

# A Contribution to Croatian Translation History: Translation Flows from English into Croatian (1950s to 1980s) and their Social-cultural Context

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## **A Contribution to Croatian Translation History: Translation Flows from English into Croatian (from the 1950s to the late 1970s) and their Social-cultural Context\***

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Starting from the assumption that research on translation history may contribute to our understanding of particular translation practices (Pym 1998), the paper presents the data on translation flows from English into Croatian in two periods: in the 1950s and early 1960s and in the late 1970s. The dynamics of translation flows in the two periods are reconstructed with a view to answering two main research questions: a) Which differences could be observed in translation flows from English in the two periods? b) Which differences could be observed in the proportion of popular fiction genres translated from English in the two periods? The quantitative data obtained are brought into correlation with the main features of the broad socio-cultural context and the developments in the publishing sector.

*Key words:* translation flows, translated literature, the publishing sector, genres of translated literature, English as a source language

### **1. Introduction**

Within the field of translation studies in general, and the subfield of translation history in particular, research on the phenomenon of translation flows has attracted considerable attention over the past two decades. A large number of studies (Heilbron 1999, Branchadell/West 2005, Alvstad/Helgesson/Watson 2011, Şehnaz/Pokorn 2013, Pięta 2016, Ursu n.d. ) examine this phenomenon with regard to diverse geographical regions, historical periods and language pairs. However, in the Croatian context no research on translation flows has been conducted so far. The lack of research on this phenomenon within the context of Croatian translation history is even more surprising when we take into account that recent studies of translation flows often focus on the dynamics of cultural exchange, placing

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to the fore the asymmetrical exchange from the so-called dominant and minor languages (Helgesson/Watson/ Alvstad 2011, Branchadel/West 2005, Vickars 2010, Heilbron 1999). Among other issues, the examination of translation flows points to the effects of the domination of one international language, English, on cultural diversity (Pym 2005: 27), and suggests that in peripheral cultures translation could be a tool of liberation from cultural hegemony (ibid.). However, in order to engage with such issues, we need to have the basic data about translation in the target culture: how much has been translated, from which source languages, which genres and languages have been preferred? Once gathered and presented these could also be useful in further research aiming at reconstructing preliminary translation norms (Touy 1995: 56-61).

This paper is part of a larger study (Veselica Majhut 2012) which examines the relations between the evolution of preferences for certain translation strategies in translating popular fiction from English to Croatian, and the position of English as a source language (SL) in Croatian translated literature. The paper presents an analysis of the quantitative data on translation flows from English and other most popular SLs in Croatia (French, German and Russian) over the period spanning from the 1950s to the late 1970s. Further, it provides a brief overview of the developments in the publishing sector in the selected period, as the immediate institutional context of literary translation production.

## 2. Methodology

As we have already pointed out, no research on translation flows into Croatian has been conducted prior to our study. The main source of data on published translations we used is *The Bibliography of World Literature in Croatian Translations* (1945-1985) (further in the text: *BLW*).

As the *BLW* was our main source of data on the number of translations, it is necessary to provide some information regarding the reliability of the source and its organization of data. The preface to the *BLW* (Dragojević and Cacan 1988: 5) explains that the main sources for the compilation of the *BLW* were “the Thematic Catalogue and the Alphabetical Catalogue of the National and University Library in Zagreb, the existing bibliographies in books and journals and lexicons of translated literature.”

The *BLW* contains a total of 4019 bibliographic entries. Listed by the year of their publication, published translations in book form are classified into three genres: poetry, drama and prose. Another criterion for the classification of the bibliographical units is the authors’ affiliation to national literatures. This is not established on the basis of the language used, but by the authors’ “belonging to the same cultural circle, based on the linguistic, national, traditional and a personal sense of belonging” (our translation) (Dragojević 1992: 82). This means that literature translated from German can be found under the headings for Germany (it should be noted that no distinction is made between the Federal and Democratic Republics of Germany), Austria and Switzerland.

The works of authors writing in the English language are classified into English, Canadian, American and Australian literature. This is in line with the

traditional view of Croatian literary studies: the term “English literature” is used to refer to English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh literatures.

The *BLW* thus classifies the 4019 bibliographic entries into 54 national literature subgroups and 6 subgroups of “supranational literatures”: African literatures, Indian literatures, American Indian literatures, Eskimo literatures, New Latin literatures and Church Slavonic literatures.

It should be noted that our close inspection showed that the data presented in the *BLW* are not completely correct with respect to the affiliation of listed works to respective national literatures. Some works by Australian authors, such as *Headhunters of the Coral Sea* by Ion L. Idriess are listed under English literature. In other respects, the data in the *BLW* are highly reliable, as our cross-checking with the data in the Catalogue of the University and National Library confirmed.

The data provided by the *BWL* are here analyzed with two aims: to establish quantitative trends in translation from English into Croatian in the selected period, and to compare the presence of literature translated from English with the presence of literature translated from other major SLs in this period.

With regard to the data used to overview the developments in the publishing sector and their correlations to the socio-cultural context, we relied on available secondary sources.

### 3. Translation flows and the publishing sector from 1950 to 1965

#### 3.1 *An overview of the developments in the publishing sector in the 1950s and early 1960s*

Before the 1950s, control over the cultural sphere in former Yugoslavia was carried out through Agitprop (the Department for Agitation and Propaganda of the Communist Party), founded in 1945, whose sections existed on all levels of the state apparatus. In this period, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, through the all-encompassing network of Agitprop sections, imposed its vision of what the aim of cultural activities should be: the propaganda of communist ideology. Bilandžić (1999: 240) summarizes the official attitude towards literature: “Decadent Western literature was condemned, and the autonomy of creation denounced as a bourgeois manipulative category.” (our translation).

One of the features of the publishing sector in Yugoslavia before the 1950s was its extreme centralization: the head offices of most publishing houses were in Belgrade, with subsidiaries in other parts of the federation. To illustrate the extent of centralization, Tomašević (2008: 96) points out that the Zagreb-based subsidiaries of only a few publishing houses, such as *Novo pokoljenje* (New Generation) and *Kultura* (Culture), had “permission for linguistic adaptation of only those books that the central office selected” (our translation). So far, no comprehensive studies examining the position of translated literature and the governing nomenclature attitudes towards translated literature prior to the 1950s have been conducted. An extract from a letter sent by the head of Agitprop

Milovan Đilas to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia might be used as an illustration of the dominant attitude. In the letter, dated 17 October 1946, Đilas comments on annual publishing plans, whose approval was within the range of his responsibility. He recommends that "from English, American and French literature only the best works of critical realism and 'revolutionary Romanticism' (*borbeni romantizam*) should be published, as well as the best works of progressive writers" and that "attention should be paid to Polish, Albanian, Bulgarian, Czech and, to some extent, to Romanian literature" (Vukelić 2012: 9).

The abandoning of Soviet-type planned economy in the early 1950s had its impact on the publishing sector as well. Tomašević (2008) points to the changes on the publishing scene that took place in the early and mid-1950s, which coincided with the changes in the overall political and economic system. In 1951, *Novo pokoljenje* changed its name into *Mladost* (Youth), which was to become one of the largest and most successful Croatian publishing houses in the socialist period. As we can see from the data in the database of the Croatian National and University Library, the change of name was accompanied with changes in publishing policies and plans. Thus, in 1952, immediately after the change of name, a new publishing series called *Popularna biblioteka* (Popular Library) was launched. In 1958, *Kultura* became *Naprijed* (Forward). In 1963, *Školska knjiga* (Schoolbook) and *Leksikografski zavod FNRJ* (the Lexicographic Institute of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia) were established. Both of these newly established houses based their publishing policy on specialization, which was characteristic for the publishing sector in communist countries (see Sóhar 1999). Thus, *Školska knjiga* started as a publisher specialized in textbooks for primary and secondary schools and higher education institutions. Later, its activities expanded to include the publishing of various types of textbooks and reference literature. *Leksikografski zavod FNRJ* was established as a publisher specialized in encyclopedias and various types of reference books.

The 1950s economic reforms had a further impact on book production.

Publishers who could not count on state subsidies for particular types of books (the so-called progressive literature [*napredna literatura*]), turned to publishing increasing numbers of books that could find their place on the market. These were very often those books which they [Marxists] had disdained (crime novels, romances, spy novels, etc. (Stipčević 2008: 49) (our translation)

Stipčević's more extensive account of the changes introduced in publishing in the late 1950s provides a clearer insight that might help us understand tendencies in the selection of literature to be translated:

After 1948 [*sic*] books by Soviet authors were replaced with some other books, tolerated, though not recommended, by the Party. These were the books by *popular American and Western European authors; most of them were trivial literature*, and literature which in the eyes of the Party members presented evidence of the decadence of Western civilization, i.e. *romance novels, spy novels, crime novels* and similar books. People accepted and read such books,

partly because these books had been denounced by Agitprop propaganda, but also because people really liked reading such books. (2008: 263) (our translation and emphasis)

### 3.2 *Translation flows in the 1950s and early 1960s by the source language*

In order to present the general trends in this period, we have condensed the data into three five-year periods: 1950-1954, 1955-1959, 1960-1964.

Table 1 provides the data on the number of books translated from English, French, German and Russian in the 1950s and early 1960s.

**Table 1** Number of books translated into Croatian by source language (1950-1954, 1955-1959 and 1960-1964)

Period	English	French	German	Russian	Other languages	Total number of translated books published
1950-1954	98	82	43	55	80	358
1955-1959	149	86	56	38	94	423
1960-1964	162	84	78	72	91	493

Table 1 shows a general rise in the number of translated books published over the three 5-year periods taken into account. This is evident when we examine both the total number of translated works published and the number of works translated from a particular SL. With regard to this trend, the only exception is the number of books translated from the French language, which remained relatively stable. A considerable rise in the number of translated books published is in line with the data presented by Juričević (1987: 97) who points out that the period from 1945 to 1954 was marked by an increase in overall book production. This increase continued well into the 1960s, so that by 1965 the publishing sector doubled its output, with “more than three books per inhabitant” (ibid.).

A comparison of data for the early 1950s and early 1960s shows a considerable rise in the number of books translated from English: from 98 in 1950-1954 to 162 in 1960-1964. A stable though slight increase is observed in the number of translations from German. Translation flows from Russian show a different pattern: a significant fall in the late 1950s, followed by a considerable rise in the early 1960s. The significant fall in the late 1950s may be accounted for by the political events, namely the break-up with the Soviet Union and the ensuing general atmosphere of distancing from the Communist bloc in the 1950s. We can get a rough picture about this from Bilandžić’s account of the atmosphere in the early 1950s, when the new ideology, “turned the Soviet Union from ‘paradise’ into ‘hell’, and ‘turned’ Stalin, the ‘teacher’ and ‘leader’ of all progressive mankind, into a tyrant, satrap and oppressor” (our translation) (Bilandžić 1990: 346).

A clearer picture of the proportion of most popular SLs might be gained if we look at the proportion of each SL within the overall body of translated literature into Croatian for each period.

**Table 2** Proportions of major source languages (1950-1965)

Period	English	French	German	Russian	Other languages
1950-1954	27.37%	22.91%	12.01%	15.30%	22.35%
1955-1959	35.22%	20.33%	13.24%	8.98%	22.22%
1960-1964	33.26%	17.25%	16.02%	14.7%	18.69%

As we can see in Table 2, the proportion of literature translated from English increased considerably in the period 1955 – 1959 (from 27.37 percent to 35.22 per cent) and more or less stagnated in the period 1960-1964, when it constituted 33.26 per cent of all translated literature. It is interesting to note that the proportion of translations from other most popular SLs does not follow this pattern. For example, while the total number of books translated from French is relatively stable (see Table 1) the proportion of translations from French within the total number of translated books exhibits a steady decline (from 22.91 per cent in 1950-1954 to 17.25 per cent in 1960-1964). This comes as no surprise if we bear in mind that over the entire period from 1950 to 1964, a considerable rise in the overall number of translated books published is observed (see Table 1). A reverse trend is observed for German (from 12.01 per cent in 1950-1954 to 16.02 per cent in 1960-1965), as the proportion of translations from German shows a tendency of a slight and steady increase. The pattern for Russian is even more interesting: a drop in the proportion of literature translated from Russian observed in 1954-1959 is followed by a slight increase in the early 1960s.

To conclude, the quantitative data show that in the period 1950-1954 the proportion of literature translated from English (27.37 per cent) did not differ considerably from the proportion of literature translated from French (22.91 per cent). This leads us to suggest that these two languages were the main SLs, with German and Russian considerably less represented. However, in the period 1955 to 1959, the situation changed: English became the dominant SL, leaving the volume of translation from other most popular SLs far behind. While the proportion of no other SL surpassed 20 per cent in the entire body of translated literature, translations from English accounted for 35.22 per cent of all translations in the late 1950s. In the period 1960-1964, English retained this position, as literature translated from English accounted for 33.26 per cent of all literature translated. The proportion of other most popular SLs remained below 20 per cent.

### *3.3 Translations from English in the 1950s and early 1960s by genre*

Since we have established above that in the period 1955 – 1959 English gained an edge over the other SLs, it seems logical to examine whether the Croatian publishers' growing interest in literature translated from English in the late 1950s and early 1960s was coupled with any changes in the preferences for the types of books translated. We have decided to classify the data on the published works

extracted from the *BWL* into three categories: literary fiction, popular fiction, and children's and juvenile fiction. This seems to be a standard classification in literary studies.

**Table 3** Works translated from English (1950-1954, 1955-1959 and 1960-1964) by genre

Period	Literary fiction	Popular fiction	Children's/juvenile fiction
1950-1954	75	13	9
1955-1959	80	36	9
1960-1964	65	68	29

Table 3 shows that in 1950-1954 the majority of books translated from English belonged to literary fiction: 75 works as opposed to 13 that can be classified as popular fiction. A considerable rise of publishers' interest in popular fiction is evident in the late 1950s. However, literary fiction works were still predominant. This was clearly reversed in the period from 1960 to 1964, when popular fiction titles gained a slight edge over literary fiction.

To conclude, our analysis of translation flows (both by the SL and genre) shows shifts in the selection of works to be translated: a growing interest in the works written in English is coupled with a preference for popular fiction. These trends seem to be in correlation with political and economic changes that occurred in the period from the 1950s to the early 1960s (discussed in 3.1) and that had an impact on the publishing sector. To be more precise, on the one hand the break-up with the Soviet Union and the abandoning of the Soviet type of planned economy lead to the weakening of strict central control over what is published. On the other hand, the economic reforms drove publishers to take into account what type of books readers wanted to read and buy.

#### 4. Translation flows and the publishing sector in the late 1970s

##### 4.1 *An overview of the developments in the publishing sector in the late 1970s*

In the 1970s, a significant change occurred in the organization of the publishing sector in former Yugoslavia: from the 1970s on each republic had its policy regarding the publishing sector. Juričević's account provides an interesting insight into the developments in the publishing sector in the 1970s and 1980s:

The economic reform caused an intense leap: the number of published books almost doubled in comparison to the previous period (1954-1965). The market had its influence, sometimes even misleading, because this growth was followed by a fall, probably provoked by a discrepancy between the production and consumption of books. The fall in book production in the period 1974-1980 was caused by the abolishment of subsidies (which were later reintroduced in



the Socialist Republic of Serbia and the Socialist Republic of Slovenia) and a high rise in the prices. The general inflationary wave affected the book as well, but it also contributed to the decrease in its consumption – although this cannot be discerned from the total output, but rather from the number of titles published. (our translation) (Juričević 1987: 96)

The statistical data collected in the *Statističko-informativni pregled kulture u SR Hrvatskoj 1981.-1985.* (Statistical and Information Overview of Culture in the Socialist Republic of Croatia 1981-1985) shed light on the developments in the late 1970s. The report (Tuđman 1987) was released by the Republic Committee for Education, Culture, Physical and Technical Culture and presents mainly the data for the period from 1978 to 1981. Unfortunately, as such a report does not exist for the previous periods, no comparison of the data is possible.

According to the data released in this report, in December 1979 there were 50 “publishing work organizations” (*izdavačka radna organizacija*) in Croatia. Six years later, in 1985 there were 34 such organizations. A steady drop in the number of publishing houses in the 1980s can be easily explained by the overall economic crisis affecting Yugoslavia in this decade, but also by the reasons cited by Juričević, such as the abolishment of subsidies for publishers.

The data classified according to UDC for the Socialist Republic of Croatia (SRC) and for the whole of Yugoslavia (SFRY) are provided only for the year 1978. We present them as an illustration of the main trends.

**Table 4** Data on publishing activities in 1978

Croatia:	Fiction titles published	336
	Fiction titles by local authors	207
	Fiction titles by foreign authors	129
	Total no. of books published	1,339
Yugoslavia:	Fiction titles published	1,959
	Fiction titles by local authors	1,405
	Fiction titles by foreign authors	554
	Total no. of books published	10,509

Source: Tuđman 1987: 185

The statistical data presented in Table 4 show that in 1978 a total of 1,339 titles were published in the Socialist Republic of Croatia. Further, of the total number of books published, 336 books were fiction titles. In other words, fiction accounted for 25 per cent of the books published. Of 336 fiction titles published 207 titles were written by local and 129 by foreign authors. That is, translated fiction accounted for 38 percent of all fiction titles published. It is evident that translated literature, in quantitative terms, was not dominant.

The data for the whole of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia show an even more striking dominance of non-translated over translated literature.

The total number of books published in 1978 in the whole of then Yugoslavia was 10,509, of which 1,959, or 18 percent, were fiction titles. Of those only 554, or 28 percent were translations. These data show clearly that the publishing of translated literature constituted a minor segment of the publishing sector activities.

The data on the print-runs may contribute to a more nuanced picture: of the 10,433 copies published, 6,478 were written by Yugoslav and 3,995 by foreign authors. In other words, it seems that translated literature had significantly larger print runs.

This may be explained by the fact that books by domestic authors were largely in the category of "books that nobody needs" (Stipčević 2008: 42), typical of communist countries.

#### 4.2 Translation flows in the late 1970s by the source language

The data on the number of books translated into Croatian in the period from 1975 to 1979 are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5** Number of books translated into Croatian (1975-1979) by source language

Period	English	French	German	Russian	Other languages	Total number of translated books published
1975- 1979	190	72	59	22	50	393

The table shows that the number of translations from English as a SL is the only variable to have increased in comparison with the 1960s. The figures for all other languages dropped in the same period. Comparing the total number of translated books published to the figures for the late 1950s and the early 1960s, we can observe a drop in the overall production of translated literature. Thus, in the late 1970s, the volume of published translations declined and reached the levels similar to the period 1950-1954 (393 translated books vs. 358 translated book).

The trend of the domination of English as a SL is even clearer if we consider the proportion of translations from English and other languages.

**Table 6** Proportions of most popular source languages (1975-1979)

Period	English	French	German	Russian	Other languages
1975-1979	48.35%	18.32%	15.01%	5.60%	12.72%

It is evident from Table 6 that the proportion of translations from English rose significantly when compared to the early 1960s: in the late 1970s, translations from English accounted for almost half (48.35 per cent) of all translations while

in the early 1960s translations from English accounted for 33.26 per cent of all translations. With regard to this, we should point out that the figure of 48.35 per cent is higher than the world average in the same period according to UNESCO data (Pym/Chrupała 2008: 27). To be more precise, according to UNESCO, English was the SL for 41 per cent of all translations.

It is interesting to note the simultaneous fall in the proportion of translations from Russian. These two trends might be understood as a significant indicator of the dominant attitudes towards Russian vs. Western cultural products in this period. In a study on the multiple roles translations of Russian authors played in former Yugoslavia, Forrester (2011: 119) comments on a substantial drop in translations from Russian:

In the 1970s and especially the 1980s, however, the Soviet Union had the general reputation in Yugoslavia of a locus of low-status stagnant socialism, opposed and outdone by the political and economic freedoms and more appealing popular culture of Western Europe and especially North America. The end of the Krushev-era Thaw and the Warsaw Pact's incursion into Czechoslovakia in 1968 dispelled any lingering sense that the USSR could offer political or cultural inspiration.

### 4.3 Translation flows in the late 1970s by genre

We will now look at what types of literature were preferred within the bulk of literature translated from English in the late 1970s.

**Table 7** Works translated from English (1975-1979) by genre

Period	Literary fiction	Popular fiction	Children's/juvenile fiction	Non-fiction works
1975-1979	36	52	3	16

The trend observed in the period 1960-1964 was continued, with popular fiction retaining an edge over literary fiction and children's fiction. We should recall that in the early 1960s popular fiction barely had an edge over literary fiction. In the late 1970s, however, popular fiction held a considerable edge over the other genres. In addition to this, we should point out that a new category within translated literature, non-fiction works, emerged. To conclude, in the late 1970s, publishing activities in Croatia entered a period of stagnation (see 4.1). However, English as the dominant SL retained its position.

## 5. Conclusion

The paper presents an analysis of translation flows in two periods: from the 1950s to the early 1960s and in the late 1970s. The bibliographical data analyzed

point to two clear trends: from the late 1950s onwards, English was the dominant SL in Croatia. In addition to the strengthening of the dominant position of English, the analysis has revealed another shift in translation policy: dominance of popular fiction in translated literature from the early 1960s on. These changes could be correlated with the changes provoked by the developments in the broader social context. Economic and political reforms that started in the early 1960s brought about changes in the publishing sector: lesser central control over what is published, more autonomy on the part of publishers and the introduction of certain market criteria that pushed publishers towards launching books interesting to the general readership. On the other hand, though English retained its dominant position in the late 1970s, a general drop in the volume of translations published in Croatia is observed.

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### **Prilog hrvatskoj povijesti prevođenja: kretanja u prevođenju s engleskog na hrvatski (od 1950-ih do kraja 1970-ih)**

Rad donosi analizu kvantitativnih podataka o kretanjima u prevođenju (*translation flows*) na hrvatski od 1950-ih do kraja 1970-ih. Dinamika kretanja prijevoda rekonstruirana je pomoću bibliografskih podataka o prijevodima knjiga u Hrvatskoj. U analizi podataka željeli smo pružiti odgovor na dva glavna pitanja: a) Koje se razlike mogu zamijetiti u zastupljenosti engleskoga kao izvornog jezika? b) Kakve se razlike mogu zamijetiti u zastupljenosti popularne književnosti u prijevodu s engleskoga? Koristeći sekundarne izvore o funkcioniranju nakladništva u navedenome razdoblju pokušali smo uspostaviti korelacije između smjerova u prevođenju i glavnih promjena u načinu funkcioniranja nakladničkog sektora. Pokazalo se da je krajem 1950-ih (u razdoblju od 1955.-1959.) engleski postao dominantni izvorni jezik. U tom je razdoblju 35,22 posto svih prevedenih djela prevedeno s engleskoga. U prvoj polovici 1960-ih zamijećena je i promjena u zastupljenosti žanrova književnosti koja se prevodi s engleskoga jer vodeću poziciju preuzima popularna književnost. Ove se tendencije mogu dovesti u korelaciju s političkim i gospodarskim promjenama u tom razdoblju koje su utjecale na nakladništvo. U prvome redu, razlaz sa Sovjetskim Savezom i napuštanje planskog gospodarstva dovode do slabljenja državne kontrole nad nakladničkom djelatnošću, a zbog ekonomskih reformi koje uvode stanovite tržišne mehanizme nakladnici počinju voditi brigu o interesima čitalačke publike. U razdoblju kasnih 1970-ih zamjećuje se stagnacija u nakladničkoj djelatnosti u Hrvatskoj. Unatoč tome, engleski je očuvao poziciju dominantnog izvornog jezika, pa djela prevedena s engleskoga čine gotovo polovicu svih prevedenih djela (48,35 posto svih prevedenih djela).

*Ključne riječi:* kretanja u prevođenju, prevedena književnost, nakladnički sektor, žanrovi prevedene književnosti, engleski kao izvorni jezik