

# THE STUDY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN HUNGARY

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**T**he scope of this article does not permit of an exhaustive treatment of the subject or of a complete history of the spread of the English language in Hungary. We are therefore compelled to confine ourselves to a general description of the channels along which the study of English started and the conditions which either furthered or retarded its progress.

The interest in Great Britain displayed by Hungarians is not of recent origin. Not to mention the sporadic, disconnected contacts of the Middle Ages, after the catastrophe of Mohács (1526) we find, especially in the history of Transylvania, attempts being made to secure England's diplomatic support, not only through the offices of the English ambassador in Constantinople, but also by way of immediate approach. More than one Prince of Transylvania sent envoys to England for this purpose. Jerome Laski was sent by King John; his court secretary, Stephen Kakas, by Sigismund Báthory; and Constantine Schaum by George Rákóczi II, to win support for Transylvanian Protestantism. From the third decade of the 17th century Calvinist students of theology made it a practice to spend some time at English universities, and consequently in the sphere of religion the influence of English Puritanism on spiritual life in Hungary was not inconsiderable.

The language of learning in the Middle Ages was Latin, and even without a knowledge of English our students of theology, who spoke the former language excellently, would undoubtedly have done well at the English universities. Naturally we may take it that they acquired a certain

vocabulary in their everyday contacts, but there is no sign of their having attempted to impart their knowledge of English to others on their return. There are only a few indications to show that they translated English works into Hungarian. Thus George Kórócz de Szeps, head preacher of Tokay, published a translation of *The Kingis Quair*, a work written by King James I of Scotland. We also know that Paul Medgyesi, Susan Lórántffy's court chaplain, translated several English theological works into Hungarian. It often happened, too, that Calvinist ministers who had visited England became teachers in Protestant colleges; thus Stephen Kolozsvári, who was in London in 1685, afterwards taught in the college at Enyed.

This was the Stephen Kolozsvári of whom mention is made in the diary of his journey by Chishull, chaplain to the British Embassy in Constantinople, who accompanied Lord Paget, Britain's ambassador in Vienna, on his journey through Hungary. Besides Kolozsvári, Stephen Szirák, Calvinist minister of Csege, is also mentioned by Chishull. We know that both of these Hungarians had been in England; but Chishull does not say in what language he conversed with them.

Francis Rákóczi II, too, repeatedly had recourse to the diplomatic support of the English Embassy in Vienna; and his envoy, John Michael Klement, often visited the island kingdom. This comparatively young man was chosen by the Prince because he was very well educated, sharp-witted and "a young man versed in modern languages". Undoubtedly Klement, who after the disastrous end of the war of independence became a political adventurer *par excellence* at the European courts, must have spoken English well.

In the latter half of the 18th century we find scarcely any traces of Hungarians with a knowledge of English. For in the struggles of the Counter-Revolution the losing Protestant churches grew poor and could barely afford to send their theological students to the comparatively nearby German universities. In this period only one name is worthy of mention, that of Matthew Bél. He studied in Germany from 1704 to 1707 and taught in the school of the great pietist, August Francke, where modern languages were also

taught. On his return to Hungary he became headmaster of a school in Pozsony, *but we have no data to show that he taught foreign languages there.*

He most probably spoke English. This is indicated by the fact that, in recognition of his scientific work, he was elected member of the Royal Society; and we also know that he was acquainted with English grammar and that in his youth his greatest ambition had been to go to England.

In the latter half of the 18th century the great intellectual movements of the period, rationalism, deism and in particular German pietism, slowly made their way into Hungary. The movements extended to education; and it was urged that not only Latin and religion, but also modern subjects and languages should be taught in the schools. It was but natural that in Hungary, especially in the Protestant schools, a teacher here and there should have made an attempt to meet the requirements of the new era.

Education as a problem not only engaged the attention of those whose profession it was; parents also were exercised to find an answer to the question of what and how their children should study. In treating of the 18th century we must distinguish the education of the children of the aristocracy, which in the main was individual in character, from that imparted in certain famous schools. It is a well-known fact that the Hungarian aristocracy, influenced by the Vienna Court, were attracted to French culture, and that the foreign language they learned was primarily French. But the interest of our magnates was also directed, though perhaps not simultaneously, towards England. Their interest in that country was, however, of a different nature and was concerned chiefly with questions of political economy and the constitution. It was but natural that parallel with this interest a desire should arise to learn English, in order to be able to study English scientific matter at first hand. This explains why in spite of the interest displayed in England, English belles lettres were not immediately discovered.

It is thus easy to understand why our aristocracy (the Széchenyis, Eszterházys, Telekis and other families) not only visited England themselves and preserved contacts with English aristocratic circles, but also did their best to ensure

their children learning English. Francis Széchenyi, who so insistently urged that modern languages should be taught, was a pupil of the Vienna Theresianum, where numerous Hungarian contemporaries of his had an opportunity of studying English. We are in possession of many plans written by Hungarian aristocrats for the tutors of their children, and in most of them English is one of the foreign languages to be taught. "Educational plans" of this sort were drawn up amongst others by Count George Festetics (1799) and Count Ladislas Teleki. The latter's plan is very interesting in that it explains why its drafter considered the English language of such importance; viz. because the ability to read English scientific literature was a cultural necessity for every educated person. He not only insisted on his children learning English, but even prescribed the method of instruction. Baron Nicholas Wesselényi, a contemporary of Kossuth, was educated according to this plan. From it we learn also that at that time there were many English teachers in Hungary, and Hungarian tutors were afforded opportunities of accompanying their pupils to foreign countries and to England too.

The aristocracy learned English in the Theresianum and from their language masters; but where did the petty nobles and the burghers of the cities receive the impulse to study foreign languages? In the German universities, more especially in Göttingen. The Göttingen University, the *Georgia Augusta*, was founded by King George III of England in 1734 and was opened in September, 1737. Within a short time it became famous throughout Europe and was much favoured by Protestant Hungarian students, who thus became acquainted with the English language and with English scientific literature and belles lettres. Of their number we shall mention only a few names. John Kis, Lutheran Superintendent (Moderator), writes in his memoirs that while a school-boy in Sopron he and several of his school-fellows, encouraged by their masters, learned English, without any help, from a grammar, and learned it so well that they were able to understand easy authors. He received the loan of many English books from one of his masters, Peter Raics. He also mentions that before entering the

university at Göttingen, while on a journey through Hungary, he saw many English books in Késmárk, in the library of the famous scholar John Genersich (1761—1823). John Kis and several of his fellow-students learned English well in Göttingen and grew to like English literature exceedingly. It was the above-mentioned John Genersich and his pupils who in the school at Késmárk opened channels in Hungary by which English culture spread. In his little book on education, written for the aristocracy, he advised English instead of French governesses for young girls. His reader for the young contains stories of Alfred the Great and of Lady Jane Grey. In the famous Debrecen College many students who afterwards became Hungarian poets learned English privately. Besides Adam Horváth de Pálócz and Joseph Péczeli, mention must also be made of one of the professors of the College, the savant Esaiiah Budai, who studied in Göttingen. It was probably his encouragement that led the pupils of the College to take up the study of English.

As these examples show, by the end of the 18th century neither encouragement nor zeal was lacking where the study of English was concerned. If we consider Adam Horváth de Pálócz and John Kis as belonging to the second generation, we may say that interest in the English language began to awake in the seventies of the 18th century. A greater impulse still was given to the study of English by the fact that the newspapers inaugurated in the closing years of the century often published news from England, especially reports of English constitutional life and parliamentary battles. Samuel Decsy, who had been a student at Göttingen University, urged the teaching of modern languages both in the *Bécsi Magyar Kurir* and in his book *Pannoniai Fénix* (Vienna, 1771), on the principle that they would prove useful for the purpose of establishing contacts in the field of national economy. He advised the Hungarian nobility to follow the example of the English peers, who were not ashamed to take an active part in economic life. Decsy urged the Hungarians to get into touch with them, the *sine qua non* of that being a knowledge of English.

Encouragement of this kind led to a more rapid spread of the study of English, mostly by way of private endeavour.

The means of study were abundant, although scarcely any English grammars were published in Hungary. But in fact there was no need of books explaining the English grammar in Hungarian, since the Hungarian public interested in scientific works were accustomed to read them in Latin or German and procure them from booksellers in Germany and Austria. In the latter half of the 18th century English grammars, dictionaries and lexicons innumerable appeared in Göttingen, Jena and Leipzig. One of these was N. Bailey's English Dictionary, which reached its fifth edition in 1778 and was reprinted in a revised edition in the first half of the 19th century. Another even more widely spread book was Theodore Arnold's famous grammar, the *Grammatica Anglicana oder englische Grammatik*, which was published several times not only in Leipzig but also in Vienna (1782, 1793, etc.). A copy of this work exists in the library of Alexander Kisfaludy. Other books to appear in Vienna were N. Sammer's *Englische Sprachlehre* (1783) and his *Neuste Englische Grammatik* (1795). It is not impossible that Peyton's famous work, "The Elements of the English Language etc." (London), which ran to several editions in the latter half of the 18th century, or its French version, *Lés Éléments de la langue Angloise* (London), reached Hungary as early as the 18th century, for those books are to be found in several Hungarian libraries.

There was no lack of reading matter. The catalogues of the best Vienna and Pest booksellers, copies of which are to be found among the volumes bequeathed to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences by Count Ladislas Teleki, witness that numerous English publications were to be had in the latter half of the century. Here mention will only be made of a few. In a French catalogue of books dating from 1762, Frederic Bernardi, a Viennese bookseller, includes 21 English books, among which, together with works on geography, philosophy and pedagogy, we find English-German, English-Italian, English-Latin dictionaries, a French grammar in English and alongside of Young's poems an anthology of the works of modern poets ("A Select Collection of Modern Poems", Glasgow, 1759), as well as a volume of the "Tatler" and the "Spectator" and an 8-volume edition of "Clarissa

Harlowe". Johann Friederich Jahn's German catalogue offers 5 English books, one of which is Arnold's grammar and another an anthology published in Halle.

In Hungary Louis Schedius published annually a catalogue of the new books of the year (*Allgemeines Verzeichniss der inländischen Bücher*). The catalogue for 1802 contains only two English books: Hume's History and an essay on art. By the end of the 18th century we find a great decrease in the number of foreign books, even in the Vienna catalogues. The French Revolution and the European events connected with it led the Emperor to introduce severe measures to prevent the importation of foreign books and magazines and to forbid Hungarian youths to study at foreign universities. This also implied a more rigorous control of schools, especially with a view to prevent masters teaching more subjects than prescribed in the curriculum. As neither the first nor the second *Ratio educationis* made provision for the teaching of modern languages, it is no wonder that we experience a distinct retrogression at the turn of the century, as regards both contacts with England and the study of English.

It was not merely by chance that Széchenyi strove to turn the attention of Hungarian public opinion towards England again in the twenties of the 19th century. But without a knowledge of the keen interest displayed in the previous century it would be impossible to explain the rapid strides with which Hungarian society was able to follow Széchenyi's lead. "From the twenties of the 19th century it was English politics and economy that were the most admired in Hungary; they were considered an example in every way, and large numbers of Hungarians learned English and visited the island kingdom." That people were prompted to learn English was due mainly to those of our authors who had made the acquaintance of English literature and strove to give the Hungarian reading public an opportunity of enjoying its masterpieces. Already in 1817 Gabriel Döbrentei of the Transylvanian Museum writes that as many young people as possible ought to learn English and translate English books into Hungarian. The Minerva of Upper Hungary recommends prospective writers to learn

English. The English also began to discover Hungary. Especially after the introduction of steamship navigation they began in large numbers to visit this country, through which ran the London-Constantinople route.

Thus in the first half of the 19th century not only was the encouragement to learn English privately great, but also the opportunities of doing so were ample. Alexander Fest, in his essay "Data concerning the spread of the English language", publishes numerous particulars showing how many teachers of languages, native English teachers as well as Hungarians, advertized for pupils in the magazines and daily newspapers of that period, not only in Budapest, which was then beginning to be a literary centre, but also in several provincial towns. Count Aurelius Dessewffy expressed pleasure at the spread of English, but deplored that it was confined to conversations in English with trainers and grooms and the reading of a few fashionable novels.

It is doubtful whether the teaching of English as an institution existed in that period. We have no proof that it did; all we see is that, after the pattern of the Sopron school, the literary societies formed in certain schools made the study in groups of modern languages an item of their programmes. Thus in Sárospatak in 1832, under the leadership of Bartholomew Szemere, a law student, who later became Minister, a literary society was formed, which was sanctioned by the diocese on condition that its members undertook to learn French, German and English. Outside the framework of these literary societies the Budapest Lutheran secondary school was the only one of which we possess data showing that foreign languages were taught as extra subjects, partly by teachers of languages, partly by teachers belonging to the school. In the forties the Presbiterary decided that the teaching of English, French and Italian was desirable and therefore appointed de Lambert professor of English, who in his inaugural address delivered in German expounded the object of teaching modern languages. We have no data relating to other schools, but this by no means signifies that teachers who knew English did not teach it to private pupils, even perhaps to groups. Charles Szeleczky,



a master of the Pozsony Lutheran Lyceum, for instance, wrote an English grammar, and in the very middle of the Great Plain, among the teachers of the Lutheran secondary school in Szarvas, an institute struggling with financial difficulties, we find the name of Michael Boszy, who in 1810 translated the works of Shakespeare into Slovak, as well as those of the great scholar Maurice Bloch de Ballag, John Vajda and Julius Louis Dallos, the first lecturer in English language and English literature in Budapest University.

In 1806 F. Charles Alauda received permission to organize English courses in the building of the Budapest University. This permission was renewed in 1823, but only on condition that instruction was to be imparted gratis. It was Thun who encouraged the teaching of modern languages at the University; and in 1849 he introduced English, which — as in the past — was taught by language masters.

The development of English philological literature belongs to the latter half of the 19th century. Besides the above-mentioned English grammar by Charles Szelezcky, one with notes in Latin and an English reader were published in 1825 by Lemouton. In 1842 Michael Kis wrote the first English grammar in Hungarian and in 1848 Emery Freyrech published another English grammar, also in Hungarian. The first complete English grammar, reader and dictionary, written with excellent pedagogic feeling, were the work of Julius Louis Dallos. His works, first published in 1853, ran to many editions. With the collaboration of Arthur Patterson a revised edition of these works was published early in the 20th century. They were very popular with Hungarian students of English. Besides the works enumerated above, numerous more or less complete grammars and dictionaries were published, which shows that the desire to learn English never faltered, and a really widespread wish was met by the Minister of Education when in 1884 he requested the Faculty of Philosophy to create a chair of English language and English literature.

From 1849 on Louis Lewis, language teacher, and later James Egan had taught English at the University. In 1869 Julius Louis Dallos was appointed reader. After these pre-

liminaries Arthur Patterson, the first official professor of English in Budapest University, began his lectures. From 1896 to 1899 he was assisted by Arthur Yolland, who from 1899 on became sole Professor of English. The generation of teachers trained by Professor Yolland have made the study of English possible in secondary schools and thus the wish of many preceding generations has seen fulfilment.

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Nemzeti Széchenyi Könyvtár