, for example, publishes translations of fiction books from different European languages, including Basque. So far, they have published Karnele Jaio's *Her Mother's Hands* (2018), and Miren Agur Meabe's *A Glass Eye* (2018) and *Burning Bones* (2022). In the Netherlands, Zirimiri Press focuses on literature from smaller and rarely translated languages. They have translated books by Basque authors Julen Gabiria, Harkaitz Cano and Laura Mintegi among others. Catalan publisher Pol·len,¹² in turn, is a young, independent publisher that in recent years has published several Basque books in Catalan. Joseba Sarrionandia, Miren Agur Meabe and Mari Luz Esteban are some of the authors whose works they have translated. Likewise, Galician publisher Hugin & Munin specialises in translating works written in other languages into Galician, and to date they have translated four works from Basque: Harkaitz Cano's *Pasaia blues* (2013), Juanra Madariaga's *eSPedicion: o poder dunha montaña* (2017), Uxue Alberdi's *O xogo das cadeiras* (2018) and Karnele Jaio's *A casa do pai* (2022).

Regarding literature for children and young adults, agreements between publishers in different languages spoken in Spain have proved effective as tools for distributing works in Catalan, Galician and Basque among intrastate literatures (López Gaseni & Etxaniz Erle 2005). But most recent data show that the collaboration between publishers has lost importance and very few books have been translated from Basque lately via such agreements.

The role played by the Spanish language and literature in the exporting of Basque literature is unquestionable. On the one hand, this is because Spanish is the most frequent target language of translations from Basque, and because it is used to reach both non-Basque-speaking readers in the Basque Country and Spanish readers in general (in Spain or Latin America); and on the other hand, because it opens the door to dissemination in other markets in foreign languages acting as pivot language. Revisiting phenomena related to translation proposed by Domínguez (see section 2), Spanish is frequently used as language for second hand translations and in other cases it may perform intermediation functions. The relevance of Spanish in the exporting of Basque literature is reflected in both the number of translations published in Spanish and their weight in percentage terms. Translations into Spanish act as a springboard for distribution in other languages, which is why their repercussion is so relevant. The same occurs with other literatures in co-official languages in Spain, the further export of which depends on the Spanish literary system (Comellas 2016, 2021; Galanes 2016).

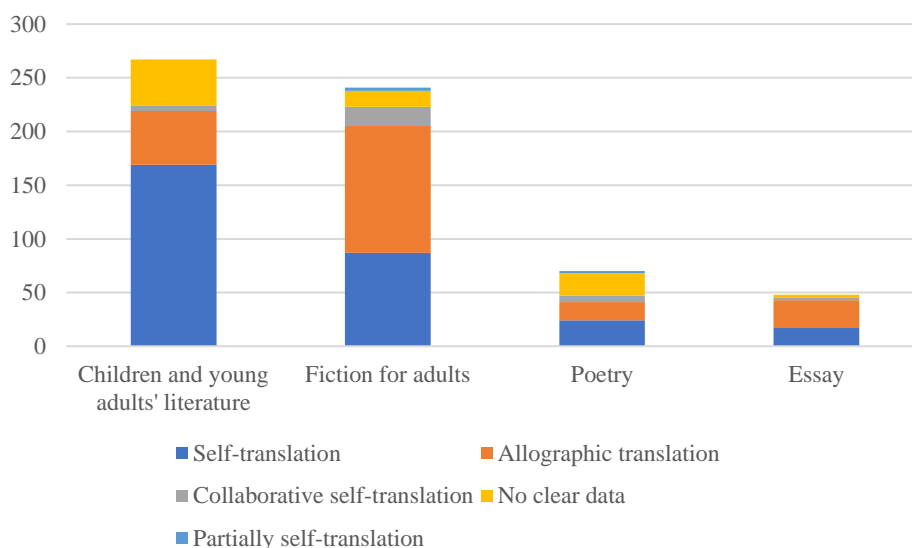
In regard to languages other than Spanish, the information available in the various catalogues consulted in collecting the data for this study is not sufficient to clearly identify the source languages used for transfers. Consequently, it is in many cases impossible to determine whether translations are direct or indirect. 175 indirect translations and 173 direct translations have been identified,¹³ but in other 460 cases there is no clear information on what source text was used for translation. It is, however, beyond doubt that more and more translations are acknowledged to have been made directly from Basque: until the year 2000, only 27 direct translations were identified, while between 2001 and 2010, there were 46, and for 2011-2020, the figure rises to 82.

¹² The three publishers mentioned (Parthian, Zirimiri and Pol·len) were awarded the Etxepare-Laboral Kutxa Translation Prize. The prize is shared by the publisher and the translator as it rewards the quality of the translation and the publisher's promotional strategy.

¹³ Among the direct translations, there are 2 self-translations into Esperanto, a further 20 self-translations into French and three collaborative translations between the author and a translator into Catalan (2) and Galician (1).

As for who actually does the translation, different types of translators are identified due to the minority status of Basque. In translation into Spanish, we have identified self-translators, co-translators who collaborate with self-translators, professional translators and even publishers who also act as translators. Writers quite frequently take part in the translation of their own works into Spanish, as shown by previous studies (Manterola 2014; 2021, Arrula-Ruiz 2018). The data up to 2010 show that author-translations and allographic translations both stood at around 40%, but in recent years self-translation seems to have been gaining strength: the data up to 2020 show that they account for almost half of the translations into Spanish (Manterola 2021). It is true that self-translation does not have the same presence in all genres: it has more weight in books for children and young adults than in fiction books for adults, poetry collections or essays. Apart from individual self-translation, the study shows a further 5% of cases in which there is collaborative self-translation, with authors translating their work with the help of a co-translator.

Figure 4. The presence of each type of translation into Spanish by genres



Two types of translators into languages other than Spanish have been identified: those who speak Basque fluently, and those who do not. Among those who speak no Basque, some are professional translators with long careers in literary translation who have translated top-ranking authors who write in Spanish. They include English translator Margaret Jull Costa, Serbian translator Biljana Isailovic and French translator André Gabastou. Among translators who speak Basque, there are two main profiles: native Basque speakers with a good command of the target language, and native speakers of a target language who learned Basque as adults. It is quite frequent in smaller languages for translations out of a language to be done into the translator's foreign language. Cases in point include English translators Amaia Gabantxo and Nere Lete. Translators who learn Basque as adults normally access Basque as fluent Spanish speakers.¹⁴ So when they translate a Basque book that already has a Spanish version into their

¹⁴ Some translators will find it difficult to withdraw from their communication competence in Spanish, both at a linguistic and at a cultural level. Their language proficiency in Spanish may interfere in translating a literary work written in Basque (Manterola 2020: 401). According to Japanese translator Nami Kaneko, the knowledge of

target mother tongue, they can consult both versions. This practice lies somewhere between direct and indirect translation and consists of using both the original text in Basque and the text translated into Spanish as source for the translation.¹⁵ The use of a compiled original is another probable indicator of dependence on Spanish in the foreign-language dissemination of Basque literature.

4. Promotion and dissemination of Basque literature

Promotion and dissemination are essential in making a literature known beyond its borders, and they are necessary for its survival, since two-way literary exchanges enrich a literature and enable it to evolve. Minority cultures need to design cultural policies suited to their characteristics. Grutman mentions two types of trend when analysing the situation in Belgium: *laissez-faire* language policies, which follow market norms, and policies that promote equal opportunities for the different languages in the country (2017: 45).

Many countries and nations have specific institutions for the promotion abroad of their cultural output. In the case under study, cultural entities at both state and regional levels offer aids for producing cultural output. However, as suggested by Montero Küpper (2016), Manterola (2021), and Castro & Linares (2022), regional bodies in Spain tend to finance cultural output in smaller languages, whereas central state institutions mainly provide aid for translating literature written in Spanish.

The Government of the Basque Autonomous Community¹⁶ began to develop cultural policies to enhance literary translation and dissemination of Basque culture in 2000. Initially, the Culture Department was in charge of cultural output abroad, but in 2007 a specific institution was set up to handle the task: the Etxepare Basque Institute (hereafter called Etxepare). Etxepare is the entity responsible for Basque cultural diplomacy and its mission is to promote the Basque language and culture outside the Basque Autonomous Community. Its major objective is to

enhance the international presence and visibility of the Basque language and contemporary Basque creativity, to promote international cooperation and to foster exchange and communication between creators, professionals, stakeholders and public institutions (Etxepare s.d.).

Etxepare supports both cultural output in Basque and the production of cultural output by Basque artists in Spanish.¹⁷

Spanish influences foreign translators who learn Basque as adults in three moments: when they chose a work to translate, during the translation process and when they present the translated work (Manterola 2016b: 44).

¹⁵ Translators might consult the Spanish text on an *ad hoc* basis, or more systematically, to solve their translation problems or to see the different options that exist in the original and its translation into Spanish in order to choose the most appropriate one for the target text. Translators with a more limited knowledge of Basque will need to consult the Spanish text for a better understanding.

¹⁶ Other territories where Basque is spoken (the Chartered Community of Navarre in the Spanish Basque Country and the Communauté d'Agglomération du Pays Basque in France) do not offer support for the promotion of culture abroad.

¹⁷ Most regional bodies that offer aids for translation in Spain limit their scope to output in co-official languages, but the Etxepare Basque Institute is an exception, as it offers aid for translation of literary works written in Basque or in Spanish (see Castro & Linares 2022 for a comparative analysis).

The main initiatives linked to literary translation from Basque provided by the institute involve offering grants for the translation of literary works (to subsidise translation and publication costs), grants for sample translations into English or French, awarding the Etxepare-Laboral Kutxa Translation Prize, and granting aid for travel costs to participate in literary fairs or cultural events. Seeking to broaden its activities, Etxepare includes updates in the requirements of its annual calls and develops new culture programmes.¹⁸ Despite its modest size and resources, Etxepare's performance is growing and diversifying.¹⁹

Aids for literary translation provided by official bodies can solve the lack of interest or the lack of demand from the market. Between 2011 and 2020, Etxepare awarded a total of 164 grants for translating works from Basque, accounting for 39% of all the translations published in that period. Apart from direct aid for translation, Etxepare assisted authors in the form of travel aid to promote their work abroad. It also promoted subsidised works at international book fairs.

The number of translators who have learned Basque as a foreign language and are capable of translating from it is quite limited, as Basque is not frequently learned as a second language, and second hand translation or indirect translation has been (and continues to be) widespread in the exporting of Basque literature (Manterola 2014; 2021). Etxepare's annual call for translation aid does not expressly exclude indirect translations, but it is not unusual that translations from an intermediary Spanish version are subsidised.²⁰ Additionally, the Etxepare-Laboral Kutxa Translation Prize, which has been awarded yearly since 2015 to the best translation from Basque, has gone to an indirect translation in two of its nine editions to date.²¹ This openness to indirect translation is also visible in translation into Basque. For example, books published in the "Universal Literature" collection promoted by the Association of Basque Translators, Proofreaders and Interpreters (EIZIE) receive a public subsidy for translation. The call for translations permits translators to work from intermediate versions instead of the original, provided that they use more than one intermediate translation.²²

Basque literature faces another challenge for its export: the lack of any specific training for translators to qualify them to work from Basque.²³ The Basque language is so different

¹⁸ In recent years, Etxepare has been promoting dialogue between Basque culture and other world cultures through Cultural Connections, such as Scotland Goes Basque in 2019 and Saison Québec – Pays Basque in 2021-2022 (<https://www.etxepare.eus/en/cultural-diplomacy>).

¹⁹ For example, in 2021 the institute published a call for aid for the foreign-language subtitling of films and plays created in Basque.

²⁰ Examples of subsidised works translated indirectly from Spanish into other languages in recent editions of the aid include the translation of *Obabakoak* by Bernardo Atxaga into Serbian (2021), *Euskal Herriko ipuinak* by Juan Kruz Igerabide into Arabic (2021), *Atertu arte itxaron* by Katixa Agirre into German (2020) and *Etxeak eta hilobiak* by Bernardo Atxaga into Danish (2020). Poetry written by Joseba Sarrionandia was translated into Armenian (2021) based on the English version *Prisons and Exiles*.

²¹ The first Etxepare-Laboral Kutxa Translation Prize awarded to an indirect translation went to Ukrainian translator Yaroslav Gúbarev and the publisher Anetta Antonenko Publishers for the translation of *Behi euskaldun baten memoriak* by Bernardo Atxaga (2017), and the second to Dutch translator Mariolein Sabarte and the publisher Zirimiri Press for the translation of *Ameak ez dute* by Katixa Agirre (2022).

²² The call states that "if the translation is not based on the original version, translators should use at least two source languages (see the most recent call here: https://eizie.eus/eu/argitalpenak/literatura_unibertsala/itzulpen-lehiaketa-2023).

²³ The University of the Basque Country UPV/EHU offers a degree in Translation and Interpreting, where students work mainly with Basque as the target language of their translations. Students can only access an optional 6 ECTS course to translate in the opposite direction, that is, from Basque into Spanish. No other university offers the option of learning Translation and Interpreting with Basque as a working language. For more information, see Manterola & Tamayo 2020.

from neighbouring languages that the required cultural immersion entails a considerable investment of time and effort. For this reason, the Etxepare Basque Institute and the Association of Basque Translators, Proofreaders and Interpreters (EIZIE) have both been promoting the training of Basque translators for several years through translation workshops (“The Writer and his Translators”) and specific programmes (“New Translators”).²⁴ In the absence of official university courses in translation from Basque, these activities serve to some extent to offset the need to promote training in literary translation with Basque as a source language.

These training programmes have been successful, as the translators who participated in them have published their work in the target cultures.²⁵ Examples include Maria Páchkova’s Bulgarian translations of the books *Zergatik panpox?* and *Hiru Mariak* by Arantxa Urretabizkaia, Barbara Pregelj’s Slovenian translations of several books from Bernardo Atxaga’s *Xola* collection, Katarzyna Sosnowska’s Polish translation of the novel *Gizona bere bakardadean* by Bernardo Atxaga, and the Spanish translation of Danele Sarriugarte’s novel *Erraiak* by translator Miren Iriarte.²⁶ These examples show that the programmes in question are not only aimed at training but also at the publication and dissemination of Basque literature abroad.

The efforts of the public sector actors involved in internationalising Basque literature have so far focused on investing in training, subsidising translations, and promoting the mobility of creators, while aid for promotion and dissemination is a more recent, and to date more limited, innovation. It is important to further examine the activity of the institute to learn more about the avenues explored for the promotion of Basque literature abroad.

It should also be emphasised that translators play a valuable role as prescribers in their respective cultures, since they not only translate works but often also take on the roles of assessing the potential interest of books in the target culture, selecting which works are translated, suggesting their suitability to publishers who cannot access the original work, and helping in promotion once the translations are published.

Alongside the roles played by translators as producers of the translated texts and prescribers in their respective cultures and alongside the initiatives set up by public institutions to promote translated literature, it is worth mentioning literary agents as the parties responsible for managing the external dissemination of literature by selling translation rights. There has been little tradition of such agents in Basque literature. In the 1990s, Alejandro Zugaza launched Ikeder, the first and for some time the only literary agency in the Basque Country. It represented authors such as Bernardo Atxaga, Anjel Lertxundi and Kirmen Uribe. Ikeder closed down some years ago, but the figure of the literary agent has been gaining importance in recent years, and more and more contemporary Basque writers have one. However, it is striking that the main agents representing Basque authors are located outside the Basque Country. This is the case of Ute Körner (Bernardo Atxaga, Mariasun Landa, Xabier

²⁴ The workshop “The Writer and his Translators” brings together an author and several translators into different languages to work together on different translations of the same source text. The “Itzultzaile berriak” (New Translators) programme, on the other hand, is an innovative training programme that gives translators from other countries the opportunity to translate works by Basque authors into their respective languages. For more details, see <https://eizie.eus/en/events/basque-literature-translated-into-other-languages-ii>.

²⁵ Apart from the publications in book format mentioned in the text, the text samples translated in the workshops were published in paper and/or electronic format (https://eizie.eus/en/publications/basque-literature-in-other-languages/writer_publications?set_language=en).

²⁶ As seen in the previous section, Bulgarian and Slovenian increased the number of translations in the last ten years under study, in part due to the participation of Páchkova and Pregelj in the New Translators programme.

Etxeberria), Casanovas & Lynch (Kirmen Uribe), Ella Sher (Katixa Agirre, Uxue Alberdi, Oihane Amantegi, Irati Elorrieta, Karmele Jaio, Hasier Larretxea, Nerea Loiola), SalmaiaLit (Eider Rodriguez, Harkaitz Cano, Amets Arzallus and Ibrahima Balde) –all located in Barcelona²⁷– and Mertin Witt (Unai Elorriaga) –based in Frankfurt. The absence of literary agents based in the Basque Country pushes Basque authors to search for agents elsewhere. The lack of a solid literary structure makes literature in the smaller language dependent on agents who work in major language systems.

Apart from the actors directly involved in the translation and dissemination of Basque books, there is another strategic factor that stands out: literary prizes. The Euskadi Literary Prize, awarded by the Basque Government, promotes the work of a specific author within the Basque community. It also grants an additional amount of money if the prize-winning work is translated into another language. So far, prize-winning books have been translated mainly into Spanish, but the prize has not boosted their international circulation. On the other hand, the Spanish National Award has been awarded to various Basque authors: Bernardo Atxaga (1989), Unai Elorriaga (2002) and Kirmen Uribe (2008) were awarded the prize in the Fiction category; Miren Agur Meabe (2021) in Poetry; Mariasun Landa (2003), Juan Kruz Igerabide (2018) and Patxi Zubizarreta (2023) in Children and Young Adults' Literature; and Anjel Lertxundi in the Essays category (2010). They are all renowned writers in their original language, and have all been translated into Spanish; some of them have also been translated into other languages, but only Atxaga, Elorriaga and Uribe have accessed the international book market by publishing with major, benchmark publishers.

5. Final remarks

This paper offers an overview of the outreach of contemporary Basque literature. The study reported on here permits us to reflect on literary exchanges from a smaller language context and to assess cultural policies for the promotion of Basque literature abroad.

The study shows that literary translation from Basque is generally on the increase, although a slight drop has been noted. The recession that began in 2008 was reflected throughout the decade of 2010-2020. The effects of the 2020 pandemic remain to be seen in future studies.

A thorough knowledge of the links between the source and target cultures and the hierarchical relationships established in the cultural exchange is vital when examining the circulation of translations. The complex sociolinguistic situation in the Basque Country makes dependence on Spanish an intrinsic characteristic of the Basque language. Having fewer speakers, being less commonly taught as a foreign language, and lacking official status across the whole of its territory characterise the development of Basque language. Basque literature is produced in a multilingual territory, so translation is an indispensable element in spreading it not only beyond its borders, but also among Basque readers who do not speak Basque. The number of translations published by publishers located in the Basque Country is relatively high, especially Spanish translations (and to a lesser degree French and English). This shows that translation from Basque is not necessarily a sign of export and dissemination abroad. It suggests that the major audience for extratranslations is intraliterary, that is, Basques who read in Spanish

²⁷ Publishing houses and literary agents in the Spanish literary system are mainly located in Madrid and Barcelona and the two cities are central in Spanish literature.

are their main public. A more exhaustive study would be needed to determine the extent to which they reach a more extensive audience within other territories in Spain and abroad.²⁸

A quantitative analysis shows that the number of authors translated, the number of originals translated, and the number of target languages are increasing year by year. The genre most translated is children and young adults' literature, followed by fiction for adults, which is in line with the original production in Basque. As regards target languages, there is a big difference between Spanish and other languages in terms of the number of translations, which might be an indicator of interposition (Comellas 2021: 67). It also demonstrates how powerful the core role of Spanish is within the Iberian inter-literary system. It is commonly assumed that accessing the hyper-central language (English) favours a greater dissemination of a smaller language, but that assumption is not validated by this study. There are several hubs in the world literary system, and Spanish is the closest geographically and culturally to the Basque literary system, and is the most frequent target of Basque works. As Castro & Linares (2022: 801) point out, "Spanish is the (potentially intermediary) 'global language' into which literature in Basque is translated". As shown in this study, translation phenomena frequent in the Spanish literary polysystem mentioned by Domínguez (2010) have a notable presence when translating Basque literature, such as self-translation, second hand translation, intermediation and intraliterary translation.

In recent times, more and more books have been translated directly from Basque, or at least the data obtained reveal that paratexts more often recognise Basque texts as the source texts used for translation. As indicated in the previous section, indirect translation is not excluded when translations into other languages are subsidised, which demonstrates it is still a common or even significant practice for the dissemination of Basque literature. Although direct translation is becoming more frequent, it requires an appropriate context, and it is far from easy to establish direct relations for a language with limited dissemination. As mentioned above, training translators is essential, and unless a regulated training programme is developed, the training of translators to translate from Basque will have to be encouraged by other means. In the absence of training, indirect translation will still be an acceptable and desirable activity in order to establish communication with other cultures. There are more and more translators who have learned Basque as a foreign language and are capable of translating from it. However, translators who learn Basque as adults usually have a high level of Spanish. This means that even when they translate from Basque, the Spanish version offers valuable help in the translating process, as mere reference material, for use at the same level as the original text or even as the main source, foregoing the original.²⁹

In the absence of any specific demand from the market, minority cultures tend to produce supply-driven translations. The market does not expressly request these translations, but actors outside the literary translation process push for translations to be published and disseminated among the audience. This may be a form of cultural diplomacy, which seeks to highlight the artistic creations of a culture. When examining translation as a social phenomenon, policies for promoting literary translation cannot be overlooked, whether they come from public or private entities, since they finance *what* is translated and *how* it is translated.

²⁸ For example, studies based on the number of reviews and/or citations, text reuses, sales numbers, and/or number of printed copies could assess the impact of translated books. In turn, a reception study would contribute to a better understanding of readers' perspectives on translated works.

²⁹ Japanese translator Nami Kaneko highlights the importance of the Spanish version when translating from Basque in an interview in the journal *Senez* (Manterola, 2016b). Manterola (2020) also addresses this issue.

Patronage has been observed to be a fundamental element for the promotion and dissemination of literature created in smaller languages. Unless there is specific demand, it is the culture of origin that promotes its own literary creations abroad. However, in the case studied here not only the original minority culture but also the intermediary culture in the major language plays an important role in dissemination in third languages. Spanish acts as a bridge language and culture, not only when Spanish translations are used as source texts for third language translations, but also in raising the profiles of authors and their works in target cultures.

The previous section shows that public resources destined for translation may produce an increase in the number of books translated. The participation of translators in specific translation programmes organised by Etxepare and EIZIE may also have a positive effect as they continue to translate works by Basque authors, as in the case of Bulgarian translator Maria Páchkova and the Slovenian translator Barbara Pregelj.

As shown by the quantitative study, the Basque literary system has a close, asymmetric relationship with the Spanish system. Therefore, when support for Basque authors and works comes from Spanish institutions, it often serves as a launching pad for third language translations. A literary prize in Spain awarded to a Basque author frames that author within the Spanish system, which draws attention to them as biliterary writers, binational writers³⁰ or even as Spanish writers, to the detriment of their Basque origin. As pointed out above, the Spanish National Award had an immediate influence on the exports of Atxaga, Elorriaga and Uribe, but further research would be needed to learn more about how their works have been received by foreign readers. In a way, bilingual authors are located in two systems, which makes a clear identification difficult. “Desde el momento en que algunos autores se colocan en ambos sistemas y la posición que adquieren en el segundo influye en el primero, el primer sistema no será del todo autónomo”³¹ (Manterola 2014: 247). Consequently, the support that Basque literature receives from the Spanish central system shapes relationships of dependency.

Consideration should be given to initiatives by entities that promote the original culture in order to assess the steps taken so far. Many beneficiaries of the aid for translation granted by the Etxepare Basque Institute are publishers located in the Basque Country that publish translations into Spanish (Manterola 2021: 92). One might think that publishing a translation within the Basque Country is not the same as publishing one outside it, as they are not targeted at the same audience. Spanish is a frequent target language of subsidised works (Castro & Linares 2022), so the major scope of the translation aid is not only reaching a foreign audience but also reaching intrastate readers. It is therefore necessary to define what the goal granting subsidies is, in order to develop lines of action to determine what type(s) of translation to promote, into what languages and for what target audiences. An updated aid system would be better suited to Etxepare’s main objective of disseminating and promoting Basque culture outside the Basque Country.

All in all, the existence of a specific entity for promoting the Basque language and culture is beneficial for the dissemination and promotion of a national culture abroad but also for enhancing its self-perception within the original territory. The promoting entity helps to overcome difficulties inherent in smaller languages and to diminish dependence on hegemonic

³⁰ Biliterary authors participate in two literary systems, whereas being a binational author implies not only participating in two literary systems, but also belonging to two literary systems, that is, two national literatures consider them to be part of their literary systems. See Đurišin 1984, 1993 or Domínguez 2010 for more details.

³¹ “As soon as authors position themselves in both systems and their position in the second influences that in the first, the first system ceases to be fully autonomous”. [Translated by the author of the paper]

cultural agents when disseminating cultural output abroad. Resources offered by Etxepare include translation aids (from which 39% of all translations published between 2011-2020 benefited, as mentioned above). However, the resources offered by Etxepare are not limited to translation aid: it also helps writers to raise the profile of their works by providing travel aid and by awarding a translation prize. Further study of how target audiences receive the works would be needed to assess the effectiveness of the initiatives set up by Etxepare.

Reflecting on the role played by translation in different cultures helps to assess the possibilities of accessing them from a small literature. This paper seeks to address the circulation of translations from Basque by studying the translation-related actors, resources and policies set in place to date. An open topic for reflection in the future is whether internationalisation is a consequence of visibility: becoming more visible is essential for the promotion of translations from Basque and their international outreach. What is done elsewhere, however, also feeds back into Basque literature itself, as translation into other languages influences the awareness of the original cultural actors and audience. Translation into other languages therefore also strengthens the internal market.

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