

# PARATEXTS IN TRANSLATIONS OF CANONICAL TEXTS (THE CASE OF THE BIBLE IN LATVIAN)

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The paper discusses paratexts, their use and prevalence in translations of the Bible in Latvian, with a particular focus on the last translation that was published in 2012. Paratexts are used to improve the perception of the main text and may include introductions, prefaces, postfaces, footnotes, side notes (marginalia), endnotes, glossaries, indexes and appendixes. Though the translation of the Bible, being a canonical text, is subject to various limitations, there is an increasing tendency to use more footnotes to explain various phenomena: information about the original texts, different variants of the Bible manuscripts, the existence or nonexistence of some verses; cultural words and facts – explanations about units of measurement, old objects, concepts, geographical and historical information; linguistic information: explanations of polysemy, decoding of words, etymologies of place names, semantics, wordplay; and alternative translations offered by the translator. The author suggests a glossary that could inform the reader of the Biblical characters, place names and the new transcription of many proper names. Footnotes could then dwell on linguistic issues.

## INTRODUCTION

Texts are often accompanied by other material, known as paratexts. (Language) paratexts may include introductions, prefaces, postfaces, footnotes, side notes (marginalia), endnotes, glossaries, indexes, appendixes. Paratexts together with the main text affect the reception and understanding of the main text by the public at large. Paratexts are not primarily characteristic of translations only. They have a long history, appearing in printed texts soon after the invention of printing. In the 17th century footnotes started competing with the hitherto dominant marginal notes (Kaestner 1984; Eckstein 2001: 9-11). In the 18th century paratexts found their place in research writing and also started appearing in fictional texts. In the 19th century they tended to vacate fiction, to return there in the 20th century. Paratexts at times have been considered as important as the text itself. Thus, Edward Gibbons' "History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire"

(1776–1789) derived its fame to a large extent because of the extensive use of footnotes containing quotations and flamboyant comments by the author. His footnotes can be viewed as a precursor of modern footnoting.

Paratexts in previous decades have attracted the attention of researchers, especially in Germany, where establishing a sub-branch or discipline of footnotology and its typology has been suggested (Rieß 1995). Often, other terms are used in the meaning of *paratexts*, namely *peritexts*, *epitexts*, *extratexts*. Occasionally paratexts are viewed extremely broadly as equivalent to *metatexts*: anything that is connected with the text, including various translations of the text.

In translation paratexts provide the necessary conceptual and background information that is necessary for the reader to understand the translated text better, e.g. in the Bible translation the direct versus the transferred meaning, as well as the meanings of the proper names cannot normally be decoded without paratexts, e.g. Hebrew *Hava* meaning *the alive one*, *the life giver* and its Latvian counterpart *Ieva* with its (dormant) direct meaning of *bird cherry tree*.

If a word or term is translated literally or transcribed, a paratext can explain the transferred meaning. If the translation is free and adapted, paratexts can explain the direct meaning. Thus, text and paratext work together and should be created together. Frequently paratexts are created not by the translators but by experts. This occasionally leads to a less cohesive and successful result.

The term *paratexts* originates from the book *Seuils* by Gerard Genette (1987), published in English as *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Genette 1997). Genette's writing generally dwells on the paratexts in books and views paratexts as liminal devices. Today the term is frequently understood in a broader sense, often referring to digital media, e-books, databases, corpora and also to translations. It can also comprise commercials, advertising materials, epigraphs, and pictures (Tahir-Gurcaglar 2011:113-115), thus the Bible translations frequently contain maps of the Middle East, pictures of scrolls or religious characters.

## THE TRANSLATOR AS AN INTERMEDIARY AND THE TRANSLATOR'S VISIBILITY

The role of translators in the formation and development of Latvian written language is far from being fully understood and appreciated (Veisbergs 2009, 2012). The translator's role is enormous, however, usually they are left in the shadows and are rarely visible, e.g. in past Bible translations the translators' names have often been omitted. Paratexts can be viewed as an obvious element of the translator's visibility or voice, the translators' footprints (Palaposki 2010), and the translator's hand (Mainberger 2001). Koskinen (2000: 99) when discussing the translator's visibility distinguishes between textual, paratextual and extratextual visibility.

Textual visibility is expressed in the text itself and includes translation strategies (which are not always visible to the lay readers); paratextual visibility comprises all paratexts and additions. Extratextual or social visibility can be noticed outside the translation, e.g. press releases, criticism, interviews dedicated to the translation or translator. For example, in the case of the last translation of the Latvian Bible the social visibility was massive, which one must say is hardly to be expected for a “normal” translation.

Paratexts occasionally draw fire, first because they split the reader’s attention, and secondly, as Venuti argues “in making such additions, the translator’s work ceases to be translating and becomes commentary. Moreover, the translation acquires a typically academic form, potentially restricting its audience and it fails to have the immediate impact on its reader that the foreign text produced on the foreign reader” (Venuti 2009:159).

Paratexts are normally considered secondary and subordinate to the main text (Derrida 1991:193). In a translation one actually hears two voices or sees two hands – that of the author of the original and that of the translator. The translator not only transfers the text into another language and culture, but implements the transfer presuming the expected target audience, or the model reader (Eco 1984: 7).

The model reader of a translation has a different cultural background, along with a different competence and expectations (expectations from a translation are frequently different from those of the original). Texts often contain phenomena unknown to the target reader, or bearing different ideological or connotational nuances, e.g. sheep and goats, branches on the streets, a kiss, etc. (Nida 2003). The model reader of a Bible translation is varied and complex: many readers are well prepared and knowledgeable on the subject. For them a new translation may be interesting and refreshing, but may also seem awkwardly new, revisionist, digressive and shocking. The other readers are the novices and new readers who know little or virtually nothing about biblical contents and form. In any case the translator (or translators, as the new translations are often group work) tries to help the reader either overtly or covertly, or attempts to combine both approaches. The overt assistance is usually implemented by means of paratexts.

## PARATEXT TYPES

Paratexts, apart from language, i.e. linguistic form, can also include maps, pictures, drawings, and photos. The modern electronic media offer hyperlinks, videos, commentary pages, etc. However, in traditional book format paratexts are usually:

a) **prefaces / introductions.** This is the translator’s place of honour (a preface is more likely to be read than a postface). A preface is rarely accessible to the translators; normally it is reserved for the original author or expert. Translators usually get access to introductions only in serious research and scientific works, where they can espouse their translation strategies and sometimes provide examples and solutions.

b) **footnotes** are viewed variously in different ages, cultures and text types. They normally have the author’s commentary function in the original works (Benstock 1983: 204).

In translations the functions are broader. Footnotes are occasionally viewed as a translator's failure or shame, they are occasionally ridiculed and considered to be "the black sheep" (Grafton 1999: 25), as reading footnotes interrupts the flow of the text and its linearity splits the reader's attention. It is also a problem as to how to assess the reader's knowledge, yet, from the point of view of translatology, footnotes also provide interesting information about what the translators have viewed necessary to explain. Indirectly, and not very precisely, footnotes may serve as a sign of what the reader might know or not;

c) **endnotes** are, contents-wise, similar to footnotes but being situated at the end of the book they tend to be even more cumbersome and less reader-friendly;

d) **side notes, marginal notes (marginalia)** are usually used for specific purposes – either as cross references or enumeration, or explanations of specific items;

e) **glossaries** usually contain an explanation of terms in specific, specialized domains;

f) **indexes** are of two types, the short versions contain page references of items, the long versions provide synoptic explanatory information;

g) **appendices** usually contain relevant information grouped according to domains.

## PARATEXT CONTENTS IN TRANSLATION

It is impossible to produce a clear and complete classification of the contents of paratexts, as different types of paratexts focus on different phenomena, yet often the same issues may be discussed both in the introduction, footnotes or endnotes. As many sub-concepts overlap, e.g. cultural words (*realia*) and foreign words, citations often contain foreign elements, and often footnoting/endnoting issues are hard to categorize. Normally notes (footnotes, endnotes, side notes) explain what would be known to the original text reader and unknown to the model reader of the translation. As remarked above, there are various options of transfer and adaptation: these instances can be explained or explicitated in the text itself, they can be loan-translated or explained by means of paratexts.

Traditionally in Latvian, notes explain:

- Quotations in foreign languages – Latin, French, German, English, etc.
- Cultural words (*realia*): geographical, religious, educational, arts, institutional words and concepts, etc.
- Allusions (which often overlap with cultural words or concepts).
- Wordplay, ambiguities, cases where the text is not mono-dimensional.
- Translator's or translation problems.

## PARATEXTS IN CANONICAL WORKS

Though paratexts in canonical texts are often viewed as a separate category possessing established constraints, they tend to be as varied as paratexts in general, e.g. in the two

Latvian translations of the Koran in 2011. One of them, done by a famous translator Uldis Bērziņš (Korāns 2011a) from Arabic contains a 6-page poetic introduction about the book, its translator and the language. In the end matter there are pictures, translator's endnotes with a page dedicated to the issues of transcription and around 20 pages of comments and a list of sources as well as 85 pages of Prof. Ešots endnotes and a list of sources providing explanations, parallel variants, allusions, interpretations and references. Thus, endnotes comprised more than 100 pages (486-589 pp.)

The second translation was done by the famous Latvian composer Imants Kalniņš (Korāns 2011b). Though the title page says that it is "an interpretation from Arabic", this remark is ambiguous as it might be understood as the translator's individual interpretation or an interpretation of the Arabic text via another language. It is also doubtful whether the composer actually knows Arabic. Paratextually this translation is poorer than the other one: there is a short philosophical poem by the translator and a 4-page biography of the Prophet Muhammad. There are no clearly separated paratexts in this translation, but relatively frequent bracketed explanations inserted in the text, mostly providing Arabic words.

#### SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTICS OF BIBLE TRANSLATION

Though the Bible is viewed as a prototypically canonical text, the translation of which is limited in its interpretation (Chesterman 1997: 22), its various editions in Latvian have gradually attuned the text to the perceived or real norms of the language and the interpretation of the original can also be considered as becoming more and more precise. Here two remarks seem worthy of mention. First, for the first 300 years the translations were performed by non-native Latvian speakers and the early translations did not always use "correct/adequate" Latvian (which, however, does not mean that the "incorrect" Latvian was not later codified as the Latvian Biblical style). Second, although starting with the first edition in 1689 the Bible was supposedly translated from the original languages, it seems the German text was at least to a certain extent consulted in the process.

The text of the Bible is also normally adapted to the knowledge level of the perceived target audience. The changes and amendments occasionally call forth objections and protests, yet rational changes are often positively appreciated, as noted by Bielenstein in as early as 1904 (Bilenšteins 1995: 222). Translations of the Bible also have some doctrinal constraints. The Bible societies of the past were cautious as regards explanations and commentaries, as these could carry interpretation differences and biases and thereby cause denominational strife. The British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) changed its official stance in 1971, when the 1804 phrase of the charter "without note or comment" was changed to "without doctrinal notes or commentary". Thus, in the past, paratexts in the traditional meaning were not welcome in Bible translation. Extending covert explanations is also contrary to the idea of being faithful, though apart from faithful translations there are also alternative versions and renderings of the

Bible. There could be borderline cases when some explicitation could be considered in order to avoid confusion, e.g.:

*Un notika, ka tanīs dienās Jēzus nāca no Nacaretēs Galilejā un tika Jāņa kristīts Jordānā.  
(Marka 1:9) (Bībele 1965)*

*Tajās dienās Jēzus atnāca no Galilejas (apgabala) Nācaretēs (pilsētas) un Jānis viņu kristīja Jordānā (s upē). (Bībele 2012: 2206)*

*Gloss: In those days Jesus came from (the town of) Nazareth of Galilee (region) and was baptized by John in the Jordan (river).*

One might argue that for new readers who lack knowledge of these geographical names they have to be explicitated.

The Bible has a most complex model reader whose interests are difficult to balance. Novice readers would find there much obscurity. Traditional users might have objections to innovation and change both in contents and language. And finally the Bible is a book that is usually not read linearly and consecutively, but referred to, often looking for a book, chapter, fragment or verse. This might presume a need for repeated explanations. There have been cases of inserting the paratextual information in the text directly (Blight 2005:7), but these are mostly not viewed as traditional translations, but alternative versions.

## PARATEXTS IN LATVIAN BIBLE TRANSLATION HISTORY

The first translation (Ta 1689) actually contains extensive paratexts. There is a lofty introduction in German by Superintendent Johann Fischer (the title page is, however, in Latvian), informing the reader of the King and Martin Luther. There are marginal notes and brief summary introductions to the chapters. And there are surprising insertions in the text in smaller letters marked with an asterisk (of the type that today we would expect in footnotes), e.g. Genesis 3:22:

*Un Dievs tas Kungs sacīja: Redzi/ tas Cilvēks ir\* tapis it kā no mums.*

*\*Ebr: Valodā ir tā skan: Redzi, tas Cilvēks ir tāds bijis, kā viens no mums.*

*Gloss: And the Lord God said: See / the Man has\* now become as if one of us. \* In Hebr. Language it sounds: See, that Man has been, as one of us.*

The 1825 edition (the 4th edition) (Biblia 1825) has an extensive didactic introduction by the General Superintendent Jehkab Fischer (son of Johann Fischer) from the 1739 edition in Latvian about the way the Bible is supposed to be read and understood. Explanatory insertions are gone, marginal notes are introduced within the column, summary introductions for the chapters have remained and there is a Sunday reading list at the end.

The 1877 edition (Bihbele 1877) edited by Bielenstein retains the introduction, marginal notes are within the column and summary introductions for the chapters have become very concise. There are no footnotes. The Sunday reading list has been retained.

The 1965 London (émigré) edition (Bībele 1965) has no introduction and there are a few footnotes mostly explaining Hebrew language meanings, e.g.:

*Ieva*\* \**Ari Hava – ebr.- dzīvā (Genesis 3:20)*

*Gloss: Ieva*\* \**Also Hava – Hebr. The alive one.*

*Augļus*\* \**t.i. procentes (Leviticus 25:36)*

*Gloss: Fruits*\* \**i.e. percentage/interest.*

### ***The New Translation***

The new Bible translation is the second translation after many revised and amended versions. It has many innovations (Tēraudkalns 2008: 200; 2009), among them a more frequent use of footnotes and a substantially changed transcription. Yet it is not an alternative or super-modern translation and it retains many traits of the old one. The new translation contains a brief postface – two paragraphs on the principles, history and a couple of translation issues, three explanations on citations, footnotes and titles, and a list of abbreviations used in the footnotes.

The introductory part contains brief information on the Translation commission, contents and a one-page explanation of the abbreviations parallel to Protestant and Roman Catholic names of the books. There are the traditional side notes – cross references to similar texts. The rest of the paratextual information is in the footnotes:

1. Information about the original texts, variants of the manuscripts, existence or nonexistence of some verses:

*Katrā tornī četri\* vīri (1743).*

*\*Dažos manuskriptos: trīsdesmit divi.*

*Gloss: On each tower were four\*men. \*In some manuscripts: thirty two (1. Maccabees 6:37)*

*Gāja cauri Marisanas zemei\* (1740).*

*\*Dažos manuskriptos: Samarijas.*

*Gloss: passed through Marissa\*. \*in some manuscripts: Samaria (1. Maccabees 5:66).*

*Pēc Israēla dēlu skaita\* (351).*

*\*Vairākums tulkotāju atzīst par pareizāku grieķu tulkojuma versiju: pēc Dieva dēlu skaita.*

*Gloss: the number of the sons of Israel\* \*most translators consider the Greek translation variant to be more correct: according to the number of the sons of God (Deuteronomy 32:8).*

*Esi sveicināta, izredzētā\** (2250).

*\*Pēc Romas katoļu tradīcijas: žēlastības pilnā.*

Gloss: *Hail, favoured one\**      *\*According to the Roman Catholic tradition: full of grace (Luke 1:28).*

*Dāvida Psalm\** (1023).

*\*mizmor (ebr. val.) - lietots vārds, kura nozīme nav zināma.*

Gloss: *The Psalm of David\**      *\*mizmor - a word in the Hebr. language, the meaning of which is unknown (Psalms 109:1).*

2. Cultural words and facts – explanations about units of measurement, old objects, concepts, geographical and historical information:

*Man jāpiemin Lepnā\** (994).

*\*Poētisks Ēģiptes apzīmējums.*

Gloss: *I will make mention of the Proud\**      *\*a poetic description of Egypt (Psalms 87:4).*

*Tajā ietilpa divi tūkstoši batu\** (572).

*\*bats – apmēram 45 litri.*

Gloss: *It contained two thousand baths\**      *\*bath – around 45 litres (1.Kings 7: 26).*

3. Linguistic information: explanations of polysemy, decoding of words, etymologies of place names, semantics, intentional or casual wordplay. Often these phenomena overlap with cultural words.

*Kristum jānāk no Dāvida dzimuma\** (2336).

*\*Burtiski: sēklas.*

Gloss: *Christ is a descendant\* of David*      *\*literally: of the seed (John 7: 42).*

*Tur būs arī pilsēta, kuru sauks - Hamona\** (1498).

*\*Hamona (ebr. val.) – pulks.*

Gloss: *There will be a city called Hamonah\**      *\*Hamonah (Hebr. language) – multitude (Ezekiel 39:16).*

*..tāpēc lai to sauc par sievu\*, jo no vīra tā ņemta* (10).

*\*Īš (ebr. val.) – vīrs; išā (ebr. val.) – sieva.*

Gloss: *she shall be called woman\*, for she was taken out of man*      *\*Īš (Hebr. language) – man/husband; išā (Hebr. language) – wife (Genesis 2:23).*



*dieva gars\* lidinājās pār ūdeņiem. (7)*

*\*Arī: vējš.*

Gloss: *the Spirit\* of God was hovering over the waters. \*Also: wind (Genesis 1:2).*

Alternative translations offered by the translator. In the new translation these footnotes are very unevenly distributed which suggests different translators had different priorities.

*Varens vējš\* (1877).*

*\*Cits iespējams tulkojums: varenības dvesma.*

Gloss: *Mighty wind\* \*Another possible translation: breath of might (Wisdom of Solomon 5:23).*

*Tie smeltos drosmi\* (1903).*

*\*Cits iespējams tulkojums: liksmotu.*

Gloss: *They would seek courage\* \*Another possible translation: might rejoice (Wisdom of Solomon 18:7).*

*Vīņš nedienu\* veica (1904).*

*\*Cits iespējams tulkojums: karapulku.*

Gloss: *He overcame the destroyer\* \*Another possible translation: troops (Wisdom of Solomon 18:22).*

*Ko lai jums saku vispirms?\* (2338).*

*\*Grūti tulkojams pants. Cits iespējams tulkojums: Kopš sākuma jums to saku.*

Gloss: *What should I tell you first?\* \*A difficult verse for translation. Another possible translation: I told you that from the beginning. (John 8:25)*

Occasionally footnotes explain syntactic issues and sentence structures, e.g. to whom a pronoun refers to, or provide the literal translation:

*tie\* – (1748).*

*\*Romiešu draugi.*

Gloss: *they\* \*friends of Romans (1.Maccabees 8:1).*

*bet nevienam tu neskaities sieva\* (1665).*

*\*Burtiski: tu nesaucies neviena vārdā no viņiem .*

Gloss: *Literally: but to no one are you a wife\* \*you do not bear the name of a single one of them (Tobit 3:8).*

The same footnotes are repeated whenever the item repeats. As a result, contrary to other translated literature, the Bible translation offers a relatively even spread of footnoting, avoiding their abundance in the beginning and absence at the end. However, there are some books of the Bible where footnoting is more rife than in others, suggestive of the particular translator preferring or avoiding paratexts. This suggests that the editorial policies as regards use of footnotes have not been strict or fully agreed or have not been punctiliously implemented.

## CONCLUSIONS

The new translation of the Bible in Latvian offers a broader use of paratexts than the previous editions. Most of the paratextual information is contained in the footnotes. It provides information about the original texts, variants of the manuscripts, existence or nonexistence of some verses; explains cultural words and facts; and provides linguistic information: explanations of polysemy, decoding of words, etymologies of place names, semantics, intentional or casual wordplay and occasionally offers alternative translations by the translator. The distribution of footnotes is uneven, which is suggestive of a lack of editorial oversight of clear policies as regards paratexts.

The author suggests that a glossary of the Biblical characters, place names and new transcription of many proper names would be a good paratextual tool. There is still much information missing that would be valuable to new readers. An extended explanatory index for the Bible would be impracticable as many linguistic items occur very frequently. In the view of the author a glossary informing the reader of the Biblical characters, place names and new transcription of many proper names would be a good tool. Footnotes could then dwell on the linguistic and translation issues of particular cases.

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## PARATEKSTAI KANONINIŲ TEKSTŲ VERTIMUOSE (BIBLIJOS VERTIMO Į LATVIŲ KALBĄ ATVEJIS)

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Santrauka

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