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**Literary Transfer in Post-Communist Hungary:
Diverging Paths of Canadian Literature
Translated into Hungarian between 1989 and 2014**

Doctoral (PhD) theses

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1. Historical Background and Research Question

The political transformation of 1989 opened up an avenue of cultural transfer between Hungarian publishers and the transnational agents of the global book market in a rapid and dynamic way. Translations have not only been carriers of new ideas, but after the transformation, the practice of publishing translations remained instrumental in changing the industry of the target cultural field. The PhD thesis maps the evolving network of Hungarian publishers producing translations of Canadian literature in a 25-year period of dynamic political and social changes between 1989 and 2014, and traces the publishers' transfer practices that have radically been remodelled due to contextual elements such as cultural diplomacy, government funding, the impact of transnational literary prizes, and the emergence of new actors in the global book market. The research focuses on *how the Canadian–Hungarian translation flow was mediated by the contextual elements between 1989 and 2014*.

Books recreated in a target culture retain a relationship with the original product but function differently in a new social context. Hungarian publishers after 1989 had to acquire cultural literacy for the global book market and had to make decisions about what carries value and is marketable in the target culture. The publishers had many available possibilities in the selection and production process, and their selection and reframing choices about Anglophone and Francophone books are revealing cultural dynamics, translation policies and norms. The transfer activities of the publisher contain an act of (cultural) translation, a meaning-making activity. The publisher

is guided by both rational and aesthetic goals: on the one hand, wants to make the venture profitable, on the other hand, maintains a network that recognizes cultural value and prestige linked to cultural products.

After 1989, the large, state-owned publishing houses were privatized, small-scale independent publishing houses were established, and new motivations emerged in publishing along the lines of market economy and the dynamics of the international literary field of that time. Translation is a key aspect of this process, not only because texts often circulate novel literary themes and genres, but because this activity is in the focus of international negotiations of soft diplomacy, it may involve financial decisions for the publishing companies, and motivate a network of agents who are otherwise not part of a monolingual publishing process.

After the 1999 Frankfurt Book Fair, where Hungary was the guest of honour, Hungarian authors and publishers had an exceptional opportunity to create and strengthen connections in the global book market while adapting to an international open setting. The translation assignments influenced the social positions of the agents as some of them started to translate prestigious Nobel Prize authors. The publishers' network widened by connecting to public institutions at an international level and to individual translators, since instead of speakers of Russian and languages used in the Communist countries, now there was a sudden demand for experts of other languages, particularly English and French. The number of books translated from Russian and the languages of the former Communist countries radically decreased while at the same time, the number of imported

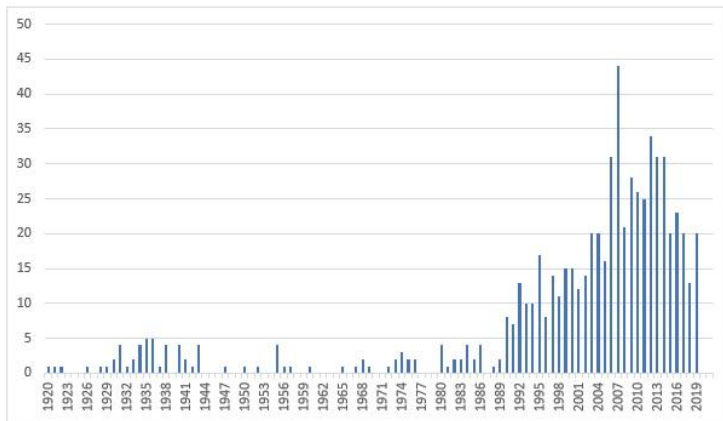
cultural products, especially books translated from the English language almost doubled between 2000 and 2014, according to the cultural statistics of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH). After the political transformation, the position of publishers as key agents and gatekeepers persisted, but their orientation changed from being in service of Communist ideology, to managing relations and resources with transnational agents in the global book market.

The Canadian–Hungarian translation flow is a many-sided case, as Canada is an officially bilingual country that supports and publishes literary works in the English and French languages as well as in the languages of the Canadian minorities. Along with that, a number of indigenous languages (eg. Inuit languages) have also gained publishing space in Canada, so when we talk about the circulation of Canadian literature, we are referring to a diversity of languages, cultures being represented instead of a uniform national canon. Canada strengthened its cultural identity in the 1960s and 1970s when translation was supported by the Canada Council for the Arts as part of the country’s international cultural diplomacy. Although merges and signs of globalization can be witnessed in the source country with the shrinking of McClelland, the so called “Canadian publisher”, and the advances of international conglomerates such as Penguin, the diversity of Canadian literature is still prominent if we compare it with the literary field of Hungary between 1945 and 1989 which have been heavily controlled and influenced by the literary production of the Communist countries and Communist ideologies. Thus, on the side of the source country, we can

note a need for self-expression, on the side of the target country, a strict screening process until 1989, and after a change of regime, a keen interest in Western literary products.

The research takes an interdisciplinary approach and builds on theories of sociology (Bourdieu¹ 1990, 1991, 1983/1993, 1996, 2002, 2008, van Es and Heilbron 2015, Jijon 2019, Sapiro 2008, 2010, 2015, 2016), literary scholarship (Casanova 2021, 2004, Kürtösi 1987, 1988a, 1988b, 2018, 2019, 2021, Martonyi 1999), translation studies research (Alvstad 2012, Batchelor 2018, Pym 2006, 2010, Saraeva 2009, Sohár 1999, 2022, 2025) and historical research (Sewell 2005) in order to get a holistic overview of the translation flow on a macro, meso and micro level. The research question of the study emerges out of a quantitative bibliographic dataset, the *Translation Research Project* of the Central European Association for Canadian Studies (CEACS). On the following frequency graph, the number of translated Canadian books into Hungarian after 1989 and the varying periods of production can be seen.

¹ For references and links to sources, please see the bibliography of the thesis.



Number of translated titles of Canadian literature into Hungarian between 1920 and 2019. Source: CEACS

2. Research Methodology

The small-N research was driven by a quantitative, bibliographical initial enquiry (as shown above), but was complemented by a qualitative dataset. The data were triangulated in order to eliminate blind spots in both quantitative and qualitative data and facilitate a socio-historical investigation. Triangulation for completeness in a study of social contexts was not, however, merely a cross-checking of datasets, but a coherent integration of methods, which specifically reflected on and counterbalanced the strengths and weaknesses of available datasets. The qualitative dominant, research-specific mixed-method design allowed for the examination of the translation flow's situatedness in a time period of social change. The initial data set was the bibliographical database of the Central European Association for Canadian Studies launched in 2010, a catalogue which lists Canadian

literature translated into eight languages in Central Europe which proved to be the most complete and reliable bibliographic catalogue in regard to the translation flow. According to the CEACS data, up to 1989, a total of 91 titles, and between 1989 and 2014, a total of 483 titles were transferred into Hungary.

The second source of quantitative data is the annual cultural statistics on the general publishing industry collected by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH). The third type of publicly available data are the reports of the Canada Council for the Arts on its subsidies for 'International Translation Grants' within the Arts Abroad program, which is the most supported area in the Council's cultural agenda. The statistical inquiry will point to years of higher and lower production which invite further investigation through qualitative methods: semi-structured interviews with key agents in the translation trajectory, and the analysis of discursive and non-discursive paratexts.

Two sets of semi-structured interviews were conducted. One set of interviews were done with Hungarian literary agents who mediate translation rights in Hungary and in the neighboring countries and represent large publishing 'territories' in their portfolio, Canadian authors included. The other set comprise of interviews with the Hungarian key agents in the translation trajectory, such as the founder of the Budapest International Book Festival, publishers, editors, translators, and critics.

For the Alice Munro's case study, four general newspapers, four literary journals and one online literary portal were surveyed. The qualitative data included in-house archived material of Európa

Publishing House as well. With the permission of the publisher, eighty anonymized readers' reports on Canadian authors were found and analysed. Fifteen of these were dated between 1989 and 2014.

Non-discursive data was also collected to trace the publisher's reframing strategies. The covers of translated Canadian books were compared with their originals and examined along the themes that had appeared in the agent interviews.

The data analysis used the methodological tool of triangulation (within and across methods) to improve the reliability of the datasets and test six hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: In the Canadian-Hungarian translation flow, the path of translated literature will vary depending on the language of the original publication, English or French. (Partially confirmed)

Hypothesis 2: The translation initiative of the Canadian cultural diplomacy will impact the publishers' decision to transfer books during the examined period. (Partially confirmed)

Hypothesis 3: Canadian literature may be linked to other cultural products that has an impact on the publisher's decision to translate books between 1989 and 2014. (Confirmed)

Hypothesis 4: There were events where Canadian literature was introduced between 1989 and 2007, and Canada's guest of honourship at the International Book Fair in Budapest in 2007 impacted the volume and quality of the translation flow. (Confirmed)

Hypothesis 5: Framing practices will vary according to literary genre and temporal aspects (before and after 1989). (Partially confirmed)

Hypothesis 6: Canadian regional frames, emphasizing the foreign aspects of Canada, will be stronger in the paratextual material in order to highlight exoticism. (Disconfirmed)

3. Results

The research has found that between 1989 and 2014 an overwhelming majority, that is 95% of the transferred Canadian books were translated from English, and 2.5% from French and an even lower percentage of 1.5% from Czech, and 1% from Spanish. Even though Canada is officially a bilingual country, the position of the English language exerts its hypercentrality in the world system of languages (de Swaan 1993, Heilbron 1999).

The study also found that in the case of Hungary, after 1989, there were large-scale structural funding schemes in place as part of the Canada's tools for cultural diplomacy, yet these were mostly effective in Western Europe and not in Central Europe. Hungarian publishers were not aware of the available support or this funding was still not enough to take the financial risk that publishing a new Canadian author meant. The research has shown that while international translation grants have been part of Canada's cultural diplomacy, these large-scale structural funding instruments may not be as effective on a local level. To allocate funding where it is most needed in the translation flow, the translation of literary pieces written

in less translated languages of Canada (French included) could be prioritized by the government initiatives.

The data shows that although the practice of using thorough readers' reports in Európa Publishing House persisted even after 1989, the criteria and selection process of books for translation have greatly changed. While readers' reports mentioned the audiovisual adaptation in connection to international success even before 1989, this fact was not decisive for the transfer. The research has clearly revealed that Hungarian publishers were motivated after 1989 by the presence of audiovisual adaptations of Canadian novels when deciding for translation. Visual marking of these film adaptations also appeared on book covers and in the media responses. Other art forms, however, for example visual art, theatre, contemporary dance, music had only indirect influence on the publishing scene.

Datasets – both statistical data and interview data – confirm that the Canada's guest of honourship at the International Book Fair in Budapest in 2007 was the most significant motivator of the translation flow after 1989. Interested agents with varying agendas, such as academic scholars, the Canadian Embassy, MKKE the organizer foundation of Budapest International Book Fair, literary agents, publishers, and the media bodies cooperated to disseminate the translations prepared for the event and introduce Canadian culture to the Hungarian readers. The event of the book market had far-reaching effect even in the field of diplomacy, as in 2008, H. E. Michaëlle Jean, the Governor General of Canada visited Hungary with a larger delegation.

The PhD research has expanded Alvstad's (2012) and van Es & Heilbron's (2015) perspective on framing strategies and identified a fourth strategy: cultural bundles, besides the already pinpointed regional, universal and commercial frames. Cultural bundle refers to the adaptations of the same piece in other (media and art) forms. The research has found that a mix of regional and universal frames have been used by publishers when presenting Canadian literature. Among the regional frames, not only references to Canada, but also references to Hungarian history were in the forefront. For Hungarian–Canadian immigrants, publishing literature became a way of keeping contact with Europe and the 'homeland' after 1956, which in this case is hard to specify, since Hungarian–Canadian immigrants may also originate from regions that are now part of surrounding countries, such as Romania, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Ukraine. European historical traumas (e.g. Trianon Treaty, Holocaust, 1956 Uprising) are discussed in these novels, which are found to be highlighted themes in the Canadian literary flow to Hungary. These Canadian–Hungarian personal relations also aid the publishing of these books, since the Canadian authors are more likely to know about the funding scheme of the Canada Council for the Arts. In the case of the Canadian–Hungarian translation flow, the introduction of new Canadian literature facilitated the possibility and continuity of a dialogue with Hungarian readers in the "mother land."

Although there has been a growth and an increasing interest for Canadian literature in Hungary, 76 out of 117, that is, the majority of publishers launched only one or two titles, and a concerted effort to

introduce Canadian authors is missing. Often varying publishers acquire the translation rights for Canadian authors and the fragmented marketing strategies do not aid the reception process. Since translations do not carry the recognition of the original, the marketing effort through reframing and a conscious positioning are key factors when introducing new titles.

Through three case studies, the thesis follows the diverging paths of the books of Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro and Lucy Maud Montgomery in the Hungarian post-Communist political, economic, cultural or social context. The studies show that although certain patterns of the global book market prevail (centrality of English language, dominance of transnational recognition – especially the Nobel Prize –, the impact of audiovisual adaptations, more funds allocated to Western Europe), each book has a idiosyncratic path that is highly dependent on the decision of the agents in the translation flow, which may be for example the publisher, the editor or a devoted translator.

To sum up, through the analysis of the Canadian–Hungarian translation flow between 1989 and 2014, the social context of transferred texts has been traced both in the source and target cultures. Mediating contextual elements (eg. government funding, soft diplomacy, financial constraints, events of the book market, the publisher’s framing strategies, events of history, individual agency) have been identified at macro, meso and micro levels. The interdisciplinary point of view and the approach of data triangulation have allowed for a more holistic view that accounts for both global

regularities and idiosyncrasies in a dynamic period of social change. It shows that translation is indeed a social practice.

4. Related Publications and Conference Presentations

“Alice Munro magyarországi recepciója fordításszociológiai szemszögből,” [The Reception of Alice Munro from the Perspective of the Sociology of Translation.] *Tiszatáj: Irodalmi, művészeti és társadalmi folyóirat* 72, no. 1 (2018):32-41.

“How Many Hungarian Voices Does Alice Munro Have?.” In *Canada Consumed: The Impact of Canadian Writing in Central Europe (1990–2017)*, *Le Canada à la carte : influence des écrits canadiens en Europe centrale (1990–2017)*, edited by Don Sparling and Katalin Kürtösi. 175-190. Brno: Masaryk University Press. 2019.

“Symbolic capital in the Hungarian translation of Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*” In: *Translation in and for Society: Investigating Sociological and Cultural Aspects in Literary and Specialised Domains*, Videobook, edited by Martínez Ojeda & Beatriz, Rodríguez Muñoz & María Luisa, Córdoba: UCO Press, 2019. ISBN: 978-84-9927-453-9.

“A kiadatlan Atwood.” [The Unpublished Atwood.] *Tiszatáj: Irodalmi, művészeti és társadalmi folyóirat* 74, no. 2 (2021): 90-100.

“Triangulating data and methods to map the social context of Canadian literature translated into Hungarian between 1989 and 2014.” In *Recharting Territories: Intradisciplinarity in*

Translation Studies, edited by Gisele Dionísio da Silva, Maura Radicioni, 99-122. Leuven: Leuven University Press. 2022.

“The Unpublished Atwood.” In *Varietas delectat*, edited by Anikó Sohár. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó. 2024.

“From Canada to Hungary: The Unpublished Atwood” *Pázmány Papers* 1, no. 1. (2023): 161-177.

„A kiadatlan Atwood” In *A túlélés művészete: Tanulmányok Margaret Atwoodról*, edited by Katalin Kürtösi, Péter Hajdu, 52-71, Szeged: Tiszatáj Könyvek. 2025.

24-26 May 2018, *Symbolic capital in the translation flow of Alice Munro's literary work*, Translation Research – Translator Training international conference, Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Budapest, Hungary.

27 August – 8 September 2018, *Hungarian translations of Anglophone Canadian literature published between 1989-2014*, CETRA Translation Research Summer School, KU Leuven, Belgium.

26-28 September 2018, *Symbolic capital in the Hungarian translation of Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale*, University of Cordoba, KU Leuven, Translation in and for Society, First international e-conference in Translation Studies.

22 March 2019, *Intersemiotic Translation and its Contextual Elements*, Inter- and Transmedial Translation Analysis: Methods and Concepts international colloquium, University of Tartu, Semiotics Department, Estonia.

7-8 May 2019, *Pitching the Image of Canada to Hungary: The Publisher's Practices of Framing before and after 1989 in Hungary*, Translating Images of Canada international colloquium, University of Tartu, Translation Studies Department, Estonia.

9-13 September 2019, *The Reviewer, the Publisher and the Literary Agent: cultural mediators in the literary flow from Canada in the changing Hungarian literary field between 1989 and 2014*, Living Translation: People, Processes and Products. IX. EST Congress, panel co-convenor, presenter, Stellenbosch University, Republic of South Africa.

25-26 November 2021, *The paratextual framing of Alice Munro's books in Hungary*, Alice Munro at 90: Central European Interpretations - Alice Munro 90: interprétations de l'oeuvre en Europe Centrale international conference, KRE-ELTE, Budapest, Hungary.

4-6 June 2021, *The changing agency of publishers in the Canadian-Hungarian translation flow*, The Global Publishing and the Making of Literary Worlds, international conference, online, ICLA - Princeton University, USA.

23-24 November 2023, *Translation Grants of the Canada Council for the Arts in Central Europe between 1998 and 2022. Canada: Current and Future Challenges*, international conference, ELTE, KRE, PPKE, Budapest, Hungary.