

# JÁNOS ARANY AND THE MODERN HUNGARIAN NATIONAL LANGUAGE

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## ABSZTRAKT

Arany Jánosnak a modern magyar nemzeti nyelv kialakításában elvitathatatlan szerepe van. Írásművészetének kibontakozása és kiteljesedése egybeesik a magyar nyelv egy jelentős korszakával, a nyelvújítás időszakával, pontosabban annak azzal a részével, amikor a nyelvbővítés szakasza már alkonyodóban volt, és elérkezett az ideje a szelekció etapjának. Ekkor a fő feladat már az volt, hogy egyrészt az újonnan keletkezett nyelvi egységek közül kiválasztódjanak azok, amelyek valamilyen okból nem bizonyultak alkalmasnak a nyelv bővítésére, másrészt, egyben meginduljon egyfajta differenciáció is; azaz a különféle stílusrétegek, szaknyelvek, szakterminológiák kialakítása, bővítése, kultiválása az újonnan keletkezett nyelvi egységek elterjesztésével. Arany ebben a folyamatban, vagyis a modernizált „europaizált” magyar nemzeti nyelv alkalmazásában megteremtésében, ill. az innovált kód stabilizálásában és differenciálásában töltött be iránymutató szerepet. Az a nyelv, amelyet írásművészetével maga is standardizált a következő időszakban, Ady és a Nyugatosok megjelenéséig legalábbis, etalon lett.

## KULCSSZAVAK

modern nemzeti nyelv, nyelvbővítés, nyelvújítás, szelekció, differenciáció, innovált kód stabilizálása

The following paper contains some additions from János Arany's life; it deals with the role of the intellectual greatness in the formation of the modern Hungarian national language. The paper also focuses on the current linguistic situation, the function of the Hungarian standard, its importance nowadays and finally, it deals with certain questions of the Slovakian Hungarian language planning and language shaping.

## **János Arany's role in the formation of the modern Hungarian national language**

János Arany has an undisputable role in the formation of the modern Hungarian national language. The unfolding of his art of writing coincides with a significant era of the Hungarian language, that is, with the time of language reform. More specifically, a certain period of language reform, when the language expansion was at its dawn and it became the time for selection. At this time, the main task was to a) sort out those linguistic units from the newly formed ones which, for some reason, did not prove to be suitable for the expansion of the language, and also (b) it was time for the launch of a sort of differentiation, that is, to cultivate, expand and form the various stylistic layers,

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A tanulmány a Fórum Kisebbségkutató Intézet keretében működő Gramma Nyelvi Iroda támogatásával készült a komáromi Selye János Egyetem Magyar Nyelv és Irodalom Tanszékén.

technical language and terminology by spreading the newly formed language units. Amongst these stylistic layers – besides the standard -, the language of literature also had a significant place.

Arany played a highly important, normative role in this process, that is, in the formation and use of the modernized, “Europeanized” Hungarian national language as well as in the stabilization and differentiation of the innovated code. He bravely applied the newly formed linguistic elements as well as the dialects. He became a true language creator by exploiting the potentials of the language and by “creating”<sup>2</sup> the modern Hungarian high literature writing style (folk narrative art), especially in his late poetry. The language, which he also standardized with his own writing art, remained an epitome, at least until the appearance of Ady and the Nyugatosok (lit. Westerners). “The interpretation of the relation systems of literature, writers and language variants in Hungarian cultural history of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is based on János Arany. The summarizing statements most of the time say that the national language and thus the literary language is ultimately realized in the person and work of János Arany” [9: 57].

Arany’s language use, the formation of his writing art, his language shaping and language creating power is excellently summarized by Gábor Tolcsvai Nagy in the following manner:

“His language use was very diverse, he essentially created a new poetic language at every era. The abundance of old and archaic elements, besides (and after) the folk style in the lyric works of the 1850s (*Évek, ti még jövendő évek, Kertben, Mint egy alélt vándor, Balzsamcsepp, A lejtőn, Az örök zsidó, Rendületlenül*) hits a more objective voice, creates a clearer, standardizing and refining language. This variety later seems to become almost static to the literary and vernacular language codified by the Hungarian grammars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Again, his later period shows newer language forms. Arany, however, did not create and use these in order to strengthen the central linguistic norm, but he consciously validated them through stylistic and pragmatic considerations: this was the language with his adequate aspirations. His great linguistic power, maybe against his wish, affected the shaping and formation of the norm (standard), partly in contrast to the Szarvases, but at the same time he also took part in its deconstruction. He himself was aware – and he pointed this out on many occasions – that the language is changing, because the language is spoken, written and understood...” [9: 59].

According to Géza Bárczi, “... the overly rigid judgements and condemnations of the *Nyelvőr* (lit. *Language Guardian*), together with its aspiration to keep certain words which already became commonly used, as well as its style-criticism, made many writers oppose the movement. We know that János Arany many times did not agree with the *Nyelvőr*; he added strong critique to the volumes in footnote forms, and he believed that “the linguist gentlemen know it better” what is correct and good, but the poet “feels it better” [1: 355].

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<sup>2</sup> “Using a different approach, this is how Béla Németh G. interprets Arany’s language use: »The language and style of his lyric poetry are the most characteristically “created” language and style. Ancient laws and language potentials discovered as a scientist light up and impact the language of his lyric poetry; these language elements are cosmologically distant from the commonness of the folk language. Through an inner evolution-depiction, this Arany portrait shows the poet’s search for balance; the »style-optimism« of the mind of the original genius, who desires adequacy and seeks sovereignty «“. [9: 59]

Language in our region is a national matter, it is a tool for becoming a nation. A good example for this is the history of the Slovak language. Štúr Ľudovít and his associates, with the codification of the Slovak literary language (*spisovný jazyk*), greatly promoted the waking of the national identity and the fulfillment of the idea of nation-unification. That is, with the modernization of the language, they successfully served the modernization of the society as well (cf. [6, 7]).

Since as a language creator Arany served the cause of our national language, he also served our cause of becoming a modern nation. It is evident that language and society are factors which are complementarily conditions of each other. The formation of the modern language is presupposed by deeper social transformation. A more significant social transformation also has a direct impact on the language, mostly on its vocabulary. The vocabulary reacts to social changes with the sensitivity of a seismograph. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Hungary experienced the period of the evolution of the middle class – this process cannot be isolated from linguistic modernization. János Arany had an excellent talent for discovering this as well as the crises, personal and social dramas (cf. *Hídavatás*) caused by the rise of the middle class. He is well-known as a master of drama and the psyche (*Szondi két apródja; A walesi bárdok, Ágnes asszony*), this paper, however, does not focus on the analysis of the philosophical, moral and poetic aspects of his work<sup>3</sup>.

Mutatis mutandis, Arany, in his writing art masterly joined the so-called folk language with the urbanizing, middle-class vernacular. With this he proved that Hungarian, similarly to other languages, is a flexible communicational tool for filling in all communicational functions. The language reform [cf. 3: 74], the expansion of the linguistic functions might have been in favor<sup>4</sup> for Arany, even if the defeat in the revolution and in the war of independence did not create favorable circumstances for writing; it was not favorable for his ambition regarding the realist style, nor his artistic attitude (*Epilógus*).

Arany took part in the war of independence as guard of the nation, and he edited (together with Gereben Vas) the journal *Nép Barátja* (lit. “*Friend of the People*”). It is commonly known that he played a role in the shaping of the final version of Madách’s *Az ember tragédiája* (*The Tragedy of Man*). Retrospectively, we can say that he recommended for Madách certain stylistic changes, with which he increased the aesthetic value of the work. Imre Madách corrected the linguistic and poetic flaws of his work *The Tragedy of Man* based on Arany’s instructions, this way the work got rid of many agrammatic forms, inadequate archaisms and idiomatic words (cf. [4: 8]). He also wrote significant, pioneering papers about our versification (*A magyar nemzeti versidomról*).

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<sup>3</sup> “Arany knew the language-modifying factors of the unique literary work very well: the genre, the theme and the structure of the work. In his papers and in their occasional comments he used current text and sentence-centered poetics and stylistics. Though he also saw the adequate manifesting form of the Hungarian language in folk language and in the grammar built on it (it was not a coincidence that Zsigmond Simonyi and János Horváth built upon this view), he could not accept the dogmatizing extremes of the Szarvases.” [9: 59]

<sup>4</sup> “The works of Arany, mostly his lyric epic, became the epitomes of the extension of the standard in the second half of the century, whether the writer of Toldi desired it so or not (Gyulai and other critiques and linguists played a determining role in this.) His linguistics-related works also had a codifying nature; they were not only descriptive, but partly prescriptive as well.” [9: 33]

In the difficult months of the dispirited aftermath of the war of independence Arany escaped into translation. Translating Shakespeare and Aristophanes makes him one of our best literary translators. These works also clearly show us how great of a linguistic talent he had. He translated three plays of Shakespeare (*Hamlet*, *King John*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*). According to our literary history lexicons, from the point of view of loyalty, mood and linguistic beauty, only a few literature could present similar translations. He translated from German, English and Latin as well.

János Arany was well-known for his linguistic genius, but few people know that he was also studying Turkish. After the Latin, Greek and Hebrew of the school, when turning seventeen, he deals with German and French, and is working on Shakespeare when twenty-five; during his teaching job at Nagykőrös he learns Italian; when teaching at Szalonta, he is familiarizing himself with Spanish, and during the starting years in Budapest, in the 1860s, he studies Turkish grammar [cf. 8].

After he moved to Pest and became the director of the Kisfaludy Company in 1860, first he edited the journals *Szépirodalmi Figyelő* (lit. *High Literature Observer*) and *Koszorú* (lit. *Wreath*). Between 1865 and 1879 he was first the secretary of the Academy, then he became secretary-general.

### **The current linguistic situation. The functions and significance of the standard today. The Hungarian language in the EU**

In the following part, we follow the train of thought of the remarkable paper of Jenő Kiss [4], in which he discusses the significance of the standard in the context and interrelation of the current linguistic and political situation in the European Union.

The European Union promotes the preservation and support of the small languages and cultures; it looks at them as values to be preserved. In this context, it should be mentioned that the members of minority communities often have to face a limitation – e.g. regarding the use of their mother tongue – which does not apply for the members of the majority society. (In general, we can say: these problems are not, or less known by the members of the majority society, or rather they underrate it.) The legislature of the European Union might help for the majority society not to be threatened by the minorities' efforts regarding the preservation of their mother tongue. Since there is a strong connection between preserving the mother tongue and the national identity, those wanting to do the former, naturally also intend to preserve their national identity. In the mother countries, the national identity is not in danger, and its issue rarely comes up, especially in the context of minorities. For the Hungarians, it is a historical urge, a fact, that from the possible nation-models (state-nation, citizen-nation or culture-nation) the latter is typical. So it has to think and act in this one, not forgetting that in this model, the mother tongue gets a distinguished role.

The assurance of free activity, the increase of economic and cultural mobility and the previously unimaginable possibilities of the linguistic relationship-preservation can connect anyone anywhere into the circulation of the use of mother tongue. This can lead to the strengthening of the feeling of being united as a nation, and it is also a language-preserving force. In the Union, on long term outlook, it might be possible that “the mother tongues used in multiple countries will interlock (whether it is about the language of the majority or minority)”. (Szépe 2001: 75) What would this mean? It would mean that the weight of the Hungarian language would

increase e.g. approximately 30% among the European languages (ibid.). And what about the Hungarian – Hungarian linguistic communication? The aforementioned possibilities of preserving the linguistic relationships definitely decrease the linguistic disintegration and at the same time, they increase the spread of the standard Hungarian. It cannot be predicted precisely, but the migration – which is the consequence of the free, economically inevitable mobility of the labor force – is important from a linguistic perspective as well. Jenő Kiss, quoting Mihály Maszák Szegedy in 2004, described something that by today, has become a factual issue: “The unification of economy might come along with the migration of people. The nature of France or Germany has changed by the Arab, respectively Turkish communities living there. The immigrants have modified the image of the Netherlands and Britain, too. The expansion of the European Community might result in unpredictable changes. In the past, one was brought up in a certain language community, and was forced to use translation every time one met with a different language community. In the future, more and more people might feel *out of place*, in an interlinguistic state..., that is, interpreting language very broadly as an intellectual tradition or community memory” (Szegedy-Maszák 2004: 827, quoted by Jenő Kiss [4]) For years now, there are more than thousand Ukrainian and Romanian Hungarians working in Hungary. This, from the point of view of Hungarian language use, has both positive and negative effects. On one hand, with emigration, the possibilities of mother tongue relationships narrow down amongst the Hungarian minorities (e.g. in Transylvania and Vojvodina, where emigration is high), on the other, the active knowledge and use of the standard Hungarian increases among them (and this counter effects the Hungarian linguistic disintegration). In the matters of the minorities, the mother country, respectively the political parties and the government has to be aware of their responsibilities. Let us recall Samu Benkő’s words, phrased during the time of regime change: “An economically strengthened, morally cleansed Hungary, which plays a leading role in the universal culture, will have a great effect on the Hungarians living outside the border. It will definitely further and assist their subsistence and their linguistic and cultural attachments. We expect this moral, radiating power from Hungary.” [2: 81]

According to one axiom, the life of languages is determined by the fate of their communities. If a community successfully undergoes social and linguistic modernization, its language certainly survives. The issue of conscious language-preservation becomes or may become a burning question in minority situations. The goal here, which is also not primarily emotion-based, is not the least to ensure the sustenance of museum pieces. The goal is to keep or reach the potentially full functionality and role of the mother tongue, because the mother tongue, too, can only serve the self-realization of the individual in its unrestricted freedom. It depends on the members of the Hungarian language community, primarily on the intellectuals, whether or not Hungarians can deal with the challenges. Whether it can follow the biological rule of preservative adaptation, respectively adaptive preservation and keep up with the world; whether it can utilize the opportunities provided by the European Union. Because the Union, still, means challenge and opportunity at the same time.

### **The Slovakian Hungarian language maintenance, language planning and language shaping**

The beginnings of the Czechoslovak language maintenance go back to the time of the first Czechoslovak Republic, however, there was no systematic, organized language maintenance at

that period of time, only temporarily occurring warnings and writings with advisory nature. One of István Jakab's papers about the Czechoslovak Hungarian language maintenance starts with this statement (cf. Jakab 1976: 153). The Slovakian Hungarian language maintenance truly evolved only after the Second World War. Its progress and shaping was determined by the current historical, political and social situation. Besides these, the language trend of the mother country and the role language maintenance played in the mother country also highly affected it. In order to understand the outset and nature of the Slovakian Hungarian language maintenance, we need to look back at the beginnings.

Many papers deal with the fact that the Hungarian language maintenance and the minority Hungarian cultural life evolved after the Second World War with difficulty, and they also discuss how all its progress was affected by the political situation. We can also refer to the reality, that in Czechoslovakia, the Hungarian language maintenance did not have adequate forums either. Language maintenance in the fifties and sixties of the previous century, in the same way as before – between the two wars – began by occasional utterances, which were brought into being by necessity (cf. Jakab 1976: 153).

Only after the conditions of the use of the Hungarian language were set, did it become a relevant, essential task – manifested in everyday practical life, too – to maintain the Hungarian language used in a minority setting. Language maintenance in the beginnings was instinctual and it was limited to a relatively narrow field: it struggled with the problems of vocabulary use and stylelessness, it fought against linguistic sloppiness. Most problems occurred primarily in the area of vocabulary use (cf. Jakab 1976: 154).

From a language maintainer's perspective, and in general, only Hungarian linguists and language maintainers working at domestic departments (for a long time only those in Bratislava and Nitra) and other colleagues working in editorial offices were dealing with the questions of the Slovakian Hungarian language use. We could mention the names of Imre Mayer, István Jakab, Judit Mayer, László Zeman, Gábor Morvay. Later Gizella Szabómihály and István Lanstyák wrote papers about the situation, role and tasks of language maintenance. From the beginnings, however, theoretical, professional and practical help was provided by Hungarian linguists, mostly by those who joined the domestic departments for a longer period of time as language reviewers from the mother country. We can emphasize the work of László Deme, who was working at the Hungarian department at Bratislava for five years during the 1960s and 1970s. In his book, *Nyelvi és nyelvhasználati gondjainkról* (lit. *About Our Linguistic and Language Use Troubles*), he summarized his Slovakian Hungarian language experience (Madách, Bratislava, 1970). In his work, László Deme characterizes the Slovakian Hungarian Language use in the following way: "it is active on two levels. On the lowest (the level of family and village administration) and on the highest (the level of high literature and journalism.) What is in between, not counting some exceptions, is not active in Hungarian" (Deme 1970: 39).

Based on the principles of Hungarian language maintenance at the time, the principles of the Czechoslovakian language maintenance were first phrased by István Jakab (cf. Jakab 1976: 165–166; also see 1983). In one of his later papers, besides accepting the earlier principles, he adds the following:

"our language maintenance has enough of its troubles. Maybe it is understandable that its most important underlying principle is this: there is one Hungarian language. No matter how the

aforementioned other view is spreading, we believe: there is no Slovakian Hungarian language, only maybe a dialectical and regional vernacular variety of the Slovakian substandard level of the commonly used Hungarian language, and we can call that the Slovakian use of the Hungarian standard. We consider securing this principle and making it the basis of our work very important; this way we can prevent the disunion, disintegration and the process of separate evolution of our language” (Jakab 2011: 71).

Though the results which the Slovakian Hungarian language maintenance can show, remain to be seen. About this, and also about the effectiveness of the methods used in language maintenance, we can only have subjective opinions. Gizella Szabómihály phrases this in the following way:

“It is way more difficult – what is more, almost impossible – to measure the real effect of the productiveness of language maintenance; namely, we do not have objective data about what kind of changes occurred in the language use of the Slovakian Hungarians during the mentioned period of time, and also how language maintenance affected this process”(Szabómihály 2002: 143).

A true turning point in the Slovakian Hungarian language maintenance, in the same way as in other fields, was brought by the regime change. After the regime change, due to the end of the political obstacles, it became possible for mother country linguists to closely investigate the language and language use of the Hungarians outside the border. Possibly this was the time when the idea that the language use outside the border could more effectively be examined in another theoretical framework, not based on language maintenance. *Language planning*, with a newer term *Language management* and *Sociolinguistics* could provide a more adequate framework. It also became obvious, however, that language maintenance could not stay unchanged. In the period after the regime change, the investigation of the domestic language use within the newly formulated theoretical framework started to progress dynamically. Language maintenance was soon confronted by the new scientific paradigm. Gizella Szabómihály writes about this in the following way:

“I am confident that we need to break away from the traditional language maintaining »language guarding« perspective: I see the preservation of the Hungarian language, the extension of its functions, the slowing down or maybe even the stopping of the process of its separate evolution possible to realize in another theoretical framework and with other methods, which is why I find it important to insert managing our linguistic problems into the broader framework of language planning” (Szabómihály 2002: 146).

The biggest linguistics-related debate of the previous decades burst out, in fact, about the Hungarian language use outside the border. The full debate is published in the book: *Nyelvmentés vagy nyelvárulás. Vita a határon túli magyar nyelvhasználatról* (lit. *Language Rescue or Language Betrayal. Debate about the Language Use of Hungarian Outside the Border*) (Miklós Kontra – Noémi Saly (eds.), Osiris Publishing House: Budapest, 1998). The point of the debate is that language maintenance should be transformed into a theoretical-practical activity, which considers the features of minority Hungarian language use as natural phenomena, and also sees its elements – which deviate from the standard – not as “bad” or “incorrect” ones, or even non-existing forms, that is, it does not consider them as stigmatized linguistic structures, but rather as natural consequences of bilingualism and linguistic contact. Thus beside/instead of the traditional *language maintenance* term, *language management* proves to be more appropriate, mainly because

it reflects the new approach towards linguistic problem management better than the *linguistic maintenance* form.

“...the use of the term linguistic management seems to be favorable in contrast to language maintenance, whose content is getting emptier and emptier. It is preferred because of its multiple perspectives and because of its potential for embedding and investigating linguistic problems (norm problems) in a broader communicational and social context” (Szabó Mihály 2011: 560).

In light of the new approach, Gizella Szabó Mihályi sees the goals of language maintenance in the following:

- “a) the slowing down, respectively preventing the process of separate evolution and archaization of the language,
- b) the familiarization and spreading of (standard) words, phrases etc. used in Hungary,
- c) the stopping of the process which decreases the prestige value of the Slovakian Hungarian language by its extension towards more stages of its use, with a particular focus on its written form” (Szabó Mihályi 2002: 148).

Establishing the Gramma Language Office in Dunaszerdahely resulted in an improvement in the research of the domestic Hungarian language use. In 2002, this institution undertook and kept doing those tasks as well, which previously fell into the scope of linguistic maintenance. One of the newer results of the Slovakian Hungarian language planning/language management is that it threw new light upon linguistic maintenance (cf. Ágnes Domonkosi – István Lanstyák – Ildikó Posgay, eds., *Műhelytanulmányok a nyelv műveléséről* (lit. *Workshop Papers on Linguistic Maintenance*). Segédkönyvek a nyelvészet tanulmányozásához 71. Gramma Linguistic Office – Tinta Publishing House, Dunaszerdahely – Budapest, 2007).

The history of the Slovakian Hungarian language maintenance proves the thesis that the management of linguistic problems, which previously belonged exclusively under the jurisdiction of language maintenance, remained a current task; its forms, methods, theoretical framework, however, are not everlasting and unchangeable factors, but they always depend on place and time.

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