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Names of Snakes in Latvian Texts of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

Introduction

Latvian texts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are rather specific in their thematic range: they are mostly religious texts, predominantly translations. The designations of animals in these texts are also specific, used in parables and in figurative meaning. Along with the translation of the Bible and its parts, original and translated church hymns as well as other religious texts, this period can be noted for the first dictionaries with Latvian part which contained quite a number of names for various animals. Other secular texts as statutes, local regulations, oaths or dedication poems contained very few animal names.

The compilation of Latvian dictionaries began in the seventeenth century, and some of them were published at that time, e.g. *Lettus* with supplements by Georg Mancelius (Manzel) in 1638, *Dictionarium Polono-Latino-Lottaicum* by Georg Elger in 1683. However, several of such works remained in manuscript form, therefore difficult to access, until the twentieth and even the twenty-first century (e.g. both

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texts of *Lettisches und Teutsches Wörterbuch* from the middle of the seventeenth century by Christopher Fürecker, anonymous Latvian-German dictionary *Manuale Lettico-Germanicum* from the end of the seventeenth century, and Latvian-German dictionary by Johannes Langius of 1685).

The supplement *Phraseologia lettica* of Mancelius' *Lettus* contains approximately 160 designations of animals, and only some of these are names of exotic animals not found in Latvia. They were Latvianized in different ways: by loan translation, e.g. [German] *Mährkatze* / [Latvian] *Juhres=kagkis* 'monkey, literally: sea cat' (Manc1638_PhL, 1638, p. 275, l. 12), by phonetic and morphological adaptation of the foreign word, e.g. [German] *Pfaw* / [Latvian] *Pahwis* 'peacock' (Manc1638_PhL, 1638, p. 279, l. 1), by new coinages utilizing already existing Latvian names for local animals, e.g. [German] *ein Cameel* / [Latvian] *Mefcha=Sirr* 'camel, literally: forest horse' (Manc1638_PhL, 1638, p. 274, l. 9), [German] *Papagey* / [Latvian] *Wahdfemmes Wahlohdf* 'parrot, literally: German golden oriole' (Manc1638_PhL, 1638, p. 279, l. 4), or by providing descriptive translation, e.g. [German] *eine Löwe* / [Latvian] *Lowis / breefmiex Swährs* 'lion, literally: terrible beast' (Manc1638_PhL, 1638, p. 275, l. 21). Sometimes the compiler had difficulties to find an adequate German equivalent for the Latvian animal name. In such cases he gives a descriptive German designation, e.g. [German] *Roggen=Vogel / mit langen Füßen* / [Latvian] *Sehjas=putnis / Tittilbis* 'sandpiper; rye bird with long legs' (Manc1638_PhL, 1638, p. 278, l. 21) or [German] *ein Vogel fo des Abends im wege gegen die Pferde scheuft* / [Latvian] *Lehlis* 'night jar; a bird that darts at horses on the road in the evening' (Manc1638_PhL, 1638, p. 278, l. 23).

The so-called first manuscript of Fürecker's Latvian-German dictionary mentions a slightly smaller number of animals, however, many of them have synonyms, phonetic and morphological variants, and diminutive forms, e.g. stork has several names – *dzēse, melnsprāklis, stārķe, žugre, žugure*: [Latvian] *Dsehse, fchuggre. Sem* [German] *Storch*. [Latvian] *Meln=sprahklis, id. Curl*. (Fuer1650_70_1ms, 1650–1670, p. 53, l. 24), [Latvian] *Schugure, Starke. Germ. ein Storch* (Fuer1650_70_2ms, 1650–1670, p. 368, l. 15); whereas eel is named as follows, *zutis, zutītis, zutēns, zutēniņš*: [Latvian] *Suttis*, [German] *Ein Aal*. [Latvian] *gen. pl. sufchu. Sutitis* [German] *Ein Aalchen*. [Latvian] *Sutens*, [German] *Ein halb gewachsener Aal*. [Latvian] *Sutteniņfch*. [German] *Ein kleiner aal. etc.* (Fuer1650_70_1ms, 1650–1670, p. 271, l. 30–33). The only exotic animal mentioned in Fürecker's manuscripts is ape: [Latvian] *Pehr tickš*. [German] *ein Affe* (Fuer1650_70_2ms, 1650–1670, p. 161, l. 1). However, it seems very likely that the word was added later because it is followed by references to late seventeenth-century print sources which were not available during Fürecker's lifetime.

Leaving aside a detailed review of other seventeenth-century dictionaries, it can be stated that the compilers of earliest Latvian dictionaries mainly focused on local

animal names and their translations, providing exotic animal names only sporadically.¹

For the purposes of current study, religious texts comprise the translation of biblical texts and their interpretations in sermons and church hymns. The Bible, being a millenia-old text written in a different part of the world – the Middle East (the Old Testament was written in Hebrew from the fifteenth to the fourth centuries BCE, the New Testament – in Old Greek in the second half of the first century CE), provides a limited but at the same time comparatively wide array of animal names. Biblical texts feature a number of exotic animals that Latvians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had not seen and could not imagine (visualize), for instance, lion or camel. On the other hand, these texts do not mention some animals that are more characteristic to northern regions, e.g. snow bunting or elk. There are several studies dedicated to the animals mentioned in the Bible that attest almost 200 items, including both real (e.g. lion, tiger, cat, eagle, scorpion) and invented animals (e.g. dragon) (see also Freedman, 1992; Souvay, 1907).² As mentioned above, Mancelius' *Lettus* includes about 160 animal names, Fürecker's manuscripts – only 120.

Although some translated excerpts from the Bible were published before the full translation, there is no doubt that rendering the names of exotic animals into Latvian was not an easy task for Ernst Glück, translator of the Bible (1685–1689). The translation demonstrates several ways which were used by Glück and previous translators of the excerpts (see Kazakēnaitē, 2019, p. 286) in solving translation problems – in this case, naming in Latvian previously unknown and undesigned animals:

(1) the names of exotic animals are substituted with names of local, familiar animals, e.g. porcupine, an inhabitant of southern regions, was renamed hedgehog, obviously on the grounds of a certain common feature – both animals have spines (quills): *Un es darrifchu to par Ihpařchumu teem Efeem*, literally “And I will make it property of hedgehogs” (VD1689_94, 1689 [1694], Isa, 14:23), in modern translation: *Atdošu dzeloņcūkām*, literally “I will give it to porcupines” (*Bībele*, 2012, p. 1174);

(2) forming a descriptive name by adding some characteristic attribute to an already known animal name, e.g. antelope was called *mazais ēršķis* (*ēršķis* in the seventeenth century was a name for deer), possibly presuming that antelope was similar to local deer because, like deer, it belonged to artiodactyla, had horns, although it was smaller in size: *Erfchķis / Stirna un Meřcha=Wehrfis / un Meřcha=Ahfis / un*

¹ Usually from German into Latvian or from Latvian into German. The only exception is Elger's Polish-Latin-Latvian Dictionary.

² In fact, these sources contain not a list of animals, but a list of possible animals because there are instances when in Hebrew or Old Greek (and, of course, in other languages of translations) some animals are mentioned in descriptive way, e.g. *liels jūras zvērs* (a large sea beast) only suggests a possibility that it might be crocodile.

mafais Erfchķis / un Breedis / un Mefcha=Kaķa (VD1689_94, 1689 [1694], Deut, 14:5); here *mafais Erfchķis* is literally ‘small deer’. In modern translation the same excerpt features the word *antilope* ‘antelope’ (*Bibele*, 2012, p. 321);

(3) exotic animal names are incorporated into the text almost without adaptation, literally taken over from Hebrew and only adding Latvian endings, for instance, in the following enumeration of different lizards: *Kà tur irraid* Anaka / Koals / Letaä / Komets / un Tinfchamets*. As a kind of justification the translator provides an asterisked footnote with explanation that Arabs know these lizards which are strange to Latvians: **Tahs irr peezas Tautas no Ķirfattehm, kas pee teem Ara-beņeem pafihstamas, bet pee mums nepafihstamas irr*, literally “These are five species of lizards which Arabs know but we are not familiar with” (VD1689_94, 1689 [1694], Lev, 11:30); in modern translation the same passage reads: *un gekons un krokodils, un varans, un smilšu varans, un hameleons* “the gecko, the monitor lizard, the wall lizard, the skink and the chameleon”³ (*Bibele*, 2012, p. 188). Martin Luther’s Bible translation into German of 1545 reveals a different method: names of exotic animals are translated using familiar German designations: *Der Jgel / der Molch / die Aydex / der Blindschleich / vnd der Maulworff*, literally “hedgehog, newt, lizard, blindworm, and mole” (Luth1545, 1545);

(4) more often the translator gave preference to already adapted and possibly familiar names (used in texts prior to the full translation of the Bible) which were borrowed through German as an intermediary. Some of such words had been included in the first Latvian dictionary *Lettus* or its supplement *Phraseologia lettica* (Mac1638_L, 1638; Manc1638_PhL, 1638), e.g. in the Old Testament sentence *atneffe Seltu un Sudrabu / Elewantu=Kaulus / un Pehrķikes / un Pawas*, literally “brought gold and silver, elephant bones, and monkeys, and peacocks” (VD1689_94, 1689 [1694], 1 Kgs, 10:22); for comparison – [German] *ein Aff* / [Latvian] *Pehrte / Pehrķiks* (Manc1638_PhL, 1638, p. 276, l. 16), [German] *Pfaw* / [Latvian] *Pahwis* (Manc1638_PhL, 1638, p. 279, l. 1).

In secular texts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries like statutes of different levels, oaths, and dedication poems (but with the exception of dictionaries), animals are seldom mentioned and almost always in indirect manner, e.g. in the martial law statute of 1696, *zirgs* ‘horse’ is used in the phrase *koka zirgs* ‘wooden horse’, which, most probably, means a specific seventeenth-century punishment device: *Kas aiskawejahs us Krohņu Darbu eet / tam buhs us kohka Sirgu fehdeht*, literally “He who is late for his state job, must sit on the wooden horse” (SKL1696_RA, 1696, par. 51). In a dedication poem the bird name *balodis* ‘pigeon’ is used in a complex name of a month: *peektâ Deenâ Sehrķffnu Mehnen / ko ir Ballofchu Mehnefs*

³ English translation of the Holy Bible is cited from the New International Version (<https://www.biblegateway.com>).

fauz, literally “the fifth day of the month of frozen snow-crust, which is also called pigeon’s month” (ZP1685, 1685, p. 1, l. 29).

Religious texts make up the largest part of texts from these centuries in terms of volume, both among manuscripts and printed texts, and consequently names of snakes are mostly found in Bible texts and texts related to the Bible. In light of this, the best insight into the usage of such names can be gained by studying those names that are used in the Bible.

In Latvia, there are three species of snakes: viper, grass snake, and smooth snake. Smooth snake, however, is a very rare animal in Latvia and, probably, was not widespread several centuries ago because its name was not registered in old written sources. On the other hand, lexicographic works have registered the word *tārps* in the meaning of ‘snake’.

In modern societies taboo words are usually related to sexual life, some physiological processes, etc. (Hock, 1996, pp. 231–234); several centuries ago taboo words as a rule designated something people were afraid of, for example, dangerous animals. Making taboo of dangerous animals resulted in a relatively faster change of their names. It is a characteristic feature that as a result of taboo, names of dangerous animals changed comparatively more often – names of snakes and crocodiles were made taboo already in ancient Egyptian (Rava-Cordier, 2010, p. 133).

The objective of the paper is: (1) to analyse the use of *čūska*, *odze*, *zalktis*, and *tārps* in Latvian texts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, using materials of the Corpus of Early Written Latvian Texts in an attempt to determine how precisely the translators of religious texts rendered names of snakes, and to ascertain whether any semantic changes have taken place, or whether religious texts show specific use; (2) to find out if taboo and related euphemisation is reflected in early Latvian texts.

Čūska, čūška

The word *čūska* ‘snake’ does not belong to Common Baltic lexis (older designation for snake is *odze*, see discussion in the next sub-chapter); it is formed, according to some etymologists, on imitation of hissing sound, comparable to the word *čūkstēt* ‘to hiss, to sputter’ (Fraenkel LEW, 1962–1965, p. 305; ME, 1923–1932, vol. 1, p. 425), and most probably “in the past it was a cover name to substitute the older *odze*” (Karulis, 1992, vol. 1, pp. 192, 193). However, in seventeenth-century texts the word *čūska* (cf. LVVV, 2016) and its phonetic and morphological variants *čūška*, *cūska*, and *cūška* were used mostly in the sense ‘snake’ just like nowadays, so there is no ground to talk about semantic changes during the last four hundred years. One cannot deny that the word probably is relatively new; despite the fact that the first book in Latvian was published in 1585, the word *čūska* first appeared in print only in 1631.

In the translated parts of the Bible which were published earlier ‘snake’ was referred to as *odze* (in Modern Latvian: ‘viper’).

The word *čūska* in modern meaning was registered both in early lexicographic sources, e.g. in the first Latvian dictionary, Mancelius’ *Lettus* of 1638: [German] *Schlang* / [Latvian] *tšchuhßka* (Manc1638_L, 1638, p. 157B, l. 1) and in Christopher Fürecker’s Latvian-German dictionary manuscript of the mid-seventeenth century: [Latvian] *Zuhschka*, [German] *eine Schlange* (Fuer1650_70_1ms, 1650–1670, p. 314, l. 10), and in religious texts, e.g. Glück’s translation of the New Testament of 1685: *Jeb kad tas kahdu Siwi luhdf / kas tam weenu Tzuhßku dohtu?* “Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?” (JT1685, 1685, Matt, 7:10).

In religious texts the use of *čūska* was not infrequently symbolic. Of course, this is not peculiar to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Latvian religious texts; rather, it can be attributed to biblical symbolism in general – snake as a tempter of Eve in the first book of Moses (Genesis) is perceived as a symbol of Satan, whereas copper snake in the fourth book of Moses (Numbers) and in the Gospel of John in the New Testament is rather a positive image, a symbol of faith.

Especially in the books of New Testament and in interpretations of the Bible (e.g. in Mancelius’ three books of sermons) the word *čūska* refers to the concept of ‘devil, satan’, e.g. *Tahß Seewas fähklai buhß tai Tschußkai tam Wällam to Ghalwu fa=ßpahrdiet*, literally “The seed of the woman shall kick the head of snake, the devil” (Manc1654_LP1, 1654, p. 346, l. 28).

Such metaphorical use with the meaning ‘devil, satan’ is encountered in the word combination *veca čūska* ‘old snake’, typical for Mancelius’ religious works (in sermons and in the book of Latvian church hymns), e.g. *bett Jesus Christus gir wehl stipprahx / taß gir tam Wällä / tai wätzai Tschuhßkai to spähku pa=jehmis*, literally “but Jesus Christ is even stronger, He has taken away the strength from the devil, the old snake” (Manc1654_LP1, 1654, p. 323, l. 31). Such use is motivated, most probably, by a verse in the Book of Revelation: *Un tas leelais Puhķis irr ismefts / ta wezza Tschuhßchka / dehwehts tas Wels / un tas Satans* “The great dragon was hurled down – that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan” (JT1685, 1685, Rev, 12:9).

In the Bible, the general name *čūska* is most likely used to designate not only vipers, but also snakes characteristic of the location of biblical events, exotic snakes from Latvian point of view. However, as snakes in the original biblical text are referred to by a general name, the Latvian translator did not have to think of specific terms.

In rare cases the word *čūska* is used to name other animals. As it was mentioned in the introduction, the translators of the Bible used familiar animal names to designate exotic creatures unknown to Latvians at that time. Thus, in some cases the word *čūska* or its variants were used in particular places where the Bible mentions scorpions, e.g. in Mancelius’ translation of the Wisdom of Sirach (1631): *Tee Swähri / Tschuhßkas / Sallßchi / Sohbins / gir arridßan Attreepßchanas deh! radditi*, literally

“Beasts, snakes, grass snakes and sword are also created with the aim of revenge” (Manc1631_Syr, 1631, p. 591, l. 23). In Luther’s translation of 1545 the same passage reads: *Die wilden Thiere / Scorpion / Schlangen / vnd Schwert* (Luth1545, 1545, Sir, 39:36). In the Latvian translation of 1631 *Scorpion* is translated as *Tfchuhßkas* ‘snakes’, and *Schlangen* ‘snakes’ is rendered as *Sallßchi* ‘grass snakes’.

In one more instance (Book of Isaiah) the translators apparently had difficulties to find an appropriate equivalent for the Hebrew word with the meaning of ‘beast, monster’. The modern translation *kaus jūras nezvēru!* ‘he will slay the monster of the sea’ (Bibele, 2012, p. 1193) in Glück’s version reads: *un wiņſch nokaus to leelu Tfchuhßku / kas Juhṛâ irr*, literally “and he shall slay big snake that is in the sea” (VD1689_94, 1689 [1694], Isa, 27:1), employing the word *čūska*.

In such cases it is impossible to interpret *čūska* as ‘scorpion’ or ‘dragon’; rather, it can be explained as the translator’s attempt to render an unknown concept to his readership (seventeenth-century Latvian peasants) in the most comprehensive way.

Odze

If it is a traditional view that the lexeme *čūska* analysed before is formed on Latvian sound imitation (ME, 1923–1932, vol. 1, p. 425) and can be regarded as a relatively new coinage, then the word *odze* ‘viper’ belongs to the common Indo-European lexis, an old designation of snake. Although in Mülenbach’s Dictionary of Latvian Language the meaning of the word *uôdze* is only general *Schlange* ‘snake’ (ME, 1923–1932, vol. 4, p. 413), in modern Standard Latvian the dominant meaning is ‘viper’. Wojciech Smoczyński links Lithuanian *angis* and Latvian *uôdze* with I-E root *ang^h(h)i- (Smoczyński, 1982, p. 220).

Algirdas Sabaliauskas links the Lithuanian word *angis* ‘snake, viper’, related to Latvian *odze*, with Old Prussian *angis* ‘snake’, Old Russian *ужъ* ‘grass snake’, Russian *уж* ‘grass snake’, Polish *wąż* ‘snake’, Latin *anguis* ‘snake’ and several other words. He states that already in the earliest Lithuanian written texts the word *angis* had a parallel term *gyvâtė*, which is more common in Modern Lithuanian. The old name for snake *angis* has survived only in south-western dialects of Lithuania (Sabaliauskas, 1990, p. 26); in Modern Lithuanian it is more typical to use *angis* in the meaning of viper than snake in general.

In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Latvian texts the word *odze* was used in the same context as the word *čūska*, practically both words were used as synonyms; however, *odze* in the meaning of ‘snake’ is registered approximately 50 years earlier than *čūska* (cf. LVVV, 2016).

In the earliest Latvian dictionaries the word *odze* was translated into German as *Schlange* ‘snake’ or *Natter* ‘viper, grass snake’: [German] *Natter* / [Latvian]

Ohdfe (Manc1638_PhL, 1638, p. 294, l. 5), [Latvian] *Ohdse* [German] *ein Schlange*. (Fuer1650_70_1ms, 1650–1670, p. 167, l. 8). In another lexicographic source (Elger's Polish-Latin-Latvian Dictionary) the word combination *odzis čūska*, literally 'viper snake', may lead to an assumption that *odze* and *čūska* are not used here as full synonyms, but rather as a hyponym and hypernym (superordinate), similarly to *egles koks* 'spruce tree' and other such seventeenth-century formations: [Polish] *wąz polspolity ziemny*. [Latin] *Serpēs*. [Latvian] *Odzis czufkā* (Elger, 1683, p. 576).

As it was mentioned earlier, in religious texts the word *odze* is registered in the first publications, e.g. in the Gospels and Epistles of 1587: *Vnde tas leels Sathanas / ta weetcza Odze*, literally "and big Satan, the old viper" (EvEp1587, 1587, p. 220, l. 18). As can be seen, here the word is used in the context of *čūska*, already quoted in the passage from the Book of Revelation, where the modern translation has *čūska: sensenā čūska, ko sauc par velnu un sātanu* "that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan" (*Bībele*, 2012, pp. 2619, 2620).

Contrasting sixteenth- and seventeenth-century translations of New Testament texts with the latest translation of 2012 and Luther's German translation of 1545, it is clear that in approximately half of the cases in the old texts the word *odze* was used in places where in modern text and, probably, in the original, the animal referred to was snake in general and not viper in particular, e.g. *Lai mehs arri ne kahrđinajam Kriřtu / kà zitti no teem wiņņu kahrđinaja / in tappa no tahm Ohdfeh̄m apmaitati*, literally "We should not test Christ, as others among them did and who were killed by vipers" (VLH1685, 1685, p. 66, l. 23). The same passage in modern Bible translation reads: *un gāja pazušanā no čūskām* "and were killed by snakes" (*Bībele*, 2012, p. 2470), and in Luther's translation: *Vnd wurden von den Schlangen vmbracht* (Luth1545, 1545, 1 Cor, 10:9).

In the same way as *čūska*, the word *odze* was sometimes used in the old texts as scorpion, e.g. *Kam nikna Seewa irr / tas irr kà neweenahds Wehrfchu Pahris / kam weenahđi wilkt buhs / kas to dabbu / tas dabbu Ohđfi*, literally "One who has furious wife is as an unequal pair of oxen who has to pull equally; who gets it, gets the viper" (VLH1685_Syr, 1685, p. 38B, l. 16). In Luther's translation of 1545 the same passage reads: *Wer sie krieget / der krieget ein Scorpion* (Luth1545, 1545, Sir, 26:10).

Taking into account that in lexicographic sources the word *odze* was interpreted both as 'snake' and 'viper', it can be suggested that in the sixteenth century *odze* dominated as the only general name for snake. In the seventeenth century, similarly to Lithuanian, snake was called by the old name *odze* and the newer one – *čūska*, the former designation gradually acquired a narrower meaning of 'viper'. In the translation of the Old Testament that was published in 1689, four years after the New Testament, in almost all cases the word *odze* was used in the same instances of the Holy Scriptures as Hebrew equivalent 'viper' in the original and *odze* in modern Latvian Bible translation (2012). The only departure from these was in the Book of Isaiah:

juhs effat mafaki nekà neneeka / un juhfu Darbs irr ļaunaks nekà Ohdfe, literally “you are smaller than nothing, and your work is worse than a viper” (VD1689_94, 1689 [1694], Isa, 41:24). In the modern translation it reads: *jūsu darbi ir tukšība* “and your works are utterly worthless” (*Bībele*, 2012, p. 1225). Obviously, the translator deviated from the original and chose the image of snake, viper as a symbol of something very bad. However, such usage is an exception and, probably, the translation of the Old Testament furthered the proliferation of a narrower meaning of *odze* as ‘viper’.

It seems that in the eighteenth century the above mentioned narrowing of meaning became widespread because Gotthard Friedrich Stender translates *ohdfe* into German as *Otter* ‘viper’: [German] *Otter*, [Latvian] *ohdfe* (Stender, 1789, p. 447).

However, as Evija Liparte argues in her paper on the good and bad snake, Latvian folklore materials that were mostly collected in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries reveal the use of *odze* also in general sense of ‘snake’, including grass snake: “it is quite possible that in folklore the word *odze* could have been used in the meaning of grass snake”. And this corresponds to the idea that “it seems that exactly *odze* was the original general name for snake. But as the name of snake is a taboo word [...], the word *odze* was gradually replaced by onomatopoeic *čūska* that imitates the hiss of snake” (Liparte, 1993, p. 32).

Zaltis/zalktis

Lithuanian linguist Algirdas Sabaliauskas acknowledges that both Latvian *zalktis* ‘grass snake’ and Lithuanian *žaltys* ‘grass snake’ belong to Common Baltic lexis, or more precisely, they can be traced only in Latvian and Lithuanian; in other languages the concept of grass snake is designated by words of different root. He considers that these Baltic words are of obscure etymology, although there are etymologists who link the Latvian word *zalktis* with the adjective *zaļš* ‘green’ (ME, 1923–1932, vol. 4, p. 685; this is questioned by Smoczyński, 2007, p. 773), or the verb *zalgot* ‘to glint’ (Karulis, 1992, vol. 2, p. 548).

Mülenbach’s Latvian Language Dictionary gives the first meaning of *zalktis* as: (1) *die Ringelnatter, Hausnatter, eine Schlange überhaupt* ‘grass snake, snake in general’ (ME, 1923–1932, vol. 4, p. 685).

In Latvian texts of the seventeenth century (dictionaries and translations of religious texts) the word *zaltis/zalktis* is used only in the general sense of ‘snake’.

In Mancelius’ dictionary and Fürecker’s dictionary manuscripts the word *zalktis* is translated into German as *Schlange* ‘snake’, the German name for grass snake (*Natter*) is found nowhere. In Mancelius’ dictionary *Schlang* is translated by a string of synonyms: [German] *Schlang* / [Latvian] *Tjchuhška / Saltis / Tahrps* (Manc1638_

PhL, 1638, p. 294, l. 1). Similarly in manuscripts of Fürecker's dictionary: [Latvian] *Saltis*, [German] *ein Schlange* (Fuer1650_70_2ms, 1650–1670, p. 341, l. 2) and in manuscript of Langius dictionary: [Latvian] *Salktis* (*Tjchuhfka*) [German] *eine Schlange* (Langijs, 1936, p. 233). In a slightly different context, the word *zaltis* is included in Elger's Polish-Latin-Latvian dictionary: here it is given as one of the translations for Polish *Báziliŝek* and Latin *Bafilifcus*: [Latvian] *Odzis / zaltis szufka / dewet* [Latin] *Bafilifcus* (Elger, 1683, p. 9A).

The Latvian word *zalšāda* is translated in dictionaries as *Schlagenhaut* 'snake's skin': [German] *Ich hab eine Schlagenhaut gefunden* / [Latvian] *eš atraddu Sallfch=Ahdū*, literally "I found the skin of a grass snake" (Manc1638_PhL, 1638, p. 294, l. 11).

In religious texts one can notice the same practice: as in the case of *odze*, the word *zaltis* is used as a synonym of *čūska*. It seems appropriate to cite a passage from Chapter 12 of the Book of Revelation mentioned before; however, this time instead of *čūska* or *odze* the focus is on *zaltis*: *In tas leelajs Puhķis / tas wezzajs Saltis / kam Wahrds irr tas Welns in Sahtans*, literally "And that big dragon, the old grass snake, whose name is devil and satan" (VLH1685, 1685, p. 113, l. 31).

In Glück's translation of the Old Testament (Book of Isaiah) the word *zalktis* is mentioned only once: *Jir tas lehkdams Saltis tur Ligfdas darrihs* (VD1689_94, 1689 [1694], Isa, 34:15); modern version: *Tur lēcējčūska ligzdos un dēs* "The flying snake will nest there and lay eggs" (*Bībele*, 2012, p. 1210).

The habitat area of common grass snake does not reach into the Middle East, probably only borders on it in some places, therefore it is not surprising that studies on animals mentioned in the Bible (Freedman, 1992) do not record the grass snake. Consequently, it may be asserted that the word *zalktis* in Latvian religious texts of the seventeenth century is used in the meaning of 'snake'.

Looking through later dictionaries I tried to clarify when the word *zaltis/zalktis* is translated not as *Schlange*, but as *Natter/Ringelnatter*, i.e. as a word in German in the sense of 'grass snake'.

Although in Jakob Lange's dictionary *zaltis/zalktis* is not translated as *Schlange*, this dictionary does not provide a clear picture: [Latvian] *Saltis*, *Salktis tas*, [German] *eine Kupferschlange* (Lange, 1773, p. 266); the word *Kupferschlange* in Modern German designates *Blindschleiche* 'blindworm'.

Stender's dictionary gives [German] *Natter*, [Latvian] *ohdfe* (Stender, 1789, vol. 1, p. 431), [Latvian] *falktis*, [German] *Hausŝchlange* (Stender, 1789, vol. 2, p. 236). In several German dictionaries *Hausschlange* is rendered into Latin as *Coluber Berus* 'viper'; in Grimms' dictionary: *Hausschlange, f. coluber berus, gemeine viper*, which means 'viper, snake in general' (DWB).

Ulmann's dictionary of 1872 gives the following: [Latvian] *falkfis, -fcha, falkts, faltis, faltens*, [German] *eine Schlange, ein Molch* (Ulmann, 1872, p. 232); this proves

that even at the end of the eighteenth century Latvian *zalktis* was translated as ‘snake, newt’.

The first use of Latvian *zalktis* in modern meaning ‘grass snake’ was recorded in Russian-Latvian-German Dictionary of 1872: [Russian] *Ужъ, m.* [Latvian] *saltis, salktis, m. Natter, f.* (Valdemārs, 1872, p. 616).

The above mentioned lexicographic data seems to prove that the word *zaltis/zalktis* was mostly used in the general sense ‘snake’; it could be a term not only for a grass snake, but for other snakes, including the poisonous ones, too, even for some reptiles. The specific meaning ‘grass snake’ developed in a gradual and slow process.⁴

In separate Latvian sub-dialects, mainly in Courland (for example, in Nīca, Remte, Pope, Ugāle, Usma), the word *zalktis* is still used in the general sense of ‘snake’ (LVIVK, n.d.).

Interestingly enough, a similar picture can be observed in Lithuanian. In the Dictionary of Lithuanian Language the word *žaltys* has three meanings: (1) modern meaning ‘grass snake’; (2) any snake-like animal; (3) an animal that in a biblical sense tempted Eve; embodiment of evil (LKŽ, 1941–2002, vol. 20, pp. 143–145).

Tārps

In modern Standard Latvian the word *tārps* has a meaning of ‘worm’; however, in the Supplement to ME one of its meanings is ‘snake’: *tārps* I ‘die Schlange’ supported by examples from Krišjānis Barons’ collection of folk-songs and from different Latvian sub-dialects (EH, 1934–1946, vol. 2, p. 671). Pēteris Šmits in his collection of Latvian folk beliefs provides a context for the use of *tārps*: *Kad mežā ejot, tad nevajagot piesaukt vārdu čūska, jo tad čūskas rādoties, bet vajagot gan sacīt tārps* “When in forest, one should not say the word *čūska* ‘snake’ because then the snakes come up, one should use the word *tārps* instead” (A. Krūmiņa, Smiltene) (Šmits, 1940, vol. 1, p. 323).

This illustrates the use of euphemisms in connection with taboos peculiar to dangerous animals. In the meaning of ‘snake’ the word *tārps* displays a metaphorical transfer that is based on common features of two concepts – both snakes and worms are longish creatures without legs and they move by crawling.

In Lithuanian one can see a euphemism of the same semantics: the second meaning of the word *kirmėlė* ‘worm’ is ‘snake’ (LKŽ, 1941–2002, vol. 5, p. 841).

Such metaphors usually turn into “dead metaphors” rather quickly, the word changes its meaning and further use is no longer perceived as metaphorical. However, this has not happened with the word *tārps*, mostly because it is not part of

⁴ For comparison: German *Natter* also has two meanings: ‘grass snake’ and ‘viper’.

Standard Latvian and is mainly used in sub-dialects of Latgale (Rāzna, Kaunata, Asūne, Liksna, Preiļi), where it is still perceived as a euphemism (LDIAK, n.d.).⁵ It is interesting that almost 400 years ago the German word *Schlang* was translated as *Tfchuhßka / Saltis / Tahrps* (Manc1638_PhL, 1638, p. 294, l. 1). Other early texts do not support such usage, the word *tārps* was basically used as ‘worm’ or ‘reptile’; the sense ‘snake’ has not been registered in religious texts and other dictionaries. However, this does not seem surprising, as Mancelius mostly recorded popular speech, and the substitution of *čūska*, *zalktis* or *odze* by the euphemism *tārps* can be regarded as a peculiar feature of popular speech in certain situations, both in the seventeenth century and in modern times.

Conclusions

In sixteenth-century Latvian texts snake in general meaning was referred to only as *odze* (nowadays *odze*: ‘viper’). In seventeenth-century texts the words *čūska* (nowadays: ‘snake’), *odze* (nowadays: ‘viper’), *zalktis* (nowadays: ‘grass snake’) were used in similar contexts as synonyms; in the same instances of Bible texts both as ‘snake in general’ and as ‘devil, satan, embodiment of evil’.

It can be supposed that the oldest names for snake were *odze* and *zalktis*; besides, *odze* was both a general name for snakes and a specific term of viper, whereas *zalktis* was a general name for snakes (including the venomous ones) and a designation of grass snakes. Gradually the word *odze* was “pushed out” of its general meaning by a euphemistic imitation of hiss – *čūska*, and so *odze* narrowed its meaning to viper only. Early Latvian texts also document the time of concrete semantic changes: in the sixteenth century the word *čūska* was less current than *odze* ‘snake’, in the seventeenth century they were more or less equally used, and in the eighteenth century one can observe stabilisation of modern meanings of *čūska* ‘snake’ and *odze* ‘viper’. The word *zalktis* also underwent a narrowing of meaning: with reference to grass snakes and not snakes in general. Of course, texts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries document only one period in a much longer process of semantic change. In the nineteenth century the word *zalktis* was used in a general sense of ‘snake’, and such practice can be observed even nowadays in the sub-dialects of Kurzeme. Comparison with the Lithuanian language allows to conclude that the above mentioned facts show neither specificity of old texts, nor incompetence of translators; they are rather historical language facts: both Latvian *odze* and Lithuanian *angis*,

⁵ In Latvian sub-dialects similar euphemisms are abundant, e.g. *garastis*, literally ‘that who has a long tail’; *garausis*, literally ‘that who has long ears’; *garais tārps*, literally ‘long worm’; *cērtamais tārps*, literally ‘cuttable worm’; *lunkanais zvērs*, literally ‘supple beast’; *raibais*, literally ‘motley’; *sīvzobis*, literally ‘that who has sharp tooth’; *stripainis*, literally ‘stripy’ (LDIAK, n.d.).

and Latvian *zaltis/zalktis* and Lithuanian *žaltys* originally had more general meaning 'snake', later gradually narrowing their semantics to specific kinds of snakes.

Early Latvian texts preserve another euphemistic name of snakes: *tārps*, literally 'worm'; as a euphemism it is still current in several Latvian sub-dialects.

It is possible that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries animals as well as plants were not so strictly separated in peoples' minds, the borders between their names were more fluid, therefore any of snakes' names could be attributed to any snake species in Latvia.

Translated by Juris Baldunčiks

Abbreviations

DWB – *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm auf CD-ROM und im Internet*. <http://dwb.uni-trier.de/de/>

EH – Endzelīns, Jānis; Hauzenberga, Edīte. *Papildinājumi un labojumi K. Mūlenbacha „Latviešu valodas vārdnīcai”*. I–II. Rīga: Kultūras fonds, 1934–1938; Grāmatu apgāds, 1946.

EvEp1587 – *Euangelia und Episteln...* Königsberg: Gedruckt... bey Georgen Osterbergern, 1587.

Fraenkel LEW – Fraenkel, Ernst. *Litauisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, I–II, Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962–1965.

Fuer1650_70_1ms – Fürecker, Christopher. *Lettisches und Teutsches Wörterbuch...* I. http://senie.korpuss.lv/source.jsp?codificator=Fuer1650_70_1ms

Fuer1650_70_2ms – Fürecker, Christopher. *Lettisches und Teutsches Wörterbuch...* II. http://senie.korpuss.lv/source.jsp?codificator=Fuer1650_70_2ms

JT1685 – *Tas Jauns Testaments Muhsu Kunga Jesus Kristus...* Rīga: Johann Georg Wilcken Königl. Buchdr., 1685.

LDIAK – *Latvijas dialektu atlanta kartotēka. File collection of the Atlas of Latvian Dialects*. Depository at the Latvian Language Institute, University of Latvia.

LKŽ – *Lietuvių kalbos žodynas*, I–XX. Vilnius: Mintis, Mokslas, Lietuvių kalbos institutas, 1941–2002.

Luth1545 – *Biblia, das ist, die gantze Heilige Schrift Deudsch* (1545). <http://www.zeno.org/Literatur/M/Luther,+Martin/Luther-Bibel+1545>

LVIVK – *Latviešu valodas izlokšņu vārdnīcas kartotēka. File collection of the Dictionary of Latvian Sub-dialects*. Depository at the Latvian Language Institute, University of Latvia.

LVVV – Andronova, Everita, Anna Frīdenberga, Renāte Siliņa-Piņķe, Anta Trumpa, Pēteris Vanags, *Latviešu valodas vēsturiskā vārdnīca (16.–17. gs.)*. *Elektroniska vārdnīca*. Rīga: LU Latviešu valodas institūts, 2016. <https://tezaurs.lv/lvvv/>

Manc1631_Syr – *Das Hauß, =Zucht=vnd Lehrbuch Jesu Syrachs* [translated by Georgius Mancelius]. Gedruckt zu Riga durch vnd in Verlegung Gerhard Schröders, 1631.

- Manc1638_L – Mancelius, Georgius. *Lettus...* Gedruckt vnnd verlegt zu Riga durch Gerhard Schröder, 1638.
- Manc1638_PhL – Mancelius Georgius. *Phraseologia Lettica...* Riga: Gedruckt vnnd Verlegt durch Gerhard Schröder, 1638.
- Manc1654_LP1 – Mancelius, Georgius. *Lettische Lang=gewünschte Postill...* Riga: Gedruckt und verlegt durch Gerhard Schröder, 1654.
- ME – Milenbahs Kārlis. *Latviešu valodas vārdnīca*. Rediģējis, papildinājis, turpinājis J. Endzelīns, I–IV sēj. Rīga: Kultūras fonds, 1923–1932.
- SKL1696_RA – *Sawadi Karra=Teesas Likkumi...* Riga: [G. M. Nöller], 1696.
- VD1689_94 – *Ta Swehta Grammata Jeb Deewa Swehtais Wahrds...* Riga: Gedruckt bey Johann Georg Wilcken, 1689 [in fact: 1694].
- VLH1685 – *Vermehretes Lettisches Hand=Buch...* Mitau: George Radetzky, 1685.
- VLH1685_Syr – *Das Hauß, =Zucht=und Lehr=Buch Jesus Syrachs...* Mitau: George Radetzky, 1685.
- ZP1685 – *Semmiga Paklannischana...* [Greetings poem of an unknown author]. [Mitau]: George Radetzky, 1685.

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Names of Snakes in Latvian Texts of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

Abstract

This article analyses the naming of snakes in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Latvian texts which are taken from the Corpus of Early Written Latvian Texts, containing the first Latvian dictionaries, religious texts, and some secular texts. The objective of the paper is to try to determine how precisely the translators of religious texts rendered names of snakes, and to ascertain whether any semantic changes have taken place, or whether religious texts show specific use. The study also aims to find out if taboo of dangerous animals, snakes in particular, and related euphemisation is reflected in early Latvian texts. The paper focuses on four Latvian words: *čūska*, *odze*, *zalktis*, and *tārps*; two of them, *odze* and *zalktis*, from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries until present time, have undergone significant semantic changes, probably because of euphemisation triggered by taboo. Comparison with the Lithuanian language allows to conclude that such usage, different from Modern Latvian, is neither specificity of old texts, nor incompetence of translators, but rather historical language facts. It is also established that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries animals as well as plants were not so strictly separated in peoples' minds, the borders between their names were more fluid, therefore any of snakes' names could be attributed to any snake species in Latvia.

Keywords: 16th and 17th century Latvian texts; names of snakes; semantic changes; taboo; euphemisms

Nazwy węży w szesnasto- i siedemnastowiecznych tekstach łotewskich

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł analizuje nazwy węży w szesnasto- i siedemnastowiecznych tekstach łotewskich, pochodzących z korpusu wczesnego piśmiennictwa łotewskiego, zawierającego pierwsze łotewskie słowniki, teksty religijne i świeckie. Autorka podejmuje próbę ustalenia, jak dokładnie tłumacze tekstów religijnych przekładali nazwy węży, oraz wyjaśnienia, czy zachodziły w tym zakresie zmiany semantyczne i czy teksty religijne zawierają specyficzne użycia. Artykuł ma również na celu ustalenie, czy tabu w odniesieniu do groźnych zwierząt, zwłaszcza węży, i związana z nim eufemizacja znajdują odzwierciedlenie we wczesnych tekstach łotewskich. Analiza skupia się na czterech łotewskich leksemach: *čūska*, *odze*, *zalktis* i *tārps*. W okresie od XVI i XVII wieku do czasów współczesnych, dwa z nich, *odze* i *zalktis*, uległy znacznym zmianom semantycznym, prawdopodobnie wywołanym eufemizacją wynikającą z tabu. Porównanie z językiem litewskim pozwala stwierdzić, że takie użycie, odmienne niż we współczesnej łotewszczyźnie, nie wynika ze specyfiki wczesnych tekstów łotewskich ani z braku kompetencji tłumaczy, lecz z historii języka. Jak wykazano, w XVI i XVII wieku poszczególne zwierzęta i rośliny nie były tak mocno wyodrębnione w ludzkiej świadomości, granice pomiędzy ich nazwami były bardziej płynne, a zatem wszystkie omawiane nazwy można przypisać wszystkim gatunkom węży występującym na Łotwie.

Słowa kluczowe: szesnasto- i siedemnastowieczne teksty łotewskie; nazwy węży; zmiany semantyczne; tabu; eufemizmy

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