



# ***More Than Three Per Cent: A New Look at the Statistics***

by Ian Giles

Report available to download: [https://www.lit-across-frontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Translaiton-Statistics-UK\\_2017-1.pdf](https://www.lit-across-frontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Translaiton-Statistics-UK_2017-1.pdf)

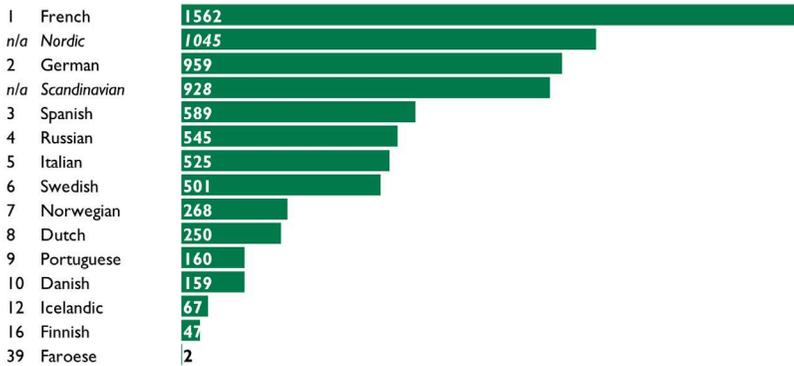
In September 2017, the Literature Across Frontiers (LAF) project released *Publishing Translated Literature in the United Kingdom and Ireland 1990-2015*, an update to its 2015 report, previously discussed from a Swedish and Scandinavian perspective in SBR 2015:2. This updated report analyses publication data for translated literary publications in the period 2013-2015, drawing on data provided by the British National Bibliography and subsequently filtered by Dewey category.

While it remains the case that those with an interest in the findings ought to read the initial and updated reports for themselves, this article will summarise key findings from the update that are of particular interest to readers of SBR. In headline terms, it still remains the case that translations have represented 4.5%-5% of all literary publications, and a recorded peak of 5.23% in 2011 remains unsurpassed.

The inclusion of three additional years of data does not change the 2000-2012 rankings for most translated European languages, as shown in the table. Over this 15-year period, the Scandinavian languages combined still come in third, while adding Faroese, Finnish and Icelandic moves the Nordic languages into second place.

## Selection of most translated European languages in UK between 2000 and 2015, including all Nordic languages.

Number of Titles



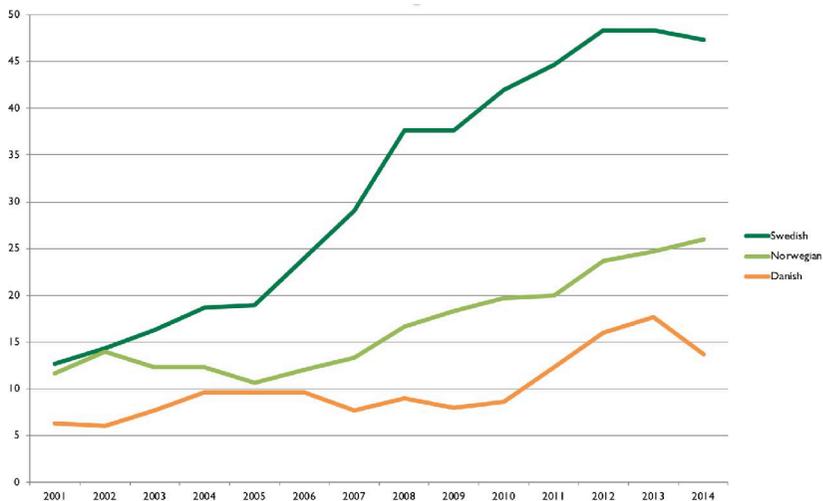
Things are somewhat different for the period 2013-2015. While French and German remain the two most translated European source languages, Swedish moves up to third place with a remarkable 142 publications in three years. Danish, too, moves up a place to ninth. Over the period in question, the Scandinavian languages represent the second largest source of translated literature, while the Nordic languages combined (302) almost rival French (345) as the single largest source of translated literature in Britain.

Looking at annual publication figures in 2013-2015, the 2012 peak of 52 books achieved by Swedish remains unsurpassed, although 49 books in both 2014 and 2015 are the joint second highest outputs for Swedish this century. Similarly, Danish enjoyed its second and third strongest years this century in 2013 and 2014 respectively. Norwegian, meanwhile, improved dramatically on its performance from 2000 to 2012, recording its first, second and fourth best years in the 21st century.

If we calculate the three-year moving average for publication data, we can observe some additional trends. From 2001 to 2014, publications of Swedish translations have grown twice as fast as any other comparable language, at an average rate of more than 20% per year. This is compared to average annual growth of around 9% for both Danish and Norwegian. Looking at average growth in 2012-2014, based on the three-year average, we can see that we appear to have passed peak growth for Swedish, which grew at just 2% per year, while Danish grew at 5% and Norwegian maintains strong growth at 9% per year. Finnish, by comparison, saw average growth of 59% during this period, fuelled by its status as Frankfurt Guest of Honour in 2014.

### Line graph showing three-year moving average of translated books published per year in the period 2001-2014 for the Scandinavian languages.

Number of Titles



More generally, it should be noted that the positive Scandinavian experience reflects wider trends. The period 2012-2014 was evidently a boom period for translated literature in the UK, with all top ten European languages, excluding Spanish and German, recording their best annual result this century during this period. The report's authors also draw attention to the rise of children's literature in translation, which in 2015 represented 14.58% of all translated literature published compared with just 7.41% in 2009. No detailed breakdown of data is provided per language, but in the case of the Nordic languages, and especially Swedish, often considered as a vibrant source of children's books, this would provide interesting food for thought.

The original 2015 report left us on a cliffhanger – there was an upward trajectory for Swedish and Scandinavian translations, but what happened next? In growth terms, the mid-2000s represented the best years for Swedish this century, while 2012 was the golden year for translated Swedish literature in the UK by number of publications. While the massive growth may have passed, Swedish has obviously settled into a position of strength in the 2010s. Should it maintain its current trends, it is surely only a matter of time before the Swedish total for the 21st century surpasses Italian, and perhaps even Russian. The other Scandinavian languages are also wholeheartedly engaged in this current wave of translated literature in Britain, with Danish doing well and Norwegian enjoying strong growth at present. Given that Norway is the 2019 Frankfurt Guest of Honour, it seems likely that the pace of Norwegian translations will only increase – will this be to the benefit or detriment of Swedish, the Scandinavian pacesetter thus far this century? Only time will tell. We await future reports from LAF with bated breath.