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## **Exploring the presence of smaller literatures in two British prizes for literary translation**

### **1 Introduction**

Over the last couple of decades, the literary translation market in the United Kingdom has changed considerably. Part of this evolution concerns the growing availability of works translated from other languages into English, including from smaller languages. In addition, several domestic awards recognizing international authors and their English translators have been created or revamped, leading to increased media attention and wider visibility among the public. The major prizes recognizing literary translation are the International Booker Prize and the EBRD Literature Prize, with the latter's key focus being on the literature of less represented geographies and languages. Indeed, the author's analysis of the results of the EBRD Literature Prize has illustrated that this aim has been mirrored in the selection of longlisted, shortlisted, and prize-winning works (Hoyte-West, 2022a).

With the visibility of smaller literatures being a topic of growing academic interest, the aim of this contribution is to examine the presence of these literatures in two highly-regarded British literary translation prizes: the Oxford-Weidenfeld Prize and the Warwick Prize for Women in Translation. Both prizes have their stated objectives – in the case of the Oxford-Weidenfeld Prize, it is the recognition of a skilfully-translated work of high cultural value; for the Warwick Prize, it is to increase the accessibility and visibility of works of translated literature written by women. Nonetheless, given that seeking new and diverse voices is a hallmark of both prizes, this study aims to analyse the presence of smaller literatures in both awards. This will be done through situating and analysing the relevant linguistic data with the aim of establishing whether, despite their differing objectives, these two prizes also recognize smaller literatures and thus contribute to their visibility in the broader British context.



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## 2 Translation prizes and ‘smaller’ literatures

As with the term ‘small’ or ‘smaller’ language, the notion of ‘small’ or ‘smaller’ literature can be notoriously difficult to define. Like the concept of ‘small states’ in international relations (Crowards, 2002), it can be used comparatively in many contexts, areas, and domains. Indeed, given the vicissitudes of historical, societal, and other factors, numerical ‘smallness’ may not necessarily be a crucial discriminator: some smaller languages may boast a rich and prestigious literary history. Noting the existence of much discussion on the matter, it is important to highlight that various factors may have influenced literary production and dissemination in these smaller languages, including socio-political aspects such as strict minoritization policies, issues of being subject to colonization by a dominant power, the existence of widespread diglossia, or the lack of appropriate codification. Accordingly, this study adopts the notion of smallness as outlined by Rajendra Chitnis, Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen, Rebecca Atkin, and Zoran Milutinović in their landmark edited collection *Translating the Literatures of Small European Nations* (Chitnis et al, 2020). In the work’s introduction, Chitnis and Stougaard-Nielsen write that their “use here of the less theoretically established and marked term ‘small’ relates less to the size of the nation or historical subservience to empire than to the hegemonies of transnational publishing in which these literatures operate” (Chitnis and Stougaard-Nielsen, 2020, 3). Hence, with research demonstrating that the top five source languages of published literary translations in the United Kingdom were major international languages such as French, German, Spanish, Russian, and Italian (Büchler and Trentacosti, 2015, 5), the usage of ‘small’ here refers to the position of a given literature within a specific literary translation market. Indeed, this discussion also aligns with wider debates and analysis within literature studies, and recent examples exploring the developing area of global literary studies have highlighted this – for example, as outlined by Roig-Sanz and Rotger (2023) in the opening to their edited volume on the issue. Additional insights on the topic are also presented in some of the diverse contributions contained in the book edited by Kullberg and Watson (2022), where a contemporary lens is adopted to examine vernacular literatures within the broader concepts of world literature.

Within the wider sociology of literature, as exemplified by the works of prominent theorists such as Gisèle Sapiro and Johan Heilbron (see, for example, Heilbron 1999; 2020; Heilbron and Sapiro, 2007; Sapiro, 2014), discussion and debate on the global circulation of literature and the function of translation within this context remain of avid interest, especially with regard to smaller literatures (see for example, Zlatnar Moe, Žigon, and Mikolič Južnič, 2019). Indeed, this nexus has also been explored further within more sociologically-focused areas of translation studies, mirroring developments towards greater examination of the identity, status, and agency of literary translators (e.g. Heino, 2021; Mikolič Južnič, Zlatnar Moe, and Žigon, 2021; Hoyte-West, 2022b).

As such, a small but expanding area of academic interest in translation prizes is already extant, with several studies delving into specific markets such as awards for literary translation in the Brazilian context (Dionísio da Silva, 2022), and comprehensive historical and contemporary analyses of a series of major translation prizes awarded in Sweden (Dahl and Svahn, 2021; Svahn, 2022). This has been complemented by profiles of certain named awards for specific languages, including the Ramon Llull Prize for Literary Translation (*Premi Ramon Llull de traducció literària*) for Catalan (Hoyte-West, 2019), the Martinus Nijhoff Translation Prize (*Martinus Nijhoff Vertaalprijs*) for Dutch (Linn, 2021), and Greece's State Award for Literary Translation (*Κρατικά Βραβεία Λογοτεχνικής Μετάφρασης*) (Dimitroulia, 2012).

Turning to the British context, the lack of parity between the widespread worldwide availability of translated works originally written in English with the small number of works translated into English has been highlighted, leading the noted scholar Michael Cronin to observe that “there is clearly a translation imbalance in terms of a privileged source language (English) which does not engage in a relationship of reciprocity in the area of literary translation” (Cronin, 2006, 36). Indeed, though English is of course the country’s *de facto* official language,<sup>1</sup> it is also important to recognize that the United Kingdom is a multilingual entity. This is not only through the presence of autochthonous languages such as five of the six Celtic languages, but also through myriad other tongues owing to immigration, globalization, and the country’s history as a major colonial power. However, and as underlined by Mann, Kiaer, and Çakır (2022, 6), the impact of language-in-education policies in the United Kingdom has led to declining numbers of students opting for foreign languages at secondary and tertiary level. In citing examples regarding the availability of school qualifications and university courses for several Asian languages, they observe the limited range of possibilities available (Mann, Kiaer, and Çakır, 2022, 9). As such, undergraduate courses in many smaller languages are offered only at a very low number of institutions (including, for example, specialist ones such as the UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES) or the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS)). Accordingly, this has a corresponding effect on the numbers of graduates with skills and interests in using these tongues for literary translation purposes.

As alluded to in the introduction to this article, the topography of literary translation prizes in the United Kingdom has been dominated by the Booker International Prize, to which the new EBRD Literature Prize has recently been added.<sup>2</sup> As mentio-

1 Unlike many other countries, the United Kingdom does not have a legally-enshrined *de jure* official language. For more information, see e.g. Mac Síthigh (2018).

2 As an aside, one of the most prominent global awards which can recognize literary translation into English is the Dublin Literary Award, which is given annually in the Republic of Ireland. If a translated work is selected for the award, then the sum of 100,000 EUR is shared between the work’s author (75%) and its translator (25%) (Dublin Literary Award, 2023).

ned previously and discussed in the author's earlier work (Hoyte-West, 2022a), it is centred on smaller, less-translated languages, and has recognized a variety of literatures since its foundation in 2017, including prize-winning translations from Ukrainian and Uzbek. Additionally, other relevant awards which highlight smaller languages are on offer in the British context. To give some examples, these include several of the endowed prizes awarded by the London-based Society of Authors<sup>3</sup> which recognize literary translation into English from specific smaller languages such as Dutch, Hebrew, and Swedish (The Society of Authors, 2023a). Furthermore, as exemplified by the Czech Centre London's promotion of the Czech-English iteration of the international Susanna Roth Translation Award (Czech Centre London, 2022),<sup>4</sup> there are also opportunities for literary translators to take part in country-specific variants of international translation prizes.

### 3 The Warwick Prize for Women in Translation and the Oxford-Weidenfeld Prize

Created in 2017, the Warwick Prize for Women in Translation is an annual award of 1,000 GBP recognizing a work of literature (broadly interpreted to include various forms of prose, poetry, literary non-fiction, drama, and others) which was originally written by a woman and has been translated into English (the translator does not need to be female). Additionally, the work must have been published in the twelve months prior to the closing date by a publisher based in the United Kingdom or the Republic of Ireland, and also hold the relevant ISBN (University of Warwick, 2023a). The prize is linked to the University of Warwick, one of the United Kingdom's leading universities and with a strong reputation in languages, literature, and cultural studies. Indeed, as the prize's website notes, its focus is to address "the gender imbalance in translated literature and increasing the number of international women's voices accessible to a British and Irish readership" (University of Warwick, 2023a), noting the "peripheral" nature of women's writing in translation even within the marginalized position that translated literary fiction occupies within the British context.

The second prize in this study, the Oxford-Weidenfeld Prize, has been awarded yearly since 1999. Bearing the name of its late founder, the well-known publisher George Weidenfeld, it is supported by three of the constituent colleges of the University of Oxford (St Anne's College, The Queen's College, and New College) and

<sup>3</sup> The Society of Authors is a British trade union originally founded in 1884 which represents all different kinds of writers, including literary translators (Society of Authors 2023b, 2023c).

<sup>4</sup> The Susanna Roth Translation Award (*Cena Susanny Roth*) is an annual international prize which honours the best translations of a specified Czech literary text into the languages of participating countries in Europe and Asia. It is coordinated by the international network of Czech cultural centres (*Česká centra*) together with the Arts and Theatre Institute (*Akademie IDU*) in Prague (Czech Literary Centre, 2023).

administered through the Oxford Comparative Criticism and Translation (OCCT) research centre. The prize's aim is “to honour the craft of translation, and to recognize its cultural importance” (OCCT, 2023a) through, as stated by one of the previous judges, recognition of “Englishings of prose fiction, poetry, and drama from living European languages” (Reynolds, 2008, 65). The eligible works must be published in the calendar year before the prize, with a British ISBN and with the price displayed in sterling. In addition, the entry requirements for the prize observe that entries from “under-represented languages in the English-speaking book market, as well as from more established languages are encouraged” (OCCT, 2023b).

#### 4 Methodological aspects

In examining the presence of smaller literatures in the Oxford-Weidenfeld Prize and the Warwick Prize for Women in Translation, it was decided to employ a desk-based approach using publicly-accessible resources (the official websites of both awards) with the aim of determining the current state-of-play. A similar perspective was used for the author's previous work on translation prizes (Hoyte-West, 2019, 2022a), and has also been used for analysis of other literary prizes, such as the Nobel Prize in Literature (see Demir and Süslü, 2021). Initially, it was originally intended to follow a similar strategy to the author's prior analyses in the current work, but it quickly became clear that the different types of data available for both prizes – as well as the differences in the length of time that the prizes had been operational – would mean that a modified approach was required.

In terms of the open-access information available, the website of the Warwick Prize for Women in Translation (University of Warwick, 2023a) contains language-related information about all the works that had been entered, longlisted, and shortlisted for the prize since it was first awarded in 2017, as well as details of the eventual winner (a runner-up prize is also awarded). In contrast, the Oxford-Weidenfeld Prize website (OCCT, 2023a) contains varying data depending on the year selected. In the first instance, this comprised just the name of the winner (1999-2006), then the winner and the shortlisted works without language-specific information (2007-2018), the winner and shortlist with language-specific information (from 2018 onwards), and, as of 2022, details of the longlist, shortlist, and the winning work with relevant language information and also the judges' citations. Noting the word limit of the present analysis, and in seeking a way to deal with this clear imbalance in the range and types of information available, it was decided to compromise by focussing primarily on the data from the shortlist and final prize-winners from 2017 up until 2022. In addition to providing an up-to-date snapshot of the current situation regarding smaller languages in both prizes, this approach and time period

was also similar to that used in the author's analysis of the EBRD Literature Prize (Hoyte-West, 2022a), thus allowing relevant comparisons to be made. Although these constraints are recognized as limitations, given the current study's innovative character and the fact that broader research on translation prizes is still evolving, it was deemed that the information gained would represent a gateway for further in-depth studies and research on this relevant topic.

## 5 Findings and discussion

As per the data featured on the websites of each prize, an analysis of the six editions of each prize between 2017-2022 revealed a total of 88 shortlisted works. This comprised 48 from the Oxford-Weidenfeld Prize (eight shortlisted works per year) and 40 for the Warwick Prize for Women in Translation (between six and eight shortlisted works per year). Both shortlists recognized works written in 18 different source languages, with different ones appearing in each shortlist, giving a total of 28 languages represented.

Table 1: Source languages represented in the shortlist for the Oxford-Weidenfeld Prize, 2017-2022. Sources: OCCT (2023c)

Language	Number	Language	Number
Catalan	1	Finnish	2
Danish	1	Dutch	2
Greek	1	Slovenian	2
Croatian	1	Swedish	2
Icelandic	1	Portuguese	3
Lithuanian	1	Russian	4
Norwegian	1	German	6
Romanian	1	Spanish	6
Serbo-Croatian	1	French	12

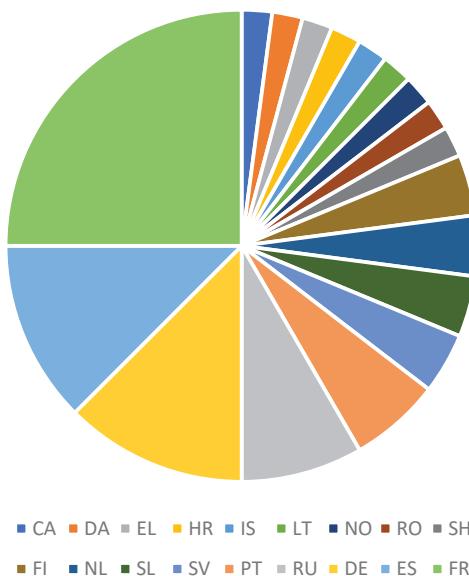


Figure 1: Source languages represented in the shortlist for the Oxford-Weidenfeld Prize (2017-2022).

Table 1 and Figure 1 present information about the available source languages for the Oxford-Weidenfeld Prize. As illustrated above, four major world languages (French, Spanish, German, and Russian) have dominated the shortlists in recent years, with French the source language for exactly a quarter of the total shortlist. Given the award's European focus, only languages originally spoken on that continent are featured. Nonetheless, there is considerable linguistic diversity on display. Of the languages with one sole representative on the shortlist, all nine could be argued as representative of smaller literatures, such as Catalan, Icelandic, and Lithuanian. Additionally, the source language of one of the French entries for the 2022 prize is listed as "French (Mauritian)" (OCCT, 2023c), itself indicative of an association with a smaller literature although written in a major international language. An object of further interest is the award's selection of the designation "Serbo-Croatian" to denote the languages known nowadays as Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, and Montenegrin. In this particular context, it was used to recognize a translation of a work by the Yugoslav Nobel Prize winner Ivo Andrić.

Table 2: Source languages represented in the shortlist for the Warwick Prize for Women in Translation (2017-2022). Sources: University of Warwick (2023b, 2023c, 2023d, 2023e, 2023f)

Language	Number	Language	Number
Irish	1	Catalan	1
Croatian	1	Hungarian	2
Korean	1	Spanish	2
Farsi	1	Swedish	2
Italian	1	Russian	3
Arabic	1	Chinese	3
Japanese	1	French	5
Hindi	1	Polish	6
Greek	1	German	7

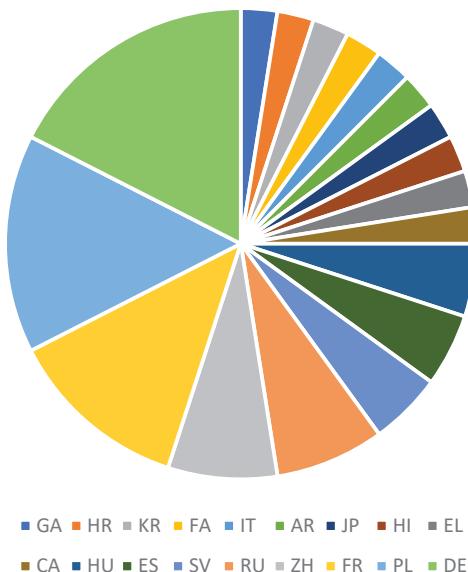


Figure 2: Source languages represented in the shortlist for the Warwick Prize for Women in Translation (2017-2022).

Of the 18 languages featured in the shortlist for the Warwick Prize for Women in Translation (Table 2, Figure 2), German dominates with seven out of the 40 entries. Interestingly (and representative of a smaller literature as denoted for the purposes of

this study), Polish<sup>5</sup> is in second position with six entries, followed by French. Ten languages have only one entry, several of which represent less-translated literatures such as Irish and Modern Greek. The shortlist for the Warwick Prize is also distinguished by the presence of works from non-European literatures, including Hindi, Farsi, Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. Although numerically large in their numbers of speakers, these literatures could nonetheless be considered as smaller in the context of this study, given that literary translations from these source languages are currently not commonplace in the context of the United Kingdom.

Table 3: Source languages represented by the winner of the Oxford Weidenfeld Prize (2017-2022). Source: OCCT (2023c)

Language	Number
Swedish	1
Spanish	1
Serbo-Croatian	1
Finnish	1
Swedish	1
French	1

Table 4: Source languages represented by the winner of the Warwick Prize for Women in Translation (2017-2022). Source: University of Warwick (2023h, 2023i, 2023j, 2023k, 2023l, 2023m)

Language	Number
German	3
Croatian	1
French	1
Swedish	1
Hindi	1

As demonstrated in Tables 3 and 4, data on the prize-winners illustrate that both awards can be said to include smaller literatures at the highest level of recognition. Indeed, the previous six editions of the Oxford-Weidenfeld Prize have been won by

5 Apart from English (and/or Welsh), recent figures have shown that Polish is the most common ‘main’ language in England and Wales, spoken by 1.1% of the population (Office for National Statistics, 2022). However, though Poland is the fifth largest country in the European Union and has a rich literature (including multiple winners of the Nobel Prize in Literature (see Research in Poland, 2023)), for the purposes of this study it can be considered a ‘smaller’ literature in the context of the British literary translation market.

translations from different source languages, of which three could be said to be representative of smaller literatures (Finnish, Swedish, and Serbo-Croatian), to which could potentially be added the work originally written in Mauritian French.<sup>6</sup> By way of contrast, almost half of the seven winners of the Warwick Prize have been translations from German. However, the 2022 award was shared between two works with Swedish and Hindi as source languages, both of which could be viewed as smaller literatures on the British literary translation market.<sup>7</sup>

## 6 Some concluding remarks and possibilities for further research

This contribution has provided a preliminary exploration of the visibility of smaller literatures in two leading British awards for literary translation, the Oxford-Weidenfeld Prize and Warwick Prize for Women in Translation. Despite the stated foci of both prizes not being explicitly on smaller literatures, these can be said to be highly present in the shortlists as well as among the prize-winners. This is exemplified by comments by the eminent scholar Susan Bassnett, a founding figure of the Warwick Prize, who in a recent panel discussion on the topic observed that “we can see something quite interesting here, which is not only a number of small publishers willing to take risks, but an interesting number of prize-winning entries from small languages”, adding that “looking at which languages are represented in our shortlists, one can see that there are very interesting artworks written in small languages” (Bassnett, Venuti, Pedersen, and Hostová, 2022, 6).

The data analysis has also shown that there are rich possibilities for further in-depth analysis of these prizes. For example, as outlined by the wealth of information available regarding the entries for the Warwick Prize for Women in Translation, additional investigations could offer a comprehensive picture of relevant trends in the translation of literary works originally written by women. In addition, further comparative

6 The winners of the Oxford-Weidenfeld Prize were: (2022): *Cargo Hold of Stars* by Khal Torabully, translated from the (Mauritian) French by Nancy Naomi Carlson; (2021): *Wretchedness* by Andrzej Tichý, translated from the Swedish by Nichola Smalley; (2020): *Crossing* by Pajtim Statovci, translated from the Finnish by David Hackston; (2019): *Omer Pasha Latas* by Ivo Andrić, translated from the Serbo-Croatian by Celia Hawkesworth; (2018): *Such Small Hands* by Andrés Barba, translated from the Spanish by Lisa Dillman; and (2017): *Bret Easton Ellis And The Other Dogs* by Lina Wolff, translated from the German by Frank Perry (OCCT, 2023c).

7 The winners of the Warwick Prize for Women in Translation were: (2022): *Osebol* by Marit Kapla, translated from the Swedish by Peter Graves, and *Tomb of Sand* by Geetanjali Shree, translated from the Hindi by Daisy Rockwell; (2021): *An Inventory of Losses* by Judith Schalansky, translated from the German by Jackie Smith; (2020): *The Eighth Life (for Brilka)* by Nino Haratischvili, translated from the German by Charlotte Collins and Ruth Martin; (2019): *The Years* by Annie Ernaux, translated from the French by Alison L. Strayer; (2018): *Belladonna* by Daša Drndić, translated from the Croatian by Celia Hawkesworth; and (2017): *Memoirs of a Polar Bear* by Yoko Tawada, translated from the German by Susan Bernofsky (University of Warwick 2023h, 2023i, 2023j, 2023k, 2023l, 2023m).

projects could explore the visibility of smaller literatures in other translation prizes both in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. Accordingly, building on the foundational material analysed in this study, it seems highly likely that translations from smaller literatures will continue to grow and be represented in major literary translation prizes in the United Kingdom in the years to come, thus increasing their visibility on the broader publishing market as a whole.

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## **Exploring the presence of smaller literatures in two British prizes for literary translation**

**Keywords:** translation prizes, Oxford-Weidenfeld Prize, the Warwick Prize for Women in Translation, small literatures, literary translation

This article offers an overview of the visibility of smaller literatures in two prominent British literary translation awards: the Oxford-Weidenfeld Prize and the Warwick Prize for Women in Translation. In contextualizing this exploratory study through a brief recapitulation of the concept of smaller literatures within broader notions of world literature, attention is also paid to the increasing popularity of scholarship on translation prizes, before the British literary translation scene is presented and summarized. After outlining the form, scope, and stated aims of the two prizes, the methodology of the study is introduced, together with any possible limitations. Subsequently, and adopting a literature-based approach, the relevant websites for both awards are scrutinized to obtain the necessary data. This is then analysed and discussed, with the aim of ascertaining the extent to which smaller literatures can be said to be present in the two prizes. Finally, some preliminary conclusions and suggestions for further research on the subject are outlined.

## Prisotnost manjših literatur pri dveh britanskih nagradah s področja literarnega prevajanja

**Ključne besede:** prevajalske nagrade, nagrada Oxford-Weidenfeld, Warwickova nagrada za ženske v prevodu, majhne književnosti, književni prevod

V članku avtor preučuje prepoznavnost manjših literatur v dveh uglednih britanskih literarnih prevajalskih nagradah: *Oxford-Weidenfeld Prize* in *Warwick Prize for Women in Translation*. Pri kontekstualizaciji te raziskovalne študije s kratko opredelitevijo koncepta manjših književnosti znotraj širših pojmov svetovne književnosti je pozornost namenjena tudi vse večji priljubljenosti štipendij za prevajalske nagrade, preden je predstavljena in povzeta britanska literarna prevajalska scena. Po orisu oblike, obsega in navedenih ciljev obeh nagrad je predstavljena metodologija študije skupaj z morebitnimi omejitvami. Poleg tega avtor natančno pregleduje spletne strani obeh nagrad, da bi pridobil potrebne podatke. Te so potem predmet nadaljnje analize in razprave, pri čemer avtor želi ugotovili, v kolikšni meri so manjše literature prisotne v selekcijah obeh nagrad. Na koncu avtor poda nekatere preliminarne sklepe in predloge za nadaljnje raziskave na to temo.

### About the author

**Antony Hoyte-West** is an interdisciplinary researcher focusing on linguistics, literature, and translation studies. His interests include historical and contemporary language policy, sociological aspects of the translation and interpreting professions, literary translation studies and institutional translation and interpreting. A qualified translator and conference interpreter from several languages into his native English, he holds a doctorate in linguistics and postgraduate degrees in languages and social sciences from the universities of St Andrews, Oxford, Galway and Silesia. He is the author of forty-five publications and has presented his research at international conferences in a range of countries.

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