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TRANSLATING COLLOQUIAL LANGUAGE IN *THE CATCHER IN*
THE RYE: A STUDY OF VALDA RAUD'S 1961 ESTONIAN
TRANSLATION *KURISTIK RUKKIS*

BA thesis

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the translation of colloquial language in J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), focusing on Valda Raud's 1961 Estonian translation *Kuristik rukkis*. The aim is to analyse how American slang, idioms, repetition, and informal, speech-like stylistic features are rendered in Estonian and how these choices affect Holden Caulfield's narrative voice. The first part provides a literature review on translation norms, translator agency, Soviet Estonian ideology in relation to translation, and Salinger's colloquial style. The second part presents a comparative textual analysis of selected examples, revealing a reliance on domestication that preserves readability while reducing stylistic repetition and colloquial immediacy.

Keywords: translation, colloquial language, narrative voice, *The Catcher in the Rye*

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INTRODUCTION

Colloquial language plays an essential role in shaping the narrative voice, tone, and authenticity of literary texts. In works where the protagonist's voice is central to the storytelling, the use of informal expressions, slang, and conversational markers is important for constructing a believable and engaging character. For translators, capturing this informality can present a challenge, as colloquialisms are embedded in cultural and social contexts, and their meaning is often inseparable from the linguistic environment in which they originate. This makes translating colloquial language a complex task that requires consideration of both linguistic nuance and cultural context.

One novel, where colloquialism is especially significant, is J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951). The main character Holden Caulfield's narrative voice is defined by American teenage slang of the late 1940s and early 1950s, and his informal, conversational style is a key element of the novel. When translating such a text, conveying the narrator's personality becomes inseparable from accurately rendering their colloquial expressions. However, translating colloquialisms is complicated by differences between languages and cultures. English and Estonian differ substantially when it comes to slang, metaphors, and idioms. Furthermore, translations from the mid-twentieth century, such as Valda Raud's *Kuristik rukkis*, were produced in a sociolinguistic environment that differed both from the original context of the novel and from contemporary Estonian usage. These factors make it necessary to examine how colloquial language and slang were adapted, altered, or omitted in the translation process.

This thesis investigates the translation of American colloquial expressions in *The Catcher in the Rye* into Estonian and examines how Valda Raud's translation interprets slang, idioms, conversational markers, and informal stylistic features. The primary focus of the study is the translation of American colloquial expressions in Raud's 1961 Estonian version of the

novel. In addition to this main objective, the study also investigates the translation strategies employed for informal language, their impact on the preservation of Holden Caulfield's unique narrative voice and tone, whether consistent patterns of translation can be observed across the text, and to what extent cultural adaptation occurs.

The main objectives of the study are to identify the translation strategies used to render colloquial expressions, evaluate their impact on tone and meaning, and analyse how cultural adaptation techniques influence the representation of informal language. In addition, the thesis compares recurring patterns or inconsistencies in the translation of similar expressions and examines how Raud's translation renders the authenticity and stylistic nuances of Salinger's original text.

The analysis focuses on the entire novel *The Catcher in the Rye* (1994) and its first Estonian translation, *Kuristik rukkis*, by Valda Raud (1961), situating the study within previous research on the novel, translator visibility, and Estonian translation practices, as well as the cultural context of Soviet Estonia and the linguistic challenges posed by Salinger's style. The main focus is on colloquial language, including slang, idioms, conversational markers, and informal expressions. The study is limited by its focus on a single, older translation, and by the fact that evaluating narrative tone and stylistic authenticity inevitably involves some degree of subjective interpretation.

The thesis is divided into two parts. The first part is the literature review, which discusses the theoretical framework related to translation strategies and the translation of colloquial language, as well as previous research on the novel. The second part discusses the novel's translation by analysing selected expressions.

1. PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON TRANSLATION AND *THE CATCHER IN THE RYE*

1.1 Translator Agency Under Normative and Ideological Pressure

1.1.1 Norms and Translator Visibility

Translation involves choices that affect how texts are perceived across cultures, and the translator shapes this perception. It can be conceptualised as a cultural, but also as a political act that shapes or challenges ideologies and norms, with its impact shifting across different historical and social contexts (Venuti 2004: 19). Similarly, Theo Hermans (in Baker 2019: 228) views translation as a “negotiation of difference and otherness,” emphasising its interpretive and relational nature when approached from a hermeneutic perspective. The translator’s choices of expressions and language are shaped by linguistic differences, cultural expectations, and ideological pressures, making translation both a creative and interpretive process. Because languages differ in structure, expression, and cultural context, translation inevitably entails some loss or alteration of meaning from the original text (Nguyen 2011: 169).

Often, this is connected to the translator’s visibility. The concept of translator visibility addresses the extent to which a translator’s presence is acknowledged in the translated text and discourse surrounding it (Venuti 2004: 5). Historically, translation practices have often favoured invisibility, emphasising fluency to create the illusion of an untranslated text (Venuti 2004: 5). This tendency reflects prioritising the target culture’s expectations over the translator’s agency. Translator visibility is closely related to the strategies of domestication and foreignisation. Drawing on Schleiermacher, Venuti (2004: 20) explains that domestication reshapes the source text so that it conforms to the linguistic and cultural expectations of the target audience, while foreignisation retains features of the source language and culture, allowing cultural differences to remain visible. Anne Lange (2015: 143) has described the need for a balance between domestication and foreignisation by saying that not everything can be domesticated, because that would situate the narrative in the target country (Estonia), but at the same time, some domestication has to be done because otherwise the translation would be hard to read and

understand. Thus, translator visibility is shaped by cultural expectations and dominant norms, influencing whether a translation prioritises fluency and invisibility or acknowledges the translator's agency.

These issues are also closely tied to cultural translation norms, which, according to Gideon Toury (2004: 198), shape both the strategies used and decisions made during the translation process. Such norms influence whether a translation aligns closely with the source text or adapts to the target audience. Toury (2004: 202), for example, distinguishes between two main types of norms, called preliminary and operational. These norms directly influence which texts are selected for translation and how they are rendered for the target audience. The preliminary norms focus on translation policy and the amount of tolerance for indirect translation through mediating languages (Toury 2004: 202). They often reflect cultural and political priorities, determining whether certain works are translated at all and if indirect translation through a mediating language is acceptable (Toury 2004: 202). In some contexts, such as Soviet Estonia, these norms were shaped by ideological constraints and publishing policies. This has been described as negotiating between domestic and foreign cultural influences, with particular attention to implied meanings and underlying implications within translated texts (see also Viira 2023: 8).

Operational norms, on the other hand, influence the translator's choices during the translation process, shaping the structure of the text and the balance between preserving features of the source text and adapting it to the target language (Toury 2004: 202). They shape smaller decisions, such as lexical choices, sentence structure, and stylistic adaptation. These norms determine whether translators adopt domestication strategies to ensure readability or retain foreign elements to preserve authenticity. For example, in chapter 25 of the Indonesian translation of *The Catcher in the Rye* by Gita Widya Laksmi, out of the 38 profanities that appear, only two are directly translated, while others have been omitted or softened (Azura et

al. 2019: 47). This influences the tone of the narrative as well as the main character Holden's characterisation, because in the original text, the profanities show his personality. Their omission, however, makes him seem more polite and reserved, reducing his authentic voice and altering the book's informal, spoken narrative (Azura et al. 2019: 47-52). Overall, this example shows how operational norms can significantly shape both characterisation and narrative voice, demonstrating the translator's role in mediating not only meaning but also stylistic and cultural nuances.

Thus, translation is not a neutral act, even when we consider the genre of literary translation, but instead it is shaped by norms that operate at multiple levels, from the selection of texts to lexical choices. These norms influence strategies such as domestication and foreignisation, mediating between fidelity to the source and the expectations of the target culture. As the example of the Indonesian translation shows, even seemingly minor choices, such as omitting or softening profanities, can significantly alter narrative voice and character portrayal. Understanding these dynamics is essential for analysing Valda Raud's translation, where similar compromises between linguistic, cultural, and ideological pressures shaped the Estonian version of Salinger's novel.

1.1.2 Translation and Ideology in Soviet Estonia

During the Soviet period (1940-1941, 1944-1991), translation played a significant role in both expanding the number of books available in Estonian and serving as a tool of ideological control. Valda Raud's (1920-2013) career exemplifies this duality. As her biography, *Valda Raud. Üks elu* (Tomson 2020) illustrates, Raud was a translator whose works introduced Estonian readers to Western classics despite strict censorship. Thus, her 1961 translation of J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* demonstrates how translators navigated linguistic and cultural nuances under political constraints, often softening rebellious undertones to align with

Soviet norms while trying to maintain a balance between ideological expectations and Western expressions in such works. The language and topics of Western literature clashed with Soviet Estonian norms, so translators made compromises to adapt such works without openly going against prevailing ideological expectations (Viira 2023: 8-10). Ideological constraints in Soviet Estonia affected not only the content of translations but also acceptable forms of language use. Drawing on Hennoste, Viira (2023: 11) notes that colloquial language was regarded as inappropriate and seen as the opposite of proper written language, and that its use in literary texts was discouraged. Slang was not considered ideologically neutral, instead it was thought to challenge the norms and authorities (Viira 2023: 14). In this context, Raud's tendency to standardise Holden's speech and reduce slang and spoken-language markers can be seen as a response to the prevailing beliefs, rather than a stylistic preference.

This reflects a broader trend in Soviet Estonia, where translation was never a neutral process, but a negotiated cultural practice. In *Tõlkimine omas ajas* (2015), Anne Lange, however, argues that beyond conveying basic meaning, a translator should strive to capture the original work's poetics. This can be a complicated task for the translator, as certain expressions are simply untranslatable. Thus, some things had to be domesticated, especially during Soviet times, when many Western concepts and practises were unheard of in Estonia. As Möldre (2020: 276) notes, translations operated within a framework where political and institutional expectations frequently outweighed literary considerations. They were shaped by quotas, censorship, and the need to align with the official cultural policy (Möldre 2020: 275-278). For example, editorial councils complained that works from "brotherly republics", other Soviet Socialist Republics of the Soviet Union, were weak but still had to be published to meet political requirements (Möldre 2020: 275-278). Translators, therefore, operated under pressure to domesticate unfamiliar concepts and soften ideologically sensitive elements, often sacrificing stylistic nuances to ensure the text remained publishable under Soviet norms.

Thus, translation in Soviet Estonia was a complex negotiation between fidelity to the original text, ideological compliance, and cultural preservation. While translators aimed to preserve the poetics of original works, political constraints often forced them to adapt language and meaning.

1.1.3 Valda Raud as a Translator

Valda Raud (1920-2013) was an Estonian translator whose career was shaped by her interrupted studies, the circumstances of the Second World War, and her personal life, including her marriage. She focused largely on translating from English into Estonian, although she also translated from Russian across a number of genres: prose, poetry, and drama (Tomson 2020: 29, 35). Raud studied English and German philology at the University of Tartu, but her studies were disrupted by the Second World War (Tomson 2020: 29, 35). Around the same time, she married Mart Raud, and the couple later lived in Moscow (Tomson 2020: 34-40). She continued translating there until their return to Estonia in 1944 (Tomson 2020: 45). In 1951, she graduated with a bachelor's degree in English philology, while continuing to practise literary translation (Tomson 2020: 62).

Her husband, Mart, played a role in her development as a translator, as in 1941, after observing her helping other students with translation, he encouraged her to pursue it herself as well (Tomson 2020: 72). Raud was intrigued by this, and despite the war, she returned to translating after getting her degree. In addition, her journey to becoming a translator was also shaped by correspondence with foreign scholars, most notably Donald Fiene, a researcher on J. D. Salinger (Teder 1980). Raud sent him her first translation of *The Catcher in the Rye*, and in exchange, the professor sent her other Salinger books, as well as research on the author (Teder 1980). As she has said, Salinger intrigued her as an author, although she first translated him because of a recommendation from a friend, rather than by choice (Urmet 2004).

Raud has also discussed the topic of translators staying true to the source text, saying that she herself takes more liberties when translating, while still trying to remain faithful to the original and the author's language use (Jürisalu 1980). Furthermore, she has mentioned issues with translating the title *The Catcher in the Rye* as *Kuristik rukkis* (precipice in the rye) instead of *Püüdiija rukkis* (catcher in the rye), as the editor Evi Simson found *kuristik* (precipice) to be too negative for the intended target audience of the novel, but this title was kept in the end, as it had already gone into print and been translated similarly into other languages (Jürisalu 1980). Thus, these experiences influenced not only how Raud became a translator but also how she approached translation itself, balancing fidelity with the freedom she believed was necessary.

1.2 Colloquial Features of Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*

1.2.1 Holden Caulfield's Narrative Voice

Holden Caulfield's narrative voice is one of the most distinctive features of *The Catcher in the Rye*, shaping both the novel's tone and the reader's perception of his character. The novel is told through Holden's first-person retrospective narration, which imitates the patterns of adolescent spoken language. His voice is also rooted in the specific linguistic environment of postwar Northeastern United States, particularly New York City. The novel, published in 1951 and set in the late 1940s, incorporates the language of upper-middle-class teenage boys attending East Coast preparatory schools. Holden's language use reflects his social and regional background as an adolescent in New York, educated in boarding schools, and his casual profanities and loose syntax show teenage informality. His voice is characterised by informality, spontaneity, frequent colloquialisms and profanities, and repetitions of certain words and phrases. Through these stylistic features, Salinger creates the impression of immediacy and authenticity, as if Holden is speaking directly to the reader rather than presenting a carefully structured narrative.

This effect results from Salinger's deliberate use of conversational rhythms and loosely structured, authentic, oral speech-like syntax. Holden's narration often resembles spontaneous speech, as it is full of digressions, interruptions, and self-corrections. He comments on his storytelling or minimises the relevance of certain details. Costello (1959: 173) notes, pointing to the character's idiolect, that Holden frequently ends thoughts with colloquial phrases such as "and all" or "or something". Colloquialisms, informal lexis, or expressions commonly used in everyday colloquial or oral speech, which often differ from standard written language, make Holden's narration loose and unstructured, suggesting that he could elaborate further but chooses not to (Costello 1959: 173). Costello (1959: 173) adds that Salinger uses these phrases to such an extent that they become part of Holden's character, not only his manner of speaking. These stylistic choices give the narrative its informal, unfinished quality and reinforce the idea of an unmediated adolescent voice.

Holden's language is also characterised by the frequent use of profanities. Swear words such as "hell," "bastard," and "damn" appear consistently throughout his narration, functioning less as expressions of anger and more as routine elements of his daily speech. As Costello (1959: 176) observes, such expressions are especially common when Holden recounts conversations with his peers, but they occur less when he directly addresses the reader. This pervasive use of certain words contributes to the authenticity of his voice, reinforcing the impression of unfiltered adolescent discourse. However, it is difficult to determine what exactly these words mean for him, since Holden applies expressions such as "bastard" and "old" to people, weather, and to himself, which removes their specificity and renders them semantically vague (Yazdanjoo et al. 2016: 3).

Together, these features show that Holden's narrative voice is shaped by conversational looseness, recurring colloquialisms, and profanities. They give the impression of unfiltered adolescent speech, while simultaneously revealing his defensiveness and attitude towards

others. Through this distinctive narrative style, Salinger shapes the novel's tone and the reader's understanding of Holden's character as a young adolescent.

1.2.2 Linguistic Challenges that Affect the Translation

Translating literary texts involves linguistic challenges that go beyond simple word substitution, particularly when dealing with slang, vernacular expressions, and profanities, because they carry cultural and stylistic nuances that are deeply embedded in the source language. Such features help construct character identity and social context, making their translation especially complex.

In *The Catcher in the Rye*, these challenges arise from the tension between preserving foreign elements of the source text and adapting them to the linguistic norms of the target language. Because slang functions pragmatically rather than semantically, literal translation often results in the loss of humour or narrative voice. Ulvydienė and Abramovaitė (2012: 104) illustrate this through the expression "That killed me," rendered in Lithuanian using slang (*liuks*, denoting something excellent or great), vulgar slang (*rupūs miltai*, meaning coarse flour, use as a curse), and colloquial language (*ko nepastipau*, meaning how did I not die). While the first two choices achieve dynamic equivalence by preserving Holden's expressive voice, the colloquial version is only partially equivalent, and literal translations elsewhere in the Lithuanian text further reduce informality and pragmatic meaning, weakening Holden's distinctive narrative voice (Ulvydienė and Abramovaitė 2012: 104-105). This example shows that difficulties in translating slang can weaken the pragmatic force of the original, potentially reducing both the humour and the distinctiveness of the protagonist's voice.

As *The Catcher in the Rye* employs vernacular language and slang throughout the story to convey Holden's personality, it has posed challenges for translators, who must try to preserve his voice while also making his American slang understandable for the target language readers.

A study that focused on translations of the novel into Slovene, Italian, and Serbo-Croatian found that the translators sought to reflect the original's tone by using language typical of teenagers in their own cultures, but conveying slang and idiomatic expressions remained one of the most demanding challenges in the process, resulting in some loss of Holden's authentic voice (Bratož 2005: 98,100). A similar conclusion was reached based on the Indonesian translation, where the translator employed softening and omission to translate the book and make it more acceptable for the target language readers (Azura et al. 2019: 47). However, the authors of said research concluded that these translation strategies failed to convey Holden's slang and expressions in a way that would have been similar to the original, instead making him appear more polite and reserved (Azura et al. 2019: 50-51). These challenges demonstrate that translating slang and vernacular language is not simply a matter of lexical substitution but a task that influences narrative voice, cultural authenticity, and reader interpretation.

Thus, research on the translations of *The Catcher in the Rye* shows that rendering the specifics of Holden's character speech, features of slang, idiomatic language, as well as use of profanities, is a process in which translators must decide between preserving the foreign elements of his language or adapting it to the linguistic and cultural expectations of the target language. Whether through softening, omission, domestication, or the use of local slang, these strategies inevitably shape how Holden is perceived and shifts in tone can make him sound more polite, neutral, or less rebellious than in the original. Consequently, the translation of slang is not purely a linguistic task but a stylistic and cultural one, with implications for characterisation, authenticity, and the reader's perception.

2. ANALYSIS OF *KURISTIK RUKKIS*

The discussion focuses on how specific linguistic features central to Holden's idiolect, such as slang, repetition, colloquial and metaphorical expressions, are handled in translation. Representative passages from the English source text are examined alongside the 1961 Estonian translation by Valda Raud. The comparison draws on close reading, existing scholarship on Salinger's stylistic choices, and key concepts from translation studies, including equivalence, paraphrasing, omission, domestication, and literal translation. In this analysis, equivalence refers to the preservation of meaning and tone, as well as stylistic effect, rather than direct word-for-word translation. Paraphrasing means rephrasing an idea while retaining its original meaning, while omission involves leaving out a part or element of the source text. Literal translation refers to a close rendering of the source text. Attention is given to the ways in which these strategies influence the tone of the narration and the portrayal of Holden's character.

2.1 Colloquial Expressions

One of the most distinctive features of Holden Caulfield's narration in *The Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger is his reliance on colloquial expressions, such as slang, idioms, and figurative language. These elements contribute to a narrative voice that is rebellious and ironic while also conveying Holden's emotions and thoughts. In the Estonian translation, the translator negotiates between preserving Holden's idiomatic American teenage speech and adapting it to the target culture. The following examples illustrate key translation strategies of colloquial expressions and their effects on Holden's voice.

For example, Holden expresses "I felt like giving somebody a buzz." (Salinger 1994: 52), which is translated as "*Tahtsin kellelegi traati tõmmata.*" (Salinger 1961: 52). This can be seen as an example of functional domestication. Here, the informal English expression is replaced with a culturally familiar idiomatic Estonian expression, while the casual, spontaneous tone is still preserved. This is a successful domestication because it recreates informality

without sounding translated. Similarly, when Holden says, “Game, my ass.” (Salinger 1994: 7), it is translated as “*Või mäng – minu seenele.*” (Salinger 1961: 11). The vulgar American dismissal is replaced with an idiomatic Estonian expression. This is an example of domestication, as the emotional effect is preserved, but culturally adapted. This adaptation is successful in maintaining Holden’s attitude, though the American teenage bluntness becomes more domestic.

In addition, Holden frequently uses profanities such as “goddam,” “sonuvabitch,” and “bastard,” which function as intensifiers rather than literal obscenities. However, in some instances, these expressions get translated as much more general phrases. For example, his proclamation “They were coming in the goddam window.” (Salinger 1994: 12) is rendered as “*Kõike tehti ainult paraaditsemiseks.*” (Salinger 1961: 15). Here, the metaphor is removed and replaced with a culturally transparent explanation, making Holden sound less impulsive and more analytical. Similarly, his “sonuvabitch” is translated differently depending on the context, for example, as “*siga*” (Salinger 1961: 28), “*krants*” (Salinger 1961: 24) and “*litapoeg*” (Salinger 1961: 41). This creates inconsistent levels of intensity, which weakens the recognisable repetition of Holden’s insults and makes his voice sound less uniform.

Holden’s speech is also characterised by spoken-language markers, which Salinger uses to convey spontaneous teenage narration. In the Estonian translation, many of these features are standardised, resulting in a more neutral and literary tone. For example, the original sentence “I like to be somewhere at least where you can see a few girls around once in a while, even if they’re only scratching their arms or blowing their noses or even just giggling or something.” (Salinger 1994: 2) is translated as “*Mulle vähemalt meeldib vahetevahel näha mõnda plikat, isegi kui nad ainult oma käsivarsi sügavad, nina nuuskavad või niisama itsitavad.*” (Salinger 1961: 6). The English sentence contains hesitation markers (“or something”), and loosely coordinated clauses, creating a rhythm typical of natural spoken discourse. The Estonian

version, however, renders these as a syntactically regular, cohesive sentence. Similarly, the sentence “She had a big nose, and her nails were all bitten down and bloody-looking and she had on those damn falsies that point all over the place, but you felt sort of sorry for her.” (Salinger 1994: 2), is translated as “*Tal oli suur nina ja küüned olid tal peaaegu verele näritud ning midagi oli topitud rinnahoidjasse, et rinnad kopsakamad paistaksid, kuid minul hakkas temast kuidagi hale.*” (Salinger 1961: 6). Again, the repetition of spoken language is removed and replaced by a regular sentence. This shift reduces the impression of immediacy and informality, making Holden sound less like an impulsive teenager and more like a polished narrator. As a result, the translation downplays his habit of thinking out loud in long, rambling strings of observations, therefore diminishing the immediacy of Salinger’s narrative style.

Furthermore, Holden frequently labels people as “phonies,” which is often substituted for other expressions in the Estonian translation. For example, “I was surrounded by phonies” (Salinger 1994: 12) is translated as “*seal oli mu ümber üksainus vale ja valskus*” (Salinger 1961: 15). Here, instead of a direct slang equivalent, the translator uses abstract nouns, which can be considered a semantic expansion combined with domestication. Similarly, while Salinger (1994: 2, 3) uses “phony slob”, Raud (1961: 6) translates it as “*variser ja juhmar*”. While the meaning is preserved, the impact of “phonies” as a repeated teenage insult is weakened. In English, “phony” is a key lexical marker of Holden’s identity, while the Estonian translation makes it more abstract, taking away the casual, everyday tone of Holden’s original wording.

Thus, the translation consistently relies on adaptation and domestication to render Holden’s colloquial speech into natural Estonian, prioritising fluency and readability over literal transfer. While this strategy successfully preserves his irony, exaggeration, and emotional volatility, it also reduces the repetition and recognisable expressions, such as “phony,” “goddam,” and “that killed me,” that shape his idiolect in the original. By varying or neutralising these recurring expressions, softening profanities and replacing certain words with

clearer phrasing, the translation diminishes the sense of a self-repeating, impulsive teenage voice. As a result, Holden remains rebellious and critical, but he sounds more controlled and less colloquial than in Salinger's original.

2.2 Repetition and Idiolect Markers

One of the central features of Holden Caulfield's narration is his heavy reliance on repetition and recurring idiolect markers, which create the illusion of spontaneous speech and construct a recognisable teenage voice. Expressions such as "that killed me," "old + name," "and all," and frequent intensifiers like "goddam" function as verbal cues that contribute to an impression of spontaneous and subjective narration. In the Estonian translation, however, these markers are often varied or reformulated, which alters the consistency of his voice.

An example is the recurrent phrase "That killed me." In the description of his brother's short story, Holden says, "It killed me." (Salinger 1994: 1), translated as "*Jutt missugune!*" (Salinger 1961: 5). In other instances, "That killed me." becomes "*Lausa rabav.*" (Salinger 1961: 67), "*Säärased naljatilgad mõlemad.*" (Salinger 1961: 74), "*See alles on midagi.*" (Salinger 1961: 118) and "*Naera vôi lõhki.*" (Salinger 1961: 166). These examples demonstrate a strategy of stylistic variation combined with domestication, in which the translator uses different idiomatic equivalents rather than preserving a single repeated phrase. While each solution works contextually, the cumulative effect is a loss of repetition as a feature of Holden's idiolect. In the original, the recurrence of "that killed me" reflects Holden's exaggerated style, while in translation, this pattern becomes less visible, making his speech sound more lexically diverse but less characteristic. These varied renderings show that the translation does not treat "that killed me" as a stable element of Holden's idiolect, resulting in a loss of the consistency and repetition which is central to Holden's speech.

Similarly, Holden frequently attaches “old” to names, as in “old Spencer” or “old Luce.” For example, “Old Luce knew who every flit and Lesbian in the United States was.” (Salinger 1994: 129) becomes “*Luce näis teadvat kõiki ühendriikide pederaste ja lesboslasi.*” (Salinger 1961: 120). In addition, “I was crazy about The Great Gatsby. Old Gatsby. Old sport.” (Salinger 1994: 127) is rendered as “*Olin „Suurest Gatsbyst” lausa vaimustuses. Eriti Gatsbyst endast. Täitsa mees.*” (Salinger 1961: 118). The adjective “old” is omitted, resulting in a case of omission that also neutralises the tone. Here, “old” does not literally indicate age but signals ironic familiarity and emotional ambivalence. Its systematic absence in the translation removes a subtle but persistent marker of Holden’s ironic distancing, slightly flattening his tone.

Another important part of Holden’s idiolect is his use of filler expressions, most often “and all,” which signal spoken, unplanned, immediate narration and a teenage manner of speaking. For instance, throughout the book “and all” is most often translated as “*ja nõnda edasi*” (Salinger 1961: 6) or “*ja puha*” (Salinger 1961: 6). In most instances, however, it is omitted and sometimes replaced by another word in an attempt to explain things in more detail, such as “He was a real rake and all, but he knocked women out.” (Salinger 1994: 84) which becomes “*Ta oli hirmus elumees ja liiderdaja, aga naised jooksid talle järele kui hullud.*” (Salinger 1961: 80). This illustrates a broader tendency in the translation to prioritise syntactic clarity and idiomatic fluency over the preservation of discourse markers that construct Holden’s idiolect. In the source text, the repetition of “and all” signals hesitation, vagueness, and loosely structured, speech-like narration. Even when semantically redundant, it contributes rhythm and reinforces the impression of a teenager speaking impulsively. In the Estonian translation, however, the expression is frequently omitted, standardised, or replaced with other, more direct expressions. This results in a loss of repetition as a stylistic device and weakens the oral quality of the narration. While the translation remains natural and readable, Holden’s voice becomes more composed and less similar to spontaneous adolescent speech.

Overall, the Estonian translation consistently favours idiomatic fluency over the systematic repetition that shapes Holden's idiolect in the original. While each rendering is natural and contextually appropriate, the variation reduces the coherence of his speech. Because these recurrent phrases function as markers of Holden's emotions, insecurity, and adolescent immediacy, their reduction can change the reader's perception of his character. The translated Holden speaks in a more controlled, less repetitive manner, which softens the impression of instability that is central to Salinger's portrayal of him in the original.

2.3 Figurative Language

Holden Caulfield's narration in *The Catcher in the Rye* relies heavily on figurative expressions that shape his voice, emotions, and adolescent worldview. To do this, Salinger mostly uses metaphors, hyperboles, and similes. The Estonian translation shows a consistent tendency to adapt or neutralise figurative language to better fit domestic usage.

Holden frequently relies on metaphorical expressions to convey strong judgments and emotions. For example, "...he was a nice old guy that didn't know his ass from his elbow." (Salinger 1994: 7) is translated as "...ta on juba vana krõbike, kes enam millestki mitte mõhkugi aru ei saa." (Salinger 1961: 10). The bodily metaphor, which in English signals confusion through imagery, is replaced with a paraphrase that removes both the physical component and the profanity. This results in a more neutral tone, as the American teenage slang is domesticated into a more general Estonian colloquialism. A similar shift occurs in the rendering of Holden's hyperbolic self-descriptions. "Boy, I'll bet I jumped about a thousand feet." and "I didn't know what the hell to say – I mean I was embarrassed as hell." (Salinger 1994: 172) become "*Ah sa poiss, kargasin üles nagu ussist nõelatud.*" and "*Ma ei osanud midagi öelda – olin nagu puuga pähe saanud.*" (Salinger 1961: 158). In the first case, the English exaggeration relies on an impossible physical action, while the Estonian version substitutes an idiomatic image of sudden

shock. Although the intensity remains, the stylistic quality changes as Holden's spontaneous overstatement becomes a fixed idiom with a more conventional cultural meaning. In the second case, the original uses an intensifier "as hell" rather than a metaphor, whereas the translation introduces figurative imagery "*nagu puuga pähe saanud*." This can be seen as compensation, in which the profanity is softened or removed, and the translator adds a vivid metaphor to preserve the emotional force of Holden's reaction.

For example, Holden says, "They were coming in the goddam window." (Salinger 1994: 12), which is translated as "*Kõike tehti ainult paraaditsemiseks*." (Salinger 1961: 15). Here, the translator suppresses the literal hyperbole and replaces it with a culturally clearer, abstract generalisation. As a result, the translation loses the absurdity and immediacy of Holden's figurative speech, softening his emotional intensity and reducing the exaggeration characteristic of his narrative voice. Similarly, "I mean when she was talking and she got excited about something, her mouth sort of went in about fifty directions, her lips and all." (Salinger 1994: 70) becomes "*Kui ta rääkis või oli ärritatud, siis ta huuled liikusid sajas suunas*." (Salinger 1961: 67). The translator preserves the metaphor but amplifies it by doubling the number from fifty to a hundred. This is an intensified hyperbole, making the description even more exaggerated than in the original. While this maintains the figurative quality of Holden's speech, it subtly alters his tone by amplifying the overstatement.

Overall, the translation of figurative language in *The Catcher in the Rye* demonstrates a tendency towards domestication and tonal adjustment. Metaphors and hyperboles in the original are frequently neutralised, paraphrased or replaced with idiomatic Estonian expressions that sound more natural in the target language. In some cases, profanities and bodily imagery are softened, while in others the translator compensates by introducing new figurative expressions or intensifying existing ones. These shifts preserve the emotional impact of Holden's narration,

but they also modify his voice, making it less spontaneous and more aligned with conventional Estonian colloquial usage.

2.4 Domestication as a Strategy for Naturalisation

A common translation strategy in the Estonian translation of *The Catcher in the Rye* is domestication, which involves adapting the source text to the linguistic, stylistic, and cultural norms of the target language. In the translation, domestication is used frequently to align Holden's informal speech, slang, and cultural references with prevailing Soviet Estonian literary and ideological norms. Rather than preserving the exact wording or cultural specificity of the English original, the translator often replaces expressions with idiomatic Estonian equivalents or culturally familiar phrasing.

An example of domestication can be seen in the translation of colloquial expressions. For instance, the sentence "Game, my ass. Some game." (Salinger 1994: 7) is translated as "*Või mäng – mingi seenele. Mis mäng see on!*" (Salinger 1961: 11). The literal meaning of "my ass" is not preserved, but instead the translator uses the Estonian expression "*mingi seenele*," which conveys dismissiveness in a culturally natural way. Similarly, Holden says, "I'll be up the creek..." (Salinger 1994: 24) which becomes "*Olen pigis...*" (Salinger 1961: 27) or "But we chewed the fat..." (Salinger 1994: 96) and "...chewed the rag" (Salinger 1994: 23), where fat becomes "*latramine*" and rag is "*vatramine*." While these Estonian verbs successfully convey informal, aimless chatting, they remove the imagery of chewing seen in the original. In this sense, domestication makes the translation more accessible for Estonian readers but also removes some of Holden's colourful expressions.

Another example of domestication, as well as the cultural climate of the translation, is the rendering of sexual expressions in the text. For example, "The other end of the bar was full of flits." (Salinger 1994: 128-129) is translated as "*Baari teine ots oli täis lillasid lõnguseid.*"

(Salinger 1961: 119). Similarly, “Old Luce knew who every flit and lesbian in the United States was.” (Salinger 1994: 129) becomes “*Luce näis teadvat kõiki ühendriikide pederaste ja lesboslasi.*” (Salinger 1961: 120). These choices show how culture-dependent Holden’s slang is, and how far the translator goes in adapting it for a 1961 Estonian readership. While “flit” is a comparatively mild American slang term, the translator uses expressions such as “*lillad lõngused*” and “*pederastid*,” which carry far stronger derogatory and negative connotations in Estonian. This shift reflects not only domestication but also the ideological environment of Soviet Estonia, where homosexuality was treated differently from 1950s American youth culture. As a result, Holden’s original slang loses its cultural nuance and instead acquires a harsher, more judgmental tone. Similar processes occur elsewhere in the translation, where explicit words are often softened, such as “feeling horny” (Salinger 1994: 56), becoming “*tundsin end kehvasti*” (Salinger 1961: 56) or “sex”, which is translated as “*armuasjad*” (Salinger 1961: 122) or “*suguelu*” (Salinger 1961: 122). These choices reduce the directness and crudeness of Holden’s voice, aligning the text with the more conservative cultural and ideological norms of 1960s Estonia. In doing so, the translation preserves the meaning but loses the sexual immediacy and frustration characteristic of the original narration.

In addition, the translation includes culturally specific items and expressions that have been fully revised in order to remain understandable to the Estonian reader. One of the most characteristic examples of this, especially from the older translation, is “hamburger” (Salinger 1994: 31), which becomes “*hamburgi kotlett*” (Salinger 1961: 34). In the 1950s–60s, the American-style hamburger as a fast-food item was not yet known in Soviet Estonia. For an Estonian reader in 1961, the word hamburger would have been unfamiliar. To avoid this, the translator substituted it for an item that the reader could recognise, making it a minced-meat patty. By doing so, the translator preserves the general semantic field of a quick, simple meat-based food but loses the cultural specificity of the American fast-food setting. Similarly, Holden

mentions how a singer sounds “very Dixieland and whorehouse” (Salinger 1994: 104), translated as “*Ta laulab seda väga lõunamaiselt ja isegi uulitsaplikalikult*” (Salinger 1961: 97). Here, the cultural specificity of Dixieland jazz disappears and is replaced with a more vague reference to southern music. In addition, the explicit mention of “whorehouse” is softened to hint at impropriety. These choices remove the original’s culturally embedded imagery and substitute it for more general, culturally neutral expressions. As with other examples from the novel, this ensures readability but reduces the colourfulness and cultural embeddedness of Holden’s narration.

These examples illustrate how extensively domestication shapes the 1961 Estonian translation of *The Catcher in the Rye*. The translator consistently prioritises readability and cultural accessibility, adapting Holden’s slang, expressions, and cultural references to fit the linguistic and ideological norms of 1960s Estonia. While this strategy ensures that the text is understandable for its target audience, it also reduces the cultural specificity and imagery. As a result, the translation offers a more neutral, less culturally specific version of the novel, reflecting the linguistic and ideological constraints, as well as limited knowledge of American culture in Soviet Estonia.

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis aimed to analyse how Valda Raud translated colloquial language in *Kuristik rukkis*, the Estonian translation of *The Catcher in the Rye*, and how these choices affect the representation of Holden Caulfield’s narrative voice in the Estonian version. The analysis focused on linguistic and stylistic features of the original text, including colloquial expressions, repetition, idiolect markers, figurative language, and domestication, and examined how these are rendered in translation. The theoretical framework, which drew on translation studies and

previous research on the novel, provided the basis for understanding how translation norms, cultural context, and linguistic differences shape the translated text.

The introduction outlined the importance of colloquial language in constructing narrative voice and highlighted the challenges of translating culturally embedded slang and informal speech. It also introduced the historical and linguistic context of the 1961 Estonian translation. The literature review provided an overview of translation theory, including concepts such as domestication, foreignisation, and translator visibility, as well as the specific constraints of translation in Soviet Estonia. In addition, it discussed the stylistic features of J. D. Salinger's writing, particularly Holden Caulfield's distinctive voice, as well as the linguistic challenges that arise when translating slang, idioms, and spoken language. Previous research showed that translating such features often involves adaptation, omission, or softening, which can alter characterisation and tone.

The analysis demonstrated that Raud frequently relies on domestication and adaptation when translating colloquial expressions. American slang and idioms are often replaced with culturally familiar Estonian equivalents, which preserve the general meaning and emotional tone but reduce the cultural specificity of the original. At the same time, profanities are often softened or omitted, and some expressions are paraphrased or neutralised, making Holden's speech less abrupt and informal. These strategies make the text more accessible to the target audience but also alter the stylistic nuances of the original.

The analysis of repetition and idiolect markers showed that recurring expressions such as "that killed me," "and all," and the use of "old" as a modifier are often varied or omitted in the translation. While each choice is contextually appropriate, the overall effect is a reduction in the use of repetition as a stylistic device. This weakens the sense of a consistent, recognisable idiolect, making Holden's voice appear more controlled and less spontaneous than in the original. Similarly, the treatment of figurative language revealed a tendency to replace

metaphors and hyperboles with more conventional or culturally familiar expressions. In some cases, figurative elements are neutralised, while in others they are intensified or compensated for elsewhere in the text. These strategies maintain the emotional impact while altering the narrative's stylistic character.

The discussion of domestication further showed how the translation adapts not only language but also cultural references and ideologically sensitive content. Culture-specific items are often replaced with more familiar concepts, and taboo topics such as sexuality are softened to align with the norms of Soviet Estonian society. These choices reflect the broader cultural and political context in which the translation was produced, demonstrating that translation is shaped not only by linguistic considerations but also by external constraints and expectations.

The thesis shows that while Raud's translation successfully conveys the narrative and preserves most aspects of Holden's character, it also alters the linguistic features that define his voice. The translated Holden remains critical, emotional, and rebellious, but he sounds more standardised with less of his characteristic repetitive adolescent speech. These findings highlight the importance of colloquial language in literary characterisation and demonstrate how translation strategies can significantly influence narrative voice and reader perception. The analysis reveals that shifts in colloquial language reshape the narrative voice in minor but noticeable ways, illustrating how stylistic choices in translation can influence characterisation.

Further research could expand on this by comparing Valda Raud's translation with more recent Estonian translations of the novel in order to examine how changing cultural norms influence the rendering of colloquial language. Such an approach would make it possible to assess whether a contemporary translation preserves more of Holden's idiolect and stylistic features than the 1961 version.

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RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Riti Järveots

Translating Colloquial Language in *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951): A Study of Valda Raud's 1961 Estonian Translation *Kuristik rukkis*

Kõnekeeletõlkimine romaanis „Kuristik rukkis“ Valda Raua 1961. aasta eestikeelse tõlke põhjal

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Annotatsioon:

Bakalaureusetöö eesmärk on analüüsida, kuidas tõlgitakse kõnekeelt J. D. Salingeri romaanis „Kuristik rukkis,“ (1951) keskendudes Valda Raua 1961. aasta eestikeelsele tõlkele. Töö lähtub sellest, et kõnekeel, släng, metafoorid ja kordused on Holden Caulfieldi kui jutustaja idiolekti keskseks osaks ning nende tõlkimine mõjutab tegelaskuju ja narratiivi kujutamist.

Töö esimeses osas antakse ülevaade varasematest uurimustest kõnekeeletõlkimise, tõlkenormide, tõlkija nähtavuse ning „Kuristik rukkis“ keeleliste eripärade kohta. Samuti käsitletakse tõlkimise ideoloogilist konteksti Nõukogude Eestis ja Valda Raua tegevust tõlkijana. Teises osas keskendutakse romaani eestikeelse tõlke analüüsile, vaadeldes valitud näidete põhjal, kuidas on kõnekeelsed väljendid, kordused, metafoorid ja idiolekti tunnused tõlgitud.

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Märksõnad: tõlge, kõnekeel, jutustajahääl, „Kuristik rukkis“

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