ქართული ენიდან 1991წლიდან მიმდინარე მთარგმნეობითი პროცესის მიმოხილვა

ფაქტები, ტენდენციები, რეკომენდაციები

TRANSLATIONS FROM GEORGIAN after 1991

Facts, Trends, Recommendations
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Facts, Trends, Recommendations

A summary of seven country studies commissioned by GPBA within the Book Platform project
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The following additional materials are available online in
English and Georgian at WWW.BOOKPLATFORM.ORG:

1. The full-text versions of all the seven studies on translations
   from Georgian
2. Searchable bibliographic database
3. The Terms of Reference of the translation studies describing
   aims and expected results
4. Other useful studies on translations from other countries
   (mostly in English language)
On behalf of the National Center of the Georgian Book, we would like to express our gratitude to the Book Platform project. We would like to take this opportunity to emphasize the significance of the programs and research studies implemented within the project’s scope for the development and support of the Georgian publishing sector.

In addition, we would like to point out that in recent years, the promotion of Georgian literature has become one of the main priorities of the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection. From 2010 to the present, approximately 40 projects were funded within the framework of the Ministry’s “Program for the Promotion Books and Literature” (Georgian short-story anthologies, poetry collections, novels, belles-lettres prose, etc.). Foreign publishers’ interest in Georgian literature has increased in recent years and has been strongly supported by the proper and consistent policies carried out by the state regarding books and literature. More and more Georgian publishing houses have participated in international book fairs, while public readings of books by Georgian authors and discussions with foreign readers have been organized abroad. The Ministry, together with a number of sponsor organizations, has organized professional workshops for publishers and translators both in Georgia and beyond the country’s borders.

In March 2014, the National Center of the Georgian Book was established by the initiative of the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia; the major goals of the Center are the promotion of Georgian literature abroad, support for the Georgian publishing sector, and development of various special programs, which will lead to further intensification and development of this process. Already this year, the National Center of the Georgian Book plans to translate up to ten Georgian books and conduct a number of professional-educational seminars for publishers and translators. In total, the
number of Georgian books translated into foreign languages and published in 2010-2014 with co-financing from the Ministry and the National Center of the Georgian Book shall be approximately 50. Translations published abroad with our support shall be distributed in 17 foreign languages (English, German, French, Italian, Russian, Polish, Dutch, Croatian, Ukrainian, Azeri, Armenian, Egyptian, Turkish, Macedonian, Greek, Hungarian, and Swedish).

The research conducted by the Book Platform regarding the development of the abovementioned processes and programs shall greatly contribute to the creation of a unified database of foreign-language translations of Georgian literature; the National Center of the Georgian Book is initiating this work as of 2014. It is noteworthy that the research fulfilled within the scope of the Book Platform regarding the translation of Georgian literature into foreign languages from 1991 to the present covers seven European languages (Polish, German, English, Swedish, Spanish, French, and Czech). These studies are particularly important for the future, as we continue expanding bibliographic databases and linguistic perfection.

It should also be noted that posting the existing bibliographic databases in an online space and providing free access to it would help scholars, translators and publishers of Georgian literature in searching for the necessary and relevant information. In addition, in the process of determining a strategy for translations and the development of short- and long-term action plans for the National Center of the Georgian Book, this research and its gradual expansion and improvement is an issue of particular significance.

On behalf of the National Center of the Georgian Book, we would like to express our gratitude to the participants in the project Book Platform for their activities and development of significant research within the scope of the project for the promotion of Georgian books and literature.
This publication is the outcome of a two years-long mapping of translations from Georgian language into seven other languages published in the period 1991-2012. The text and the statistics included here is largely based on the work of researchers' commissioned by the Georgian Publishers and Booksellers Association (GPBA), who have prepared complete bibliographies and analyses of translations from Georgian into Czech, English, French, German, Polish, Spanish and Swedish.

But why study and map translations at the first place? Translation is an indispensable means for the circulation of ideas and literary works across languages and cultures. It is also much more than simply a tool for transferring texts from one language into another; it is an art and a creative act in and of itself. Translations are key to the ongoing enrichment of any language and culture, but they also remind us that no culture and no language are closed units.

Translations play different roles at different historical moments, while the criteria for quality translations also differ historically. Choices about what gets translated and how it reaches its audiences are determined by changing social and economic circumstances, and by the activities of various intermediaries: authors, translators, publishers, agents, funding organisations, etc. In other words, choices as to what gets translated and published derive from a rich variety of interests - often divergent ones! - and considerations. Once published, translations take on a life of their own in the recipient language’s context: reader receptions, their market success and the follow-ups of each book published are difficult to predict.

The mapping of translation flows - in this case of Georgian texts and authors - aims at shedding light precisely on these barely

1 For a list of names of all the researchers, please, refer to the reverse title page of this publication.
discernible mechanisms that make a translation happen, and on the subtle consequences of any given translation on literary communication between two languages. Such studies are of particular importance for a language such as Georgian, with its rich tradition and its current non-privileged position as a source language for translation. For the first time ever, this collection of studies provides extensive bibliographical data on translations from Georgian after 1991 into seven recipient languages. Grounded on verifiable empirical data, these studies constitute an indispensable source for various interpretations and analyses. The studies make an attempt to offer an evidence-based look at the questions that are of concern for the whole literary, cultural and publishing community in Georgia:

Is Georgian literature known well enough to audiences in other countries? What are the mechanisms through which a translation and publication from Georgian happens? What promotional techniques work best and what can be done to improve the presence of Georgian culture abroad via translations?

Getting the answers to these questions are not as straightforward as it may seem at a first glance.

Firstly, because the individual studies of the seven target languages differ in quality. While some offer a comprehensive picture of the presence of Georgian literature in translation, the results of others have been questioned by Georgian stakeholders themselves during the discussions preceding this publication. The bibliographies of translations on which the statistics included here is based are the most up-to-date and comprehensive ones available but still they do not claim to be utterly complete. For example, some 40% of the titles collected by the researchers and included in the current bibliographies, lack ISBNs. It took more than two years to select researchers, negotiate terms and scope of studies, execute them and edit/translate results. As a consequence, currently most of the studies are already outdated but we hope the main observations of tendencies are still valid.

Secondly, the answer to the above questions is not an easy one because the presence of Georgian writings in translation
is affected in equal measure by the availability of skilful intermediators (above all, translators!), a comprehensive strategy and support, but also by the recipient’s country context: its cultural and book infrastructure, its literary traditions, its audiences’ expectations. This is why any recommendations on the elements of a successful strategy for promoting Georgian writings would differ for the different recipient languages.

*How can the studies be used, and by whom?*

Despite the imperfections of the results we offer here, the methodology of the studies as well as the wealth of data and conclusions offer a useful material for anyone concerned with translations, publishing and cultural communication, both in Georgia and abroad. Alongside other possible uses, the data in the studies may serve as a reference for identifying translators, publishers, cultural and academic institutions, media, etc in the target country that is already engaged in one way or another in promoting Georgian literature. Potential users include both individuals and organisations: foreign and Georgian publishers, agents, authors, translators, journalists and periodicals, booksellers, literary critics and researchers.

In practical terms, both Georgian and international publishers and translation promoters can get immediately ANUP-TO-DATE picture of translations available so far in the target language, while making their own choice what to translate. Further, the bibliography includes invaluable list of translators’ names and even newcomers in the translation arena can get an insiders’ view immediately.

Ultimately, the studies are addressed to anybody involved in shaping and implementing cultural policies: institutions in Georgia such as the Ministry of Culture, the Georgian Book Centre, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education, cultural sections at the embassies, Georgian Studies departments, writers’ and translators’ associations, and all other public, private or civil organisations dedicated to the more effective promotion of Georgian culture abroad.
3. THE SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDIES ON TRANSLATIONS FROM GEORGIAN

The studies and bibliographies cover translations of works originally written in Georgian language and published in book format in translation, both in Georgia itself or abroad during the period 1991-2012.

The aim of the studies was to gather data and to analyse tendencies in the flow of translations from Georgian into seven other languages. It is the first time after independence that such wealth of bibliographic data has been gathered and made available.²

The authors of the country studies were selected and commissioned by the Georgian Publishers and Booksellers Association (GPBA), the partner organisation implementing the Book Platform project in Georgia. The authors of the studies have different backgrounds, most of them - albeit not all - reside and work in the target country being studied, and are related to the book sector in their capacity as translators, academics, publishers or journalists. In each country, the researchers were chosen not only because they work in the book sphere, mostly as translators, but also because they act as mediators in the cultural communication between Georgia and the respective country.

For the purposes of the study, “Georgian translations” include all books in all genres originally written by Georgian authors, irrespective of the language in which the author writes. Some

² The complete searchable bibliography of translations from Georgian into the seven recipient languages covered by the studies can be found at http://bookplatform.org/en/activities/52-translations-from-ge-en.html
countries’ studies have titles that include large extracts of translations of Georgian texts (usually from Medieval times) as well as original author’s commentaries - these are also in the bibliographies.

The bibliographic data includes main translations published in book format as well as few online sources (in the event they contain large body of translations). Thus, while the bibliographies themselves exclude articles in periodicals or individual translated excerpts published in anthologies, the texts of the studies discuss these publications as well.

The time period covered by the studies begins in 1991, in order to draw a realistic picture of the situation within the new context of political independence and the waning of the centrally regulated economy and of the state-supported and ideologically motivated policy of promoting translations.

The seven target languages covered by the studies certainly do not give the full picture of translation flows from Georgian. Given limitations on time and resources, the seven languages were chosen as a representative sample that includes both the largest European publishing markets (English, German, French), two languages from the post-socialist realm (Czech and Polish), a smaller European language (Swedish) as well as Spanish. Importantly, the studies of translations into German cover countries other than Germany itself: Austria and Switzerland, French includes France but also Belgium. However, due to financial limitations the study of English-language translations includes publications in the UK only but not the US or Canada.

The methodology of the individual studies and the current summary included the following components:

- Collection of bibliographic data\(^3\) from various sources in the recipient countries (national libraries, academic libraries, translators and academics’ personal archives, publishers’ catalogues, online bookshops, etc), international databases (UNESCO Index Translationum)

- Desktop research and sometimes also interviews conducted

\(^3\) Lists of bibliographical and other sources used can be found at the end of each of the studies.
by the researchers with key figures in the translation flow: translators, publishers, foundations

- Collection of available data on the publishing and translation market of the recipient country

- Writing of the country/language reports; comments by the Book Platform team and additional fine-tuning undertaken by the researchers

- Refining of mistakes and inconsistencies (regarding lack of detail, different spelling standards, divergent concepts of genre divisions, etc.) in the bibliographic data by the Book Platform team

- Calibration of the data into various statistical spreads (most popular languages for translation, dynamics over time, etc.)

- Formulation of the general outcomes of the studies and tendencies based on statistics.

Unfortunately, in the course of the studies, the researchers faced a series of constraints, primarily related to the lack of reliable data. The most commonly faced challenges included:

- Incomplete information in the UNESCO’s Index Translationum. Even though the Index is supposed to be a “world database of translations”, it relies on information supplied by the respective national libraries. Consequently, the Index suffers from all the inconsistencies and mistakes that are to be found in the national catalogues as well. We also found discrepancies between data in the Index and some national bibliographies. For example, while there is an approximate equivalence between the Index and the bibliographies of the current studies for countries such as Germany, Poland and Sweden, for other countries the Index data is rather incomplete.

- Gaps, errors and inconsistencies in national library catalogues, especially when it comes to less-popular source languages such as Georgian. Library catalogues in some countries often do not mention the original language
of the translated work;

- Lack of ISBNS. Thirty-three titles in the bibliography lack ISBNS. This applies to translations published in various countries, and mainly to publications by small companies, NGOs, and foundations. The lack of an ISBN makes a publication virtually “invisible” to bibliographers and to the book market as a whole.
4. THE STUDIES’ OUTCOMES: A SUMMARY FROM A BIRD’S EYE VIEW

The studies’ outcomes may be subject to a variety of readings and interpretations. Here is one possible summary of the data and analyses:

I. Contemporary Georgian literature in translation is only recently becoming more visible

The publications in the seven languages studied here numbered a total of 178 titles. Again, a word of caution should be applied here: the bibliographies cover only seven languages and only books published in Europe. Thus, this is by no means the total number of titles translated from Georgian since independence.

The dynamics of translations in the 1990s and after the year 2000 do not reveal any particular tendencies. The visible spike of 22 titles in 1998 is explained solely by the 12 bibliographic entries from Poland, when Warsaw University brought out 12 editions of classic Georgian texts within a single year.
Despite that fact that there has been no apparent boom in translations after the year 2000, over the last decade contemporary, living Georgian authors have clearly dominated over the classics and non-fiction works of historical interest. The reasons for this can be attributed mainly to the Ministry of Culture’s support programme, which gives financial incentives to foreign publishers to partly cover the commercial risk associated with publishing lesser-known literatures. In addition, it is in the last four to five years that a series of “mediating” activities have started playing a key role in communicating the country’s lively literary and intellectual scene abroad: a strong presence at major book fairs, a series of professional visits by international publishers to Georgia, information materials in English and other languages, attempts at literary agenting and active efforts on that part of several publishers in licensing rights. Thus, it is only recently that the country’s authentic literary and intellectual voice has been heard in translation.

II. German is currently the language most open to translations from Georgian, followed by French and Polish

![Graph: Total N of Books Translated 1990-2012]

Translations into German are not only the most numerous, they also demonstrate a clear preference for literature over other types of writings; they also encompass a wide variety in terms of genres, authors and historical periods of the original works.
Of the total of 66 works published in German during the given period, the majority (46) have been published in Germany, while the others were published in Austria (2), Switzerland (8) or in Georgia itself (10). It should be noted that in 2013 alone, a year not included in the present statistics, six contemporary titles were published in German. The importance of the Georgian presence and cultural programs at book fairs in Leipzig and Frankfurt cannot be underestimated. The list of publishers from German-speaking countries is very diverse, but one should note Unionsverlag’s (Switzerland) publication of Tamta Melashvili’s “Gatvla” which received the prestigious German Youth Book award, Surkhamp’s anthology 18 Autoren from the year 2000 and certainly Dato Barbakadze’s four titles, all with different publishers. German-language publishers with more than one title on their list include: Königshausen & Neumann (humanities), Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena (humanities), Henschel (literature and drama), Pendo Verlag (two titles by Aka Morchiladze), POP-Verlag (literature) and Reichert Verlag (mixed).

The 33 translations published into French include far fewer literary works’ instead the focus is on dictionaries and language-learning materials, albums and texts of a religious nature. There is no clear tendency regarding publishers’ interest with the exception of L’Harmattan and its several editions of language-learning materials; so far no French publisher has made more than one attempt to translate from Georgian. The four editions published in Belgium are of hagiographic and clerical texts.

English, the language every author wants to get translated into, is included here only with publications in the UK, hence the statistics show only a limited picture of the translation landscape. Throughout the whole of the 1990s when Western European publishers were discovering literatures from the post-Soviet world, essentially no translations of Georgian works were published in the UK. Those after the year 2000 are mainly academic anthologies, including translations of extracts, e.g. not full-volume translations and mainly deal with Georgian history and church history. Thus, the Dalkey Archive’s (included here as it has offices in London and Dublin, too) anthology *Contemporary Georgian Fiction* is a major breakthrough of...
immense importance for literary translations from Georgian into English. The attention the anthology received from prominent media in the target language is also unprecedented.

Of the remaining languages in the chart above, Polish ranks highly only because of the overwhelming presence of academic titles published by Warsaw University. Also notable are the three dramatic works translated by the Polish Theatre Institute (Manana Dolidze, Basa Džanikaszwili and Lasha Bugadze) and the only contemporary fiction title, Zaza Burczuladze’s Adibas, released by the young, independent publisher Claroscuro.

For comparison with other countries studied within the Book Platform project\(^4\): in the same period from Ukrainian, 65 titles were translated into English, 60 into German, and 23 into French. Translations from Armenian numbered: 28 into English, 16 into German and 60 into French. However, any attempt to compare and weigh a country’s cultural links by looking at the sheer numbers of titles is unwise, as it risks overlooking a multitude of details that play a role in literary export.

\(^4\) All statistics and studies can be found at http://bookplatform.org/en/clusters/5-policy-studies.html
III. There is a body of experienced, skilled and dedicated translators from Georgian. But not too many!

Unlike translations from some other “less-popular” languages, translations of Georgian texts are almost always done directly from the original.

The cases of intermediated translations occurred in Sweden (4 out of 4), Spain (2 out of 4), Poland (4 out of 26) and France (3 out of 33). Russian remained the top intermediary language throughout the 1990s, slowly replaced by French, English and German.
Translators play a central role in introducing Georgian writings in translation. The translator’s role goes well beyond translating a text. The translator is a multifaceted intermediary who participates in all stages of the publishing process: choosing the work, convincing a publisher to publish it, finding funding for the publication, and participating in the promotion and marketing of the published book. In other words, the translator is the key cultural intermediary between the Georgian text and its recipient context.

The vast majority of translators from Georgian are native speakers of the recipient language or reside in the recipient country and are basically bi-lingual. Most of them have a solid academic background in Caucasian studies. However, there are countries and languages that either lack any qualified translators (e.g. Sweden) or that have only one or two. In these instances, a reorientation in the professional career of a single person may lead to a dramatic drop in published translations.

Given the limited prospects for a sufficient number of translations being commissioned, translating from Georgian is considered a mission or a hobby rather than a profession. The status of the rights of the translators from Georgian (including copyrights, types of contracts, visibility, etc.) do not differ from those of their colleagues translating from other languages in countries where a framework for the protection of such rights exist. Some of the studies report that the availability of a grant for a given publication influences the size of the translator’s remuneration.

IV. Literary titles constitute 63% of all translations from Georgian.

“Literature” here encompasses fiction, poetry, folklore, children’s literature and drama, of any period, classical or contemporary. Over the last ten years in particular, international publishers have been far more interested in contemporary Georgian literature rather than the classics.

Still, compared to other lesser-known cultures, Georgia appears on the translation scene to a large extent as an object
of study (with historical works or those related to tourism or language learning) rather than a subject with its own voice. In the statistics here, the “humanities” section, for example, is comprised of academic titles mostly edited and compiled by non-Georgians, and rarely includes translations of original research by Georgian academics.

V. Rustavelli remains the “literary star” of Georgia

Authors’ rankings are always risky and provoke controversies; this is even more true in this case, given the limited number of languages that the present studies cover. Still, we include a list of the authors’ names that appear most commonly in the bibliography to point to an important fact: Georgia has not yet managed to introduce contemporary, living literary figures who would be recognizable to international readership and who would open up pathways for new names in translation. Apart from few isolated cases, today’s Georgian literature has not yet made visible breakthroughs in mainstream and/or high-quality literary publishing houses, in prominent literary periodicals and in the media. Further, its real life in translation via new media tools is yet to come.

A second look at the “top 10 most translated authors” reveals a series of instructive details on how misleading statistics may be.
The collections included here are for the most part non-literary ones, while fiction and poetry anthologies account for a total of 10 titles, mainly in German. It must be noted that Georgian literary works, especially throughout the 1990s, appeared in anthologies dedicated to different “regions”. Depending on the editorial concept and perhaps also on the geopolitical situation, Georgian authors may find themselves to anthologies of “Caucasian literature” or of “East European literature”.

Rustavelli remains number one author in translation, both before and after 1989, both in the sheer number of titles but also in the number of languages. However, the authors following him on the list (Orbeliani and St. Grigol Peradze) are only present in Polish and only thanks to one academic publisher. The only contemporary living author in top 5 on the list is Data Barbakadze with his significant presence (four titles) in German.
VI. Translations published in Georgia itself have little chance of reaching an audience in the target country

Throughout the whole period of time since the early 1990s being studied here, a total of 12 titles in the reviewed bibliography of translations were published in Georgia itself. The majority of them are translations into German, while the rest are multilingual (1), French (1) and English (1). Most probably the number of these translations is much higher, but not all of the researchers considered such publications worth including in the studies’ bibliographies.

Even when translated by native speakers of the recipient language, because they were published in Georgia, such titles have no chance for entering into circulation in the recipient language’s real book market, for reaching their intended readers or for receiving critical attention. Such publications rather serve as courtesy gifts, for promotional purposes (on the part of the country, the author, or the publisher) or for exchange at literary or other events.
Translation is an indispensable means for the circulation of ideas and literary works across languages and cultures. It is also much more than simply a tool for transferring texts from one language into another; literally, translation is an art and a creative work in and of itself. Translations are key to the ongoing enrichment of any language and culture, and they remind us of the interrelations of literatures and cultures across the world.

Translating and publishing from the languages of “lesser-known” literatures, such as Armenian or Georgian, into the other languages of the world is part of the drive to further develop our literatures and cultures. Through literary translation national literatures become international, and our classical and contemporary literature can be accessed across linguistic and cultural borders. Translations contribute to making our cultures, economies and countries more visible and recognizable internationally. Support for translations abroad contributes to the local economic development of the publishing industry; a more internationalized literary dialogue also contributes to the development of our contemporary literary field at home.

Presently, however, a series of factors make it impossible for most quality literature to get translated without additional support.
I. Therefore, we appeal to the public bodies in our countries - primarily but not exclusively the Ministries of Culture, as well as publicly supported organizations in the field of books, publishing and translations, to adhere to a policy of encouraging translations abroad, which conforms to the following principles:

I.1. is long-term, transparent, inclusive and is a result of discussion with the book sector where the necessary professional expertise lies.

I.2. is decentralized and independent in terms of functions, management, activities and funds from national authorities, that is - encourages initiatives by non-state actors such as those based on the “arm’s length principle,” involving private and independent organizations that have specific expertise and experience in the field.

I.3. is open to cooperation, both domestically and internationally, with partners working in the area of “cultural export”. This also includes studying and analyzing models for translation support from other countries, such as Poland, the Netherlands, Norway and many others.

II. Specifically, as professionals in the book sector, we recommend that such a support policy:

II.1 strives for a better balance between supporting the translation and dissemination of our literary heritage and of contemporary, current literary works by living authors.

II.2 targets reading audiences in the recipient language of translation and therefore gives a priority to translations published in the target country, rather
than to the ones published “at home”; takes into account the context of the recipient country.

II.3 considers the fact that the complexity of the field of literature (with its various traditions and aesthetics), the demands of the different international book markets and reading audiences require differentiated strategies.

II.4. takes into account that international interest towards our literatures is in direct correlation with our own openness to international cultural dialogue in terms of publishing translations, hosting international events, etc.

II.5. acknowledges the key role of translators as intermediaries in making our literatures accessible to the world, and therefore provides special incentives for quality translators.

III. We endorse the attached recommended Policy Instruments for Encouraging Translations as described in the policy studies\(^5\) of the Book Platform project, which can be applied as a whole or individually, namely: 1) support for a specialized agency for the promotion of translations; 2) grants for international publishers; 3) incentives for translators, such as awards, training seminars, etc.; 4) literary hospitality measures; 5) mobility programs; and 6) informational resources directed at the international market, including support for sample translations.

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IV. In our professional work in the field of books, literature, publishing and translations, we remain committed to continue working for the inclusion of our literatures in the international cultural dialogue.

*Discussed and endorsed during the international conference on the Promotion of Translations (Yerevan, 21-22 February 2014) organized by the Book Platform project in the framework of the EuroEast Programme of the European Union. Open for endorsement by all other cultural actors in the European Neighbourhood countries.*