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Canadian Anglophone Authors Translated into Serbian: Research and Result Analysis

Abstract

The paper deals with the current trends in the field of the translation and publication of Canadian authors in Serbia. In the first part of the paper, the authors focus on the favourable aspects of Canada-Serbia relations in the new millennium, which resulted in the translation and publication of a great number of Canadian Anglophone authors in Serbia in the last fifteen years. After concentrating on the results of the research dealing with the most published Canadian Anglophone authors in Serbia, the authors discuss the difficulties the project team encountered while compiling the bibliography. In the last part of the paper, the authors comment on the quality of Canadian literature translations produced in Serbia.

Résumé

L'article traite des tendances actuelles dans le domaine de la traduction et de la publication des auteurs canadiens en Serbie. Dans la première partie du document, les auteurs se concentrent sur les aspects favorables des rapports entre le Canada et la Serbie dans le nouveau millénaire, qui ont abouti à la traduction et à la publication d'un grand nombre d'auteurs canadiens anglophones en Serbie au cours des quinze dernières années. Après avoir étudié les résultats de la recherche portant sur les auteurs canadiens anglophones les plus publiés en Serbie, les auteurs examinent les difficultés rencontrées par l'équipe du projet lors de la compilation de la bibliographie. Dans la dernière partie du document, ils commentent la qualité des traductions serbes de la littérature canadienne anglophone.

1. Introduction: Canada-Serbia relations in the new millennium

Lately, we have been witnessing an increasing development in the size, sophistication and diversity of Serbia's arts and cultural sector. Bearing in mind the common cultural values as well as the historical bonds shared between Canada and Serbia, this cultural expansion creates a favourable climate for new collaborative ventures that will hopefully further enrich and strengthen the Canada-Serbia relationship.

Some of the most significant Serbian cultural manifestations in which various Canadian artists and performers usually take an active part include the Belgrade International Book Fair, the Belgrade International Theatre Festival (BITEF), the Belgrade film festival (FEST), the Novi Sad EXIT music festival, the Belgrade Music Festival (BEMUS) and the Belgrade Summer Festival (BELEF). Thus, the diversity of Canadian society, based on the Aboriginal inhabitants



as well as the heritage of immigrants from every part of the world, including the Western Balkans, is constantly being promoted in Serbia.

It is no wonder then that Canadian culture “has seen a boom” in Serbia. Award-winning Canadian illustrators, authors and publishers exhibit at the annual Belgrade book fair every year. More and more Canadian books are being published in Serbian translation, for a total of over 100 titles in the last 5 years alone. According to the official site of the Government of Canada, “Serbian has been the third or fourth most important language in the Canada Council’s translation support program for the past several years” (http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/serbiaserbie/cultural_relations_culturelles/index.aspx?lang=eng&view=d).

The beginning of the growing interest in Canadian culture started with the introduction of, at the time, a challenging new course – Canadian Studies, the first of its kind in Serbia – at the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš during the 1990s. The continuing interest of many academics in the field of Canadian Studies was channeled into the activity of founding an association for the region of former Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav Association for Canadian Studies (YACS) was formed in February 2001 and is still active, nowadays called the Serbian Association for Canadian Studies (SACS): it brings together university teachers, researchers and students from Serbia whose work is related to Canada. Its goal is to promote Canadian Studies among the academic members of the population as well as the general public by creating an academic network for individuals interested in the study of Canada.

Apart from being concerned with the notion of Canadian identity, the scholars in Serbia usually refer to the huge migration waves of highly educated Serbian intellectuals to Canada (the process known as ‘brain-drain’) that coincided with the foundation of YACS as one of the possible reasons for the popularity of the Canadian Studies course. This wave of migration happened after the civil war in former Yugoslavia and its disintegration, so that the vision of Canadian multicultural society, based on the salad bowl model, in which diverse cultures are juxtaposed, but whose distinct qualities, like salad ingredients, are kept and respected, seemed like a positive breakthrough from the harsh economic and political realities of the country in the process of social transition. According to Statistics Canada, the 2006 census documented 72,690 Canadians of Serbian origin. It is estimated, though, that the number of Serbs is actually between 100,000 and 125,000. Toronto is said to have the largest population of Serbs after Vienna and Chicago (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/start-debut-eng.html>).

However, uprooted from their own culture and environment, Serbs in Canada often find it difficult to reconcile their Serbian identity with the new Canadian one. Vesna Lopičić explains the problem in her book *Aspects of Autobiography: The Book of Revenge*: “It is not always that the hyphen connects what is the best of the two cultures, leaving the person to enjoy the benefits of both. More often, one needs to work hard to reconcile the two, the private and the public, and to come to terms not only with the positive, but also with the negative aspects of their hyphenated lives” (Lopičić, 32). Reconciling these two aspects of identity is particularly difficult for Serbs due to the differences between the two cultures.

This problem was dealt with in the “Diaspora” project, organized by the CEACS in the period 2007-2010, which resulted in a two-volume publication made up of an anthology dealing with the immigrant literature of the Central European countries in Canada as well as a selection of oral testimonies by the immigrants themselves. Apart from representing a good starting



point for a further multi-disciplinary academic research, this project also aimed at introducing a new MA course at the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš – the Literature of the Serbian Diaspora in Canada – that has been quite popular among MA students for two years in a row now. It goes without saying that a whole new group of experts is rapidly being formed – MA and PhD candidates in the field of Canadian Studies.

It is important to emphasize that, simultaneously with the activities of YACS and SACS, Canadian Studies courses were being introduced at most Serbian universities (including private universities, for example Megatrend in Belgrade and the International University of Novi Pazar) as well as at the state University of Pale in the neighbouring Republic of Srpska. This boom of interest in Canadian culture has been based on its diversity, some of which was reflected in the new courses that appeared under the large umbrella of Canadian Studies – the already mentioned course on the Literature of the Serbian Diaspora in Canada, Canadian Short Fiction, Contemporary Female Canadian Authors, etc. This is important to note because the whole process of presenting new Canadian Studies courses contributed to the creation of a new intellectual climate favourable for the growth and development of Canada-Serbia relations. The new group of intellectuals and academics, with an insight into Canadian culture and a desire to enrich their knowledge about it, have actually been dictating the current trends in the field of the translation and publication of Canadian authors in Serbia, which leads us to the current CEACS project, “Translating Canada”.

2. Translating Canada in Serbia: the most published Canadian Anglophone authors

Before concentrating on the issues raised during the process of gathering information about Anglophone Canadian authors translated into Serbian, it is necessary to mention the members of the team in charge of this demanding activity. The team consists of six members, all of whom are related to the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš: Milena Kostić, a teaching assistant at the English Department in Niš and a PhD student at the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad; Ivana Vljaković, also a teaching assistant in Niš and a PhD student at the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad; Saša Trenčić, an MA student of the English Department in Niš and Nikola Milojević, Julija Popović and Bojana Todorović, fourth-year students volunteers with a special interest in the field of Canadian Studies.

One of the first impressions related to this thorough research is based on the number of Canadian Anglophone authors translated into Serbian – approximately sixty-five authors have been published in the last fifteen years, which, quite importantly, coincides with the already discussed ways of promoting Canadian culture in Serbia: the introduction of Canadian Studies at faculties and the creation of the Serbian Association for Canadian Studies. This basically shows that Serbian academics and scholars played a significant part in this process. They have been in charge of creating reading lists for course curricula and, simultaneously, shaping the reading trends of their students, future promoters of Canadian culture in Serbia. Here, it is important to emphasize the fact that many university professors were the first translators of Canadian Anglophone authors, so that they have been shaping the reading trends not only of



their students, but of the reading public in Serbia in general.

The most published and popular Canadian Anglophone authors in Serbia, the ones in charge of spreading Canadian national images and values, mostly belong to the cultural field of literature, literary theory and criticism. This is partly due to the already mentioned reading lists for Canadian Studies at faculties and translation activities of scholars and, at the same time, to the promotion of Canadian culture in the film and music industry worldwide. Thus, the leading Canadian Anglophone writers translated into Serbian in the last fifteen years include: Margaret Atwood (seven of whose novels were translated and published in Serbia in the last five years, which reflects her importance for Canadian culture today – a winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Award and Prince of Asturias award for Literature, the Booker Prize, the Governor General's Award, etc.), Leonard Cohen (interestingly enough, translations of Cohen's selected poetry have appeared, but not his novels, which is a clear indicator of Cohen's popularity in the world music industry and its influence on the Serbian 'translation/publication' market), Michael Ondaatje (eight of his novels have been translated into Serbian – the appearance of the film version of *The English Patient* in 1996 greatly contributed to his popularity), Guy Gavriel Kay (five of whose fantasy fiction novels were translated and published in Serbia in the last five years), Alice Munro (winner of the 2009 Man Booker International Prize for her lifetime body of work, three-time winner of the Governor General's Award for fiction and a perennial contender for the Nobel Prize, with five publications in Serbia in the last five years), and many others.

This research has also given an insight into the cultural phenomena of artists' dual national identity. For example David Morrell, with a total number of twenty titles translated into Serbian, is a Canadian-American novelist, born in Kitchener, Ontario, in 1943 but living and working in the United States, best known for his debut 1972 novel *First Blood*, which would later become the successful Rambo film franchise starring Sylvester Stallone. Movement in the opposite direction can be seen in the case of William Gibson, an American-Canadian speculative fiction novelist, born in the United States but living in Canada since 1968, who has been called the "noir prophet" of the cyberpunk subgenre. Gibson also coined the term "cyberspace" in his short story "Burning Chrome" (1982) and later popularized the concept in his debut novel, *Neuromancer* (1984), both of which have been translated into Serbian, as well as ten more science fiction works by the same author.

Apart from the fiction writers and poets translated into Serbian, the most prominent figures from another cultural sphere, that of literary theory and criticism, are Northrop Frye, with a total of six critical studies translated into Serbian, and Linda Hutcheon, with a total of five publications in Serbian.

In conclusion, this research shows that the most translated and published Canadian Anglophone authors in Serbia come from the sphere of the humanities: literature, literary theory and criticism. The following part of the paper will deal with the most common difficulties that the researchers encountered during this time-consuming process and the ways they were resolved.



3. Difficulties the team encountered while compiling the bibliography

Creating an online bibliography of Canadian authors translated into Serbian proved to be not without difficulties. The most important one the team was faced with was incomplete data found in online sources, which in many cases failed to provide all the required information.

At the very beginning of the research, the team members had to find and choose the tools to help them gather the information they were after. The one which could be relied on to provide certain more general facts was the Google search engine. The searches with the names of authors and/or books returned mostly with lists of sites which sold the literature in question. However, some of these websites, such as www.amazon.com, or www.knjizara.com, proved valuable in the sense that they provided pieces of information which were missing elsewhere. In any case, Google and bookselling websites were used as the last resort, to check the information gathered elsewhere and sometimes fill in the remaining blanks. The second website used was at the same time one of the most reliable ones – WorldCat, “the world’s largest network of library contents and services”. WorldCat is where librarians and other information professionals meet in order to maintain and expand the network. Furthermore, they do not limit access to most of the content on their site, which is a great help to scholars worldwide engaged in projects similar to this one. However, we should mention that the following information was often not listed in the description of the literature we ran through the search: author of foreword/afterword (where applicable), illustrator (where applicable), edition, and whether the literature in question was a part of a collection or anthology. Still, the more important facts, such as the name of the author, original title, title of translation, etc., were available in the majority of cases. The team was also initially hoping to find at least some data on scholarly literature in KoBSON, the Consortium of Coordinated Acquisition, which is the most important database used by Serbian researchers. The searches there did not yield the desired results, however.

One of the problems the team had was that of finding slightly different, or even contradictory, data for one and the same piece of literature. In such cases, the researchers tried to find information from as many different sources as possible, and establish which data were supported by the majority of sources. In extreme cases, the researchers went to the University Library of Niš, in hope of finding validation for the data there. More often than not, the library did not have the literature in question or any information about it.

Another interesting problem which the team faced is related to the language of translation which appeared as part of the literature description. We came across the following results: Serbian, Serbo-Croatian, Croato-Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian. Given the complex political situation amongst the ex-Yugoslav republics, we were at a loss whether to include anything other than Serbian in our findings. In purely linguistic terms, all these are basically one and the same language (as is the case, for example, with British English, American English and Australian English), with different ethnic names given to them. Those who make this claim support their conclusions with the following evidence: that there is almost complete mutual intelligibility and that they have virtually the same phonology, morphology and syntax, based on the same, Stokavian dialect. On the other hand, political reasons have led to claims of these being dis-



tinct languages. It is precisely for these reasons that the members of the team had a dilemma as to the importance of the year in which a particular translation, with any of the above other than Serbian listed as the language of translation, was published, since it was after the 90s and the breakup of Yugoslavia that the distinct languages started being insisted upon. We decided to include the publications in any of the above-mentioned distinct languages which came out before the 90s in our bibliography, and leave the data concerning the language the way we found it. For everything after this period in time, we decided to include Serbian translations only. There is a linguistic reason for this decision as well – it was after the 90s that the languages of the former Yugoslav republics (excluding Serbia) started to be changed, primarily by means of the exclusion of the elements which were “too Serbian” in them and their replacement with domestic neologisms (Bugarski 2009: 134). This has resulted in a certain degree of divergence from what was once Serbo-Croatian (Croato-Serbian), even though the artificial language changes did not fare well with the people.

To conclude, we can say that the team managed to collect a significant amount of data, despite the limitations of the sources, occasional conflicting or missing pieces of information and the language of translation dilemma. The next section of this paper will delve a bit into the problems of translation itself and the state of traductology today, and also present some observations concerning the translations of Canadian literature available in Serbian through an example of a paper written by an author with a long-standing academic career in Canadian studies.

4. Lost in translation or the quality of Canadian literature translations produced in Serbia

The term translation draws on the Latin root *translatio* (transfer, carry over, displace), which, according to Catherine Porter, “conveys translation’s main function – namely to move meanings from one context (often but by no means exclusively linguistic) to another”. In everyday usage, translation can refer to “such vital concepts as decoding, paraphrasing, interpretation and explanation” (Porter, letter, MLA list serve, 13 November 2008). In line with this definition, Von Flotow and Nischik correctly value translation as “underlying and predating most other forms of cultural transfer, such as rewriting, adapting, anthologizing, staging and even filmmaking” (Von Flotow and Nischik, 1). This “deliberate activity”, as they perceive it, “means processing a text through the mind, emotions, and personal and public history of another intelligence, which is never neutral and always also subject to the vagaries of ideology, political pressure, funding problems, time constraints and even indifference and neglect” (Von Flotow and Nischik, 2). Thus, translation becomes a sort of cultural diplomacy strategy whose significant role is the intercultural negotiation of national images and values.

Despite the fact that a considerable number of Canadian authors have been translated into Serbian, we have few analyses of the actual translations. The question which naturally arises from this statement is why there would be a need to analyse translations in the first place. For one thing, because it is interesting to see how much gets lost in translation, but also, unfortunately, because of the current state in Serbia translation-wise. One of the most



famous Serbian linguists, Prčić, describes current trends in English to Serbian translation as all but superficial (Prčić 2005: 194). He supports his claims by evidence collected from a wide variety of sources, both printed and electronic books, magazines and scientific publications, film subtitles, websites, etc., and goes on to further describe what lies in the essence of such a trend. Firstly, he states that this ‘pseudo-translation’ focuses exclusively 1) on the form, and 2) on the literal aspect of the meaning. Furthermore, from the methodological point of view, it favours the application of minimum intellectual effort, utter neglect for linguistic and extralinguistic context and avoidance of the use of dictionaries or appropriate textbooks.

It is worth noting one effort to analyse the translation of a Canadian novel into Serbian. The author of the article, Tanja Cvetković, focuses on the lexical level of the text, i.e. on Canadianisms and says: “The novel *The Studhorse Man* belongs to Canadian prairie literature and as such it should be analyzed within that cultural context. Consequently, the first problem when translating *The Studhorse Man* was how to situate the source text within the Serbian target culture system searching for its significance or acceptability” (Cvetković 2011: 60). By analysing the way in which Canadianisms were translated into Serbian, she concluded that this was mostly done by means of the process of domestication, with only a few examples of the process of foreignisation. However, some aspects of the original meaning were lost in both processes. Some of the examples Cvetković lists are the following (all domesticated): a) “red eye” translated as “sok od paradajza”, where the target phrase denotes tomato juice made with beer, and the source phrase denotes tomato juice only; b) “snowshoes” translated as “cipele za sneg”, which in Serbian does not present a completely accurate image of specific racquet-like attachments for shoes; and c) “chickadee” translated as “senica”, which is the most similar domestic bird of the same genus, since chickadees are peculiar to North America only (Cvetković 2011: 60-62).

We can certainly say that the differences in source and target language phrases are not vital to the understanding of the novel as a whole, but they do take away some nuances of meaning and pieces of cultural information. Similar analyses with other linguistic levels (e.g. morphology and syntax) would give a more comprehensive data on how much gets lost in translation. Speaking of Canadianisms, we might add that translators alone are not to be blamed for occasionally not finding the appropriate translations for them. Sandra Hamilton from the School of Translation and Interpretation, University of Ottawa, feels that dictionaries available on the market do not contain quite a few elements of both English and French as used in Canada, mostly due to the fact that they are produced in Europe (Hamilton 1997: ii), so once again, we come up with the problem of insufficient resources.

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