

Three Milestones of Latvian Translation Criticism

Andrejs Veisbergs

University of Latvia
andrejs.veisbergs@lu.lv
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6107-2348>

Gunta Ločmele

University of Latvia
gunta.locmele@lu.lv
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6094-2791>

Abstract. The article provides insight into the development of translation criticism from 1920s to 1980s in Latvia by offering translations of excerpts from theoretical texts that map important events in translation history. We start with the book, published in 1924, which evaluated the 1689 translation of the Bible into Latvian, then concentrate on a polemical article by Rainis (1925) on his innovative 1897 rendition of Goethe's *Faust* and finish the analysis with a discussion of a work written in 1984. The latter stood out during the Soviet era by drawing attention to the aesthetic values of translation, contrasting with the prevailing focus on linguistic aspects, specifically the quality of the Latvian language. Each of these three works, in its own manner, exerted influence both on the historico-philosophical ideas of its era and on the evolution of translation in Latvia. The review and translations of these three excerpts are contextualized through an analysis of Latvian translation history. It is stressed that despite censorship, the Soviet-time translations spread the ideas that often contradicted the Soviet ideology as well as opened new broader vistas for language use.

Keywords: translation criticism, translation history, Latvia, aesthetics of translation, language.

Trīs latviņu vertimo kritikas etapai

Santrauka. Straipsnyje, pasitelkiant svarbiems Latvijos vertimo istorijos įvykiams skirtų vertimo kritikos straipsnių ištraukų vertimus, brėžiama Latvijos vertimo kritikos raida XX amžiaus 3-uoju–9-uoju dešimtmečiais. Pirmiausia aptariama 1924 m. išleista knyga apie pirmąjį Biblijos vertimą į latvių kalbą (1689 m.), toliau pristatomas polemėnis Jānio Rainio straipsnis (1925 m.) apie jo novatorišką 1897 m. Goethe'ės *Fausto* vertimą ir galiausiai pateikiama sovietmečiu (1984 m.) paskelbto vertimo kritikos teksto ištraukos analizė. Ši trečioji ištrauka – tai dėmesiu estetinėms vertimo vertybėms išsiskiriantis vertimo kritikos tekstas, priešpriešintinas iki tol tik lingvistinius aspektus, t. y. latvių kalbos kokybę, nagrinėjusiems vertimo kritikos darbams. Visi trys darbai savaip veikė laikmečio istorines ir filosofines idėjas ir vertimo raidą Latvijoje. Trijų ištraukų apžvalga ir vertimai pristatomi platesniame Latvijos vertimo istorijos kontekste. Pabrėžiama, kad net veikiant cenzūrai, sovietmečio vertimai skleidė dažnai sovietinei ideologijai prieštaraujančias idėjas ir vėrė naujas, platesnes kalbos vartojimo galimybes.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: vertimo kritika, vertimo istorija, Latvija, vertimo estetika, kalba.

Introduction

Translation histories in general are intertwined with processes in culture, religion and politics, the same applies to the Latvian translation scene which has had a very turbulent and changing history (Veisbergs 2016). Although writing about translation in Latvia has a shorter history than translation itself, some of the criticism influenced the way translations were considered and produced. The paper will provide three excerpts of such translation criticism set against a brief outline of Latvian translation history as a whole. The chosen works can be viewed as milestones in the development of the thought about translation in Latvia because they raised the level of criticism to the point where it could be viewed as an academic activity (Paloposki 2012: 184). These works are: the book by Jēkabs Līgotnis (1924), which represents the first comprehensive description of the contributions made by Ernst Glück, the first translator of the Bible into Latvian, to culture and language. By drawing parallels to Luther's translation of the Bible into German, this book places the translator's work into a broader context. The second piece, a polemical article by Rainis (1925), serves as an example of a translator corroborating his linguistic solutions and showcasing their wider significance in positioning Latvian among highly developed European languages. The third, work, authored by Tamāra Zālīte and Jānis Sīlis (1984), delved into aesthetic concepts of translation and influenced the education of future translators during the Soviet time.

These excerpts both illustrate the prevailing issues of translation criticism at the time and how they shaped the future thinking and trends. The three analysed writings fall into the category of explanation in Anthony Pym's classification of historical translation research because they describe the translations as processes of change, however they contain features of other categories—translation archaeology and criticism—as well (Pym 1998: 5–6).

1. *Ernests Gliks* [Ernst Glück] by Jēkabs Līgotnis

1.1. *Translation and Criticism*

Serious Latvian writings about translation naturally start with analysing the first serious translations and like in many places these are religious texts, connected with the ideas of Reformation. A regionally relatively early translation of the whole of the Bible (1685–1689) was carried out by Ernst Glück, a German parson, with one assistant. It was translated from the original languages of Old Hebrew and Latin and laid the basic norms of written Latvian. The translation was discussed in various church fora before publishing, later editions and amendments underwent certain discussion as well. What is noteworthy of this first translation is interlinear notes of the translator, thus making

the translator visible. It must be pointed out that until the middle of the 19th century translations constituted most of the written Latvian texts, furthermore, translators were exclusively non-native speakers—mostly German parsons. Thus for several centuries the Latvian language had two different forms—a rich oral tradition was embodied in a million of folksongs and unsophisticated daily language, and written texts—translations of mostly religious literature done by non-Latvians.

The book by Līgotnis (1924) was the first to cover all aspects of Ernst Glück's translation of the Bible: socio-historical, socio-cultural and linguistic as demonstrated by the excerpt. It deals with the cultural gap between the society for which the Bible was written and the society for which the translation was created, describes the way the translator dealt with his work and discusses the influence of Glück's translation on the development of the Latvian language thus answering research questions of real translation criticism (Williams and Chesterman 2002: 11). Before Līgotnis, translation of the Bible was only discussed from isolated angles. The excerpt below is the first presentation of Līgotnis's text in English and is included to demonstrate its importance both at the time of its publication and today.

1.2. *The Excerpt*¹

“Casting a look at the age of spiritual scripts in Latvian writing (1530–1750), one has to dwell on [...] brilliant personality, Latvian translator of the Bible, a Latvian “Martin Luther” and the father of Latvian schools Ernst Glück. [...] Ernst Glück is to be considered the founder of all our religious literature, an establisher of religious terminology and the vocabulary of the church writings, the first most complete master of the style of our religious literature. The written religious language, established by Glück, has obtained refinement and its rough edges have been smoothed out in recent times, but its foundation has remained unchanged and it lives on in our spiritual texts. Moreover, works by the masters of our secular prose (Neikens, brothers Kaudzītes, Jēkabs Apsītis, Andrievs Niedra) show the influence of the language of the Bible, thus of the Latvian language created by Ernst Glück, even up to the end of the 19th century. From that we see what a great linguistic and spiritual masterpiece Glück has left to the Latvian nation by his Bible translation.

The time of Glück's activities corresponds with the Swedish rule in Vidzeme [Livonia] (1629–1721) [...]

Although Glück is a young man just over twenty, he clearly understands the great importance of the work he is undertaking and prepares for it seriously. First, he learns Latvian thoroughly. But to translate, one needs to know not only the language one translates

¹ The excerpts from the book by Līgotnis (1924) and from the article of Rainis (1925) were translated by the authors of the article. The book by Tamāra Zālīte and Jānis Silis (1984) was originally written in English.

into. And the Bible has to be translated from the originals—from Hebrew and Greek. But Glück does not feel sufficiently strong, in particular, in Hebrew: Therefore Glück returns to Germany, to Hamburg, to a renowned expert of oriental languages Edzardus, to enhance his knowledge of languages, particularly Hebrew, under his tutelage.

In 1680, we see Glück in Vidzeme again. [...]

What difficulty Glück as a translator of the Bible had to encounter can be grasped if we consider that the Bible is one of the deepest collections of scripts in world literature. The Bible is the heritage from the Hebrew people. But the Hebrew people, as Gotthard Vierhuff says in his essay *Der Sprachforscher als Kritiker der Bibelübersetzung* (*Magazin*, XIII., II., 1863), is “the nation of religion in history and their language is the language of religion. The Hebrew language has expressions and words for thoughts and things where, in their specific development, other languages lack such expressions and words. The Hebrew language is as rich in this respect as it is poor for science.” The translator of the Bible has to delve both into the spirit of the Hebrew people and the spirit of the Bible, as well as into the spirit of the language the Bible is being translated into. Referring back to Glück’s translation, the same Vierhuff writes that Glück “has provided the Latvian translation of the Bible, which fully enters the Hebrew spirit of the Bible, which (the translation) finds such expression in Latvian for specific Hebrew ideas that [...] proves a complete understanding by the translator; in very many places it is better conveyed meaning-wise and language-wise than Luther has managed to convey it in German; yes, truly, Glück makes Latvian richer in many ways and lifts it out of the slavery.” Such praise by an expert proves not only Glück’s amazing linguistic talent, but also the great accuracy and enthusiasm of mind with which Glück has made the translation.

Contemplating the words used in the Latvian translation of the Bible, as “Dievs” (‘God’), “velns” (‘devil’), “svets” (‘holy’), “želasība” (‘mercy’), “atpestišana” (‘redemption’), “ticība” (‘faith’), “mīlestība” (‘love’), “cerība” (‘hope’)—linguist Dr. A. Bielenstein writes: “The deep spiritual wealth that the Latvian language possesses manifests itself here, as well as a perfect adequacy of form in which it can express Christian ideas.” And further on, “What strikes the eye is what a high regard the Latvian language deserves, which has given such a deeply representative and beautiful expression for the highest and most sacred concepts, and what high recognition the men deserve who have translated the Bible scriptures in Latvian and in the majority of cases have found an unsurpassed expression for the originals” (*Magazin*, XIII., III.). Several later attempts to retranslate the Bible have not given satisfactory results. For instance, Glück’s excellent knowledge of Greek and Latvian is manifested by the ability of Glück to find such a deep expression for the Greek language in Latvian that a concept is not directly translated, but its idea is recreated by a new figure of speech or a completely new designation. Thus pastor [Karl Rudolph Theodor] Doebner in his article about the history of the Latvian translation of the Bible (*Magazin*, IXX., II.) cannot stop admiring the name “dienu mūžs” [day-age] created by Glück.”

[...] The Bible was printed at J. G. Wilcken’s printing house in Riga. [...] In 1694, publisher Wilcken finished printing of the Bible [...]. The Bible was not selling well

enough, partly due to the high price, but mainly—due to the ignorance and illiteracy of the people. [...]

The Bible translated by Glück contains 2487 pages. Glück spent 8 years translating it. Glück's only assistant in translation was the theology student [C. B.] Witten [...]. It is hard to estimate of what importance Witten's cooperation was. Since Bible translation required substantial language knowledge, of which we do not have any proof if Witten had it, then the largest merit for the translation goes to Glück. Glück's work, considering the quality of translation, deserves admiration, as Luther, for instance, spent 13 years translating the Bible into German, moreover, Glück [...] was encumbered with other duties as a pastor and translated into the foreign language that had undeveloped literary forms, while Luther translated into his mother tongue. The pace of work can undoubtedly be influenced by that. Moreover, Luther, while translating the Bible, had one or two expert assistants. Glück had to work alone. This is a great proof to Glück's outstanding talent as well as his enormous ability to work hard and produce. As refers to the correctness of the language of Glück's translation, there are two proofs for it: First, the pastors of Kurzeme (Courland) and Vidzeme parishes did not need more than 15 weeks for perusing Glück's handwritten translation; secondly, the experts who have compared Glück's translation to the original and know Luther's German translation write: "Glück in very many places having guessed the ideas of the holy scriptures finds Latvian words for them even better than Luther does in German sentences." (What difficulty the translation of the Bible involves can be understood from Luther's remark: "It happened quite often to us that we were searching and asking for a single (German) word for fourteen days, for two, three weeks yet sometimes did not find it." It should be noted that the remuneration for the translation was very low even for that time [...]).

The introduction to the Latvian Bible is written by Superintendent General Fisher in German. It praises the Swedish King Charles XI for overseeing the matter. The New Testament has an introduction in Latvian under the headline: "Mīļais latvieti" [My Dear Latvian] and is considered to be written by Glück himself. Nowhere in Glück's Bible translation is his name mentioned.

Glück's Bible translation is a giant work in technical, literary and moral sense. As regards the technical side, we already admired the speed and quality of Glück's work. In literary matters, Glück with his translation should be considered the establisher of our spiritual prose. Even today, after 240 years, Glück's language lives on in our spiritual writing. For centuries, our writers and spiritual workers have learned from it. Even in our everyday language, often without realizing where our thinking is influenced by spiritual texts, we use Glück's language. Thus even today Glück lives among us.

[...] True, the majority of Latvian people did not yet know how to read. But the book served those who had to do spiritual work among the Latvian people. If the people did not yet know how to read the Bible, they learned it in the later centuries. Thus the Bible became the first book in homes and with its content and thoughts influenced the spirit of the nation. [...]

Was the influence positive for the Latvian people? I think that, irrespective of some opposing voices pointing to the dark sides of Judaism (fanaticism, despotism, intolerance), the religious (not the dogmatic) idea of Christianity yet fertilized the spirit of our nation, made it richer and served as a great spiritual support in the hard days of the people's slavery in the later centuries. The religious idea could not kill the initially light, sun-filled and urging base of the nation's soul. The Bible is interesting as a document of history as well, particularly as regards the development of religiously philosophical thought.

Next, the Bible is an eternal springtime of poetry. Christ's *Beatitudes*, some places in the *Acts of the Apostles*, the *High Song of Solomon*, the *Book of Job*, the *Songs of David*, the *Books of Isaiah*, *Ezekiel* and others talk to us in the language of a beautiful strange oriental poetry with its rich comparisons, great temper, strong abstractions, original hyperboles, bright effects. These models of poetry like big polished gems have existed for thousands of years and the dust of time will not cover them with rust. This poetry could not but influence the fresh spirit of the Latvian people in those days as well.

Of no smaller merit are also Glück's development of our literary language and the establishment of the written language on the basis of the Middle dialect." (Līgotnis 1924: 35–53)

Thus, in his book Līgotnis pointed out the influence of Glück's translation on the development of Latvian religious literature and secular prose, described its value through its enrichment of Latvian culture and language and through contributing to lifting the emerging nation's spirit. Līgotnis was the first in Latvia who underscored the translator's role in a historic sense. Līgotnis's book stood out as the most comprehensive review of a historic translation at the time.

2. Rainis *The New Backlash* (from 1925 Introduction to his *Collected Works*)

2.1. *The Context of Rainis's Critical Work*

In order to understand Rainis's contribution to the Latvian language and translation development better, a broader historical context of translation and writings about translation is needed.

In the 18th and the first half of the 19th century other translations, besides religious texts, appeared, mostly dedicated to medicine, gardening and similar issues, as well as translations of fairy tales. Though many retained the stilted language, adaptation and localization was used, testifying to the awareness of different styles, functions and target audience.

The second half of the 19th century saw an expansion of various translated texts and when Latvian native literature sprang up it was very much an imitation of the cur-

rent translations. Secular translation is well known to go hand in hand with birth of nation building (Chernetsky 2011; Kumar 2013; Easlick 2014; Ožbot 2021). From the very beginning the focus was on the Latvian language—the goal was to prove that Latvian was not the primitive language of the peasants, but could well serve the modern needs of the emerging nation. Thus the National Awakening which marked the beginnings of nation building is in fact dated with the first high quality translation of quality poetry in 1856: *Dziesmiņas* ('the Little Songs') by Juris Alunāns. The aim stated in this booklet was to show that high quality texts could be well translated into Latvian. The book was accompanied by an introduction on good use of Latvian.

Translation criticism is hard to find in the early 18th and 19th centuries, and it amounts to sporadic occurrences or actions, e.g. a new Bible translation was destroyed at the beginning of the 19th century, since it was viewed as too modern and imprecise. The first translation of a novel into Latvian (Campe's *Robinson der Jüngere* (1824)) received an extended review (Robinsons 1829) which mostly focussed on the contents of the book, the extent of localization and Latvian language issues. Besides it was in German.

In the second half of the 19th century occasional complaints about too literal (word for word) translation from German can be found in newspapers. There was a fierce personal battle over the translation of Byron's *Manfred*, later some discussion of plays translation (since theatre had become very popular), certain objections to the emerging pulp literature translations. Basically, however, criticism focussed on the quality of Latvian.

2.2. Rainis: A Literary Critic

In-depth translation criticism appeared after the greatest Latvian poet and playwright Rainis (1865–1929) translated Goethe's *Faust* in an innovative way, making free and elegant use of Latvian. Though the translation was hailed as an incredible achievement, Rainis came under repeated attacks by the leading Latvian linguist of the age Karlis Muehlenbachs for too free and arbitrary use of the language. Rainis did not give in and seems to have won the controversy.

Rainis started his literary career by translations and even when writing his own works carried on translating masterpieces from German, English, French, Russian, Norwegian and other languages. In 1912 he wrote that he had wanted to drop translation and focus on his own creation, but found translations excellent for honing language use, stating that "originals never allow exercising elegant use of the language as well as translations."

Rainis's translation of *Faust* (1897) was and is considered a brilliant transfer of Goethe's text, making use of Modern Latvian (another, closer and perhaps more faith-

ful, translation followed only 100 years later). As already mentioned, it created a polemic between him and Muehlenbachs. But neither the polemic nor Rainis himself actually addressed the problems of translation, only issues of Latvian. The writer addressed translation issues much later, during the 1920s, as exemplified in the excerpt below. He composed this text as an introduction to his collected works. It is indicative that Rainis discusses the social and linguistic paradigms and parameters exclusively.

2.3. *The Excerpt*

“Thus, before I even started my literary and translation activities, I had to clear the road for it and attain the rights of existence and life for the Latvian language itself in its new period of development.

I started this struggle in May 1897, when a polemical article appeared in *Mājas Viesis* supplement *Goethe’s ‘Faust’ and ‘Baltijas Vēstnesis.’* The polemic started and was conducted mainly around the translation of the *Faust*, but it turned into a struggle around the new language, because the *Faust* translation was the first and most consistent introduction and use of the new Latvian language.

The main attacks by the old linguists were directed against the “clipping of words,” e.g. instead of *ilgošanās* I had *ilgas*, instead of *gaidīšana–gaidas*, instead of *mirdzēšana–mirdza*, etc. Then there were attacks against the transfer of vernacular and partly also Lithuanian words into Latvian; and finally against creation of new words, even when observing the language rules.

But, the new language of the *Faust* translation was not arbitrarily and artistically invented and introduced because of the writer’s whim and only on the occasion of *Faust*. The new language had grown and developed in my consciousness and practical work already long ago, since the time of the gymnasium and studies. A large part of the new and clipped words, e.g. “mila” can be seen in my first writings that have been published in 1887 and 1888 in *Mazie Dunduri* and *Apdziedāmās dziesmas*. The brevity and ease of language (clipped words) and free flow is characteristic of the first big translation of my gymnasium years, published later, Pushkin’s *Boris Godunov* [...] around 15 years before the translation of *Faust*.

I should point out that I spent my childhood and adolescence in the upper part of Courland and Latgale, where the dialects are still alive and where many words as if created by me, are used by people as old Latvian words. Also the relatedness of Lithuanian is closer felt there than in the rest of Latvia. I should also point out, what is already mentioned in the beginning of the book, that in my childhood and adolescence and also later I spent much time on folklore, ethnography and linguistic studies. The old dictionaries, e.g. Stender’s, old song books were much read by me.

This explains why my new language seemed an alien, new invention by an absurd and arrogant youth to our linguists, also to the famous and merited Muehlenbach, but in fact and in my consciousness my new language was the same people’s old language, only deeper perceived and further developed.

The new writer lived deep, with his whole essence, in the people’s language, while the old linguists knew and studied it only theoretically and had not at that time understood

and studied it sufficiently. It is characteristic that many old words, that could be found in Stender's dictionary, even in Ulmann's dictionary, seemed to the learned linguists inventions by the writer.

As a general note I must say here: the language as a live organism grows and develops in its organs, its users, i.e. in the nation and the writers, while linguists do the great work of studying, registering, arranging and systematization, which is a very important and honourable work. But they misunderstand their task when they want to assume also the work of creating and further developing of the language, which is done by the live organism of the people. The language compiled and invented by linguists is an artificial product.

Goethe's 'Faust' and 'Baltijas Vēstnesis' was the article that took up the defence; it was started in fact by *Mājas Viesis* editors and publishers, who spoke about the technical side of the *Faust* translation. **About the principles of translation itself, i.e. about the new language** I had to write myself. [...] By publishing *Faustus*, the editors of *M. V. Mēnešraksts* and Plāteš publishers assumed a great work that, at that time, held exceptional social, literary, and technical importance. As for the literary aspect, it is not for me to judge; that will be a decision for history. However, socially, it represented **the appropriation of great German culture by Latvians** and standing next to an old cultural nation. It raised the self-confidence and self-respect of the Latvian people to unprecedented heights: we could now consider ourselves as belonging to Europe; the European breadth now entered in our literature. The technical side was as important, Latvian industry and technology showed for the first time that it could produce in Latvia as high quality product as Germany. Our industry gained self-confidence and self-respect that started a new period of development. [...]

The struggle continued throughout the first half of 1898 and was conducted by Mr. M. without much shyness and anonymously and ended only in August with a full victory of the *Faust* translation, with a letter of Mr. M. where he conceded that he had not wanted to defame the *Faust* translation, but merely pointed out some five or six errors. [...]

When I speak above about the new language struggle as a historical, finished and won, I have to limit and concretize this thought. Yes, my new Latvian language won: it is not only the modern literary language used by the writers, it is also the official language. My principles of language revitalization, also "clipping" have become the leading principles of Latvian construction and further development, which were necessary when establishing Latvia as a state.

"Terminology commissions" have created many new words in all branches of science and life according to the principles combatted then. The new language is a fact, it has won—the loser is the one who fought against it, he lost the struggle according to all laws of tragedy. The follower of the respected linguist in his great monumental dictionary of Latvian has been objective enough: He has tried to erase traces of the struggle and its author, when including several of the words fought against, he has marked their provenance with *M. V. Mēnešraksts* or even with other writers, but not the one who fought for them. To sustain historical truth one should compile a separate dictionary of the words used in my writings and translations. But for me it is enough that the cause has won, i.e. the new Latvian language, and no one will be able to destroy that. The work was done and will stay." (Rainis 1925: 81–90)

2.4. *The Effects of Rainis's Legacy*

Rainis's polemic in a way set the trend that has lasted until today, translations (and they frequently have constituted majority of texts) are generally viewed through the prism of whether the Latvian language used by the translator is good and elegant, occasionally noting some slips or false friends. Also retrospectively it is often mentioned what the translation or translator has given to Latvian. Another facet of the above tendency is that occasionally the focus on exquisite use of Latvian seems to eclipse correspondence of style and tenor of the translation and the original. This can be seen in the above mentioned *Dziemiņas*, also in Rainis's translation of *Faust*, which linguistically was more Rainis than Goethe. It was only in the 1980s and 1990s that criticism drew attention to the fact that the translator's language occasionally was more expressive, complex, innovative and even outlandish than the original (Veinerte 1988, Poišs 1993).

However, Rainis did indeed to some extent change the course of development of the Latvian language by his innovations, mostly focussing on clipping. Linguists accordingly refer to pre-Rainis Latvian and post-Rainis Latvian (Veidemane 1999: 77). His models were adopted and are frequently used in Latvian terminology today.

By the end of the 19th century the quality of translations reached an acceptable level and a huge translation industry developed. German, Russian, later also English, French, Italian, were used as the main source languages, often with German and Russian as intermediary languages. The interwar independence period saw an expansion of the scope of translations with other direct source languages (Estonian, Finnish, Swedish, Norwegian, Spanish, Lithuanian a.o.) joining the traditional contact languages. Latvia ranked second in Europe per books per capita and translations constituted a fair share of the statistics, both old and new foreign texts became available. Translation criticism, however, remained subdued and mostly focussed on the quality of Latvian and lamenting on the huge amounts of unnecessary translations which seemed to inundate the reading/books market thus allegedly impeding national writing.

3. Jānis Silis and Tamāra Zālīte *Basic Problems of Translation Theory*

3.1. *Translation and Criticism Under the Soviet Rule*

Post-war soviet period was at first most depressive and isolationist, when Russian fully dominated the translation scene. Translation criticism was vulgar, mostly focussing on the Latvian language errors and ascribing ideological meaning to those. Later translations picked up again, many done via Russian, but generally of good quality. Growing Russification also meant that technical and administrative texts would be increas-

ingly accessible in Russian only, so translators mostly dealt with fiction. The whole translation scene was Moscow-controlled and most translations were of Russian and Soviet literature. Modern Western literature was considered suspicious and ideologically dangerous and had to be carefully weighed with numerous authors and works tabued. A Latvian translation could be published only after a Russian translation of the same work had been done (Silis 2009: 183). The fidelity approach was paramount, accuracy and norms were the hallmark of proper translation; standard Latvian had to be used. Text manipulations (mostly deletions) were made, for ideological reasons by editors and censors, sometimes editorial paratexts (footnotes) explained ambiguous passages, books were supplied with introductions explaining the proper understanding of the translated work. The translator's name was often removed from the title page to the next page or the end of the book. When older translations were republished the translators' names were not mentioned in cases when they were considered politically suspicious or had fled to the West after World War II. Though politics determined what could be translated and how, the resulting product sometimes undermined the communists' goals, despite censorship. A fine-tuned system of ambiguous subtexts and undercurrents developed behind the monolithic official façade. A considerable number of retranslations were done, mostly of classics, making them more accurate and using more modern language. Literary translation gradually became a profession and tended to be feminine. Some high-quality translations, like Joyce's *Ulysses*, were done abroad by émigrés in the Latvian diaspora. Translation criticism, however, remained restricted to the quality of the target language (Latvian). The booklet by Jānis Silis and Tamāra Zālīte *Basic Problems of Translation Theory* (Rīga, 1984) aimed at the students of the university, stood out against the background of linguistic translation criticism and dealt with the aesthetic values of translation.

Tamāra Zālīte (1918–1990) was a well known lecturer of the university, possessing broad knowledge of world culture and focussing on Shakespeare and English literature. She had a most interesting biography, had communist inclinations in pre-war Latvia, had gone to Britain, trained as ballet dancer, but when World War II broke out, worked for the Soviet TASS agency in Britain, after the war returned to Soviet Latvia, was deported to Siberia as a British spy and became a lecturer of the University of Latvia after rehabilitation in 1956. She translated much Latvian literature into English and her PhD *Some problems of literary translation from Latvian into English* reflected this experience. She was generally considered an enlightened freethinker, bordering on a dissident.

Jānis Silis (1950) was at the time a young lecturer at the university. He later became one of the most prolific translato-logists in Latvia, Dean of the Faculty of Translation in Ventspils College.

3.2. *The Excerpt*

“Translated literature is so much part of our life that we rarely give it special thought. This applies not only to multi-national countries like the USSR, that cohere through the agency of a common language (Russian in our case), but also to the world in general, that is unimaginable without constant steady international relations.

Thus, the question, so frequently raised, as to whether or not a translation can replace an original, is in actual fact redundant: it simply does—and more frequently than we are aware of. When we first get acquainted with Greek mythology, with Homer, the *Nibelungen song* and so on we automatically accept them as part of our literature.

Translation lies at the very source of culture. It is only when two languages meet that awareness of words and with it of meanings, begins. Roman culture set out from translations of the Greek Bible text. This text had been taken from its Hebrew original and later on contributed to the development of literary language in Europe, e.g. Wycliff’s into English, Glück’s into Latvian, and these translations were always part of a wider, more significant struggle, ideological in its essence. [...]

The very understanding of the word “precision” caused difference of opinion: is it a matter of number or weight².

It is an old problem; in the 4th century Hieronymus (St. Jerome, author of the *Vulgata*), wrote “*Non verbum e verbo, sed sensum exprimere de sensu*” (‘Not from word to word, but from meaning to meaning’).

[...]

Every work of importance is eventually translated, if it belongs to a small nation whose language is not widely known (Latvian, for example), the translation becomes a source of further translations, and even if these lose in freshness and power, yet they enrich the cultural treasury of the target language. For example, in the 19th century a contemporary of Walter Scott’s Jameson visited the Baltic countries and brought back English translations of Latvian folk songs that he had taken from their German version. Dostoyevsky knew Shakespeare from German translations—not always good, and yet Shakespeare became one of his basic sources, part of his reality. In his notes to the novel “The Possessed” he quotes Othello’s magnificent lines “But oh!. Iago, the pity of it...” The original reads: “But yet, the pity of it, Iago! Oh! Iago, the pity of it, Iago” (Act IV, scene 1, line 205). Even from the impoverished version at his disposal, from which the rhythm is gone and with it the pain, Dostoyevsky sensed the beauty of Shakespeare’s utter simplicity of expression. It brings to mind Pasternak’s lines “nelzja ne vpast k koncu kak v eresj. V neslihannuju prostatu.”

In translation we “break up” the original expression, to get at its meaning and impact, then mould our TL so as to reproduce this essence. Translation thus leads to discoveries

² The interaction between Greek and Roman cultures sparked off the development of Latin literature. The interplay between medieval Latin and local languages in Britain is interestingly presented by A. Gurevich in his book *Problemi srednivekovoi narodnoi kulturi*, Isskustvo 1981.

in the TL, and to enrichment of it, by revealing its possibilities (This can only be effected if the translator knows his language creatively and feels its elasticity as well as its limits).

Translation thus widens man's means of expression, hence his culture (though in practice we often find not only translators but, especially editors frequently dead to possible unprecedented usages). Therefore the translator carries a special responsibility in the cultural process.

A vivid example is Constance Garnett (1861–1946) who at the end of the last century set herself the task of rendering into English the outstanding works of 19th century Russian fiction—Tolstoy's, Dostoevsky's, Chekhov's, etc., thus being largely responsible for the enormous influence of Russian literature upon English writing. Translations of Ibsen played a decisive role in the development of such gigantic figures as James Joyce and Bernard Shaw.

The history of translation registers some curious phenomena, one of them is the fate of *Ossian* (Olsin, Gaelic warrior and bard, son of Finn, 3rd century). McPherson (1736–96) published ostensible translation from Gaelic and Erse languages, greatly admired by Goethe, Pushkin and writers of other European countries. However, their authenticity was challenged by Samuel Johnson, and after McPherson's death it became clear that he had freely tampered with the *Ossian* texts, adding his own verse and modifying the original. For all that McPherson's *Ossian* was an event in literary developments of Europe. It stimulated interest in Gaelic folklore, which is felt even today (for example, in John Fowles' writing), it became a model for Czech, French, Russian poetry.

Another curious chapter in the history of translation belongs to Shakespeare's sonnet—the sonnet as a genre having meandered from Italy, through France, to England where Shakespeare finally modified it in his specific way. Shakespeare's own poetry was enriched and stimulated by a wide range of translations that included Montaigne, Machiavelli, Erasmus of Rotterdam.

[...]

There is only one unique work of art—the original. But it can and must have a number of translations. Is it a statement of pessimism concerning possibilities of good translations? We do not think so. An art work is man's victory over time—unlike man himself it is eternal, moreover as time goes on it grows increasingly rich and meaningful. Another quality that it shares with all art is its synthesis of objective validity and subjective, individual meaning to each perceiver, which includes the translator. Every translation opens up a new facet of the original, an undiscovered possibility. We may think of the different translations of the sonnets, of *Hamlet* (Pasternak's and others). [...] Each translation is unique, yet not a single one will recapture the full ambivalence of the original. In this respect the translator's work can be compared with that of the producer or actor. The reader perceives the original through an individual perception and understanding. A translation is ineluctably some unique interpretation. We have, for example, in Russian a whole range of hamlets—heroic, cowardly, selfless, self-centred, thinking, “redundant.” Every translator lays stress on the aspect closest to him or to his age. [...]

The decisive condition is that the translator's point of procedure should be a single-minded interpretation of the original, in whatever key he hears it. [...]

Latvian has two different translations of Homer's *Ulysses*, done by Dinsbergs and Milēnbahs; three versions of Goethe's *Faust*—by Dinsbergs, Māsens and Rainis. Andrejs Upīts sees in these translations a means of enrichment of the Latvian language, a serious step forward in Latvian culture.

A work of verbal art is a semiotic system consisting of aesthetic signs. It is in a state of constant flux of interrelations and interactions with objective and subjective contexts, hence subjected to constant changes. The human consciousness that perceives them is also both socially conditioned and subjective, unique. All this explains the infinite possibilities of perceiving and translating in the aesthetic field. Only translation lays open the fullness of meaning—or meanings of the text. The more intensively this is done, the more intensive does the art work live." (Silis, Zalīte 1984: 4–11)

To get permission for publishing and satisfy the overseers and censors the authors had to pay the necessary political dues—introduce the mandatory references to Marxist and Soviet authorities, praise Russian authors and critics. However, it allowed referring to many facts, authors and literary works that were unknown to an isolated soviet student with little or no access to Western sources. The booklet focussed on the aesthetic issues of translation which was novel and interesting in the staid translatology scene that was mostly linguistically oriented.

The Aftermath

When Latvia regained its independence in 1991, Latvian was re-established as the sole official language of the state. This led to an enormous growth in the volume of translated information and a major proportional shift from expressive (fiction) texts to appellative and informative ones. Most translations are not in literary or even book form. The tradition of adaptation has found a new creative outlet in advertising, as well as in software localisation. Most information now comes from the West and often via English. Within ten years, the source language pattern changed radically: If in 1985 the proportion of books translated from Russian and English was 15 : 1, in 1994 the proportion was 1 : 6. It has stayed the same since then.

Translation criticism, although in a way influenced by the above writings, has remained in the shadow and has not changed its focus on the quality of Latvian rather than comparing the original and the translation. A similar situation has been reported in some other countries, for example, France, where book reviews in the newspapers in 1990s did not comment on the way translations were performed (Vanderscheiden 2000: 282).

While throughout the everchanging Latvian history translations and translation language have been a major force in shaping the Latvian language, culture and world-view (Veisbergs 2009), translation criticism has been peripheral in its influence, though sometimes contributing to a better understanding of the translation scene, as illustrated by the above texts.

Conclusion

Translations into Latvian have seriously contributed to the development of Latvian. The first translations influenced the formation of the Latvian language by setting the linguistic norms of the written language. The 19th century translations served as the basis for the blending of oral folk language and the written language, expansion of new terminology as well as the emergence of original Latvian literature. Despite censorship, the Soviet-time translations spread the ideas that often contradicted the Soviet ideology as well as opened new broader vistas for language use. Translation criticism in the case of Latvian mostly focussed on Latvian language issues, but also drew attention to the meaning and message of the originals, and their importance for the Latvian reader. The above three works of translation criticism, each in its own way, influenced the historico-philosophical ideas of their age and the development of the Latvian translation scene.

Sources

- Ligotnis, Jēkabs. 1924. Ernests Gliks [Ernest Glück]. In *Juris Mancelijs. Kristaps Firekers. Ernests Gliks. Biografiski raksturojumi ar izmeklētiem paraugiem no viņu rakstiem. Ievērojami vīri dzīvē un darbā 2*, 35-53. Rīga: A. Jessens.
- Rainis, Jānis. 1925. Jaunā atstrāva. Publicistikas trešais posms. Eseiņstika. 1896.-1907 [The New Backlash. The Third Stage of Journalism. Essay Writing]. In *Dzīve un darbi. Biografija un kopoti raksti. IX*, 81-90. Rīgā: A. Gulbja apgādībā.
- Silis, Jānis and Tamāra Zālīte. 1984. Translation in the Cultural Process. In *Basic Problems of Translation Theory*. Rīga.

References

- Campe, Joachim, Heinrich. 1824. *Robinsons Kruhsinsch*. Jelgavā: pee Jahņa Wridriķča Steffenhagen un dehla.
- Chernetsky, Vitaly. 2011. Nation and Translation. In: *Contexts, Subtexts and Pretext: Literary Translation in Eastern Europe and Russia*, edited by Brian James Baer, 33–53. Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Easlick, Kathleen. 2014. Literary and Cultural Exchange: Translation Trends in the Nordic and Baltic Countries. *The Romanian Journal for Baltic and Nordic Studies*, 6(2). 77–94.
- Kumar, Ravi. 2013. *Role of Translation in Nation Building*. New Delhi: Modlingua.

- Ožbot, Martina. 2021. *Translation and Multilingualism. A Dynamic Interaction*. Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete Univerze v Ljubljani.
- Paloposki, Outi. 2012. Translation Criticism. In *Handbook of Translation Studies*. Volume 3. Edited by Yves Gambier and Luc van Doorslaer, 184-191. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Poišs, Mārtiņš. 1993. Vārds [The Word]. *Karogs* 10. 181–205.
- Pym, Anthony. 1998. *Method in Translation History*. Manchester: St. Jerome.
- Robinsons Kruhsinsch. 1829. *Magazin, herausgegeben von der Lettisch Literarischen Gesellschaft*. Zweites Stueck. Mitau: Steffenhagen und Sohn. 51–66.
- Silis, Jānis. 2009. *Tulkojumzinātnes jautājumi. Teorija un prakse* [The Issues of Translation Studies. Theory and Practice]. Ventspils: Ventspils Augstskola.
- Vanderschelden, Isabelle. 2000. Quality Assessment and Literary Translation in France. In *Evaluation and Translation*. Special issue of *The Translator* 6 (2), edited by C. Maier, 271–293.
- Veidemane, Ruta. 1999. Rainis kā tulkotājs [Rainis as a Translator]. In *Rainis un Gēte*, edited by G. Grīnuma, 77–81. Rīga: Latvijas Gētes biedrība, Nordik.
- Veinerte, Biruta. 1988. Tomasa Manna tetraloģija latviešu valodā [Tetralogy of Thomas Mann in Latvian]. *Karogs* 6. 162–165.
- Veisbergs, Andrejs. 2009. Translation Language: The Major Force in Shaping Modern Latvian. *Vertimo Studijos* 2. 54–70.
- Veisbergs, Andrejs. 2016. *The Swings and Turns in the Latvian Translation Scene*. Berlin: Lambert Academic Publishers.
- Williams, Jenny and Chesterman, Andrew. 2002. *The Map. A Beginner's Guide to Doing Research in Translation Studies*. Manchester: St. Jerome.