

Valts Ernštreits, Liivi kirjakeel, Tartu 2013. 231 pp.

The book by Valts Ernštreits is a thorough analysis of about a 150 years development of the Livonian literary language. It is based on his doctoral thesis (Ernštreits 2010) on the same topic. Although this southern Finnic language has never been big considering the number of speakers (the number of Livonians has probably never exceeded 30,000), it is big in the sense that it has developed a common literary language. The book demonstrates that this has been a continuous and conscious process, where native Livonians have played an important role. The author himself has also been actively involved in this process and his book has grown out of a practical need. Ernštreits (p. 11) explains that one of the goals of the study was to understand the decisions made by different authors in different periods of time, in order to avoid mistakes made already, and, if applicable, put into use some good decisions that have fallen into oblivion. The whole discussion is placed into a broader historical and cultural perspective, likely to address readers with various interests and backgrounds.

Discussion of the development of the Livonian literary language based on its sources first requires setting the criteria for what counts as a source of a literary language. Ernštreits (p. 19) defines two types of source material: (i) publications or their manuscripts that have been compiled by Livonians (or at least with their involvement) and are meant for Livonians; (ii) publications or their manuscripts compiled since the 1980s, often by non-native speakers of Livonian and usually meant for Livonian language learners. He has excluded (i) text collections and academic dictionaries created for research purposes, and (ii) letters, remarks etc. that in a way are incomplete in the form and may interpret the principles of literary language in various ways. As a result, 29 publications or their manuscripts were found to meet the above criteria, thus qualifying for further analysis. The first sources to fulfil the

criteria are two Gospels of Matthew (Mt 1863a and Mt 1863b), written in the two main dialects of Livonian — the Eastern and Western dialects. As the gospels date back about 150 years, this is also the approximate length of the development process of Livonian literary language as understood here. In fact, the first linguistic notes on Livonian date from the 13th century, but up to the mid-19th century, their amount remains quite small and uneven; also, they have been noted down by non-native speakers of the language (see Vääri 1959 : 191–202).

Such criteria indeed serve as guidelines that help to decide what counts as a literary source and what does not, but at the same time they enable some flexibility. For instance, the first comprehensive collection of texts, lists of words and sentences as well as a dictionary and grammar were published already in 1861 (SWa and SWb), but although Livonians were involved as language consultants, the publication served academic purposes and primarily had a scholarly value. The gospels published two years later were, in fact, not meant for Livonians either, but Ernštreits (p. 37) opts for them, because a few former language consultants now acted as translators.

The author first gives a general background to his book by briefly introducing the Livonian language and its dialects as well as the development of the literary language, including previous research on it. Next he presents his research problems and describes the methods used in the study. The main body of the book is divided into the following chapters: "First books of Livonian", "The 5 ABC-books", "Other sources of 1920s", "The journal *Livli*", "Publications by the Livonian Friends Society in Latvia", "Other secular sources of 1930s", "Clerical sources of 1930s", and "The clerical sources published after World War II". The last part of the book discusses the change in the function of the literary language and later developments. This is followed by conclusions and numerous appendices.

Such a structure is rather well-justified as, on the one hand, it follows the chronological order of the sources; on the other hand, it makes it easier for the reader to understand which sources belong together and thus deserve a joint analysis. For example, the publications by the Livonian Friends Society in Latvia have, among other characteristics, in common that they tried to advocate the Central Livonian dialect. In addition to the overall structure, the organization of single chapters is also reader-friendly. Namely, the analysis of literary sources is divided into two parts: first, the sources are considered from a broader cultural and historic perspective, and then, their linguistic features are discussed in greater detail in the section titled "Language". This enables information of special interest to be found or returned to with little effort.

The analysis focuses on 23 linguistic features that belong to three different levels of language description: phonology, morphology and lexicon. Syntactic features are said to have been left out for the reason that there is not enough previous research available on syntax that would have enabled proper features to be selected for analysis. As it appears, about half of the selected features concern phonology (e.g. the marking of vowels and their quantity, palatalization of consonants, *stød* etc.). Morphology gets the least attention as only 3 out of the 23 are true morphological features (declination of agent nouns, use of the supine abessive form *-mõt* and outer locative cases). Still, there are borderline cases that concern both morphology and phonology, or morphology and lexicon. As far as representation of phonetic features in writing is claimed to have caused some of the major problems for various authors (p. 27–29) the focus on phonology is fully justified.

The discussion of features is presented as follows: for each source, the most characteristic features are discussed in greater detail, while the less characteristic or missing features have only been listed at the end of the section under the title "Other features". The appendices give a fine comparative picture in six tables that contain all the features studied across

the 29 sources. Table 3 (p. 216), however, creates some confusion as it uses Latvian acronyms to denote dialect names. It can only be understood from p. 26 that the following acronyms should be used instead: *lbA* — Est. *lvI* (*idaliivi* 'East Livonian'), *lbR* — Est. *lvL* (*lääneliivi* 'West Livonian'), *lbV* — Est. *lvK* (*keskliivi* 'Central Livonian').

Although Ernštreit's study is not the first analysis of the development of the Livonian literary language, it is by all means the most thorough one, covering the period from the first literary sources up to this day. For example, the study by Väari (1948) is comprehensive enough, but considering its date of publication it is based on just a handful of sources. In addition, it is maintained that in the previous studies some sources have received but little attention, if any, like, for example, the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 1880) as well as the literary sources published between the two World Wars and after World War II (p. 24).

As regards the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 1880), however, it seems that the question is not in the amount of attention it has received but rather in the multitude of different opinions concerning the dialect used in the gospel. Notably, some researchers consider it as the second edition of the gospel published in the East Livonian dialect (i.e. Mt 1863b), some authors think it is based on the gospel in the West Livonian dialect (i.e. Mt 1863a); but sometimes the Gospel of Matthew (1880) is even regarded as a translation into the Central Livonian dialect. Ernštreits discusses these different opinions and although he maintains that there is a grain of truth in each of the three, he makes his own contribution by showing that the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 1880) actually represents the first attempt to bring the dialects closer to each other, to find a more "universal" language (see p. 45–49). The analysis is well presented. Nonetheless it would have benefited from the author's viewpoint on what could have been used as the possible foreign sources for translating the gospel. Note that the analysis on the earlier two gospels (Mt 1863a and Mt 1863b), among other issues, includes

a discussion on the possible sources (probably Latvian) used by the translators (p. 36).

With his study, valts Ernštreits has certainly made a contribution not only to the understanding of the development of Livonian literary language but to the studies of Livonian in general. His results can be used as reference material in further studies, e.g. they can be elaborated by including syntactic features

once there is more research available on Livonian syntax. In addition, they may prove useful for analysing the language of the sources left out from the present study.

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Abbreviations

Mt 1863a — Das Evangelium Matthäi in den westlichen Dialect des Livischen übersetzt von dem Liven J. Prinz und dessen Söhnen P. Prinz und J. P. Prinz, durchgesehen von F. J. Wiedemann, London 1863; **Mt 1863b** — Das Evangelium Matthäi in den östlichen Dialect des Livischen zum ersten Male übersetzt von dem Liven N. Pollmann, durchgesehen von F. J. Wiedemann, London 1863; **Mt 1880** — Püva Matteus Ewangelium lihischki. Drukkõ pandõd England un wõhrõ mã bihbõl-

seļtsch perahst. Gedruckt für die Britische und Ausländische Bibelgesellschaft, Peh-terburgs 1880; **SWa** — Joh. Andreas Sjögren's Livische Grammatik nebst Sprachproben, St. Petersburg 1861 (Joh. Andreas Sjögren's Gesammelte Schriften. Band II. Theil I); **SWb** — Joh. Andreas Sjögren's Livisch-deutsches und deutsch-livisches Wörterbuch, St. Petersburg 1861 (Joh. Andreas Sjögren's Gesammelte Schriften. Band II. Theil II).

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