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Translation and the Paradox of Cultural Flux

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Abstract

The term *culture*, as theorists have long observed, describes at least two distinct things: a shared set of assumptions or beliefs shaping how a group of people interpret themselves and their place in the world, and the group of people itself. The boundaries between cultures, in both senses, are porous and shifting, and the words people use to name them are “essentially contested,” in the sense proposed by W.B. Gallie. This article explores the nature of that contestation in Canada, a country marked by considerable internal diversity, focusing on the role of translators funded by the Canada Council. It describes two trends: first, inside Canada, a decades-long history of translation occurring within the Toronto-Montreal corridor, and second, outside of Canada, a growing rate of translation of Canadian works by non-Canadian translators into languages other than English and French. These trends influence the ways that Canadian culture is essentially contested, and they point to a paradox: efforts to pin down identity have the opposite effect. The nature of contestation is such that efforts to define borders and establish categories produce the very churn they are intended to stop.

Keywords: Canada Council; cultural identity; cultural translation; essentially contested concepts; geography of translation

1. Introduction

Two years ago I became a Canadian citizen. As one would expect, I had to take a test to demonstrate my knowledge of Canadian history and values. The study guide devoted an entire page to the War of 1812, which it was at pains to explain Canada had won. I grew up in the United States, where I learned a different story. The War of 1812, my teachers said, was really the second Revolutionary War, the point where we – Americans – defeated Great Britain (not Canada) once and for all, securing our independence into the future. According to the Canadian citizenship guide, however, Canada (not Great Britain) defeated the United States after the U.S. invaded, and by repelling the Americans, we – Canadians – secured our independence into the future. As the test approached, I wondered what I would say if I had to

answer the question, “Who won the War of 1812?” But the right answer was clear: everything hinged on the antecedent of the pronoun *we*.

Strange as the experience felt to me, it is far from uncommon. If my identity is hybrid, it is in the most unremarkable way. In fact, the value of my story is its utter ordinariness: in a world where travel is cheap and where the internet connects us seamlessly (or nearly so) to points across the globe, crossing borders is quotidian and banal. Indeed, if there’s anything remarkable about my story, it’s the ease with which my family’s migration took place: I took a job at a university in a safe and comfortable city, and we live in a version of English that, to the listener uninterested in the pleasure of insignificant details, sounds exactly like what we spoke before.

But my story, in all its banality, illustrates a series of contradictions at the heart of debates about identity, especially in a multicultural country like Canada. According to the citizenship guide, Canadians share a culture, even if it is sprawling and diverse. To become Canadian is to transform oneself – in a literal, performative way, by swearing allegiance to “His Majesty King Charles the Third, King of Canada, [and to] His Heirs and Successors” (as the oath of citizenship has it) – and to adopt that culture as one’s own¹. By acquiring my new citizenship, I stepped from one circle to another on the Venn diagram of national identity, and as far as I was concerned, the War of 1812 had a new winner.

The most important contradiction here is between two senses of the word *culture*. It describes, first, a shared set of assumptions or beliefs shaping how a group of people interpret themselves, the world, and what happens there. Second, it describes the group of people themselves². As an American (culture in the second sense, that of community), I interpreted the War of 1812 in the context of the Revolutionary War, steeped in the mythology of tea parties, red coats, and taxation without representation (culture in the first sense, that of an interpretive horizon). As a Canadian (culture, again, as community), I interpret it in the context of the threat of American aggression, steeped in a mythology of loyalists, good government, and self-preservation (culture, again, as interpretive horizon).

The contradiction between these ideas runs deep, especially in the assumption that they map onto each other – that an interpretation of the

¹ Here I am adapting an argument originally made by Boris Buden and Stefan Nowotny (2009).

² I am not the first to make this distinction between different meanings of culture. It is widespread among anthropologists, although I first encountered it in Richard Collins’s *Culture, Communication and National Identity* (1990).

world and the people who share it are somehow coterminous. My goal, in line with the theme of this special issue, is to describe a phenomenon that, to my knowledge, has only ever been discussed implicitly. I am interested in the ways that culture in both senses is altered by acts of cultural translation, understood as a process by which people “come to understand an object or text whose meaning derives from a shared interpretation of the world,” a process that “takes place through conversation and exchange” (Conway, 2020: 5). I argue that culture in both senses is in fact provisional and changing. The content of the shared horizon is essentially contested: any attempt to fix the meaning of a term like *Canadian* “inevitably involves endless disputes about [its] proper uses on the part of [its] users” (Gallie, 1956: 169). Likewise, the group making an identity claim changes over time: people join and people leave. More importantly, however, I argue that translation, as an act of substituting one sign set for another, with all the cultural baggage that substitution implies, reflects these changes even as it brings them about.

2. “Canada” as essentially contested concept

Halfway through her book *On Community*, Casey Plett writes that community “consists of both enumeration and mythos. It’s always dissolving and remaking itself. It contains multiplicities and inner divides, sometimes more than an outsider could ever conceive of” (2023: 82). Her point is that the ability to name a community – for instance, Canada – is deceptive insofar as it presupposes an entity to be named. Although members of a community might have the sense that their shared identity coheres around a core set of ideas, they would be hard-pressed to name them in a consensual way. Any effort to pin them down reveals how elusive they really are, always to be found just beyond an ever-receding horizon.

In this respect, culture, in both senses I invoke above, falls into a category described by W.B. Gallie as “essentially contested” in that “there is no one clearly definable general use of [the concept] which can be set up as the correct or standard use,” and any effort to do so tends to end in “head-on conflict of interests or tastes or attitudes, which no amount of discussion can possibly dispel” (1956: 168–169). According to Gallie, essentially contested concepts are characterized by seven traits. They (1) are “appraisive” because they involve value judgments (2) that relate to an achievement having an “internally complex character.” People justify their

judgments (3) by referring “to the respective contribution of [the concept’s] various parts or features,” (4) modifying their evaluations as circumstances change, often in unforeseeable ways. Furthermore, (5) they recognize that others contest their evaluation, too. Despite these changes, (6) the concept coheres around “an original exemplar whose authority is acknowledged by all the contestant users” (7) to which people appeal as they argue in favor of their interpretation, maintaining the exemplar’s status as such (1956: 171–172, 180).

Consider Canadian culture (in both senses) in light of these characteristics. It is viewed positively by those who extol its virtues (trait 1). Others, of course, are critical, especially when describing Canada’s settler policies, the effects of which are both historical and current. Indeed, as I was studying for the citizenship test, First Nations groups were uncovering gravesites at residential schools that revealed the horrors of Canada’s treatment of Indigenous peoples. In that respect (and others), Canada’s achievements, such as they are, are deeply ambivalent, or, in Gallie’s words, “internally complex” (trait 2). To give another example, Canada instituted the world’s first official policy of multiculturalism in 1971, in response to the report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, part of which challenged the commission’s premise that Canada was bicultural along English/French lines. Pierre Trudeau’s government introduced the policy by explaining that “cultural identity is not the same thing as allegiance to a country” and that “cultural pluralism is the very essence of Canadian identity” (Canada, 1971: 8580). It proposed to institute policies to support cultural groups that wanted to “contribute to Canada,” the goal being to help “members of all cultural groups to overcome barriers to full participation in Canadian society,” to “promote creative encounters” between groups, and to help immigrants “to acquire at least one of Canada’s official languages in order to become full participants in Canadian society” (1971: 8581). The policy represented an attempt to codify certain dimensions of Canada’s diversity-in-unity, the very definition of internal complexity, justified by references to the different ways Canadians prioritized values (trait 3).

Of course, not only do Canadians prioritize these values differently, but the values themselves also change over time (trait 4). The 1971 policy, for instance, made no mention of First Nations, focusing instead on Canada’s different immigrant groups, an omission that would never be made now. Values change in part because people recognize them as contested (trait 5). To give just one example, in *The Unfinished Canadian* Andrew Cohen

responds to multiculturalism's promoters by arguing that one result of the policy has been that Canadians "are living on islands of our own in the Sea of Canada – Chinatown, Greektown, Little Italy, Little India, Ste. [sic] Boniface, Westmount – associating with each other largely through trade and commerce. But we have nothing in common" (2007: 160). Phil Ryan (2010), in turn, responds to Cohen by situating Cohen's complaints among the litany made by multiculturalism's critics, in particular with respect to what they perceive as an overemphasis on cultural identity at the expense of shared identity.

The idea that Canadianness derives from an "original exemplar" is clear in the appeals Canadians make to other nations as models (although those models, too, are contested, despite the role they play as exemplars in the Canadian context) (trait 6). Cohen, for example, asserts that the "study of national character begins with others. It looks first to the British, the French, and the Americans" (2007: 6). Others appeal to Canada's "founding peoples" (Paquin, 1999) or, more abstractly, to ideas of Canada as an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1991) or even "*une âme, un principe spirituel*" [a soul, a spiritual principle] (Renan, 1882: 26, my translation)³. Whatever source they cite, Canadians' appeals to these exemplars maintain their status as such (trait 7): they are the standards against which Canadians measure their collective identity, contested though it may be.

3. Translation as contact point

I want to focus here on Canada's multiculturalism as a reflection (or perhaps refraction) of Canada's "internal complexity." The idea that multiculturalism essentializes the relationship between people and the ideas they share is widespread. One challenge to such essentialism is translation, which makes ideas from one group available to another. Through the exchange it facilitates, translation reveals the porousness of the boundaries between cultural groups.

In Canada, translation is big business, as the magazine of the American Translators Association observed in 2010: "Although it has only 0.5% of

³ It is worth noting that Renan also says, "*l'essence d'une nation est que tous les individus aient beaucoup de choses en commun, et aussi que tous aient oublié bien des choses*" [the essence of a nation is that all its members have much in common, and also that all have forgotten many things] (Renan, 1882: 9, my translation). The obligation to forget (or, more to the point, to have forgotten) is the starting point of much contestation.

the world population, it occupies fully 10% of the global translation market” (Hamilton, 2010: 13). Where literary translation is concerned, the Canada Council for the Arts, a Crown corporation established in 1957, has made grants available to translators since its inception, providing “a vital stimulus for [...] literary exchange and inventiveness,” as Agnès Whitfield (2011: 15) writes. It has proven a success, at least in quantitative terms. Between 1993 and 2005, its grants led to an annual production of about fifty translations per year (Whitfield, 2011: 16), a number that has continued to grow. Statistics from 2024 show that between 2017 and 2023, the Canada Council funded between 167 and 217 translations each year, with average recommended funding ranging between about \$8,300 and \$10,600 per project (table 1). Most of the grants supported the translation of literature, although between 1 in 7 and 1 in 5 supported the translation of theatrical texts, with occasional projects supporting deaf and disability arts or multidisciplinary activities (table 2; category designations come from the Canada Council). The translation grant program’s success is also observable in the interactions it has encouraged between “Anglophone and Francophone presses and between Anglophone and Francophone translators and authors” (Whitfield, 2011: 19).

Year	Number of awards	Average recommended funding / project	Total recommended funding
2017–18	167	\$10,546	\$1,761,193
2018–19	184	\$9,188	\$1,690,531
2019–20	180	\$8,524	\$1,534,265
2020–21	217	\$8,578	\$1,861,430
2021–22	193	\$8,276	\$1,597,204
2022–23	181	\$8,849	\$1,601,591
Total	1,122	\$8,954	\$10,046,214

Table 1. Number and value of awards made by the Canada Council for the Arts in support of translation projects, 2017–23. Data source: Canada Council for the Arts (2024).

Year	Literature	Theatre	Deaf and Disability Arts	Multidisciplinary Activities	Total
2017–18	144 (86%)	23 (14%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	167
2018–19	149 (81%)	35 (19%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	184
2019–20	143 (79%)	36 (20%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	180
2020–21	184 (85%)	33 (15%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	217
2021–22	169 (88%)	23 (12%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	193

Year	Literature	Theatre	Deaf and Disability Arts	Multidisciplinary Activities	Total
2022–23	155 (86%)	25 (14%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	181
Total	944 (84%)	175 (16%)	2 (0%)	1 (0%)	1,122

Table 2. Translation projects for which the Canada Council for the Arts recommended funding, broken down by field of practice, 2017–23. Data source: Canada Council for the Arts (2024).

To be sure, translation is not an innocent exercise. Like any other action, it is influenced by exogenous social and political realities. Many significant works in Canadian literature, for instance, remain untranslated because of lack of interest or funds or time, and even when translations exist, they are not always readily available: “most libraries,” Whitfield writes, “give priority, in their collection development policies, to Canadian literary works in the original. The status of translations [is] less certain” (2011: 23). Critical or scholarly work – one foundation on which a shared canon is built – is rarely translated, while funding pressures – already present when Whitfield published her article over a decade ago and exacerbated in the years since – have led to a steep decline in comparative literature courses in high schools and universities (2011: 25). There are also important asymmetries in translation patterns. For one thing, “In practice, despite the inclusion of First Nations languages [in Canada Council granting guidelines], [...] the program has been massively weighed towards French and English” (Whitfield, 2011: 15). Within the English-French pair, fewer works are translated into English than into French, leading Whitfield to conclude that “the Anglophone majority would appear to be much less interested in translating works by authors writing in the language of the linguistic minority” (2011: 25). And historically, when translations into English have been produced, their status as translations has often been obscured in ways that appear to threaten Francophone Québécois identity by subsuming the works under the broader label of *Canadian* culture (Mezei, 1988).

4. Communication as translation

Efforts to quantify translation in Canada obscure something subtler happening at the level of culture. Those efforts are misleading, in fact, to the degree that they presuppose entities such as Anglophone and

Francophone Canada, which, like the idea of Canadianness itself, are essentially contested concepts.

A useful heuristic tool to describe this contestation and its effects is the model of a sign proposed by American Pragmatist philosopher Charles Peirce (1940). Something becomes a sign, in Peirce's expansive definition, at the point where it brings something to mind for someone. Words are perhaps the most recognizable signs, but anything can have this function, ranging in complexity from "the musty smell while walking in a forest" or "the aftertaste from a deliciously exotic meal" to symbols whose meanings are codified by convention, such as a red octagon that every driver should recognize as a signal to stop (Liszka, 1996: 48). Signs are made up of three components. First is the representamen, or the thing that evokes something else – the musty smell, the aftertaste, the red octagon. Second is the object, or the slice of the world to which the representamen points – the woods through which one is walking, the meal one has eaten, a traffic signal. Third is the interpretant, or an idea or association evoked by the representamen and the object – the calm comfort that forests bestow on wanderers, the pleasure of spending time with friends over supper, the requirement to stop (and the consequences if one does not). Signs are dynamic in that interpretants can themselves become representamens, evoking ever-expanding chains of associations – an aftertaste that evokes a specific meal that evokes the pleasure of another's company that evokes fond memories of time spent with one's friends, and so on.

As people try to define Anglophone or Francophone Canada (or Canadianness more broadly), arguing about who belongs and who does not, these associations evolve. Hence the contestation. To understand how, consider the experience of talking to another person, in all its ordinariness. As we converse, our interactions have a clear temporal orientation. On the one hand, I, addressing myself to you, take into consideration the different contexts in which I think you have encountered the ideas I want to discuss (Vološinov, 1986). Perhaps I think you agree with me. Perhaps I think you disagree. In either case, I choose what to say and how to say it accordingly, oriented as I am toward your discursive past, to say nothing of my own. But I am also concerned with the associations my words are likely to evoke for you, and, anticipating your reactions, I "parry objections that I foresee [... and] make all kinds of provisos" (Bakhtin, 1986: 95). In that respect, I am also oriented toward our shared discursive future. And when you respond to me, your orientation mirrors my own: pulled between past and future, you choose your words to maximize their effectiveness in the present.

This bifurcated temporal orientation influences the chain of associations – the representamens evoking interpretants, which then themselves act as representamens – that signs bring to mind for both of us. With each turn taken in our conversation, I find that the words we use acquire new associations as I take account of what you say (and anticipate your response), and as you do the same. If nothing else, at the moment I speak, I must take account of your most recent conversational turn, which I had only anticipated before. For me, that turn, small though it may be, becomes a new association evoked by the words we are both using. In effect, as we converse, we substitute a new sign with an expanded chain of interpretants for an older, more limited one. Communication becomes a form of translation (Conway, 2017). The effect might be short-lived and almost imperceptible, but it is there if I look for it (Conway, 2020)⁴. Over time the cumulative effects of these exchanges – not just between you and me, but between others who carry on their own conversations – become manifest in the evolution of language itself, as words’ meanings become narrower or broader or shift from one register to another (McWhorter, 2001).

5. Translation and community churn

Just as meaning churns, so do communities, as Plett (2023) writes in the book I cite above. This process is clearest with respect to words describing community membership, such as *American* or *Canadian* or *Anglophone* or *Francoophone*. These words take on new meanings for individual speakers (*Canadian* changed dramatically for me during my citizenship ceremony), in ways that may or may not coincide with their uses by members of the community they (ostensibly) describe. Hence, yet again, their essential contestation.

The evolution of identity words is really a symptom of broader changes in the relationship between culture as an interpretive horizon and culture as

⁴ Consider the essay I am writing right now: it is a turn taken in a conversation, even if its pace is slowed down by the medium of writing. As I write, you, my reader, are an abstraction to me, but I still choose my words in anticipation of how I think you will react. Perhaps you are a peer reviewer, in which case you will be looking for evidence. Perhaps you are a student reading my essay for a paper you plan to write, in which case you will be looking for concrete examples. I can provide both in footnotes, to which you, taking account of the new associations I am working to attach to words like *sign* or *translation* or *Canada*, might even respond.

the community that shares it. The relationship between individuals and communities is mediated in part by the material dimensions of shared meaning, manifest in the tension between an individual's interpretative horizon and the broader horizon of the community to which they belong. The overlap between horizons is never perfect, but the fit is better for some people than for others. Part of the feeling of belonging depends on an individual's sense of that fit: the greater the divergence, the less they might feel like they belong. For instance, the more I observe the polarization that has come to dominate U.S. politics, a symptom of shifts in a collective interpretive horizon increasingly dissonant with my own, the more I feel alienated from the home I left a decade ago. People respond to such divergence in different ways, sometimes by leaving the community, sometimes by asserting their right to belong by bringing about further shifts in their shared collective horizon. When activists work to gain recognition for people who are marginalized, their efforts, in the terms I have proposed here, serve in part to expand the chain of associations evoked by words designating community membership.

Translation has a particular role to play in this process. Translators maintain a complex status in the conversations they carry out with members of both the source and target communities (although I use *source* and *target* here heuristically because they, too, are essentially contested). As Kathy Mezei says,

As *reader* of the source text, the translator is a producer of meaning of the source text since the translator has a personal history and is herself as culture-bound as the source and subsequent target text. The translator-reader-enscriber is also conscious of her audience, the readers of the target text, who again will be producers of meaning. Both of these determine the production of the translation. (1988: 15)

The process viewed through the conceptual lens I have proposed looks a bit like this. Imagine I write a novel. My work captures a snapshot of the configuration of ideas making up an interpretive horizon, with all its internal tensions and contradictions, at a given moment. My novel is published, but the horizon of which I captured a snapshot continues to change, even if only in ways that are unremarkable in the short term. (Those changes will become clearer in the longer term: in a century, my novel will appear dated, the way that novels written in the early twentieth century appear dated to readers now.)

Now imagine that you are a translator who finds my novel and decides to re-express it in a new language. Your work reflects two interpretive horizons, those of the source culture and the target culture. Your act is fundamentally hermeneutic as you account for the associations evoked by words in one context and anticipate what they will evoke in another. In effect, you engage in “an interpretive act that inevitably varies source-text form, meaning, and effect according to intelligibilities and interests in the receiving culture” (Venuti, 2019: 1).

However, even as you and I capture snapshots of our respective horizons, we also contribute through the act of writing or translating to the churn of meaning, you doubly so. By reflecting the source culture back to itself, you contribute to its evolution, as those who can read your translation see themselves refracted through a new prism. But you also contribute to the evolution of the target culture through the new ideas – those I have shared – that you introduce. Indeed, nothing stands still. Everything – the interpretive horizons of source and target culture, the people who claim membership in communities sharing those horizons – is part of a slowly churning Heraclitan flux, cohering more or less around core ideas that people acknowledge even if they cannot pin them down.

6. Recent geography of translation inside (and outside) of Canada

What does this abstraction mean in a concrete sense, for instance for translation in Canada? Although it is impossible to make extrapolations about the composition of Canadians’ interpretive horizons – or even the content of translations themselves – from the data provided by the Canada Council, it is possible to observe two suggestive trends. Consider table 3, which describes the number of grants made between 2013 and 2023, as well as their geographic distribution inside and outside of Canada.

Year	Grants made to	Grants made to	Total grants made
	organizations in Canada	organizations outside of Canada	
2013–14	164 (64%)	94 (36%)	258
2014–15	182 (61%)	115 (39%)	297
2015–16	232 (73%)	86 (27%)	318
2016–17	98 (53%)	86 (47%)	184
2017–18	83 (50%)	84 (50%)	167
2018–19	98 (53%)	86 (47%)	184

Year	Grants made to organizations in Canada	Grants made to organizations outside of Canada	Total grants made
2019–20	103 (57%)	77 (43%)	180
2020–21	99 (46%)	118 (54%)	217
2021–22	74 (38%)	119 (62%)	193
2022–23	79 (44%)	102 (56%)	181
Total	1,212 (56%)	967 (44%)	2,179

Table 3. Translation grants awarded to entities inside and outside of Canada, 2013–23. Data sources: Canada Council for the Arts (2018, 2024).

First, between 2017 and 2023, the Canada Council’s support for translation increased, in aggregate if not linearly, although it was higher before 2016–17. (The Canada Council used different categories for its statistics from 2013–17 and 2017–23, so comparisons are imperfect.)⁵ Looking at the location of grant recipients, it is also clear that the Toronto-Montreal corridor is home to most of publishers receiving translation grants, following patterns observed by Whitfield a decade ago. Figure 1 shows a map of Canada with the location of all domestic grant recipients between 2017 and 2023, darker colors indicating greater density of recipients. The scale of the map obscures the sheer magnitude of concentration: except for an almost imperceptible blip near Vancouver, most recipients fell in this corridor, including 227 recipients in Montreal and 97 in Toronto, or over 60 percent of all grants awarded in Canada, in line with ratios observed in prior years (Canada Council for the Arts, 2007, 2024).

⁵ I used the `dplyr` package in the programming language R to extract and analyze these data (Wickham et al., 2023). The two spreadsheets I used classify translation grants differently. The sheet covering 2013–17 distinguishes between “Book Publishing Support - Translation Grants,” “International Translation Grants,” and “Grants for the Translation of Canadian Theatre Works” in the column “Canada Council for the Arts Program Title” (Canada Council for the Arts, 2018). The sheet covering 2017–23 lists all translation grants simply as “Translation” in the column “Canada Council for the Arts Component/Program” (Canada Council for the Arts, 2024).

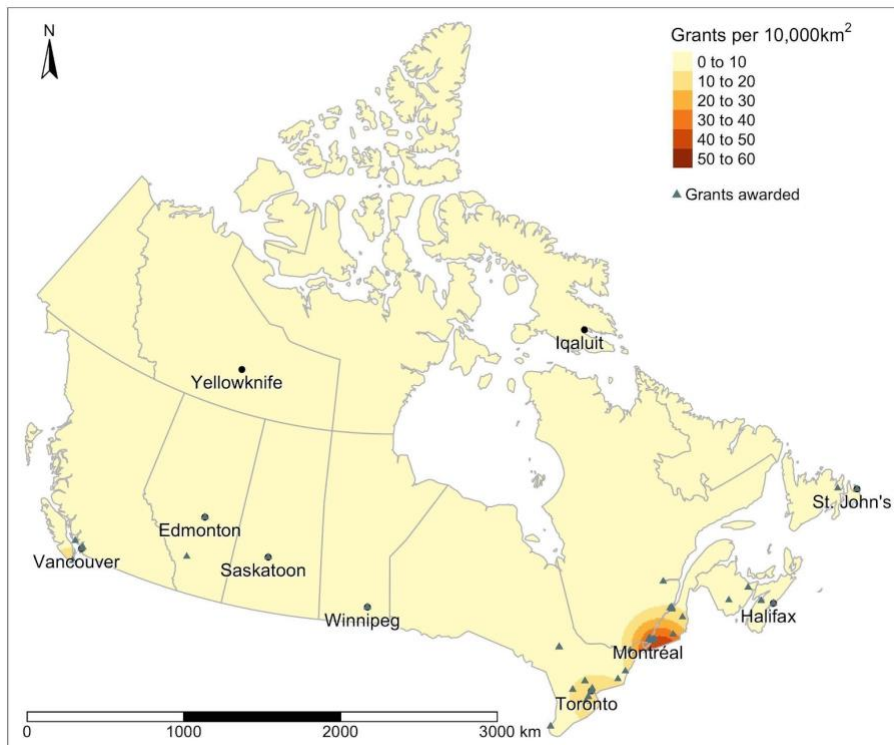


Figure 1. Location of translation grants awarded (in Canada) by the Canada Council for the Arts, 2017–23. Data sources: Canada Council for the Arts (2024), Government of Canada (2022), Natural Earth (2022a, 2022b).

The second trend, however, is perhaps more interesting. As table 3 shows, the focus on organizations outside of Canada has grown: while the overall number of grants made each year has fluctuated, the number and percentage of grants made to organizations outside of Canada have increased, with some year-to-year variation. Between 2013 and 2017, a little more than a third of the recipients of Canada Council translation grants were located outside of Canada. Between 2017 and 2023, that ratio rose to more than half. They were located in 168 different cities, the most frequent being Skopje (73 recipients), Barcelona (28), Amsterdam (22), Madrid (17), Belgrade (16), and Kyiv (15) (Canada Council for the Arts, 2024). In other words, where translation grants are concerned, the churn shaping the interpretive horizons of Canadian culture is occurring as much beyond Canada’s borders as within them. Although the statistics I analyze do not

indicate the languages of translation, this geographic scope suggests that they now extend well beyond English and French.

This trend is symptomatic of a broader phenomenon affecting more than just Canada, namely the erosion of the nation-state in an era of globalization. Broadly, Jürgen Habermas (2001) speaks of a “postnational constellation.” The state’s administrative authority over its own territory, he writes, is challenged by various forms of “risk that do not respect national borders,” such as ecological disasters and organized crime, “above all of international trafficking in drugs and arms” (2001: 68). States must work together to address these challenges, sometimes at the cost of their sovereignty, at least in certain domains. At the same time, the identities underpinning national communities are challenged by migration and economic globalization, both factors undermining the “democratic legitimacy of the nation-state” (Habermas, 2001: 68–80).

More narrowly, Canadian literary criticism, including discussions of translation, has followed a similar historical arc. The Canada Council was founded in response to the 1951 Report on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, which argued, by Imre Szeman’s account, that “it was the nation-state that gave life to Canadian culture” – rather than Canadian culture justifying the nation-state – “in order to give legitimacy to itself” (2003: 154). In that respect, the Canada Council’s efforts were part of a larger effort to understand or define Canada in national terms. That effort continued through the 1970s, a decade marked by the growth of literary nationalism, exemplified by Northrop Frye and Margaret Atwood, orbiting around questions related to the themes defining (English) Canada (Szeman, 2003: 155–156; Zacharias, 2016: 103–104).

In the decades that followed, however, a “transnational critical return emerged in response to the accelerating globalizations of culture and capital, which, some argued, increasingly threatened to render the nation irrelevant” (Zacharias, 2016: 106), in line with Habermas’s observations above. As mobility of people and capital increased, so did the attention critics paid to migration and hybridity, as questions of national identity were reconsidered inside Canada (by people like me who straddle categories) and outside Canada (as non-Canadian organizations received an increasing percentage of funding to translate Canadian works). Consequently, a broader set of interlocutors is talking about or questioning Canadian culture and its meanings, albeit obliquely, through their choice of what and how to translate, in the dual context of translators’ and authors’ cultural milieux.

To be sure, this discussion still takes place within the bounds of a state apparatus, as realized in forms such as the Canada Council. The state, perhaps weakened, has not disappeared, raising the question of how these changes relate to Canadianness as an essentially contested concept, to return to Gallie (1956) and my discussion above. In short, some traits have remained the same while some have changed. The category *Canadian* still has appraisive dimensions (trait 1) in that it is perceived as good or bad depending on the observer's perspective. People who try to define it still recognize that others contest their evaluation (trait 5), and they still appeal to original exemplars, in particular other national identities, around which the concept's meaning coheres (traits 6 and 7), although such exemplars are subject to the same pressures of internationalization as the concept of Canadianness itself.

What has changed are the circumstances in which the concept is contested (trait 4), under pressure from the changing logics of global capitalism and the responses of national governments working to assert their authority. Consequently, the internal complexity of the concept of Canadianness has grown, especially as people justify their notions by referring to the increasingly complex nature of the concept's various parts (trait 3). As more immigrants have come to Canada, the diversity of people asserting or contesting ideas of Canadianness has increased. A 2020 survey of Canadians asking questions related to identity reveals the nature of this complexity. When presented with different scenarios in relation to the question, "What makes you feel more Canadian?" respondents said they felt most Canadian when they saw veterans being honored on Remembrance Day or when they watched Canadian teams compete in international sporting events. They were more ambivalent, however, when presented with scenarios related to cultural diversity, such as when they "[saw] people from many different races/cultures in [their] community" or when they "read or [heard] about new refugees arriving in Canada." Younger and more educated respondents were more comfortable with diversity, as were immigrants, who said they were more likely to feel Canadian in such situations (Environics Institute for Survey Research, 2020: 8, 12–13).

6. Conclusion: Identity beyond borders

This geographic expansion points to a need for a more focused form of empirical work. How do its effects become visible in the texts translators

produce, for instance, or in the patterns of circulation of translations inside and outside Canada's borders? More broadly, how do geography and language interact as factors shaping people's sense of who is Canadian and who is not? Do similar dynamics characterize the translation of other (contested) national literatures, as people take advantage of cheap travel and the connections afforded by increasingly convergent technology?

Answering these questions will involve exploring a fundamental paradox related, as I write in the introduction, to the ways that culture as an interpretive horizon and as a community is altered by acts of translation, in a conventional sense (the rewriting of literature in a different language) and as *cultural* translation (the negotiation of meaning). Efforts to pin down identity – to say that *these* people belong to a cultural community, while *those* people do not – have the opposite effect. The nature of contestation is such that efforts to define borders and establish categories produce the very churn they are intended to stop. Statements meant to fix identity invite other statements from a different perspective, adding further interpretants to the chain of associations evoked by the signs designating identity.

Indeed, the questions raised by this paradox are profound, its implications wide-ranging in ways my sketch here can only suggest. The nature of its effects will depend, ultimately, on whether people – writers, translators, readers, but also voters and politicians – see the questions it raises about language, identity, politics, and geography as an opportunity or as a threat.

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