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TRANSLATION, GENDER, AND LEGITIMACY

A Study of Review Excerpts

Introduction

A number of scholarly works have been published on the topic of gender and translation. For example, Luise von Flotow has published and edited several books on women and translation, including *Translating Women* and *The Routledge Handbook of Translation, Feminism and Gender*, co-edited with Hala Kamal.¹ In the latter volume, scholars such as Sanaa Benmessaoud and Elizabeth Gibbels analyze the translation of women's writing, while Rajkumar Eligedi and Garima Sharma focus on the translation of feminist writings.²

In the present article, I take a different approach to gender and translation by directing the interest toward gender in the sociology of translation – arguably an under-developed topic. I focus on paratexts, which are an interesting unit of analysis for those interested in questions related to the discipline of sociology of translation or, more specifically, its sub-branch; the sociology of translations.³ Since paratexts give signals on how a work of fiction is packaged to fit a specific audience,⁴ and function as a threshold to the story,⁵ they are likely to provide valuable insights into what publishers deem as important to convey to readers, and give hints on what readers are most likely to be attracted to when browsing the shelves of a bookstore. Some studies touching on paratexts, translation, and gender have been carried out previously, but few have analyzed how translated novels are paratextually designed for marketing purposes.⁶ Through this article, I contribute to bridging this research gap by drawing attention to an element often foregrounded on book covers to entice readers, namely the review excerpt.

Before specifying the aim of this article, I will briefly highlight two concepts central to this study: review excerpts and legitimacy. The first is the main unit of analysis in this study, and the second is an important theoretical concept for a closer analysis of the review excerpts. A review excerpt is a short text that publishers place on the covers of novels, most often paperback novels. They contain praise for a book and are regu-

larly quotes from longer reviews.⁷ Genette makes the distinction between peritexts and epitexts, where peritexts are paratexts that are published in the same physical volume as the main narrative, whereas epitexts are published in texts surrounding the volume in one way or another.⁸ Review excerpts are hence epitexts – reviews published in for example newspapers and magazines – turned peritexts once quoted and published on the book cover.⁹ In addition, the review excerpt is a special kind of paratext since it straddles both the review and the advertising genre. However, its function on a book cover is primarily as a marketing device.¹⁰ It is what Batchelor, inspired by Annika Rockenberger, defines as a “commercial paratext.”¹¹ Its function is to advertise, praise, and sell.¹²

Inspired by Bourdieu’s *The Field of Cultural Production* from 1993, Gino Cattani and colleagues make the distinction between three kinds of legitimacy that a cultural product can be granted: bourgeois, popular, and specific legitimacy.¹³ Bourgeois legitimacy is recognition from critics, popular legitimacy is recognition from the public, and specific legitimacy is recognition from peers – in this case, recognition from other authors.¹⁴ In the present study, I will use these nominations to categorize the different kinds of review excerpts that appear on book covers.

The aim of this study is to investigate the review excerpts that are used on book covers when translated literature is marketed to Swedish buyers and how variables associated with gender affect excerpts. The aim can be divided into two research questions:

RQ1 Does gender affect whether source culture or target culture review excerpts are foregrounded?

RQ2 Does gender affect what kind of legitimacy is foregrounded on book covers?

Review excerpts are the main unit of analysis and the dependent variable. An author’s gender, on the other hand, is the key independent variable. In addition to the research questions above, it is expected that the study also will yield secondary results of relevance for anyone interested in questions regarding for example the intended reader’s gender, the critic’s gender, as well as other questions regarding for example social class and different genres and literary segments – questions that are not necessarily related to gender, but to other groups and strata in the society, and that are relevant for the theme for the TfL special issue in which the article appears.

Theory and Previous Research: Reviews and Review Excerpts

Although this article focuses on gender and translation, the section on theory and previous research is devoted to works focusing on reviews and review excerpts. For an overview of studies dealing with gender and translation, the reader is advised to look at the introduction to this special issue (as well as other articles within it) and the books and volumes mentioned in the introduction to this article.

Johan Svedjedal mentions that one of the functions of literary criticism, apart from being evaluative, is to assist industrial initiatives in selling goods on a market. This means that positive as well as negative reviews can help sell a book, since they both contribute to giving it publicity.¹⁵ Karl Berglund also notes the commercial advantages

of book reviews, mentioning that they are useful for publishers since they can indicate the quality of a novel and categorize it within a genre. The greatest advantage of a review excerpt, according to Berglund, is that a book can appear as authorized by critics and not only by its publisher.¹⁶

Both Svedjedal and Berglund acknowledge that not all media and critics have the same consecrational power. Regarding print media, national morning newspapers, the largest evening papers, and literary journals have the most power. Reviews published by the Swedish Bibliotekstjänst (The Library Service) lay the ground for what local libraries buy and are the most important instances of literary criticism, according to Svedjedal.¹⁷ In his study of review excerpts on the covers of Swedish detective novels, Berglund notes that neither TV, radio, nor the internet have managed to challenge critics from the daily newspapers in review excerpts. In his corpus, consisting of 568 reviews from 153 detective novels,¹⁸ Berglund observes that publishers resort to media of high prestige when possible, but they sometimes also need to turn to less powerful consecrational institutions, such as weekly magazines and book tip websites, to make it look as if a book has received critical acclaim.¹⁹

Moving on to critics, Svedjedal points out that Horace Engdahl is (or, when adjusting Svedjedal's reasoning after the crises in the Swedish Academy, rather "was") an especially important critic in Sweden, because of his important roles in the literary system – not just as a critic.²⁰ However, while one should thus recognize the potential impact of individual critics, Berglund's study shows that the mention of a reviewer's name in excerpts seems to be less important than indicating where the review was published. In other words, it is more important to sign the review "*Svenska Dagbladet*" than "Magnus Persson" or "*Dagens Nyheter*" than "Lotta Olsson."²¹

The main unit of analysis in this study is the review excerpt. It is necessary to point out that I also include so-called *blurbs* in the study and often refer to them by the term "review excerpt." According to Berglund – and Rye Andersen – who has devoted empirical attention to dust jackets, blurbs are not the same as review excerpts. Blurbs are instances where a publisher has asked another author to read a book manuscript and give a (positive) value judgment that can be printed on the cover.²² Hence, blurbs, to a large extent, correspond to specific legitimacy. Rye Andersen argues that review excerpts are more authentic than blurbs, since they are not ordered by a publisher. But Rye Andersen also questions the value of a review excerpt, since it is the result of a "copy and paste" activity: it is possible that the original review is more negative than it appears in the excerpt.²³ Berglund mentions that review excerpts end up as "expected superlatives," which lose their power,²⁴ and Rye Andersen describes blurbs as "worthless value judgments."²⁵ What we can gain from Berglund's and Rye Andersen's reasonings is that both blurbs and review excerpts risk becoming so general that they may be placed on the cover of any novel, but review excerpts may be seen as somewhat more reliable.

Rye Andersen asks whether blurbs are sometimes more valuable for an author than for a reader. An author "blurb" by another author with a high amount of cultural capital will result in the bestowal of cultural capital on the former. It is also less common for an author "below" another in terms of cultural capital to "blurb" the author of higher status than it is for the opposite to occur. The absence of blurbs may signal that no author surpasses the author in question in terms of cultural capital and that

the author's name speaks for itself.²⁶ We can interpret Rye Andersen's reasoning to raise the hypothesis that well-known and/or consecrated writers do not need review excerpts and blurbs to the same extent as lesser-known authors.

Because the present study borders the field of sociology of literature, it is appropriate briefly to review literature that reports on the reading habits of the Swedish population in relation to the variables of social class and gender. Svedjedal refers to numbers from Nordicom (the Nordic Information Centre for Media and Communication Research at the University of Gothenburg) and notes that the reading of books has increased and become more democratic than it was in the past. Reading has increased among people with low education, and publishers now focus less on the cultural elite than they did previously.²⁷ Numbers that measure media habits in the Swedish population in 2021, from Nordicom's *Mediebarometern 2021* (the Media Barometer), show that there are more women than men who read books daily. According to these statistics, 54% of Swedish women read books daily, while only 37% of men do.²⁸ Of these, 40% of the women read works of fiction on a daily basis, whereas the number was 25% for men.²⁹ *Svenska förläggareföreningen* (the Swedish Publishers' Association) and *Svenska bokhandlareföreningen* (the Swedish Book Sellers' Association) do not take gender into account in their statistics, but their report for 2021 contains a section called "Voices from the profession" in which a bookstore owner states that her main buyers are middle-aged women who prefer reading physical books, like to discuss books with shop attendants and fellow readers, and like to blog about them.³⁰

Assessing numbers from Nordicom and *Mediebarometern* over the years makes it clear that the internet has changed the Swedish population's reading habits.³¹ The advent of the internet has also changed literary criticism.³² Many amateurs have now entered the field of literary criticism, using platforms such as Amazon and private social media accounts to publish comments and critique.³³ Ann Steiner observes that there is an idealistic view on the internet when it comes to reading and sharing reading experiences; it is democratic and inclusive, and everybody has the opportunity to both write and read reviews. At the same time, critics argue that there is a risk that this is not the case, and Anglo-American cultural dominance on the internet will push smaller cultures to the periphery.³⁴

Steiner notes that there are differences and similarities in how professional critics and amateurs write reviews. These differences depend on genre. Amateurs review all genres, whereas critics mainly focus on novels of high prestige. For the latter, critics and amateurs write reviews that are similar in content and style, with amateurs imitating professional critics. For popular literature, there is a difference between the two.³⁵ This type of literature is less reviewed by critics. For amateur critics, it is often important to distance themselves from professional critics and defend the genre. Steiner mentions that a drive behind readers of popular literature is to be part of a reading community and share personal reading experiences, just like the women described in *Svenska förläggareföreningens* statistics.³⁶

Materials and Methods

This study is based on a corpus consisting of photographs of covers of paperback novels translated into Swedish. To create the corpus, which I refer to as "the bookstore

corpus,” I visited a bookstore in a mall in the outskirts of a medium-sized (80,000 inhabitants) Swedish city. The bookstore belonged to a well-known bookstore chain, with roots from the 1800’s. I asked for permission to take photographs of all the fiction paperback books. I photographed front and back covers but left out the inside of the covers, as including these would result in the handling of too many variables. Furthermore, front and back covers are the most important elements in the so-called reading order.³⁷ Since I was only interested in translated literature, I left out all novels originally written in Swedish. Books marketed as “classics” and “crime fiction” had their own shelves, and were not included. I noted that some books may have been misplaced, but I kept them in the corpus, since it was impossible to verify the genre of every book in the corpus.

After having photographed the covers, I created a spreadsheet with an overview of the different books in the corpus, noting their title, author, author’s gender, publisher, source language, and type of legitimacy. For the latter, I counted and categorized the excerpts according to their type of legitimacy and noted whether they came from the source culture (SC), the target culture (TC), or (an)other culture(s) (OC). The results from the corpus are analyzed using descriptive statistics.

The reason for choosing paperback novels is that they are most often not first editions.³⁸ Second and subsequent editions are often published in paperback, and here publishers have more data to access regarding a novel’s reception in a literary system. There will simply be more TC reviews to choose from than for first editions, where publishers will most likely need to resort to SC reviews. Since this article partly investigates what reviews (TC or SC) are most used on the book covers, it is paramount that the material not consist of first editions, but of second or subsequent editions.

In Sweden, the paperback novel has always belonged to the segment of so-called *billighetsböcker* – that is, ‘cheap books’.³⁹ The Swedish paperback novel had its first commercial upswing in the 1960’s, when it was common that first editions were published in the format. In the government white paper *Läsandets kultur* (“The culture of reading”) from 2012, it is stated that the paperback novel had a new boom in the last 15 years, but that the format is now used for reprints. Especially fiction is a common genre to publish in paperback, and the variation within this genre is wide, since both popular literature, literature of high prestige and classics are published in paperback. It is clear, though, that the paperback format is mostly devoted to titles that are published in large volumes, as well as bestsellers.⁴⁰ It is therefore expected that the corpus used in this article has a similar composition.

Results

The results section consists of two parts. The first focuses on the quantitative results from the bookstore corpus. I divide the population into groups according to gender and compare them. In the second part, I return to some observations from the quantitative analysis, highlight a few observations from the corpus, and discuss both in light of theory and previous research. To a large extent, in this part, I also devote attention to other observations that may be relevant for the theme of the special issue where this article is published.

The Bookstore Corpus: Quantitative Results

The investigated bookstore had a total of 660 books retailed in paperback as “Fiction.” Out of these 333 – or slightly more than 50% – were translations and hence included in the corpus. Books translated from English ($n = 234$) make up 70% of the corpus. Among the 333 books in the corpus, women authors dominate with 262 titles, and 69 are written by men. The distribution of female–male authors is 79% to 21%. There are two novels that I have not categorized as having either a female or male author. The Dutch author Marieke Lucas Rijneveld, who is represented in the corpus with *Obehaget om kvällen* (*The Discomfort of Evening*; Dutch original *De avond is ongemak*), identifies as partially non-binary, and Ambrose Parry (*Där inget vissnar mera*; English title *The Way of all Flesh*) is a pseudonym for Chris Brookmyre (a man) and Marisa Haetzman (a woman).⁴¹ Counting unique author names instead of titles and leaving out Rijneveld and Parry leads to 218 unique author names, distributed between 169 women and 49 men. This yields almost the same distribution (78%–22%) between female and male authors.

Together, the 333 books have 829 review excerpts on their covers distributed between the groups “women authors,” “men authors,” “non-binary” (Rijneveld), and “co-ed co-authors” (Parry). When categorizing the excerpts into the three kinds of legitimacy of Cattani and colleagues for the four groups of authors, as well as into their culture of origin, the bookstore corpus yields the numbers presented in Table 1.

Type of Legitimacy	Bourgeois				Popular				Specific				Total
Origin of excerpt	SC	TC	OC	Total	SC	TC	OC	Total	SC	TC	OC	Total	
Women authors (n = 262)	62	410	4	476	8	93	1	102	42	20	3	65	643
Men authors (n = 69)	22	136	4	162	0	6	0	6	8	2	4	14	182
Non-binary (n = 1)	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Co-ed co-authors (n = 1)	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Total	84	549	8	641	8	99	1	108	50	22	8	80	829

Table 1. Number of review excerpts in the corpus filtered by gender, origin of excerpt, and type of legitimacy.

In total, there are 643 review excerpts on female authors’ book covers and 182 for male authors. I will return to these numbers later on, where I will use them as points of departure for studying the distribution between the three kinds of legitimacy for these two groups.

Rijneveld and Parry only have two review excerpts each. In Table 2, I have excluded them to compare the two largest groups: women and men. Table 2 provides the means (M), standard deviations (SD), and minimum and maximum numbers of review excerpts for the two groups.

Gender	Number of review excerpts	M	SD	Min	Max
Women authors (n = 262)	643	2.45	1.34	0	6
Men authors (n = 69)	182	2.64	1.60	0	7
Total population (n = 331)	825	2.49	1.40	0	7

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, and minimum and maximum numbers of review excerpts filtered by gender.

On average, there are 2.45 review excerpts on female authors' covers and 2.64 excerpts on those of male authors. The number of review excerpts for male authors in the sample is slightly higher than for female authors, but this number is not statistically significant ($p = .33$),⁴² and there is no external validity. There is also more dispersion among the men ($SD = 1.60$) than among the women ($SD = 1.34$) for the number of review excerpts per cover. There are 17 books with no excerpts on their covers. Proportionally, these are fairly evenly distributed between men (4) and women (13). Two novels in the corpus have 7 review excerpts each.

Returning to Table 1, there is a clear preference from publishers to front review excerpts from the TC for all groups of authors. Table 3 is filtered by the variable "origin of excerpt" and provides the number (N) of review excerpts per culture of origin, together with their means.

Origin of excerpt	SC		TC		OC	
	N	M	N	M	N	M
Women (n = 262)	112	0.427	523	1.996	8	0.031
Men (n = 69)	30	0.435	144	2.087	8	0.116
Both groups (n = 331)	142	0.429	667	2.015	17	0.048

Table 3. Number of review excerpts filtered by gender and origin of excerpt.

Table 3 provides an answer to RQ1 and shows that there is almost no difference between the two groups concerning SC reviews ($M = .43$ for women and $.44$ for men) or TC reviews ($M = 2.0$ for the female authors and 2.1 for the male). Although the number of OC reviews is low, we note that OC review excerpts are used more on the covers of books by male authors ($M = .116$) than by female ones ($M = .031$).

Returning to Table 1, it provides the answer to RQ2. It shows that of the 829 review excerpts in the corpus, 641 (77%) originate from sources that can be categorized as granting bourgeois legitimacy. We can thus conclude that this type of legitimacy is most frequent in the corpus. There is a small difference between men and women regarding occurrences of bourgeois legitimacy. Using the numbers from Table 1, 643 for women and 162 for men, we note that excerpts signaling bourgeois legitimacy appear on the covers of books written by men in 90% of cases and in 74% of cases for women. On average, there are 2.35 review excerpts per cover categorized as granting bourgeois legitimacy for male authors and 1.82 for women. Of the 641 bourgeois legitimacy excerpts, there is a clear dominance of TC reviews for all groups. For women, the numbers are 13% SC, 86% TC, and 1% OC. For male authors, they are 14% SC, 84% TC, and 2% OC.

Of the 829 review excerpts, 108 cases (13% of the total) are categorized as providing popular legitimacy. For the total sample, popular legitimacy is the second most preferred type of legitimacy when Swedish publishers choose review excerpts for translated literature. One of the most evident results in the bookstore corpus is that an author's gender greatly influences a publisher's tendency to foreground excerpts categorized as popular legitimacy. For female authors' reviews, 16% are categorized as popular legitimacy, with only 3% for male authors. Another notable number in Table 1 is the preference for TC excerpts. Of the 108 cases of popular legitimacy, 91% are TC excerpts. The distribution between the three types of culture of origin for the reviews categorized as granting popular legitimacy is different for women and men. For women, the numbers are 8% SC, 91% TC, and 1% OC. For men, they are 0% SC, 100% TC, and 0% OC.

There are only 80 cases (10%) of reviews categorized as establishing specific legitimacy in the corpus. This shows that specific legitimacy is the least preferred type of legitimacy when Swedish publishers choose review excerpts for covers of translated paperback novels. There is a small difference between the two groups: 14% of male authors' reviews are categorized as providing specific legitimacy and 10% of female authors. There is an overweight of SC review excerpts, but the distribution – 63% SC versus 27% TC – is more even for specific legitimacy than for the other two types. In addition, the percentage of OC excerpts (10) is higher than for the other types of legitimacy. The distribution between the three types of culture of origin for the reviews categorized as signaling specific legitimacy is different for women and men. For female authors, the numbers are 65% SC, 31% TC, and 5% OC. For male authors, they are 57% SC, 14% TC, and 29% OC. It should be pointed out that the total number of excerpts categorized as providing specific legitimacy for male authors is low, and it is wise to not devote too much attention to the percentages.

The Bookstore Corpus: Qualitative Results and Discussion

Already in the descriptive presentation of the corpus, it was possible to conclude that there is a large dominance of female authors. Unfortunately, I do not have any bases of comparison to shed light on this observation, such as statistics showing the distribution between male and female authors in translation on other bookstore shelves in Sweden. However, the earlier numbers from *Mediebarometern 2021* showed that women are more avid readers than men. In the corpus, there are many books targeting women that are written by women. These numbers may partially explain female dominance in the corpus. *Svenska förläggareföreningen's* statistics for the most sold authors in 2021 show that two female authors from the Anglo-American literary field topped sales lists for the fiction genre: Delia Owens, with *Där kräftorna sjunger* (*Where the Crawdads Sing*), and Lucinda Riley, with *Den saknade systern* (*The Missing Sister*).⁴³ Both of these books appear in the bookstore corpus together with a large amount of romance and feel-good novels. Women are most often credited as authors in these genres, which partly explains the uneven gender balance in the corpus.

As noted in Table 2, the average number of review excerpts per book cover is 2.49. According to Rye Andersen, covers of paperbacks are normally richer in blurbs than first editions.⁴⁴ This is natural, as the reception of a novel is unknown in first editions.

In the corpus, I have no first editions to compare with, but the average number of review excerpts appears quite low. One might have expected that there would have been more excerpts, since paperbacks, according to Rye Andersen, are more commercial in their design than first edition hardback covers.⁴⁵ The average number of review excerpts per cover appears to be especially low in light of Berglund's results. He investigated crime fiction from 1998 to 2011, and noted that the number of excerpts from reviews increased during this period. The books from the latter period tended to have three to four quotes on the cover. In Berglund's corpus of 153 novels in paperback, there was only one book that did not have any review excerpts on its cover.⁴⁶ In the bookstore corpus, there are 17 books without excerpts (5% of the corpus). The difference between Berglund's and my results can be explained by genre. It seems safe to conclude that crime fiction is a more commercial genre than general fiction, and Rye Andersen's theories that the more commercial a product is the more review excerpts it contains may support this hypothesis.

Earlier, we noted that there were slightly more review excerpts on book covers by male authors. Men also have an overweight of reviews categorized as bourgeois and, particularly, specific legitimacy. Although the difference between men and women is not statistically significant, this result is interesting considering previous research. As we remember from Rye Andersen's reasoning, well-known and/or consecrated writers do not need paratextual consecrational markers to the same extent as lesser-known authors. As I created an overview of the authors in the corpus, I noticed that the number of well-known and/or consecrated writers was higher among the men than the women. Even though Rye Andersen's results mostly concern blurbs and are based on a smaller sample, it is possible to raise the hypothesis that the bookstore corpus partly contradicts Rye Andersen's theories. The results imply that publishers consider that translated women authors, although many of them are less well known than their male counterparts, need fewer review excerpts to sell. This line of thought is particularly pertinent given the earlier observations that books targeting women dominate the bookstore corpus and statistics show that women are more frequent readers. These two observations strengthen a hypothesis that could be formulated as such: books written by (and for) women do not need the same number of review excerpts as books written by men, since they are likely to sell anyway.

As pointed out earlier, Svedjedal mentions that one of the most prestigious critics in Sweden is Horace Engdahl. However, his name does not appear in the corpus. This may be partly because there are many literary genres represented in the corpus, including genres that would not be subject to any reviews from critics in the Swedish Academy. One may also hypothesize that Engdahl's name, as hinted earlier, might have a slightly negative ring to it following conflict in the Swedish Academy. A third explanation may simply be that a few years have passed since Svedjedal's article, and a new generation of critics has emerged. If there is a new generation, then Lotta Olsson and Ulrika Milles seem to be two of its most prominent figures. Reviews by the former (who was indirectly mentioned as an important critic by Berglund) are frequent in the corpus and always appear with the newspaper she works for, *Dagens Nyheter*, which is a national newspaper of high prestige. What is especially interesting with Olsson is that her name appears on the covers of translated books categorized as novels of high prestige and on feel-good novels. In this way, she shares characteristics with the ama-

teur critics studied by Steiner, who review all types of fiction. Some studies show that the border between highbrow culture and popular culture is becoming increasingly blurred, and Olsson's name appearing on the covers of all kinds of genres is in line with these theories.⁴⁷ Regarding Olsson, it should be noted that she is categorized as a "critic" by *Dagens Nyheter* – that is, as a person writing book reviews – but at the same time, she appears just as much as a person giving book tips, i.e. more informal recommendations. Every Saturday Olsson has a column in *Dagens Nyheter* where she gives book tips, which often concern genres such as feelgood or crime fiction, and not only novels of high prestige.⁴⁸ An explanation for Olsson's reviewing of all kinds of literature may hence be her status both as a critic and a person giving book tips, which are two different genres within the world of literary criticism.

Above I noted that Olsson's name always appeared with the name of the newspaper that she writes for. As I delved deeper into the cases of bourgeois legitimacy in the raw data – the photographs of the book covers – I noted that most of the review excerpts came from high prestige Swedish newspapers, such as *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet*. It is also common to refer to the so-called *BTJ*, which is an abbreviation for Bibliotekstjänst.⁴⁹ This observation is in line with previous research by Svedjedal and Berglund. The fact that the majority of the excerpts used on the covers come from the TC indicates that publishers ascribe them the highest status, or, more likely from a publisher's point of view, the highest commercial potential – even higher than review excerpts from the hypercentral Anglo-American system. It seems as if publishers have confidence that readers trust the Swedish literary system and its consecrators, especially regarding female authors. Interestingly, the same is also true for the reviews categorized as popular legitimacy, where there are few cases of SC reviews. The cases of popular legitimacy are most often excerpts of reviews taken from social media. The risk that Steiner mentions about the internet resulting in the Anglo-American system pushing other cultures to the periphery has not become a reality for review excerpts, where SC excerpts – including Anglo-American ones – are seen as much less important compared to their Swedish counterparts.

The corpus shows some inconclusive patterns in the Swedish literary system's relationship to the Anglo-American system. According to studies by Chatarina Edfeldt and colleagues in 2019, 28% of all books published in Sweden were translations.⁵⁰ The equivalent number in the bookstore of my study is above 50%. Furthermore, of the translations in my corpus 70% are from English. This result is in line with previous research, which shows the dominance of English as a source language.⁵¹ It seems as if results from the bookstore corpus both contradict and verify previous research. There is a large amount of translated literature in the corpus, and there is a large Anglo-American dominance in terms of books retailed in the store, but reviews from the Anglo-American literary system are not used to the same extent as one might expect. Another observation that suggests that the Anglo-American system is less powerful than expected is that a number of the authors in the corpus writing in English have their roots in what could, in Wallersteinian terminology, be referred to as the periphery. Ayobami Adebayo, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and Shubhangi Swarup are a few examples.

In the corpus, there are no numbers signaling the critic's gender, but as I created an overview of the corpus, I noted that for bourgeois legitimacy, there is an equal gender

balance among the critics. For popular legitimacy, there is no such balance. In all cases where the person behind a review can be identified, it is a woman. This observation is in line with *Mediebarometern 2021*'s numbers and with *Svenska förläggareföreningen*'s report, showing that women are the most avid readers and the ones who are most likely to be interested in sharing reading experiences and discussing books. In the corpus, it is possible to see a direct link between popular legitimacy, feel-good literature, and amateur critics. The corpus shows that the instances of popular legitimacy are especially frequent on the covers of feel-good novels. From Steiner's observations that readers of popular literature want to be a part of a reading community, share reading experiences, and defend a genre, one can draw the conclusion that popular legitimacy has just as much worth as bourgeois legitimacy for feel-good novels, not least because these readers are credible; they are part of the same reading community as book buyers. It should be noted that there are also cases of bourgeois legitimacy on the covers of feel-good novels – even from the high prestige newspapers (cf. Lotta Olsson earlier). However, there are no male reviewers for feel-good novels.

As Steiner noted, the number of amateur critics has increased with the advent of the internet, but popular legitimacy is not used nearly as much as bourgeois legitimacy in the corpus. Instead, it seems as if Berglund's observation that other types of media are not used to the same extent as reviews from traditional media is more correct for the sample in question.

In this article, I do not focus on how review excerpts are formulated to any large extent, but for popular legitimacy, it is interesting to point out that "easy read" is sometimes used as a sign of quality. On the cover of Sarah Morgan's *Vinterbröllop (A Wedding in December)*, there are two excerpts from reviews pointing out that the novel is easy to read: "A charming and easy to read mix of love with humor and a whole lot of coziness to enjoy" (Boklysten) and "Well-written, easy to read and a real page-turner" (Emmas bokhylla).⁵² "Well-written" and "easy to read" are two qualities of a book that are not often included in critics' reviews, whereas they can perfectly well be combined when a review is written by a blogger. One may raise the hypothesis of whether the value judgment "easy read" is an example of amateur critics taking on a "bildungsauftrag". Is it a way to encourage more people to discover literature? As signaled earlier, Svedjedal notes that the reading of books has increased and become more democratic. The fact that "easy read" is branded as a quality criterion for a book relates to Svedjedal's reasoning about the democratization of the reading of fiction. It is possible that "easy read" literature is commercial, but the commercialization of reading and literature has also led to it becoming more accessible to all strata of society. This appears to be the case for feel-good literature. All this being said, however, it is important to remember that the review excerpt, as mentioned earlier, straddles the review and the advertising genre: while it to a large extent says something about the status of a book, it is also a commercial paratext that is supposed to entice potential readers to buy the book in question.

In a volume on feel-good literature, Piia Posti and Maria Nilsson mention that feel-good is a genre that is read all over the world; it is transnational and read as often in its original language as in translation. Drawing on ideas from other literary scholars, they note that all genre-literature should be viewed more broadly, namely as different "worlds," where books, agents, and institutions, such as editors, publishers, readers, journals, and even fictional characters, are all important ingredients.⁵³ Bearing

the above in mind, it is interesting to note that the transnational perspective is not reflected in the review excerpts, where TC review excerpts dominate. Instead, one recognizes the pattern of bourgeois legitimacy, where TC reviews are judged as most important. It is also highly probable that it is much easier for publishers to search for reviews “closer to home” than peruse blogs and social media accounts from all over the world to find fitting quotes. This line of reasoning is partly supported by Berglund, who mentions that to easily find reviews to quote, publishers use subscription services to databases containing most national newspapers.⁵⁴

Another observation concerning the review excerpts categorized as granting popular legitimacy is that they could be defined as book tips instead of reviews following specific criteria. As Steiner notes, the most important thing for book bloggers and influencers seems to be to interact with other readers rather than casting value judgments on a book, and it seems to be these aspects that publishers choose to focus on when choosing excerpts for covers.

Earlier, I noted that there is a clear dominance for TC review excerpts in the category bourgeois legitimacy. However, this is not the case for specific legitimacy, where SC reviews dominate, specifically reviews from the Anglo-American literary system. At first glance, it may seem as if the hypercentral Anglo-American literary system has an important consecrational power. At the same time, the dominance of SC excerpts may be explained by the fact that the strategy of using blurbs is not widespread in Scandinavia.⁵⁵ In addition, the fact that blurbs, according to Rye Andersen, seem to be common on the covers of Anglo-American literature but only appear 50 times in the corpus suggests that many SC blurbs have been left out and not judged as important to translate into Swedish.⁵⁶

Among the review excerpts categorized as granting specific legitimacy, there are some cases where cultural agents other than authors have blurbed a novel. These agents are often people with the right kind of capital, for example, politicians or artists. For Colson Whitehead’s *Den underjordiska järnvägen* (*The Underground Railroad*), Barack Obama and Oprah Winfrey – two African-American consecrators with a high amount of cultural capital – are foregrounded. On the back cover of Gregory David Robert’s *Shantaram*, there is a review by Isabella Lövin from *Femina*. Lövin has three important roles as a consecrator: politician, journalist, and author. The fact that a female politician’s review from a magazine targeting women is used raises questions about whether it is an attempt by the publisher to attract readers to a story about a man that is written by a man.

Finally, as noted earlier, Svedjedal points out that both positive and negative reviews may assist sales figures. This is not the case for the books in the corpus, where there are no instances in which excerpts expressing negative criticism are used. It is still possible, though, that Rye Andersen’s “creative copy-paste strategies” have resulted in review excerpts appearing more positive than they were at the beginning.

Implications of the Study and Methods Discussion

Although this study largely consists of quantitative descriptive results mapping the corpus, it has implications beyond the immediate material analyzed. For one, the findings contribute more empirical evidence to the field of translation sociology and

the sociology of literature. This study also contributes results to the book market, mainly publishers and bookstores, by showing what a potential book buyer experiences in a bookstore in a snapshot of time. It also contributes insights on book publishers' strategies when choosing reviews to quote and may lay the ground for changing these practices.

Another possible implication of the study is that it may contribute to theoretical discussions on the power of the paratext. I earlier mentioned that review excerpts are epitexts turned peritexts. In further studies one may ask what happens when uncommercial epitexts in the shape of reviews are quoted, words are taken out of their context, and transformed into commercial peritexts placed on the cover of a novel. How does this strategy affect the critics writing the reviews, and what importance do the readers allot to the review excerpts when choosing a novel?

There are some methodological limitations to this study. Using only one bookstore's assortment of books gives a sample that represents one moment in time in one specific bookstore. I can only draw conclusions about the sample. In the future, it may be possible to extend the corpus with more bookstores or create other corpora that make more comparisons possible, such as a corpus of literature written in Swedish or a corpus of literature in another country. Another methodological choice that may not have affected the results, but still should be problematized, is the choice of bookstore where the material was collected. The bookstore chain in question has had a long tradition of selling course books to university students, and this academic legacy may still influence the genres and literary segments that are retailed in the store. As I assembled the corpus, I noted that many genres and literary segments were represented, but it is possible that another bookstore would have had another composition of genres and literary segments. However, the choice of store will probably not have had any major effect on the variables relating to gender that have been the center of attention in this study.

Since this study is limited, there are variables that I have not been able to investigate further. I have not taken different publishing houses into account in the quantitative analysis, nor have I contacted publishers or consulted previous research on the publishing industry. Instead, I have taken book buyers' perspectives and investigated what they come across when browsing the shelves of a bookstore.

One of the strengths, but also one of the weaknesses, of quantitative studies is the strategy of categorizing and quantifying. A strength of quantitative studies is the possibility of comparing different (gender) groups to reveal differences between them and, as a next step, taking action to change uneven distributions of power and goods. In this study, categorizing and labeling different groups depending on biological gender may be seen as somewhat essentialist, since it contributes to perpetuating categories that are not clear-cut in real-life society. This article may function as a first step to a quantitative mapping of the field, which could, in turn, be followed by qualitative approaches to problematizing the concept of gender and sex to a much larger extent. Another issue regarding categorization relates to the three kinds of legitimacy. As I conducted the study, I ran into cases where the borders between the different kinds of legitimacy were not always clear-cut. This is especially true for specific legitimacy, where, for example, Oprah Winfrey may be categorized both as a critic and another author. However, I argue that the corpus is so large that a few categorization errors have not affected the results.

Another methodological issue in this study is that I used only descriptive statistics. Although there are a few calculations of p-values, it should be possible in the future to apply inferential statistics and draw conclusions about the population at large, and not only about the sample.

Conclusion

In this article, I have investigated two research questions using a corpus of 829 review excerpts from the covers of 333 paperback novels translated into Swedish. In the first research question, I asked whether gender affects whether SC or TC review excerpts are foregrounded. The results show that there is almost no difference between women and men in this regard and that there is a clear preference for TC review excerpts in both groups. It should be noted that the covers of books by male authors tend to include an excerpt from a culture other than the SC or the TC to a slightly greater extent than books written by female authors. In the second question, I investigated the kind of legitimacy (bourgeois, popular, or specific) that was most frequent in the corpus and if there were any differences in their frequency depending on gender. The results show that there is a large overweight of bourgeois legitimacy from the TC for both groups.

At first glance, the answers to both research questions may appear to have yielded a null result. When scrutinizing the numbers further, the results show that there are differences between the groups. There is a large difference between men and women in the use of popular legitimacy – female authors are significantly more represented. Another difference is male authors' preferences for review excerpts categorized as specific legitimacy. In addition to answering the research questions, the study has also yielded other results. The most striking of which is the large number of women authors in the corpus. Another result is that Anglo-American consecrational power seems to be much less used by publishers than expected.

Notes

- 1 Luise von Flotow, *Translating Women* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press 2011); Luise von Flotow and Hala Kamal (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Translation, Feminism and Gender* (Abingdon: Taylor and Francis 2020). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315158938>.
- 2 Garima Sharma, "An Indian woman's room of one's own. A reflection on Hindi Translations of Virginia Wolf's A Room of One's Own," in *The Routledge Handbook of Translation, Feminism and Gender*, eds. Luise von Flotow and Hala Kamal (Abingdon: Taylor and Francis 2020), 184–195; Elizabeth Gibbels, "The Wollestonecraft Meme: Translations, Appropriations, and Receptions of Mary Wollstonecraft's Feminism," in *The Routledge Handbook of Translation, Feminism and Gender*, eds. Luise von Flotow and Hala Kamal (Abingdon: Taylor and Francis 2020), 173–83; Sanaa Benmessaoud, "Maghrebi women's literature in translation," in *The Routledge Handbook of Translation, Feminism and Gender*, eds. Luise von Flotow and Hala Kamal (Abingdon: Taylor and Francis 2020), 64–82; Rajkumar Eligedi, "Volga as an international agent of feminist translation", in *The Routledge Handbook of Translation, Feminism and Gender*, eds. Luise von Flotow and Hala Kamal (Abingdon: Taylor and Francis 2020), 17–31.

- 3 Andrew Chesterman, "The Name and Nature of Translator Studies," *HERMES – Journal of Language and Communication in Business* vol. 22 (2009:42), 6, <https://doi.org/10.7146/hjlc.v22i42.96844>.
- 4 See Jana Rüegg "Marketing Frenchness. The Paratextual Trajectory of Patrick Modiano's Swedish Book Covers," in *Paratexts in Translation. Nordic Perspectives*, eds. Richard Pleijel and Malin Podlevskikh Carlström (Berlin: Frank und Timme Verlag 2022), 168.
- 5 Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997), 1–4.
- 6 See Marcus Axelsson, "Translating Feminism. Paratexts in the Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish Translations of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963)," in *Paratexts in Translation. Nordic Perspectives*, eds. Richard Pleijel and Malin Podlevskikh Carlström (Berlin: Frank und Timme Verlag 2022), 93–121; Valérie Henitiuk, "Translating Woman: Reading the Female through the Male." *Métra* vol. 44 (1999:3), 469–84, doi:10.7202/003045ar.
- 7 Karl Berglund, "Bokanalyser bortom verk och författarauktorisering: Exemplet recensionsutdrag på samtida svenska pocketdeckare," in *Textkritik som analysmetod: Bidrag till en konferens anordnad av Nordiskt Nätverk för Editionsfilologer 2–4 oktober 2015*, eds. Paula Henrikson, Mats Malm & Petra Söderlund (Stockholm: Svenska vitterhetssamfundet 2017), 173.
- 8 Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, 4–5.
- 9 Cf. Berglund, "Bokanalyser bortom verk och författarauktorisering: Exemplet recensionsutdrag på samtida svenska pocketdeckare," 172.
- 10 Maria-Lluïsa Gea-Valor, "Advertising Books: A Linguistic Analysis of Blurbs," *Ibérica* (2005:10), 45, <https://revistaiberica.org/index.php/iberica/article/view/445>.
- 11 See Annika Rockenberger, "Video Game Framings," in *Examining Paratextual Theory and its Application in Digital Culture*, eds. Nadine Desrochers and Daniel Apollon (Hershey, Penn: IGI Global 2014), 252–286.
- 12 Kathryn Batchelor, *Translation and Paratexts* (London and New York: Routledge 2018), 160.
- 13 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (Cambridge: Polity, 1993).
- 14 Gino Cattani, Simone Ferriani, and Paul D Allison, "Insiders, Outsiders, and the Struggle for Consecration in Cultural Fields: A Core-Periphery Perspective," *American Sociological Review* vol. 79(2014:2), 261, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122414520960>.
- 15 Johan Svedjedal, "Kritiska tankar: Om litteraturkritiken," in *Litteraturens offentligheter*, eds. Anders Olsson and Torbjörn Forslid (Lund: Studentlitteratur 2009), 162.
- 16 Berglund, "Bokanalyser bortom verk och författarauktorisering: Exemplet recensionsutdrag på samtida svenska pocketdeckare," 175.
- 17 Svedjedal, "Kritiska tankar: Om litteraturkritiken," 168–169.
- 18 Berglund, "Bokanalyser bortom verk och författarauktorisering: Exemplet recensionsutdrag på samtida svenska pocketdeckare," 171.
- 19 Berglund, "Bokanalyser bortom verk och författarauktorisering: Exemplet recensionsutdrag på samtida svenska pocketdeckare", 176.
- 20 Svedjedal, "Kritiska tankar: Om litteraturkritiken," 169.
- 21 Berglund, "Bokanalyser bortom verk och författarauktorisering: Exemplet recensionsutdrag på samtida svenska pocketdeckare," 176–177.
- 22 Berglund, "Bokanalyser bortom verk och författarauktorisering: Exemplet recensionsutdrag på samtida svenska pocketdeckare," 173–174; Tomas Rye Andersen, "Omslag," *Passage – Tidsskrift för Litteratur Og Kritik* vol. 22 (2007:57), 76–78, <https://doi.org/10.7146/pas.v22i57.1393>.
- 23 Rye Andersen, "Omslag", 76–78.

- 24 Berglund, "Bokanalyser bortom verk och författarauktorisering: Exemplet recensionsutdrag på samtida svenska pocketdeckare," 173.
- 25 Rye Andersen, "Omslag," 78.
- 26 Rye Andersen, "Omslag," 79–80.
- 27 Svedjedal, "Kritiska tankar: Om litteraturkritiken," 165.
- 28 Nordicom, *Mediebarometern 2021*, (Göteborg: Göteborgs universitet 2022), 78. <http://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1659067/FULLTEXT02.pdf>
- 29 Nordicom, *Mediebarometern 2021*, 85.
- 30 Erik Wikberg, *Bokförsäljningsstatistiken helåret 2021*, (Stockholm: Svenska förläggareföreningen & Svenska bokhandlareföreningen 2022), 18–19, <https://forlaggare.se/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/bokforsaljningsstatistiken-2021-helar.pdf>
- 31 See Nordicom's archive: https://www.nordicom.gu.se/sv/publikationer/sok-bocker-och-rapporter?combine=&field_publicerad_r_target_id=All&field_publicerad_lang_1_target_id_2=All&field_kategori_1_target_id=3121
- 32 Ann Steiner, "Digital litteraturkritik," in *Litteraturens nätverk. Berättande på internet*, ed. Christian Lenemark (Lund, Studentlitteratur 2012), 51–52.
- 33 Ann Steiner, "Amatörkritik på internet," in *Litteraturens offentligheter*, eds Anders Olsson, and Torbjörn Forslid (Lund: Studentlitteratur 2009), 178.
- 34 Steiner, "Amatörkritik på internet", 181.
- 35 It is sometimes necessary to make a distinction between literature of high prestige and popular literature, and the fairest way of doing this is to define the former as "books that are reviewed in prestigious contexts, are dealt with in literary history, and receive literary prizes" and the latter as literature that is popular, and, most often, commercial. See Ann Steiner, *Litteraturen i mediasamhället* (Lund: Studentlitteratur 2019), 256–257.
- 36 Steiner, "Amatörkritik på internet," 183–185.
- 37 Karl Berglund, *Mordförpackningar. Omslag, titlar, kringmaterial till svenska pocketdeckare 1998-2011*, (Uppsala: Avdelningen för litteratursociologi vid Uppsala universitet 2016), 14.
- 38 SOU 2012:65. *Läsandets kultur* <https://data.riksdagen.se/fil/F7768127-700F-4FAD-9110-5FoD9025108E> 224.
- 39 Gunnel Furuland, "Billigbokens förändringar 1940-2017. Från folkböcker till pocketserier. Definitioner, förlagskulturer och spridningsvägar," in *Böckernas tid. Svenska Förläggareföreningen och svensk bokmarknad sedan 1943*, ed. Johan Svedjedal (Stockholm: Svenska Förläggareföreningen, 2018), 297–300; see also Berglund, *Mordförpackningar. Omslag, titlar, kringmaterial till svenska pocketdeckare 1998-2011*, 18.
- 40 SOU 2012:65. *Läsandets kultur*, 224–225.
- 41 Canongate. <https://canongate.co.uk/contributors/13184-ambrose-parry/>.
- 42 Calculated using a two-tailed t-test.
- 43 Wikberg, *Bokförsäljningsstatistiken helåret 2021*, 7.
- 44 Rye Andersen, "Omslag," 81.
- 45 Rye Andersen, "Omslag," 76.
- 46 Berglund, "Bokanalyser bortom verk och författarauktorisering: Exemplet recensionsutdrag på samtida svenska pocketdeckare," 171, 175–176.
- 47 Marc Verboord, "Market logic and cultural consecration in French, German and American bestseller lists, 1970–2007," *Poetics* vol. 39 (2011), 290.
- 48 See for example Lotta Olsson, "Lotta Olsson tipsar: Här är 5 nya deckare du bör läsa", *Dagens Nyheter*, 2023-02-18, <https://www.dn.se/kultur/lotta-olsson-tipsar-har-ar-5-nya-deckare-du-bor-lasa-2/>
- 49 One of the most quoted newspapers within the category of SC bourgeois legitimacy is *Kirkus Books*. *Kirkus Books* specializes in writing short reviews for the book industry to

use. It resembles BTJ, although BTJ targets the public sector, whereas *Kirkus Books* targets an industry with commercial interests.

- 50 Chatarina Edfeldt, Erik Falk, Andreas Hedberg, Yvonne Lindqvist, Cecilia Schwartz, and Paul Tenngart, *Northern Crossings. Translation, Circulation and the Literary Semi-periphery* (New York: Bloombury Academic 2022), 201. <https://library.oapen.org/viewer/web/viewer.html?file=/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/52488/9781501374265.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- 51 Johan Heilbron, "Towards a Sociology of Translation: Book Translations as a Cultural World-System," *European Journal of Social Theory* vol. 2 (1999:4), 434. <https://doi.org/10.1177/136843199002004002>
- 52 Quotes from the cover of Sarah Morgan, *Vinterbröllop* (Stockholm: Harper Collins 2021).
- 53 Piia K. Posti and Maria Nilsson, "Förord" in *Speglingar av feelgood. Genre, etikett eller känsla?*, eds. Piia K. Posti, and Maria Nilsson (Växjö: Linnaeus University Press 2022), 2–3.
- 54 Berglund, "Bokanalyser bortom verk och författarauktorisering: Exemplet recensionsutdrag på samtida svenska pocketdeckare," 176.
- 55 Berglund, "Bokanalyser bortom verk och författarauktorisering: Exemplet recensionsutdrag på samtida svenska pocketdeckare," 173.
- 56 Rye Andersen, "Omslag," 81.