

Literary Translation as an Instrument of Slovenian Cultural Diplomacy with Particular Regard to Translations in German

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Abstract

The article discusses translation policy in Slovenia as part of the country's cultural diplomacy. Translations of Slovenian literature, especially into German and English, are among the goals of the country's cultural policy, in part because of Slovenia's upcoming role as Guest of Honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2023. The article analyses the role of the financial support for and promotion of translations from Slovenian into foreign languages by the Slovenian Book Agency and the Trubar Foundation. The study of subsidies for translations into German, English, French, Italian, Croatian, and Hungarian shows that while the number of subsidies for translations into German and English is high, as expected, Croatian takes the leading role among the target languages studied. This underscores the importance of the still-vibrant social and political ties stemming from the historical context of Yugoslavia. In addition to the crucial role of subsidies in exporting literature from a peripheral language such as Slovenian, the translation process and the promotion of literature depend to a considerable extent on other market actors—as the interviews with three literary experts showed.

Keywords: literary translation, translation policy, cultural diplomacy, subsidies, Slovenian Book Agency (JAK)

INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS¹

This study examines the role of translation policy in the context of cultural diplomacy of the Republic of Slovenia. Countries develop their own cultural policies to exert influence abroad, including through the translation of their literature into foreign languages. The study focuses on how state, as well as non-state actors, select and regulate the export of Slovenian literature and what this can tell us about the relative degree of power of certain target languages in comparison to each other and compared to the source language. Slovenian has the role of a peripheral language in the international translation system (Heilbron 1999, 433; Zlatnar Moe, Žigon, and Mikolič Južnič 2019, 42). Moreover, Slovenia is classified as a small state due to its limited influence in world politics (Požgan and Bojinović Fenko 2012, 39–40). For small states, culture is the most appropriate tool to increase their international visibility in foreign policy relations (*ibid.*, 40) and to shape their own policy of prestige (Udovič 2017, 200). Although languages and translations play a crucial role in international affairs and in any form of diplomacy, research in the field of Translation Studies on cultural diplomacy is still relatively scarce (Flotow 2018, 193, 200). In Slovenia, cultural diplomacy and soft power have only been studied in the field of foreign policy and international relations (Podgornik and Udovič 2012; Bojinović Fenko 2014) as well as in connection with transculturality (Žigon, Kondrič Horvat, and Udovič 2020), while a study within Translation Studies has not yet been conducted.

The present study has three main objectives. The first objective is to define what role translation plays as a means of Slovenia's cultural diplomacy and how translation policy in relation to literature export is defined in the state's main strategic documents for culture. The second goal is to find out what the state support of the Slovenian Book Agency (JAK) and the Trubar Foundation for Slovenian literature in translation reveal about the power relations between the selected languages (German, English, French, Italian, Croatian, Hungarian). Finally, the study aims to identify the main actors (institutional and others) involved in the selection and promotion of translations (national institutions, authors, translators, editors, etc.).

CULTURAL DIPLOMACY AND TRANSLATION

As an integral part of foreign policy and public diplomacy (Požgan and Bojinović Fenko 2012, 32), cultural diplomacy is considered an instrument that is part of soft power (Hill 2003, 135; Nye 2004). Language and translation play an important

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role in cultural diplomacy, as translation is a tool through which cultural elements of the country of origin, along with its literary and intellectual traditions, enter the target country (Flotow 2018, 197; cf. Udovič 2020). Translation initiatives can be used for political reasons and to achieve certain effects related to the image of a particular country abroad (Maack 2001; Flotow 2018, 197; Heilbron and Sapiro 2018, 185).

Cultural diplomacy can be implemented by different types of actors. On the one hand, there are state actors, e.g., foreign ministries, cultural attachés, and diplomatic and consular representations. One of the oldest forms of supporting and practising cultural diplomacy is represented by national cultural institutes such as the British Council, the Alliance Française, and the Goethe-Institut etc. (Bučar 2007, 45–50). Apart from the Slovenian Culture and Information Centre (SKI-CA) in Vienna and the Slovenian Cultural Centre Berlin, Slovenia has no other cultural centres or cultural attachés abroad, unlike other, comparable countries. Slovakia, for example, has eight cultural institutes/centres abroad (Udovič and Podgornik 2016, 126), while the Danish Cultural Institute is currently present in at least nine countries worldwide (Danish Cultural Institute 2022). Nevertheless, the implementation of cultural diplomacy is also in the hands of non-governmental organisations as well as individuals, such as artists and musicians or, in the field of translation, publishers, editors, writers, translators, etc. (Institute for Cultural Diplomacy n.d., 11).

TRANSLATION POLICY AND TRANSLATION FLOWS

In the field of Translation Studies, the concept of translation policy has been defined and discussed by various scholars, such as Holmes (1988), Meylaerts (2011), and Gonzáles Núñez (2016). In this article, the concept of translation policy will be understood as defined by Meylaerts (2011, 163), who relates translation policy to different types of settings that include both institutional organisations and a wide range of relatively informal decisions related to ideology, strategies of translators, editors, and publishers, prizes, grants, subsidies, and translator training.

States can be recognised as the central actors in regulating translation flows and shaping translation practices, as they influence publishing and encourage or inhibit translation through subsidies or other forms of support or, on the other hand, through the imposition of restrictions and censorship (Heilbron and Sapiro 2018, 184; cf. Rude-Porubská 2010). Institutional organisations have a significant impact on the export of cultural capital², of which translations are a crucial part, through national policies that include financial support. Subsidy systems namely

2 Here the term cultural capital is used as defined by Pierre Bourdieu (1986).

“spring from cultural policies that attempt to incorporate certain cultural goods into the national patrimony” (Heilbron and Sapiro 2007, 100). Translation policy can therefore be seen as an instrument of national cultural policy³ used to promote a country abroad (cultural diplomacy).

Translation flows between language groups form the core of the analysis of the international system of translation introduced by Johan Heilbron (1999, 432). In this hierarchical but at the same time very dynamic system, language groups occupy a hyper-central, central, semi-peripheral or peripheral position. English occupies a hyper-central position since 50–70% of literary translations in the world are from English. With a share of 10–12% each in the same global system of literary translation, French and German occupy a central position, while some languages such as Italian, Spanish, Czech, Polish, Russian, etc. are classified as semi-peripheral. All other languages (including Slovenian) belong to the peripheral group; the share of literary translations from these languages in the system is less than 1% (Heilbron 2000, 14). Thus, the “availability or absence of translations from different languages in different book markets reflects existing cultural and political power relations,” which are furthermore linked to economic and symbolic capital (Hertwig 2020, 6; Sapiro 2008, 159).

METHODOLOGY

To answer the research questions, first, the last three National Programmes for Culture (2008–2011, 2014–2017, 2022–2029) and the Slovenian Book Agency Strategy 2020–2024 (JAK 2019b) were examined to see if Slovenian cultural diplomacy initiatives emphasise translation as part of cultural export and as a tool to promote Slovenia’s image and culture.

Second, the subsidies for translations into selected languages (German, English, French, Italian, Croatian, Hungarian) provided by the main institutions supporting and promoting Slovenian literature abroad—the Slovenian Book Agency⁴ and the Trubar Foundation⁵—were quantitatively analysed from 1991 to May 2021 to determine how the subsidies differ according to the languages chosen for translation. This period was chosen because preliminary research showed that

3 Cultural policy should be understood as a “sum of government’s activities” regarding arts, the humanities, and heritage (Mulcahy 2006, 320).

4 JAK was established in 2009 by the Slovenian government and is the main public institution supporting the production and promotion of books abroad.

5 The Trubar Foundation was established in 1992 as “a joint venture of the Slovenian Writers’ Association, Slovenian PEN, and the Centre for Slovenian Literature (supported by the Slovenian Book Agency)” (JAK 2019a, 42). Since 2020, financial support from the Trubar Foundation has been entirely under the auspices of JAK (Slovene Writers’ Association 2014).

translation activity has been most vibrant since the independence of the Republic of Slovenia. Data were collected from the official websites of the Slovenian Book Agency (JAK 2015) and the Trubar Foundation (Društvo slovenskih pisateljev 2014). The criteria for selecting the above-mentioned languages are based on Heilbron's international translation system—as outlined in the National Programme for Culture 2014–2017, central German and hyper-central English are considered the languages into which Slovenian literature should be comprehensively translated in the years of preparation for the Frankfurt Book Fair. French was chosen because of its central position in the global translation system, to draw comparison with German. It seemed reasonable to consider Italian, Croatian, and Hungarian as well, since they are official languages in Slovenia's neighbouring countries, which have close cultural and political ties to Slovenia. Moreover, Italian and Hungarian are recognised as official languages of the Italian and Hungarian ethnic minorities in Slovenia, while Slovenian is also recognised as a minority language in both countries.

These subsidies were further investigated for the case of translations into German, as the Slovenian language area is historically, culturally, and politically most closely connected to the German-speaking area (Kocijančič Pokorn 2008; Žigon 2020; Rozman, Žigon, and Mezeg, in print). Moreover, German is the second most common source and target language for literary translations to and from Slovenian (Zlatnar Moe, Strsoglavec, and Žigon 2017, 172; JAK 2019a, 24). The analysis of subsidies for translations into German in the last ten years (2011–2021) was conducted to make comparisons on two levels: a) the share of financially subsidised translations in the total number of literary translations in the same period, and b) the most represented literary genres of Slovenian literature in German translation compared to literary genres promoted by state subsidies. First, literary translations from Slovenian into German were recorded using the extensive Slovenian library information system COBISS and supplemented by other relevant bibliographies and catalogues (Vavti 2006; *Karlsruher Virtueller Katalog*). In addition to grants from JAK and the Trubar Foundation, other private or public grants were also considered if information about them was available in COBISS.

Finally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three important actors in the Slovenian and German-language literary fields. Interviewee 1 is a Slovenian literary translator with more than 20 years of experience translating mainly from German and Spanish into Slovenian. He/she has translated more than 30 books. Interviewee 2 is a German writer, poet, and literary translator who translates mainly from Slovenian and English into German and has translated more than 28 books. Interviewees 1 and 2 have received numerous literary awards. Interviewee 3 specialises in the international promotion of Slovenian literature and humanities books at JAK, while Interviewees 1 and 2 also work closely with

JAK as literary experts. The questions focused mainly on the criteria for selecting Slovenian books for translation and consequently for financial support from the state, the reasons for the discrepancies between the target languages, the promotion strategies for Slovenian literature on the German-language literary market, and the main actors involved in the export and promotion of Slovenian literature.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Translation policy in the Slovenian National Programmes for Culture

The National Programme for Culture is the main strategic document of Slovenian cultural policy. In all three National Programmes, separate chapters are devoted to books and the Slovenian language. The goals include the translation of literary and humanities works by excellent Slovenian authors and their systematic promotion abroad. International cooperation between publishers is also recognised as an important goal, while special attention is given to Slovenian publishers operating in neighbouring countries and Slovenian language courses abroad, which contribute significantly to the promotion of Slovenian literary production. The impact of these measures should be visible in the increase of translations of Slovenian literature into foreign languages and their publication by renowned publishers abroad, the establishment of Slovenian authors abroad and their presence at important literary festivals.

In the National Programme 2008–2011, the number of translations into foreign languages co-financed by the Ministry of Culture is more precisely defined and amounts to at least 30 translations per year. While the National Programme 2008–2011 and the National Programme 2022–2029 do not refer to the specific target languages of translations, the National Programme 2014–2017 specifies that the main target language for translation of Slovenian literature should be German. This can be partly attributed to Slovenia's role as the Guest of Honour at the world's largest book fair in Frankfurt in 2023. The decision of the Slovenian government on the country's candidacy was implemented in 2014, while the contract between the Republic of Slovenia and the Frankfurt Book Fair was signed in 2018. Preparations for the Frankfurt Book Fair are mainly led by JAK. The National Programme 2014–2017 and the Slovenian Book Agency Strategy 2020–2024 show that German is perceived as a language through which Slovenian literature and culture can gain wider international recognition. In addition to German, English is also mentioned as a target language in the preparations for Frankfurt, most likely due to its hyper-central position in the global translation

system. Therefore, the goal formulated in the National Programme 2014–2017 is to increase the number of Slovenian books translated into German and English by 30% per year. The current National Programme 2022–2029, while less specific about target languages, implicitly emphasises the importance of translations of Slovenian literature into German when it mentions Slovenia's crucial role as Guest of Honour at Frankfurt 2023.

Subsidies for translations from Slovenian into foreign languages

The results show that especially German, but also English, received an increasing number of subsidies from JAK in 2011–2021 compared to previous years (Figs. 1, 2, and 3), which can be explained by the preparations for Frankfurt. One of the requirements for the role of Guest of Honour is the publication of 100–150 translations into German in the last five years (Interviewees 1 and 2). Therefore, JAK has offered additional financial support for translations into German, which, in addition to translations, partially covers printing costs, promotion, and literary events. This offer is very popular among German publishers, who would otherwise probably not have chosen Slovenian authors to the same extent (Interviewee 1).

Another interesting fact is that the language with the highest number of subsidies from the Trubar Foundation and cumulatively (Fig. 3) is Croatian, with a total of 165 subsidies over 30 years. According to Interviewee 1, 70% of the requests for co-financing of translations at JAK are for the languages of the former Yugoslavia (e.g., Croatian, Bosnian, Serbian, Macedonian), a country to which Slovenia belonged from the end of the First World War until its independence in 1991. This trend shows that the links between the literary field of Slovenia and that of the other countries of the former Yugoslavia are still very strong due to the common socio-political and historical context (Interviewees 1 and 3). As the same interviewees point out, the presence of Slovenian literature on the Croatian literary market is definitely very important, as Croatian is still a language with more speakers than Slovenian. However, all interviewees emphasised that a book translated into Croatian probably has a lower chance of being translated into many other languages, while an excellent translation into German, English, or French is also an opportunity for Slovenian literature to enter other markets.

Considering the central role of French in the global system of literary translation, it is surprising that the number of subsidies for translations into French is so small. The same concern was expressed by Interviewee 1, who admitted that some partners at JAK would like to see more translations into French or Spanish, and that they had organised special initiatives for translations into French in previous years, but these had met with little interest. Interviewee 3 confirmed that it is very

difficult to enter the French market and that only the most prominent authors have managed to do so, e.g., Vladimir Bartol, Boris Pahor or Drago Jančar (cf. Mezeg 2020; Mezeg and Grego 2022).

Both semi-peripheral Italian and peripheral Hungarian have received more subsidies overall than French (Italian almost twice as many as Hungarian), which could be explained by their geographical, cultural, and social proximity to Slovenia. The relatively high number of subsidies for translations into Italian could also be due to the preparations for Slovenia's role as Guest of Honour at the 2024 Bologna Children's Book Fair. However, this hypothesis would need to be explored as part of a more detailed analysis of all literary translations into Italian, not just those that are subsidised. As confided by Interviewees 1 and 3, the applications for public tenders for financial support largely reflect the field of publishing and the interest of foreign markets in Slovenian literature. The different shares of subsidies between languages could indicate actual translation flows between the selected languages, but this hypothesis would need to be tested using data on the actual number of translations from Slovenian into each language, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

Figure 1. *Subsidies from the Trubar Foundation (1991–2021).*

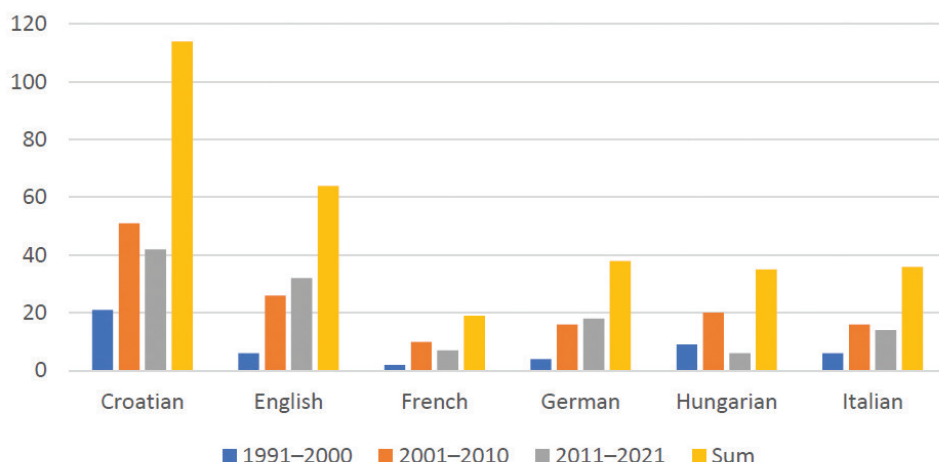
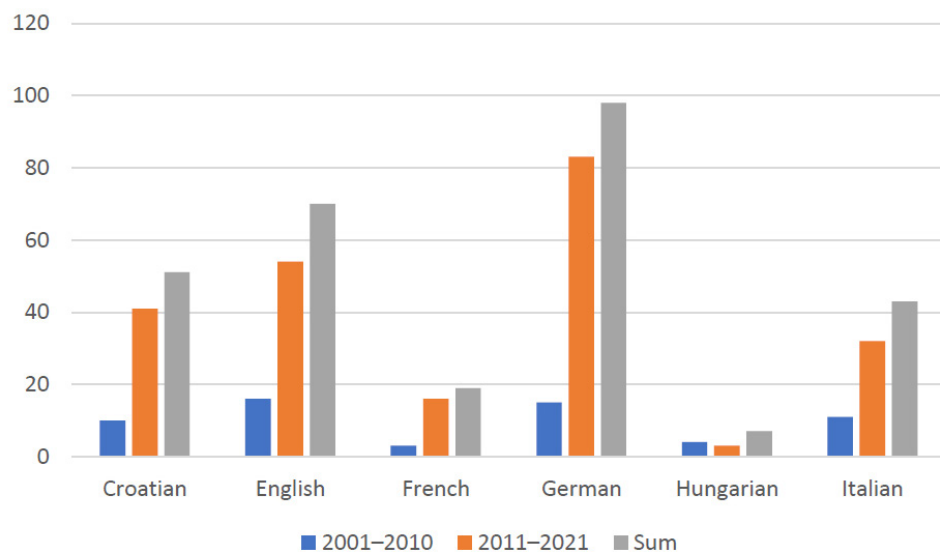
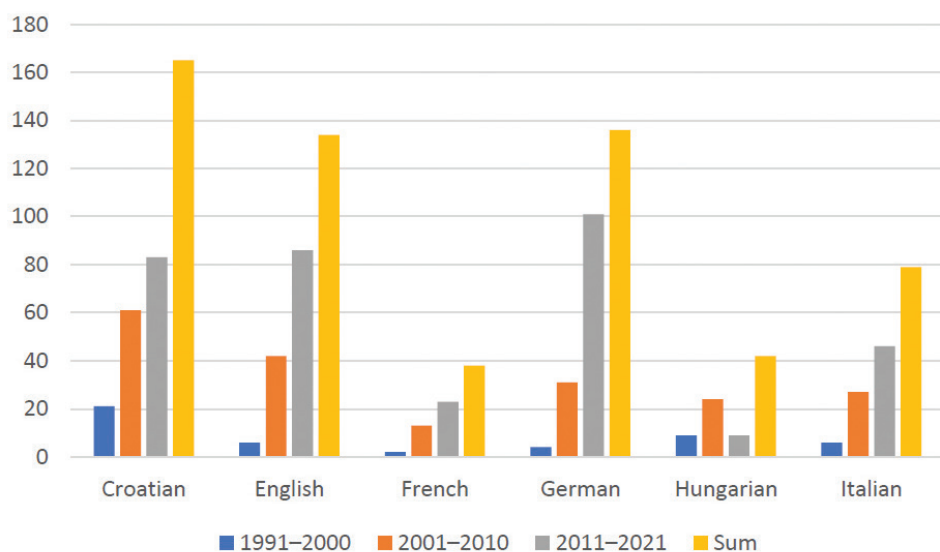
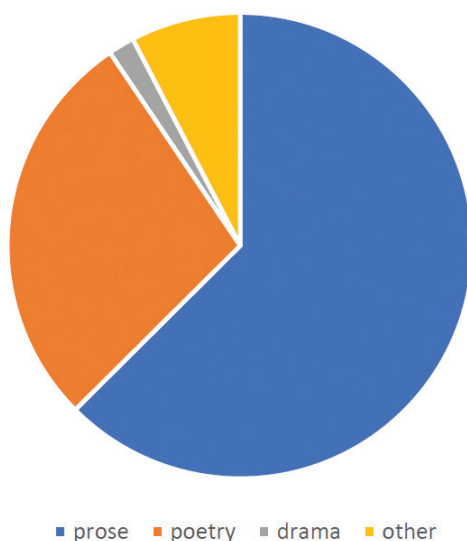


Figure 2. *Subsidies from JAK (2009–2021).*Figure 3. *Subsidies from the Trubar Foundation and JAK (1991–2021).*

Literary translations from Slovenian into German (2011–2021)

Below (Fig. 4) is an overview of literary translations from Slovenian into German from 2011 to May 2021. The translations have been categorised according to literary genre (prose, poetry, and drama) and the category “other,” which includes mainly anthologies of mixed literary genres.

Figure 4. Translations of Slovenian literature into German (2011–2021).



As can be observed, the predominant literary genre exported to German in the years studied is prose, with 172 works or 62.5% of the total literature translated. Poetry ranks second among the genres with 77 works (28%), while the number of translations of plays is the lowest (five). The predominant role of prose works can be explained by the expectations and requirements of the target literary field. According to all three interviewees, German and other international publishers are strongly interested in novels, while this genre is not one of the strongest assets of the Slovenian literary scene. According to Interviewees 1 and 2, the problem with Slovenian prose is that the role of the editor is underdeveloped. In Slovenia, books are written faster than in Germany and authors are less open to changes in the content of the book. Poetry, on the other hand, is perceived as the strongest part of Slovenian literature. However, poetry is not very popular with publishers, as it is read much less than prose and therefore sells less. The

most convenient way to promote poetry is often to publish it in anthologies (Interviewees 2 and 3).

Subsidies for translations from Slovenian into German

Among the studied Slovenian literature in German translation in the period 2011–2021, a total of 73 works were found that received subsidies, i.e., 26.5% of the total Slovenian literature translated into German in the observed period. It is important to emphasise that this figure does not match the total number of subsidies for this period by JAK and the Trubar Foundation presented in the section Subsidies for translations from Slovenian into foreign languages (pp. 329–331), as that analysis also included non-literary works and may have included books that had already received financial support but had not yet been published by May 2021.

Of the 73 co-funded books, most (48) were supported by JAK, nine were supported by the Trubar Foundation, and seven books were supported jointly by both. The remaining nine books were published with the help of various funders, such as the Slovenian Government Office for Slovenians Abroad, the Austrian Ministry of the Arts, Culture, the Civil Service and Sport, the Slovenian Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning, and other cultural departments in various Austrian provinces (e.g., Carinthia, Styria) or cities (e.g., Vienna, Klagenfurt), etc. This shows that government agencies other than JAK also consider literature as an important element of promoting the country abroad.

The analysis has also shown that the literary genre that has received the most subsidies is prose (57 books), followed by poetry (13 books), drama (two books) and “other,” which includes works from different literary genres (one book). The distribution of subsidies by literary genre corresponds to the general distribution of literary genres in German translations (cf. Section 5.3), i.e., prose works received the most subsidies, followed by poetry, drama, and “other.”

The role of the main actors in the selection and promotion of translations

Until the establishment of JAK in 2009, the promotion of Slovenian literature abroad depended heavily on non-state actors, such as authors, translators, etc. (Blatnik 1995, 7). Even today, some authors are very active and successful in independently finding publishers abroad and promoting themselves (Interviewee 1). However, most authors depend to a large extent on their translators, who play the role of literary agents, a profession that has never really developed in Slovenia (Interviewees 1 and 3; cf. Maček 2018). Moreover, translators are trusted not only

because of their extensive knowledge of the current literary scene and the publisher's catalogue, but also because their advice is considered less influenced by the economic constraints faced by the agents or publishers of the originals (Društvo slovenskih književnih prevajalcev 2021).

As for the German-speaking market, many deals and recommendations for translations are based on the trust and cooperation of actors who have already worked together and trust each other's opinions, as all three interviewees confirm. Therefore, when selecting Slovenian books for translation and publication, German publishers often turn to experts in the Slovenian literary field who have already proven themselves to be professional and consistent in terms of quality, such as successful writers, translators, employees of JAK, or independent literary critics. In recent years, JAK has increased the number of professional trainings for publishers and agents, as well as the number of meetings with German agents and publishers. Several Slovenian publishers, such as *Mladinska knjiga*, *Cankarjeva založba*, and *Goga*, have begun to assign special staff to sell translation rights abroad, and this area is developing more and more (Interviewee 1).

A preliminary analysis of publishers of translations into German (1991–2021) shows that most books are published by the Carinthian bilingual publishers *Draava*, *Mohorjeva družba*, and *Wieser Verlag*, which play an important role in introducing Slovenian literature to the German-speaking world (cf. Köstler and Leben 2014, 213). However, Interviewee 2 suggested that the promotion of Slovenian literature abroad could be more successful if the strategy focused on larger publishers in German-speaking countries that could reach a wider audience.

As for the criteria for co-funding translations, the interviewees pointed out that authors' success in Slovenia and abroad, literary prizes, or previous publications with the same publisher can bring additional points. The main criterion is, however, the quality of Slovenian authors, translators, and publishers, who also take care of distribution and organisation of events. However, quality alone does not guarantee the success of a particular book abroad. The book should be published in the right context, promoted consistently, and direct contact and discussion with the public should be established (Interviewee 2).

CONCLUSION

Translation in the sense of exporting literature by Slovenian authors is included in Slovenia's main strategic documents on cultural policy, which means that the promotion of Slovenian authors and books should also be considered part of the country's cultural diplomacy. JAK has proven to be one of the most important state actors controlling the selection and promotion of Slovenian literature

abroad, as subsidies attract foreign publishers. In addition, over the years, individual experts in Slovenian publishing have established their own connections with foreign publishers and act as market actors promoting Slovenian literature abroad. Some authors, but especially translators, are also recognised as intermediaries who propose literature for translation, while publishers are often involved in promotional strategies. This preliminary study of translation flows based on subsidies shows how other factors, such as geographic proximity and historical, political, and cultural ties, may influence Heilbron's theory of translation flows. In the future, a more comprehensive comparative analysis of translation flows from peripheral Slovenian into other more central languages could reveal other important factors influencing translation activity. Furthermore, more interviews could be conducted to better understand the role of state and market actors.

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Književno prevajanje kot sredstvo slovenske kulturne diplomacije s posebnim ozirom na prevajanje v nemščino

Članek obravnava prevodno politiko v Sloveniji kot del slovenske kulturne diplomacije. Prevajanje slovenske književnosti, predvsem v nemščino in angleščino, je med cilji kulturne politike države, med drugim tudi zaradi vloge Slovenije kot častne gostje na mednarodnem knjižnem sejmu v Frankfurtu leta 2023. Pričujoči članek analizira vlogo finančne podpore za nastanek in promocijo prevodov iz slovenščine v tuje jezike, ki jo nudita Javna agencija za knjigo Republike Slovenije in Trubarjev sklad. Študija subvencij za prevode v nemščino, angleščino, francoščino, italijanščino, hrvaščino in madžarščino je pokazala, da medtem ko je število subvencij za prevode v nemščino in angleščino pričakovano visoko, vodilno mesto med proučevanimi ciljnim jeziki zavzema hrvaščina. To poudarja pomen še vedno tesnih družbenih in političnih vezi, ki izhajajo iz zgodovinskega konteksta Jugoslavije. Intervjuji s tremi literarnimi strokovnjaki so pokazali, da sta poleg odločilne vloge subvencij pri prevajanju književnosti iz perifernega jezika, kot je slovenščina, prevajalski proces in promocija književnosti v veliki meri odvisna tudi od drugih tržnih akterjev.

Ključne besede: književno prevajanje, prevodna politika, kulturna diplomacija, subvencije, Javna agencija za knjigo Republike Slovenije (JAK)