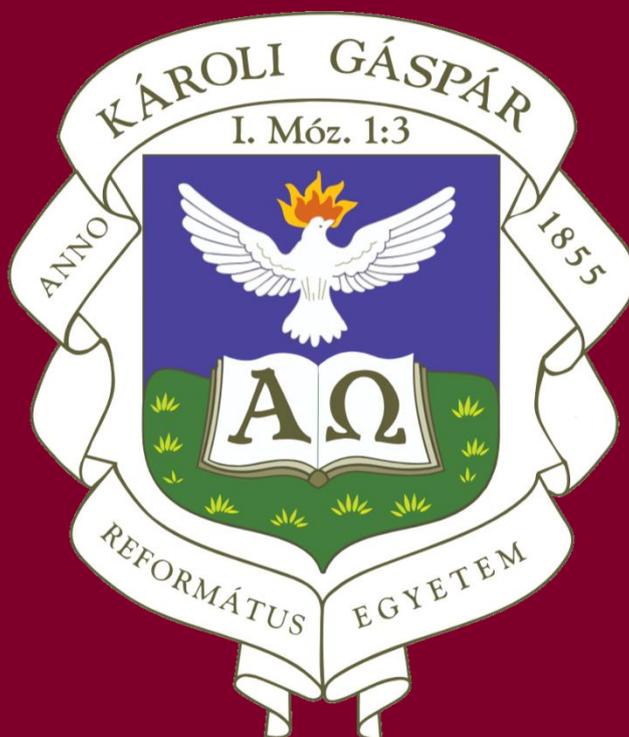




KÁROLI GÁSPÁR REFORMÁTUS EGYETEM  
Bölcsészet- és Társadalomtudományi Kar

# SCHOLIA IUVENUM HUMANIORA

Volume III



Budapest, 2025

SCHOLIA IUVENUM HUMANIORA

III. évfolyam

Kiadó: Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem, Bölcsészeti- és Társadalomtudományi Kar

Székhely: 1088 Budapest, Reviczky u. 4.

Felelős kiadó: Dr. habil. Csoma Mózes KRE BTK dékán

Főszerkesztő: Dr. Gála Edit

Honlap: [btk.kre.hu/scholia](http://btk.kre.hu/scholia)

ISSN 2939-6123

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# PERSONAL AND POLITICAL NEXUS: THE LETTERS OF QUEEN ELIZABETH I TO THE DUKE OF ANJOU<sup>1</sup>

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REVIEWER: DR. HABIL. STRÓBL ERZSÉBET

## ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore the primary reasons for the failure of marriage negotiations between Elizabeth I and Francis, Duke of Anjou, conducted in the 1570s and 1580s. It focuses on Queen Elizabeth's letters to the Duke, her final and one of the most significant marital candidates. The research examines nine letters and analyses them alongside their historical context for a comprehensive understanding. Based on the investigation of Elizabeth's writing style, rhetorical strategies, and the stylistic norms of the era, this paper highlights the specific circumstances of, and reasons for Elizabeth's rejection of the Duke. This paper concludes that the rejection by Elizabeth was not due to a lack of personal attraction, but to the political risks associated with the marriage: the threat to Elizabeth's independence, financial matters, and religious differences.

## INTRODUCTION

Elizabeth I, Queen of England and Ireland from 1558 until her death in 1603, was a pivotal figure in English history. She is often referred to as the "Virgin Queen" – a title that not only became emblematic of her reign and political strategy, but also signified her reluctance to marry, mostly due to her desire to maintain sovereignty. Elizabeth rebuffed numerous marriage proposals as her suitors' romantic overtures and political ambitions usually contradicted her own strategies. Francis, the Duke of Anjou, was no exception in this regard. Negotiations for a potential marriage between the Queen and the Duke commenced in the 1570s and proved to be a blend of political alliance and personal intrigue, but the Duke's ambitions to win the hand of the English monarch never materialised.

The political and personal dimensions of the relationship between Elizabeth I and Anjou has received considerable scholarly attention. The reason why it is interesting to analyse this relationship is because a vast amount of effort and time was devoted to it by both parties.<sup>2</sup> In her pioneering book on Elizabeth I's courtships, Susan Doran analysed the broader implications of the Duke's courting in the political climate of the sixteenth century. While she argued that the marriage negotiation was a political

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<sup>1</sup> The Author received 2<sup>nd</sup> prize for an earlier version of this paper at the 37<sup>th</sup> National Student Circle Conference (37. OTDK) in 2025 – the Editor.

<sup>2</sup> The Duke of Anjou wrote twice as many letters to Elizabeth as she did. See Elizabeth, *The Letters of Queen Elizabeth*, 96.

manoeuvre to forge an alliance that could deter potential threats, she also stated that Elizabeth's relationship with Anjou fulfilled a personal need as much as a political one.<sup>3</sup> Carole Levin also discusses the nature and significance of the relationship. She argues that this exchange of letters provides insight into Elizabeth's diplomatic strategies and her complex feelings regarding this marriage and other alliances<sup>4</sup>. However, none of the relevant works focuses on analysing her letters to the Duke of Anjou. Although recent editions of the correspondence provide valuable commentary on the texts in both their introductions and footnotes, they do not offer a profound analysis of the Queen's style in these specific letters. Moreover, the intimate nature of the Queen's letters to Anjou remains largely unexamined probably because historical analysis prioritizes political narratives over personal correspondence.

This paper examines nine letters exchanged between Elizabeth I and the Duke of Anjou between 1579 and 1584 from stylistic, historical, and personal perspectives. These letters are deemed authentic by the editors of the *Collected Works* of Elizabeth I. The editors omitted "routine and formulaic" letters that were written in her name or letters that have an uncertain provenance.<sup>5</sup> Only two of the letters, one of 1579 and another of 1581, are handwritten by Elizabeth, which highlights the personal importance of these letters within the correspondence. However, this does not mean that the other letters were not dictated by her.

The analysis of the letters is organized into three parts. First, an overview of the historical context is provided. This introduces the reader to the background of the Duke's courtship. Then a thorough inspection of the nine letters identifies a range of exquisite figures of speech, the stylistic and structural features, and the frequency, purpose, and chronologically evolving tendencies of the texts. The third part of the paper discusses the three principal issues contributing to the eventual failure of the marriage negotiation between Elizabeth I and Anjou: the question of religion, the Duke's operation in the Netherlands, and the financial dilemmas.

This paper aims to shed additional light on an exchange of letters between Elizabeth I and the Duke of Anjou. It draws on existing research on the specific chronology, language, and rhetoric employed by the Queen. Although existing studies interpret the broader themes of the letters, this paper provides in-depth analysis in a historical context. Thus, this paper offers both historical and textual analysis and argues that the letters composed by Elizabeth I and addressed to the Duke of Anjou reveal the specific obstacles which prevented the marriage, the most decisive of which were the religious differences, the Duke's operations in the Netherlands, and his pressing need for financial aid from the Queen. These letters show Elizabeth's wisdom and erudition by intertwining rhetorical strategies and emotional expressions. The sometimes intimate and persuasive language of the letters imply a fundamental, deeper, and more personal reason for delaying and then withdrawing from the marriage. This paper explores the

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<sup>3</sup> Doran, Susan, *Monarchy and Matrimony: The Courtships of Elizabeth I* (Routledge, 1996), 164.

<sup>4</sup> Levin, Carole, *The Reign of Elizabeth I* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 54.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, ed. Leah S. Marcus, Janel Mueller and Mary Beth Rose (University of Chicago Press, 2000), xiv–xv.

interplay between the historical context and the principal challenges addressed in the letters, thereby illuminating the complexity of the correspondence.

#### THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE COURTSHIP OF FRANCIS, THE DUKE OF ANJOU

Elizabeth I is known as the Virgin Queen. She never married or had children, nonetheless, she remained an attractive potential marriage partner for decades for European royalty. She had numerous suitors although none succeeded in winning her hand in marriage. A wide range of domestic and foreign matrimonial candidates lined up during Elizabeth's reign. The Duke of Anjou was the last in a long list of suitors and he had every prospect of winning the hand of the Queen of England. First, the most notable suitors are introduced, then the Duke of Anjou's courtship and life are presented, lastly, his courting is examined.

One of the most important suitors of Elizabeth I was Robert Dudley, who was not only a childhood companion, but also a favoured confidant and close advisor. Their relationship was complex and fraught with challenges, yet it was characterised by a deep and enduring affection that persisted until Dudley's death in 1588. Even though Dudley, created Earl of Leicester in 1564, lost his wife under ambiguous circumstances in 1560, just in time to express his intention to marry the Queen, their union did not take place.<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth would not risk allying herself with a man implicated in murder. Additionally, marrying a subject could undermine her sovereignty and authority, making such a union strategically unwise.

In the 1560s, two further notable suitors negotiated for the hand of England's queen, namely King Eric XIV of Sweden and the Archduke Charles of Austria. The match with the Protestant King of Sweden would have bolstered the Protestant coalitions in Europe, leading to the unification of two powerful nations under a common religious banner. The union with the Catholic Archduke would have eased tensions between Spain and England. Moreover, Elizabeth preferred to marry a prince rather than a monarch. The negotiations, however, eventually ceased due to Elizabeth's lack of personal interest in the first candidate, and religious differences with the second.

By the 1570s, the noncommittal and aging Elizabeth had fewer marriage prospects. Establishing a dynastic connection with France appeared to be one of the most beneficial options, including the last seriously considered marriage proposal by Francis, Duke of Anjou. However, Francis was not the first Duke from the House of Valois with whom long and serious negotiations were conducted. King Charles IX had expressed interest in marriage with Elizabeth in 1565, and between 1570–1571, Henry, Duke of Anjou, eighteen years Elizabeth's junior, was also contemplated as a potential husband. Although highly beneficial to England, the marriage was never seriously discussed, mainly due to the difference in religion and the disparity in age between the parties. Henry opposed a match with a heretical queen, especially if she was more than twice his age.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Loades, David Michael, *Elizabeth I* (Hambledon Continuum, 2011), 141.

<sup>7</sup> Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony*, 100.

As Elizabeth was running out of options, the age difference became less important, which is shown by the fact that the twenty-four-year-old François, Duke of Alençon between 1555–1584, and Duke of Anjou between 1566–1584, after his brother's Henry's accession to the French throne, was accepted as a serious suitor of the forty-six-year-old Queen. As a royal scion, Francis fitted Elizabeth's notion of choosing her partner from royal circles, but his Catholicism proved a significant problem based on previous experience. Francis, however, was much more willing to compromise than his brother, by then Henry III of France. Although the age difference between the Queen and the Duke was even greater, both courts tried to ignore it. As time went on, the English also increasingly had to consider the last opportunity to make an alliance with the French, which was perhaps Elizabeth's last chance to marry.

Born as the third and youngest son of King Henry II of France and Catherine de Medici of the Valois dynasty, in 1576, Francis became the Duke of Anjou, a title that positioned him as a potential heir to the French throne.<sup>8</sup> However, his political ambitions extended beyond France, and he became involved in the complexities of the Eighty Years' War (1568–1648) in the Netherlands, of which he became sovereign in 1580. His short reign was marked by instability and military challenges: his forces experienced logistical difficulties and resistance from both Spanish troops and local factions. He struggled to gain sufficient support for a successful campaign and faced criticism for his leadership. By 1584, Francis had returned to France and abandoned his military projects in the Netherlands. Shortly after his unsuccessful military campaign, he died in 1584, at the age of 29, probably from typhoid fever. As the last male heir of the Valois dynasty, his death had significant implications for the French succession. His passing contributed to the rise of the Bourbon dynasty, thus marking a decisive moment in French history.

Francis made a marriage proposal to Elizabeth out of political interest, as he had a desire to strengthen his position within European power dynamics. She, too, was under pressure to marry and produce an heir, and a union with the Duke would have strengthened ties between England and France. Despite the potential political advantages, Elizabeth was reluctant to marry the Catholic Duke due to the religious unrest in Europe. However, Francis's proposal in 1579 could have been beneficial to England by weakening anti-Protestant sentiment in France, countering the growing French influence in the Netherlands, and establishing a defensive alliance with France. Discussions of the match began as early as 1572, but the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre, the killing of Huguenots that started on August 23 of that year, halted the consultations, and no official proposal was made until 1579.<sup>9</sup> The French had the same demands that were proposed when Henry was courting as a duke in 1570 regarding his pension, the free exercise of the Catholic religion, and his authority as a co-ruler. These demands were as unacceptable to the English court in the case of Francis as they were earlier. Although Francis by no means wanted to relinquish the prospect of the union and was willing to make concessions by renouncing

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<sup>8</sup> He also held the titles Duke of Berry and Duke of Touraine.

<sup>9</sup> Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony*, 138.

many of his financial and political demands, the question of religion seemed still unsolvable. In response, Elizabeth applied diplomacy, which involved the consideration of the preferences and interests of her subjects, and the specific argument that the marriage is not feasible if she cannot obtain her people's consent to it. She repeatedly used this argument to postpone or terminate negotiations. She continued to offer hope to Anjou throughout the year 1580, but in the spring of 1581, it became obvious that Elizabeth would not agree to the marriage.<sup>10</sup>

It is noteworthy that, contrary to custom, Anjou personally visited Elizabeth I on three distinct occasions: once in secrecy in 1579 and twice officially in 1581. The purpose of these visits was to persuade her to consider marriage to him. The Duke's first visit to England is only vaguely reported in English contemporary documents, which still offer some insight into Elizabeth's sentiments and enthusiasm regarding the match. After reaching Greenwich on 17 August 1579, Anjou attended balls and banquets, which were followed by flirtatious conversations. He did not hold discussions with Elizabeth's councillors as the emphasis was on entertainment. The supporters of the match declared the visit to be a great success. The Duke and the Queen understood each other and were satisfied with each other's appearance without being hindered by the age difference between them. During and after the visit, Elizabeth presented herself as a woman in love although the authenticity of her feelings remains questionable.<sup>11</sup> The secret and official visits of the Duke throughout the year 1581 are a highly significant factor in the prolonged marriage negotiations.

However, Elizabeth's favourable view of the match was not shared by most Protestant subjects. Most of her key advisors and favourites opposed the union. They were distrustful of the French, and they believed that the marriage would jeopardise the ban on Catholic religious observances in England. Additionally, with Henry III's childless marriage, the Duke was the direct heir to the French throne, which could have threatened England's sovereignty. Various potential scenarios were drawn up should the marriage be formalised. The possible death of Elizabeth in childbirth, in which case England would have been left with the Duke as a foreign ruler,<sup>12</sup> was a significant concern given her advanced age.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the death of both Elizabeth and Henry III without any offspring could have meant the formation of a dual monarchy. In this case, Francis could reside in the French court and leave England in the hands of a viceroy. Furthermore, Elizabeth's advisors opposing the match kept reminding her of the numerous martyrs burnt as a result of Mary's union with a foreigner.<sup>14</sup> In early October 1579, members of the Council openly voiced their objections to the French marriage, but failed to deliver a

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<sup>10</sup> “[The marriage of Elizabeth] seems to me like the weaving of Penelope, undoing every night what was done the day before and then reweaving it anew the next, advancing in these negotiations neither more nor less than has been done and undone countless times without reaching a conclusion one way or the other.” The Duke of Parma, 3 October 1580, quoted in Charles Wilson, *Queen Elizabeth and the Revolt of the Netherlands* (1970), p.75.

<sup>11</sup> Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony*, 162.

<sup>12</sup> Erzsébet Stróbl, *I. Erzsébet: Egy mítosz születése* (L'Harmattan, 2022), 160–162.

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth reached the age of forty-six in 1579.

<sup>14</sup> Mary concluded marriage with Philip II of Spain in 1554.

firm resolution and returned the burden of decision-making to Elizabeth.<sup>15</sup> As a number of prominent courtiers were against the French match, a Council declaration of support for the match was impossible. The courtiers who opposed the marriage were Sir Francis Walsingham, principal secretary to the Queen, Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester – although he initially supported the case –, and Sir Henry Sidney, father to the English poet, Philip Sidney. One notable supporter of the match was the Lord Chancellor of England, Sir Christopher Hatton. However, none of the Queen’s councillors had a firm stance on the match. A similar ambivalence characterised the position of William Cecil, 1<sup>st</sup> Baron of Burghley, a principal advisor of Elizabeth. On the one hand, he composed a highly intimate and encouraging letter addressing Elizabeth in 1579, delivering fatherly advice on the loneliness of a life without marriage.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, he was strongly hesitant regarding the union with France. Detailed records are available from a 1579 conference of the Council on the Queen’s marriage, which contains a list of the arguments for and against the match as well as the leading opinion that the marriage would entail more dangers than benefits. The following aspects were discussed: the “Assistance on the Religion in France,” “The discontentment of the people to be governed by a stranger,” and “The comfort which may redownde to the Realme by the blessed fruit of hir [majesty’s] body.”<sup>17</sup>

The public opinion of the era was marked by a xenophobic sentiment. From August 1579, a plethora of pamphlets, ballads, and Latin verses that opposed the marriage were published. They generally focused on the Duke’s religion and nationality, Elizabeth’s age, and the risks of marrying “the brother of childless France.”<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth’s potential union was even likened to her sister Mary’s marriage to Philip II of Spain and raised fears of another violent persecution of Protestants. For example, John Stubbs’ pamphlet, *The Discoverie of a Gaping Gvlf*, viewed the marriage as a threat to the entire Protestant Church of England.<sup>19</sup> The court labelled this pamphlet as seditious and imposed a ban on the open discussion of the Queen’s marriage.<sup>20</sup> Eventually, the popular opposition to the Duke ultimately doomed the marriage negotiations.

Although Elizabeth’s final and arguably most significant marriage proposal ultimately failed, both she and her court approached the matter with earnestness, trying to bridge their numerous differences. This commitment is underscored by the Duke’s three visits to England and some personal mementos preserved by Elizabeth. For instance, her Girdle Prayer Book contained Anjou’s and her own miniature

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<sup>15</sup> Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony*, 173.

<sup>16</sup> “Letter 45, Additional Document B: William Cecil, Lord Burghley, to Queen Elizabeth, 1579” in Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 240–242.

<sup>17</sup> Egerton, Francis Henry, *The Egerton Papers*, ed. John Payne Collier (Camden Society, 1840), 78–80.

<sup>18</sup> Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony*, 163.

<sup>19</sup> John Stubbs, “The Discoverie of a Gaping Gvlf whereinto England is like to be swallowed by an other French marriage, if the Lord forbid not the banes, by letting her Maiestie see the sin and punishment thereof”. In *John Stubbs's Gaping gulf, with letters and other relevant documents* (The University Press of Virginia, 1968), 6.

<sup>20</sup> The fear of punishment boosted the creativity of the opponents of the match with regard to the expression of their sentiments. Although at court frog jewellery – Monsieur’s nickname given by Elizabeth was “Frog” – became a popular means of flattering the queen, the usage of the words “frog” and “toad” in a pejorative way lived its heyday in all kinds of published works during Monsieur’s courting.” *English Literary Renaissance* 11 (1981): 235–260; Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony*, 168, 252.

portraits. Furthermore, the significance of this relationship is underlined by a sonnet, composed by Elizabeth herself. This affectionate masterpiece was composed on Anjou’s last departure from England, thus commemorating the painful and definitive separation of the two. This Petrarchan sonnet is without a title but is known as *On Monsieur’s Departure* and incorporates contrasting phrases such as “grieve,” “love,” and “hate,” which contribute to the overall effect of a lover’s monologue.<sup>21</sup>

The next chapter explores the Queen and the Duke’s correspondence, which provides valuable insights into the complexities of their relationship and showcases the efforts made to attain the marriage.

## STYLE AND LANGUAGE

The following table provides a structured overview of the principal features of the nine letters examined in this study.

Date	Location	Type	State	Source
Feb. 14, 1579	Westminster	Copy		PRO, State Papers, France, Elizabeth 78/3/9, fol. 21r.
Dec. 19, 1579	Westminster	Autograph		Hatfield House, Cecil Papers 135/23, fol. 40.
ca. Dec. 1579–Jan. 1580		Copy in a secretary’s hand with one (and possibly a second) local correction in Elizabeth’s hand.		Hatfield House, Cecil Papers 149/24, no foliation.
Jan. 17, 1580		Copy in a secretarial hand with one local correction in Elizabeth’s hand.		Hatfield House, Cecil Papers 149/25, no foliation.
March 17, 1581	Westminster	Autograph, with remnants of two seals.		Hatfield House, Cecil Papers 135/21, fol. 36.
ca. June 1581		Copy		Hatfield House, Cecil Papers 149/31, one recto page, no foliation.
May 14, 1581		Copy		Hatfield House, Cecil Papers 149/36, no foliation.

<sup>21</sup> Szőnyi, György E., “Cross-Dressing the Tongue: Petrarchist Discourse and Female Voice in Queen Elizabeth’s ‘Sonetto,’” *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 11, no. 1 (2005): 78.

May 24, 1582		Incomplete copy with one (and possibly a second) local correction in Elizabeth's hand.	Fragment	Hatfield House, Cecil Papers 149/38, no foliation.
Sep. 10, 1583		Copy		Hatfield House, Cecil Papers 149/40, no foliation.

The style and language of the selected letters of Elizabeth I written to the Duke of Anjou between 1579 and 1583 require a closer analysis, as the letters contain hidden or euphemistically conveyed admonishments or criticism. Her language is carefully crafted to navigate delicate political matters; therefore, it demonstrates her ability to handle sensitive issues with tact. Despite the conventional and formal tone of her letters, she includes personal sentiments, expressing her loyalty and devotion to the Duke. The letters became increasingly more emphatic as well as more intimate as time passed. Elizabeth uses a persuasive tone in her communication, gently urging Monsieur to consider her position and requests. She presents her arguments with logic and diplomacy and aims to influence his decisions in an increasingly assertive manner. Elizabeth's letters may be read either as efforts to maintain her authority and dignity while she is deeply in love, or as a series of veiled attacks in retaliation for the immature pride of a young suitor.

Elizabeth and Anjou began their correspondence in the late 1570s, and around 1579, especially after the Duke's first visit in August, it developed into a more affectionate conversation and took on a more personal tone. As the acquaintance deepened, there was a significant shift in style to a personal, witty, and affectionate tone, even as the topics discussed marked the beginning of political tensions and pressures regarding their union. Later, Elizabeth's voice became increasingly disappointed and expressed unfulfilled hopes. After 1582, the letters were less frequent, and the correspondence gradually dwindled, with the last letter dating from 1583.

Elizabeth's greetings are simple. They sometimes contain only the name of the addressee, sometimes the name is supplemented with "dear," "right trusty," "our beloved," or very prudently as "friend" or "cousin" although "friend" in French [*ami*] could also connote "beloved." The usage of the plural first-person pronoun referring to the writer makes the early letters more formal than the later ones. Later, Elizabeth refers to herself with the singular first-person pronoun, providing a more intimate tone. Furthermore, as time progresses, the "we" [*nous*] pronoun assumes a new meaning. Instead of referring to Elizabeth and her countrymen, it becomes a reference to Elizabeth and the Duke themselves. Furthermore, the "our" [*nostre*] possessive adjective changes to "my" [*mon*] in the greetings, thereby creating the later usual "my dearest" [*mon tres cher*] collocation.

The Queen usually concludes her letters with lengthy felicitations. These frequently contain requests to the addressee and her indispensable prayers such as "the Creator knows, to whom I will not cease to

pray that He will protect you from those who do not esteem you and that He will do all that will be the best for you, Monsieur,”<sup>22</sup> or, in a letter of 1580, “As the Creator knows, whom I pray to give you a hundred years of life. With my very affectionate commendations.”<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth, being a deeply religious individual by nature and status, was known for her religious writings, including prayers, which exemplify her personal faith. These religious sentiments were meant to reinforce her authority and to convey the impression that divine guidance informed her choices. The queen incorporated, in almost all her letters written to the Duke, relatively short – usually paragraph-long – prayers, dedicated to his health, safety, and long life ahead. However, these prayers were also very often used as expressions of her own hopes and concerns, adding a strong sense of hidden advice or even command.

Elizabeth’s letters to Monsieur adopt the elegant and peculiarly Elizabethan style of English writing and transposes it into the French language. Associated with the prose romance of John Lyly, euphuism is characterised by the excessive use of literary devices such as balance, antithesis, alliteration, similes, repetitions, or rhetorical questions.<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth’s texts are marked by this elaborate and ornate style. Her intricate sentence structures often utilise metaphors and extended comparisons, showcasing the rich imagery of the embellished euphuistic style, popular in England in the late 1570s and early 1580s. Furthermore, Elizabeth’s style of writing is characterised by unusually long, elaborately phrased sentences, inserted subordinate clauses and back-references, a strongly elevated tone, and highly distinctive use of language.

One of the metaphors used by the Queen is the “rock in a storm,” where the rock symbolises the affection in their immovably steady relationship, which is besieged by those who oppose their match or the circumstances which hinder the sealing of the marriage. This figure of speech recurs altogether three times during the correspondence, always adapted to the various situations. Once, the “bright rock” – the heroic Monsieur – stands against the storm of evil tongues and false persuasions besieging her persona.<sup>25</sup> By this metaphor, Elizabeth conveys a recurring sense of gratitude for his affection. In her letter of 1581, the “steady rock” symbolises Elizabeth herself, persuading Monsieur of her eternal affection: “If you trust to such a rock, all the tempests of the sea will be far from shaking it, nor will any storm on the earth turn it aside from honoring and loving you.”<sup>26</sup>

Elizabeth calls Monsieur “a good astronomer,”<sup>27</sup> stating “that you could judge of the future and clearly know where they are tending, for fear that in avoiding Scylla you fall into Charybdis.”<sup>28</sup> Scylla and Charybdis are sea monster figures from Greek mythology, featured in Homer’s *Odyssey*, and

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<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 233.

<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 247.

<sup>24</sup> “Euphuism.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Accessed October 2, 2024.

<sup>25</sup> “I present to you my most humble thanks for having shown us a bright rock from which neither the tempests of false persuasions nor the storm of evil tongues has had the force to shake the constancy of your affection [...],” Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 245.

<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 249–250.

<sup>27</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 251.

<sup>28</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 251.

together they represent a state of being and choosing between two treacherous alternatives.<sup>29</sup> Scylla is usually depicted as a multi-headed monster snatching sailors from the passing ships, and Charybdis as a whirlpool swallowing everything in its vicinity. By this classical metaphor, Elizabeth refers to the evil French councillors that unsettle Monsieur's trust in, and affection for, her, or as she stated in a letter of 1580, "[they are] setting you [Monsieur] up as the target of their arrows."<sup>30</sup> In the same letter to the Duke, she references King Solomon when she wishes Monsieur had the wisdom of the biblical figure so that he can "separate the false ones from the true ones" since "it is so difficult [...] to know the difference between seeming and being."<sup>31</sup> However, not only the advisors are referred to with these rich phrases. In a letter of 1581, written on the occasion of Monsieur having evaded his brother's and mother's efforts to prevent him from an act pleasing to Elizabeth, she labelled the relationship between the King and Mother Queen of France and the Duke as "a vintage from so evil a harvest."<sup>32</sup>

Moral and philosophical reflections are also present in Elizabeth's letters. These are exemplified by her appeal to God to protect Monsieur from deceitful advice and allow him to associate with those who hold him in higher regard than themselves. Politeness and respect were key foundations that these aphorisms are built on, and loyalty and virtue are frequent topics discussed in her texts. The following passage, in which she comments on delays in the negotiations, reflects her mature attitude: "I have used time, which ordinarily accomplishes more than reason does."<sup>33</sup> She continues her "lecture" to Monsieur: "Many people go away repenting of having made rash judgements at the first stroke, without having weighed in a better balance the depth of their opinions, I assure myself that some, upon hazard of their own lives, wish not to be so foolishly governed."<sup>34</sup> Here, Elizabeth underlines her own prudence while she represents other individuals' judgement as unsound.

In every letter, there are loving and private statements. There is an array of endearing blandishments, for example, in a letter of 1581, she reassures the Duke that "I will not be annoyed if at each hour I were to receive a letter."<sup>35</sup> In another letter, she offers him the comfort that "affection is not diminished by absence, nor cooled by persuasions."<sup>36</sup> Elizabeth frequently expresses her gratitude for any benevolent action performed by Monsieur, for instance, for sending affectionate letters regularly. These sentiments function almost as greetings throughout her correspondence, for example, in the opening sentence in the letter of 1581: "The honor you bestow upon me by frequently sending your letters is indeed significant; however, the comfort I derive from them far surpasses this honor."<sup>37</sup> Another time, as an expression of her love, she informs Monsieur that, till her body decomposes into dust, she will

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<sup>29</sup> "Scylla and Charybdis." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Accessed August 4, 2025.

<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 245.

<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 245.

<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 250.

<sup>33</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 243.

<sup>34</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 243.

<sup>35</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 251.

<sup>36</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 244.

<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 249.

continuously carry the weight of the hardships endured by Monsieur for her sake.<sup>38</sup> It is also common for her to “court” Monsieur with excessive kindness, which is illustrated by the following example: “Your rare virtues and sweet nature, accompanied with so many honorable parts that I cannot recite them for their number nor dare to make mention of them for the length of time that would take me.”<sup>39</sup>

In her correspondence with Monsieur, Elizabeth employs imaginative figurative language, prominently featuring the motif of flowers. In a letter of 1581, she juxtaposes this motif with a synecdoche, stating that “sweet flowers culled by the hand that has the little fingers that I bless a million times.”<sup>40</sup> This imagery serves to evoke a sense of tenderness and intimacy, since the flowers are described as maintaining their freshness, “as if they had been culled in the same instant.”<sup>41</sup> This freshness is analogously linked to Monsieur’s “verdant affection” towards her, suggesting a parallel between the vitality of the flowers and the intensity of his feelings. Furthermore, Elizabeth expresses her devotion by declaring: “Monsieur, I have taken care not to lose a leaf or a flower, despite all the other jewels that I have.”<sup>42</sup> This statement underscores her commitment to preserving the emotional depth of their relationship. Her second letter of 1581 completes this floral imagery and concludes with the evocative phrase, “commending myself to the little fingers.”<sup>43</sup> The themes of affection and reverence that permeate her writings depict her deep emotional connection to Monsieur. In the last text she composed to Monsieur in 1583, her strong sentiments are conveyed by dark imagery in the concluding sentences: “As long as God does not permit such a pact, so long will I never cease honoring, loving and esteeming you like the dog who, often beaten, returns to his master.”<sup>44</sup>

A peculiar aspect of Elizabeth’s style is her practice of assigning affectionate nicknames to her favourites. Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, received the nickname “Eyes,” whereas Jean de Simier, intermediary between the English and French court, was presented with the name “Ape.”<sup>45</sup> Doran argues that Monsieur was no exception, and the nickname “Frog” was used by Elizabeth in reference to him, possibly inspired by a frog brooch in gold with vermeil and precious stones, included in the jewellery of her majesty.<sup>46</sup> However, the French were commonly referred to as “frogs” as well.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, this name could have been given to Monsieur based on his childish, pock-marked face and short stature.

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<sup>38</sup> “[...] it pleases you to tell me at length of the hazards, losses, and machinations that you have endured for my sake. The which I cannot forget, having them engraved in my soul, where, until its separation from my body, I will not leave to recognize and be pained by them always.” in Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 254.

<sup>39</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 243.

<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 249.

<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 249.

<sup>42</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 249.

<sup>43</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 251.

<sup>44</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 260.

<sup>45</sup> Jean de Simier arrived in England in January 1579 to woo the Queen in the Duke of Anjou’s name. He quickly became an accomplished courtier, with whom the Queen did not talk about politics, or even about the terms of a possible agreement. Instead, he attended feasts and masques with Elizabeth, thus becoming an attractive favourite with her. See Loades, *Elizabeth I*, 208.

<sup>46</sup> Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony*, 163.

<sup>47</sup> Bindman, David. “How the French Became Frogs: English Caricature and a National Stereotype.” *Apollo*, vol. 158, no. 498, (2003) Gale Academic OneFile, 1.

If so, this case would be pivotal in understanding the depth of their intimacy as this – possibly insulting – nickname stuck with the Duke.<sup>48</sup> The nickname could have been a gesture towards those who opposed the possibility of love between the parties and signified the complex nature of the courtship.

A further factor in the complicated nature of the relationship between Elizabeth and Monsieur is the matter of truthfulness. Elizabeth continuously reassures Monsieur about her sincerity and the truthfulness of her writings. Since her credibility was often attacked abroad, she habitually integrated reinforcing statements, such as “God is my witness that I never use subtleties or stratagems to do myself good at your expense.”<sup>49</sup> In her letter of 1582, she defends herself at some length: “Remove [...] my dearest Monsieur any thought that I stand to blame for the passion of anger that gives you offense because your constancy should be doubted. [...] [Because I] have never said nor thought it, whatever opinion others may have had of it. [...] I purge myself of the calumnies imputed to me, in France and elsewhere, of having used subtleties or changefulness in what I promised you.”<sup>50</sup> As time passed, these statements became more frequent and conveyed a sense of weariness, as in her last letter: “[...] the queen mother [...] put on me the fault that I have never committed, having always looked to the king to perfect that which I can no longer do more than mention, except to entreat you to do me so much right as to exculpate me even by the sentence of your ministers, who themselves know my innocence. [...] I cannot bear such an injury – that they bite and weep at my affection with regard to you.”<sup>51</sup>

The letters exhibit a unique dynamic between Elizabeth and Monsieur that can be interpreted as a mother–son relationship, particularly regarding their tone and style. Elizabeth often exhibits a protective and deeply caring attitude towards the Duke. Being an experienced monarch in her mid-40s, Elizabeth showed an almost motherly solicitude, which manifested itself in the tendency to blame someone else and absolve Monsieur. The following sentence in her letter of 1583 illustrates this attitude: “Whoever they are who have given you the advice on this have thought to make a spot on our friendship, or to break it altogether in order by the same means to achieve their designs and reclaim you to their life.”<sup>52</sup>

Elizabeth often mentions her age in a candid and usually playful manner. Her statements like “time runs on and I with it, which renders me unfit to please as I would wish,”<sup>53</sup> reflects her acknowledgement of the time pressure to produce an heir and doubts about her desirability as a wife at her age. In her letters, she openly deals with her ageing. By mentioning her own biggest weakness, her age, she admits her vulnerability. However, this does not prompt the reader to feel sorry for her, rather it highlights her maturity and thus, her power. Elizabeth is conscious of her strengths and weaknesses and therefore exploits all her potential. By claiming that “I am almost in agreement with the opinion of those who do

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<sup>48</sup> Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony*, 154.

<sup>49</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 250.

<sup>50</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 254.

<sup>51</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 260.

<sup>52</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 259.

<sup>53</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 238.

not quit reminding you of my faults,”<sup>54</sup> she showcases her self-awareness and humility. She almost victimises herself in the following statement: “Monsieur, my dearest, grant pardon to the poor old woman who honors you as much (I dare say) as any young wench.”<sup>55</sup>

Although Elizabeth held the highest rank in England and her authority exceeded that of every fellow Englishman, she – following the custom of the age – assumed a humble style when addressing Monsieur or other male favourites. For instance, she often resorted to flattery: “I confess that there is no prince in the world to whom I would more willingly yield to be his than yourself.”<sup>56</sup> By degrading herself, she showcased her modesty, as in the following excerpts from a letter of 1579: “forgive me the curiosity that holds me to your actions;” “I give you now a fair mirror to see there very clearly the foolishness of my understanding.”<sup>57</sup> However, these gestures of self-abasement become increasingly rare with the course of time. Elizabeth’s voice grows more assertive and critical, as in her letter of 1580, which contains a sharp reprimand: “I [...] believe that you doubt too much of a woman’s silence.”<sup>58</sup> This tendency reaches its climax in the last letter to Monsieur, in which her unrestrained critique of the French king is concluded with the short statement: “There is my opinion.”<sup>59</sup> She offers no extenuation, and her language is stark and concise.

Elizabeth needed to be particularly cautious in her choice of words as her political interests were intertwined with her relationship with Monsieur. In a patriarchal society, it was generally considered unconventional for a woman to instruct or advise men regardless of her status. Furthermore, women’s situation in France was even more constrained since, under Salic Law, a woman could not accede to the throne: succession was restricted to the male line according to the principle of primogeniture. Nonetheless, Elizabeth often gives indirect advice to Anjou in her letters. She expresses hope that Monsieur will act in the most favourable or appropriate manner or asks God to give Monsieur a clear mind to realise the possible falsehoods. In a letter of 1581, she writes: “Set a distance, I pray you, such evil counsels from the favor of your ears and believe that, whatever the evil deserts that others will bear you, it is for a prince always to resemble himself.”<sup>60</sup> Moreover, “assuring herself” of Monsieur’s capability in the 1582 letter, she conveys another piece of advice to him: “I do not doubt that you keep always in memory, of what nature the vulgar are in all countries, and will place your trust according to the occasion that I present you with, desiring nothing more than the continuation of our contentment, and cursing (my charity being very cold in this regard) all who overturn our good designs.”<sup>61</sup> Here too, the shorter and more direct wording of the last letters is noticeable. In the same letter, Elizabeth uses the

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<sup>54</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 238.

<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 251.

<sup>56</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 243.

<sup>57</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 238.

<sup>58</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 244.

<sup>59</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 260.

<sup>60</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 250.

<sup>61</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 253.

following phrase when providing her opinion on a matter: “I will take the boldness of enlightening you [...]”<sup>62</sup>

All in all, Elizabeth’s correspondence addressed to Monsieur can be analysed from multiple perspectives. Her euphuistic style demonstrates her wit and extensive humanistic education and is characterised by a rich variety of figures of speech that she tailors to various contexts. A notable technique she employs in advising the Duke, despite her established expertise in diplomacy, is her deliberate self-degradation. She positions herself subordinate to him in order to communicate her wisdom without risking offense. Furthermore, Elizabeth’s letters reveal a profound affection and almost maternal concern for the Duke, which may be attributed to the significant age difference between them. Ultimately, Elizabeth’s meticulously crafted and stylistically sophisticated letters reflect the constantly changing political landscape and offer valuable insights into her responses to domestic and foreign political developments, as well as personal matters.

#### SIGNIFICANT THEMES ADDRESSED IN THE CORRESPONDENCE

The letters of Elizabeth I to the Duke of Anjou address three significant issues that ultimately prevented the success of the marriage negotiations. These are the question of religion, the Duke’s military operations in the Lowlands, and his pressing requests for financial support. Although the style of the letters reveals the intimate relationship between Elizabeth and the Duke, these issues were not resolved.

##### THE QUESTION OF RELIGION

A greatly problematic topic and major point of conflict discussed at the court of Elizabeth and in her letters to Anjou was their difference in religion. This was the reason for the rejection of many of her previous suitors as well. Furthermore, this is the only topic in the letters about which Elizabeth states clearly and firmly that if Monsieur does not give in to her demands, the marriage negotiations will be stopped immediately.

In the sixteenth century, Europe was undergoing a major religious transformation due to the Protestant Reformation. In the case of monarchs, a Protestant–Catholic union could strengthen ties or eliminate conflicts between rival countries. However, such marriages were commonly criticised and disapproved of, which could also lead to uprisings and increasing domestic tension. The successor’s faith could also be a source of controversy, as it could lead to major shifts in government.

In England, within the span of four generations, the population was compelled to switch religions three times: first, when Henry VIII established the Church of England; second, when Mary I persecuted Protestants; and finally, under the Protestant rule of Elizabeth I. Elizabeth sought to reach a compromise through the Elizabethan Religious Settlement, a series of legislative measures aimed at reconciling these

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<sup>62</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 254.

divergent faiths.<sup>63</sup> However, she faced many challenges, primarily from Philip II of Spain, who attempted to destabilise her Protestant regime.

Therefore, England, having experienced difficulties that Mary I's Catholic husband posed, might not have been prepared to deal with another Catholic co-ruler that Monsieur intended to be. His rule would have reignited the religious tensions in England and alienated Elizabeth's Protestant supporters both countrywide and abroad. Furthermore, Elizabeth, due to her enforcement of the Act of Supremacy, had already been excommunicated by Pope Pius V in 1570.<sup>64</sup> Thus, her marriage would not have been consecrated.

By the year 1580, letters from Elizabeth to the Duke had begun to address the question of religion. Elizabeth strictly followed her court's policy, according to which no compromise could be made regarding the topic. However, one of Monsieur's demands as a prospective co-ruler was that the Catholic religion should be accepted and freely practised. In response, Elizabeth referred to the prohibition of the open exercise of the Catholic faith in England and the non-negotiable nature of the issue. If Anjou did not compromise, they would part ways and remain "faithful," yet only distant "friends": "I do not want this negotiation to trouble you thus any more, that we may remain faithful friends and assured in all our actions, unless it pleases you to make other resolution than the open exercise of religion."<sup>65</sup>

Thus, the problem of religion was more significant than the "friendship" with Monsieur and posited a significant obstacle to the marriage. In the most respectful and courteous manner, Elizabeth articulated her opinions and wishes in all controversial matters. Although remaining strict and unmoveable in the matter, she refers to the wishes of her people as both a consolation and an excuse. She adds that religion is "a thing so hard for the English to bear,"<sup>66</sup> and declares:

I promise you on my faith, which has never yet sustained a spot, that the public exercise of the Roman religion sticks so much in their hearts that I will never consent to your coming among such a company of malcontents without your being pleased to consider that the commissioners loosen the strict terms that Monsieur Simier offered us.<sup>67</sup>

Not wanting the negotiations to run aground, Monsieur tried to make several concessions during 1580 and 1581, but his hands were tied by the French King and the Queen Mother. Anjou's conversion to Protestantism, which would have been very pleasing to the English, was out of the question.

In conclusion, there was no clear solution to the problem of religion as neither party intended to compromise. The letters of Elizabeth show that this was one of the most important problems that prevented the royal union.

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<sup>63</sup> Loades, *Elizabeth I*, 133.

<sup>64</sup> Levin, *The Reign of Elizabeth I*, 20.

<sup>65</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 244.

<sup>66</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 243.

<sup>67</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 243.

## THE NETHERLANDS

Another contributing factor in the failure of the princely marriage was the operation of the Duke of Anjou in the Netherlands because Elizabeth strongly opposed “marrying into war.”<sup>68</sup> In the late 1570s, Anjou became involved in the Eighty Years’ War (1568–1648), a conflict between the Spanish Empire and the Dutch provinces seeking independence. In 1580, Monsieur was appointed as the sovereign of the Netherlands with a view to uniting the Protestant factions against the Spanish. The Duke attempted to lead military campaigns against the Spanish forces without much success. The Eighty Years’ War broke out after the Protestant Reformation, when the majority of the Dutch population converted to Protestantism, while Spain and the Netherlands remained under the strict governance of Philip II. Heavy taxation also contributed to the protracted rebellion against Spanish control.

Initially, Elizabeth was sympathetic to the Dutch struggle for independence from Spanish rule as the Dutch championed the Protestant faith. Moreover, England intended to weaken Spain, their most significant rival, through financial aid and military assistance offered to its opponent.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, the Queen supported the Duke’s involvement in the conflict, hoping that he would be capable of uniting the Protestant factions.

However, his acceptance of sovereignty over the region reversed the situation. The Queen believed that this development could lead to the fragmentation of the Protestant factions and the conversion of some to Catholicism. Moreover, she thought that Anjou’s Protectorship might alienate her supporters both in England and the Netherlands. This concern was fundamentally one of trust. The Queen feared the implications of a French Catholic prince governing a region in which unrest and rebellion could tip the balance in favour of Catholicism. This apprehension constituted the main topic of the final letter exchanged between Elizabeth and Anjou.

The Duke’s acceptance of the position of sovereign was contrary to the wishes of the Queen. In her letter of 1582, Elizabeth rebuked the Duke for accepting the supreme governorship of the Netherlands: “What more can I do, you having taken on such state as you have?”<sup>70</sup> The Queen was also disappointed about Monsieur’s insistence on asking for her financial help while ignoring her advice and requests. Moreover, a little earlier – as it can be inferred from Elizabeth’s letter – Anjou had promised the Queen to renounce any further interest in the situation in the Netherlands. Despite this, he assumed the position of sovereign.

Significantly, the first letter from Elizabeth to Monsieur discusses the deteriorating situation in the Netherlands. Anjou claims that the reason for his leaving the Low Countries was that he wanted to see his beloved. This might not have been true, as the situation in the area was worsening, and his army

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<sup>68</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 250. n. 2. This expression is Elizabeth’s own. It appears in a letter to the French ambassador in which she refers to Monsieur’s acceptance of the sovereignty and the consequences she would be faced with as “rib” of the Duke. These consequences could be a Spanish attack on England and damage to English trade relations with the Continent.

<sup>69</sup> Doran, Susan, *Elizabeth I and Foreign Policy, 1558–1603* (Routledge, 2000), 37.

<sup>70</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 252.

began to desert him, providing him with “abundant motivation” to leave the Netherlands.<sup>71</sup> Although in 1579, Elizabeth still supported the prince’s actions, the issue of the war in the Low Countries became one of the most significant issues raised in their final letters.

In conclusion, Elizabeth’s letters to Monsieur convey her concerns about the stability of the region. She highlights its strategic importance to England and her apprehension over the spread of Catholicism, which would legitimise Spanish control and undermine the Protestant cause. The tone of the Queen’s letters on this subject is increasingly serious and – at the same time – disappointed. This problem continued even after Elizabeth had already decided against the marriage – a decision in which the situation in the Netherlands played a major role.

### FINANCIAL ISSUES

The third crucial issue mentioned in the letters was the matter of financial resources. As time passed, the Duke pressed the Queen with increasing urgency for financial aid. Furthermore, from the outset, he demanded political power and a large annuity as the Queen’s future husband. Francis Henry Egerton’s manuscripts about these years provide an insight into this matter: “The people shalbe more taxed than heretofore, which they will murmur at, the rather bicause it is by the meanes of a straunger.”<sup>72</sup> Later, in order to maintain the possibility of marriage, Anjou sought compromises and softened some of his initial requests, but the issue of money – mainly in connection with the situation in the Netherlands – caused tension between the two courts.

The expectation that the Queen of England should serve as the primary supporter of a foreign Duke—particularly one whose Catholic faith posed a threat to domestic stability—was inherently problematic. Furthermore, the geographical distance of the Duke of Anjou’s military campaigns raised the question whether England should become involved at all, as such engagements could have jeopardised English interests, such as cementing Protestantism among the Dutch. At this point, it was highly questionable whether a diplomatic compromise could be made, and if so, whether it was worth the trouble. The main issue was that the Queen was unwilling to give aid to the Duke with whom no official match has yet been made, and whose primary financial support should have come from the King of France and the Queen Mother. Henry III, however, refused to support his brother’s endeavours in the Netherlands. Therefore, marrying Elizabeth was the only means by which the Duke could secure the essential resources to fund an army, restore his credibility with William of Orange, and engage the provinces in the ongoing conflict against Spain.<sup>73</sup>

In 1581, Elizabeth’s opinion on the issue of marriage changed several times. On November 22, the negotiations seemed to have successfully concluded. The Queen notified, among others, Francis Walsingham, her principal secretary, that she had exchanged rings with the Duke and the marriage

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<sup>71</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 232. n. 2.

<sup>72</sup> Egerton, *The Egerton Papers*, 80.

<sup>73</sup> Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony*, 154.

would take place after all.<sup>74</sup> This development, however, was overshadowed by the resentment caused by Monsieur's pressing requests for money. The tension caused by the disagreement regarding finances persisted well into middle of December 1581, when Elizabeth "promised Monsieur a loan of £60,000, virtually a bribe to get him to leave England."<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, the conflict remained unresolved, and on February 1, the Duke of Anjou left England's shores for the last time. Although there were no more personal encounters between him and Elizabeth, their relationship did not end at this point. Further affectionate letters were dispatched from their places of residence, and Monsieur did not relinquish to press the Queen for funds. Eventually, hearing about his disastrous campaigns, including his failed attempt to acquire Antwerp in 1582, Elizabeth ceased to deliver her payments.

Elizabeth's stance in her letters to Monsieur on the question of money may be considered defensive. She made excuses for not committing herself to any financial aid. In her letters, Elizabeth repeatedly claims that she will follow her counsellors' wise advice on financial matters because they are the most qualified and reliable authorities on this question. She states that she is not the person responsible for these decisions, and she will not interfere in the business of her courtiers who are more capable of handling financial matters. As she writes: "If you bring up the subject of money, I am so poor an orator for my profit and like so little to play the housewife that I give charge of this to such as are wiser than I."<sup>76</sup> At the same time, Elizabeth reassures Monsieur regarding her dowry, promising that even if a specific sum were required for some reason, she will not reduce it for the sake of her own country.<sup>77</sup>

In spite of the tensions caused by the issue of financial aid, the letters do not lack utterances conveying affection, which takes on a somewhat bittersweet quality with the passing of time. Elizabeth's lines are expressive, and her style is lucid and intense. The emotionally charged and honest letters reflect a deep understanding and friendship between them. Nevertheless, the continuance of the pressing matter of finances caused the Queen a great deal of disappointment:

Then he [the French ambassador] tired me with language that seemed very strange to me: that you desired to know what will be the aid you will give for the preservation of the Netherlands, saying to me that you are assured by the king that he will aid you the same as I do. My God, Monsieur, how unfortunate you are to believe that this is the way to preserve your friends, by always debilitating them!<sup>78</sup>

Elizabeth conveys her annoyance with the actions of the French King and Monsieur's insistence on asking for her aid. Her tone completely changes in her last letter of 1583, when diplomatic relations became strained. She questions the French King's judgement, characterises him as feeble, and criticises him for not being able to defend his own brother without aid from neighbouring kingdoms. She believes

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<sup>74</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 251–252, n.1.

<sup>75</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 251–252, n.1.

<sup>76</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 255.

<sup>77</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 256.

<sup>78</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 259.

that the King wishes her to provide funds instead of him and offers only a pledge that he will do the same. Elizabeth surmises that this diplomatic proposal is a trap and suspects the king of intending to ruin her financially, “while he is not lacking in better means by way of less inconvenience.”<sup>79</sup>

Elizabeth’s letter of condolence of 1584 to Catherine de Medici, Queen Mother of France and mother to the Duke of Anjou, following Anjou’s death at the age of twenty-nine, marks the definite end of the Monsieur-era in the Queen’s life. The letter comments critically on the issue of aid so often mentioned in her letters to the Duke. She blames the King of France and the Queen Mother for not sending aid to the Duke, even if it was clear that his military efforts in the Netherlands were fruitless.

Conveying bitter sentiments about Monsieur’s choices, Elizabeth’s letters demonstrate the impact of financial issues on their relationship. In the correspondence, this theme stands out as the third major issue obstructing the princely match. Although the financial conflict of interest and the question of the situation in the Netherlands could have been resolved, or at least overcome, the religious differences already predicted the destiny of the relationship between the Duke and Elizabeth.

## CONCLUSION

The relationship and the negotiations between Elizabeth and the Duke of Anjou was characterised by an interplay of personal sentiment and political strategy. Doran aptly calls their relations a “protracted dalliance.”<sup>80</sup> As this analysis demonstrated, the letters were pivotal in the elucidation of the factors that contributed to Elizabeth’s reluctance to enter into matrimony with Anjou.

The analysis of Queen Elizabeth’s letters to the Duke between 1579 and 1583 sheds light on their relationship and illuminate both the depth of Elizabeth’s affection and the unique dynamics operating between them. As highlighted in the letters, the challenges posed by religious divisions, the Duke’s military endeavours in the Netherlands, and his persistent requests for financial support from the Queen were the main reasons for the breakdown of the marriage negotiations.

However, the subtle and somewhat personal language used in Elizabeth’s letters indicates that there was a deeper, personal reason for her hesitation to formalise the marriage. Nonetheless, the relationship with Anjou was of great value to Queen Elizabeth because it was the last opportunity for her to marry. With the cessation of the courtship, it became clear for the ageing Queen that she would maintain her unmarried status for the rest of her life.

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<sup>79</sup> Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 259.

<sup>80</sup> Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony*, 130.

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“FAME OF MYSELF, TO JUSTIFY” IN RETRANSLATION:  
AMY KÁROLYI AND ISTVÁN LÁSZLÓ GÉHER’S FIDELITY TO EMILY  
DICKINSON<sup>81</sup>

KÁRPÁTI LILLA EDIT

REVIEWER: DR. MUDRICZKI JUDIT

ABSTRACT

Fidelity, a translation’s closeness to the original text, is a prominent issue in translation studies, especially in the context of retranslations that often depart from domesticating strategies. This paper joins contemporary discussions on retranslation by examining Emily Dickinson’s Poem 713 and its Hungarian translations by Amy Károlyi and István László Géher. The present study aims to test the truth value of Chesterman’s “Retranslation Hypothesis” in the context of Dickinson’s Hungarian translations, that is, whether Géher’s translation is foreignizing and therefore more faithful to Dickinson’s original poem than Károlyi’s. Dickinson’s poem necessitated treating closeness to stylistic form and content separately, a finding which problematises the notion of fidelity. Géher is only relatively faithful to form because the foreignizing strategies in his retranslation do not ensure true fidelity. In terms of content, Károlyi’s first translation was found to be more faithful than the retranslation, which disproved the hypothesis. However, the way she organised the content does not reflect Dickinson’s enigmatic fragmentation. Therefore, Chesterman’s “Retranslation Hypothesis” appears to be too general and only partially true.

INTRODUCTION

Retranslation has been recognized as a form of competition between (literary) translators.<sup>82</sup> Besides the obvious motivation to correct potential mistakes of a previous version,<sup>83</sup> retranslators also aim to “take a stance towards the existing translation(s) by signalling departure from” them.<sup>84</sup> In addition to the foreign source text, translators may also consult previous translation(s) in their work process. They tend

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<sup>81</sup> The Author received Honourable Mention for an earlier version of this paper at the 37th National Student Circle Conference (37. OTDK) in 2025 – the Editor.

<sup>82</sup> Lawrence Venuti, “Retranslations: The Creation of Value,” *Bucknell Review* 47, no. 1 (2004): 32, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/retranslations-creation-value/docview/201683587/se-2>.

<sup>83</sup> Venuti, “Retranslations,” 26; Kappanyos András, “Kényszer és kihívás: mivégre fordítunk újra,” *Alkalmazott Nyelvészeti Közlemények* 16, no. 1 (2023): 41, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/kényszer-és-kihívás-mivégre-fordítunk-újra/docview/2926202904/se-2>.

<sup>84</sup> Mihálycsa Erika and Jolanta Wawrzycka, “Introduction: Retranslation: ‘None the Worse for Wear However’ (U 16.1465),” *European Joyce Studies* 30, (2020): 1, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48730632>.

to justify their own translation “by establishing their differences from one or more previous versions.”<sup>85</sup> Therefore, the purpose of this translatory competition appears to be asserting one’s own uniqueness.

Chesterman’s “Retranslation Hypothesis” states that the main difference between translation and retranslation is the extent of fidelity of the translated text to the original.<sup>86</sup> Building his theory on the ideas of Berman, Bensimon, and Gambier, Chesterman claims that first translations tend to be freer,<sup>87</sup> naturalising, domesticating versions,<sup>88</sup> while retranslations “approximate more closely the original’s constitutive difference.”<sup>89</sup> Venuti defines domestication as an “ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values,” and foreignization as an “ethnodeviant pressure on those values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text.”<sup>90</sup> Therefore, retranslations can be considered foreignizing, while first translations appear domesticating in accordance with Chesterman’s hypothesis. Venuti considers retranslation to be one of the means to prevent the target culture from domineering over the translated foreign text.<sup>91</sup>

Moreover, a literary work’s ever changing cultural relevance is decisive in the emergence of new translations. First translations may introduce these foreign source texts into the target culture,<sup>92</sup> however, being translations, their cultural relevance, for example, interpretations or language use, is inevitably bound to the era in which these translations were created. Thus, they may not be adequate in subsequent cultural contexts.<sup>93</sup> However, older translations should not be considered mere examples of error, Venuti suggests, but rather as texts that “open up new paths of invention” and interpretation.<sup>94</sup> Accordingly, instead of concentrating on the failures of first translations, Massardier-Kenney emphasises translations’ “ability to keep a work alive.”<sup>95</sup>

Kappanyos claims that the reading public in Hungary is not aware of the nature of prose translation.<sup>96</sup> The translation process is considered a mere “mechanic recoding” from one language to another, which needs to be done only once.<sup>97</sup> Therefore, retranslations are usually regarded as “anomalies” because the reading public believes that a previously translated text should only be revisited to correct the translator’s

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<sup>85</sup> Venuti, “Retranslations,” 25.

<sup>86</sup> Andrew Chesterman, “A Causal Model for Translation Studies,” in *Intercultural Faultlines*, ed. Maeve Olohan, (Routledge, 2017), 21–25.

<sup>87</sup> Chesterman, “A Causal Model,” 22–23.

<sup>88</sup> Kris Peeters and Piet Van Poucke, “Retranslation, Thirty-Odd Years after Berman.” *Parallèles* 35, no. 1 (2023): 6.; Mihálycsa and Wawrzycka, “Introduction: Retranslation,” 2.

<sup>89</sup> Mihálycsa and Wawrzycka, “Introduction: Retranslation,” 2.

<sup>90</sup> Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation*. (Routledge 1995), 20.

<sup>91</sup> Venuti, “Retranslations,” 36.

<sup>92</sup> Veronika Mesić, “Revisiting the Retranslation Hypothesis: A Case Study of Two Croatian Translations of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*.” *Hieronymus: Journal of Translation Studies and Terminology* 7, (2020): 8.; Mihálycsa and Wawrzycka, “Introduction: Retranslation,” 2.; Peeters and Van Poucke, “Retranslation,” 6.

<sup>93</sup> Kappanyos, “Kényszer és kihívás,” 42–44.

<sup>94</sup> Venuti, “Retranslations,” 36–37.

<sup>95</sup> Françoise Massardier-Kenney, “Toward a Rethinking of Retranslation,” *Translation Review* 92, no. 1 (2015): 78, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07374836.2015.1086289>.

<sup>96</sup> Kappanyos, “Kényszer és kihívás,” 35–36.

<sup>97</sup> Kappanyos, “Kényszer és kihívás,” 36. (The English translation is mine.)

possible mistakes.<sup>98</sup> In contrast, the widespread access to new information in our time has raised readers' expectations and demands, necessitating the emergence of new, contemporary translations.<sup>99</sup> Kappanyos argues that the purpose of retranslation is to "dynamically renew the [...] relevance" of literary texts.<sup>100</sup> However, newer translations still "do not always fare better in the target context."<sup>101</sup>

Conversely, in the case of poetry, Kappanyos identifies an innate translation consciousness in the Hungarian reading public.<sup>102</sup> The given "language performance is clearly attributed to the translator; it has its own value and thus can be compared with other such performances created of the foreign original."<sup>103</sup> Therefore, the competitive nature of retranslation is even more apparent in poetry. This is because poetry translation appears to centre around the person of the translator, who wishes to show his or her own differing "ideas"<sup>104</sup> and interpretations of a given literary work. However, this competition is not eliminative since the frequent comparison of various performances facilitates an inspired artistic coexistence of various versions.

Emily Dickinson's poetry, although not widely known in Hungarian literary culture, showcases the coexistence of several 20<sup>th</sup>-century and contemporary translations. Decades after her posthumous recognition by the American literary establishment, in Hungary, her legacy was primarily perpetuated by Ágnes Gergely and Amy Károlyi. Two volumes of Dickinson's selected poems were published to introduce her poetry to the Hungarian audience in 1978 and 1989, while nowadays, it is literary journals that provide an outlet for contemporary translators to present their competing, personal interpretations.

Dickinson's style proved to be eccentric enough for American readers, thus, translators must carefully select the appropriate translation strategy to familiarise foreign audiences with her poems. Kappanyos claims that Hungarian readers themselves often feel inclined to compare different translations of the same works,<sup>105</sup> so the critical comparison of Dickinson's translations is also necessitated by this readerly response to poetry translation. Due to Dickinson's distinctive poetic diction, both translators and retranslators face the dilemma of choosing between domestication and foreignization, which clearly evokes Chesterman's "Retranslation Hypothesis." Even though it has been shown to be an insufficient frame of analysis,<sup>106</sup> today there is no other conceptual model that can replace Chesterman's hypothesis. It is "continuously criticised, [but] also [...] continuously present in the critical discourse on retranslation."<sup>107</sup> Therefore, Hungarian readers and critics of Dickinson's poetry might well be interested

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<sup>98</sup> Kappanyos, "Kényszer és kihívás," 35–36.

<sup>99</sup> Kappanyos, "Kényszer és kihívás," 47.

<sup>100</sup> Kappanyos, "Kényszer és kihívás," 35.

<sup>101</sup> Mesić, "Revisiting," 10.

<sup>102</sup> Kapranos, "Kényszer és kihívás," 44–47.

<sup>103</sup> "A fordításszövegben megnyilvánuló nyelvi teljesítmény kétségkívül a fordító teljesítménye, amely önmagában is értékelhető, de össze is vehető az adott eredetiből kiinduló más teljesítményekkel." – Kappanyos, "Kényszer és kihívás," 45. (The English translation is mine)

<sup>104</sup> Kappanyos, "Kényszer és kihívás," 45. (The English translation is mine.)

<sup>105</sup> Kappanyos, "Kényszer és kihívás," 44.

<sup>106</sup> Peeters and Van Poucke, "Retranslation," 8.

<sup>107</sup> Peeters and Van Poucke, "Retranslation," 11.

in finding out whether translators of the previous century “diluted” Dickinson’s unique voice when first introducing her poetry in Hungary, and whether contemporary translations are closer to the original works. This paper aims to find out whether Chesterman’s “Retranslation Hypothesis” is true for the Hungarian translations of Dickinson’s poetry by analysing and comparing Amy Károlyi’s and István László Géher’s translations of Poem 713 (“Fame of Myself, to justify,”). In other words, its goal is to establish whether Géher’s retranslation is more faithful to Dickinson’s original than Károlyi’s first translation.

## METHODS

Emily Dickinson’s oeuvre features a variety of subject matters. In the research process, altogether 316 poems which have been translated into Hungarian at least once were collected. These texts could be grouped into eight categories according to their subject matter or main theme. The following themes were identified: death and immortality, female identity, life wisdom, love, nature, religion, self, and success. In both the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Dickinson’s poems on death and immortality as well as on nature were the most popular among Hungarian translators, while poems conveying life wisdom constituted the third most often translated category. Poems on success appear to be the least inspiring for contemporary translators even though success and literary fame are quite prominent themes in Dickinson’s works. References to her withdrawal from publicity abound in most of her texts, letters and poems alike. The unusual authorial stance of shunning fame necessitates critical attention. Moreover, Bollobás argues for engagement with lesser-known poems by Dickinson: “if someone decides to delve into poems which are less frequently discussed, they will surely encounter a richness of thought equal to that of her widely known and celebrated works.”<sup>108</sup> Therefore, a poem about success was selected as the focus of the present study.

To compare the fidelity of the poem’s first translation and its retranslation, a contemporary and a 20<sup>th</sup> century translator’s works were chosen. Emily Dickinson had two major Hungarian translators in the past century, Ágnes Gergely and Amy Károlyi. However, it was Károlyi’s 1978 volume, *Emily Dickinson válogatott írásai: Károlyi Amy fordításai és tanulmányai*, edited by Ágota Steinert (Magvető Könyvkiadó, 1978), in which Hungarian readers could encounter Dickinson’s poetry for the first time in a separate collection. This volume established Károlyi as the most prominent Hungarian translator of Dickinson. Therefore, Károlyi’s translations serve as a suitable basis of comparison. According to Gera, the title of her 1975 comprehensive poetry translation volume, which includes the works of poets from many different countries, *Vonzások és viszonzások* [Attraction and Reciprocation], describes Károlyi’s motivation for translation as a personal, inner need.<sup>109</sup> Gera also claims that translating Dickinson

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<sup>108</sup> “[D]e az, aki a ritkábban tárgyalt versekben mélyül el, biztos lehet abban, hogy ugyanolyan gondolatgazdagsággal találkozik, mint a széles körben ünnevelt költemények olvasásakor.” – Bollobás Enikő, *Vendégünk a végtelenből: Emily Dickinson költészete* (Balassi Kiadó, 2015), 16. (The English translation is mine)

<sup>109</sup> Gera György, “Vonzások és viszonzások: Széljegyzetek Károlyi Amy fordításkötetéhez,” *Jelenkor* 19, no. 6 (1976): 559–565, <https://www.jelenkor.net/userfiles/archivum/1976-6.pdf>.

constitutes one of the main translatory “(life)stages.”<sup>110</sup> As Károlyi writes, “translating Emily Dickinson is not like drawing with pastels, the translator makes contoured outlines with blade, thus, it is inevitable that he or she cuts his or her own finger.”<sup>111</sup> This suggests a strong bond of blood and pain between poet and translator. Thus, Károlyi introduced the works of the “queen of intellectual sensations,”<sup>112</sup> to the Hungarian reading public more than twenty years after the publication of the first, comprehensive Dickinson collection by Thomas H. Johnson (1955).

There are twenty-one translations by Amy Károlyi that correspond to the theme of success. These poems are the following:<sup>113</sup> Poem 35 (Nobody knows this little Rose –); Poem 67 (“Success is counted sweetest”); Poem 98 (“One dignity delays for all –”); Poem 288 (“I’m Nobody! Who are you?”); Poem 306 (“The Soul’s Superior instants”); Poem 374 (“I went to Heaven –”); Poem 401 (“What Soft – Cherubic Creatures –”); Poem 435 (“Much Madness is divinest Sense –”); 441 (“This is my letter to the World”); Poem 486 (“I was the slightest in the House”); Poem 563 (“I could not prove the Years had feet –”); Poem 583 (“A Toad, can die of Light –”); Poem 627 (“The Tint I cannot take – is best”); Poem 696 (“Their Height in Heaven comforts not –”); Poem 713 (“Fame of Myself, to justify,”); Poem 866 (“Fame is the tint that Scholars leave”); Poem 891 (“To my quick ear the Leaves – conferred –”); Poem 1072 (“Title divine – is mine!”); Poem 1379 (“His Mansion in the Pool”); Poem 1659 (“Fame is a fickle food”); Poem 1746 (“The most important population”).

István László Géher, a contemporary poet publishing under the name G. István László, claims to have translated 618 of Dickinson’s poems, which makes him the most prolific contemporary translator of Dickinson in Hungarian literary circles. Most of his translations have not been published, but he generously provided access to his manuscripts. He was the student of another major Hungarian translator of Dickinson, Ágnes Gergely. Géher’s motivation for translating the poems is similar to Károlyi’s. He translates various other English poets, yet the number of his Dickinson translations implies a deep fascination with the 19<sup>th</sup> century poet. Indeed, Géher claims that he “deals with the roots of [his] own poetic voice” through the texts he translates. Thus, the act of recreating the text in another language enables him “to reach the depths of inspiration that is the starting point or determinant” of his own poetry,<sup>114</sup> which seems especially true for his translating Emily Dickinson. Kappanyos characterises poetry translation as a process consisting of flashes of inspiration, the results of which are then linked

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<sup>110</sup> Gera, “Széljegyzetek,” 565. (The English translation is mine.)

<sup>111</sup> “ED-t fordítva a fordító nem pasztellkrétával rajzolgat, hanem beretvával kontúroz, s így óhatatlan, hogy olykor ne vágjon az ujjába.” Károlyi Amy, “Emily Dickinson világa,” in *Emily Dickinson válogatott írásai: Károlyi Amy fordításai és tanulmányai*, ed. Ágota Steinert (Magvető Könyvkiadó, 1978), 32. (The English translation is mine)

<sup>112</sup> “[É]lményre való képesség királynőjének.” – Károlyi, “Emily Dickinson világa,” 7. (The English translation is mine)

<sup>113</sup> These poems are listed in accordance with Johnson’s numbering system, which is preferred prevails in Hungary to Ralph W. Franklin’s newer order. Bollobás, *Vendégünk a végtelenből*, 18.

<sup>114</sup> “olyan inspirációknak a mélyére tudok az újateremtés aktusán keresztül kerülni, amik a saját szövegvilágomnak is origói, vagy meghatározói.” – István László Géher (translator), Interview with Kárpáti Lilla Edit, March 18, 2025. (The English translation is mine.)

together by ideas,<sup>115</sup> which appears to be true for both translators. In addition, Géher recognizes and focuses on retaining<sup>116</sup> the modern stylistic features of Dickinson's poetic voice, which he sums up with the phrase "spasmodic reticence."<sup>117</sup> According to Géher, Dickinson combines powerful, exploding utterances with restrained or reticent fragmentation resulting in the use of dashes and irregular forms.<sup>118</sup> If Károlyi is considered the first major translator of Dickinson, Géher can be seen as her retranslator. Therefore, the works of these two translators invite critical comparison.

There are five published translations by Géher dealing with the topic of success. They were published in the literary journals, *Parnasszus* (2018/2; 2022/4) and *2000* (2020/1). These poems are the following: Poem 441 ("This is my letter to the World"); Poem 601 ("A still – Volcano – Life –"); Poem 613 ("They shut me in Prose –"); Poem 819 ("All I may, if small,"); Poem 1763 ("Fame is a bee"). Comparing the two lists shows that there is only one poem (Poem 441) that was translated and published by both Géher and Károlyi. However, Géher's unpublished translations augments the list by seventeen poems. Thus, the following poems were translated by both poets on the theme of success: Poem 67, Poem 288, Poem 306, Poem 374, Poem 401, Poem 435, Poem 441, Poem 486, Poem 563, Poem 583, Poem 627, Poem 696, Poem 713, Poem 866, Poem 891, Poem 1072, Poem 1659, and Poem 1746. The published translations of Poem 441 would be an obvious choice for a comparison, considering that it was listed by Bollobás as one of the most quoted and anthologised Dickinson poems.<sup>119</sup> However, Poem 713 was chosen for analysis to highlight the critical value of a lesser known but not less emblematic text that could facilitate a more nuanced understanding of Dickinson's stance toward literary success.

## RESULTS

Even though Emily Dickinson's style and poetic imagery could not earn the recognition of the contemporary literary public as she was unwilling to publish<sup>120</sup> her texts in her lifetime with the exception of seven poems,<sup>121</sup> her preference for obscurity was in line with 19<sup>th</sup> century American literary ideals. Leo Braudy argues that, for Dickinson and her most prominent contemporaries, such as Whitman, Thoreau, and Emerson, "the badge of true success was public neglect, because each served ideals higher than the satisfaction of the multitude."<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Kappanyos, "Kényszer és kihívás," 45. (The English translation is mine.)

<sup>116</sup> Géher, Interview with Kárpáti Lilla Edit.

<sup>117</sup> Géher. István László, "A dickinsoni vulkán," *Parnasszus* 24, no. 2 (2018): 15, [https://epa.oszk.hu/03700/03714/00010/pdf/EPA03714\\_parnasszus\\_2018\\_2.pdf](https://epa.oszk.hu/03700/03714/00010/pdf/EPA03714_parnasszus_2018_2.pdf).

<sup>118</sup> Géher, Interview with Kárpáti Lilla Edit.

<sup>119</sup> Bollobás, *Vendégünk a végtelenből*, 19.

<sup>120</sup> Thomas Herbert Johnson, "Editing the Poems," in *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Including Variant Readings Critically Compared with All Known Manuscripts*, ed. Thomas Herbert Johnson (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1955), xlv.

<sup>121</sup> Thomas Herbert Johnson, "Notes on the Present Text," in *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Including Variant Readings Critically Compared with All Known Manuscripts*, ed. Thomas Herbert Johnson (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1955), lx.

<sup>122</sup> Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History* (Oxford University Press, 1986), 463.

Dickinson's partly enforced, partly self-inflicted seclusion is likened by Bollobás to celibate priesthood.<sup>123</sup> Crumbley interprets this seclusion as her commitment to the service of literature and argues that her poetry conveys a unique devotion to artistic immortality. Thus, Crumbley distinguishes Dickinson from her contemporaries by her characteristic seclusion and preoccupation with the "proper conduct of the artist" who truly believes in immortal fame that is independent of popular opinion.<sup>124</sup> She was metaphorically married to her own creativity,<sup>125</sup> and her life of "losses melted together to form a queenly diadem."<sup>126</sup> Thus, Dickinson's oeuvre exemplifies the kind of poetry that seeks timeless literary values. Moreover, in her letters, Dickinson expressed her preference for obscurity and implied her disapproval of popular recognition: "If fame belonged to me, I could not escape her – if she did not, the longest day would pass me on the chase – and the approbation of my Dog, would forsake me – then – My Barefoot-Rank is better –."<sup>127</sup>

Poem 713 seems to argue that inner, personal justification of one's own merit is more important than recognition by others. The speaker suggests that the mere existence of great poetry is enough to earn lasting fame and immortality for the author without any other effort to obtain recognition:

713

Fame of Myself, to justify,  
All other Plaudit be  
Superfluous – An Incense  
Beyond Necessity –

Fame of Myself to lack – Although  
My Name be else Supreme –  
This were an Honor honorless –  
A futile Diadem –<sup>128</sup>

The poem's complicated syntactic structure highlights the superiority of the speaker's "inner order"<sup>129</sup> over outer justification.

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<sup>123</sup> Bollobás, *Vendégünk a végtelenből*, 34.

<sup>124</sup> Paul Crumbley, "Emily Dickinson's Funeral and the Paradox of Literary Fame," *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 26, no. 2 (2017): 53, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/edj.2017.0014>.

<sup>125</sup> Bollobás, *Vendégünk a végtelenből*, 28.

<sup>126</sup> "[E]gy élet veresége királynői diadémává olvadt," – Károlyi, "Emily Dickinson világa," 9. (The English translation is mine.)

<sup>127</sup> "Dickinson/Higginson Correspondence: 7 June 1862 (Letter 265)," Dickinson Electronic Archives: Nov. 9, 2024, <https://archive.emilydickinson.org/correspondence/higginson/1265.html>

<sup>128</sup> Dickinson, *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Back Bay Books / Little, Brown and Company, 2021), 350–351.

<sup>129</sup> Bollobás, *Vendégünk a végtelenből*, 14. (The English translation is mine)

Regarding its form, the poem consists of two common metre quatrains, which are composed of iambic “lines of tetrameter alternating with trimeter.”<sup>130</sup> The even lines contain mere eye-rhymes, and the third line in the first stanza is irregular with its seven syllables.

The structure of the sentences hinders comprehension, but the meaning can be clarified by means of certain insertions: “‘If I can justify my fame to myself, then...’ and ‘If my fame lacks justification, then although...’” as Susan Kornfeld suggests.<sup>131</sup> Therefore, the speaker relies on “personal integrity, self-respect, and honor rather than [on] public acclaim.”<sup>132</sup> The appreciation of the public is unnecessary if the writer deems herself talented.

In addition, fame is likened to a religious ceremony with incense for this resin is traditionally used in church rituals for worship.<sup>133</sup> Incense is also recognized as one of the gifts that the Three Wise Men bring to baby Jesus in the Christian tradition. Yet Dickinson argues that the Magi’s gift is unnecessary; in truth, it does not make the child in Bethlehem any greater. In contrast, the second stanza creates an alternate reality, in which the speaker is worshipped by society even though she lacks the personal justification of artistic merit. She outright renounces this state by the phrase “Honor honorless,” placing a true, “non-futile” Diadem onto that poet’s head whose Fame is self-justified.

The rejection of popular fame is in line with Dickinson’s secluded, literary priesthood,<sup>134</sup> which makes Poem 713 emblematic of Dickinson’s stance towards success. As Károlyi observes, “The prevailing taste in the 19<sup>th</sup> century deprives her of success, yet behold, she does not wish to write for the market, she writes for eternity.”<sup>135</sup> Dickinson’s “timid life”<sup>136</sup> may seem odd to the majority, yet for her, order comes from within, through self-justification. Thus, there is no need for the glory and the riches that public acclaim could grant her. By dedicating her life to the sole purpose of writing poetry, she becomes “the queen of the world she herself created.”<sup>137</sup> In this imaginary world, there is no hierarchy but a coexistence of kind neighbours.<sup>138</sup> She shows “majestic hospitality” to “the companions of her queenly self” and “shares her life with [...]real friends as well as with the characters of her inner

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<sup>130</sup> Mary Kinzie, *A Poet’s Guide to Poetry* (The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 400.

<sup>131</sup> Susan Kornfeld, “Fame of Myself, to Justify,” *the prowling Bee*. August 11, 2013, <https://bloggingdickinson.blogspot.com/2013/08/fame-of-myself-to-justify.html>.

<sup>132</sup> Páraic Finnerty, “‘If fame belonged to me, I could not escape her’: Dickinson and the Poetics of Celebrity,” *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 26, no. 2 (2017): 41. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/edj.2017.0013>.

<sup>133</sup> “Frankincense,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Jan. 03, 2025. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/frankincense>.

<sup>134</sup> Bollobás, *Vendégünk a végtelenből*, 34.

<sup>135</sup> “A korízlés elveszi tőle a sikert, ám tessék, ő nem a piacnak, ő az időnek ír.” Károlyi Amy, “Emily Dickinson útja,” in *Emily Dickinson válogatott írásai: Károlyi Amy fordításai és tanulmányai*, ed. Ágota Steinert (Magvető Könyvkiadó, 1978), 115. (The English translation is mine.)

<sup>136</sup> Dickinson, *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, Poem 696, (Back Bay Books / Little, Brown and Company, 2021), 342–343.

<sup>137</sup> “A maga kreálta világnak ő a királyasszonya.” – Károlyi, “Emily Dickinson világa,” 13. (The English translation is mine.)

<sup>138</sup> Bollobás, *Vendégünk a végtelenből*, 14.

world.”<sup>139</sup> The poem conveys Dickinson’s preference for timeless artistic values over fleeting success, and highlights the importance of the poet’s belief in the value of her works.

Amy Károlyi and István László Géher made the following translations of the poem:

**Amy Károlyi:**

Magam híret szükségtelen,  
Hogy igazolja más,  
Ez fölösleges tömjén,  
Oktalan tapsolás.

Önnön hírem, ha nem lelem,  
Bár nevem lenne fény –  
Ez a dicsőség dicstelen,  
Ez olcsó diadém.

**István László Géher:**

A Hírnév – Önigazolás –  
A Méltatás – üres –  
Belélegezni – Tömjén –  
Kapni – fölösleges –

Ha nincs Hírnevem – meglehet  
Egyszer elnyerem Én –  
Teher lenne a Fejemen –  
Egy sivár Diadém –

Structurally, both translations follow the original. Also, both Károlyi and Géher preserve the English poem’s iambic metre and syllable count although there is an irregular, trochaic third line in the first stanza of Károlyi’s translation. In contrast, their rhymes sound more regular than Dickinson’s. There is an apparent difference in punctuation. Each translator’s use of dashes in this poem exemplifies their usual approach to Dickinsonian punctuation. Károlyi retained only one of the original’s six dashes while Géher added six more. The capitalization of first letters is also a unique feature of Dickinson’s poetry. This is usually preserved in Géher’s translations but omitted in ones by Károlyi, which is also the case in their respective versions of Poem 713.

The complex, fragmented syntax of the source text was apparently challenging, as the two translators’ approaches resulted in differing images that nonetheless accentuate the importance of artistic self-justification. Károlyi aimed to clarify the structure of the sentences, which can be considered a domesticating approach. The clauses in the first lines, however, are inverted: “Magam híret *szükségtelen*, / Hogy igazolja más,” [It is *unnecessary* for others to justify my fame], placing the equivalent of “Beyond Necessity” right at the beginning of the poem. However, the phrase “Magam híret” is in contrast with the domesticating style, as it provides a fascinating, faithful solution to Dickinson’s enigmatic “Fame of Myself.” Károlyi preserves the contrast, clarified by Greenup, of “fame in the special sense,” i.e. self-justification, and “fame in the general sense,” i.e. public acclaim.<sup>140</sup> She also adds to the ambiguity by

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<sup>139</sup> “[M]agánya ugyanakkor sohasem jelent társtalanságot, inkább fenséges vendéglátást [...]: megosztja életét királynői énje társaival, a barátokkal és a barátnőkkel éppúgy, mint belső világának szereplőivel.” – Bollobás, *Vendégünk a végtelenből*, 34. (The English translation is mine.)

<sup>140</sup> Martin Greenup, “The Glimmering Frontier: Emily Dickinson and Publication.” *The Cambridge Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (2004): 348, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42967510>.

dividing the first two lines in a way that the first line reads “Magam hírért szükségtelen,” [literally: My fame unnecessary]. Yet it must be acknowledged that Károlyi’s reference to self-justification remains implicit due to an emphasis on justification by others: “Magam hírért szükségtelen, / Hogy igazolja más,” (my emphasis). Her synonyms for superfluity are all fitting: “szükségtelen” [unnecessary], “fölösleges” [redundant], “oktalan” [unreasonable], though the latter is an insertion. Moreover, Dickinson’s reference to frankincense is preserved, and “Plaudit” or praise is translated with the more closely related, auditory concept of “tapsolás” [applause].

Géher, in contrast, makes equations between concepts in his first stanza, using the foreignizing dashes to tie together the paired concepts. His first line creates an entirely different ambiguity; implying that fame is merely self-justification *or* that self-justification is the true form of fame (“A Hírnév – Önigazolás –”). Contrary to Károlyi, his foreignizing style is paired with a more domesticating vocabulary in the beginning of the poem. Moreover, his syntax is clearer than Dickinson’s despite the fragmenting dashes. With his third line, he seems to acknowledge a certain pleasure to be derived from praise (“Belélegezni – Tömjén –” [To Inhale – [it is] Incense –]) by alluding to the rich aroma of the resin that conjures up the image of Catholic worship. Yet Géher’s structure can pair self-justification of one’s fame [Hírnév] in the first line with the conceptually familiarizing gesture of inhaling incense. Breathing is a personal, *self*-sustaining act, hence in his translation, praise *from the self*, that is, fame originating from non-ceremonial self-justification, provides animation to a poet. However, the second and the fourth lines resolve the ambiguity in a more explicit way. The speaker suggests that outer appraisals are superficial (“üres” [empty]), while the last line puts an overt emphasis on the superfluity of incense or worship (“Kapni – fölösleges –” [To receive – [it is] superfluous]), which is in line with the original stanza’s meaning.

In the second stanza, Károlyi smoothly conveys the meaning suggested by the original, while Géher further complicates the implications of the first stanza. In Károlyi’s translation, the first line of the first stanza and that of the second stanza are different (“Magam hírért” és “Önnön hírem”) and thereby the anaphora (“Fame of Myself”) that organises the structure of Dickinson’s original poem is eliminated. Nevertheless, Károlyi conveys the conflict between outer and inner recognition: “Önnön hírem, ha nem lelem, / Bár nevem lenne fény –” [If I cannot find my own fame, / Although my name were light]. Interestingly, she places the speaker under the limelight of a stage by translating the supremacy of a famous name as “light,” which logically corresponds to her translation of “Plaudit” as “tapsolás” [applause], and thereby she familiarises the imagery. In the closing lines, the speaker rejects the diadem of spotlight by describing it with the adjective “olcsó” [cheap] and the faithful alliteration “dicsőség dicstelen” [glory inglorious]. In this way, the inner acknowledgement of one’s own talents is implicitly likened to a magnificent crown upon a self-respecting poet’s head.

Géher’s last stanza leaves out the original’s anaphora, too, though he retains the fragmented quality of Dickinson’s poem by dint of dashes and capitalised letters. More importantly, he modifies the

meaning by using only the concept of “fame in the general sense,”<sup>141</sup> even though the first line of the first stanza retrospectively suggests that self-justification is the truest form of fame. In addition, the second line of this quatrain (“meglehet / Egyszer elnyerem Én –” [perhaps / One day I will obtain it]) has a strikingly hopeful tone creating a paradoxical contrast with the first stanza and the closing lines. The phrase “sivár Diadém –” [bleak Diadem] in the last line is indeed more consistent with the first stanza’s depreciation of public applause since “sivár” conveys the hollowness of popular fame. However, the preceding line, “Teher lenne a Fejemen –” [It would be a burden on my head] deviates considerably from the original’s focus on honour. Instead Géher’s translation closes with the idea of rejecting the burdensome diadem) of popular fame.<sup>142</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This paper compared Amy Károlyi’s and István László Géher’s translations of Emily Dickinson’s Poem 713 in order to test Chesterman’s “Retranslation Hypothesis,” which argues that retranslations are foreignizing and closer to the original.<sup>143</sup> Interestingly, the comparison of Károlyi’s first translation and Géher’s retranslation did exhibit a contrast between domestication and foreignization, yet in the case of Dickinson’s poetry, these translatory strategies appear too complex to be assessed in terms of fidelity. Firstly, the above analysis suggests that the poem’s form and meaning must be treated separately as the translator’s faithfulness may not extend to both categories. Secondly, further complexities may be revealed when analysing the translations in terms of those separate categories as well.

The comparison of the two translations’ punctuation reveals the clearest contrast between foreignization and domestication. Dickinson builds her poems on unuttered but implied thoughts and logical connections, which are reflected in unconventional punctuation. Károlyi domesticised these eccentric features in her translations, while Géher claimed<sup>144</sup> to preserve them and ostensibly did so. However, Géher did not simply preserve these features; he exaggerated them. About half of Géher’s thought-dividing dashes are additions. Although the proliferation of dashes is characteristic of most poems by Dickinson, including this specific poem, the insertion of even more dashes, that is, the exaggeration of an eccentricity, complicates the relationship between foreignization and fidelity. In certain respects, he is indeed more faithful to Dickinson’s “spasmodic reticence”<sup>145</sup> than Károlyi is, but through his additions, he cannot be considered exactly faithful to the original poem.

After establishing Géher’s relative faithfulness to the fragmentation of Dickinson’s text, one would expect his text to be closer to the content as well based on Chesterman’s hypothesis. However, his

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<sup>141</sup> Greenup, “Dickinson and Publication, 348.

<sup>142</sup> Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that the image corresponds to the poet’s overall approach to fame, see: “If fame belonged to me, I could not escape her.” – “Dickinson/Higginson Correspondence: 7 June 1862 (Letter 265).”

<sup>143</sup> Chesterman, “A Causal Model,” 22–23.

<sup>144</sup> G(éher), “A dickinsoni vulkán,” 15; Géher, Interview with Kárpáti Lilla Edit.

<sup>145</sup> Géher, Interview with Kárpáti Lilla Edit.

translation contains several changes in both imagery and meaning, such as “Belélegezni – Tömjén –” [To Inhale – [it is] Incense –]; “– meglehet / Egyszer elnyerem Én –” [perhaps / One day I will obtain it]; and “Teher lenne a Fejemen –” [It would be a burden on my head]. These alterations make the translation seem a Hungarian poem inspired by Dickinson. Moreover, Géher domesticates Dickinson’s enigmatic “Fame of Myself” and eliminates the anaphora.

In contrast, Károlyi preserves the ambiguity of the phrase “Fame of Myself,” integrating an unexpected foreignizing solution into her text. She also provided a faithful translation of the phrase “Honor honourless.” Moreover, the comparisons above clearly showed that the overall meaning residing in her translation is more in line with Dickinson’s. However, her translation appears to be more reader-friendly, as though she wished to decipher the poem so that Hungarian readers understand the underlying focus on self-justification. This could have been the objective of her entire volume as well. Furthermore, Dickinson’s insistence on self-justification becomes explicit through Károlyi’s familiarising, domesticating approach, and the anaphora structure is missing from her translation as well. Therefore, Károlyi’s relative faithfulness to Dickinson’s imagery and intermittent foreignization of the text partially disproves Chesterman’s “Retranslation Hypothesis.” Nevertheless, her translation cannot be considered faithful to the poem as it familiarises and domesticates Dickinson’s fragmented style and oblique statements.

All in all, Chesterman’s hypothesis is merely partially true for Géher’s and Károlyi’s translation of Poem 713. This is because the explicitness of Károlyi’s translation does not reflect Dickinson’s enigmatical style, whereas Géher’s exaggeration of fragmentation results in differing imagery and meaning. Consequently, Peeters and Van Poucke’s claim about the insufficiency of Chesterman’s hypothesis<sup>146</sup> is right in the case of Amy Károlyi’s and István László Géher’s translations of Dickinson’s Poem 713. The comparative analysis above suggests that the poem’s form and content should be treated separately when considering the fidelity of poetry translations. Therefore, the translators’ relative closeness to either of these separate aspects, whether proving or disproving the hypothesis, does not necessarily constitute true fidelity. Even though Károlyi domesticated Dickinson’s unique style and fragmented sentence structure, Géher’s additions in terms of content and punctuation did not render his translation more faithful to Dickinson’s original poem. Also, Károlyi’s unanticipated closeness to Dickinson’s imagery is relative since she provided a deciphering, familiarising translation. Therefore, Chesterman’s hypothesis seems to be too general to apply to Károlyi’s and Géher’s translations of Dickinson’s Poem 713. Even though the rejection of unjustified fame is apparent in both versions and each translation shows the contrasts between domestication and foreignization, neither Géher’s inspired version nor Károlyi’s reader-friendly translation can be regarded as especially faithful to the original.

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<sup>146</sup> Peeters and Van Poucke, “Retranslation,” 8.

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# THE ADVANCE OF THE GOTHIC MONSTER: THE PROJECTION OF FEAR IN GOTHIC STORIES

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## ABSTRACT

Gothic fiction is a significant component of contemporary literature and is the foundation of many subgenres today. The key themes and essential elements of terror and horror have endured throughout literary history, and the portrayal of fear has been adapted to suit new audiences. Thus, an analysis of the foundational works of the genre must consider not only its central themes but also the evolution of Gothic fiction demonstrated by these texts that responded to, and reflected their audience's interests, expectations, and anxieties in their respective presents. This paper argues that the monster gradually infiltrates society, by getting closer to the English audience in a physical and psychological sense in three classic works of the Gothic genre: Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. This paper offers a close reading of the three texts, with a special focus on the themes of isolation, the shifting boundary between monster and human, the changing societal anxieties that are depicted through the monsters, and the stories' gradual move towards the English reading audience. The gradual changes in the fictional depiction of these issues indicate the evolution of the Gothic genre.

## INTRODUCTION

At first, the term "Gothic" had negative connotations as it derived from the name of a Germanic tribe, the goths, and evoked the ideas of barbarism and destruction. However, according to Nick Groom, later on with the Enlightenment, the term gained a new meaning, emphasising that the Goths "resisted and rebelled against tyranny, one that was driven by its own values of liberty and freedom, one that swept away centuries of Roman oppression and cruelty."<sup>147</sup> Thus the term Gothic has both a positive and negative meaning.

According to Hogle, Gothic literature presents ideal settings for staging the irreconcilable contradictions of life. Through the Gothic, we are "'throwing off' into a ghostly or monstrous Other the unresolvable contradictions in our beings and societies [...], however much the resulting 'abject' is a

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<sup>147</sup> Nick Groom, introduction to *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story*, by Horace Walpole (Oxford University Press, 2014), xii.

fiction that conceals our underlying conflicts from us by ejecting them outside ‘normal’ humanity.”<sup>148</sup> This is why contemporary social anxieties are present in every Gothic story.

Gothic literature relies on certain stock devices, such as haunted castles, deserted mansions, secret passages, midnight scenes, a persecuted heroine, and supernatural occurrences. Robert D. Hume argues that there are four significant components of this genre. First, the location and period are remote from the reading audience; however, this element changes in later literary periods. Secondly, the story is underpinned by moral values that constitute “a standard which the reader recognizes as close to his own everyday outlook.” Thirdly, the action is moved forward by a villain-hero. Lastly, the boundary between good and evil becomes blurred.<sup>149</sup>

By analysing the changing monsters in three of the most influential Gothic novels, this paper argues that the Gothic monster advances toward the heart of English society. This paper also examines the different causes of social anxieties in the stories, drawing on the concepts of isolation, infiltration, and the shifting boundary between the monstrous and the human. First, Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, the first major work in the Gothic genre, is examined with a focus on the villain-hero, who is the source of fear, and the traces of the old romance tradition. Then the paper discusses Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* in terms of the contrast between alchemy and modern sciences, the human traits of the monster, whose alienation and isolation leads to his doom. Lastly, this paper analyses Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* from the perspective of social anxieties about the Other invading civilised society.

#### THE DISTANT MONSTER AS THE SOURCE OF FEAR

*The Castle of Otranto* was first published in 1764 under the alias of a fictitious translator, who claimed that the work “was found in the library of an ancient Catholic family in the north of England. It was printed at Naples, in the black letter, in the year 1529.”<sup>150</sup> With this gesture, Walpole could avoid negative publicity in case his book did not prove to be successful. As John Riely states, Walpole was not confident that a narrative of supernatural events would be well received.<sup>151</sup> The first edition had a print run of 500 copies, which were sold in four months, therefore, a second edition was needed. In the Preface to this new edition, Walpole avowed his authorship and apologised for the deceit. He also explained that the story “was an attempt to blend the two kinds of Romance, the ancient and the modern. In the former, all was imagination and improbability: in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success.”<sup>152</sup> As Jerrold E. Hogle points out, this passage articulates “the fundamentally conflicted dynamic resident at the core of Gothic fiction from its inception.”<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Hogle, “Quandaries of Science,” 23.

<sup>149</sup> Robert D. Hume “Gothic versus Romantic: A Reevaluation of the Gothic Novel.” *PMLA* 84, no. 2 (1969): 287, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1261285>.

<sup>150</sup> Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 5.

<sup>151</sup> John Riely, “The Castle of Otranto Revisited.” *The Yale University Library Gazette* 53, no. 1 (1978): 3.

<sup>152</sup> Walpole, Preface to the Second Edition, *The Castle of Otranto*, 9.

<sup>153</sup> Jerrold E. Hogle “The Gothic Image and the Quandaries of Science in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*,” in *Global Frankenstein*, 21–36 (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 22.

The story of *The Castle of Otranto* starts *in medias res*, amid the preparations for a marriage, between prince Conrad, the son of Manfred and princess Isabella, when it is discovered that the groom has disappeared. As people are looking for him, one of the servants of Prince Manfred returns and is terror-stricken: “Running back breathless, in a frantic manner, his eyes staring, and foaming at the mouth. He said nothing but pointed to the court. The company was struck with terror and amazement.”<sup>154</sup> These lines exemplify the novel’s narrative strategy, which is the intentional delaying of the discovery of unbelievable phenomena. The characters are either shocked and thus cannot communicate or they are interrupted by an impatient listener. Here, the former happens: they are “struck with terror and amazement.” The servant witnesses a horrid scene but cannot articulate it. Instead of telling what he saw, he points at the site. The expression “terror and amazement” invokes the idea of the sublime. According to Edmund Burke, the sublime “is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.”<sup>155</sup> Walpole comments on the intentional delay of the discoveries in the Preface to his second edition as follows: “The very impatience the reader feels, while delayed by the coarse pleasantries of vulgar actors from arriving at the knowledge of the important catastrophe he expects, perhaps heightens, certainly proves that he has been artfully interested in the depending event.”<sup>156</sup> In this way, Walpole can maintain the interest of the reader, heighten the emotions, and intensify the anticipation of grisly occurrences. This can be seen later in the plot, when a character sees a ghost and tries to tell Manfred about it. Manfred interrupts them and urges them to say what has happened and not to prevaricate.

Thus, the story starts with action and a sense of impending danger. It is eventually revealed that Prince Conrad, has been crushed to death by a large stone helmet. The family does not understand how this could have happened, especially because there are no statues where the prince was killed. When a young peasant observes that the helmet looks identical to the armour of the “figure in black marble of Alfonso the Good, in the church of St. Nicholas,”<sup>157</sup> Manfred immediately imprisons him and later plans to execute him. Thus, Manfred is presented as a terrifying tyrant at an early stage in the story.

In *The Castle of Otranto*, fear is generated not only by the tyrant, but also by supernatural events and apparitions. The statue of Alfonso the Great is a case in point. Three drops of blood trickle from its nose, nods three times, the statue’s helmet falls, and crushes the groom, then floats in the air and its full body armour roams the castle. Another ghostly apparition is the animated portrait of prince Manfred’s grandfather, Don Ricardo. This apparition is witnessed by prince Manfred, who, while he is the source of fear for many, is terrified when the ghost “uttered a deep sigh, began to move and quit its panel, and

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<sup>154</sup> Walpole, *Otranto*, 18.

<sup>155</sup> Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful with an Introductory Discourse Concerning Taste, and Several Other Additions*, section VII. Of the Sublime, Vol. I. The Project Gutenberg.

<sup>156</sup> Walpole, *Otranto*, 10.

<sup>157</sup> Walpole, *Otranto*, 20.

descend on the floor with a grave and melancholy air.”<sup>158</sup> The last and perhaps the most frightening apparition is the skeleton in Lady Hippolita’s apartment. The Marquis of Vicenza, the father of princess Isabella, glimpses a strange figure in Hippolita’s private chapel and is about to leave when the figure turns and looks at him. In a hollow voice, it passes judgement on the frightened Marquis, with “the fleshless jaws and empty sockets of a skeleton, wrapt in a hermit’s cowl.”<sup>159</sup> It forbids him to marry Matilda, the princess of Otranto, then vanishes into thin air. These supernatural occurrences keep the castle’s residents in fear. Similarly, the eighteenth-century reading audience was terrified. Walpole received letters from readers, saying that the story “engages our attention here, makes some of us cry a little, and all in general afraid to go to bed o’ nights.”<sup>160</sup>

Another source of anxiety is the fluid and often ambiguous boundary between humanness and monstrosity. In this story, the source of evil is not the supernatural beings, but the main character, Manfred, the prince of Otranto. As Hume explains, Walpole maintains a clear division between good and evil; however, the tradition of the villain-hero also originates from his work.<sup>161</sup> The monstrosity of Manfred’s character is shown when, immediately after his son’s death, Manfred wants to divorce his wife and force Isabella, his prospective daughter-in-law, into a marriage with himself. He is very aggressive toward both female characters, and Isabella is only able to flee from his grasp because a ghost disturbs the prince.

The supernatural apparitions in this story help the virtuous characters. They are the distant, moralising voices of the past, as the ghost of Alfonso the Great, and the grandfather’s painting are both spirits from former times, who try to warn the villain-hero, and at the same time assist the other characters. For example, they help Isabella escape and warn Manfred that his actions will lead to the fulfilment of the prophecy. The prophecy is that the castle “should pass from the present family, whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it.”<sup>162</sup> The objective of the supernatural beings is not to haunt and harm the characters but to guide them and to urge the villain-hero to repent. However, the arrogance of Manfred destines him to fulfil the prophecy and kill his last heir, his own daughter.

In *The Castle of Otranto*, three characters, all of whom represent the younger generation, experience isolation in some form. The most isolated character is Theodore, who was abducted by pirates when he was five and sold as a slave. He is eventually rescued by a Christian vessel and sent to his home in Sicily, where he finds the family estate in ruins and learns that his father has retired to a monastery. Thus, he becomes isolated once more. When he arrives at the court of Otranto in search of his father, he is imprisoned in the ghost’s helmet, which isolates him from the residents of the court. Another isolated character is Isabella, the Marquis of Vicenza’s daughter. She is about to marry young prince Conrad and

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<sup>158</sup> Walpole, *Otranto*, 25.

<sup>159</sup> Walpole, *Otranto*, 98.

<sup>160</sup> Riely, “Otranto Revisited,” 3.

<sup>161</sup> Hume, “Gothic versus Romantic,” 283.

<sup>162</sup> Walpole, *Otranto*, 17.

has been living with her prospective in-laws. She was taken from her home in her father's absence, and her protector was bribed. Even after the marriage is cancelled, Manfred keeps her in the castle. Last, Matilda, the daughter of Prince Manfred, has been isolated as well. The story starts with the preparations for the wedding of her younger brother while she is still unmarried. This suggests that she has been neglected and not introduced into the society of other noble families. Moreover, Manfred "never showed any symptoms of affection to Matilda."<sup>163</sup> Thus, she is emotionally isolated from her father. Finally, she is killed by her own father, who, in a fit of mad jealousy, mistakes her for Isabella.

Religion, namely Catholicism, is an integral part of the story. This was an unusual choice by the author who created his work long after the Reformation. Walpole pretended that the manuscript was found in the library of an Italian Catholic family and was written "in the darkest ages of Christianity."<sup>164</sup> The characters occasionally rely on religion for protection. For example, when Isabella flees Manfred, she prays to the saints to deliver her in peace to the church. Another example is when a conversation between Bianca and Princess Matilda is interrupted by strange noises. The women become frightened, and Matilda suggests that they pray: "If they are spirits in pain, we may ease their sufferings by questioning them. They can mean no hurt to us, for we have not injured them—and if they should, shall we be safer in one chamber than in another? Reach me my beads; we will say a prayer and then speak to them."<sup>165</sup>

As Horace Walpole stated, he blended two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern. There is a marked contrast between male characters who exercise abusive power over women and those who show chivalric respect for them in the novel. Manfred does not respect the women around him. He does not appreciate his only daughter, despises his wife, and tries to force Isabella to marry him. By contrast, Theodore and the Marquis are chivalrous. When Isabella and Theodore meet by chance, Theodore generously offers his assistance: "'I will die in your defence' [...] 'I value not my life,' said the stranger, 'and it will be some comfort to lose it in trying to deliver you from his tyranny.'"<sup>166</sup> He is the perfect example of a knightly character, protecting the persecuted young heroine, who, next to the villain-hero, is one of the typical protagonists of early Gothic stories.<sup>167</sup> The contrast between Manfred and the Marquis can be felt when Bianca, frightened by the giant armour, wants to describe it to the prince: "'Saw what? tell us, fair maid, what thou hast seen,' said Frederic. 'Can your Highness listen,' said Manfred, 'to the delirium of a silly wench, who has heard stories of apparitions until she believes them?'"<sup>168</sup> Their attitude to women is perfectly depicted by this short exchange. Manfred is portrayed as a brute and a tyrant, while the Marquis treats the lady-in-waiting with respect and gallantry.

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<sup>163</sup> Walpole, *Otranto*, 17.

<sup>164</sup> Walpole, *Otranto*, 5

<sup>165</sup> Walpole, *Otranto*, 40.

<sup>166</sup> Walpole, *Otranto*, 28.

<sup>167</sup> Riely, "Otranto Revisited," 7.

<sup>168</sup> Walpole, *Otranto*, 94.

Walpole's work is part of the early Gothic tradition, in which the location and characters are distant from everyday life. Even so, he was able to create an atmosphere that thrilled and unnerved his English audience. Ultimately, he fulfilled his ambition to pave the way for future generations of Gothic writers.

#### THE DEMONISATION OF SCIENCE IN *FRANKENSTEIN*

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a quintessential Gothic story, incorporating its traditional elements, such as a remote location, gloomy atmosphere, a hero-villain, and the blurry boundary between good and evil.

Mary Shelley uses many narrative devices to unfold this eerie Gothic story. She incorporates three narrations into the story. First, Captain Robert Walton's letters; second, the narrative of Victor Frankenstein, which is recorded by Walton; third, the story of the monster, as told to Victor and written down by Walton. This embeddedness of story within story adds tension to the narrative.

One of the traditional elements of the genre that is changed in this story is the remote period, as the novel is set in an indeterminate decade. While *The Castle of Otranto* is set on the Continent in the 1520s, the story of *Frankenstein* starts with a letter addressed to England and written on December 11<sup>th</sup>, 17--. This was not a distant date from Shelley's contemporaries as she started writing this story in the summer of 1816. The story was set in the recent past, which contributed to the unease. The letter was sent to England, and if the story and the letters could reach the country, there was a possibility that the monster could, too.

*Frankenstein* is not simply a tale that evokes terror: it also comments on fears the contemporary audience had. The story of *Frankenstein* revolves around the dilemmas of science. The contrast between medieval alchemy and the modern sciences is presented through Victor Frankenstein's education. First, he reads the books of Cornelius Agrippa, Paracelsus, and Albertus Magnus, renowned alchemists. Later, at university, he studies chemistry and the natural sciences. Nevertheless, in his experiments, science and alchemy are both present.

The tension between two different scientific approaches is evocative of a publicly staged debate in between 1814-19 on the topic of the "origins and nature of life", between John Abernethy and William Lawrence. Mary Shelley was probably well-versed in this debate as Lawrence was Percy Shelley's physician. In the novel, Frankenstein echoes Abernethy, who argued that soul and electricity are both "'superadded force' infused from above as a 'mobile, invisible substance' external to any physical container."<sup>169</sup> In contrast, Lawrence argued that the origins and nature of life can be discovered through close examination as "'the particles of a living body are dependent on each other' from the time of any infant's conception, an understanding that can be achieved only by 'a close observation of the actions of living creatures' or the 'fabric' of bodies."<sup>170</sup> Even though Victor Frankenstein supports Abernethy's

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<sup>169</sup> Hogle, "Quandaries of Science," 26.

<sup>170</sup> Hogle, "Quandaries of Science," 26.

theory, in practice, he follows Lawrence's method when he dissects creatures and corpses to understand how they work and to be able to recreate them. Hogle argues that, by combining the two theories, Frankenstein "makes his creature a fearsome site for embodying and abjecting that very irresolution in much of Mary Shelley's audience between life conceived of as a divinely-based 'preformation' and life understood as a self-shaping 'epigenesis.'"<sup>171</sup> The presence of these two conflicting theories supports the argument that Gothic literature incorporates opposing philosophies, beliefs, and elements to create its immersive stories.

The 1818 edition of the novel contains a more elaborate explanation of the driving life force of the creature. The young Victor sees a tree struck by lightning after a storm and asks his father to explain what has happened to it. Alphonse Frankenstein, Victor's father even demonstrates an experiment for his son. Mary Shelley's husband, Percy Shelley, was known to carry out experiments that tested the capabilities of electricity in his laboratory; thus, she was relatively well acquainted with the positive and negative aspects of these experiments. Hogle observes that "Mary Shelley is clearly aware that, in the public mind of her historic moment, electricity includes simultaneously one potential for solving and extending the secret of life *and* a terrifying capacity for generating an excess of energy that can produce deadly conflagrations."<sup>172</sup>

The shifting line between monster and human is dramatized through the relationship between the creature and its creator. It is not only the creature that commits crimes, but Frankenstein also. He recounts that "During my first experiment, a kind of enthusiastic frenzy had blinded me to the horror of my employment; my mind was intently fixed on the consummation of my labour, and my eyes were shut to the horror of my proceedings. But now I went to it in cold blood, and my heart often sickened at the work of my hands."<sup>173</sup> He frequently rummaged through dead bodies and dissected them. Victor commits horrific actions during the creation process, blurring the line between monster and human while pursuing a supposedly noble aim.

In *Frankenstein*, there is no female presence at the time of the "birth." The creature is not naturally conceived but made in a laboratory by a single person. It is assembled from parts detached from the dead bodies of different people. This undeniably reduces its humanity. Even though Victor calls him an animal, he cannot be called that either.

When Victor Frankenstein begins to assemble his creature, he uses the most beautiful body parts to create the living being, but the overall effect is alarming. When it gains consciousness, Victor is terrified and flees the scene, leaving it completely alone. The creature tries to integrate himself into society, but people reject him due to his repulsive appearance.

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<sup>171</sup> Hogle, "Quandaries of Science," 26.

<sup>172</sup> Hogle, "Quandaries of Science," 28.

<sup>173</sup> Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013), 147.

Victor calls his creature many other derogatory names, such as “the wretch,”<sup>174</sup> “demoniacal corpse,”<sup>175</sup> “my vampire,”<sup>176</sup> “abhorred monster,”<sup>177</sup> and many more. Moreover, he refers to the monster with different pronouns, alternating between “he/him” and “it.” He dehumanizes the creature in order to lessen the guilt of creating him and then leaving him behind. The unwillingness to take responsibility for his actions is a recurring element in the story. Victor leaves the creature not long after it gains consciousness, only because it is ugly, and when the creature disappears, he does not try to find him. Even after the creature’s narrative, the scientist reaffirms that the creature is a monster who wants to harm society.

According to John Locke’s theory, when people are born, their mind is a blank slate, a “tabula rasa.” There is no previous impression, knowledge, or memory: “All Ideas come from Sensation or Reflection. - Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas.” Therefore, it is the child’s surroundings and circumstances of life that in a great deal form them into what they become.<sup>178</sup> The creature is rejected by society. For instance, he is chased out of a village after he saves a girl’s life. After these repeated rejections, he understands that it all happened because they saw him as a monster. As a result of the hardship and harsh treatment he has experienced, the nameless creature slips into the same habit as his creator, calling himself a fiend and a wretched thing: “how was I terrified, when I viewed myself in a transparent pool! At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am.”<sup>179</sup>

The creature’s story paints a picture of his early life and personality traits that shows no trace of the brutish or demonic qualities that Victor attributes to him. The monster recounts that he needed to adjust to light, hunger, and cold. He tells how different sounds made him feel, and that he was not ignorant of the beauty of nature around him. The harsh rejection by the townspeople leaves a deep mark on him. Consequently, after finding the De Lacey’s, he spends many months longing for their friendship but is too afraid to reveal himself. His education is obtained through listening to the lessons given to Safie by Felix De Lacey and reading three major works of literature: *The Sorrows of Young Werther* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Plutarch’s *Lives*, and John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. The creature understands and interprets the stories. He even notes their emotional impact: “But *Paradise Lost* excited different and far deeper emotions. [...] It moved every feeling of wonder and awe.”<sup>180</sup> Literature, culture, and interpersonal relations make people who they are. In the same way, they shape the identity of the creature.

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<sup>174</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 45.

<sup>175</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 46.

<sup>176</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 64.

<sup>177</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 86.

<sup>178</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Vol. I. The Project Gutenberg, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/10615/10615-h/10615-h.htm>.

<sup>179</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 99.

<sup>180</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 113.

Like human beings, the monster longs for companionship and seeks human relationships. He understands gentleness and kindness. For example, he gathers wood for the family, so Felix does not have to leave them each day. But the rejection he experiences is devastating; he is hurt, and from this experience, natural emotions surface such as embarrassment and anger, which make him violent. In addition, his vengeance presents him as a ruthless character, especially after he kills Frankenstein's brother and frames Justine for the murder. However, at the very end of the novel, when he is towering above Victor's body, he admits to Walton that he did not enjoy his evil rampage, during which he killed all of Frankenstein's friends and family: "For whilst I destroyed his hopes, I did not satisfy my own desires. They were for ever ardent and craving; still I desired love and fellowship, and I was still spurned."<sup>181</sup>

Earlier in the tale, the creature asks Frankenstein for a mate. He has read *Paradise Lost*, in which the creation of Eve is depicted. He sees himself as Adam at one point and demands that his creator give him a mate of his own kind, with whom he can live happily in a remote land in South America. Through this desire, he shows vulnerability and a longing for companionship. He also demonstrates human articulateness when he reasons with Victor. When Frankenstein dies, the creature is not celebrating but appears remorseful. He tells Walton he detested his own actions, which resembles a last confession before dying. This final conversation might re-humanise the creature. He despises his misdeeds and still longs for love and acceptance.

In brief, the Gothic monster in Mary Shelley's novel advances towards English society. The novel contrasts the old with the new, like *The Castle of Otranto*, but not in terms of types of romance, rather in terms of pseudoscience versus modern scientific discoveries. By doing so, the author deals with the questions her contemporary audience were grappling with. Shelley endows the creature with human traits and emotional dilemmas, showing its vulnerability. Thereby she makes it harder for her reader to distinguish between good and evil.

#### THE FEAR OF INVASION BY THE OTHER

Legends of vampires can be found in many cultures, but the modern vampire originated in Eastern Europe as an unidentified disease swept over villages, decimating its inhabitants.<sup>182</sup> People searched for answers in the decaying bodies, which, after they were unearthed, showed signs that were interpreted as proof that they were the "living dead." They had bloated stomachs, blood on the corners of their mouths, and their nails and hair were longer. These are natural side effects of decomposition, but at that time, people did not know this. Thereafter, they regarded them as vampires and tried to destroy them.

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<sup>181</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 200.

<sup>182</sup> Jeffrey S. Hampl and William S. Hampl, "Pellagra and the Origin of a Myth: Evidence from European Literature and Folklore," *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 90, no. 11 (November 1997): 636, <https://doi.org/10.1177/014107689709001114>.

While stories of vampires were not as popular as nowadays, Bram Stoker's novel was not the first work of fiction to feature this bloodthirsty monster. Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, for example, was published more than twenty years earlier, and it enjoyed great success. Moreover, during the infamous summer nights in Lord Byron's villa, it was not only Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* that was conceived, but also Polidori's "The Vampyre." This short story had a significant influence on *Dracula*, undeniably the most famous vampire character. In addition to these literary precursors, Bram Stoker used folktales and combined them with his own ideas. For example, the "staking of vampire was already a well-established motif in folklore and literature"<sup>183</sup> when he wrote his story, but he added the idea that vampires have no reflections in mirrors.

Much like in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the characters in *Dracula* express a sense of duty to liberate humanity from the threat of the monster. This determination is first declared by Jonathan Harker, when he discovers the Count in one of the boxes: "This was the being I was helping to transfer to London, where, perhaps, for centuries to come he might, amongst its teeming millions, satiate his blood lust, and create a new and ever-widening circle of semi-demons to batten on the helpless. The very thought drove me mad. A terrible desire came upon me to rid the world of such a monster."<sup>184</sup> Later, it is stated by the doctor as well: "We men are determined—nay, are we not pledged? —to destroy this monster."<sup>185</sup> They know that the monster will spread vampirism, which will lead to death and destruction. Consequently, they set out to annihilate him.

However, in the process, the righteous characters also display violent tendencies as a result of fear and desperation. They engage in acts of destruction, such as staking and decapitating corpses. These actions might seem acceptable in the heat of the battle. However, the reader might question the protagonists' moral high ground if they look at their actions objectively. Even the characters themselves are unsure whether these actions are justifiable at first: "'Heavens and earth, no!'" cried Arthur in a storm of passion. "Not for the wide world will I consent to any mutilation of her dead body. Dr. Van Helsing, you try me too far."<sup>186</sup> Consequently, the novel blurs the boundary between good and evil. Hume explains that there was a general shift in the interpretation of good and evil after the Renaissance: "Gothic novels prepare the way for and shares the romantic "confusion" of good and evil. But [...] Gothic remains darkened by the necessary ambiguities of its conclusions [...]"<sup>187</sup> However, in *Dracula*, there is no question whether the supernatural character is evil. He is not morally ambiguous; he wants to destroy humanity.

The proximity of the monster, who threatens to destroy English values, can be sensed from the behaviour and emotional reactions of the human characters. At Harker's first mention of the Count,

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<sup>183</sup> Miller, Elizabeth, "Back to the Basics: Re-Examining Stoker's Sources for 'Dracula,'" *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 10, no. 2 (1999): 193, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43308384>.

<sup>184</sup> Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2000), 45.

<sup>185</sup> Stoker, *Dracula*, 195.

<sup>186</sup> Stoker, *Dracula*, 171.

<sup>187</sup> Hume, "Gothic versus Romantic," 289.

people around him start to act strangely, which he attributes to superstition and folklore. For example, people act as if they did not understand him when he tries to gather information about Dracula. Then, as the stagecoach is drawing closer to their meeting point, the other passengers give him gifts that are intended to protect him from harm. Earlier, the innkeeper's wife has put a crucifix around his neck; then, in the stagecoach,

One by one several of the passengers offered me gifts, which they pressed upon me with an earnestness which would take no denial; these were certainly of an odd and varied kind, but each was given in simple good faith, with a kindly word, and a blessing, and that strange mixture of fear-meaning movements which I had seen outside the hotel at Bistritz—the sign of the cross and the guard against the evil eye.<sup>188</sup>

When he arrives at the secluded castle, where he only meets the Count, his impression of danger lurking in the shadows only intensifies.

The shifting boundary between human and monster is also shown through Jonathan Harker's perception of the Count. When he can look closely upon Dracula, he notes his white, sharp teeth, pale and pointy ears, hair growing on his palms, and his long, sharp nails, all of which are bestial features. However, he does not immediately grasp the gravity of his situation. He realizes only gradually that he is completely isolated from all other human beings, he cannot leave the castle on his own, and he does not know who the strange Count is. It is only when he witnesses the Count leaving through the window and climbing down the walls like a lizard that he fully realises he is entrapped by a monster. Therefore, this shift from human to monster can be seen in Harker's recognition of the true nature of Dracula.

Another example of the shift from the human to the monstrous is the grisly transformation that the two main female characters undergo. While the men are able to save Mina, Lucy changes into a vampire, which is why they need to destroy her. The first appearance of female characters in Stoker's *Dracula* is that of the three vampire ladies, whose description emphasises their conspicuous sexuality. John Allen Stevenson highlights that these vampire women have the power "to inspire a sexual response in others"<sup>189</sup> and notes that this pattern is repeated when Lucy, and later Mina, is bitten. During the process of their transformation, Lucy and Mina are in an indeterminate state: they are neither fully human nor a monster, but they are clearly under the influence of Dracula. There are various critical explanations as to why Dracula targets these women. According to Stevenson, "the real horror of Dracula [is that] he is the ultimate social adulterer, whose purpose is nothing if it is not to turn good Englishwomen like Lucy and Mina away from their own kind and customs."<sup>190</sup> Dracula's adulterous tendencies are also shown by the fact that he keeps three female vampires, whom he loved at one point, in his castle. Nonetheless he is seeking out newer preys, who are young unmarried women.

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<sup>188</sup> Stoker, *Dracula*, 9.

<sup>189</sup> John Allen Stevenson, "A Vampire in the Mirror: The Sexuality of Dracula," *PMLA* 103, no. 2 (1988): 145, <https://doi.org/10.2307/462430>.

<sup>190</sup> Stevenson, "The Sexuality of Dracula," 143.

In *Dracula*, isolation is a recurring theme. First, it is conveyed through Dracula's remote residence. He lives far away in a Transylvanian castle that is regarded as accursed, so people avoid going near it as much as possible. When Jonathan Harker is brought to the castle by the Count's carriage, the coachman, Count Dracula in disguise, makes unnecessary detours to disorient Harker. After their arrival, Jonathan realises that there are no residents or servants in the whole castle: he, the Count, and the three female vampires are the sole residents. This experience encapsulates the sense of isolation. Another example is the isolation of the crew on the schooner ship *Demeter* that sets sail to Whitby. As the ship advances into the open sea, more and more men disappear. The crew do not know that they are transporting Dracula, who roams the deck of the ship each night. They are completely isolated, they cannot ask for help, and in the end, all of them die.

Another crucial theme is infiltration. Having acquired various properties in London, Dracula soon sets sail and leaves for the bustling metropolis of the age. He has also targeted Newcastle, Durham, Harwich, and Dover as future destinations. After the arrival of the Count in England, it becomes the main location of the story. This is a noticeable change compared to the other two novels, in which the monster is either haunting an ancient Italian castle or creeping closer to society, but is not able to mingle unnoticed with English citizens. In Transylvania, people know who Dracula is, they are cautious and take pre-emptive measures against him. However, modern city-dwellers do not care about the superstitions of a remote country, so Dracula regards London as a favourable hunting ground.

Dracula's move from Transylvania to London serves as a symbol of the threat of foreign infiltration. English readers of the Victorian era might have seen the Count as a metaphor for immigration, disease, and moral decay, which are represented as monstrous in the story. The fear of foreign infiltration is called reverse-colonisation, which means that a country regarded as civilised is being invaded by "primitive" forces. Whereas a defining feature of classic Gothic literature is the remoteness of the location, "Stoker's novel achieves its effects by bringing the terror of the Gothic home."<sup>191</sup> The closeness of the setting and the monster's thorough knowledge of the country fills the audience with horror.

The escalation of anxiety in the novel is portrayed through the first-person accounts of the protagonists in the form of letters and diaries, as the format of the novel is epistolary. This brings the whole story and the characters' fate closer to the audience. Reading the fragments and putting the story together amplify the tension. As Hume states, a "distinctive feature of the early Gothic novel is its attempt to involve the reader in a new way. [...] in Gothic writing the reader is held in suspense with the characters, and increasingly there is an effort to shock, alarm, and otherwise rouse him."<sup>192</sup>

Jonathan Harker, during his travel to the castle, expresses an unease about not being familiar with the country, the culture, and the people he sees and meets. There is a strangeness in everything he sees, from the food to the landscape, and his discomfort becomes evident. Only when he realises that he is

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<sup>191</sup>Stephen D. Arata, "The Occidental Tourist: 'Dracula' and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization," *Victorian Studies* 33, no. 4 (1990): 622, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3827794>.

<sup>192</sup>Hume, "Gothic versus Romantic," 284.

kept prisoner by a supernatural being, does he experience extreme fear. After he returns to London, he catches sight of Dracula in the crowd, which triggers an overwhelming response, suggestive of severe trauma.

Another character that expresses anxiety repeatedly is Mina Murray. While looking for her sleepwalking friend, Mina gives voice to her fear that others might see Lucy in her current state, in her nightgown and barefoot. Despite the urgency of the situation, and the fact that Lucy is clearly in danger, Mina's main concern is social propriety. Throughout the book, Mina is portrayed as virtue personified. This moment reinforces this image and highlights the extent to which social norms govern her behaviour. In her social class, for a woman to be deemed immodest was a devastating blow.<sup>193</sup> Uncontrolled female sexuality was one of the primary anxieties of Victorian society. In the novel, both Lucy and Mina are pure, innocent girls, up until the point they are bitten by Dracula. The bite carries sexual connotations and, as a result of it, the women's demeanour changes. Lucy's transformation into a corrupted, sexually voracious woman is unstoppable, and she becomes one of the "'voluptuous" women [...] monsters, loathsome creatures fit only for destruction."<sup>194</sup>

In *Dracula*, many modern technologies and practices are mentioned, and these are practised by the virtuous characters of the story. In a sense, Western Europe and its technological advances are contrasted with Eastern Europe, which represents outdated superstitions. The new technologies used by the characters include shorthand writing, the phonograph, and blood transfusions. Shorthand writing is practiced by Jonathan and Mina, who record their experiences in their journal this way. When Dracula finds Jonathan's journal, he cannot read his notes because he does not know this technique. Dr. Seward keeps an audio-diary, by recording his days on a phonograph in his asylum. The medical procedure of blood transfusion is practised many times in the novel, which was a very rare and new scientific practice, with a high failure rate, but it is smoothly incorporated into the story. Hogle points out that Gothic figures can effortlessly represent the tension between "dying (retrogressive) and emerging (progressive) human inclinations, beliefs, and social structures that almost always co-exist—and that we always fear having to face—at nearly every stage of human history and many stages of individual growth."<sup>195</sup>

The idea of the cosmopolitan self is similarly modern. Jonathan Harker is a prime example of the cosmopolitan as it is part of his work to travel abroad if needed to meet a client. He is curious about the new country and enquires about its culture. In contrast, the Count has not travelled much; he is not a man of the world, but he wants to change this. He learns English and carries out research into the history, geography, and culture of the country. As Barney Warf explains, "Cosmopolitanism comes in many other forms, ranging from the religious to the neoliberal. Whom one defines as belonging to one's cosmos—and whom one does not—lies at the heart of these varying conceptions of what it means to be human."<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Stevenson, "The Sexuality of Dracula," 140.

<sup>194</sup> Stevenson, "The Sexuality of Dracula," 145.

<sup>195</sup> Hogle, "Quandaries of Science," 23.

<sup>196</sup> Barney Warf, "Cosmopolitanism and Space," *Geographical Review* 102, no. 3 (2012): iii, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41709186>.

Similarly, the characters view the Count as the “other,” which is one of the reasons why he is persecuted in the new country.

In the end, even though Dracula was defeated, he had managed to get to the city and pass through the streets unnoticed. In this novel, fear lurks in the background of all of the characters actions. The sense of duty to rid the earth of such a monster motivates the characters to pursue and destroy Dracula regardless of personal danger. Even though they succeed, there still lingers the feeling of being defeated, as they have lost Lucy and could barely save Mina.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, leaving its temporally and geographically remote settings, the Gothic monster arrives at the heart of the British Empire. Even though certain elements of the genre changed, such as the remoteness of location and time period or the source of social anxieties that are represented in the novels, the foundation stayed the same. The action is moved forward by the villain-hero, the stories deal with the anxieties of the era, there are moral values that are recognised by the reading audience, and the boundary between good and evil becomes blurred. In all three novels, there is a tension between two opposing ideas, such as the incorporation of the features of old and new romances, the duality of pseudoscience and modern scientific discoveries, and English culture as opposed to the foreign and monstrous other. Each novel features isolation, infiltration, and a blurry boundary between humanness and monstrosity.

In these three novels, the location and the time of the settings are brought closer to their respective audiences, from a distant European country and the Middle Ages to the recent past, to present-day London. Even though *Frankenstein* is still mainly set in mainland Europe, the monster claims to have roamed the shores of the isle. In *Dracula*, the monstrous Other arrives in the country and passes through the most populated areas. Walpole, Shelley, and Stoker created stories that dramatized the anxieties of their contemporaries, whether these fears concerned the return of feudal authority, modern sciences, or reverse-colonisation.

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# THE IMPACT OF FANTASY ON THE REPRESENTATION OF TRAUMA IN R. F. KUANG'S *THE POPPY WAR*

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## ABSTRACT

Rebecca F. Kuang is a contemporary author who has been gaining popularity at a rapid pace. The topics her novels engage with are significant and current global problems. Through close reading and drawing on humanities-based trauma studies, this paper explores the representation of war and transhistorical trauma by means of fantasy elements in Kuang's *The Poppy War* (2018). Focusing on this novel's four chapters, this paper argues that, although the feelings of the oppressed are foregrounded by fantasy elements and the use of free indirect speech and interior monologue in the narrative, these elements do not contribute to the protagonist's recovery from traumatic experiences. Consequently, the supernatural gains control over the protagonist through the Phoenix, the symbol of her painful memories, resulting in the constant repetition of her trauma. Nevertheless, the novel draws attention to the significance of trauma through specific narrative and aesthetic tools.

## INTRODUCTION

R. F. Kuang's work draws on supernatural elements to explore war, identity, culture, and trauma. *The Poppy War* trilogy consists of three books (*The Poppy War* 2018, *The Dragon Republic* 2019, *The Burning God* 2020) that follow the life of Fang Runin, a war orphan whose chances of social advancement depend on gaining acceptance to the Nikan Empire's elite military school, Sinegard. The protagonist takes matters into her own hands and decides to escape a miserable life planned for her by her adoptive family. The reader follows her journey from this determination to the hardships she experiences as an outsider from the countryside in the capital city. Runin has to fight for her place in the school with students from prestigious families and professors, and later, for her place in the military. Having been introduced to shamanism, she discovers her shamanistic abilities while the events of the Second Poppy War unfold. Runin battles against oppression, guilt, and her own and her ancestors' trauma while trying to improve her living conditions and simultaneously, contribute to the Nikan Empire's efforts to defeat the Federation of Mugen.

The trilogy enjoyed popular and critical success. The way she combines fantasy and history in *The Poppy War* has not been explored even though it seems to have contributed to the success of the trilogy.

Kuang revisits the Second Sino-Japanese War in her fantasy trilogy, which deal with the traumatic history of China during the Second World War. The serious message is conveyed through a fantasy setting; thus, at first glance, the novel seems to make light of the issue. However, the present paper, in which Kuang's novel is read from the perspective of trauma studies, will show that it is not the case.

Fantasy books are rarely discussed in connection with individual, which affects individuals or collective trauma, affecting whole groups. However, a fantasy series by Sarah J. Maas, *A Court of Thorns and Roses*, has been analysed by Abigail Army with a focus on trauma representation and its effects on the genre. According to Army, "[t]he fantasy genre is one born out of society's need to escape the realities of the world,"<sup>197</sup> which is a generally true statement. However, it fails to highlight the importance of the supernatural elements in the process of the representation of not only escaping from, but of representing and working through trauma.

Fantasy fiction may be regarded as a means to escape reality, but it is more important to examine what role fantasy elements play in introducing and representing trauma in contemporary literature. Most supernatural elements depicted in fantasy novels can be regarded as metaphors that stand for real life issues, such as Runin's trauma and anger embodied in the character of the Phoenix. When asked about the reasons for combining history, memory, and fantasy, Kuang replied: "I like SFF [Science Fiction and Fantasy] where the magic is quite obviously a metaphor for something else."<sup>198</sup> In this case, SFF is not only a means of escapism but also a way of staging painful experiences and trauma in a meaningful manner. The gruesome details of violence and war depicted in the first book leave the reader in a state of shock and disbelief. Moreover, the novel intensifies these feelings with narrative tools and supernatural events that precede or happen simultaneously with the scene in which trauma is represented. The depiction of the brutality of war in the novel exemplifies the representation of traumatic experiences in wartime in fantasy books. Exploring the novel's narrative techniques helps understand the trauma of the protagonist and shows that these devices can be used in fantasy novels to convey the impact of traumatic experiences.

In the 1990s, trauma theory and trauma representation focused on the chaotic and fragmented nature of narratives. Cathy Caruth, one of the key figures of humanities-based trauma studies, examined the way one can express trauma in literature, filmmaking, and psychology. Trauma is an emotional response to an external, overwhelming event that disturbs previous ideas of a person's sense of self and the way one assesses the world around them.<sup>199</sup> A traumatising event might be individual, such as female sexual

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<sup>197</sup> Abigail G. Army, "'May the Odds Be Ever in Your Favor': The Hunger Games as Texts for Critical Engagement and 'I Am Both Worse and Better Than You Thought': Implications and Significance of Trauma Representation in Fantasy Literature" (master's thesis, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2022), 41, [https://libres.uncg.edu/ir/uncg/f/Army\\_uncg\\_0154M\\_13558.pdf](https://libres.uncg.edu/ir/uncg/f/Army_uncg_0154M_13558.pdf).

<sup>198</sup> Ifeoluwa Adeniyi, "Speculative World-Building as a Refracting Prism: An Interview with Rebecca F. Kuang," *American Studies* 60, no. 3 (2021): 121.

<sup>199</sup> Michelle Balaev, "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory," *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 41, no. 2 (2008): 150.

violence or collective, as wars or natural disasters.<sup>200</sup> Caruth highlights the importance of accessing historical experience of trauma and discussing it, as well as the sheer impossibility of doing so. She states that solving this paradoxical problem is the greatest challenge in trauma studies<sup>201</sup> and concludes that trauma itself is inaccessible.<sup>202</sup> Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub studied the importance of, and damage caused by, experiencing as well as witnessing trauma. Felman and Laub approach the topic through the tragic event of the Holocaust. They emphasise the complexity of dealing with trauma both from the point of view of the directly affected person and the witness. The witness can give testimony of the events but poses new difficulties for the understanding of the past, such as the recollection of events in “bits and pieces.”<sup>203</sup> As these two approaches show, in the 1990s, trauma theory elaborated on the difficulties and challenges of expressing traumatic occurrences. It mainly focused on distressing events connected to Europe and the Western world, such as the tragedy of the Holocaust and later, in the early 2000s, on the terror attacks of September 11, 2001.

By the 2000s, humanities-based trauma studies have come under attack for only dealing with Western historical trauma. Critical studies have been published about the Westernised nature of trauma theory by such scholars as Sonya Andermahr, Stef Craps, and Jill Bennett. According to Andermahr, trauma theory neglects non-Western and minority traumas. She argues that the “Eurocentric bias of trauma theory”<sup>204</sup> needs to be eliminated by decolonising the field.<sup>205</sup> The expansion of narratives by including traumatic events from around the world was deemed necessary by Stef Craps, too. Craps highlights that, although there have been instances when scholars, such as Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra, sought to discuss non-Western traumas, these attempts failed eventually, due to the strong Eurocentrism of the discipline, which did not allow their complete discussion.<sup>206</sup> Craps also insists that, even though the aim was the same in the 1990s, namely the involvement of non-Western narratives and groups in the discussion of collective trauma, the anticipated dialogue between cultures did not take place.<sup>207</sup> Therefore, the inclusion of non-Western cultures is still on the agenda, and the gap identified by these scholars ought to be filled. Examining a wider range of fictional narratives that illustrate traumatic events is crucial for the discipline since they contribute to the discourse by providing a variety of depictions of traumatic events. Thereby, narratives that have been overlooked are given the opportunity to contribute to trauma representation and offer new, non-Western perspectives on trauma.

This paper discusses narrative techniques and supernatural elements that help convey transhistorical trauma war in the first novel of the trilogy. Transhistorical trauma is a trauma experienced by a group

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<sup>200</sup> Balaev, “Literary Trauma Theory,” 150.

<sup>201</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 6.

<sup>202</sup> Caruth, *Trauma*, 10.

<sup>203</sup> Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (Routledge, 1992): 5.

<sup>204</sup> Sonya Andermahr, “‘Decolonizing Trauma Studies: Trauma and Postcolonialism’ – Introduction,” *Humanities* 4, no. 4 (2015): 500.

<sup>205</sup> Andermahr, “Decolonizing Trauma Studies,” 501.

<sup>206</sup> Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 18.

<sup>207</sup> Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing*, 2.

(sharing similar attributes such as religion, nationality or gender), which is also experienced by an individual, who shares the same attributes possibly even centuries later.<sup>208</sup> This paper argues that the trauma of the protagonist in Kuang's *The Poppy War* is conveyed by fantasy elements, which enhance the emotional effect on the reader. These supernatural devices function as narrative tools to represent the protagonist's trauma and her inability to free herself from it as the creatures or supernatural events depicted in the novel inflict further trauma on the protagonist, forcing her to undergo the constant recurrence of her painful experiences. Additionally, these devices also serve as metaphors to represent her emotions in connection with her trauma. The paper consists of four main parts, of which the first one focuses on the historical background of the Second Sino-Japanese War, while the second chapter discusses two key narrative techniques as tools for conveying trauma. The third chapter delves into the topic of revenge and that in the book, it is the manifestation of traumatic events. Finally, the fourth chapter depicts the protagonist's attempt to work through trauma. The three analysed chapters from the book show how transhistorical trauma is represented in Kuang's supernatural narrative with the help of free indirect discourse and interior monologue.

#### HISTORY AND REPRESENTATION

The events of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) existed in a "historiographical penumbra" according to Mitter and Moore.<sup>209</sup> The war, which spanned the period of the Second World War and was part of it, had become a forgotten chapter of Chinese history as soon as it ended.<sup>210</sup> Therefore, China's position and struggles in the Second World War are very sparsely documented and hardly ever represented in fiction. In contrast, in other parts of the world, a large number of history books, biographies, and novels have been published about the events of the Second World War and its impact. The experiences of soldiers and civilians alike in the countries comprising the Axis and Allied powers have been widely represented in numerous forms of media in both the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries. Humanities-based trauma theory also studied these events and literary works dealing with them to examine the way one can represent such tragedies. The depiction of these painful events is still a sensitive topic. The role of China, however, has been overlooked until the twenty-first century.<sup>211</sup> Caruth's claim that trauma is repetitious, timeless, and unspeakable<sup>212</sup> serves as a possible, but not the only, explanation for this omission.

The main reason is that China itself has overlooked this critical period of its history until recent years, when the country's political leadership was finally willing to engage with the issue. The Communist government, the CCP (Chinese Communist Party), labelled it harmful to engage in the discussion of the

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<sup>208</sup> Balaev, "Literary Trauma Theory," 152.

<sup>209</sup> Rana Mitter and William Moore, "China in World War II, 1937–1945: Experience, Memory, and Legacy," *Modern Asian Studies* 45, no. 2 (2011): 226.

<sup>210</sup> Mitter and Moore, "China in World War II," 226.

<sup>211</sup> Mitter and Moore, "China in World War II," 227.

<sup>212</sup> Quoted in Balaev, "Literary Trauma Theory," 151.

War of Resistance to Japan, partly in order to foster the Sino-Japanese friendship.<sup>213</sup> This resulted in the dismissal of Japan's atrocities carried out during the conflict between the two countries.

Moreover, the CCP was determined to shape the narrative of China's resistance to Japan, which was led by the GMD (Guomindang, the Chinese Nationalist Party) and resulted in Chinese victory. Following the Japanese surrender in 1945, a civil war broke out between the Nationalist and Communist parties that lasted from 1945 to 1949.<sup>214</sup> After the GMD lost the Civil War in 1949, the CCP's narrative focused solely on how the party seized power.<sup>215</sup> By focusing on the events of the Second World War or the simultaneously fought War of Resistance, the CCP would have had to acknowledge the GMD's accomplishments, which after all, did not fit their narrative. By ignoring the role of the GMD in the fight against Japan, the main message of the remembrance was transformed into one of "heroic Communist resistance."<sup>216</sup>

After the death of Mao Zedong, founder and leader of the CCP, there was a change in the party's attitude to the events of the twentieth century. In the early 1980s, rather than focusing on the communist, heroic narrative of the outcome of the Second World War and the War of Resistance to Japan, scholars and the general public were eager to unearth the underlying reasons for the events.<sup>217</sup> From the mid-1980s, the CCP's main aim became to regain support among the people. In this campaign, the party relied heavily on the image of national resistance at the time of the Sino-Japanese War and emphasised the importance of unity and development.<sup>218</sup> This was the time when the atrocities of Japan started to be remembered and discussed both in terms of historiography and personal experiences. Although the aim later, mainly in the 2000s, was to decrease the tension between China and Japan, Chinese society and the diaspora were unwilling to let go of the issue.<sup>219</sup> Thus, as a result of the acknowledgement of the GMD's impact on the period of war and the critical examination of the CCP's narrative, the wartime history of China is finally open to discussion.

Another important reason why this Chinese historical trauma remains unexamined is that humanities-based trauma studies predominantly deal with non-Western historical traumas. The forgotten history of China during World War II is a prime example of a neglected, non-Western historical wound.

*The Poppy War* is one of the first fictional books gaining enough popularity to share Chinese narratives and perspectives from the period of the Second World War with Western audiences. According to Kanza and Thoyibi, the novel displays historical trauma and challenges Eurocentric

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<sup>213</sup> James Reilly, "Remember History, Not Hatred: Collective Remembrance of China's War of Resistance to Japan," *Modern Asian Studies* 45, no. 2 (2011): 469.

<sup>214</sup> Pavel Osinsky and Jari Eloranta, "Why Did the Communists Win or Lose? A Comparative Analysis of the Revolutionary Civil Wars in Russia, Finland, Spain, and China," *Sociological Forum* 29, no. 2 (2014): 323.

<sup>215</sup> Mitter and Moore, "China in World War II," 227.

<sup>216</sup> Reilly, "Remember History," 469-470.

<sup>217</sup> Mitter and Moore, "China in World War II," 228.

<sup>218</sup> Reilly, "Remember History," 471.

<sup>219</sup> Reilly, "Remember History," 489-490.

discourse while it foregrounds postcolonial perspectives.<sup>220</sup> Through a non-Western narrative that employs supernatural metaphorical elements, the wounding events are represented with eerie accuracy. Kuang used key historical events for structuring the novel, making it, what Kanza and Thoyibi call a “fictional reinterpretation of real historic traumas.”<sup>221</sup> Kuang’s trilogy does not try to hide or diminish the violence and brutality of war when representing the events of the Sino-Japanese conflict, which serves as inspiration for the trilogy.

Wars demonstrate the brutality of people, the acuteness of human suffering, and the never-ending violence of history. Fantasy, on the other hand, disrupts the reader’s train of thoughts or reactions with continual supernatural interventions, which, in the *The Poppy War*, happen either before or during an important event. Healey states that this leads to defamiliarization, which is often used in science fiction and dystopian fiction. Defamiliarization, as well as fantasy elements, contribute significantly to the representation of trauma.<sup>222</sup> The aim of defamiliarization, a concept invented by Viktor Shklovsky, is to stimulate a fresh perception of everyday objects and experiences.<sup>223</sup> Looking at mundane occurrences from a new perspective might be used to convey the traumatic experience. Kuang defamiliarizes historical events by means of supernatural plot devices, which create a sense of unease and apprehension. By analysing the narrative techniques and supernatural elements in three significant scenes of warfare in *The Poppy War*, the following sections will explain the impact of fantasy elements on the representation of trauma.

#### NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES AS VEHICLES OF TRAUMA REPRESENTATION

*The Poppy War* employs two key techniques within a predominantly third-person narration: interior monologue and free indirect speech. These usually appear in situations when the main character is undergoing a traumatising experience. An interior monologue is a “form of writing in which the inner thoughts of a character are presented” in the first person.<sup>224</sup> Free indirect discourse on the other hand, is a narrative technique in which the emotions and thoughts of a character are conveyed through third-person narration. The narrator does not quote the characters’ thoughts directly but speaks from their point of view.<sup>225</sup> The reader is inclined to identify with the characters whose ideas are conveyed through these devices of narration.

In terms of trauma representation, these two techniques emphasise the impact of the ongoing traumatic events on the characters. Furthermore, in the scenes analysed below, these tools are used

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<sup>220</sup> Kanza, Balqis Affanin, and M. Thoyibi, “Ethnic Oppression in R.F. Kuang’s *The Poppy War* Book,” *Language Literacy: Journal of Linguistics, Literature, and Language Teaching* 9, no. 1 (2025): 398.

<sup>221</sup> Kanza and Thoyibi, “Ethnic Oppression,” 397.

<sup>222</sup> Cara Healey, “Reimagining China’s Colonial Encounters: Hybridity in Stephen Fung’s *Tai Chi Zero* and R.F. Kuang’s *The Poppy War* Trilogy” *Comparative Literature & World Literature* 6, no. 1 (2021): 49.

<sup>223</sup> Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson, and Peter Brooker, “Russian Formalism and the Bakhtin School.” In *A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, 29–44. (Pearson Education Limited, 2005), 32.

<sup>224</sup> “Interior Monologue,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford UP, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/7016219453>.

<sup>225</sup> Gregory Castle, *The Blackwell Guide to Literary Theory* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 119.

together with supernatural plot devices that allow readers to look at the traumatic experience from a fresh perspective. According to Kuang, “the tools that fantasy does have are speculative elements allowing you to look at society through a refracting prism, and that allows you to spotlight certain issues.”<sup>226</sup> The fantasy genre is able to contribute to the process of revealing the impact of wounding historical events. Nevertheless, fantasy elements do not enable the characters to work through trauma in *The Poppy War*.

In the first battle scene, the narrator describes the Federation Forces as they are approaching the city of Sinegard. The setting, the banners the soldiers hold, and their positions while marching are described from the perspective of the protagonist, who is watching the enemy army from a vantage point. As the Mugenese army is nearing the centre of the Empire’s defence base, students and teachers await their fate together. In this scene, the narrator increasingly foregrounds the main character’s emotions and thoughts until an interior monologue provides full insight into Runin’s feelings of fear and insecurity:

From her vantage point high on the southern city wall, Rin watched the Federation force approach like a great fiery snake winding its way through the valley, encircling Sinegard to crush and swallow it. She saw it coming, and she trembled.

*I want to hide. I want someone to tell me I’m going to be safe, that this is just a joke, a bad dream.*<sup>227</sup>

During the scene, the narrator describes the movement of the enemy army toward the Nikan fighters, who aim to protect the capital. The enemy army is described by the narrator in terms of a “great fiery snake.” This supernatural image sets the scene for the likewise supernatural events that follow.

In the novel, fire is most frequently used in connection with the Phoenix, the main supernatural element in the novel that appears later in this scene. In Chinese mythology and folklore, the mythical bird, *fenghuang*, is widely considered by Westerners the equivalent of the phoenix.<sup>228</sup> However, in this novel, the Phoenix is depicted as the god of fire and destruction. When the protagonist calls upon this deity, her veins burn, her vision turns crimson, or she bursts into flames. The simile of the fiery snake foreshadows the subsequent supernatural scene in which Runin communicates with the Phoenix for the first time and asks for its help with defeating the enemy. Fantasy elements, therefore, play a significant role in the staging of traumatic scenes and are in some cases preceded by interior monologues or free indirect speech, which make these scenes more accessible to the reader.

Scenes that rely on free indirect discourse or interior monologue to represent traumatic events tend to be introduced concurrently with the supernatural. When it is difficult to express pain realistically, or when the main character is in extreme despair, fantasy elements are introduced into the plot to provide

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<sup>226</sup> Quoted in Iris Bosma, *From Fantasy to Realism: R.F. Kuang’s Exploration of Postcolonial Themes* (master’s thesis, Utrecht University, 2024), 14, <https://studenttheses.uu.nl/handle/20.500.12932/46677>.

<sup>227</sup> Rebecca F. Kuang, *The Poppy War*, (Harper Voyager, 2018), Kindle, chap. 11.

<sup>228</sup> Xinyu, Ye and Muhammad Anas AL-Muhsin, “Comparative Study on Myth between Chinese and Arabic: Phoenix as an Example.” *International Journal of Humanities, Philosophy and Language* 3, no. 10 (2020): 13.

ostensible solutions to the protagonist's problems. The following quote from the same scene illustrates this tendency:

The Federation didn't fight a graceful fight. They fought a brutal one. And they didn't fear death. If they were hurt, they fell, and their comrades advanced over their dead bodies. They were relentless. There were *so many of them*.

*I am going to die.*

Unless. Unless.

The poppy seeds in her pocket screamed for her to swallow them. She could take them now. She could go to the Pantheon and call a god down.<sup>229</sup>

The poppy seeds refer to the communication between people and gods since, as explained in the book, certain drugs open the minds of shamans and enable them to reach out to the gods. The use of the personal pronoun "I" in the quote above does not change the 3<sup>rd</sup> person narration since the interior monologue is only inserted to foreground the emotional impact of trauma on the protagonist. The reader can follow her thought process from fear of imminent death to the realisation that there is a way for her and the Nikan army to survive. In her mind, it is only possible by turning toward the Pantheon, where she can ask a god for help to prevent the Mugenese from seizing the capital.

This moment of realisation is the point where the supernatural takes over and Runin loses control over her actions by summoning the Phoenix to destroy the enemy:

The fire billowed outward with a vengeance. She felt a tearing sensation, as if it were being ripped from her gut, from somewhere inside her. It coursed through her, not harming her but immobilizing her. It used her as a conduit. She controlled the flame no more than the wick of a candle might; it rallied to her and enveloped her.

In her mind's eye she saw the Phoenix, undulating from its plinth in the Pantheon. Watching. Laughing.<sup>230</sup>

She, with the strength and control of the Phoenix, burns the enemy forces, which results in Nikan winning the battle. However, she realises that she has no power over her actions after she calls upon the deity.

As in subsequent scenes, the supernatural serves as a temporary resolution to Runin's fear and anger as she watches the capital nearly fall into the hands of the Mugenese. She calls upon the Phoenix when she believes that it is her last chance to retaliate against the oppressors, but by doing so, she frequently relives her own trauma, not having the capability to free herself from it. Her actions are carried out by means of magic that leave hundreds of people, including civilians, dead. There are similar scenes when the Cike, Runin's military division comprised of shamans, win fights against the Mugenese due to their ability to channel and use mystical power, but even these feats do not lead to complete victory.

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<sup>229</sup> Kuang, *The Poppy War*, chap. 11.

<sup>230</sup> Kuang, *The Poppy War*, chap. 11.

Supernatural elements, in most cases, provide an apparent solution to conflicts and surface at junctures when the protagonist feels unable to control her thoughts and emotions owing to the traumatic nature of her experiences. Nevertheless, these do not relieve her trauma, only provide a way for painful memories to emerge again or even deepen previous psychological wounds. Runin is in what Jacques Derrida defines as a state of “mid-mourning,” which, according to Ricciardi, makes the subject “perpetually re-exposed to history rather than removed from it.”<sup>231</sup> The protagonist is unable to work through or let go of her transhistorical trauma. This drives the protagonist’s actions from the beginning of the plot to the end, where, ironically, she inflicts trauma on another nation.

#### REVENGE AS THE MANIFESTATION OF TRAUMA

The book’s ending is rather unsatisfying because it does not offer any hope of recovery from trauma; instead, it indulges in a revenge fantasy. Towards the end of the novel, the massacre of the Mugenese takes place. This horrid act is carried out by the protagonist herself after she learns about the inhuman experiments the Mugenese carried out on her people, the Speerlies: “After the First Poppy War, the Federation became obsessed with your people . . . They spent the decades in between the Poppy Wars kidnapping Speerlies, experimenting on them, trying to figure out what made them special.”<sup>232</sup> These detailed experiments in the novel correspond with the biological human experiments carried out by Unit 731 in China during the Japanese invasion.<sup>233</sup> This strengthens the connection between real-life events in the war that inspired the book and the plot.

The realisation of what the Mugenese did to her ancestors makes the protagonist seek vengeance without considering the consequences of her actions. Runin decides to end the war and the constant death and suffering surrounding her. Furious after the death of Altan, her only remaining compatriot, she swears to avenge all the deaths she witnessed or learnt about when studying her nation’s history.

The protagonist bears not only her own individual trauma caused by war, but also the transhistorical trauma of the Speerlies. Collective trauma is often the result of historical oppression, which is represented in the book as a “long-term, systematically reinforced condition.”<sup>234</sup> This condition, for Runin, manifests itself in what Marianne Hirsch defines as “postmemory,” since she does not live through her nation’s previous suffering but continuously learns about and is affected by it.<sup>235</sup> Although she does not experience the trauma of the Speerly people directly, Runin feels considerable anger towards those who injured her nation. She aims to take revenge for all the suffering her nation, the Speerlies, had to endure at the hands of the Federation.

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<sup>231</sup> Quoted in Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing*, 62.

<sup>232</sup> Kuang, *The Poppy War*, chap. 24.

<sup>233</sup> David M. Gordon, “Historiographical Essay: The China-Japan War, 1931-1945,” *The Journal of Military History* 70, no. 1 (2006): 178.

<sup>234</sup> Kanza and Thoyibi, “Ethnic Oppression,” 381.

<sup>235</sup> Quoted in Kanza and Thoyibi, “Ethnic Oppression,” 386.

After learning about the tragic lives of her ancestors, Runin heads to the Island of Speer to summon the Phoenix again and ask it to destroy the Federation of Mugen for good. As on previous occasions, Runin calls upon the supernatural being while she is burning with rage. The protagonist first, does not understand the root of her constant anger and need for revenge that consume her thoughts. She calls the Phoenix repeatedly, on certain occasions even unwillingly, but in this scene, she gives in to her fury and calls the god consciously in hopes to avenge the brutalities her ancestors had to experience. As Runin learns more about her ancestors' experiences of war and brutality, it becomes apparent to the reader that her rage is the manifestation of the trauma inherited from her ancestors. As Caruth explains, "One feels anger, guilt, or shame whenever one is unable (refuses) to accept the necessity and unavoidability of what happened."<sup>236</sup> Thus, trauma can lead to anger, which is the case with the protagonist of *The Poppy War*. Runin's fury that comes from her post-traumatic state underscores the connection between her and the Phoenix, which makes an appearance when Runin is haunted by traumatic memories and therefore feels insecure, helpless, and angry.

Throughout the first book, Runin summons the Phoenix three times without the help of any poppy seeds or herbs that in the book help Shamans reach gods. On the first occasion, she is still not completely familiar with the practices of shamanism, and during her school evaluation, she is filled with rage towards her classmate, Nezha, the son of one of the most powerful military leader, the Dragon Warlord. Having been slapped in the face, Runin feels inferior, humiliated, and very angry. She lets her experienced emotions overpower her: "She couldn't breathe. Black tinged the edges of her vision—black, and then scarlet. An awful rage filled her, consumed her thoughts entirely. She needed revenge like she needed to breathe. She wanted Nezha to hurt. She wanted Nezha punished."<sup>237</sup>

The second occasion on which Runin summons the Phoenix is similar to the first one since Runin is slapped again, this time, by a person close to her, Altan: "She stood up, even as she reached somewhere inside herself—somewhere spiteful and dark and horrible—and opened the channel to the entity she already knew was waiting for her summons. The room pitched forward as if viewed through a long scarlet prism. The familiar burn was back in her veins, the burn that demanded blood and ashes."<sup>238</sup> In both scenes, the causes of Runin's rage are similar: humiliation and hurt pride, as a result of which revenge consumes her thoughts. This unbridled anger allows the Phoenix to control her. Black and scarlet are the colours, which signal the return of the deity. Scarlet symbolises fire, and black represents destruction, which is the main aim of the god. The Phoenix is not depicted as a symbol of rebirth but as a god that wants to cause pain and suffering: "And for the gifts of the Phoenix, you will pay the most. The Phoenix wants suffering. The Phoenix wants blood."<sup>239</sup> "The familiar burn" refers to the

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<sup>236</sup> Caruth, *Trauma*, 83.

<sup>237</sup> Kuang, *The Poppy War*, chap. 7.

<sup>238</sup> Kuang, *The Poppy War*, chap. 19.

<sup>239</sup> Kuang, *The Poppy War*, chap. 9.

protagonist's being ablaze, representing her suppressed rage and pain, which she shares with Altan, the only other Speerly who can invoke their patron god.

In the last scene in which Runin seeks help from the Phoenix, she ultimately dooms herself by inflicting trauma upon a whole nation, not healing but repeating and reliving her trauma. Her actions result in the death of thousands of Muganese people. Thus, she commits the same atrocity that she wanted to avenge. Runin achieves her goal and destroys the Federation but refuses to face the reality of what she has done to the people on the Island of Mugen. She aims to dismiss the traumatising nature of her own action in hopes to end the continual suffering and death that war brought upon the Empire. Runin claims that the lives she ends in a matter of seconds do not matter. Thus, she completely dehumanises her victims: "The lives were so many that she ceased to acknowledge them for what they were. Those weren't lives. She thought of the pathetic little noise a candle wick made when she licked her fingers and pinched it. She thought of incense sticks fizzling out when they had burned to the end."<sup>240</sup> The quote shows that her goal is to eliminate any guilt she might feel if she realised the full enormity of her actions.

The narrator conveys the protagonists' thoughts through free indirect discourse on the mass murder of not only soldiers, but also millions of civilians. By conveying the protagonist's thoughts via this narrative tool, the narration emphasises the feelings of anger and hunger for revenge that stems from collective transhistorical trauma. Ironically, while Runin fights to avenge the brutality she and her ancestors had to suffer, she ends up inflicting the same trauma on a whole nation.

#### THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF WORKING THROUGH TRAUMA

There is only one instance when Runin attempts to process her trauma, and it is not any of those scenes in which she calls upon gods or relies on their help to endure painful events. In the second part of the book, fantasy elements and military activities become closely intertwined, and, as the story progresses, supernatural events gain more significance in the plot. After the first victory in Sineward, the war continues, and Runin becomes part of the Cike, a special force of shamans responsible for the safety of the Empress, Su Daji. The Cike, and therefore Runin, commanded by Altan, are sent to Khurdalain to protect the city from the Federation. After an attack by the Muganese, which results in a great number of casualties, the city is invaded by a mythical being called the chimei. Originating in Chinese mythology, a chimei is a malevolent demon with a human face and an animal body, and it haunts forests and mountains. The narrator describes the entity as a "long-limbed beast"<sup>241</sup> with a face covered in black fur before its features transform to resemble the countenance of a person's loved one to enchant people and kill them.

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<sup>240</sup> Kuang, *The Poppy War*, chap. 25.

<sup>241</sup> Kuang, *The Poppy War*, chap. 17.

The appearance of the chimei is the only time when the protagonist is able to face the supernatural and attempts to work through her trauma. The passage below is another example of the combination of supernatural elements and interior monologues in a time of crisis:

It was a terrifying power of the chimei's that the more it burned, the more it looked like Altan. Rin's heart slammed against her rib cage. *Close your mind. Block out your thoughts. Don't think. Don't think. Don't think. Don't . . .*

But she couldn't detach Altan's likeness from the chimei. They were one and the same. She loved it, she loved him, and he was going to kill her. Unless she killed him first.<sup>242</sup>

Besides facing the horrors of war and the attack from their enemy, Runin has to fight the very thing that she relies on most of the time when she experiences hardship and traumatising events: the supernatural itself. This is the only time when Runin does not have to face an oppressor that aims to diminish her. The protagonist must overcome her emotions without feeling the urge to call the Phoenix: "She didn't have the poppy seed, but she didn't need to call the Phoenix in this moment. She had the torch and she had the pain, and that was enough."<sup>243</sup> The torch refers to the fire that is connected to the god, which takes control of the protagonist's actions and decisions when invoked. Runin uses the torch to burn the Chimei's face without any magical intervention, only relying on her own strength of mind to carry out her plan against the magical entity.

This scene has a symbolic significance in terms of the protagonist's character development. Although the outcome of the event seems to be the same - an enemy is burnt by Runin - the underlying result is much more thought-provoking. This is the only incident that does not haunt Runin later in the book because, this time, she is able to stop the chain of unfortunate events. She defies the supernatural and does not let it compel her to commit atrocities that traumatise others and repeat her own trauma. By facing the obstacle she encounters without soliciting the intervention of the Phoenix, Runin is able to conquer the mythical being and free the city from the Chimei's sinister influence. Thus, the protagonist overcomes a painful experience only when she does not surrender herself to the Phoenix, the main symbol of her anger that stems from the collective transhistorical trauma she experiences.

## CONCLUSION

Trauma has been studied from various aspects since Freud's theories on psychoanalysis, but the field of humanities-based trauma studies emerged only in the 1990s. Due to the obscure nature of trauma, its representation is the subject of debate in the field of humanities-based trauma theory. One area of disagreement is the extent of Eurocentric biases and limitations in dealing with different traumatic events. As this paper argues, studying fictional narratives, trauma novels that depict traumatic events is essential for the discipline since they contribute to the discourse by providing a variety of depictions of

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<sup>242</sup> Kuang, *The Poppy War*, chap. 17.

<sup>243</sup> Kuang, *The Poppy War*, chap. 17.

traumatic events. Engagement with new perspectives and new forms of narratives that represent trauma results in a more inclusive trauma theory.

Rebecca F. Kuang's *The Poppy War* represents trauma by means of narrative tools, namely free indirect speech and interior monologue, and supernatural elements. These narrative techniques, used when the protagonist encounters the supernatural, bring the feelings of the protagonist closer to the reader and provide insight into the main character's individual and transhistorical trauma. It is clearly visible through the emotions that are conveyed by free indirect discourse and interior monologue that fantasy elements almost always hinder the process of working through trauma. This is because the supernatural is represented by the god of destruction, which does not offer a way for Runin to process or escape her painful experiences. On the contrary, in most cases, it forces her to relive them. Furthermore, her fury that stems from not only her own, but also her nation's collective trauma, is closely connected to the Phoenix, which wants to feed Runin's negative feelings to control her. Therefore, Runin's trauma manifests itself in rage and a constant desire for revenge. Because her trauma remains unconscious, it is primarily expressed through the supernatural.

The only instance when the protagonist stops reliving, and ultimately, repeating her traumatic experiences in the form of conquering the chimei, the scene where she faces her fears on her own and rejects the supernatural. Runin relies on her real-world abilities to destroy a supernatural entity. This results in her victory over the supernatural in several ways. Firstly, the protagonist faces, fights against, and conquers the supernatural beast. Secondly, she refuses to invoke the Phoenix, which means that Runin turns away from the embodiment of her anger connected to her traumatic memories, and refuses to surrender herself to her rage and pain. Thus, Runin is able to prevent further trauma and heal from the experience. In this novel, therefore, the supernatural does not offer new strategies for healing, quite the opposite. The protagonist must reject the supernatural and face her own fears in order to recover from her trauma.

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# A (SOCIO)LINGUISTIC INQUIRY INTO IGBO-ENGLISH CODE-SWITCHING

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## ABSTRACT

Igbo is one of the major indigenous languages spoken in Nigeria and parts of West Africa, where English was introduced through colonisation and remains the official language. This study explores how an Igbo-English bilingual speaker uses code-switching as both a linguistic strategy and a sociolinguistic practice. Using discourse analysis of a BBC Igbo interview, the research applies Muysken's typology and Poplack's constraints to identify patterns in code-switched speech. The findings show that the code-switched speech reflects bilingual competence, aligns with grammatical rules of both languages, and contributes to the nativisation of English in Nigeria. The paper shows how code-switching expresses identity and cultural affiliation and adapts English to local contexts in post-colonial multilingual Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, a linguistically and culturally diverse country, is home to over 500 indigenous languages, spread across six geopolitical zones. Despite this remarkable linguistic diversity, English serves as the country's official *lingua franca*. The prominence of English in Nigeria is rooted in the country's colonial history. Therefore, the Nigerian linguistic environment presents an intriguing case of ongoing interaction between indigenous languages and a dominant foreign language.

This phenomenon is particularly relevant to the study of bilingualism and code-switching, two phenomena that are characteristic of multilingual contexts such as Nigeria. Bilingualism is defined by Weinreich as "the practice of alternately using two languages."<sup>244</sup> This practice often results in the fluid switching between linguistic codes within a conversation, commonly known as code-switching.<sup>245</sup> Code-switching is a widespread linguistic practice among Nigeria's multilingual speakers, especially among those fluent in both their indigenous language and English.<sup>246</sup> Code-switching is more than a mere linguistic occurrence since it reflects broader sociocultural issues, power dynamics, and the ways in

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<sup>244</sup> Uriel Weinreich, *Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems* (De Gruyter Mouton, 1979), 1.

<sup>245</sup> Sule Kavak and Ebru Deretarla Gül, "Bilingualism in Early Childhood: Code Switching.," *Psycho-Educational Research Reviews* 9, no. 3 (December 1, 2020), 71-72 <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1286601.pdf>

<sup>246</sup> Coc Chukueggu, "Diglossia and Code Switching in Nigeria: Implications for English Language Teaching and Learning," *African Research Review* 4, no. 3 (September 29, 2010), 156.

which speakers navigate both global and local linguistic landscapes. In Nigeria, where English is the language of formal education, governance, and formal communication, code-switching reflects not only linguistic competence, but also cultural adaptation.

The interaction between English and indigenous languages like Igbo contributes to the nativisation process, in which English is adapted and transformed to fit communicative expectations. Kachru defines nativisation as the process whereby a language that is appropriated by a group is tuned to the requirements of that group so that it fits their sociocultural needs.<sup>247</sup> This phenomenon is related to the evolution of English as it is shaped by contact with indigenous languages.

Bilingualism and code-switching have been central topics in sociolinguistic research for decades due to their importance in understanding language use in multilingual communities. Code-switching, defined by Hymes as the “alternate use of two or more languages, varieties of a language, or even speech styles,”<sup>248</sup> reflects the vitality of interaction between languages in bilingual speakers’ linguistic practices. Poplack further refines this definition by stating that code-switching is “the alternation of two languages within a single discourse, sentence, or constituent.”<sup>249</sup> Since code-switching helps to understand how bilingualism functions in various contexts, it has become an important area of investigation. Bilingualism supplies the linguistic flexibility necessary for code-switching, while code-switching itself represents the practical manifestation of bilingual language use.<sup>250</sup>

Grosjean defines bilinguals as individuals who use two or more languages (or dialects) in their daily lives, shifting the focus from fluency and equal proficiency to actual language use in various contexts. This more inclusive view acknowledges that bilingualism exists on a spectrum, where individuals employ different languages for different purposes and at varying levels of competence. Grosjean observes that, when a bilingual speaker interacts with a monolingual speaker, communication typically occurs in the language both parties share. Variations may arise in terms of style or formality. For instance, shifts may occur from an informal to an intimate tone, or from an informal to a formal one, among other possibilities. However, in the case of bilinguals with a shared linguistic background, this phenomenon becomes significantly more intricate, encompassing aspects beyond mere language choice and involving practices such as code-switching.<sup>251</sup> By navigating between languages, individuals can communicate aspects of their heritage and social affiliations. Therefore, code-switching functions as a means of expressing cultural identity.

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<sup>247</sup> Cited in Serges Moïse Essossomo, “The Fallacy of Promoting Non-native Varieties of English in Postcolonial Multilingual Settings: The Case of Cameroon English (CAME) in Cameroon,” *Journal of Education and Practice* 6, no. 31 (January 1, 2015): 96.

<sup>248</sup> Dell Hymes, *Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974), 103.

<sup>249</sup> Shana Poplack, “Sometimes I’ll Start a Sentence in Spanish Y Termino En Español: Toward a Typology of Code-switching”, *CENTRO working papers, Language Policy Task Force*, no 4 (March 1, 1979), 7.

<sup>250</sup> Cited in François Grosjean, *Bilingual: Life and Reality* (Harvard University Press, 2010), 4.

<sup>251</sup> Cited in Samira Abdel Jalil, “Grammatical Perspectives on Code-Switching,” *ReVEL* 7, no. 13 (2009), 2.

In the context of Nigeria, code-switching between English and indigenous languages like Igbo is particularly prevalent. Obiamalu and Mbagwu focused on the motivations and prevalence of code-switching among Igbo-English bilinguals, examining linguistic, sociopsychological, and historical factors. They made a distinction between code-switching and borrowing, arguing that borrowing involves the transfer of words from one language to another, often with phonological and morphological adaptation, while code-switching introduces unassimilated words from another language. The authors claim that Igbo speakers code-switch more frequently than other linguistic groups in Nigeria, such as Hausa and Yoruba. According to Obiamalu and Mbagwu, this may be due to the colonial imposition of English in Nigeria as well as the Igbo people's receptivity to change and admiration for the English. They identify several factors that contribute to the prevalence of Igbo-English code-switching. One such factor is subconscious linguistic behaviour. This means that code-switching has become so habitual for many Igbo-English bilinguals that it occurs without deliberate intention. Another factor is the lack of lexical equivalents for certain modern or abstract concepts in Igbo, which necessitates a switch to English in order to express such ideas more precisely. These factors illustrate that both habit and the limitations of the language influence code-switching practices among Igbo speakers.<sup>252</sup>

Ugwuanyi and Aboh observe that the spread of English due to globalisation and its dominant status in Nigeria because of colonialism have greatly influenced language use in the country.<sup>253</sup> This idea is arguably rooted in Kachru's nativisation hypothesis, according to which nativisation occurs when English, transplanted into non-native settings, acquires new forms and meanings aligned with the local linguistic and cultural contexts.<sup>254</sup> This process involves the adaptation of English to the linguistic and discursal features of the traditional language or languages that are available to the members of a particular group. In the nativisation process, the existing usage of English may not fully capture the social realities of a local group. As a result, the language must be adapted to reflect the group's unique sociocultural context.<sup>255</sup> This process is particularly characteristic of Nigeria, where code-switching has become a mechanism through which English is adapted to, and integrated into, local speech, resulting in the emergence of new varieties.

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the linguistic dimensions of code-switching between Igbo and English in one short dialogue. By analysing the structural interactions between Igbo and English within individual utterances, the study seeks to uncover whether such alternations follow identifiable linguistic rules and whether both languages retain their grammatical integrity during the switch. In addition, it considers how the practice of switching between two languages affects the

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<sup>252</sup> Obiamalu Greg O and Mbagwu Davidson U, "Motivations for Code-Switching among Igbo English Bilinguals: A Linguistic and Sociopsychological Survey," *OGIRISI: A New Journal of African Studies* 5, no. 1 (2010): 27-36.

<sup>253</sup> Ugwuanyi, Kingsley O., and Soporuchi Christian Aboh. "Nigerian English: History, Functions and Features." *World Englishes*, no. 0883-2919 (February 13, 2025), 1-2 <https://doi.org/10.1111/weng.12732>

<sup>254</sup> Kachru, "World Englishes: Approaches, Issues and Resources," *Language Teaching* 25, no. 1 (1992): 178. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0261444800006583>

<sup>255</sup> Essossomo, "Promoting Non-Native Varieties," 96.

linguistic accuracy of the speaker examined. The study investigates whether code-switching facilitates or hinders bilingual communication and aims to shed light on the linguistic processes involved in how bilinguals navigate and manage two linguistic systems.

Furthermore, this study aims to contribute, though minimally, to the understanding of the process of nativisation, in which English is adapted and transformed through contact with indigenous languages like Igbo. Bamgbose explains that when an exoglossic<sup>256</sup> language becomes an official language in a country, this second language is bound to be influenced by the linguistic and cultural environment of the native language.<sup>257</sup> By analysing the ways in which code-switching reflects the indigenisation of English, the research seeks to illuminate the ongoing linguistic changes that arise from language contact in the post-colonial setting of Nigeria. The analysis shows that languages evolve in response to local cultural and linguistic environments, resulting in the emergence of hybrid linguistic forms that reflect both global and local influences. Through an approach that combines linguistic analysis with sociolinguistic interpretations, this study seeks to answer the following research question: How do selected instances of code-switching between Igbo and English illustrate patterns and mechanisms of bilingual language use?

## METHODS

This research adopts a qualitative method, namely discourse analysis, to examine a short conversation between two bilingual speakers. The short excerpt was chosen to provide an introductory analysis of the topic, as its high concentration of code-switching within a brief segment makes it particularly suitable for detailed linguistic examination. The qualitative approach allows for an in-depth examination of code-switching in a real-life interaction, which is shaped by both linguistic and sociolinguistic factors.

The analytical framework of this study is Muysken's typology of bilingual speech, which divides code-switching into three primary processes: insertion, alternation, and congruent lexicalisation. Each of these processes offers insights into the structural patterns of code-switching. For example, insertion refers to the embedding of materials, such as lexical items or entire constituents, of one language into the grammatical structure of another. In contrast, alternation involves switching between the grammatical structures of two different languages within a discourse.<sup>258</sup> These categories help to examine how speakers switch between languages in multilingual environments. However, in this study's data, congruent lexicalisation, where different elements of the languages share a lexical inventory, is not fully realised due to the clear separation between Igbo and English. Therefore, data analysis will focus on insertion and alternation.

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<sup>256</sup> "An exoglossic language is pertaining to or characterized by the use of a language or variety which is not native to a region, but which nevertheless exercises cultural, political, or economic influence, esp. as an official norm" (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary).

<sup>257</sup> Ayo Bamgbose, "Introduction," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 141, no. 1 (2000): 1.

<sup>258</sup> Pieter Muysken, *Bilingual Speech: A Typology of Code-Mixing* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3.

This paper also draws on Poplack's two syntactic constraints that govern code-switching: the free-morpheme constraint and the equivalence constraint.<sup>259</sup> The free morpheme constraint states that "no switch can occur between a lexical form and a bound morpheme unless that lexical form is phonologically integrated into the language of the bound morpheme," while the equivalence constraint predicts the occurrence of code-switching at points where the surface structures of both languages map onto each other without violating the grammatical rules of either.<sup>260</sup> This framework is useful for understanding the grammatical and pragmatic factors that shape bilingual speech.

The primary data source for this study is a semi-structured BBC interview, which is fifty-eight seconds long and involves two individuals. Although the conversation was guided by specific questions, the interviewee, a bilingual speaker named Maria, responded in a natural, spontaneous manner. This setting allows the observation of authentic language use. The interview was transcribed verbatim to capture the instances of code-switching between Igbo and English. The goal of the speech analysis is to identify the form and structure of code-switching and examine its social implications.

## RESULTS

The interview extract was divided into 19 segments, each corresponding roughly to a complete utterance or sentence spoken by the interviewee. These segments were determined based on grammatical and pragmatic completeness. Thus, each change in topic, pause, or independent clause formed the basis for a new numbered segment. This segmentation allows a systematic analysis of code-switching instances.

Within each numbered segment, the Igbo elements are italicised to visually distinguish them from English, whereas the translated English version is provided in quotation marks. Grammatical glosses are also provided at the word or phrase level. This linguistic annotation facilitates the application of Poplack's constraints, that is, the identification of switches as insertions or alternations. The acronyms, such as 1SG.SUBJ, 3SG.MASC.NOM, and INF, are standard linguistic glossing abbreviations that explain the grammatical function of each word, for example, first person singular subject, third person singular masculine nominative, and infinitive. These help to clarify how the two languages interact at a structural level.

First, the transcript is presented to provide the original discourse data, then the analysis that follows incorporates critical commentary on the relevance to existing theories on bilingualism and code-switching.

### **Maria:**

Ndi Igbo ekenem unu

Thank you for having me on here

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<sup>259</sup> Poplack, "Typology of Code-Switching," 12-13.

<sup>260</sup> Cited in Jalil, "Grammatical Perspectives," 5.

Chineke gozicha unu

Ya shi daddy m diri ndu as of today o ga gba mu akanti

Ọ na-ajụ m gi ebolekedu ebe m na-aga na TV niile ara o chala gi

So, ma gwa ya, amadi m ihe nkwe ejega Big brother, but it's something that imala na obi m ncho i try

O si hmm... ihe a awukwa nsi hu gi. I wu gi a very open person

Amaghikwa m ma i ma ihe Big brother bu I kputa

Your life is no longer....everybody ga mara ihe gbasara gi

Arighi mi ime o, o digi possible, not yet

Before i bughị onye ala beke

**Interviewer:** I wu onye ocha wu onye Nigeria

**Maria:**

Awum kwa onye ocha oh

Kelo m kpa m chaga?

Ndi Igbo thank you

Apparently, most of my supporters were ndi Igbo

So, thank you for emm... nagba am as... In fact, yawu a nagba m

okwa war o

Because a wum nwa afor, so, you people have to nagba m

So, thank you for all the love

(Excerpts from Maria's interview with BBC Igbo correspondent)<sup>261</sup>

### **Word/Phrase/Syntactic level**

1. *Ndi*                    *Igbo*                    *ekenem*                    *unu*

People- PL.NOM    Igbo    I- 1SG.SUBJ greet    you- 2PL.OBJ

"I greet you Igbo people"

[This line is in Igbo with no code-switch.]

2. Thank you for having me on here

[This line is in English with no code-switch.]

3. *Chineke gozicha unu*

God            bless-PFV.IMP            you-2PL.OBJ all

"God bless you all"

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<sup>261</sup> Maria Chike Agueze, "Maria Speaks Igbo Like a Pro," posted by gloriakelly88, September 12, 2021, BBC Igbo, YouTube, 0:58.

[This line is in Igbo with no code-switch.]

4. *Ya shi* daddy *m* *diri* *ndu* as of today  
 if(assuming)- COND daddy my- 1SG.POSS was-PST alive as of today  
*o* *ga* *gba (mu) akanti*  
 he- 3SG.MASC.NOM would (me)- 1SG.OBJ slap

“If my daddy was alive as of today, he would slap me”

This sentence includes both Igbo and English elements but functions primarily within Igbo grammatical structures. It implies an informal context while incorporating English expressions, which aligns with the insertion mechanism. It conforms to the equivalence constraint, as it combines phrases from both languages, allowing a switch as the structure is grammatically compatible.]

5. *Q* *na* *aju* *m* *gi ebolekedu ebe*  
 He- 3SG.MASC.NOM would ask me-1SG.OBJ where- WH.LOC  
*m na-aga na* TV *niile* *ara* *o chala gi?*

I am going to- PRS.CONT TV all mad are you- 2SG?

“He would ask me where I am going to with all the TV, are you mad”

[“O chala gi:” This is an expression that mostly goes with “ara” to form a rhetorical question, which is used for inquiring into the unusual behaviour of a person. The sentence uses Igbo structure and lexicon and inserts the English word 'TV', showcasing insertion as the dominant mechanism. the insertion of “TV” does not violate the free morpheme constraint, as it is a free morpheme that is not bound to any Igbo affix or morpheme.]

6. So, *ma* *gwa* *ya,* *amadi* *m*  
 So, I-1SG.NOM told-PST him-3SG.MASC.OBJ don't know-NEG I-1SG.NOM

*ihe nkwe ejega* Big brother, but it's something that

why I want to go to- INF Big brother but it's something that

*imala na obi m ncho i* try

know in-PREP heart my- 1SG.POSS I want to try

“So, I told him I don't know why I want to go to big brother, but it's something I know in my heart I want to try.”

[The utterance starts in English with “so”, transitions to Igbo, then back to English. This demonstrates alternation as the speaker shifts languages within a single utterance, which indicates bilingual proficiency. The insertion of “so” at the beginning follows the equivalence constraint, as it starts a new independent clause. The switch back to Igbo is syntactically appropriate since the insertion of the English word “try” helps to form an infinitive construction that blends elements of both Igbo and English (“i try”).]

7. *O si* hmm... *ihe a awukwa nsi hu gi. I wu gi* a very open  
 He- 3SG. MASC said hmm... that's not how I see you. You are not you-2SG.NOM, a very open  
 person.'

person

“He said hmm... that’s not how I see you, you’re not a very open person”

[This line shows alternation as it moves between Igbo and English, demonstrating the interplay of both languages. It begins in Igbo and incorporates an English phrase, possibly to add emphasis or convey a particular sentiment more effectively. English terms can carry specific subtleties or emphasis that might not translate directly into Igbo. This is particularly true for concepts that may feel more neutral or “polite” in English. By switching languages, the speaker may be reinforcing the intended meaning or tone of “a very open person”. The switch occurs at a grammatical juncture, so it aligns with the equivalence constraint; thus, it allows code-switching.]

8. *Amaghikwa m ma i ma ihe* Big brother *bu I kputa*  
 don't know- NEG.CONT I if you know what Big brother is-COP you leave  
 “I don’t know if you know what big brother is after you leave.”

In Igbo, verbs do not show tense the same way English verbs do. So, this would be translated as “I don’t know if you will know what Big Brother is after you leave.”

[This line includes the English phrase “Big brother” within an Igbo sentence.]

This alternation shows how bilingual speakers navigate language choice depending on the communicative context; in this case, shifting to English for the culturally specific reference to *Big Brother*, which may be more readily understood or carry more precise connotations in English than in Igbo. It demonstrates a successful switch between languages without violating the syntactic structure of either, and it adheres to both the free-morpheme and equivalence constraints.

9. Your life is no longer....everybody *ga mara ihe gbasara gi*  
 your life is no longer...everybody will-FUT know things-PL about-PREP you  
 “Your life is no longer...Everybody will know things about you”

[This sentence starts in English after a pause with the English word “everybody” and ends with Igbo words. This combination fits well into the syntactic structure of both languages without any alteration.]

This shows that the speaker fluidly alternates between the two languages. Whether she uses English or Igbo depends on the concept she wishes to convey. The English word precedes the Igbo clause and conforms to the equivalence constraint. The sentence structure is compatible with both languages; therefore, it allows this switch. Also, the speaker left the English sentence unfinished. This interruption or abandonment may indicate a shift in communicative focus, possibly triggered by the bilingual context or the speaker’s preference to complete the thought in Igbo.

10. *Arighi mi ime, o digi* possible, not yet  
won't-NEG I-1SG.NOM do it-3SG.NOM is not possible not yet

“I won’t do it; it is not possible not yet”

[This line is mostly in Igbo but an English phrase is inserted at the end of the sentence.]

This sentence combines Igbo and English, demonstrating that alternation can express a complete thought across language boundaries. It illustrates code-switching as it moves from Igbo to English without disrupting the sentence structure. The transition occurs between phrases, adhering to the equivalence constraint.]

11. Before *i bughị onye ala beke*  
before you are not person land white

“Before you’re not a person from abroad”

[This line is in Igbo but starts with an English word.]

This sentence uses an Igbo structure with English influence. It illustrates that the speaker’s choice of language is context-dependent, as earlier stated. The structure allows this switch as it follows the equivalence constraint.]

12. *I wu onye ocha wu onye* Nigeria  
you are person white are person Nigeria

“You are a mix of a white person and Nigerian”

[This line is mostly in Igbo with the insertion of “Nigeria.” This sentence conveys its intended meaning and maintains its integrity with an appropriate insertion without compromising the grammaticalness of the structure.]

13. *Awum kwa onye ocha*  
I’m not person white

“I’m not a white person”

[This line is in Igbo with no code-switch.]

The speaker’s immediate response to the interviewer’s reference to her mixed race is delivered entirely in Igbo. This choice suggests a heightened emotional reaction, as she draws on her heritage language to assert her identity and align herself with the in-group. Her later emphasis on being “native” and deserving acceptance from other natives reinforces this positioning, indicating that language choice here is not only a matter of code-switching mechanics but also a strategic sociolinguistic act to negotiate belonging and counter any perceived questioning of her identity.

14. *Kelo m kpa m chaga?*

how I look

“Is it because of my complexion?”

[This line is in Igbo with no code-switch.]

15. *Ndi Igbo* thank you

People Igbo thank you

[This line features Igbo and English elements in equal measure.]

This is an insertion, a mix of Igbo and English. The shift to English does not violate any constraint, as it occurs at a natural boundary between phrases, maintaining grammatical compatibility.]

16. Apparently most of my supporters were *ndi Igbo*

Apparently, most of my supporters were people Igbo

[This line includes the Igbo phrase “*ndi Igbo*” within an English sentence.]

This sentence contains both English and Igbo elements. “*Ndi Igbo*” is used in a way that adheres to the equivalence constraint as the switch occurs at the end of the sentence.

17. So, thank you for emm... *nagba am* as... In fact, *ya wu*

So, thank you for emm accepting me-1SG.OBJ as... in fact, if-CONJ you

*a nagba m o kwa war*

had not- PST.NEG accepted me-1SG.OBJ It is war

“So, thank you for emm accepting me as... ah ah...in fact if you had not accepted me

It would have been war’

[This line includes a mix of the English and Igbo languages, such as the use of “thank you for emm...” (English) and “*nagba am...*” (Igbo).]

This sentence blends English and Igbo and is characterised by a casual speech style, with multiple code-switching instances. Each switch adheres to the equivalence constraint, allowing seamless transitions between languages. The switch to the English word “war”, despite the existence of an Igbo equivalent, may signal the speaker’s association of the term with a more global register, where it evokes a strong, direct, and perhaps hyperbolic sense of threat or conflict. In this context, using “war” in English may create rhetorical distance, framing the statement less as an actual threat among her own people and more as a dramatic, humorous exaggeration in line with the casual tone of the exchange.

18. Because *a wum nwa afor*, so, you people have to *nagba m*

because I am child native so you people have to accept-ASRT me

because I am a native, so you people have to accept me

[“*nwa afor*” is an Igbo expression that shows identification with Igbo ancestry. This line contains both English and Igbo elements, such as “*a wum nwa afor*” (Igbo).

This statement combines Igbo and English, illustrating that the speaker can navigate between languages without violating syntactic rules, adhering to the equivalence constraint. The switch here is more complex than a simple insertion. The English subject pronoun and modal construction (*you people have*

to) are followed by an Igbo verb (*nagba*, “accept”) and Igbo object pronoun (*m*, “me”). This layering of grammatical elements from both languages within a single clause (this is a usual linguistic construction in Igbo) demonstrates not only syntactic compatibility but also the speaker’s fluid command of mixed-language structures.

19. So, thank you for all the love

[This line is in English with no code-switch.]

Throughout the interview, the speaker demonstrates fluency in both Igbo and English, effortlessly switching between the two while largely adhering to the grammatical rules of each language. However, she occasionally hesitates when speaking in Igbo and shifts to English, a pattern likely influenced by her early language environment. As Ma et al. argue, a child’s language environment is a strong predictor of early language development.<sup>262</sup> Maria grew up in the United Kingdom, where English was dominant, and only learned Igbo later in life after relocating to Nigeria. This background likely accounts for the moments of hesitation and frequent switching to English during the interview.

## DISCUSSION

The analysis of code-switching between Igbo and English in the interview reveals that the two languages have significantly influenced each other, particularly in terms of syntax, phrases, word order, sentence starters, verb conjugation, and pronouns. The syntax of Igbo generally follows a Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) word order. Similarly, English uses the SVO word order in statements. This similarity facilitates code-switching within sentences such as “everybody ga mara ihe gbasara gi” (sentence 9). In this sentence, the placement of the verb “ga mara” aligns with English verb placement, making the switch linguistically and structurally accurate within the sentence.

Furthermore, the blending of phrases from both languages is prominent throughout the conversation. For example, in sentence 17, the phrase “So, thank you for...” retains the English structure while being embedded in an Igbo sentence. This blending demonstrates that the two languages can merge seamlessly, which allows the speaker to construct meaningful sentences without breaking syntactic rules.

The analysis reveals that there is a difference between the word order in Igbo and English phrases. English follows a head-final structure, where qualifiers typically precede the head noun, for example, in the phrase “white person”. In contrast, Igbo is a head-initial language, where the head noun precedes the qualifying elements; for example, “onye ocha” translates as “person white”. This difference between the two languages is evident in phrases like “Ndi Igbo” (sentence 15), which translates as “People Igbo”. Despite this minor structural disparity, the speaker maintains grammatical correctness in both linguistic systems.

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<sup>262</sup> Yue Ma et al., “Variations in the Home Language Environment and Early Language Development in Rural China,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18, no. 5 (March 6, 2021), 1. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18052671>.

In this speech sample, several linguistic features illustrate the nativisation of English. In sentence 11 (*Before i bughị onye ala beke*), the speaker adopts the English word 'before' into an otherwise Igbo sentence structure. While the use of 'before' in this position may appear ungrammatical or unclear in English, where 'before' is more typically used as a preposition or subordinating conjunction, it is structurally acceptable in Igbo, where an equivalent temporal or conditional connector can naturally begin a sentence. This shows the insertion of an English lexical item into an Igbo syntactic frame, highlighting how English elements can be adapted to fit local grammatical norms even when the result seems unconventional to monolingual English speakers.

Another noteworthy aspect of this bilingual speech extract is the use of pronouns. In Igbo, there are fewer pronouns than in English, and they do not express gender. For instance, "O ga gba mu akanti" (sentence 4) and "O digi possible, not yet" (sentence 10) both use the pronoun "O", which can refer to subjects of any gender ("he" in the first case and "it" in the second). This lack of gender differentiation in Igbo pronouns contrasts with the English system, where distinct pronouns are used for masculine, feminine, and neuter subjects. The absence of gender-specific pronouns in Igbo can present challenges for speakers of English when learning Igbo, as it requires a conceptual shift in how subjects are referenced.

The speaker's transitions between languages demonstrate her bilingual competence, even though her earlier hesitations suggest greater ease in English than in Igbo. The blending of languages is particularly evident in sentences like "Because a wum nwa afor, so, you people have to nagba m" (sentence 18), where she begins in English, switches to Igbo, reverts to English, and ends in Igbo, showcasing her ability to integrate both languages fluidly within a single utterance.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of this code-switching speech extract. The speaker balances effective communication with adherence to the syntactic rules of both languages. However, the pauses that occur before certain switches likely reflect the fact that Igbo is a later-acquired language for the speaker, learnt after relocating from the United Kingdom, where English was dominant. These pauses suggest that her Igbo proficiency has not yet reached the same level as her English, even though she now lives in a native Igbo-speaking environment. Finally, the syntactic mixing observed in the conversation does not necessarily lead to grammatical errors. Rather, it reflects the speaker's adeptness at manoeuvring within and between two linguistic systems.

The analysis of the speech data, which draws on Muysken's typology of bilingual speech and Poplack's constraints on code-switching, reveals several key patterns and strategies in the bilingual speaker's code-switching behaviour. The results demonstrate a sophisticated use of code-switching, which adheres to established linguistic models and constraints.

In terms of Muysken's typology of bilingual speech, insertion is one of the most frequently observed types of code-switching in the speech examined. For instance, in the sentence "O na aju m gi ebolekedu ebe m na-aga na TV niile ara o chala gi," (sentence 5) the speaker embeds the English noun "TV" into an Igbo sentence without disrupting the grammatical structure. Similarly, in "Because a wum nwa afor,

so, you people have to nagba m,” (sentence 18) the items “Because” and “so, you people have to” are inserted within a largely Igbo sentence. This illustrates that the speaker effortlessly integrates English phrases into her speech without altering the underlying Igbo syntax.

Alternation, another of Muysken’s types, occurs when the speaker switches between languages at clause or sentence boundaries. The speech frequently alternates between Igbo and English, as can be seen in the sentence “Ndi Igbo ekenem unu” (Igbo) (sentence 1), followed by “Thank you for having me on here” (English) (sentence 2). The switch happens between complete syntactic units, allowing a seamless transition between the two languages. Similarly, in “O na aju m gi ebolekedu ebe m na-aga na TV niile ara o chala gi” (Igbo), (sentence 5) followed by “So, ma gwa ya” (English/Igbo) (sentence 6), the alternation occurs at clause boundaries.

In terms of Poplack’s code-switching constraints, the speech generally adheres to the free morpheme constraint and the equivalence constraint. For instance, in “Ya shi daddy m diri ndu as of today o ga gba mu akanti” (sentence 4), “daddy” is a free morpheme that the speaker inserts into an Igbo sentence without disrupting the grammatical structure. Similarly, in “O si hmm... ihe a awukwa nsi hu gi. I wu gi a very open person” (sentence 7); the insertion of the English phrase “a very open person” respects both Igbo and English grammatical rules, maintaining the syntactic integrity of the sentence. The same example also shows that the speaker’s code-switching behaviour adheres to the equivalence constraint. In “I wu gi a very open person”, the switch between Igbo and English occurs without violating the grammatical rules of either language, as both syntactic structures are equivalent at the point of the switch.

In terms of frequency, insertion (13 occurrences) is the most dominant code-switching strategy observed in the speech, which suggests that English words and phrases are often embedded into Igbo discourse. Alternation (2 instances) also plays a significant role, allowing the speaker to fluidly switch between languages depending on the conversational context or topic.

Overall, the speech displays a sophisticated use of code-switching, adhering to both Muysken’s typology and Poplack’s constraints. The predominance of insertion and the consistent observance of syntactic rules in both Igbo and English demonstrates bilingual competence.

The answer to the research question of how selected instances of code-switching between Igbo and English illustrate patterns and mechanisms of bilingual language use is that the speech data reveal both the complications and fluidity of bilingualism. By inserting English words like “TV” or phrases like “Thank you,” the speaker demonstrates that English has become embedded in local speech, even in conversations primarily in Igbo. This reflects a linguistic shift that is characteristic of nativisation, where English is adapted to the local linguistic environment. The ability to switch languages at sentence or clause boundaries signals bilingualism, common among Nigerians who navigate both local and global spheres.

The speech also gives a limited insight into the sociolinguistic significance of code-switching in Nigerian society. The speaker’s use of Igbo when addressing the community with phrases such as “Ndi

Igbo ekenem unu” (“Greetings to the Igbo people”) reflects her cultural identity and affiliation with her local ethnic group. However, she switches to English to express formal gratitude or engage in topics like popular culture (Big Brother, a reality TV show), which suggests that English is used in more formal or globalised contexts. This linguistic behaviour mirrors the broader sociocultural divide in Nigeria, where English often symbolises modernity, education, and social mobility, while indigenous languages like Igbo are associated with local identity, tradition, and intimate or communal contexts.<sup>263</sup>

The analysis also supports my hypothesis that code-switching contributes to the evolution of language in Nigeria through the process of nativisation. The speech exemplifies that bilingual Nigerians contribute to this linguistic evolution by blending two distinct linguistic systems to create a hybridised form of communication that reflects both the global influence of English and the local relevance of Igbo.

In conclusion, the results of the analysis show that code-switching between Igbo and English is a sociolinguistic phenomenon that reflects the ongoing nativisation of English as it becomes embedded in Igbo speech patterns. This process demonstrates that code-switching plays a critical role in shaping communication patterns in multilingual Nigeria.

This study demonstrated the process of code-switching between Igbo and English through the utterances of a bilingual speaker. The analysis based on Muysken’s typology of bilingual speech and Poplack’s constraints on code-switching showed that the speaker exhibited bilingual competence. She switched between Igbo and English frequently and largely maintained grammatical integrity in both languages.

From a linguistic perspective, the study showed that code-switching has a significant influence on word order, verb conjugation, and sentence formation. The analysis revealed that code-switching does not occur randomly but follows systematic rules and reflects bilingual proficiency. The Igbo-English bilingual speaker used code-switching strategically, often switching at points where the structures of the two languages align.

However, the analysis of the speech of a single individual presents several limitations, such as small number of speakers, limited sociolinguistic variables, which may affect the generalisability of the findings, and using a large-scale conversation sample would improve the discussion as well. Thus, the study merely presents an interpretation of the individual speaker’s language practices in the speech extract, it does not claim to capture the diverse processes of code-switching across the Igbo bilingual community.

The findings of this study reveal the importance of code-switching in bilingual communities and raise several important questions for further research, such as the role of language dominance in shaping code-switching patterns and the cognitive aspect involved in Igbo-English code-switching is an area that remains underexplored.

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<sup>263</sup> Efurosibina Adegbija, *Language Attitudes in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Sociolinguistic Overview* (Clevedon, Avon; Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters, Ltd, 1994), 234.

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DICTIONARY USE HABITS AND THE IMPACT OF AN EXPLICIT  
DICTIONARY AWARENESS WORKSHOP ON HUNGARIAN UNIVERSITY  
STUDENTS' DICTIONARY USE STRATEGIES<sup>264</sup>

PINTÉR ORSOLYA

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ABSTRACT

Research has consistently shown the importance of dictionary use in language learning though the effectiveness of dictionary training needs further research. This study explores the impact of a short workshop on online dictionary skills, comparing previous findings with data from 65 Hungarian first-year English majors. An online questionnaire revealed that students mainly use digital dictionaries on electronic devices rather than paper-based ones, but are unaware of many available features, which may be due to a lack of formal instruction. Most students reported learning dictionary skills independently. Additionally, a task sheet was designed to assess learning outcomes through quantitative and qualitative analysis, comparing the trained treatment group ( $n = 40$ ) with an untrained control group ( $n = 25$ ). Results indicate that even brief training significantly improves dictionary skills, such as the ability to identify grammatical features, find synonyms and antonyms, locate collocations, and navigate entries. These findings support earlier research since they suggest that short, structured training can enhance learners' ability to use online dictionaries effectively and highlight the potential of short-term interventions for improving dictionary use skills.

INTRODUCTION

Although dictionary use has been studied since the 20th century, it remains underexplored in academic discourse, particularly in Hungary. Technological advancements have significantly transformed lexicography, leading to new dictionary formats and changing user habits. Understanding these shifts is essential for developing dictionaries that fully meet user needs.<sup>265</sup> However, few Hungarian studies have investigated dictionary usage or the impact of dictionary skills training.

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<sup>264</sup> This study is a shortened version of a master's thesis submitted to the Department of English Linguistics and the Institute of English Studies at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary in 2025, where it received an Institute Outstanding Thesis Award. This study extends a prior BA thesis (published online) with new data, addressing earlier methodological limits. Due to the limited scope of this study, a comprehensive review of the relevant literature is not included; however, readers interested in further exploration can consult the sources cited.

<sup>265</sup> Dringó-Horváth et al., "Szótárhasználati ismeretek vizsgálata német és angol szakot végzettek körében," *Modern Nyelvoktatás* 26, no. 4 (2020): 16.

In other countries, several studies have investigated the effectiveness of such programmes. Chi conducted a pre-test-post-test study with three groups (two experimental, one control, N = 186) and found that participants who received training demonstrated greater awareness of dictionaries' range of information beyond simple definitions. Limitations included the focus on first-year students and teachers from Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and multi-week interventions, leaving open questions about the efficiency of short-term training and characteristics of other populations.<sup>266</sup> Carduner implemented a similar study at an American university with three experimental groups but without a control group, thus the lack of a control group limited comparability.<sup>267</sup> Gavriilidou et al. examined Greek primary school students (grades 5–6) using pre-test-post-test-control group designs and observed improved dictionary awareness, but the findings cannot be generalisable to adult learners or to different settings.<sup>268</sup> These studies suggest that pre-test-post-test or control group designs are effective for assessing dictionary training, but prior research leaves gaps regarding different populations, shorter interventions, and context-specific applications. The current study addresses these limitations by investigating Hungarian first-year university students in a single 90-minute class using a post-test-only control group design, allowing for a targeted, time-efficient evaluation of dictionary awareness training.

Earlier studies indicate that only a limited number of in-depth investigations have been conducted in this field.<sup>269</sup> Consequently, this study seeks to fill this research gap by answering the following questions:

**RQ1:** What are the defining characteristics of dictionary use habits and preferences among first-year English majors?

**RQ2:** To what extent are participants aware of the various features offered by digital dictionaries?

**RQ3:** How effective was the short dictionary training in equipping students with the essential skills for proficient online dictionary use?

## METHODS

### OVERVIEW

The research involved 65 first-year BA English majors at Károli Gáspár University, divided into treatment and control groups. An online questionnaire was used to gather data on dictionary habits, while a task sheet assessed practical skills. Training was delivered through a Study Skills seminar class and followed by a comparative evaluation of the two groups' performances. The present study employs

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<sup>266</sup> Amy Chi, *An Empirical Study of the Efficacy of Integrating the Teaching of Dictionary Use into a Tertiary English Curriculum in Hong Kong* (Language Centre of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, 2003), 40.

<sup>267</sup> Jessie Carduner, "Productive Dictionary Skills Training: What Do Language Learners Find Useful?" *The Language Learning Journal* 28, no. 1 (2003): 71.

<sup>268</sup> Zoe Gavriilidou et al., "How Can We Raise Strategic Dictionary Use in the Classroom: The Effect of a Dictionary Awareness Program on Dictionary Use Strategies," *Lexikos* 34, no. 1 (2024): 105.

<sup>269</sup> Martina Nied Curcio, "Dictionaries, Foreign Language Learners and Teachers: New Challenges in the Digital Era," in *Dictionaries and Society: Proceedings of the XX EURALEX International Congress, 12–16 July 2022, Mannheim, Germany*, ed. A. Klosa-Kückelhaus et al., (IDS-Verlag, 2022), 74–75.

a quantitative research approach, namely a post-test-only control group design.<sup>270</sup> In addition to the analysis of numerical data, the printed task sheets were subjected to qualitative analysis to facilitate a more in-depth interpretation.

## PARTICIPANTS

The participants of the current research were first-year BA (bachelor's degree) students majoring in English Studies at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary. The study primarily focuses on the Hungarian context; therefore, to maintain the homogeneity of the research sample, only Hungarian students were included as participants.

In total,  $N = 65$  students took part in the investigation, out of whom  $n = 37$  were female (59.7%),  $n = 21$  were male (33.9%), and  $n = 4$  people (6.4%) did not want to identify their gender. There were three students who participated in one of the sessions and completed the task sheet but did not wish to fill out the online questionnaire; therefore, the total number of those who completed the survey is  $N = 62$ . There was no significant difference between participants' ages since they are currently studying in the first year of the English Studies BA programme. 90% were aged between 18 and 21 ( $n = 55$ ), and the average age was 20.

Secondary school students who wish to enrol in a BA program in British and American Studies at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary must pass the advanced English final exam. Consequently, at the time of the study, almost all respondents had obtained a language certificate at either the B2 or C1 level (according to the CEFR = Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), except two individuals who stated that they did not have language exam certificates. This is probably due to a misunderstanding since it is not straightforward in some cases that a passing score of 60% in the advanced English final exam at secondary school automatically gives a B2 level language certificate, while a score of 40% corresponds to a B1 level complex language qualification. 25% of the respondents ( $n = 15$ ) possessed a C1 level qualification, while 75% ( $n = 45$ ) held a B2 level certificate. Furthermore, participants were asked whether they had been learning English for ten years or less. The findings revealed that 56.5% ( $n = 35$ ) had more than ten years of experience with the language, whereas 43.5% ( $n = 27$ ) had been studying it for less than a decade.

Out of the total number of participants included in the study ( $N = 65$ ), 40 individuals were allocated to the treatment group and 25 to the control group through simple randomisation.

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<sup>270</sup> Preetha Krishnan, "A Review of the Non-Equivalent Control Group Post-Test-Only Design," *Nurse Researcher* 26, no. 2 (2019): 37–40; Barry Gribbons and Joan Herman, "True and Quasi-Experimental Designs," *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation* 5, no. 1 (1996), 2; Grant Morgan and Rachel Renbarger, "Posttest-Only Control Group Design," in *The SAGE Encyclopaedia of Educational Research, Measurement, and Evaluation*, ed. Bruce B. Frey (Sage Publications, 2018), 1279–1281.

## RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

In the current study, quantitative and qualitative data were obtained. A questionnaire and a post-test task sheet were developed to collect data for the study. The questionnaire aimed to gather information on participants' dictionary use habits, awareness, and preference. The post-test task sheet was designed to assess the practical application of dictionary skills: the treatment group completed it after the training, while the control group completed it before the instruction on the specific features of online dictionaries. A shortened version of the questionnaire utilised by Pintér was employed in this research.<sup>271</sup> The original questionnaire was adapted to fit the specific objectives of the research. This survey is grounded in a previous scientific study by P. Márkus et al., which was utilised for comparative data analysis.<sup>272</sup>

### THE ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE<sup>273</sup>

Participants were required to answer a total of 14 questions. Of these, 12 were related to dictionary use, while 2 focused on demographic information (age and gender). Additionally, 3 questions assessed participants' English proficiency based on their language exam certificates and the duration of their English language studies. The first six questions of the survey focused on participants' dictionary use habits and preferences. The next question aimed to gain data on their prior knowledge of dictionary skills and use. The last two questions concentrated on respondents' awareness of the unique features that online dictionaries can provide. Most responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale, which assigns numerical values to the responses ranging from one to five. The rating scales were structured as follows: Agreement (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree), Preference (1 = Least important, 5 = Most important), and Frequency (1 = Never, 5 = Regularly). Before the study commenced, participants were informed about its purpose and were assured of anonymity. Participants gave their consent before proceeding with the questionnaire and were required to answer all questions before submission. To enhance the comprehensibility of the survey questions, it was necessary to provide all the questionnaire items and the instructions for the test tasks in the students' native language. To avoid any potential confusion, the use of technical language was avoided in the questionnaire.<sup>274</sup>

### THE TASK SHEET

The task sheet consisted of a series of activities designed to evaluate whether participants in the treatment group could effectively use an online dictionary based on their acquired knowledge and skills. The same worksheet also examined the performance of control group members who had not participated

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<sup>271</sup> Pintér, "Dictionary Use," 116.

<sup>272</sup> Katalin P. Márkus et al., "Dictionary Skills in Teaching English and German as a Foreign Language in Hungary: A Questionnaire Study," *International Journal of Lexicography* 36, no. 1 (2023): 179–188.

<sup>273</sup> Due to length constraints, a detailed analysis of the questionnaire results is not possible; however, a summary is provided in the Methods section.

<sup>274</sup> Robert Lew, "Questionnaires in Dictionary Use Research: A Reexamination," in *Proceedings of the Tenth EURALEX International Congress, EURALEX 2002, 12–17 August 2002, Copenhagen, Denmark*, vol. 1, ed. A. Braasch and C. Povlsen (Center for Sprogteknologi, Copenhagen University, 2002), 267–271.

in the workshop. It comprised nine exercises, each targeting distinct features of online dictionaries. The tasks were designed to measure participants' ability to locate different types of information about given words effectively and individually within a dictionary entry in the online version of the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE: <https://www.ldoceonline.com>). The task sheet was designed to be completed within 45–50 minutes.

The first task required participants to identify different symbols within an entry. A picture of a dictionary entry with six circled symbols was provided, and participants were instructed to describe, in their own words, the meanings or denotations of the symbols.

In the second task, a table was provided containing three words and four different parts of speech (noun, verb, adjective, adverb). The participants' task was to mark, for each word, every part of speech in which the given word could potentially occur.

The third task aimed to assess whether the participants knew where words belonging to the same word family are listed within the online dictionary entry. Three words were provided, and participants were required to write down up to eight words that belong to the same word family as the given headwords.

The fourth task focused on locating collocations. Participants were asked to list a maximum of eight collocations for each of the three words listed. The task aimed to establish whether they knew where to find collocations within an entry.

In task five, students were asked to list synonyms and antonyms for the three words provided. Given that they could rely on their prior knowledge in this task, they were explicitly instructed to provide multiple examples for each. The main objective of the task was to see how well participants could navigate between multiple dictionary entries. For instance, if participants successfully found the antonym of the word “smart”, for example, “dumb”, they were encouraged to investigate further by identifying synonyms of “dumb” within other entries that could serve as additional antonyms of “smart.”

Task six focused on irregular plural forms of nouns as well as irregular past simple and past participle forms of verbs. Three words were selected for both categories, each specifically chosen for their less familiar irregular forms, making it necessary for participants to utilise a dictionary to identify their correct usage.

Task seven aimed to evaluate participants' ability to identify and interpret the location and marking of grammatical collocations in online dictionary entries, as well as to determine their awareness that example sentences are provided to illustrate correct grammatical usage and contextual meaning.

Task eight was designed to test students' ability to identify stylistic information, namely style labels such as *formal*, *informal*, *derogatory*, *slang*, related to a given vocabulary item, and to determine whether the item can be used in written or spoken contexts, in formal or informal settings.

Lastly, task nine addressed syllabification. Respondents were asked to mark all the possible places where the two relatively long words could be separated by a hyphen at the end of a line.

## DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data collection took place between September 23, 2024, and December 03, 2024. The questionnaire, created with Google Forms, was available exclusively in Hungarian. The task sheet was specifically designed for the current study to assess participants' skills and knowledge related to dictionary use. The task sheet underwent a review process, during which professional feedback was sought and incorporated to ensure its effectiveness and suitability for its purpose.

The workshop was conducted on four separate occasions, each taking up a single 90-minute class, during which participants completed both the questionnaire and the task sheet and received the training. The training was delivered as part of a Study Skills seminar for first-year undergraduate students majoring in English Studies at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary. The participants ( $N = 65$ ) were divided into two treatment groups ( $n = 40$ ) and two control groups ( $n = 25$ ); however, the unequal group sizes resulted from variations in class enrolment. For the data analysis, the groups are treated collectively as one control and one treatment group.

For the treatment groups, the lesson followed a structured format. It began with a brief presentation outlining the main objectives of the research, providing general information about dictionaries, and emphasising the significance of dictionary use, particularly the role of online dictionaries in contemporary language learning. After the presentation, participants were asked to fill in the online questionnaire, which took about 5–10 minutes. This was followed by instruction, during which students were guided through the exercises on the task sheet. The features of online dictionaries and the types of information they provide were demonstrated. For each task, one example word which was included in the task sheet was introduced, while another word was presented but not included among the tasks. The online version of the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE: <https://www.ldoceonline.com>) was utilised throughout the workshop and was also used by students while completing the task sheet. The training session, after which the participants completed the task sheet, had an approximate duration of 30 to 40 minutes.

For the control groups, the session also began with the same presentation on online dictionaries but and the completion of the online survey; however, unlike the treatment groups, the control groups first completed the task sheet independently, after which they received the training and guidance on the features of online dictionaries and the information they provide. Therefore, the main difference between the workshops for control and treatment groups was that the treatment groups received specific instruction on the features of the online Longman dictionary before completing the task sheet, whereas the control groups were given the same instruction after doing the exercises. Another difference was that members of the control group were free to use any monolingual English online dictionary; unlike the treatment group, who were required to solely use the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English. The control group was permitted to use any online dictionary of their choice in order to assess whether they were familiar with and able to use one effectively; restricting them to a researcher-selected dictionary could have created obstacles and potentially biased their results.

Descriptive statistics and IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software were employed to analyse the data. For each questionnaire item and each task on the task sheet, the mean score (*M*) and the standard deviation (*SD*) were calculated. The standard deviation was used to assess the extent of variability in participants' responses, while the mean score represented the average values of the scores and answers among the different groups. The calculation of the mean scores for each task on the task sheet was used to compare the performance of the treatment and the control groups. To provide a comprehensive analysis of the data, the responses written on the task sheets were also analysed qualitatively, primarily highlighting each group's characteristics, errors, and strengths.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The responses to the questionnaires suggest that the defining characteristics of dictionary usage habits and preferences among first-year English major university students in Hungary (RQ1) are the following. They claimed to own printed dictionaries and reported having dictionary applications on their smart devices, but the actual use of these was negligible among participants. The utilisation of online dictionaries, search engines, and translation software was found to be the most prevalent among respondents. The analysis also revealed that dictionaries produced abroad were more frequently consulted than those developed in Hungary. When consulting a digital dictionary, respondents typically utilised their smartphones, laptops, or desktop computers.

Regarding the extent to which participants are aware of the various features offered by digital dictionaries (RQ2), the results indicate that participants frequently utilised embedded links to access supplementary content and multimedia elements. Interestingly, the content-adding feature (e.g. adding their own words) proved popular among respondents, while allow publishers and creators to monitor user activities and to update dictionaries (e.g. enabling new functions) remain underused. In addition, data revealed that participants used the multi-word search strategy for idioms and fixed expressions the most frequently, followed by saving previous searches and using pop-up dictionaries, while voice search and special characters were less commonly utilised. The findings showed that participants had not received adequate formal training in dictionary use during their studies and largely relied on autodidacticism to develop their dictionary skills. The results are consistent with, and lend further support to, the conclusions of previous studies.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> Dringó-Horváth et al., "Szótárhasználati ismeretek vizsgálata," 35; Fajt et al., "The Interrelationship between EFL Learning Motivation and Dictionary Use," *International Journal of Lexicography* 37, no. 2 (2024): 154–155; Péter Gaál, "Onlineszótár-használat Magyarországon (OHM) – Egy kérdőíves szótárhasználati felmérés

## RESULTS OF THE TASK SHEETS

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Treatment group	4.73	1.11
Control group	3.76	1.39

*Table 1* Task 1: Naming Symbols

1. Kérem, adja meg a bekarikázott jelek/rövidítések jelentését, vagy írja le, hogy mire szolgálnak!

The image shows a screenshot of a dictionary entry for the word "car". The entry includes the word "car", its frequency indicator "3", its part of speech "noun (countable)", and its definition: "a vehicle with four wheels and an engine, that can carry a small number of passengers". There are also examples of usage: "Dan got out of the car and locked the door.", "He isn't old enough to drive a car.", "I always go to work by car.", and "Coughlan was killed in a car accident." Below the main definition, there are three numbered callouts: 1 points to the definition, 2 points to the frequency indicator "3", 3 points to the note "American English a train carriage", and 4 points to the note "the part of a lift, balloon, or airship in which people or goods are carried". There are also callouts for the pronunciation icons and the "by car" phrase.

*Figure 1* Task 1

As demonstrated in *Table 1*, the treatment group ( $M = 4.73$ ;  $SD = 1.11$ ) achieved higher mean scores than the control group ( $M = 3.76$ ;  $SD = 1.39$ ) in recognising specific symbols within online dictionary entries. All students obtained scores ranging from a minimum of one to a maximum of six points, with no instances of a score of zero recorded. Participants were required to identify the separator between British and American phonetic transcriptions, the pronunciation audio icon, the symbols indicating the frequency of headword occurrence in the Longman corpus, the Arabic numerals separating different meanings of a headword, and the symbol redirecting the user to another entry. In general, one of the biggest problems in dictionary use is the interpretation of abbreviations, signs, and symbols.<sup>276</sup>

In the treatment group, most participants successfully identified the pronunciation audio icon, accurately determined the function of Arabic numerals, and recognised the symbols representing word frequency. However, it is important to note regarding frequency indicators that, in the Longman online dictionary, hovering the cursor over a symbol prompts the display of its corresponding meaning or abbreviation, which provides additional guidance and information for users. In some cases, the symbol indicating a link to another entry was either incorrectly identified, misinterpreted, or ignored and left

eredményei II," *Alkalmazott Nyelvtudomány* 17, no. 1 (2017): 15-18; Kosem et al., "The Image of the Monolingual Dictionary across Europe: Results of the European Survey of Dictionary Use and Culture," *International Journal of Lexicography* 32, no. 1 (2018): 111; Pintér, "Dictionary Use," 128; P. Márkus et al., "Dictionary Skills," 188-190; P. Márkus and Fajt, "Anglisztika szakos hallgatók," 38; P. Márkus and Pődör, "Lexikográfia és szótáridaktika," 103.

<sup>276</sup> Alice Y. W. Chan, "Cantonese ESL Learners' Use of Grammatical Information in a Monolingual Dictionary for Determining the Correct Use of a Target Word," *International Journal of Lexicography* 25, no. 1 (2012): 87-89; Marjeta Vrbinc and Alenka Vrbinc, "A Research-Based Study of Foreign Students' Use of Grammatical Codes in Five Leading British Learners' Dictionaries," *Linguistica* 46, no. 1 (2006): 233.

unanswered. Additionally, the function of the sign used as a separator between British and American pronunciation was frequently misunderstood or overlooked.

In the control group, a significantly higher number of errors and incomplete responses were observed. One possible explanation for this discrepancy is that, while the treatment group exclusively used the Longman online dictionary, where these symbols were clearly displayed, the control group had the option to consult any online monolingual English dictionary of their choice. As a result, it is possible that the dictionaries selected by the participants of the control group either do not include certain symbols or feature alternative representations, which may have contributed to the control group's poorer performance in task one.

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Treatment group	6.45	1.66
Control group	5.68	1.84

*Table 2* Task 2: Parts of Speech

2. Kérem, jelölje 'X'-szel, hogy az adott címszavak milyen szófajúak lehetnek!

	Főnév (NOUN)	Ige (VERB)	Melléknév (ADJECTIVE)	Határozószó (ADVERB)
sleep				
better				
sign				

*Figure 2* Task 2

In the second task, students were required to identify and mark all applicable parts of speech for the three words provided (*sleep*, *better*, and *sign*). A substantial difference was observed between the performance of the treatment ( $M = 6.45$ ;  $SD = 1.66$ ) and control groups ( $M = 5.68$ ;  $SD = 1.84$ ). This finding is consistent with the conclusions of numerous studies that underscore the efficacy of teaching dictionary skills.<sup>277</sup> In this instance, it is worth emphasising that linguistic awareness can be significantly enhanced through dictionary training.<sup>278</sup> Each correctly identified part of speech was awarded one point, with a maximum possible score of eight points. In both the treatment and control groups, all participants correctly identified at least three parts of speech in which the given words may occur.

During the extended analysis, the number of incorrectly marked options by participants was examined. Of the 40 participants of the treatment group,  $n = 2$  participants had one,  $n = 3$  had three and  $n = 6$  had four incorrect solutions. Of the 25 respondents of the control group,  $n = 1$  had one,  $n = 3$  had four and  $n = 1$  had three mistakes in task two. Despite the emphasis during the training on the importance of scrolling to the bottom of the page in the online Longman dictionary to view all available parts of

<sup>277</sup> Carolin Müller-Spitzer et al., "Online Dictionary Use: Key Findings from an Empirical Research Project," in *Electronic Lexicography*, ed. Sylviane Granger and Magali Paquot (Oxford University Press, 2012): 455–457; P. Márkus and Dringó-Horváth, "Developing Dictionary Skills," 368.

<sup>278</sup> P. Márkus and Pődör, "Lexikográfia és szótárdidaktika," 103.

speech occurrences, 27.5% ( $n = 11$ ) of the participants in the treatment group gave incorrect solutions. In the case of the control group, although only 20% ( $n = 5$ ) of the respondents gave wrong answers next to the correct ones, several correct solutions were overlooked, whereas participants in the treatment group were less likely to overlook correct answers.

The third task was the only one where no difference was observed between the results of the two groups ( $M = 3.00$ ;  $SD = .00$ ). Each participant listed at least three derivatives of the words given (*drink*, *sight*, and *think*). This may be attributed, firstly, to the participants' prior understanding of the concept

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Treatment group	3.00	.00
Control group	3.00	.00

*Table 3* Task 3: Word Families

3. Kérem, írjon olyan szavakat (legfeljebb 8) a táblázat megfelelő rubrikáiba, amelyek az alábbi címszavakkal ugyanabba a szócsaládba tartoznak! (például: *use – useful, useless*)

	Szócsalád szavai
<b>drink</b>	
<b>sight</b>	
<b>think</b>	

*Figure 3* Task 3

of word families, which enabled them to independently provide relevant and correct derivatives. Secondly, in the Longman dictionary, the first section of the entry provides information on the word family of the headword, encompassing all the derived forms of the headword.

Although the statistical analysis did not show any differences between the two groups' performances, the subsequent in-depth analysis indicated that participants in the treatment group were able to provide a greater number of examples for all three headwords, and with fewer errors, compared to those in the control group. 41.7% of the treatment group was able to list five or more correct answers, whereas only 34.6% of the control group achieved the same. Furthermore, no participants in the treatment group provided any incorrect solutions, in contrast to the control group, where some inaccurate examples were listed, such as "*drink up*," "*think-tank*," "*sight read*," "*second sight*," "*sight-see*."

Subon argued that it is essential for learners to develop a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of vocabulary in order to succeed in language learning.<sup>279</sup> Thus, learners need to be able to understand and acquire word families, which are considered crucial prerequisites for the effective use of language skills.

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Treatment group	2.95	.32
Control group	2.88	.33

*Table 4* Task 4: Lexical Collocations

4. Kérem, soroljon fel olyan kollokációkat (legfeljebb 8) melyekben az alábbi szavak szerepelnek!  
(például: *announcement* – *make an announcement*)

	Kollokációk
recommend	
care	
wish	

*Figure 4* Task 4

In the fourth task, where participants were asked to locate and list a maximum of eight lexical collocations<sup>280</sup> for the three selected words (*recommend*, *care*, and *wish*), minimal statistical differences were observed between the performances of the two groups. Both the treatment and the control group performed well: the majority of students achieved the maximum score of three points. This finding aligns with the results of Kim, who reported that her participants showed a significant improvement in locating collocations in an online dictionary after one short instruction session.<sup>281</sup> These results highlight the effectiveness of targeted training or workshops.

However, quantitative analysis of the data indicated that the treatment group had performed slightly better than the control group. All participants identified at least two correct collocations; however, few respondents provided more than three accurate examples. The results showed that 85% of the participants in the treatment group provided three or more correct solutions, whereas only 61.3% of the

<sup>279</sup> Frankie A. Subon, “The Contextualised Word Family Model of Direct Vocabulary Instruction,” *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 23, no. 3 (2018): 59.

<sup>280</sup> According to Jackson and Amvela (2007), a lexical collocation is often described as a relationship based on mutual expectation or habitual co-occurrence. The presence of one word increases the probability – beyond random chance – that another specific word will appear nearby, either within the same syntactic structure or spanning across syntactic boundaries.

<sup>281</sup> Sugene Kim, “‘Minimum Input, Maximum Output, Indeed!’ Teaching Collocations through Collocation Dictionary Skills Development,” *Lexikos* 27, no. 1 (2017): 281–282.

control group were able to list the same number of expressions. This task, along with the fifth task, exhibited one of the smallest variations in respondents' answers ( $SD < .35$ ).

Qualitative analysis showed the typical mistakes made by respondents. In some instances, participants of both groups lacked awareness of the distinction between collocations and idioms (e.g., “as you wish” or “take care of”). In some cases, they used the derivatives of the words, such as “careless” or “wishful,” which resulted in unsuitable examples. Additionally, two participants provided non-existent responses, for instance, “care preventing a tragedy.” This supports Kim’s view that it is crucial to instruct non-native students on the concept of collocations, as they frequently conflate them.<sup>282</sup> Moreover, Chi also advocates for supporting for learners in locating collocations<sup>283</sup> since by developing an awareness of collocations, learners may become more attuned to word combinations in both their

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Treatment group	4.33	1.42
Control group	2.88	.33

*Table 5* Task 5: Synonyms and Antonyms

5. Adja meg az alábbi szavak szinonimáit (rokon értelmű szavait), antonimáit (ellentétes értelmű szavait)!

	Szinonima (SYNONYM)	Antonima (ANTONYMOPPOSITE)
young		
smart		
satisfied		

*Figure 5* Task 5

reading and writing.<sup>284</sup>

In task five, students were instructed to provide multiple examples of synonyms and antonyms. The expectation was that most respondents would be able to generate one example without the help of a dictionary. The maximum score of six points was given if at least two examples were listed for each of the three words (*young*, *smart*, and *satisfied*). The data reported in Table 5 shows that students who received the training ( $M = 4.33$ ;  $SD = 1.42$ ) were able to provide more correct solutions compared to those in the control group ( $M = 2.88$ ;  $SD = .33$ ). In the treatment group, 35% ( $n = 14$ ) of the respondents were able to score six points, which means that they could provide multiple correct examples; however, in the control group, the highest score was three. During the training, participants were instructed on the meaning of the symbols connected to synonyms and antonyms in the Longman online dictionary and the role of the thesaurus box in certain entries. The results indicate that they were able to utilise these

<sup>282</sup> Kim, “Teaching Collocations,” 267.

<sup>283</sup> Chi, *Integrating Dictionary Use*, 23.

<sup>284</sup> Yuzhen Chen, “Dictionary Use for Collocation Production and Retention: A CALL-Based Study,” *International Journal of Lexicography* 30, no. 2 (2017): 246–248; Ulugbek Nurmukhamedov, “The Contribution of Collocation Tools to Collocation Correction in Second Language Writing,” *International Journal of Lexicography* 30, no. 4 (2017): 474.

features effectively. However, many participants in both the treatment and control group listed only a limited number of examples despite being explicitly asked to provide multiple items. This may indicate a lack of motivation or an unsuccessful attempt to locate synonyms and antonyms within an online dictionary entry.

Although online dictionaries typically include synonyms and antonyms within an entry, students may opt to consult an online thesaurus directly, as it may be easier and more time efficient. Bergenholtz and Gouws argued that the inclusion of synonyms in dictionaries should be guided by the users' needs and the dictionary's intended function. Synonyms are useful for tasks such as text analysis, production, and translation, but they should not be presented if they do not align with the intended objective of the dictionary.<sup>285</sup> However, Bárdos emphasised the value of teaching synonyms and antonyms, noting that they aid in understanding meaning and thereby support effective language learning; therefore, including them in dictionaries can significantly benefit language learners.<sup>286</sup>

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Treatment group	4.00	1.47
Control group	4.72	1.14

*Table 6* Task 6: Grammatical Features (Irregular Forms)

6. Kérem, töltsse ki a táblázatot a megadott szempontok szerint!

Főnevek (NOUNS)			Igék (VERBS)	
	Többes szám (PLURAL)	Megszámíthatóság (COUNTABLE/UNCOUNTABLE)		Rendhagyó alakok (PAST TENSE, PAST PARTICIPLE)
goose			grind	
thesis			tread	
information			forsake	

*Figure 6* Task 6

An unexpected result was observed in task six, which focused on the irregular simple past and past participle forms of verbs (*grind*, *tread* and *forsake*) and plural nouns (*goose*, *thesis* and *information*). Although according to Chi, one of the main reasons students consult dictionaries is to obtain grammatical information,<sup>287</sup> P. Márkus and Fajt noted that all their participants used dictionaries primarily to find equivalents while only a few students relied on the dictionary for grammatical information.<sup>288</sup> Even though grammatical information is less frequently sought in dictionaries, familiarity with the placement of this information in an entry and its corresponding markings,

<sup>285</sup> Henning Bergenholtz and Rufus Gouws, "Synonymy and Synonyms in Lexicography," *Lexicographica* 28, no. 1 (2012): 314.

<sup>286</sup> Jenő Bárdos, *Az idegen nyelvek tanításának elméleti alapjai és gyakorlata* (Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, 2000), 84.

<sup>287</sup> Chi, *Integrating Dictionary Use*, 47, 51.

<sup>288</sup> P. Márkus and Fajt, "Anglisztika szakos hallgatók," 34.

abbreviations, or signs is essential for learners since their misinterpretation can give rise to significant problems.

In task six, one point was awarded for each noun if the correct plural form was provided and the countability information was accurately indicated, while a maximum of one point was given for each verb if both the past simple and past participle irregular form were correctly identified. As can be seen from the table above, the members of the control group ( $M = 4.72$ ;  $SD = 1.14$ ) achieved better results than the treatment group ( $M = 4.00$ ;  $SD = 1.47$ ). The participants' prior knowledge might have influenced the results, though this cannot be conclusively determined.

In both groups, a common error was the omission of countability information, and many participants failed to provide the past simple form. In the first part of the exercise, involving nouns, the word “goose” was included because it can be used either as a countable or an uncountable noun. In the treatment group, 62.5% ( $n = 25$ ) of participants correctly identified both countable and uncountable forms of the given nouns, whereas only 20% ( $n = 5$ ) of students in the control group provided the correct information about the word's countability. This may be attributed to the misinterpretation of the task. Unexpectedly,  $n = 10$  participants across both groups indicated that “information” is a countable noun and that the plural form is formed by adding the suffix “-s” even though all the dictionaries used by the respondents clearly display information regarding noun countability. It can be inferred that these responses resulted from a misunderstanding or erroneous prior learning. During the dictionary workshop, special attention was given to the marking and placement of grammatical information within an online dictionary entry, but this was not reflected in the treatment group's results.

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Treatment group	7.50	1.80
Control group	6.80	2.52

In task seven, compared to the control group ( $M = 6.80$ ;  $SD = 2.52$ ), the treatment group ( $M = 7.50$ ;  $SD = 1.80$ ) demonstrated a superior performance, which may indicate the effectiveness of the training. This result supports the findings of multiple previous studies, which emphasised the essentiality and fruitfulness of dictionary skills instruction.<sup>289</sup> In this exercise, one point was given for each sentence that contained the adjective with a correct preposition after the adjective (*angry*, *delighted*, and *excited*). A total of 65% ( $n = 26$ ) of participants in the treatment group achieved scores between eight and nine out of a maximum of nine, compared to 62% ( $n = 13$ ) of the control group. Notably, no participant in the treatment group scored below three points, whereas in the control group, one participant scored zero, and one only gained two points.

<sup>289</sup> P. Márkus and Dringó-Horváth, “Developing Dictionary Skills,” 351, 368–369; P. Márkus and Pődör, “Lexikográfia és szótárdidaktika,” 103.

This task aimed to assess participants' knowledge of the location and marking of grammatical collocations within online dictionary entries. Another objective of the task was to ascertain whether the participants realised that the example sentences in the entries had been selected to illustrate correct grammatical usage and context. One notable finding from the evaluation of the task sheets was that, despite the explicit instructions provided, many students listed only the grammatical collocations without incorporating them into example sentences as required. This could indicate a lack of motivation,

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Treatment group	2.28	.55
Control group	2.52	.77

*Table 8* Task 8: Usage Labels

8. Nevezze meg, milyen kommunikációs helyzetben használjuk az adott kifejezést (pl.: formális, informális helyzetben, esetleg beszédben, írásban használt)! (REGISTER)

1. kid:
2. therefore:
3. psych:

*Figure 8* Task 8

a misunderstanding of the task, or difficulties with time management. Another frequently observed error was the omission of grammatical words. Furthermore, in many cases, participants provided their own example sentences, instead of using the sentences already provided by the dictionary. This resulted in solutions that included the adjectives but omitted the corresponding grammatical words, typically prepositions; for example, “*I was very angry.*” In this exercise, the control group exhibited the highest standard deviation ( $SD > 2.50$ ) observed in the entire data analysis, reflecting a significant degree of variation in the responses.

Apart from the sixth task, the only other task in which the control group ( $M = 2.52$ ;  $SD = .77$ ) outperformed the treatment group ( $M = 2.28$ ;  $SD = .55$ ) was task eight. Participants received a maximum of three points if they accurately interpreted the information about the stylistic restrictions of the use of headwords (*kid*, *therefore*, and *psych*). The slightly lower mean score observed in the treatment group is quite unexpected, given that the Longman online dictionary's colour-coding system, which was discussed during the dictionary workshop, highlights usage information about the selected headword. Additionally, in certain entries, a text box is provided to further clarify the contextual usage of the given terms. Despite that, only 32.5% ( $n = 13$ ) of participants in the treatment group were able to complete the task correctly and provide all the information required. The information requested in this task is also presented in the online versions of English monolingual dictionaries used by the participants. However, not all the requested data is consistently presented in all dictionaries. Jackson and Amvela suggest that

users consult at least two additional sources to ensure the accuracy of the stylistic categorisation of a word or term.<sup>290</sup> This recommendation appears to remain relevant in the era of online dictionaries, too.

Online dictionaries usually provide information about formal and informal usage. Therefore, a common tendency among respondents was to identify a word as predominantly used in an informal or

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Treatment group	1.80	.56
Control group	1.32	.95

*Table 9* Task 9: Syllabification

9. Fügőleges vonalakkal jelölje az alábbi szavak elvlasztását (tehát az összes olyan helyet, ahol sor végén a szavakat el lehet választani)!

1. c o u n t e r p r o d u c t i v e
2. m i s u n d e r s t a n d i n g

*Figure 9* Task 9

formal context while they did not indicate whether it is used mostly in speaking or writing. Conversely, some participants indicated whether the word was used in written or spoken language but did not specify its level of formality.

The last task concentrated on syllabification. Participants were required to identify and mark all potential places where the two relatively long words (*counterproductive* and *misunderstanding*) could be hyphenated at the end of a line. The highest possible score of two points was given when all correct places of separation were properly indicated for each word. The percentage of participants who provided the correct responses was significantly higher in the treatment group than the control group. 87.5% ( $n = 35$ ) of the treatment group identified all syllable boundaries accurately, whereas only 64% ( $n = 16$ ) of the control group achieved the same level of accuracy. This discrepancy is further evidenced by the mean scores, which were higher for the treatment group ( $M = 1.80$ ;  $SD = .56$ ) and indicated the control group's ( $M = 1.32$ ;  $SD = .95$ ) poorer performance in this task. The superior performance of the treatment group, which underwent the dictionary workshop before completing the tasks, further corroborates the effectiveness of dictionary use training, a finding highlighted in previous studies conducted in Hungarian and international contexts.<sup>291</sup> The current findings are also in line with the results of Chi, who reported that treatment groups performed better.<sup>292</sup> However, Chi noted that many problems occurred regarding the exercises related to syllable boundaries across both the treatment and the control groups. Chi further

<sup>290</sup> Howard Jackson and Etienne Z. Amvela, *Words, Meaning and Vocabulary: An Introduction to Modern English Lexicology* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007), 160–164.

<sup>291</sup> Gavriilidou et al., “Strategic Dictionary Use,” 114–115; P. Márkus and Pödör, “Lexikográfia és szótáridaktika,” 103.

<sup>292</sup> Chi, *Integrating Dictionary Use*, 61–97.

argued that a more detailed explanation of English syllabification should be included in dictionaries for the benefit of non-native users.<sup>293</sup>

One potential cause of the variation between the answers of the two groups is that the online *Longman Dictionary* presents the syllable structure for each headword within an entry, whereas this feature is often absent in other online dictionaries. Another possible explanation of the difference between the results of the two groups is that respondents attempted to complete the task based on Hungarian rules of hyphenation and syllabification, which signals a lack of awareness of the English principles.

## CONCLUSION

The main objective of this study was to identify current dictionary use trends and preferences among Hungarian English major undergraduates and to examine the impact of a relatively concise workshop on online dictionary skills. The data presented in this study was also compared with findings from previous research.

The results of the questionnaire reveal key trends in dictionary usage among first-year English major students in Hungary (RQ1). It is important to note that only students of Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary participated, thus the findings may not be fully generalisable to first-year students at other institutions. Although most students reported owning printed dictionaries and dictionary applications, these were rarely used in practice. Instead, online dictionaries, search engines, and translation tools were the most commonly used resources. Students also tended to prefer foreign-produced dictionaries over those developed in Hungary and primarily accessed digital dictionaries on their smartphones. Participants frequently engaged with embedded links and multimedia content, while functions like user tracking and automatic updates were largely overlooked. The most common search method was the multi-word search strategy for idioms and fixed expressions, followed by saving searches and using pop-up dictionaries, while voice search and special characters were used less often (RQ2). The responses also showed that students had received little to no formal training in dictionary use during their studies and mostly tried to acquire dictionary skills in an autodidactic manner. These results support findings from earlier studies and highlight a need for more structured dictionary skills education.

The third main objective of the current research was to investigate the effectiveness of a brief workshop on online dictionary skills by comparing the results of the treatment group, whose members received targeted training, with the scores gained by the students belonging to the control group, who only heard a generic presentation on online dictionaries and did not receive any targeted training before completing the task sheet specifically designed for this purpose (RQ3). According to the data obtained, the treatment group outperformed the control group on most tasks, thereby demonstrating the effectiveness of the workshop. The treatment group's superior performance was indicated by the

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<sup>293</sup> Chi, *Integrating Dictionary Use*, 101–102.

achievement of higher mean scores on several tasks, including those focusing on the recognition of specific symbols in online dictionary entries (Task 1), the identification and marking of all applicable parts of speech for selected words (Task 2), the listing of multiple synonyms and antonyms (Task 5), the presentation of grammatical collocations through example sentences (Task 7), and syllabification (Task 9). While the quantitative analysis clearly highlighted the differences between the two groups regarding the tasks mentioned above, when examining results obtained from the other tasks, distinctions emerged only through an expanded analysis. In the task requiring the listing of words belonging to the same word family as the term given (Task 3), no difference was observed between the mean scores of the two groups, whereas only a marginal difference was identified in their performance in the task focusing on lexical collocations (Task 4). However, the more detailed follow-up analysis revealed that participants in the treatment group were able to list more examples in the case of both tasks. Finally, the control group performed better than the treatment group in the tasks concentrating on grammatical information (Task 6) and usage labels (Task 8), but it is important to acknowledge that participants' prior knowledge may have influenced the outcomes. The results and findings corroborate earlier studies,<sup>294</sup> highlight the effectiveness of teaching dictionary skills and demonstrate the considerable improvement in linguistic awareness that can result from such training. The outcomes of the current research align with the findings of previous studies, confirming the users' preference for online dictionaries, search engines, and translation applications over printed versions, and the effectiveness and benefits of dictionary use instruction.

Despite the contributions of this study, some limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample size was relatively small ( $N = 65$ ), which restricted the generalisability of the data. Moreover, although anonymity was assured to encourage honest responses, the use of self-reported data remains a potential concern. In addition, the data collection period was quite short, approximately two and a half months, and the study focused on respondents at a single university, namely Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary. The practices of these first-year English majors may differ from those of students at other Hungarian universities. This study employed a post-test-only control group design, but without the pre-test, it is hard to determine whether the perceived improvements in the treatment group's results are solely due to the intervention. Finally, the unequal group size may also have affected the validity of statistical results.

Future studies should consider involving a larger and more diverse sample across multiple institutions. The involvement of multiple Hungarian universities and students majoring in different subjects will lead to more generalisable results. Additionally, it may be advisable to use both pre- and post-tests alongside equally sized treatment and control groups to enhance internal validity and facilitate a more precise evaluation of the impact of dictionary use training. Moreover, a longitudinal research

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<sup>294</sup> Gavriilidou et al., "Strategic Dictionary Use," 114–115; Müller-Spitzer et al., "Online Dictionary Use," 455–457; P. Márkus and Dringó-Horváth, "Developing Dictionary Skills," 368–369; P. Márkus et al., "Dictionary Skills," 188–190; P. Márkus and Pődör, "Lexikográfia és szótárdidaktika," 103.

approach might be useful as it allows the evaluation of the long-term impact of dictionary use training. Finally, incorporating different qualitative methods, such as interviews or classroom observations, may provide deeper insight into learners' attitudes, difficulties, strengths, and evolving practices in digital dictionary use.

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