

National English Language Competition 2013/2014

Last posting date: 20. January 2014

Address: Inglise keele ja kirjanduse osakond, Ülikooli 18, Tartu 50090

Important dates:

20 January – Last posting date for the research paper

14 February – The names of the finalists will be disclosed

7-8 March – Final competition at the University of Tartu, oral presentations of the project

Title:

Introducing the World to Estonia and Estonia to the World: Translators/Interpreters as Cultural Ambassadors

The aim of the National English Language Competition is to create interest in the English language and the societies and cultures of the UK, USA and other English-speaking countries. We seek to develop students' understanding of different cultural phenomena and intercultural links, but especially to guide them to see the points of connection between the English-speaking and Estonian culture through independent research and analysis. The general aim is to encourage students with academic interests in their first scholarly endeavours and to offer them an opportunity to hone their skills of research, analysis and writing. This not only meets one of the requirements of the Estonian National Curriculum but also improves analytical and writing skills that students will need on entering the labour market.

This year we specifically invite students to think about translation as a bridge between the Estonian and English-speaking cultures and the role of translators as cultural ambassadors. Translation is especially important in small cultures like the Estonian one. Translation is also currently a hot topic in English studies internationally. As a result of the global cultural prominence of English, it is not surprising that translations from English dominate on the Estonian market as well. We invite students to think about the broader politics of translation (what is being translated, when, from what languages) as well as the narrower questions of language and the art/craft of translation. We encourage descriptive translation analyses, rather than mere evaluations that dominate in Estonian public discussion. In other words, we suggest that students select a small corpus of texts or concentrate on one text, be it then a written text or a film text, and study the actual choices made in the process of translation. In this way, the research paper also develops the students' skills of textual analysis and close critical engagement with the text (more details below). We also encourage studies on specific translators in Estonian translation history, in other words, on the cultural agents who have helped to shape the images of the English-speaking world for the Estonians.

We expect

Independent student research papers (10-15 double-spaced pages in 12-point Times New Roman font) on some question of translation or interpretation. The papers are supposed to

show some background research but also to contain a clear section of independent analysis by the student.

We advise

The paper should focus on one subject area and clearly formulate a narrower research question within the area (some suggestions are given below). In view of the length of the paper, the topic should be relatively narrow to enable its in-depth analysis. The list below is not exhaustive but rather seeks to demonstrate the wealth of topics available and to stimulate students' imagination and creativity. Students are not expected to copy topics from the list below but rather to choose a topic in accordance with their interests and wishes. We want to see students' ability to select an appropriate topic area, define a research topic, gather information about it, analyse the information and draw conclusions from it.

Assessment

The papers will be assessed by the jury of the competition in one round and two stages. In the first stage the jury will assess the written paper, its content and its accordance to the requirements set for the projects (see How to Write the Research Project). The analytical side of the paper will be the main focus. Up to 15 best papers will advance to the second stage of assessment. The second stage will take place at the University of Tartu in the form of a mini conference where all participants will present the results of their research orally. This stage will assess the students' command of the topic of their paper, their ability to present the results in an oral presentation and to respond to spontaneous questions on the topic of the paper. The summaries of best three papers will be published in the newsletter of the Estonian Association of Teachers of English (OPEN!).

Possible research topics

The suggestions below are only suggestions and you may also choose to pursue other alternatives, as long as you stay grounded in the description and **analysis** of specific cases/texts. Although critical reading of previous work is central to any research, you should not forget your own empirical analysis.

- **Translators/translations in the creation of Estonian culture.** Marek Tamm (2010), among others, has argued that Estonian culture was born of translation. We invite you to think about this topic by pursuing, for example, trend-setting, innovative or important translations and translators that have enriched Estonian language and/or culture: the work of translators such as Johannes Aavik, August Annist, Henno Rajandi, Ain Kaalep, Krista Kaer etc.). Think for example of Aavik's innovation of the Estonian language through his translations of Edgar Allan Poe, among others.
- **Translations from English in Estonian cultural context.** Starting from the 1990s English translations have dominated among the translations into Estonian. However, in the past, other languages have been dominant or/and *lingua francas*. What has been translated from English in different time periods? What has been the position of translations from English? (See for example: Aile Möldre "Kirjastustegevus ja

raamatulevi Eestis aastail 1940-2000“). Even today, we need to remember that there are both translations of critically acclaimed fiction (e.g., Salman Rushdie or Paul Auster) and popular genre fiction (from Terry Pratchett to Danielle Steele).

- **Domestication/foreignization in literary translations.** Translation theorist Lawrence Venuti draws a distinction between translations that seek to blend smoothly and fluently into the target language (domestication) and those who signal their foreignness by adopting different, (source culture's) lexis and/or sentence structure (foreignization). The possible approaches are, for example: literary worlds of original translation; comparison of two or more Estonian translations of one and the same literary text (e.g., comparative analysis of parallel Estonian translations of Shakespeare's sonnets, comparative text analysis of *Alice in Wonderland* by L. Bakis/A. Oras, J. Kross, J. Linnart)). To highlight the techniques of the translators, your comparisons should be descriptive and explain the effects of choices, instead of just offering evaluations.
- **Translation as language innovation/enrichment.** Translation from other languages also adds new vocabulary to the Estonian language and/or provides space for creative parallel creation in another language. Think, for example, of the issues associated with the translation of regional varieties of English into Estonian (e.g. Scottish slang in Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* or different dialects in Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (Huck and Jim)). Other possible areas are the translations of proper names into Estonian in the translation of J. R. R. Tolkien's *Hobbit* or the *Harry Potter* series and their effect on the text.
- **Translations of Estonian fiction/poetry/audio-visual texts into English.** Possible questions: what means have been chosen to convey the culture-specific Estonian context (names, places, vocabulary referring to culture-specific objects and traditions) in English (e.g., *Kalevipoeg*, Oskar Luts' *Kevade* or the poetry by Jaan Kaplinski or Kristiina Ehin; in the area of audio-visual translation: the subtitling of *Leitudajateküla Lotte* series or culturally marked cult texts like *Viimne reliikvia* or *Malev* (or other films) for an English-speaking audience)
- **Translation/localization of everyday texts.** All kinds of translated texts help to create the image of Estonia (tourism websites, different brochures, restaurant menus, bilingual presentation of products, etc). Events like Eurovision can also be seen as a mode of marketing Estonia to the world that uses language/images in translation. Choose a small corpus of texts and analyze what is being presented and how. Pay attention not just to information selection and word choice but also, for example, differences in politeness and possible difficulties of cross-cultural transfer.
- **Foreign loans and translations in the language of young people.** Estonian has borrowed many language items from English, both by direct borrowing and adaptation (words like 'hāngima', 'šeerima', 'feim' etc are no longer English words and they continue to have a special effect in Estonian). This process happens in broader usage as well as within different subcultures. In the empirical section of your paper, compile a corpus of loans/translations and describe the types of words that have been directly translated or adapted as well as their contexts of use and functions.

- **Social media as a multilingual language environment.** Social media communication (Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, etc.) and electronic communication on mobile phones have become an active arena of language change. As in the case of topics above, choose a specific context and corpus and address one of the following questions: what languages are being used, in what forms and functions, use and effect of abbreviations, sources/origins of vocabulary/word formation, their original and transferred meaning, social status attached to different language choices (mainstream or subculture)
- **‘Estonianization’ or (as translation scholars call it) localization of computer games and other audio-visual products** (movies, cartoons, anime, etc.). You should choose one text or a small corpus of texts and discuss one of the following questions: are they translated; if not, what other modes of localization/domestication exist?
- **Translation between different modes of texts.** Making a film on the basis of a work of fiction can also be seen as a mode of translation (the technical term is intermedial or intersemiotic translation). You can choose to compare the translation/adaptation of a work of fiction to film or television and the choices that have been made in the process (of recent examples, think for example of Baz Luhrmann’s version of *The Great Gatsby* or Joss Whedon’s take on Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing*). You may also compare the choices made in two different film adaptations of the same text (e.g. the versions of *Hamlet*). However, remember in your analysis that film as a medium is multimodal and it thus has access to other modes of expression than literary text (e.g. image and sound in addition to words).

For further information please contact:

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