



*How Books Travel. Translation Flows and Practices of Dutch Acquiring Editors
and New York Literary Scouts, 1980-2009*

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English Summary

In this dissertation I studied the development of translation flows of fiction and poetry books into the Netherlands between 1980 and 2009. This study was inspired by the rising prominence of translations from English in the Netherlands after the Second World War (Heilbron, 1995) and the overall increasing importance of Anglo-American culture in Western Europe (e.g. Janssen, Kuipers & Verboord, 2008). As such I set out to study how translation flows in fiction and poetry developed in the last three decades. Not only did I ask quantitatively to what extent the share of translations from English increased further between 1980 and 2009, I also set out to qualitatively study how translations come about in practice.

I found that indeed translations from English are dominant in Dutch fiction and poetry book production between 1980 and 2009. But this position shifts during the three decades under study. While the dominance of English rises during the 1980s and peaks in the 1990s when the share of English is greater than 50 percent of all fiction and poetry books published, after 2003 the relative share of English decreases (see also Achterberg et al., 2011). This indicates a diversification of book translations but also an increasing importance of books written in Dutch that became less important in the 1990s but increased its share in the 2000s. However, the decline of English is relatively small and, on an aggregate level the dominance of English over all other languages including books originally written in Dutch is abundantly clear.

My dissertation shows that analyzing translation flows on the national-level can offer insights in the translation flows into Dutch and its relation with the production of books written in Dutch originally. However, this national-level also hides more than it reveals. Taking all genres together to understand translation flows on an aggregate level hides the differences between genres. Indeed while on the national level English is dominant, this is not the case in every genre. In poetry for instance, the position of English is much more modest, on average 3,1% of poetry books are translations from English. On the contrary among romance novels, English on average accounts for 92,3% of all books. Moreover, the development of English is different in different genres. For instance, in literary fiction the share of English is rising during the 1990s and 2000s while in crime fiction on the other hand, its share is declining from the middle of the 1990s onwards.

I have taken English here as an example to show that translation flows are not uniform. They are dynamic and differ between different parts of the literary field; between different types of books. This is the case because translation flows are the result of configurations of literary fields, for example romance novels are published by publishing multinationals that are active

in a great number of countries at the same time. These configurations structure the individual publishing decisions made by editors and publishers that are located in different parts of the literary field. Making such decisions does not entail the same thing for a small poetry publisher than it does for a large generalist publisher of crime and literary fiction. Some editors look to the Anglo-American parts of the literary world rather than the Arabic literary traditions or invest in relations with German publishers and agents rather than with French publishers and agents. Publishers focused on crime fiction for instance tended to view the Anglo-American literary field with much interest but have increasingly focused on Scandinavian countries in the last couple of years.

As such, in this dissertation translations and translation flows are understood as the outcome of a process in which all kinds of agents such as editors, publishers, agents and scouts are involved. These agents have specific positions in (trans)national literary fields and (trans)national book markets which inform their practices. The aim of this dissertation was to unpack these processes and the translation flows that emerge from them, to come to a sociologically informed understanding of the way in which translations come about in practice. The analysis contributes to two literatures; that of the study of cultural globalization, and that of the study of practices of cultural intermediaries in transnational fields and markets.

Cultural globalization

It was expected that, as globalization intensified from the 1980s onwards in the cultural industries (Hesmondhalgh 2007; Kuipers 2011) the relative share of translations would also grow. The analysis of translation flows between 1980 and 2009 shows that there is only a minor rise in the relative share of translations and, after 2003, even a decline. However, already in the 1980s the share of translations is very high. This implies that the rise of the importance of translations primarily took place before the 1980s, after the 1970s the rise is limited. The increase of transnational exchange in the cultural industries thus did not have a great impact on publishing, bearing in mind that translations were already very important at the start of the 1980s. However, it is clear that cultural globalization does not lead to an unlimited quantity of translations and that it cannot be equated with either cultural imperialism nor unbounded cultural diversity but that the way globalization comes about in publishing is more complex.

As Heilbron (1995) and Quemin (2006, 2013) also argue, there is a clear structure in the cultural world-system and the position of nations and languages in this cultural world-system does not change much over time. English is very dominant and as such can be argued to have a hegemonic position, German and French follow on a large distance and are closer in their position to Spanish, Swedish and Italian than to English. As such cultural globalization increased the concentration of transnational literary production in the Anglo-American field. However, at the same time, there is an increasing number of source languages that is presented in translation and this is the case in all genres. Within the broader framework of an unequally structured cultural world-system diversity is possible and growing but only small numbers. As such, cultural globalization is a process that creates increasing concentration and increasing diversity at the same time. Moreover, there are big differences between different genres.

Comparing translation flows in literary fiction, poetry, crime fiction and romance novels shows that there are big differences between literary fiction and poetry on the one hand, and crime fiction and romance novels on the other. Crime fiction and romance novels are more dominated by translations from English than literary fiction and poetry. The dominance of English is so great because Dutch publishers are able to produce a lot of similar titles in these genres. A publisher like Harlequin publishes almost exclusively translations from English and does so in such great numbers that these books almost singlehandedly fill the whole romance genre. Moreover, there are far less books written in Dutch in these genres. Apparently, Dutch authors have a preference for other genres, although in crime fiction there is a clear upwards trend in books written originally in Dutch.

Analysing the development of translations in four genres (literary fiction, crime fiction, romance novels and poetry) over time uncovers that their trajectories are only slightly related. Only in the case of diversity is there a field-wide development; in all genres more and more languages are represented in translation. This is not the case in the level of linguistic concentration or in the development of the share of English. Especially crime fiction and literary fiction show oppositional trends. In crime fiction the share of English decreases while this is opposite in literary fiction. As such, cultural globalization as an umbrella-concept captures very different processes in these genres that are only marginally related to each other. This raises doubt to what extent the concept of cultural globalization is useful to understand the development of translation flows into the Dutch literary field. This analysis suggests that

using the term might bring together very different processes that, in practice, are not related to each other that much.

The analysis of the Dutch literary space in chapter two showed that genres are not unified subfields themselves, or at least not always. Based on an analysis of publishers' lists I show which languages are often combined with each other in each genre and subsequently which language-genre groups are combined most often with each other in publishers' lists. The analysis shows that poetry is a very clear genre-subfield in which publishers publish poetry books from a variety of languages but hardly any books outside of the genre (see also Dubois, 2006; 2013). This is not the case for the other genres. Rather, among publishers who mainly publish fiction, there are subfields that consists of multiple genres but mainly from one language, English or Dutch, or from a large range of languages but with a far smaller share of Dutch or English books. As such, cultural globalization is not unified even on the level of the genre. It might be better understood as a process in which specific circuits are developed by publishers themselves which might or might not cross genre boundaries and might or might not cross linguistic boundaries.

What we learn from this analysis of translation flows and subfields is that international exchange can develop in different ways and can develop into different types of circuits that all add to the aggregate process of what we call cultural globalization. The extent to which we can assess this cultural globalization on a macro-level in the cultural sphere is rather limited and often hides the complexity of what is happening in practice.

Networks and practices in transnational fields and markets

To understand how translation flows develop as they do, I analyzed the networks through which books travel which are embedded in the translational literary field and the global market for translations. I found that translations are organized in decentralized transnational networks in which editors, publishers, agents, scouts and sometimes other actors (such as translators or critics) are actively engaged with selecting the best, most fitting manuscripts or published books for Dutch publishers lists and, consequently, for the Dutch book market.

This transnational exchange is formalized in trade agreements and international laws that define the way in which translation rights can be sold. As such, a transnational literary space has emerged (Casanova, 2004) in which actors from various national literary fields come together. This field is embedded in national literary fields but also surpasses it. In this

transnational literary field, there are moments when everyone meets, on the book fairs of London, New York and especially Frankfurt. There are evaluation regimes and aesthetic repertoires that all actors more or less share, for instance, everyone knows what 'upmarket fiction' means and how to translate this genre-code to their national literary field. Moreover, there are specific professions that mainly act on the transnational level and regulate the exchange of translation rights, most notably acquiring editors, literary agents and literary scouts. In three chapters I studied the practices of these transnational actors through an analysis of the practices of literary scouts in New York and Dutch acquiring editors.

One way of analyzing the practices of scouts and editors is to understand them as attempts to handle or cope with the classic problems of the cultural industries (Hesmondhalgh, 2007). Like in other fields of cultural production, the transnational literary field is characterized by overabundance, uncertainty and strife. There is an overabundance of available new manuscripts to possibly publish. It is impossible to, beforehand, know or predict the nature, quality and marketability of new manuscripts. Lastly, there is a great competition for the 'best' new manuscripts. Moreover, everyone is aware that in the consumer market roughly twenty percent of books will break-even or make a profit, the pressure to pick the 'right' manuscripts therefore is high. These uncertainties and unpredictabilities are reinforced by the global scale of the transnational literary field in which editors and literary scouts increasingly operate. One never knows where the next bestseller will be coming from.

Literary scouts work for, mainly European, publishing houses and collect (information on) new manuscripts for their clients. The scouting task precedes and engages with the decision-making process of editors, the problems of editors are therefore also the problems of scouts. For scouts the main problems are those of uncertainty and speed. The problem of uncertainty is even magnified as they see manuscripts often even earlier than editors when they are often only partially finished and not yet bought by an American publishing house, and not seen by any reviewers or consumers. As such it is very hard to 'know' which manuscripts are good. Speed is a problem especially for scouts because most European editors of the main publishing houses employ scouts and are looking for roughly the same type of manuscripts. As such, scouts are enmeshed in a fierce competition amongst themselves to be the first scout to obtain an interesting new manuscript. A race that is crucial for their status within the transnational literary field and as such for their professional success.

The solution that scouts find to handle these problems is to rely on what is called buzz, that is, the 'talk of the town'. Following who is talking about what gives scouts a sense of which

manuscripts are 'growing' and which ones are failing. Information that they then can pass on to their clients in Europe and which determines which manuscript they actively pursue and which ones they neglect.

Dutch acquisition editors cope with the problems of excess, uncertainty and competition in different ways. Their main solutions are collecting information through decentralized networks, trust in their (increasingly transnational) networks and their own expertise, and the accumulation of symbolic capital, in particular through their publishers' respective catalogues. Editors spread their decision-making power across a network of people that they trust. In that way other actors such as literary scouts or befriended editors and translators act as filters in the abundance of manuscripts available. Through these channels a select number of manuscripts comes to editors. These manuscripts are evaluated by combining aesthetic and commercial criteria and following their own expertise that is build up through years and years of experience in reading manuscripts. Chapter four shows that editors have a range of strategies (bielby & Bielby, 1994; Mauws, 2000) they use to identify the best manuscripts, most importantly the 'fit' of a manuscript with their publishing house and publishers' list. To be taken serious by foreign editors and rights holders, but also to make sense of the position they themselves hold in the literary field, editors build a publishers' list that shows some form of coherence. It is the publishers' list that embodies the publish house their symbolic capital

After the translation rights are bought Dutch editors have to bring the book onto the market. In chapter five, together with Olav Velthuis, I analyzed this processes focussing on the way market order is created through pricing strategies. We show that editors price books as if material characteristics drive the production costs. As such, the translation costs cannot be recouped in the prize as these are 'invisible'. Rather editors make translated books thicker or, for instance, give them a hardcover to be able to give them a higher price.