

THE EBRD LITERATURE PRIZE: EXPLORING GEOGRAPHICAL AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY IN A NEW TRANSLATION AWARD

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ABSTRACT: This contribution explores a new addition to the range of international awards available for literary translation into English, the EBRD Literature Prize. It was founded by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) with the key objective of broadening the range of translated literatures available to the wider English-speaking public. The Prize was created in 2017 and it has been awarded four times to date. Accordingly, building on a brief overview of the broader role of prizes and awards within the global literary translation market, the genesis and rationale which underpin the EBRD Literature Prize are presented and highlighted. This information provides the basis for the subsequent exploratory analysis, which uses the regional groupings of the EBRD's countries of operations as a preliminary framework of reference. As such, using the relevant publicly-available data, the geographical and linguistic origins of the translated literary works which have been shortlisted and longlisted for the Prize are outlined and discussed. The main aim is to determine whether any specific trends can be identified in the relevant works. Subsequently, the findings of these observations are presented, and, in recognition of the exploratory nature of this contribution, some possible indicators for additional research on the topic are offered.

KEYWORDS: European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, literary prizes, translation prizes, literary translation, Central and Eastern Europe, geographical diversity, linguistic diversity

Introductory remarks

In the context of the discussion on how so-called “small” literatures enter the wider canon, the role of translation prizes – and by extension, of how linguistically and geographically representative these awards are – remains relatively understudied. This is despite the fact that scholars have emphasised the role that translation can play in highlighting the interlinkage between language and politics (for example, see Damrosch, 2020, pp. 173-174), as well as attesting to the importance of translation as a form of consecration for smaller languages and its function in the centre-periphery dichotomy of the global publishing market (for example, see, Sapiro, 2014a; 2014b; 2016). As such, it is through translation that diverse and more peripheral voices can be heard within the dominant literary conversations, and, as English (2005) has illustrated, the enhanced cultural capital that literary prizes can bestow on smaller languages and their literatures is here of great significance. Accordingly, in analysing this extraliterary phenomenon of translation prizes, this exploratory contribution provides empirical data on the geographical and linguistic scope of a literary translation-related award which was founded by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) in 2017.

Briefly outlined, the EBRD Literature Prize¹ is a new annual translation award designed to recognise a fictional work translated into English from any official or minority language of the circa 40 countries of the EBRD's operations, which are grouped into eight regions across Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia. With the Prize's stated aim being to “champion the literary richness of [the EBRD's] regions of operations [...] [and] introduce the depth and variety of the voices and creativity from these regions to the English-speaking public and a wider global audience” (EBRD, 2022a), this contribution seeks to examine the validity of this claim by analysing the linguistic and national origins of works longlisted and shortlisted for the Prize during its five-year history. As such, it aims to identify which representatives of smaller literatures have been selected to date, and if any particular geographical and/or linguistic trends can be observed within the data obtained.

Literary prizes and the global translation market: A brief overview

Over the past few years, it is fair to say that literary prizes have been the subject of considerable academic interest around the world. To this end, numerous studies have been conducted which explore the rationale, role, and impact of such awards in various markets and contexts. To give just a brief overview, this has included research focusing on selection procedures and judging processes (for example, Titlestad, 2009; Marsden and Squires, 2019), the political capital and impact of such awards (see Driscoll, 2009; Bowskill, 2012), and aspects relating to diversity and the role of literary prizes as potential agents of change (e.g. Chatfield, 2019; van der Voorn, 2021), thus

highlighting Squires' (2004) assertion that the study of literary prizes is of great relevance regarding ideological and other issues concerning the wider production and reception of literary works.

With specific regard to translation prizes, there is a small but growing number of publications focusing on certain aspects. Here too, this includes work on the judging processes (e.g., Bassnett, 2003; Reynolds, 2008) as well as the importance of translation awards in cultural transfer processes (Broomans, 2021), and profiles of specific awards and their impact (e.g. Schulte, 1999; Bold and Norrick-Rühl, 2017). As noted previously by the author elsewhere, scholars (for example, see Casanova, 1999; Heilbron, 2000; Sapiro, 2014b; 2016 etc.) have opined that for smaller literatures the role of translation from a smaller to a major language such as English is extremely important in terms of circulation and thus widening the potential audience for a given work. As such, the transformative act of translation, and thus of moving a literary work from a peripheral to central language, can also represent a type of consecration of the literary product (Casanova, 1999, as cited in Sapiro, 2016, pp. 11-12). Thus, in terms of smaller literatures becoming part of so-called world literature, the role of translation prizes and awards can be immensely impactful in this process. Indeed, this was apparent in the author's earlier study, which explored the portrayal and promulgation of Catalan cultural identity through an analysis of the works awarded the Ramon Llull Prize for literary translation, and ultimately observed that a specific representation of Catalan history, culture, and society was promoted. As has also been highlighted by Alvstad and Borg (2021, pp. 800-801) in their study of the Maltese and Swedish translations of winners of the renowned Hans Christian Andersen book prize for children's literature, the opinions of scholars differ as to the means and processes by which smaller literatures gain currency and thus move from periphery to core within the global literary canon. In the context of translations into English in the United Kingdom, what is clear is that despite some outdated notions regarding the lack of appeal of literature in translation, over the past few years awareness has been growing among publishers and the wider public of the importance and value of translated literature in the British context (Chitnis, Stougaard-Nielsen, Atkin, and Milutinović, 2017). This is exemplified by initiatives such as the creation of Tilted Axis Press, a non-profit publishing company set up by Man-Booker International Prize-winning translator Deborah Smith, which focuses on translating works from various Asian languages into English (Tilted Axis, 2022). Other projects aim to bolster the status and visibility of the profession of literary translation in general, such as many of the awareness-raising initiatives organised by the National Centre for Writing in Norwich (National Centre for Writing, 2022). Nonetheless, despite these recent positive developments, it is clear that there is still room for improvement in this regard. As such, when the shortlist for the maiden EBRD Literature Prize was announced, Colm Lincoln, the EBRD's Deputy Secretary General noted "that too little is read in translation in English" (Onwumezi, 2018), thus echoing notions explored in relevant scholarly literature (for example, see Bold and Norrick-Rühl, 2017).

The EBRD Literature Prize

With its headquarters in London, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is an international organisation which was founded in 1991. In response to the fall of communist regimes across central and eastern Europe, as well as the breakup of the former Soviet Union, the EBRD's original aim was to provide support for the development of democratic institutions and the private sector in those transitional economies. Over time, its remit has now also broadened to include cooperation with publicly-owned organisations in other nations, as well as the promotion of policies to improve the relevant business environments of the countries concerned (Heath-Brown, 2015, p. 41; EBRD, 2022b).

As hinted at previously, the EBRD Literature Prize is awarded annually for a work of literary fiction which has been translated into English and published by a UK or European-based publisher. The work must have been written originally in any official or minority language of one of the EBRD's countries of operations, by a living author who is (or has been) a citizen of any of those respective countries (EBRD, 2022c). As noted above, the Prize was founded in 2017 in cooperation with the British Council, and has its origins in the EBRD's Community Initiative, which focuses on philanthropic and cultural aspects of the Bank's activities in its countries of operation (EBRD, 2022a). Although the EBRD is owned by a total of 71 countries, as well as by the European Union and the European Investment Bank (EBRD, 2022d), the number of nations where it is actively operational is considerably smaller. As present, the EBRD currently invests in almost 40 economies in countries and

territories, which as outlined in Table 1 below, are categorised into eight separate regional groupings (EBRD, 2022e).

Central Asia	Central Europe & the Baltic States	Cyprus & Greece	Eastern Europe & the Caucasus
Kazakhstan	Croatia	Cyprus	Armenia
Kyrgyz Republic	Czech Republic	Greece	Azerbaijan
Mongolia	Estonia		Belarus
Tajikistan	Hungary		Georgia
Uzbekistan	Latvia		Moldova
	Lithuania		Ukraine
	Poland		
	Slovak Republic		
	Slovenia		
Russia	South-eastern Europe	Southern & Eastern Mediterranean	Turkey
Russia	Albania	Egypt	Turkey
	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Jordan	
	Bulgaria	Lebanon	
	Kosovo	Morocco	
	Montenegro	Tunisia	
	North Macedonia	West Bank and Gaza	
	Romania		
	Serbia		

Table 1. List of the countries and territories where the EBRD is currently operational (Source: EBRD, 2022e).

As can be inferred from Table 1, the countries listed all have a range of official and minority languages, all of which are eligible as potential source languages. Regarding selection of the prize-winners, for the three most recent years a jury composed of four prominent literary and culture specialists has made their judgement based on a longlist of ten works from which three are subsequently shortlisted and one winner is ultimately selected (the inaugural edition followed a slightly different procedure with an extra stage in the judging process)². The Prize has a value of EUR 20,000 which is divided in half between the work’s original author and its translator. In addition, the authors and translators of the remaining two shortlisted books are awarded runners-up prizes of EUR 4,000 each. In highlighting the language and geographical diversity that underpins the Prize, its eligibility requirements and relevant press releases underscore the importance of adhering to the EBRD’s stated aim of making the wealth of literature from its regions of operations accessible to the wider English-speaking reader (EBRD, 2022a).

Method and research questions

Building on the foregoing overview of the origins and scope of the EBRD Literature Prize, as well as the general remarks on translation prizes, the following two research questions were devised:

- i) What is the geographical scope of the works shortlisted and longlisted for the EBRD Literature Prize?
- ii) What is the linguistic scope of the works shortlisted and longlisted for the EBRD Literature Prize?

In terms of the data sources used, the names and relevant details pertaining to the shortlisted and longlisted works were openly accessible on the EBRD’s website (see EBRD, 2022f).³ In terms of the data itself, it was noted that, although linguistic information regarding the original language of the contribution was available for all four years that the Prize has been existence, official information regarding the country of origin of the works’ original author was only given for 2020 and 2021 – i.e., the two most recent years that the Prize has been awarded. It was initially intended that for the previous years, other sources would be used to obtain relevant information about the national background of the authors; however, it quickly became apparent that this would not be straightforward, involving complex questions of identity, ethnicity, and nationality, as well as the issue of multiple heritages, backgrounds, and citizenships. In this regard, this concept is highlighted

by McDougall when she writes that, given the growth in international travel and migration by writers themselves, authors of literary fiction “may be accounted almost as much global citizens as they are national subjects” (McDougall, 2014, p. 55). Indeed, the complexities of the issue are noted by the EBRD’s own conditions regarding an author’s eligibility for the prize, which state that an author must either currently be a citizen or have held citizenship of one of the relevant countries (EBRD, 2022c).

In analysing the geographical scope of the Prize, it was decided to follow the eight groups of countries outlined by the EBRD in Table 1. Although it can be argued that these countries within these groups vary greatly not only in surface area and population, but also in terms of their linguistic and sociocultural composition as well as their political and economic development, nonetheless it was felt that these groupings would provide a useful framework of reference. Regarding the linguistic data, information was again taken from the relevant pages of the EBRD website. However, it was noted that the judging process of the first edition (2018) of the Prize included an extra stage, and thus an amendment was made to ensure consistency – i.e., for that year, the intermediate stage of six preselected works was not included, and solely the linguistic data relating to the three finalists was used in the present analysis.

Results and analysis: geographical diversity

	2021	2020	TOTAL
Central Asia			0
Central Europe & the Baltic States	3 (Croatia, Czech Republic, Poland)	4 (Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia)	7 (35%)
Cyprus & Greece			0
Eastern Europe & the Caucasus	4 (Georgia, Ukraine (x 3))	1 (Georgia)	5 (25%)
Russia		2 (Russia)	2 (10%)
South-eastern Europe	1 (Romania)	1 (Bosnia & Herzegovina)	2 (10%)
Southern and Eastern Mediterranean		1 (Egypt)	1 (5%)
Turkey	2 (Turkey)	1 (Turkey)	3 (15%)
TOTAL	10	10	20 (100%)

Table 2. Geographical origin of longlisted works for 2021 and 2020 (Sources: EBRD, 2022g; 2022h).

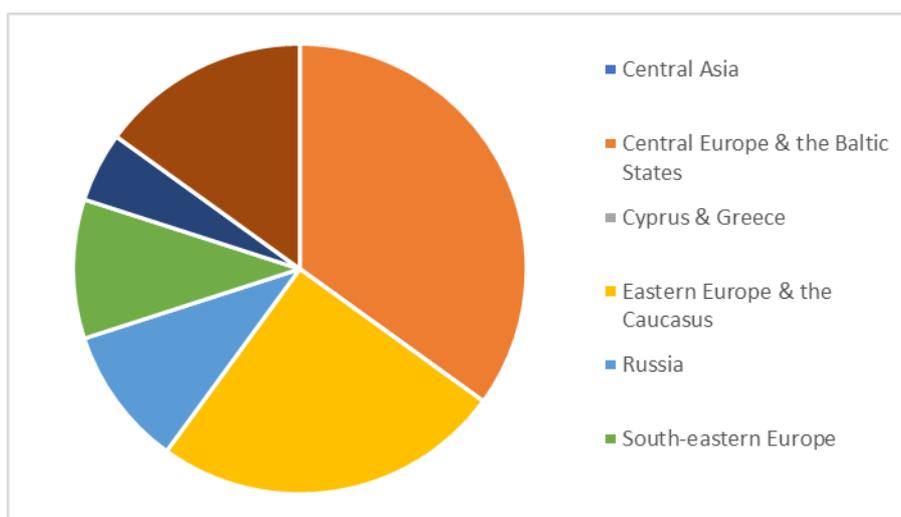


Figure 1. Geographical origin of longlisted works for 2021 and 2020 (Sources: EBRD, 2022g; 2022h).

As justified in the preceding section, the geographical analysis was only conducted for the two most recent years of the Prize’s existence. As shown in Table 2 and illustrated in Figure 1, the complete longlist for the 2020 and 2021 editions comprised 20 entries representing a total of thirteen different countries. Of that number, just over a third (7 entries, 35%), were from six different countries in the Central Europe & the Baltic States grouping. The next largest group was from the Eastern Europe &

the Caucasus grouping, with a total of 5 entries (25%), with Ukraine particularly well-represented (3 entries). Turkey, in a single-country grouping, also counted three longlisted works (15%). South-eastern Europe and Russia both had two longlisted works (10%), whereas the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean was represented by a single work. During the two years of the geographical analysis, there were no longlisted works from any countries in two of the EBRD’s regional groupings: Central Asia and Cyprus & Greece.

	2021	2020	TOTAL
Central Europe & the Baltic States	1 (Poland)	2 (Hungary, Lithuania)	3 (50%)
Eastern Europe & the Caucasus	1 (Georgia)		1 (16.6%)
Russia		1 (Russia)	1 (16.6%)
South-eastern Europe	1 (Romania)		1 (16.6%)
TOTAL	3	3	6 (100%)

Table 3. Geographical origin of shortlisted works for 2021 and 2020 (Sources: EBRD, 2022i; 2022j).

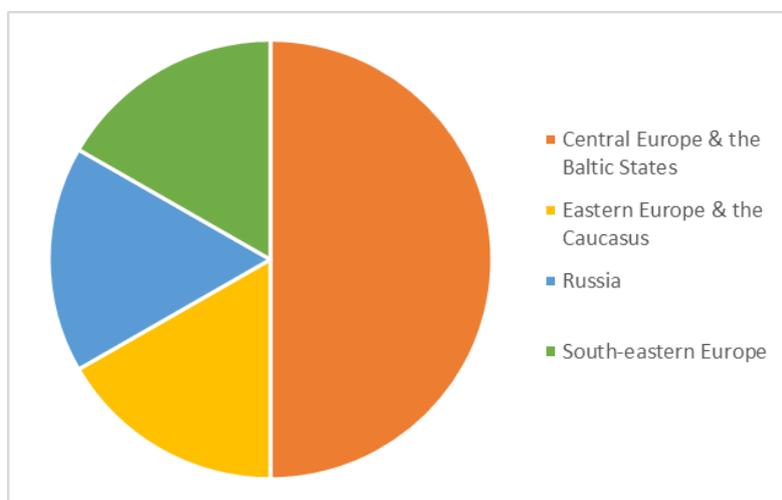


Figure 2. Geographical origin of shortlisted works for 2021 and 2020 (Sources: EBRD, 2022i; 2022j).

Turning to the shortlists, six works from four regional groupings were selected. As presented in Table 3 and depicted in Figure 2, it is perhaps unsurprising, given the large number of longlisted works from the Central Europe & the Baltic States grouping, that exactly half of the shortlist comprised works from those countries. The other three works represented the Eastern European & the Caucasus, Russia, and South-eastern Europe regional groupings respectively.

	2021	2020	2019	2018	TOTAL
Russian	1	4	1	2	8 (19%)
Turkish	2	1	1	3	7 (17%)
Arabic		1	2	1	4 (10%)
Polish	1	1	2		4 (10%)
Croatian	1			2	3 (7%)
Slovak		1		2	3 (7%)
French			1	1	2 (5%)
Ukrainian	2				2 (5%)
Romanian	1		1		2 (5%)
Albanian				1	1 (2%)
Georgian	1				1 (2%)
Czech	1				1 (2%)
Bosnian		1			1 (2%)

Hungarian		1			1 (2%)
Latvian			1		1 (2%)
Uzbek			1		1 (2%)
TOTAL	10	10	10	12	42 (100%)

Table 4. Source languages of longlisted works (2018-2021) (Sources: EBRD, 2022g; 2022h; 2022k; 2022l).

Results and analysis: linguistic diversity

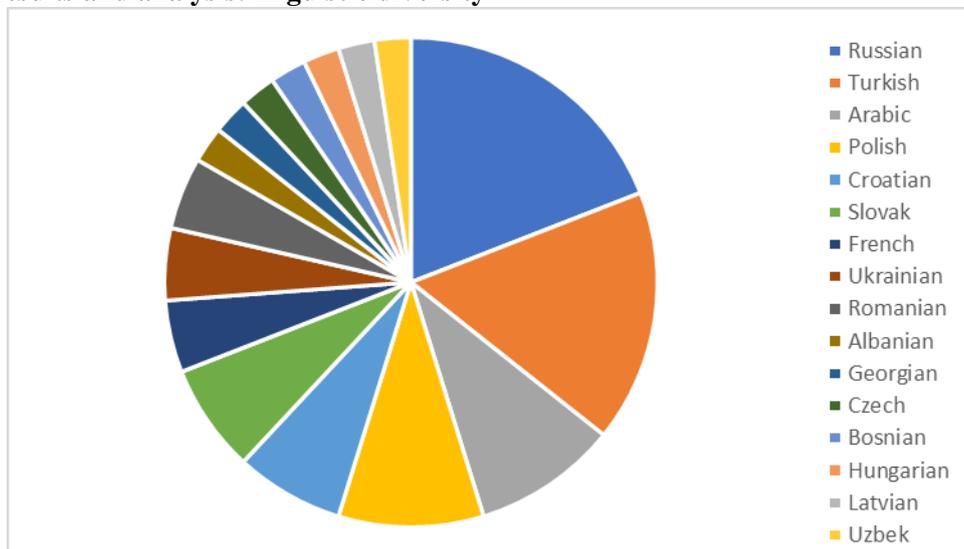


Figure 3. Source languages of longlisted works (2018-2021) (Sources: EBRD, 2022g; 2022h; 2022k; 2022l).

Regarding linguistic diversity, Table 4 and Figure 3 present the source languages of the works which have been longlisted since the Prize’s inception in 2018. To date, works translated from a total of sixteen different languages have featured, representing the Albanian, Baltic, Kartvelian, Romance, Semitic, Slavic, and Turkic linguistic families. In collective terms, works translated from Slavic languages (here represented by Bosnian, Croatian, Czech, Polish, Russian, Slovak, and Ukrainian) have been the most numerous, with a total of 22 entries (52.38%). Of the other language families, the only other member with more than a sole representative is Turkic (8 entries; 19.04%), which is represented by Turkish and Uzbek. With regard to individual languages, the most dominant source language has been Russian with a total of 8 entries (19.04%).⁴ The second one is Turkish (7 entries; 16.67%), followed by Arabic and Polish with 4 entries apiece (9.52%). Indeed, works translated from these four source languages comprise more than half of the total number of longlisted works, and seven languages are represented by one work each.

Though it is clear that linguistic diversity is a distinguishing characteristic of the longlist, one notable feature is that all of the languages listed are, at first glance, state languages, and no minority or endangered languages appear to be featured. Further examination and comparison with the geographical analysis provided above, however, note that several of the Russian-language entries and the two French-language entries could be regarded as representative of non-state languages. This may seem surprising, given that both Russian and French are major world languages and are also official working languages of the United Nations and other international organisations. However, in this regard additional investigation of the relevant sociolinguistic and geopolitical factors is required.

To varying degrees, the Russian language has had an enduring presence across much of the post-Soviet space, with corresponding implications for the region’s literature, culture, and politics. As noted by Kamusella (2018), Russian is unique among international languages in that its sole linguistic standard remains the unipolar one of Russia itself. Indeed, as observed elsewhere (for example, see Pavlenko, 2008; 2013), attitudes towards and recognition of the language vary across the different countries which formerly were part of the territory of the Soviet Union. Concerning the works longlisted for the Prize, although Russian is not an official state language in either country, at least three of the Russian-language entries have been from Ukraine and the sole work representing

Lithuania was written in the language. Therefore, it can be argued that Russian could be viewed as a non-state language in this regard.

For the two longlisted works which were originally written in French, further analysis reveals that both source texts were written by authors from Morocco. Indeed, for the most recent of the two entries, the EBRD’s website specifically notes the version of the language as “Moroccan French” (EBRD, 2022i). As with Russian in the post-Soviet space, the French language continues to play a role in the contemporary Moroccan context, though it does not hold any official status and has not done so for over six decades (Benzakour, 2012). Thus, here too, French could be regarded as a non-state language of one of the EBRD’s countries of operations.

	2021	2020	2019	2018 ⁵	TOTAL
Russian		2		1	3 (25.0%)
Polish	1		1		2 (16.7%)
Georgian	1				1 (8.3%)
Romanian	1				1 (8.3%)
Hungarian		1			1 (8.3%)
Latvian			1		1 (8.3%)
Uzbek			1		1 (8.3%)
Croatian				1	1 (8.3%)
Turkish				1	1 (8.3%)
TOTAL	3	3	3	3	12 (100%)

Table 5. Source languages of shortlisted works from 2018 to 2021 (Sources: Pyrkalo, 2018b; Ross, 2019; EBRD, 2022i; 2022j).

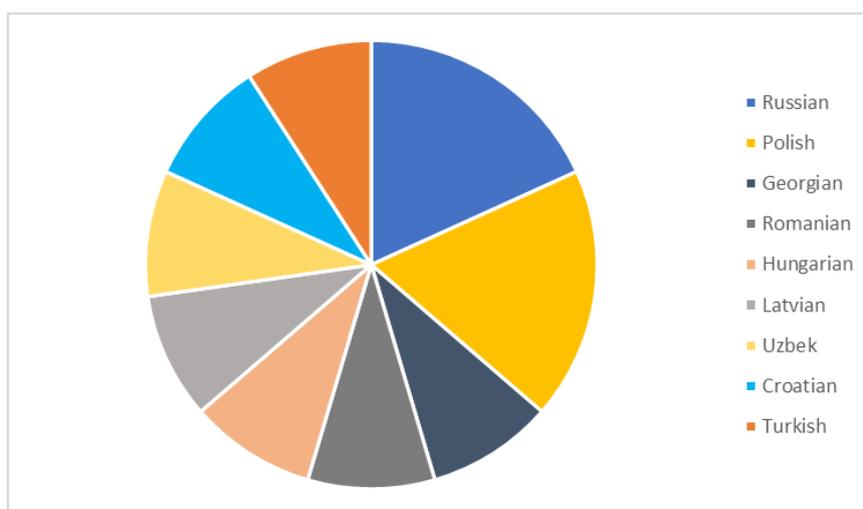


Figure 4. Source languages of shortlisted works from 2018 to 2021 (Sources: Pyrkalo, 2018b; Ross, 2019; EBRD, 2022i; 2022j).

As highlighted in Table 5 and shown in Figure 4, the shortlisted works comprise representatives of nine languages from a range of language families. In this instance, source texts originally written in Russian comprise a quarter of the shortlisted works since 2018 (3 entries), followed by Polish (2 entries). The other seven languages feature one representative each. Unlike in the results of the geographically-focused analysis, where the Central Europe & the Baltic States grouping also featured heavily among both the longlisted and shortlisted works, the linguistic-focused evaluation appears to display a more heterogenous character.

Year	Title	Author	Translator	Language	Country
2021	<i>The King of Warsaw</i>	Szczepan Twardoch	Sean Gasper Bye	Polish	Poland
2020	<i>Devilspel</i>	Grigory Kanovich	Yisrael Elliot Cohen	Russian	Lithuania

2019	<i>The Devil's Dance</i>	Hamid Ismailov	Donald Rayfield (with John Farndon)	Uzbek	Information not given
2018	<i>Istanbul, Istanbul</i>	Burhan Sönmez	Ümit Hussein	Turkish	Information not given

Table 6. Winners of the EBRD Literature Prize (2018 to 2021) (Source: EBRD, 2020a).

The final table (Table 6) provides information about the four main prize-winners of the EBRD Literature Prize to date. It also contains details about the original language that the work was written in, and (from 2020 onwards), information about the author's country of origin. In terms of this analysis, it is notable that to date there has been no repetition in geographical or linguistic terms. In other words, each prizewinning work has come from different regional groupings and represents different languages, thus illustrating that there is indeed a strong degree of diversity at the highest level of the Prize.

Concluding remarks and suggestions for further research

In analysing the geographical and linguistic diversity represented by works longlisted and shortlisted for the EBRD Literature Prize, this exploratory study has illustrated that a range of languages and regions are indeed included. Though certain regions and languages may feature more heavily on the longlist, the shortlist – as well as the eventual prize-winners – demonstrate that, based on the analysis of the data, no one geography or language predominates. However, the study has shown that no work written in a minority or endangered language has yet been selected, though two non-state languages have appeared on the longlist and one, in the instance of the Russian-language entry from Lithuania, has even been awarded the main prize. Nonetheless, the young age of the Prize means that further analysis will be required of future longlists, shortlists, and prize-winners to determine if this trend will continue over the coming years.

Although this contribution has focused primarily on data gained from online sources, it is clear that there is a wealth of opportunities for further research on the topic. These include exploring the wider impact of the Prize on the wider publishing industry in the United Kingdom and beyond – for example, through analysis of book sales, relevant awareness-raising initiatives, and the media prominence of translated literature from smaller languages and nations. In addition, qualitative research could also yield interesting findings; for example, through conducting interviews with members of the jury and officials responsible for organising and administering the Prize, as well as with the relevant authors, translators, and literary agents themselves. Furthermore, this work could be supplemented by comparative analyses involving other United Kingdom-based prizes for literary translation from various languages such as the John Dryden Translation Competition, the Oxford-Weidenfeld Prize, and the range of awards offered by the Society of Authors.

In conducting this study, however, what is evident from the analysis is that the Prize has brought wider attention to translated literature written in a range of languages from a broad spectrum of countries and regions. As such, despite the fact that it has only been in existence for a short period of time, it is clear that the EBRD Literature Prize has proven itself to be a worthy and valuable addition to the United Kingdom's landscape of literary translation prizes, with corresponding implications for the visibility of smaller languages and literatures within the wider literary canon.

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¹ Regarding the name of the award, initially the nomenclature “EBRD Prize for Literature” seems to have been more widespread at the time of its creation; at present, however, it appears that “EBRD Literature Prize” is now the generally preferred designation.

² In 2018, twelve works were longlisted for the Prize, of which six were selected to advance to the next stage of the judging process. Three finalists were then chosen, and subsequently the winner was announced (Pyrkalo, 2018a; 2018b).

³ A convenient summary is also available on the Prize’s Wikipedia page (Wikipedia, 2022).

⁴ The total number of entries for Russian includes one entry which was translated from a Russian translation of the Georgian original (EBRD, 2022g).

⁵ As highlighted in note 3, these results pertain to the three finalists of the 2018 edition.