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## Connotations of Significance and their Visualization in Slovak Poems by Imrich Fuhl

### Abstract

The paper points out the existence of the Slovak poetic word in present-day Hungary. It aims to identify the themes, creative procedures, methods and means of expression used in the Slovak poems by Imrich Fuhl. Based on a methodological basis, it follows the specific attributes of the complex being of the individual in this chronotope. It puts a special emphasis on those poems that are supported by visualization in one way or another in his two published poetry collections. It characterizes the connection between Fuhl's poetry and selected visual concretizations of his texts. In addition, individual prototexts follow not only the intricate fates of a multicultural lyrical subject, but also its natural, universal, specific objectifications. With the gradual interpretation of these forms, Fuhl's (at that time natural) youthful temperament is also at the forefront. In such a perception, the poetically depicted – even oxymoronic – world is altered, developed, perfected, but also criticized, dishonoured, reduced: until (in a certain existential and cultural sense of the word) it degenerates.

Calligrams, icons, parodies, and visual “materializations” are also mentioned as multidimensional poetic objects of these processes. The contribution also uses specific excerpts from the originals, respectively metatexts of experts in the field, which actually illustrate the way of thinking. The result and contribution of the text is the presentation of generally valid but also specific features of the author and his extraordinary literary work in given geographical and cultural coordinates.

### Key words

Imrich Fuhl. Interpretation. Nationality. Poetry. Slovaks in Hungary. Visualization.

### Introduction. Visualization as a Possibility of Poetic Literary Communication and Concretization

Poetry is closely connected with the association of ideas and thoughts. Its construction is in principle based on parallelism, on the “storage” of motifs “under each other”. An effective consequence of its effect is new knowledge, the basis of which springs from a specific gnoseological content. The reading reception thus reconstructs the “otherness” of the prototext and attempts to understand it from a semantic point of view, for example, in a double understanding of writing and image. The identification of deep connections is connected with the metaphor principle. Thanks to it, the connotation space also expands its own graphic surface, while its visualization supports a broader understanding of openness or closedness. In the author's creative arc, the dimension of visualization – also in terms of the mentioned perception of the text – changes the individual subjective understanding of poetry. At the same time, the association connected with it also expands the very horizon of the reader-interpreter, who is able to identify a new – perhaps even formally different – artistic experience. The core of the literary communication relationship is the connection between the poetic perception of the world and the personal activity of man. This is a current strategy of that kind of artistic communication. In that way it is important to have active visualization texts of contemporary

writers. Behind that contention Ponomareva and Semyan say that “[...] modern artistic communication has been transformed under the influence of the overall process visualization of all components of the cultural process and the changed perception of reality principles, including, and various forms of art”. The text therefore examines the possibilities of communication at the visual level. The form of letters indirectly affects the optical-sensual “truth” of the text. The visual composition of such written texts, as well as the visual organization of the very surface on which the text is placed, formulates the overall background of literary communication. Thanks to the visualization, the reader expands not only the interpreter's own connotation space, but also the scope of the poem itself. As Muralidharan and Hearts writes: “Literature study is a cycle of reading, interpretation, exploration, and understanding. While there is now abundant technological support for reading and interpreting literary text in new ways through text-processing algorithms, the other parts of the cycle-exploration and understanding-have been relatively neglected”<sup>2</sup>. Such a “neglected” form of access is also interpretation and

subsequent visualization of a literary text. Production of mental imagery is very important in the process of reading. As Renate Brosch writes, readers differ in their capacities to visualize and she “[...] proposes a distinction between default visualization and vivid images, a difference experienced by readers regardless of whether they are prone to more or less visual imagining”<sup>3</sup>.

### 1 Representation of Poetic Identity in the Chronotope of Slovaks in Hungary

These connections also apply to Lowland poetry, in which it is also important to find the boundaries of the literary work, i.e. the interpretive search for those meanings that have wider validity. In the terms of the reported chronotope, the humanistic aspect of poetry is manifested “[...] in an effort to express in one's own language a hint of understanding the criteria for determining the meaning of human existence and, using specific means of art, to stimulate the development of man's creative abilities”<sup>4</sup>. However, Slovak poetry in Hungary – as part of this context – is not typologically differentiated: this attribute stems from the overall ethnic and cultural context of the Slovak enclave in Hungary, an important personality of which is Imrich Fuhl, who was

1 PONOMAREVA, E., SEMYAN, T.: Creolization as a Form of Visual Communication in Contemporary Literature. In *Novyi Filologicheskii Vestnik - New Philological Bulletin*, 2017, Vol. 40, No. 1, pp. 35-36.

2 MURALIDHARAN, A., HEARST, M. A.: Supporting exploratory text analysis in literature study. In *Literary and Linguistic Computing*, 2013, Vol. 28, No. 2, p. 283.

3 BROSCH, R.: Experiencing Narratives: Default and Vivid Modes of Visualization. In *Poetics Today*, 2017, Vol. 38, No. 2, p. 255.

4 HAJKO, D.: *Dozrievanie do skutočnosti a dozrievanie do sna. Báčsky Petrovec*: Slovenské vydavateľské centrum, 2013, p. 13.

born on November 25, 1961 in Mlyny (Pilisszentkereszt). His domain is poetry, but he is also an author of prose, music, translation, journalism and art photography. A specific feature of his cultural work is bilingualism, while (especially) in poetry, he deviates from the traditional framework of the poetry that is emerging in Hungary. Even during his high school studies he drew attention to himself with texts that promised a new, until then unusual, approach to the world in Slovak literature in Hungary. Gradually he took the poetic word by strategy (which is also highlighted by a literary scientist from Hungary – Katarína Maruzsová Šebová) “[...] *challenging predecessors for their romanticizing and pathetic ideas of ethnicity extended directly into mythical dimensions*”<sup>5</sup>. His poetic gesture (according to Michal Harpáň) “[...] *is unconventional, experimental, witty, in which we see a typological kinship with some other younger Lowland poets...*”<sup>6</sup>.

In his bilingual poetry, Imrich Fuhl also works with the preferred motives of minority being (native region, national awareness, mother tongue, traditions and their perspectives). In their own original Slovak poems, however, often “[...] *in the form of irony, self-irony and parody he points to the paradoxical phenomena of national life. His*

*experiments with traditional themes and words excel in playfulness...*”<sup>7</sup>. In his textual experiments “[...] *unlike his poetic ancestors, he seeks to approach the Lowland themes non-pathetically*”<sup>8</sup>. Even with this statement, we agree with Katarína Maruzsová Šebová and add our own opinion that Fuhl also expresses his skepticism about the future of his own nationality. So he is traditional in his original Slovak poems, but basically he tries to express it in an unconventional way. With the help of a universal poetic word and calligram, he attempts to replace the free space created by a certain loss of language and thus to respond to the still existing but somewhat decaying attributes of existence.

## 2 Creative Attributes of Imrich Fuhl with Regard to Visual and Other Experiments with Text

Visualization is therefore an important term, which is also connected with the poetry of Imrich Fuhl. The lyrical subject, determined by youth, often describes various forms of (natural) freedom, that is, self and the meaning of life or human relationships. In addition, as Peter Andruška, an expert on Lowland literature,

points out, Fuhl “[...] *seeks a new poetic language and form, his lyrical images are original and unique*”<sup>9</sup>. The value of Fuhl’s lyric is, however, particularly in those poems in which “[...] *he follows the intimate positions of human being, where his youthful unrest leaves the spaces of abstract reflection and anchors in the more tangible realities of life*”<sup>10</sup>. The author’s journey led to experimentation with expression and shape. His calligrams can be perceived as well “[...] *as a way of reproaching those who have forgotten, where they come from, where they belong, and perhaps even where their (often) puzzled roads lead*”<sup>11</sup>. Individual calligrams are, however, functional and appropriately evoke various associations. The author thus likes and often changes the form and graphic arrangement of the poem, which can (at that time) be considered a new feature in his texts. It brings something new: impressionist, expressionist, dadaist... Overall – according to a contemporary literary critic from Hungary, Rozália Čipková – “[...] *he draws on a set of life experiences and knowledge, manifests his individual attitude, but he can also express himself on behalf of his peers. He longs for human companionship and harmony, is not*

7 MARUZSOVÁ ŠEBOVÁ, K.: *Kontúry prózy Slovákov v Maďarsku*. Nadlak : Vydavateľstvo Ivan Krasko, 2013, p. 88.

8 MARUZSOVÁ ŠEBOVÁ, K.: *Fotografia ako spôsob písania v tvorbe Imricha Fuhla (Myšlienky o slovenskej literatúre v Maďarsku)*. In AMBRUŠ, I. M., HLÁŠNIK, P., UNC, B. (eds.): *Ponad vek slovenských dolnozemsých básnických generácií*. Nadlak : Vydavateľstvo Ivan Krasko, 2010, p. 73.

9 POLÓNIOVÁ, S.: *Z kultúrnych dejín Slovákov v Maďarsku (1945-1990)*. Kraków : Spolok Slovákov v Poľsku, 2016, p. 108.

10 ANDRUŠKA, P.: *Literárna tvorba Slovákov z Dolnej zeme*. Šaľa : A-klub, 2013, p. 46.

11 ANDRUŠKA, P.: *Súčasní slovenskí spisovatelia z Maďarska*. Nitra : Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa, 2008, p. 69.

*illusive and thus less sentimental in his poetic thinking...*”<sup>12</sup>. His calligram is a poem, the words of which are arranged in a certain pattern; they are linked into a special visual unit which, in a hint, expresses the content of the text itself. This graphic representation of poems in Slovak literature in Hungary is represented only by Imrich Fuhl. These are the calligrams in which the poetic and visual aspects of his creative personality are conjoined.

Naturally, the poet, as a native Pilisian, relates more often to his geographical surroundings. In his visual poem<sup>13</sup> he combines verbal and pictorial elements, uses the map’s particularities and a kind of semantic triangle. He also plays with words (Príliš piliš Piliš) and makes use of the multi-plan character of possible reading perceptions. He expresses the idea that the fate of a Slovak in the Hungarian context is a kind of sawing of complex cultural (even existential) possibilities. The visual reader directly sees the Pilis Mountain in front of him/her in the construction of another poem<sup>14</sup>, in which this time the lyrical subject does not emphasize the geographical but geometric attribute: the text is built as a pyramid – like the Pilis

Hills themselves. Vectors lead to a goal through thoughtful (broader and deeper) verses. The lyrical subject carries the cross during this journey – both from the perspective of the individual and the whole national (minority) society. It criticizes the tension down and up, that is, in every direction; saying that polarization is like a difficult cross of the time for the Slovaks in Hungary<sup>15</sup>. The visualization in some poems reaches (especially in the consciousness of religious readers) a certain peak when the whole poem is shaped in the form of a cross<sup>16</sup>. The lyrical subject is critical, he has a discussion with God, but in form he fully submits himself (concrete-specifically and symbolically in the shape of a cross). He is aware of his sinfulness, even of his youthful indiscretion, but after all, he finds refuge in the form of a calligram, in the cross, in his faith, in God<sup>17</sup>. Thanks to them, he reaches a complex purification – again in form and content. Nevertheless, it is full of question marks (the lyrical subject and graphical representation of the calligram) and confusion as a person who is directly responsible for his generation. He carries a sense of discord between the real and the ideal – also by using poetic

means. As stated by Daniel W. Gleason from Illinois, a poetic text visualization expert, reader reports currently have demonstrated “[...] *that subjects understand image metaphors primarily through their physical features, and work on the visual interpretation of ambiguous figures suggests that though one cannot fuse images together, one may switch back and forth between multiple images of a figure, especially if the images share the same frame of reference. These findings indicate that readers may be particularly likely to understand image metaphor through visual imagery...*”<sup>18</sup>.

## 3 General and Specific Motives of Fuhl’s “National” Lyricism in the Space-time of Minority Being

The reduced and, at the same time, graded being of the lyrical subject is thus based (and after its interpretation also grows) on the graphical concretization of the idea/poem/creation; from letters. Such a lyrical subject – which in the poetry of Imrich Fuhl is often accompanied by visual elements – motivates himself to an ambivalent position of neutrality: individual poems are nothing and yet everything. Gradually, the poet’s creative soul accumulates questions that provide a temporary (though only muted)

15 FUHL, I.: *Križ našich Slovákov*. In FUHL, I.: *Nemé slová - Néma szavak*. Budapešť : Zdrúženie slovenských spisovateľov a umelcov v Maďarsku, 1995, p. 8.

16 FUHL, I.: *Môj križ*. In FUHL, I.: *Nemé slová - Néma szavak*. Budapešť : Zdrúženie slovenských spisovateľov a umelcov v Maďarsku, 1995, p. 21.

17 FUHL, I.: *Vlajka našej generácie*. In FUHL, I.: *Nemé slová - Néma szavak*. Budapešť : Zdrúženie slovenských spisovateľov a umelcov v Maďarsku, 1995, p. 71.

12 ČIPKOVÁ, R.: *Dozrievanie básnika*. In *SME*, 1988, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 76.

13 FUHL, I.: *Osud*. In FUHL, I.: *Nemé slová - Néma szavak*. Budapešť : Zdrúženie slovenských spisovateľov a umelcov v Maďarsku, 1995, p. 13.

14 FUHL, I.: *Piliš*. In FUHL, I.: *Nemé slová - Néma szavak*. Budapešť : Zdrúženie slovenských spisovateľov a umelcov v Maďarsku, 1995, p. 12.

5 MARUZSOVÁ ŠEBOVÁ, K.: *Kontúry prózy Slovákov v Maďarsku*. Nadlak : Vydavateľstvo Ivan Krasko, 2013, p. 87.

6 HARPÁŇ, M.: *Ars poetica Pannonica*. Nadlak : Vydavateľstvo Ivan Krasko, 2014, p. 57.

answer. During this “meditation”, the author himself materializes his poetry by using letters alone (i.e. visualization). They are some sort of black and white mosaics in which: “[...] from the sources of reason/ from the naive game of emotions/ I compose the mosaic of the past/ and the future of our (non) being/ on two sides of the canvas/ I paint fates...”<sup>19</sup>. Also in this chronotope of loneliness, we see elements of visualization based on letters. The temporary basis of the thought process resides in self-reflection with often even hyperrealistic undertones: “[...] why worry about question marks/and exclamation marks of phrase-like life/ I am glad/that I live...”<sup>20</sup>. At the same time, the degree of visualization is also enhanced by those of Fuhl’s poems that thanks to their graphic concretization appeal to the (post) modern reader. In some, he plays with his mother tongue, with the national and global language, using bold, large letters, and only showing his own nationality in italics, shocking the “deaf” and the “silent”<sup>21</sup>. He also wants to point out the evil contradictions of democracy<sup>22</sup>, when the text is disproportionately

stricken and ultimately only black and inconsistent lines remain. In doing so, he seeks happiness, which is always surrounded and bounded by highlighted, enlarged question marks and exclamation marks<sup>23</sup>. Everything is sought, developed, unwound – and a reader-interpreter of understanding and ability must decode: using words, images, schemes, punctuation marks...

Interesting is the theme of patriotism, which is expressed in a new, unusual way. To name his contradictory relation to the world (and to this issue) the author found a new poetic language and form. The frequent occurrence of an unbound verse with a national theme refreshes the new voice, while the direct defense of the bare existence of Slovakness in Hungary is also important. The lyrical entity must therefore be bifurcated, as: “[...] our subconscious mind consciously/ declares silence/and yet I sing/at once in two places/ I love and swear with two voices/hate and adore people/ I live – I write doubly/my broken life/into the double black night/glow – the hope of dawn is creeping in”<sup>24</sup>.

In the individual poems, the lyrical subject expresses thus mainly the fate of one’s own destiny. The extended mirror of time, however,

carries in itself the cross of mainly one’s own minoritarian Slovakness. The narrow circle of Slovaks in Hungary is surrounded by predators that symbolically crave the ancestor’s bones. A higher degree of visualization is possible in the case of poems that directly reckon with a certain wider connotational space of the reader-interpreter. Again, the individual – ethnic axis is referred to as the second axis. The lyrical subject feels useless – like absolute zero. This feeling is also expressed in calligrams: in the middle with the symbol of infinity and around with all zeros<sup>25</sup>. Occasionally this (wordless) form is contaminated with words, but on a wider area of poems the graphic representation of perception, feeling, thought prevails. At the same time, the extinction is determined; at the centre of his personality and the whole calligram is a huge question mark of further development<sup>26</sup>. This is only possible with words that then come to action. The combination of the expression in Slovak and Hungarian is extremely readable – the Hungarian “szavak” and the Slovak “slová” unite in the contours of the national boundaries of the lyrical subject’s living space<sup>27</sup>. Gradually, thanks to the youthful

19 FUHL, I.: Čiernobiela mozaika – Fekete-fehér mozaik. Budapešť : Vydavateľstvo učebníc, 1986, p. 20.

20 FUHL, I.: Čiernobiela mozaika – Fekete-fehér mozaik. Budapešť : Vydavateľstvo učebníc, 1986, p. 41.

21 FUHL, I.: Love Story Slováka v Maďarsku. In FUHL, I.: Nemé slová – Néma szavak. Budapešť : Zdrúženie slovenských spisovateľov a umelcov v Maďarsku, 1995, p. 54.

22 FUHL, I.: Cenzúra ‘92. In FUHL, I.: Nemé slová – Néma szavak. Budapešť : Zdrúženie slovenských spisovateľov a umelcov v Maďarsku, 1995, p. 18.

23 FUHL, I.: Svadba. In FUHL, I.: Nemé slová – Néma szavak. Budapešť : Zdrúženie slovenských spisovateľov a umelcov v Maďarsku, 1995, p. 53.

24 FUHL, I.: Čiernobiela mozaika – Fekete-fehér mozaik. Budapešť : Vydavateľstvo učebníc, 1986, pp. 20-21.

25 FUHL, I.: Absolútna nula. In FUHL, I.: Nemé slová – Néma szavak. Budapešť : Zdrúženie slovenských spisovateľov a umelcov v Maďarsku, 1995, p. 55.

26 FUHL, I.: Pravda o zániku. In FUHL, I.: Nemé slová – Néma szavak. Budapešť : Zdrúženie slovenských spisovateľov a umelcov v Maďarsku, 1995, p. 30.

27 FUHL, I.: Slovák v Maďarsku. In FUHL, I.: Nemé slová – Néma szavak. Budapešť : Zdrúženie slovenských spisovateľov a umelcov v Maďarsku, 1995, p. 6.

temperament, he comes to the (verbal) finding that good will overcome evil. This statement is also supported by a kind of visual column, which as a sand clock everywhere contains the word OK – alternating with the eloquent expression KO<sup>28</sup>. We see – also on the basis of my own reading experience – a kind of transition from purely verbal calligrams to ambivalent re-imaginings of the poetic idea to a fully iconic expression. An example is a poem<sup>29</sup>, which includes “only” traffic signs (signifying movement) or traffic symbols. With this artwork, Fuhl fully leaves his reader a broad connotation field of action with an above standard visualization of the proto-icon. Thus, as communication agent, the author has moved from visualization of infinity to various, possible, optional directions for the sentient actor of the communication axis – the reader-interpreter.

Dynamics gradually replaces statics, bare existence changes into wandering on the mentioned paths. It is important to create bridges of (national) understanding, with particular emphasis on finding the roots of the individual and the meaning of the collective. Order and system, although square as an occasional calligram, must exist.

However, it is necessary to learn human language, to have clear vision and to return to childhood. This process is a cardinaly needed change for every person. On the other hand, everything on this Earth is changing (including the shape of the poem). We live in a vicious circle, but we need to realize our coordinates and make the right choices: “[...] is this why we came to the world (just to make a living) or to live human life?”<sup>30</sup>. Some poems are exceptional in shape<sup>31</sup>: they are visually arranged in a rectangle, with spaces between words, vertically, in boxes with question marks or exclamation marks, and the like. In others, the author “plays” with the division of words, with the semantic shift of meanings of lexemes, with punctuation, or polysemy<sup>32</sup>. There is such a graphic solution of the text, when after the last verse it “breaks off the chain” and automatically writes the word, of course, diagonally, inconsistently<sup>33</sup>. He creates poetic figures, tropes, expressions (pars pro toto: porada, pravda, paráda/haha nyihaha chichichi – counsel, truth, finery/

30 FUHL, I.: Nemé slová – Néma szavak. Budapešť : Zdrúženie slovenských spisovateľov a umelcov v Maďarsku, 1995, p. 41.

31 FUHL, I.: Realita, ba: báseň zo sna / Optimizmus / Poriadok musí byť! In FUHL, I.: Nemé slová – Néma szavak. Budapešť : Zdrúženie slovenských spisovateľov a umelcov v Maďarsku, 1995, p. 65, 27, 69.

32 FUHL, I.: MoraLiza / Pľuvalizmus. In FUHL, I.: Nemé slová – Néma szavak. Budapešť : Zdrúženie slovenských spisovateľov a umelcov v Maďarsku, 1995, p. 73, 61.

33 FUHL, I.: Text a jeho autor / V začarovanom kruhu. In FUHL, I.: Nemé slová – Néma szavak. Budapešť : Zdrúženie slovenských spisovateľov a umelcov v Maďarsku, 1995, pp. 38, 39.

haha wuhaha hihihhi)<sup>34</sup>. He writes not only between rows, but also in rows without punctuation, without space, in the first place – as if without meaning. However, such a form also helps to visualize his poetic testimony<sup>35</sup>.

#### 4 The Contribution of Imrich Fuhl to the Slovak Literary Context

What is important here is his effort to create his own personality and gradually strengthen the creative, even viable (national) collective, in the same way, as expressed in the original Slovak poems by Imrich Fuhl. His texts therefore take into account active communication and the dynamics of creation with letters as well as the visual organization of the text itself. In doing so, we recognize the various advantages of the very concept of visualization in the texts of Imrich Fuhl: different, procedural, multiple and perhaps even illegible. There lies the essence of perception of his work.

Based on this, it is evident that the minority Slovak literary context, arising outside the physical borders of Slovakia, is an integral part of a broader understanding of the Slovak context. Slovak literature in

34 FUHL, I.: Pravda na porade / KôňTEXT. In FUHL, I.: Nemé slová – Néma szavak. Budapešť : Zdrúženie slovenských spisovateľov a umelcov v Maďarsku, 1995, p. 70, 72.

35 FUHL, I.: Písať medzi riadkami / Rovnoprávnosť v právnom štáte. In FUHL, I.: Nemé slová – Néma szavak. Budapešť : Zdrúženie slovenských spisovateľov a umelcov v Maďarsku, 1995, pp. 56, 64.

Hungary is thus multi-layered: it is part of not only the Lowland but also the Slovak literary context. It also includes Imrich Fuhl with his poetic work and its visualizations and connotations. In the background of this – summa summarum – the author “[...] experiments with different means of expression and thus gets into a polemic attitude with the traditional understanding of the mission of a national writer”<sup>36</sup>. From the individual verses, it is evident that Fuhl’s “[...] view of the things of life has matured, and has come to a stage where the author’s responsibility to his own work and to the human community is not enough to express general considerations”<sup>37</sup>. His experimentation with the poetic form is to a certain extent unique in the given chronotope. His artistic credo moves in a civil position, without pathos and phrases. It is overall as if an intimate conversation with the reader about his thoughts and feelings in the current (often contradictory) world. That is why it is modern and up to date.

In conclusion, we can state that Imrich Fuhl, a bilingual author from Hungary, is an important experimenter in his poems. This creative effort is still unsurpassed

in the given literary context. The presented – visually supported – poems have unique connotational specifics in the minority context. We draw our attention to them in more detail in this article. This attribute must be understood as a specific feature of Slovak literature in Hungary: together with its reduced possibilities on a theoretical and practical basis. Nevertheless, it is desirable to state this specificity in more detail for the reader in our time and space.

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37 ANDRUŠKA, P.: *Súčasní slovenskí spisovatelia z Maďarska*. Nitra : Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa, 2008, p. 69.

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### Profile of the Author

After graduation P. Šenkár (born in 1979, Nitra) worked as a teacher in primary and secondary schools in Komárno for a short period of time. Between 2006 and 2013, he was a professor assistant at the Faculty of Central European Studies of Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra. He has worked as a professor assistant (later as an associate professor) at the Faculty of Education of the J. Selye University in Komárno since 2007. Occasionally, he co-operates with the Ministry of Education,

Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic. He is a chairman of the Slovak Language and Slovak Literature Committee in the State Pedagogical Institute in Bratislava and of the teachers’ attestations in Komárno region in the Methodical-pedagogical centre. He is a specialist in literary science, predominantly in minority literature. In addition, he is an author of more than 200 publication units. His fields of teaching activities include, for example: literary science, culturology, interpretation, comparative literature, literature of minorities, etc.



