

THESES OF THE PhD DISSERTATION



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## **Cultural Bridges and Gaps**

An Analysis of Translation Strategies and Cultural Transfer Through the Hungarian  
Translations of Three Classic Works of Children's Literature

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## 1. The Object of the Research

The aim of this research is to explore the extent to which translations of children's literature reflect on the sociocultural norms of their respective eras, and how translators' decisions influence the reception, interpretation, and cultural integration of the works in the target language. One of the key focuses is to examine how the linguistic representation of changing sociocultural contexts differs from one period to another, and how these differences shape translatorial choices.

Another important objective is to investigate how the chosen translation strategies—specifically domestication and foreignization—affect the reception of the works, and influence the attitudes of target language readers' towards the original works.

The study is based on a corpus comprising all complete Hungarian translations of three classic English-language children's books:

- *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Lewis Carroll, 1865);
- *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (L. Frank Baum, 1900);
- *Peter Pan* (J. M. Barrie, 1911).

The central research questions are:

- What connections can be identified between the translatorial decisions and the reception, interpretation, and ultimately the role and success of these works in the target language culture?
- What cultural and linguistic challenges do the translations of these works present, and what solutions did the translators apply? Can these decisions be regarded as successful in terms of cultural transfer?
- What changes have these retranslations brought about in the reception and cultural positioning of these works in the target language culture?

This dissertation aims to answer these questions by applying an analytical framework capable of systematically examining translatorial decisions in children's literature. In doing so, it seeks to contribute to the development of translation studies and cultural transfer methodology.

## 2. Methods and Sources

This research uses an interdisciplinary method, combining tools of translation studies, linguistics, literary studies, statistics, and memetics. These are complemented by the application of Albert-László Barabási's success formula, which allows for a dynamic modeling of the translated works' success.

The dissertation touches upon multiple areas: I examine the works from linguistic, literary, cultural, and translatorial aspects, synthesize the results, and draw conclusions regarding which translations can be considered successful. (The concept of success is also defined in the dissertation.)

In the study I use a comparative analysis, which is based on comparing the source and target language texts. The focus areas are:

- sociopragmatic elements (addressing people, politeness strategies, use of formal and informal pronouns and expressions)
- use of dialogue markers, and the interpretation of the characters' voice and persona
- onomastic decisions (adaptation or integration of proper names)
- translating realia
- titles and paratexts
- evaluation of translatorial choices, based on Chesterman's typology
- categorizing translations based on Anikó Polgár's typology.

This complex approach allows for a systematic overview and comparison of translatorial decisions and their effect on the works' reception and cultural acceptance. The uniqueness of the method is that it evaluates the success of literary works based not only on linguistic and aesthetic criteria, but also on their social and cultural embeddedness, institutional support, and memetic impact as well.

The dissertation thus contributes to the reassessment of literary translations (not only children's literature), and provides a new theoretical framework for the examination of cultural transfer in a globalized culture. The applied methodology could be an inspiration for future literary research.

### 3. Summary of Results

This dissertation presents a comparative analysis of the Hungarian translations of three classic English-language children's books: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Lewis Carroll, 1865), *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (L. Frank Baum, 1900) and *Peter Pan* (J. M. Barrie, 1911). It focuses on translation strategies, their broader cultural effects, and the differences in translated books' success in the target culture. The research uses an interdisciplinary approach, incorporating linguistics, literary studies, translation theory, and memetics.

The analysis examines how specific linguistic and cultural elements—such as dialogue markers, character names, realia, sociopragmatic elements, and titles—were translated, and how these decisions shaped the reception of the works in Hungary. A strong correlation was found between the translation strategy (domestication vs. foreignization), and the text's ability to connect readers to the Global Cultural Impression (GCI) associated with the original work. While some translations replaced foreign cultural references with Hungarian equivalents, others retained them, trying to preserve the source text's atmosphere and stylistic nuances.

The dissertation highlights a historical shift in translation norms and fidelity perceptions. Early translations (from the first four decades of the 20th century) favored domestication to increase accessibility and the target reader's appreciation, while recent versions tend to preserve cultural otherness and stylistic fidelity. These choices greatly influenced reception: for instance, Szobotka's adaptation of *Alice*, despite mixed reviews, continues to dominate the Hungarian market. For decades *Oz* was only available in Beöthy's version, until Szöllősy's translation gained prominence. *Peter Pan* only saw its first full Hungarian translation in 2015 (by Ágnes Csonka), followed by a widely distributed version in 2016 (by Luca Szabó), which has been republished three additional times since its first publication.

Translators faced various cultural and linguistic challenges, including culture-specific references, humor, wordplay, and names. These were addressed using strategies described in Anikó Polgár's typology.<sup>1</sup> Translations that carried the original cultural memes over to the target language text—through integrative and reconstructive strategies—proved to be the most successful in linking readers to the global cultural framework of the stories. Early translations, reflecting contemporary norms, adhered to the national memory.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, globalization and digitalization have shifted the focus toward cosmopolitan memory, with new translations

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<sup>1</sup> Anikó POLGÁR, *Catullus noster* (Pozsony: Kalligram, 2003), 30–38.

<sup>2</sup> Siobhan BROWNLIE, *Mapping Memory in Translation* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, GB New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

aiming to resonate with international interpretations. Thus, retranslations not only improved textual precision but also repositioned the works within a global cultural framework. Canonized translations have become part of the collective memory.

The dissertation confirms the following hypotheses:

1. Translation strategy (domesticating vs. foreignizing) consistently influences how sociopragmatic elements, names, realia, and titles are translated.
2. Retranslations serve as cultural renewals, they add more depth, and facilitate connection with the works' GCI.
3. The handling of memetic elements plays a crucial role in cultural transfer. Translations that distort or omit such elements hinder the reader's connection to the global narrative, whereas those that preserve them enable broader cultural integration.
4. Chesterman's typology<sup>3</sup> proved effective in systematically comparing translation strategies and in identifying patterns that correlate with reception and cultural success.
5. Translation success has multiple factors, influenced not only—and in many cases mostly not—by textual quality but also by availability, institutional support, and cultural fit. Barabási's model of success<sup>4</sup> ( $S = Q \times r$ ) is used to explain why success comes from both quality and relevance.

Ultimately, the dissertation argues that translation is not just about language, rather, it is a vital act of cultural mediation. Translational decisions determine how, and whether, a target-language audience can access the global cultural constructs associated with the source text. By treating translation as a key mechanism of cultural transfer, this research proposes a scalable, interdisciplinary model applicable to other works and periods.

The main message of the dissertation is that the most effective translations are those that serve as true cultural bridges—remaining faithful not only to the text but to the cultural context—achieve greater reception and long-term success.

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew CHESTERMAN, „Causes, Translations, Effect”, *Target Online*, 1998, 201–230, <https://doi.org/10.1075/target.10.2.02che>.

<sup>4</sup> Albert-László BARABÁSI, *The Formula: The Universal Laws of Success*, (New York Boston London: Little, Brown and Company, 2018).

#### 4. List of Own Publications on the Topic

- Sasvári, Anna. 2025a. "Mesterséges Intelligencia a Fantázia Birodalmában." *DŰLŐ* Átírás, átdolgozás, adaptáció: 46–57.
- . 2025b. "A Memetika Szerepe a Kulturális Fordítástudományban." *LITERATURA* 51 (1): 4–20. doi:10.57227/Liter.2025.1.1.
- . 2024a. "The Role of Memetics in Cultural Translation." In *Space, Identity and Discourse in Anglophone Studies*, 461–477.
- . 2024b. "Fordítástudomány Mindenkinék." *LITERATURA* 50 (1): 96–102. doi:10.57227/Liter.2024.1.8.
- . 2024d. "Személynevek És Földrajzi Nevek A Pál Utcai Fiúk Fordításaiban." *NÉVTANI ÉRTESÍTŐ* 46: 43–52. doi:10.29178/NevtErt.2024.4.
- . 2023a. "A Fordítói Döntéshez Kapcsolódó Fordítástudományi Szakkifejezések Tisztázása." *ALKALMAZOTT NYELVÉSZETI KÖZLEMÉNYEK* 16 (1): 75–86.
- . 2023b. "A FORDÍTÓI DÖNTÉSEK HATÁSA ÉS KÖVETKEZMÉNYEI A FORDÍTOTT MŰ EGÉSZÉRE." In *XXVI. Tavasz Szél Konferencia 2023*, 165–173.
- . 2022a. "Nyelvi Illemtan – Hogyan Viselkedik Aliz Csodaországban?" *ALKALMAZOTT NYELVÉSZETI KÖZLEMÉNYEK* 15 (1): 176–187.
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- . 2022e. "A Globális Kultúrképzet-Jelenség Meghatározó Szerepe a Gyermekirodalmi Fordításokban." In *Műfordítás És Más Extrém Sportok*, 239–247.
- . 2022f. "Fölnöttek Vagy Nagyok? Reáliákkal Kapcsolatos Fordítói Döntések Vizsgálata A Kis Herceg Tizenkét Magyar Fordításában." In *Doktoranduszok Fóruma 2021: A Bölcsészettudományi Kar Szekciókiadványa*, 15–23.
- . 2022g. "Oz, a Nagy Varázsló Vagy Csodák Csodája?" *PUBLICATIONES UNIVERSITATIS MISKOLCINENSIS SECTIO PHILOSOPHICA* 26 (3): 247–260.