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## Defensive and defective stance in translation and translation criticism in Latvia between the wars (1918–1940)

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### Abstract

Latvia's independence period saw translations on a massive scale. The range of source languages was growing, with English overtaking German (German was also the main intermediary language). The literature translated was also extremely varied, as was quality. The choice of works to be translated was in the hands of translators and publishers, who thought of marketing interests. The agents of translation (translators and publishers) pursued mainly defective stance in translation, while criticism staunchly supported defensive stance. Translations always numerically surpassed native production in the domain of novels. The variety of translation scene came to an abrupt end with the soviet occupation.

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### 1. Introduction

The translation scene during the independence period (1918/20–1940) is an almost untouched area in Latvian translation history, although the Baltic, Swedish and German literary contacts have been studied (Stepiņš, 1983; Kalnačs, 2005; Latvieši, 2008). There are some general studies of the literary scene in Latvia in this period, focusing on original literature and on publishers (Grāmata, 1999). Karulis's serious and comprehensive Soviet-period study of Latvian publishing could pay little, and mostly critical, attention to these processes (Karulis, 1967).

Latvian national identity, which is language-centered, the literary polysystem and even the written language itself

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are all the result of translation. Translation played an exceptionally important, even pivotal, role in the beginnings of written Latvian in the 16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Translators (native German speakers) shaped, codified and modified written Latvian. Religious translations applied an approach of rigorous fidelity. Secular translations were localizations of easy-reading, sentimental German stories. Parallel to the rise of native literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the main approach gradually shifted from adaptation and domestication to foreignization and fidelity. More ambitious translations of Western classics started, usually done by distinguished Latvian writers. Alongside the traditional, faithful translations, some were freely shortened and otherwise modified.

Secular vernacular translation has often helped to initiate national literary traditions and even nation-building (Chernetsky, 2011, p. 34; Kumar, 2013). The Latvian nation emerged late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and did so as a cultural nation: the aim of national liberation was to develop the language and culture (Levits, 2012, p. 73–74). Because nation-building began late, various elements deemed necessary for nationhood had to be imported, adapted and modified.

In this paper we attempt to look not at particular works which occasionally demonstrate idiosyncratic approaches to translation but at dominant tendencies, translation scene, interference between discourses, and attitude towards “otherness” (Robyns, 1994, p. 406). Thus, two dominant attitudes could be seen working in combination: the *defective* stance against the alien (absorbing everything that is missing) and the *defensive* one (defending and absorbing through transformation). Translation was used as a way of influencing the target culture and furthering literary, political and personal interests. The various people involved in this process can be viewed as *agents of translation* (Milton, 2009). Among them were Latvian writers and poets, most of whom were prolific translators (and critics) in addition to writing their own works. Generally, they started with translations, where they looked for ideas, for trends to be replicated and adapted to the Latvian scene and necessities of the period. Thus, paradoxically, Latvian identity and language formation have translations at their very core (Veisbergs, 2012). With the establishment of the new state, these processes acquired new depth and intensity.

## 2. Publishing

Before the First World War, publishing in Latvia had developed fast, reaching 869 titles with a sizeable average print run of 3300 in 1913 (Karulis, 1967, p. 140). Publishing went into a sharp decline when war broke out, aggravated by censorship, the evacuation of printing houses and a shortage of paper. Once *de facto* independence was established and warfare ceased, publishing picked up: 70 titles in 1919 (Karulis, 1991, 2, p. 89). Pre-censorship was abolished, publishers mushroomed. In 1921, 719 titles were published and by 1924 the number had doubled to 1536. A total of 1918 titles was published in 1925 and this figure held steady. In 1925, translations nominally constituted around 15 per cent of titles published, among them serious works by Poe, Tagore, Kipling, Goethe, Maupassant, Shaw, Tammsaare, Hamsun, Plato, Wilde, Scott (*Ivanhoe*), Swift, but also adaptations of foreign works.

A new marketing product, one-lats books, appeared in the mid-1920s (in fact a similar venture can be seen in Ansis Gulbis' *Universālā bibliotēka* launched in 1911). This new mode was introduced by the enterprising young Rudzītis, who established the company Grāmatu Draugs in 1926. These were substantial, often classical or modern books all costing one lats each, including home delivery. Rudzītis had calculated he needed to sell 5000 copies to make profit since the low price (a third or a fifth of standard levels) would be offset by high sales. A total of 24 such titles (20 translations) were produced in the first year: Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Balzac, Strindberg, Maupassant, Zola and Kellermann, reaching 18000 copies. Latvia fell into a reading frenzy. The necessity to produce so many books within a short time meant translators had to work fast, and sometimes a single title was split between several translators to speed things up. For example, a book on Nordic exploration was translated by three people (Andrē, 1931), as was *Buddenbrooks* (see below). Within a short period the new paradigm spread: other companies followed. They were less successful, but competition served to drive quality up. In two years from 1926, 34 publishers produced 444 cheap titles, of which Grāmatu Draugs had 101 and Gulbis 62 (Galdiņš, 1928, p. 386). One-lats books filled a broad expanse between the pulp literature and elitist, classical literature and broke down the obvious border between these extremes. The economic crisis hit publishing hard, but afterwards the situation stabilized and print runs grew to 2500–3000.

In the late 1930s, Latvia ranked second in Europe after Denmark in titles published per 100,000 inhabitants (Denmark: 86, Latvia: 82). Altogether 27,000 titles were published during the period of independence, and the average print run was 2500–2800 (Zanders, 2013, p. 337). The largest print runs were for schoolbooks, calendars and translated fiction, often in the high 10,000s. Print runs and book sizes were growing (Skujenieks, 1938). The publishing industry in the 1920s and 1930s is characterized by several large companies with different agendas and specializations (political, artistic, volume, quality) as well as a multitude of small publishers and individual, haphazard publishers.

Thus, there were 479 publishers in 1939, among them around 200 occasional publishers (Kiploks, 1942, p. 145; Karulis, 1967, p. 183).

### 2.1. Culture transfer

The early 1920s were to a large extent the heyday of pulp literature, first translated and later local. The *Old Waverli* (1923–25) dime novels about an American trapper (110 in total) were extremely popular, reaching 10,000 copies. They had no connection to the novels of Walter Scott or Cooper's novels but came from the German series (*Hefroman*) *Der Neue Lederstrumpf* published by Dresdner Roman Verlag in 1912–25. No translator was mentioned. *Tarzan* sequels (22 volumes) appeared in the same year (Burroughs, 1923) with the translator mentioned. Some other popular series in the same years were pirate stories (Sem, 1924) in 22 volumes, Frank Allan detective stories (*Franks Alans*, 1923–24) in six volumes, the German *Harry Piel* detective stories (*Harijs Pīls*, 1923) in 20 volumes; and the German Robert Kraft *Detektiv Nobody* adventure stories in eight volumes (Krafts, 1923–24) with the translator named as Pastarīts (the nickname of Kārlis Dzelsskalns/Dzelzkalns/Dzelzkalējs). Eight volumes of Sherlock Holmes stories (*Šerloka Holmsa sērija*, 1923) were also translated by Pastarīts. Later, Allan Pinkerton's detective adventures were published (Pinkertons, 1928–30).

Similar local production developed in parallel with these as a result of culture transfer: 40 volumes of true crime stories (*Bandīta Kraupēna noziegumi*, 1926–27), another series of 42 volumes (*Bandītu karālis*, 1926–27), 12 volumes of detective stories (*Pats Dāvuss*, 1925–27), 21 volumes of adventure stories set in the foreign legion (Vanags, 1934), 20 volumes (*Kapteinis Tāivaldis*, 1926–27) about the adventures of a Latvian boy on far-off seas.

### 2.2. State impact

Some state-sponsored activities involving the Ministry of Education and Leta (the State Telegraph Agency) helped foster the recovery. The Culture Foundation subsidised some publishing and book acquisition by libraries. State involvement grew after the authoritarian regime was established in 1934. Though state support mainly went to original Latvian writing and reference literature, some serious translations were also involved, such as *La Divina Commedia* (Dante, 1921a), the Estonian epic *Kalevipoeg* (*Kalevipoegs*, 1929) and works of Thucydides (Tūcidids, 1930). Baltic cooperation, partly supported by governments, created a large turnover of these translations.

Apart from rare instances of post-publishing censorship interference, there are a few stories when politics interfered with translation, like when Remarque's *Three Comrades* (1936) were translated in 1937 Latvian Ministry of Foreign affairs following a protest of German Ambassador (Remarque was not favored in Nazi Germany) wanted to stop the book. A compromise was reached: not to advertise it in the newspapers (Rudzītis, 1997, p. 117).

Latvia joined the Berne Convention in May 1938 (*Likums*, 1936). Until then translation was open to anyone, without permission or royalties or even any need to point out that the text was a translation. This certainly made translation publishing an attractive line of business.

## 3. Translations

The literature translated was extremely varied, as was translation quality (Veisbergs, 2014 a, b). The print runs were not very long: 2793 in 1938, when 1601 titles were produced. Translations fluctuated between 10 and 20 per cent of all publications, for example, they stood at 17.8 per cent in 1938 (Karulis, 1967, p. 143). Though translations nominally never surpassed the original books in total numbers, the figures show a different picture when subtypes of works are viewed. A rough estimate in a study of the early 1930s shows translations accounting for about 40 per cent of belles-lettres over a five-year period but, when print runs and volumes are taken into account, the figures turn in favor of translations. In novels, the proportion is 60 to 40 in favor of imported goods. Only in poetry is Latvian in the lead, by 90 to 10. The statistical study then becomes more biased and subdivides novel translations into welcome classical works (13), modern classics (around 60) and around 200 'modern kiosk belles-lettres boulevard novels' (*Literāriskais imports*, 1931, p. 481–483). A more detailed review in the late 1930s entitled '163 novels' informs us that the yearly output of novels consisted of 61 translated novels published as books, 38 novels translated in instalments in newspapers, 35 in collections. The figures for Latvian novels are 24 in book form and 39 in instalment

or collections. Thus, the proportion had not changed (Erss, 1939). R. Egle has calculated that in the period between 1918 and 1938 1999 original writing publications and 1907 translations were done, among them 273 original novels versus 1070 translated novels (Egle R., 1989). Many translations in the beginning of the two decades were done via intermediary languages, for example the *Decameron* by Boccaccio was ‘compiled from German and Russian translations by Diženajo’ (Bokatschio, 1925). It should be noted that the vast majority of translations were fiction, biography and history books; the rest were religious books, popular science and practical advice books. The technical sector was covered by original Latvian books, many of which were covert translations and adaptations. Apart from book format, there were many translations in newspapers and magazines.

### 3.1. Choice of translation

The choice of what to translate was in the hands of the publishers. While some were investing in classics and serious books, others went for profit and published pulp paperbacks, still others tried to find middle road. Translators were often better informed about the current literary situation than publishers, and Germany often served as a model: what was translated there was soon translated into Latvian. Rudzītis started his new venture with one single translator, Kārklīšs, and at first they decided what to translate for themselves. The system was later improved and expanded and a sound team of expert translators and editors selected. When the publishers felt there was interest and they had prepared the ground, they issued a major series of translations, for example, of Nordic (Hamsun 15 volumes, Lagerlöf 15 volumes, Undset 16 volumes) and Russian authors (Dostoyevsky 16 volumes). Some other publishers were very selective, for example, Gulbis and Zelta Ābele mostly published quality literature. Orients, on the other hand, published mostly pulp literature.

### 3.2. Translation source languages

The proportion of translations from various languages changed over the two decades under consideration and reflect both Latvian traditions as well as changing political, marketing and attitude stance, e.g. Scandinavian and Baltic literatures were promoted.

**German** literature translations totaled around 700 (including Austrian and Swiss authors) and retained their lead in the total count of the two decades of Latvian independence. They were surpassed numerically by English in the second half of the 1930s. In addition, much translation from less-known languages was done via German. Classics such as Goethe and the Grimms’ fairy tales were staples, and Kleist, Heine, Schnitzler, Heinrich and Thomas Mann were popular. Later attention shifted to more contemporary German literature (Kalnačs, 2005, p. 627). The late 1920s saw a whole series of Kellermann and Sudermann (collected works). Kästner was popular in the 1930s, and Remarque attracted much interest. Top of the German list, however, was Hedwig Courths-Mahler with 106 titles in the mid-1930s. These translations were frequently annotated as ‘free reproductions’. They constituted about a fifth of German translations.

**English** (around 650 translations) was a rare source language in the early days. Later the number of English translations overtook that of German, and works by Maugham, Cronin, Milne, Lofting, Walpole, Twain (collected works), Poe, Dreiser, London (two editions of collected works in 14 and 30 volumes), Mayne Reid (10 volumes), and Galsworthy (7 titles) were popular. Some Shakespeare’s plays were published and an academic edition of his complete works was started, but only the first volume (5 plays) was published before the Soviet occupation (*Viljama Šekspīra darbi*, 1938). The English thriller writer Wallace had 56 books translated in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

**Russian** translations (around 350) picked up in the mid-1920s and focused on Russian classics. There were many translations of Chekhov, Turgenev and Tolstoy (collected works), children’s tales and Dostoyevsky in the second half of the 1920s. After that, Russian translations declined in number and apart from classics (Dostoyevsky collected works in 16 volumes) focused mostly on Russian past or adventure, crime and occult stories involving émigrés, e.g., nine novels by Bebutova and nearly 20 novels by Krizhanovskaya were published in the 1930s (Krischanowska, 1932). Russian was also the second most frequent intermediary language for translations from less known languages.

**French** translations sustained a steep climb and then declined. All in all over 240 titles were translated over the two decades, giving a good coverage of French literature both classical and modern. Maupassant was the most widely translated author, clocking up 38 books by 1933 (he was also the first to have his collected works translated), Dumas

had 20, Rolland 17, Dekobra (a very popular subversive writer of the interwar period, now totally forgotten) 15, Verne 12, Zola 8, France 7, Balzac 4, Flaubert 4, Molière 3. Of the translators Virza produced the most congenial translations since he mostly translated poets and writers close to his own stylistic taste.

**Norwegian**, amazingly, was the fourth most frequent source language. Around 90 works were translated during the two decades, mostly Hamsun (collected works), Undset (collected works) and Ibsen. Perhaps a similar mentality and literary taste was the reason, or perhaps the fact that some literary Latvians had emigrated to Norway after the unsuccessful 1905 revolution.

**Swedish** followed, with around 60 translations, many in the early 1920s, then a certain decline followed, and again an upsurge in the 1930s. The most popular writers were Lagerlöf, with 36 books (half of all the Swedish works translated, including her collected works in 15 volumes). Other popular authors were Strindberg, the Swedish-speaking Finnish writer Salminen and Axel Munthe whose *Story of San Michele* (Munte, 1935/6) reached three editions. **Polish** was represented by over 40 titles, including the collected works of Sienkiewicz in 24 volumes.

**Italian** translations amounted to over 30, with a tendency to decline in numbers. It is noteworthy that Italian translations started early. Perhaps this was due to the fact that Italy was the first of the major powers to recognize the new Latvian state. Apart from Dante, there were quite a few small translations and plays. *La Divina Commedia* was published by the Ministry of Education in 1921 (Dante, 1921a). It was followed by a work dedicated to the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dante's death, containing learned articles on the poet in addition to his immortal work (Dante, 1921b). It was republished in a revised version in 1936 and 1937 (Dante, 1936, 1937). **Estonian** and **Finnish** accounted for over 30 translations each. There were around 30 books translated from **Danish**, with Andersen's fairy tales dominating. **Czech, Lithuanian, Spanish, Hungarian, Dutch, Greek, Japanese**, and other literatures could boast with less than 20 books each. Classical **Latin** translations always attracted much effort and attention. Many were translated with commentary for teaching purposes: works of Livy, Phaedrus, Cicero, Virgil and Caesar. Others were meant for general interest: Plautus (Ģiezens), Caesar, Horace, Ovid, Virgil and Apuleius. The translators were usually noted philologists. Latin translations reflect the defective stance – works to be absorbed and emulated.

### 3.3. Translation approaches and strategies

Translation approaches generally depended on the status of the book. Pulp fiction was very freely translated, with frequent omissions, cuts and changes. A note under the title often stated that it was a rewrite, reproduction or free adaptation. Quality books were usually translated carefully and close to the original text, applying the German fidelity principle. Older classical texts were usually translated by knowledgeable experts and translators, frequently with introductions by translators or experts. The medium-range popular literature quality and strategies depended on the translator, some were well done, others were sloppy. Popular reference and encyclopedic works were translated freely, with adaptations, cuts and additions, defensive stance dominating. Sometimes this was stated openly, for example, one popular encyclopedia is labelled 'after the English C.H. Butcher's *Encyclopedia of Popular Science*, compiled and supplemented by Alnis' (*Populāri zinātniska enciklopēdija*, 1933). One work on modern man (Bekers, 1928) has a note on the title page reading 'translated from a German edition of 1927 and adapted to Latvian conditions'. No translator is mentioned. Sometimes the fact of translation could be inferred from references, as in the encyclopedia entitled *The Art of Life* (*Dzīves māksla*, 1932), edited by Kārklīņš, providing advice on how to be successful in society, with volumes on tact, looks, beauty care, parties, speech, sex, sports, law, etc. The first page of each volume has a short list of foreign-named sources, revealing that it is in fact a creative compilation of translations. On the other hand, there are some localization elements: some prices (of a fridge, for example) are given in lats, there is a chapter on Latvian furniture, etc. As such this hybrid work tears down the strict borderline between translation and original writing. The same hybridity can be seen in many universal or specialized encyclopedias.

### 3.4. Translator visibility

Translators gradually became more visible (Venuti, 1995) over the twenty years of Latvian independence. One obvious element of the translator visibility or voice is the paratexts, the translators' footprints (Paloposki, 2010). We can distinguish between textual, paratextual and extratextual visibility (Koskinen, 2000, p. 99). The usual types of

translation paratexts include the translator's name: whether it is present and prominent, and where it is displayed. Some translations feature prefaces or introductions by the translator. Footnotes have broader function in translation. They are occasionally viewed as a sign of a translator's failure, as shameful, as a 'black sheep' (Grafton, 1999, p. 25). Endnotes are similar to footnotes. Glossaries, indexes and appendixes are rare.

The paratextual visibility of translators varied between different text types in the period under discussion. Some translations contain several types of paratext, others omit even the translator's name. There are translations not identified as such (usually adaptations), and translations posing as original works. The interwar period of Latvian independence saw a degree of stabilization and the establishment of a certain hierarchy as regards the basic paratexts (Veisbergs, 2014 a): serious translations give the translator's name, usually also mentioning the language of the original. If the work was deemed very serious, notes and an introduction by the translator could be expected. Nietzsche's *Thus spoke Zarathustra* translated by the outstanding Latvian poet Plūdons (Nīcše, 1939) carries a prominent statement '*Introduction and translation by V. Plūdons*' on the title page. The introduction discusses Nietzsche and the translator also delves into various issues of language and translation.

The classic novel *Truth and Justice* by A.H. Tammsaare was translated by the Latvian writer Elīna Zālīte (Tamsāre, 1937). Immediately beneath the title *Land and Love* come paratexts: '*An Estonian novel (in the original "Truth and Justice"), translated with the author's permission by Elīna Zālīte*'. The permission related to the change of title. This shows a translator taking responsibility and suggesting a change of title to the author, as well as putting herself in a prominent position. Sometimes only the translator's initials are used. This usually seems to be the case for pulp or easy-reading literature. Pulp literature translations, the quality of which was often beyond remedy, were frequently entitled 'free reproductions', for instance many of Hedwig Courths-Mahler's novels. In the lower quality range, the above-mentioned *Old Wawerli* (*Old Wawerli*, 1923–1925) dime novels name neither the author nor the translator. Thus, this period seems to have established a relatively stable correlation between the seriousness of translation and the degree of translator visibility.

#### 4. Translation criticism

Traditional Latvian translation criticism favored distinctly defensive stance: only classical high-quality works deemed translation. Translation criticism generally tended to be rather parochial (in contrast to criticism of original Latvian literature that was elaborate). Generally it followed the following pattern: some information on the author, a brief description of the plot, the writer's style, and a short sentence on translation quality, usually simply saying it was good or bad. In the latter case some examples of literal translation or of mistakes in Latvian were provided.

Frequently Latvian literature is contrasted to translations and there is a strong, often elitist, stance against the cheap books and their publishers: 'One-lats books lead to banalization of books. They are often unbearably bad translations of second and third-rate foreign authors' (*Ko jūrmalnieki uzzināja*, 1929). 'For more than ten years Grāmatu Draugs has flooded Latvia with its series. More than 90% of them were translations and retranlations. Of course, there were several outstanding authors and notable works among them, but a large part were such that they had no right to take up the Latvian reader's time and money' (Rudzītis, 1938, p. 1175). Similarly, the Latvian author Līgotņū Jēkabs complains that 'our book market is flooded with bad translated literature, while our own writers works' are unknown to the people' (Līgotņū, 1929). Another critic Vidiņš insisted that intellectuals should read books in the original. And second-rate literary translations are "unnecessary and harmful. Only the most select foreign literati should be translated, only the greatest, and those should be translated well' (Vidiņš, 1932, p. 573–6).

In many ways a similar approach is seen in a long article by the prolific essayist, writer and translator Zenta Mauriņa: translators have to find the golden mean between loyalty to the original and loyalty to the mother tongue. In the past, translations of the Classics were not necessary, as everyone who had been to secondary school knew Russian or German (Mauriņa, 1928, p. 349–354).

#### 5. Linguistic issues

Defensive and defective stance can also be seen in the use of language, if its choice was deliberate (such issues perhaps were not relevant for pulp literature). With technical and LSP language, translators faced real problems. Latvian terminology was often nonexistent or patchy and many new terms had to be coined. Interference was rife in lower-end translations, and the reader can often conclude after reading a page or two that the book is not translated

from French, Italian, etc. as stated on the title page, but from Russian or German, since the text bears all the hallmarks of those languages. These can be seen as hallmarks of defective stance. But occasionally translators tried Latvianizing the language of their endeavors, e.g. in translating Botho von Keyserlingk's *Monte, der Rebell* (Keizerlings, 1937) the translator coins many new words. Occasionally translators were linguistically bold, experimental or indoctrinated. Thus, the young philologist Ieva Celmiņa's translation of Agnes Sapper's *Die Familie Pfäffling*, localized it as the linguists demanded, making heavy use of the Mühlentach-Endzelins dictionary, in addition to words and expressions from Latvian fairy tales. The result is somewhat strange. 'Such Latvianization can be accepted and recognized only by teachers of Latvian, a few literarians and the new unconservative generation of schoolchildren. Many will need time to get used to it, and to my ear it occasionally sounds strange and unusual' (Grīns, 1936, p. 561).

Some translations involved serious terminology work, an example being the 19<sup>th</sup>-century German zoologist Alfred Brehm's *Tierleben* (Brēms, 1927–28, 1935–36). Translating *Tierleben* involved an enormous text, (6000 pages long, slightly abridged for translation). Philosophy works, too, posed great linguistic challenges. Translating Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kants, 1931–34) necessitated the coining of highly sophisticated new terms previously unused in Latvian. These translations can be seen as a clear example of the defective stance.

## 6. Conclusions

Latvia's brief period of independence (1918/20–1940) saw book publishing on a massive scale. Latvia ranked second in Europe in terms of book publications per capita and boasted a developed translation industry. The range of source languages was growing, with English slightly ahead of German in the pre-war years (German was also the main intermediary language), French and Russian following. The literature translated was extremely varied, as was quality. German and Russian occasionally functioned as intermediary languages. The choice of works to be translated was very much in the hands of translators and publishers, who thought of marketing interests. With the advent of one-lats books, print runs grew longer and high-quality literature became accessible to a broader public. Defective translation stance dominated, while critics favored defensive one, lambasting most translations in general and focusing on Latvian correctness. Translator visibility grew over time and depended on the status of the work translated. Visibility was high for high-quality texts and lower for the lower end (usually zero for pulp literature). With the advent of the authoritarian system in 1934, the general drift of public thought moved in the direction of more substantial and classical values. A variety of translation scene came to an abrupt end with the soviet occupation in 1940.

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