

**UNIVERSITY OF TARTU  
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**SOCIAL STRATIFICATION THROUGH LANGUAGE: DONNA  
TARTT'S *THE SECRET HISTORY* AND „SALAJANE  
AJALUGU“ BY LIINA VIRES  
BA thesis**

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## ABSTRACT

Social stratification is a central aspect in Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* and is largely conveyed through linguistic variation in character speech. This thesis compares the employment of idiolects, sociolects, and register in the novel and its Estonian translation by Liina Viires. As Estonia has a significantly different sociopolitical history and is a much younger literary language than English, this thesis hypothesises that the distinctions in character speech are less prominent in Estonian.

The introduction provides a summary of the novel, an overview of its popularity, and insight into the elements which convey social stratification in the novel. The literature review provides theoretical background regarding the linguistic varieties of idiolect, sociolect, and register, how these varieties are used in character construction, and the possibilities and limitations of Estonian in their translation. The empirical section explains the methodology of the research and examines the use of linguistic varieties in both the original text and its translation.

Keywords: Donna Tartt, *The Secret History*, translation analysis, sociolinguistics

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Donna Tartt is an American fiction writer born in 1963. Besides a small number of short stories, to date she has published three novels: her critically acclaimed bestseller and debut *The Secret History* (1992), *The Goldfinch* (2013), awarded with the Pulitzer Prize, and her latest work *The Little Friend* (2002), awarded with the WH Smith Literary Award. Her writing explores themes such as morality, identity, truth, loss, and violence. Though Tartt has only received awards for her later works, *The Secret History* marked her literary debut and has since grown in popularity — it has been translated into 24 languages and sold over 5 million copies (Silman 2017). The novel was first published in Estonian under the title „Salajane ajalugu“ in 2007 by the publishing house Kirjastus Pegasus, translated by Liina Viires, with a reprint in 2021 by Rahva Raamat publishing.

*The Secret History* combines elements of thriller-mystery, detective fiction, psychological drama, and even Greek tragedy. However, in recent years it has also been widely categorised under the literary aesthetic Dark Academia, which gained popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic despite originating on Tumblr in 2014 (Adriaansen 2022: para 10). This subculture, which romanticised and made academia and culture more accessible during lockdown, formed around *The Secret History* as one of its central texts. People's gravitation towards the novel could be explained by its gripping plot, but noteworthy are also the characters and their relationships. The intimacy of the core group in correlation with the narrator Richard's feelings of alienation due to his different social and economic background has most likely resonated with readers and their own desire for community. This theme of social stratification is central to the novel and is conveyed partly through the characters' distinct speech patterns, which reflect their background and class differences.

*The Secret History* is set in Vermont, at an elite New England college during the 1980s. The story revolves around a close-knit group of six Classics students — Henry, Francis,

Camilla, Charles, Bunny, and Richard. Under the tutelage of their charismatic professor Julian, they become increasingly immersed in classical antiquity. This immersion eventually leads to a murder, and then another. The protagonist Richard Papen narrates the story in retrospect, describing the circumstances leading up to the second murder, the characters' motives, and the aftermath. While Hampden College is a school primarily for the upper middle class and wealthy elite, the Classics students form an even more exclusive group within it. Their elitism, isolated curriculum, and different way of speaking set them apart from the general student body, enforcing an internal hierarchy on the campus. The intellectual superiority and refined nature of Henry Winter reflect the most elitist ideals of the group. Bunny (Edmund) Corcoran, on the other hand, represents a different kind of American upper-class identity: loud, entitled, and more concerned with traditional gender roles and comfortable living than with academia or the aesthetic ideals that Henry values. These differences shape the in-group relationships, with some members becoming more distanced from reality and regular society, and feeling superior because of it, while others remain the opposite, attached to the material pleasures of modern society.

The group's elitist status is also reflected in their clothing, habits, and access to wealth. Henry's refined English suits and Francis' pince-nez and "starchy shirts with French cuffs," (Tartt 1993: 17–18), reminiscent of the Victorian era and encountered in Gothic novels, project prestige and set them apart, constructing their own isolated world — one Richard tries to fit into with his second-hand tweed overcoat and cufflinks engraved with someone else's initials (26–27). In contrast, Judy Poovey, Richard's friend and a fashion design student, wears doodled jeans, spandex tops and bright red nails (50), a splash of colour and a rare glimpse into college life beyond Richard's elitist academic bubble. The Classicists' intellectual pursuits as well as financial freedom further distinguish them: Henry, for example, is fluent in multiple languages and has published a translation of Anacreon with commentary (19) (hinting at his interest in the

Bacchanalia they later attempt to reenact); he receives a generous monthly allowance, and Francis, for instance, similarly lives off a trust fund with unrestricted access to his aunt's manor house (84), the latter also illustrating the status of his family. Richard, by contrast, nearly freezes to death over the holidays, unable to afford rent (125). Despite being part of the group, both Richard and Bunny lack the same financial freedom, although Bunny maintains his privileged lifestyle by shamelessly relying on the others.

An aspect of *The Secret History* that further reinforces these social and cultural class distinctions is its use of character speech in dialogue. The characters' speech patterns reflect their backgrounds, and the author juxtaposes distinctly dissimilar idiolects to emphasise their social differences. The interactions between the aforementioned Henry and Bunny, two of the most contrasting characters, illustrate this stratification well. Henry typically speaks in a formal, at times archaic-sounding register, and writes his diary in Latin, while Bunny's speech is more colloquial, marked by slang and casual sentence structure. For further comparison, Judy's character voice is very enthusiastic and conversational (characterised by her abundant use of the discourse markers *listen* and *you know*), as she often checks in with the listener. The characters' manner of speaking not only reveals much about their personality and backgrounds but also shapes how they are perceived — Henry comes across as intimidating yet also commands an air of authority and superiority, while Bunny often seems tactless, grating, and belonging more among the college's general student body. Such contrasts in character speech reinforce themes of exclusion and belonging within the novel's social hierarchy.

While *The Secret History* has been widely studied for its intertextuality, cultural impact, and characters (which will be elaborated on in the literature review), there has been limited research on its translations. There are three notable studies on the translation of the novel — Mustonen (2010) examines the Finnish translation, Maras (2023) the Croatian, and Bystrov & Tatsakovych (2023) the Ukrainian version —, all of which focus on figurative language. In an

effort to broaden the scope of literary and translation research on the novel, this thesis will examine the novel and its translation from the perspective of character construction.

Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* was translated into Estonian in 2007 by Liina Viires, an Estonian freelance translator. She has graduated from the University of Tartu with a Master's degree in semiotics (Viires n.d.). In addition to translating Tartt's *The Secret History*, her work includes historical romance novels such as Santa Montefiore's *Secrets of the Lighthouse* („Tuletorni saladused“ (2016)) and Liz Fenwick's *Under a Cornish Sky* („Cornwalli taeva all“ (2017)) as well as non-fiction texts such as *The World's Greatest Unsolved Mysteries* („Maaailma suurimad lahendamata mõistatused“ (2007)) (ESTER). Apart from English–Estonian fiction translation, she has also translated Estonian texts on art and architecture into English (ESTER), and has held a position at SDI Media, an Estonian localisation company specialising in subtitling and dubbing (Viires n.d.). Despite her diverse translation background, „Salajane ajalugu“ remains her most notable work due to the popularity and complexity of the original.

This study will explore the linguistic markers in Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* that contribute to character construction and differentiation, and compare how stratification through language is conveyed in „Salajane ajalugu“ by Liina Viires. As modern Estonian is a relatively young and small language, lacking the same level of linguistic variation found in English, linguistic stratification in Estonian is less defined. The translation of the novel may therefore provide insight into the linguistic distance between the two languages. The first part of this thesis gives an overview of previous research on the novel, alongside theoretical background on linguistic variation, and its role in character construction. The second part focuses on the comparative analysis of language varieties in the novel and its translation.

## 2. IDIOLECT, SOCIOLECT, AND REGISTER IN CHARACTER SPEECH: NAVIGATING SOCIAL DIVIDES IN DONNA TARTT'S *THE SECRET HISTORY*

The empirical section of the thesis focuses on the comparative analysis of the three varieties of language that are important from the point of view of character formation in Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* and its Estonian translation: idiolects, sociolects and register. The purpose of the literature review is to give an overview of the previous studies on the novel and provide theoretical background to the present research by defining the relevant language varieties and examining their role in character construction as well as their rendering in Estonian translation.

### 2.1. Previous Research on the Novel

Since its publication in 1992, *The Secret History* by Donna Tartt has attracted much reader as well as some academic attention, particularly for its engagement with classical ideas and intertextuality. Ishchenko (2024) compares the novel to Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, emphasising the shared themes of guilt and moral introspection. The study brings out parallels between Tartt's narrative voice and treatment of morality, and Dostoevsky's poetics. D'Aniello (2021) explores the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy in the novel, focusing on its treatment of themes such as beauty, guilt, and the tragic hero. Similarly, Havrylyshyn (2024) examines the novel through the elements covered in Aristotle's *Poetics*, highlighting the roles of the tragic hero and the chorus, which are reflected in Tartt's characters Henry and Richard. These studies reveal the depth of *The Secret History*'s engagement with classical literature and its influence on its plot, characters, and themes.

The cultural impact of *The Secret History* extends beyond literary circles, influencing the Dark Academia internet subculture, as discussed by Murray (2023). She identifies the novel as

central to the aesthetic. Through the analysis of social media content, Murray brings out recurring motifs such as gothic architecture, university settings, and intellectualism, all used to romanticise the academia. However, the internet subculture has also been criticised for its Western elitist focus — Lee (2024) demonstrates the novel's role in Dark Academia as both a source of nostalgia and critique of academic elitism. The recent rise in the novel's popularity could also be attributed to its central close friendships. Kurowicka (2020) emphasises this centrality of intense and often erotic friendships, comparing them to those in Tana French's *The Likeness*. The renewed interest in Tartt's *The Secret History* and the ample quantity of studies around it after 2020 may be tied to the popularisation of the Dark Academia subculture which foregrounded the novel on social media.

Although elitism can create an illusion of community, its main purpose is to divide, which cannot be overlooked in *The Secret History*. Mills' (2005) article on "the image of Classicists" explores how *The Secret History* portrays Classics students as intellectually as well as socially and financially elite. She notes the "highly old-fashioned view" that the novel paints of the field — an image that may seem ambiguous and uninviting but surprisingly works as a "recruitment tool" through its elitist aura (2005: 16). Thus, despite the somewhat ambiguous information the novel provides, it has also created an air of aestheticism and mystery around the field, resulting in many of its readers' pursuit of this academic path. In contrast, Sherry R. Truffin (2014), in her chapter on "the Schoolhouse Gothic", considers the novel to be a critique of elite academic institutions. She argues that the school's environment fosters an "intellectual and aesthetic detachment" in the characters, which ultimately leads to murder (Truffin 2014: 174). These perspectives highlight how the novel's setting and social hierarchies shape the narrative and leave a lasting impression on the readers.

Despite the novel having been translated into many languages and the considerable number of studies on its other aspects, scholarly attention on the translation of the novel remains limited.

There are only a small number of prominent studies on the translation of the novel, all focusing on nonliteral language. Mustonen (2010) investigates idioms in its Finnish translation, identifying three primary strategies: non-idiomatic translation, the use of target language idioms, and literal translation. Maras (2023) analyses the Croatian translation of similes and metaphors, bringing out replacement and reduction as common methods besides literal translation. Similarly, Bystrov and Tatsakovych (2023) explore the metaphorical conceptualisation of beauty in the Ukrainian version of the novel. These few studies demonstrate the challenges and strategies of translating figurative language in Tartt's work. However, to my knowledge, no translation-focused studies have examined other linguistic features despite there being much to explore.

As illustrated in the paragraph on the elitist nature of Classics studies, several scholars have explored the subject in regard to *The Secret History* — the isolated core group, their expensive tastes and the broader stratified school environment. Alongside appearance and behaviour, language plays a key role in conveying social hierarchy through differences in linguistic varieties such as idiolects, sociolects, and registers. Therefore, the reader's perception of the characters and the narrative is greatly influenced by the employment and translation of these varieties in character speech, which will be elaborated on in the next sections.

## **2.2. Idiolects, Sociolects, and Registers**

An *idiolect*, according to Crystal (2008 [1980]: 235), refers to the “linguistic system” unique to an individual, encompassing their personal speech habits and stylistic markers. Federici (2011: 7) elaborates that an idiolect includes linguistic features shaped by geographical, educational, social, and physical factors such as one's class, gender, race, and possible historical influences”. Therefore, an idiolect is language characteristic of an individual, encompassing the linguistic nuances that distinguish them from others by aspects of identity

and background such as gender, race, class, education, and family. While definitions vary slightly, with some limiting the term to a specific context or timeframe, suggesting that individuals have many idiolects over their lifetime (Crystal 2008 [1980]: 235), this thesis adopts the broader view of an idiolect as a speaker's overall linguistic system, regardless of time-related variation. Supporting this view of idiolect, Wales (2014 [1990]: 211) compares it to a fingerprint, emphasising that individuals exhibit unique linguistic qualities, from lispings to speech signatures, recognisable even over the phone and often despite time's passing.

Although idiolects are inherently individual, they are inevitably affected by social interactions and group identity. A person's or a character's idiolect often shares features with broader linguistic communities, reflecting their social position and belonging. Crystal's (2008 [1980]: 235) acknowledgement of this overlap is elaborated on by Federici (2011: 8) in the context of literary characters, saying that although they have their own distinctive speech styles, they can also represent the speech patterns of a wider social group (known as a sociolect). In *The Secret History*, for example, Henry's formal speech differs drastically from Judy's casual tirades which are more similar to Bunny's idiolect. Such contrasts highlight character-specific idiolects, while the broader linguistic divide between the elite group and other students on campus illustrates the presence of sociolects, both essential to understanding the novel's social dynamics.

A *sociolect* is defined as a variety of shared linguistic features associated with a particular social group (such as class or profession) (Mittal, Vashist & Chaudhary 2024: 2645) rather than a specific geographical region (Crystal 2008 [1980]: 440; Trudgill 2003: 122). Unlike the inherently individual *idiolect* (although it can be affected by a larger group), *sociolect* refers to a group's shared vocabulary, expressions, and speech patterns. Grabias (1994: 140 as cited in Lewandowski 2010: 64) highlights sociolects' role in constructing group identity, noting that they help members interpret their experiences, shape attitudes towards outsiders,

and establish norms of social interaction. Much like how group values can shape our actions, language use is even more susceptible to social influence.

A *register* refers to another variety of language used in a specific context or for a particular purpose, shaped by social norms. Hudson (1996 [1980]: 46) has compared it with a dialect in a self-proclaimed oversimplification: “Your dialect shows who (or what) you are, whilst your register shows what you are doing.” He explains that registers can vary based on formality, professional setting, or function, such as academic writing, legal speech, or casual conversation. Therefore, a student might use a formal register to pose a question in a lecture and then switch to casual language directly after turning to their friend.

In contrast, Wardhaugh (2015 [2002]: 53) associates registers with specific occupations or social groups. Although this view has been critiqued by Lewandowski (2010: 68) for overlooking the situational nature of registers, it nevertheless places the necessary emphasis on social influence. Trudgill (2000 [1974]: 81–82) and Biber and Conrad (2009: 6) stress that register studies analyse how language use is shaped by context, rather than social identity alone, and that registers are “characterized entirely, or almost so, by vocabulary differences” (Trudgill 2000 [1974]: 81). Their perspectives, in dialogue with Wardhaugh’s, underscore the role of lexical choices in signalling social belonging. As such, register can be imitated through deliberate vocabulary choices, similarly to how people may mask their accent to blend in. Evidently, while register is shaped by context, it ultimately depends on the speaker’s choice whether to conform to a particular situation or social identity, or not.

The concepts of *idiolect*, *sociolect*, and *register* are effective lenses for analysing characterisation and social dynamics in a work of fiction. An idiolect reflects a character’s unique speech patterns, influenced by personal as well as social factors, while a sociolect represents the shared linguistic features of a particular social group. Registers, shaped by context and formality, can also contribute to characterisation, as shifts in register may reflect a

character's adaptability, social awareness, or desire to belong. These distinctions between individual speech, group identity, and context-driven language use provide a foundation for interpreting character relationships and the broader social structure within a narrative.

### **2.3. Language Varieties in Character Construction**

The use of language variation — such as idiolects, sociolects, and register — has long been central to literary characterisation, employed to express a character's background, social status, and position in certain contexts. From the early examples of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Shakespeare's plays, which employed distinct speech styles to reflect regional, class-based, or professional identities (Ilhem 2013: 103-104), to Sir Walter Scott, whose use of dialect exemplified the characters' division into "us" and "them" (Macaulay 1993 as cited in Ilhem 2013: 110–111), language has functioned as a literary tool for authenticity and differentiation. The latter division is most often associated with cultural divides, but also with the social split into "high" and "low" classes, often marked through the use of standard or nonstandard language. However, Reichelt (2018: 16) points that "social class is not universally or indefinitely applicable", changing across cultures and history. Therefore, these associations are not static, and characters are often designed to reflect, reinforce, or sometimes break the linguistic boxes inherent to a particular time and place.

Looking more closely at individual characters' language use shows the importance of idiolects. Federici (2011: 8) finds that idiolects do not always make characters stand out or more memorable, but they render them identifiable by revealing aspects of their identity through language. However, characters' idiolects are rarely isolated. Instead, they are shaped by and contribute to larger sociolects, reflecting collective social characteristics like class, geography, or ethnicity, as is stated by Federici (2011: 8). He continues that, as a result, language choices in literature do more than build personality; they embed characters within a broader social

landscape. This is evident in works like G. B. Shaw's *Pygmalion*, where Eliza's linguistic transformation from cockney to Received Pronunciation symbolises not only class mobility but also societal ideals, as Thren (2018: 112) has commented on the movie adaptation *My Fair Lady*. Similarly, in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, English signifies privilege while Malayalam marks familial and cultural belonging, illustrating how bilingualism can reflect layered identities and social dynamics (Mittal, Vashist & Chaudhary 2024: 2645).

Different varieties of language play a key role in shaping characters in literature. Authors use language to portray characters' social class, geographical background, and cultural identity while also drawing attention to broader social divisions. Characters' speech patterns can reinforce or resist societal norms, making language not just a reflection of personality but an essential tool for exploring social relationships and identities.

#### **2.4. Social Stratification Through Language in Translation**

Language is never neutral; as Bassnett and Lefevere (1990: viii) and Lefevere (1992: 14) argue, it carries traces of ideology, identity, and power, meaning that translation is inherently a form of rewriting that can reshape both literature and the ideas and ideologies of its readers. Therefore, translation holds considerable influence, and the translator bears the responsibility of conveying the author's ideas to the best of their abilities. Berthele (2000: 1) notes that bridging the equivalency between source language (SL) and target language (TL) dialects and sociolects is one of the most challenging tasks for a translator. Halliday (2002: 169) illustrates this challenge by comparing registers (typically easier to translate due to their difference in content) with sociolects and dialects which are embedded in specific cultural contexts, and can therefore only be imitated in the TL, not faithfully reproduced. Thus, translators must decide whether to preserve stylistic nuances, such as a character's dialect or idiolect, or prioritise readability in the target culture.

While some prefer the conservative approach of standardising nonstandard speech for the purpose of clarity, others take more experimental routes, using dialects or certain linguistic markers in the TL to better convey the differences in the language of the source text (ST) (Federici 2011: 10; Benlakdar 2020: 93). However, the latter approach may result in the misuse of minority languages or embed unintended connotations. Despite this, these strategies align with the two translation norms identified by Toury (1995 as cited in Pym 2008: 311) and further emphasised by Federici (2011: 11): standardisation, or erasure of variation, and interference through creative attempts to maintain the social significance of nonstandard speech. In this thesis, standardisation is used in the sense of rendering the linguistic variation more homogeneous or similar to the standard version of the language, while “creative attempts” may entail the use of TL vocabulary and expressions that are associated with a particular dialect or social class in order to domesticate the ST. For clarification, Venuti (1995: 49) describes linguistic domestication as bringing elements of the target culture and language into the ST in order to produce a target text (TT) that is better understood by the target audience. However, neither standardisation nor domestication may be the “correct” choice, leaving the translator with the heavy responsibility of making it.

Challenges arise when linguistic and cultural systems differ to such an extent that a similar expression simply does not exist. This is particularly relevant in the context of Estonian, where the written language is relatively young and lacks the social status markers found in older literary traditions. Thus, language variety classification in Estonian differs significantly from the more specific definitions found in other cultures. Hennoste (2000: 30) compares Trudgill’s view of written language as relatively uniform and restricted with the Estonian (and Finnish) perspective which describes it rather as broad and heterogeneous. This highlights that applying linguistic classifications from other traditions to Estonian may result in oversimplification. Hennoste (2000: 29) also criticises the traditional division of Estonian into just literary language

and dialects for being outdated and incompatible with modern sociolinguistic classifications. This is especially relevant when analysing literary texts, where language variation is extensive.

The classification of sublanguages in Estonian remains an ongoing issue as linguistic divisions are inherently recursive, Hennoste (2000: 30) claims. He adds that just as dialects can be divided into smaller speech varieties, other linguistic subgroups, such as sociolects and registers, may require further hierarchical structuring. Hennoste and Pajusalu (2013: 128) note that due to the abolition of the class system that had begun to develop before the Soviet Union, Estonian lacks established sociolects; the only distinguishable division is between literary language and slang (130). This explains the possible challenges in translating sociolects and register. In discussing the distinctions between everyday language and its standardised version, Hennoste and Pajusalu (2013: 68) acknowledge that there is a small number of features that differentiate Estonian vernacular from its standard form. They note that the latter is more pre-planned, formulaic, and structured, yet also emphasise that the vernacular is our first language and serves as the foundation for acquiring other language registers, including the standard (75). As a result, vernacular features inevitably appear in our language use (especially spoken discourse), regardless of the intended register.

Regarding register division, Hennoste and Pajusalu (2013: 49) state that linguists have categorised two main language registers: spoken and written, with the latter often perceived as more formal. Although further subcategories exist, such as mediated spoken communication or online written discourse, there are no formal distinctions of higher and lower register as their characteristics are not equally dividable into a hierarchy. Therefore, when translating character speech into Estonian, it may be more practical to distinguish higher or lower registers by drawing on common stereotypes associated with register subcategories (e.g. online language is typically seen as more informal than printed text).

The connection between language and social stratification poses challenges in translation, particularly when linguistic systems differ significantly, as is the case between English and Estonian. The lack of established sociolects and hierarchical register distinctions in Estonian adds another layer of complexity to translation, requiring translators to be adaptable and considerate. They must navigate the subtleties of conveying character speech, levels of formality, and cultural context, while also being informed about the appropriate practices for conveying such aspects, and apply the suitable forms according to their judgement.

### **3. CHARACTER SPEECH AS A VEHICLE FOR SOCIAL DIVISION: LINGUISTIC VARIATION IN ENGLISH AND ESTONIAN**

The following part of the thesis analyses the employment of language varieties in Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* and its translation „Salajane ajalugu“ by Liina Viies. The central hypothesis is that although there are parts of the translation where it is possible to render the idiosyncrasies of speech, the characters' linguistic (and, therefore, social) differences might not be as apparent in translation as they are in the original.

The analysis is divided into four subsections. The first section will give an overview of the methodology: the frameworks applied in the analysis and the reasoning behind it. The following three sections focus on the use of registers, sociolects, and idiolects in the ST and TT, analysing how these linguistic varieties are conveyed in English and in Estonian.

#### **3.1. Methodology**

Literary translation can be defined as a process through which a similar version of the source text is produced. Consequently, translation analyses are mainly conducted by employing the comparative method — the analysis of related systems (in this case, textual material) for possible patterns, and similar and distinct features (Griffiths 2017: 474). Through the process

of comparison, patterns emerge and the methods used for translation become evident allowing the researcher to draw conclusions that are grounded in the data. A similar approach is used in the application of the sociological method, grounded theory, which is defined by its developers Glaser and Strauss (1967: 1) as “the discovery of theory from data.” They believe this method to be the most effective for generating theories that are useful in practice and suited to specific datasets (1967: 3). Thus, rather than testing an existing theory on the data, it draws from it, building theory from the data, as well as spurring further data collection driven by the emerging theory. As both methods form their theoretical frameworks around the findings, comparative translation analysis is evidently and inherently conducted using methods that are similar to the methodology used in grounded theory.

Strauss and Corbin (2015 [1990]) also focus on the process of data analysis, the first step defined as the conceptualisation of findings, or open coding (2015: 104), followed by data categorisation, or axial coding (2015: 166), both of which were essentially the methods for the analysis in this thesis. Therefore, in the context of this study, the application of the principles of grounded theory means that the hypotheses, research questions, and data categories developed and were clarified throughout the process of analysis. The idiolects, sociolects, and register found in character speech and defined in the literature review are marked in bold in the sample extracts and clarified in the ensuing discussion. The division is discussed in reverse, beginning with the broader elements of register and sociolects before identifying the more individualistic markers in idiolects.

Regarding register, the characters’ spoken as well as written language in the original and in translation is examined, e.g. the Classics students’ conversations with their professor best reflect the social hierarchy stemming from his position and competence, and the characters’ written correspondence provides insight into more deliberate language use. Sociolects are explored through a spoken exchange between Richard and Francis which highlights the

characters' distinct language habits that separate them from the general student body. Idiolects are analysed by comparing the speech patterns of Henry and Bunny in both texts. The sample extracts were selected based on visible linguistic variety diversion from the norm, such as differences in sentence structure, levels of formality, and grammar and punctuation in the characters' written correspondence.

### **3.2. Register in the Novel and Its Translation**

As established in the literature review, register refers to the level of formality and function of language in specific settings. As Hennoste and Pajusalu (2013) also noted, language register, especially in Estonian, is divided into two — spoken and written — and as the latter is often deemed more formal due to its inherent prearranged nature, written correspondence may be the best basis for determining language registers. Due to that, this section is divided into verbal and written communication to give a more comprehensive overview of register use in the novel.

#### **3.2.1. Register in Verbal Communication**

The characters' spoken register becomes most evident in the students' communication with authority figures. For example, in the characters' conversations with Julian (see Examples 1 and 2), the students adopt a somewhat more formal register. While Julian's language use is not overly formal, its slightly old-fashioned and refined quality reflects his social distance and age gap with the students. Although in their communication, there remains a level of informality due to their frequent meetings, Julian's cultivated idiolect sets the tone for academic as well as social exchanges between him and his students.

In Examples 1 and 2, Julian is seen to employ genteel expressions such as *goodness* and *dear me*, illustrating his cultivated idiolect. His use of phrases such as *really quite worried* and

*how thrilling* as well as his tendency to end his sentences with discourse markers (*you know*) or tag questions (*life has got awfully dramatic all of a sudden, hasn't it?*) give his speech a pretentious quality often associated with standard British English or upper-class speech patterns, and adds a somewhat theatrical tone to the conversation. However, the latter also shows his considerate engagement with his conversation partners. In Example 1, Francis' responses of *are you leaving now?* and *do you want me to drive you?* do not display overt features of formality, the lack of which could be attributed to his anxious state but also points to the generally more informal or conversational register used by younger people which contrasts with the elevated speech of Julian, a Classics professor about to retire. In Example 2, however, Richard responds to Julian's inquiry about being in love with the girl he got in a fight for by saying *I'm afraid I don't know her too well*, his regret emphasised by the phrase *I'm afraid*, which subtly aligns Richard's register with Julian's, highlighting the influence Julian's speech has on his students.

*Example 1.*

<p>He glanced at his watch. "<b>Goodness</b>," he said, "it's late." Francis started from his morose silence. "<b>Are you leaving now?</b>" he asked Julian anxiously. "<b>Do you want me to drive you?</b>" This was a blatant attempt at escape. [...] "No, thank you, he said. "Poor Edmund. I'm <b>really quite</b> worried <b>you know</b>." (Tartt 1993 [1992]: 382)</p>	<p>Ta heitis pilgu kellale. "<b>Taevake</b>," sõnas ta, "kell on palju." Francis ärkas võpatades oma mornist vaikusest. "<b>Kas te hakkate minema?</b>" küsis ta Julianilt ärevalt. "<b>Tahate, ma viin teid autoga?</b>" See oli ilmselge põgenemiskatse. [...] "Ei, tänan," kostis ta. "Vaene Edmund. <b>Teate</b>, ma olen <b>tõesti väga</b> mures." (Tartt 2021 [2007]: 398)</p>
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*Example 2.*

<p>"So it was a brawl," he said, with childish delight. "<b>How thrilling</b>. Are you in love with her?" "<b>I'm afraid</b> I don't know her too well." He laughed. "<b>Dear me</b>, you are being truthful today," he said, with remarkable perspicuity. "Life has got <b>awfully dramatic</b> all of a sudden, <b>hasn't it?</b> Just like a fiction..." (Tartt 1993 [1992]: 392)</p>	<p>"Nii et oligi kaklus," lausus ta lapselikku heameelt tundes. "<b>Kui põnev</b>. Kas te olete <b>sellesse tüdrukusse</b> armunud?" "<b>Ma kardan</b>, et ma ei tunne teda kuigi hästi." Ta naeris. "<b>Oh aeg</b>, te olete täna tõepoolest siiras," sõnas ta märkimisväärselt mõistvalt. "Elu on ühtäkki <b>hirmus dramaatiliseks</b> muutunud, <b>kas pole?</b> Just nagu kirjanduses..." (Tartt 2021 [2007]: 410)</p>
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In the Estonian translation, the vocabulary inherent to Julian is adapted well with the exclamations *taevake* (heavens), *armas taevas* (dear heavens) and *oh aeg* (oh dear), which carry a colloquial and similarly archaic and refined tone, fitting Julian's age and his stylised manner of speaking. An analogous effect is achieved with the direct translations of the tag question *hasn't it?* (*kas pole?*), and the phrases *really quite* (*tõesti väga*), *how thrilling* (*kui põnev*), and *I'm afraid I don't know her too well* (*ma kardan, et ma ei tunne teda kuigi hästi*), conveying an impression of refined speech. Interestingly, the formality of the original becomes even more prominent in the translated extracts through the use of the second person plural pronoun *teie/te* instead of second person singular *sina* as a marker of respect – an aspect not explicit in English as the singularity and plurality as well as formality and informality are merged in the pronoun *you* and its meaning depends on context. For instance, the phrase *do you want me to drive you?* becomes *tahate, ma viin teid autoga?* and *are you in love with her?* becomes *kas te olete sellesse tüdrukusse armunud?*. Since Estonian does not have gender specific pronouns, the translation's addition of the phrase *sellesse tüdrukusse* to specify the pronoun *her*, adds further formality by making the question more detailed.

### 3.2.2. Register in Written Communication

The characters' use of register becomes evident most distinctly through their written correspondence. To get a more comprehensive overview of register variation among the characters, Richard's written correspondence with Henry as well as Bunny will be analysed.

Henry, whose demeanour is described by Richard as one of graceful formality (Tartt 1993: 17) speaks and writes in that manner as well. In written correspondence (see Example 3), he uses many elements of formality, including the greeting *Dear Richard*, expressions of well-wishes, and despite his writing to a friend, his wording, too, is very formal, with phrases such as *I am less comfort to them than they, in their bereavement, can recognize and extend an*

*invitation*, ending the letter with the phrase *I look forward to*. Furthermore, his references to Bunny's parents with the titles Mr and Mrs and proper names instead of "Bunny's dad/father" adds to the degree of formality. Notable is also his ending the letter with lines from the *Iliad* as it exemplifies the sociolect of the Classics students. Henry compares his situation to that of Odysseus', communicating to Richard his desperation for his friends' presence "on enemy territory" yet also conveying his ability to get through this on his own, should Richard be unable to arrive early.

*Example 3.*

<p><b>Dear Richard,</b>  <b>I hope you are well.</b> For several days I have been at the Corcorans house. Although I feel <b>I am less comfort to them than they, in their bereavement, can recognize</b>, they have allowed me to <b>be of help to them in many small household matters</b>.  <b>Mr Corcoran</b> has asked me to write to Bunny's friends at school and <b>extend an invitation</b> to spend the night before the funeral at his house. I understand you will be <i>put up(?)</i> in the basement. If you do not plan <b>to attend</b>, please <b>telephone Mrs Corcoran</b> and let her know.  <b>I look forward to seeing you</b> at the funeral if not, as I hope, before.  <i>There was no signature, but instead a tag from the Iliad, in Greek. It was from the eleventh book, when Odysseus, cut off from his friends, finds himself alone and on enemy territory:</i>          Be strong, saith my heart; I am a soldier;          I have seen worse sights than this.          (Tartt: 1993 [1992]: 433)</p>	<p><b>Armas Richard!</b>  <b>Loodan, et Sul läheb hästi.</b> Olen viibinud Corcoranide pool mitu päeva. Kuigi ma tunnen, et <b>minust on neile vähem lohutust, kui nad oma leinas aru saavad</b>, on nad siiski <b>lasknud mul paljudes väikestes majapidamist puudutavates küsimustes endid aidata</b>.  <b>Hr Corcoran</b> palus, et ma kirjutaksin Bunny koolisõpradele ja edastaksin kutse veeta matusele eelnev öö nende pool. <b>Minu arusaamist mööda paigutatakse Sind</b> keldrikorrusele. Kui <b>Sa</b> ei plaani tulla, <b>ole nii hea</b>, helista <b>pr Corcoranile</b> ja anna talle teada.  <b>Loodan Sind näha</b> matusel, kui mitte juba varem.  <i>Allkirja ei olnud, selle asemel oli kreeka keelne tsitaat "Iliases". See oli üheteistkümnendast raamatust, kus sõpradest äralõigatud Odysseus avastab, et on üksi vaenlase territooriumil:</i>          Vaprust, ütles mu süda; ma olen sõdur;          olen hullemat näinud kui see.          (Tartt 2021 [2007]: 450)</p>
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Although the translation of Henry's letter begins with the, perhaps, overly familiar *armas Richard!* (beloved or dearest Richard!), even replacing the comma with an exclamation point, it maintains as much formality as the language allows. Considering Estonian does not have the same level of variety between registers as English, words and phrases such as *bereavement*, *be of help*, *household matters*, and *put up* that convey it best are somewhat neutralised, and the translation of *please* with *ole nii hea* (be a dear) gives the exchange a slightly old-fashioned and informal quality. However, the linguistic complexity in Henry's idiolect is partially preserved with specifying words such as *majapidamist puudutavates*

*küsimustes* (questions regarding the household), *endid aidata* ([let] themselves be assisted), *minu arusaamist mööda* (by my understanding). Him referring to Bunny's parents with titles preceding their surname has been domesticised, as the Estonian equivalents "härra" (*hr*) and "proua" (*pr*) are etymologically of German origin, as Estonian literary and translation scholar Anne Lange (2015: 143) notes, and due to historical factors more common in Estonian than Mr and Mrs. Despite the difference in origin, their level of formality is of equal degree. Furthermore, although the capitalisation of the pronouns *Sina* and *Sa* is often not recommended, here it helps balance the formal register inherent in Henry's idiolect and the occasion of writing to a friend.

The difference between Henry's and Bunny's manners of writing is drastic. In addition to Bunny's idiolect being in direct contrast with Henry's, Henry takes on an even higher register in his written language, while Bunny writes as he speaks, with his errors in written elements such as grammar and punctuation amplifying his careless and casual way of engaging with the people around him, as is demonstrated in Example 4 and the Appendices Eg. 1 and Eg. 2. His customary greeting is *Richard old man* or *old Gal* (depending on the recipient) and sign-off the friendly *yours* or even the conversational *see you soon* with the nickname *Bun* or *B*. His use of the abbreviation *s.p.* may demonstrate his acknowledged disregard for grammatically correct spelling or simple cluelessness regarding its correct form. He uses elliptical sentences and slang, and his writing is characterised by the many punctuation and spelling errors. Besides shaping the character's personality, attitude, and social background, his mistake-prone language also serves a deeper purpose in the narrative: it is later referenced and used to increase tension when Bunny writes Julian a letter incriminating the others; however, Julian takes the letter for a practical joke because of its mistake-heavy language use. He is not aware of Bunny's typical written register as the others regularly correct Bunny's assignments to him.

## Example 4.

<p>Richard <b>old Man</b>  <b>What do you Say</b> we have Lunch on Saturday, <b>maybe about 1?</b> I know this <b>Great little place</b>. Cocktails, <b>the business</b>. <b>My treat</b>. Please come.  <b>Yours,</b>  <b>Bun</b>  p.s. wear a Tie. I am Sure you would have anyway but they will <b>drag some godawful one out of the back</b> and <b>meke (s.p.)</b> you Wear it if you <b>Dont</b>.  (Tartt 1993 [1992]: 46)</p>	<p>Richard, <b>vana semu</b>  <b>Mis sa arvad</b>, kui läheks laupäeval Lõunat sööma, <b>nii umbes 1 paiku?</b> Ma teen <b>üht Lahedat kohta</b>. Kokteilid ja <b>puha</b>. Ma teen välja. Palun tule.  <b>Sinu,</b>  <b>Bun</b>  p.s. tule lipsuga. Sa oleksid kindlasti <b>nagunii</b> tulnud, aga kui ei, <b>kougivad nad tagaruumist välja mingi jubetise</b> ja sunnivad seda kandma.  (Tartt 2021 [2007]: 57)</p>
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In translation, there are aspects that have been similarly conveyed. For instance, the question *what do you Say we have Lunch* has been translated with the Estonian conditional ending *-ks* to be the offer *mis sa arvad, kui läheks Lõunat sööma*; the sentiment and structure of both phrases are similar, as neither leave too much room for refusal, especially when compared to the more tentative alternative *would you [like to] come to lunch with me?*. The translation of *what do you say* as *mis sa arvad* works well, however, a more colloquial tone could have been conveyed with the direct equivalent *mis sa ütled*. Further, the substitution of *anyway* with *nagunii*, the shorter version of *niikuinii*, also translates some of the original tone. The most prominent element of Bunny's letters, the capitalisation, has been standardised at places and the punctuation in the translation is more grammatically correct than in the original, e.g. the vocative *Richard* in the greeting is added a comma in the translation. The latter is likely due to the fact that the standard greeting in correspondence in Estonian is *Tere, Richard!* (Hello, Richard!), the importance of a comma before the vocative especially emphasised. The sentences in English are elliptical whereas the translation renders them more complete, e.g. *my treat* rendered with *ma teen välja* (I will take care of it) which could also have been *minu kulul* (on me), to better convey the careless tone. The omission of the abbreviation *s.p.*, marking a spelling mistake, is reasonable in the translation, as possible equivalents are not typically used in Estonian.

However, many words and phrases used in the translation compensate the standardisation. The friendly tone of the greeting *old Man* is conveyed with the phrase *vana semu* (old pal), emphasising the camaraderie. Further such renderings include the maintained vagueness of the phrase *maybe about 1* in *nii umbes 1 paiku* (about around 1 or so), *the business* translated into the emphatic *ja puha* (and everything/all), and the translation of *drag some godawful one out of the back* into *kougivad nad tagaruumist välja mingi jubetise* (fish some horridity out of the backroom), the latter enforcing the creative colloquialism with the employment of the words *koukima* (fish out) and *jubetis* (horridity).

### 3.3. Sociolects in the Novel and Its Translation

Sociolects' purpose is to construct group identity through shared vocabulary and ways of expression. The language used by the central characters of the novel, who form a group of friends and study partners, differs significantly from that of the other students on campus. In contrast to the slang and profanities often present in the fragmented speech of the latter, the sociolect of the Classicists is characterised by intellectualism, their use of Latin and Greek, and their academic as well as casual conversations around philosophical and moral dilemmas, giving thus a linguistic "superpower" or "ticket in" to the characters versed in it. Near the beginning of the novel, Francis addresses Richard, who at the time was a novice in the group, with the question *are you the new neanias?* (*neanias* meaning *young man*), using code switching. That is followed by another question *cubitum eamus?* (let's go to bed?) (see Appendix Eg. 3) as Francis employs his knowledge of Latin and mocks Richard's then outsider status in the group. Later on, Francis addresses Richard in Greek (see Example 5), yet this time with the intention of remaining unintelligible to prying ears. As is also acknowledged by Mills (2005: 14), this kind of language use "symbolizes the Otherness of these students" and functions as a form of secret in-group speech.

Although the conversation in Example 5 is conveyed in English, the author flaunts its classical origin by distorting typical English grammar: using present instead of perfect tense (*the mother grieves* instead of *is grieving*) or perfect tense instead of past or present (*there has been much rumor* instead of *is* or *was*). The lack of auxiliary verbs (*do not fear* instead of the possible *don't be scared*) and contracted forms (*do not, it is, there has been*) demonstrates a formal, archaic tone different from their usual language habits and creates a sense of the text being translated in real time. Unusual lexical choices such as *living men* (instead of *the living*), *much rumor* (instead of *many rumors*), *wicked woman*, *pray tell*, and *citizens* further enhance this effect, evoking images of classical themes and demonstrating the limited vocabulary and spontaneity of the exchange, setting it apart from the characters' usual speech habits.

*Example 5.*

<p>"Do not fear," he said to me. "It is the mother. She is concerned with the dishonor of the son having to do with wine." [...] "There has been much rumor," he said at last. "The mother grieves. Not for her son," he added hastily, when he saw I was about to speak, "for she is a wicked woman. Rather she grieves for the shame which has fallen on her house." "What shame is this?" "Oivov," he said impatiently. "Φάρμακον. She seeks to show that his corpse does not hold wine" (and here he employed a very elegant and untranslatable metaphor; dregs in the empty wineskin of his body). "And why, pray tell, does she care?" "Because there is talk among the citizens. It is shameful for a young man to die while drunk." (Tartt 1993 [1992]: 431)</p>	<p>"Ära karda," ütles Francis mulle. "Asi on emas. Ta on mures poja häbi pärast, seoses veiniga." [...] "On olnud palju kuulujutte," ütles ta viimaks. "Ema kurvastab. Mitte poja pärast," lisas ta kähku, kui nägi, et ma tahan midagi vahele öelda, "sest ta on nurjatu naine. Pigem kurvastab häbi pärast, mis on tabanud tema kodu." "Mis häbi see on?" "Oivov," lausus ta läbematult. "Φάρμακον. Ta tahab näidata, et poja laip ei sisalda veini." (ja siinkohal kasutas ta väga elegantset ja tõlkimatut metafoori: veiniriismeid tema keha tühjas nahklähtris). "Ja miks, ütle palun, see talle korda läheb?" "Sest kodanike seas käivad jutud. Purjuspäi surra on noorele mehele häbistav." (Tartt 2021 [2007]: 448)</p>
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In translation, these stylistic choices are largely preserved. The translator reinforces the tone and the unusual tense use through passive constructions such as *on olnud palju kuulujutte* (has been many rumours) and *on tabanud tema kodu* (has struck her home), and a lack of auxiliaries with *kurvastab* (verb for *feels sad*) instead of the possible alternatives *on kurb* (is sad) or *leinab* (grieves). Instead of improving the flow with conjunctions, the translator has maintained the fragmented sentences, conveying to the reader that the character is translating

the information into Greek without enough time to adapt to its structure and vocabulary. The sense of archaism is reinforced in translation through rendering the phrase *there is talk* with the slightly figurative expression *käivad jutud*. Further, conveying words such as *wicked*, *citizens*, and *shameful* with the equivalents *nurjatu*, *kodanikud*, and *häbistav*, and *drunk* with the figurative *purjuspäi* show the translator's intent to use similarly constrained and stylised vocabulary reminiscent of the ancient or at least obsolete language patterns.

### 3.4. Idiolects in the Novel and Its Translation

Idiolects comprise the linguistic characteristics of an individual that distinguish them from others, although sociolectal, dialectal, and registral influences will inevitably also be present. Therefore, character idiolects are identified by the nuances that allow readers to differentiate between characters even when such distinctions are not made explicit otherwise. As mentioned earlier, apart from being full of Classical references, Henry's and Professor Julian's idiolects are of a higher register compared to other characters and convey a sense of refinement and precision. In contrast, Bunny's idiolect is based on a different register, defined by his frequent use of slang and colloquial language, and reflecting his more informal, colloquial and lax manner of speaking.

For instance, Example 6 is an extract of a conversation between Henry and Charles where they discuss their preferences regarding mountainous terrain or the seaside. Henry uses many conjunctive words and phrases such as *in that regard*, *rather*, *rather like*, and frequently makes use of the superlative as illustrated in expressions such as *the slightest bit of interest*, *the oddest tongues*, *the most barbarous*. These choices render his speech more expressive and elevated. Additionally, he uses the pronoun *one* and other more formal expressions such as *remote prospects* or *line of reasoning*, making his vocabulary and sentence structure appear arranged and suitable for an academic setting. Throughout, Henry makes references to Greek

history and literature, and at the end of his explanation, he is said to be “lapsing into Greek”, further emphasising the pretentious nature of his manner of speaking. However, this also exemplifies the sociolect of the group, as Charles, understanding the language, is able to comprehend Henry’s meaning within their shared context.

*Example 6.*

<p>[Charles:] “I’ve always liked the mountains better than the seashore.”</p> <p>“So have I,” said Henry. “I suppose <b>in that regard</b> my tastes are <b>rather</b> Hellenistic. <b>Landlocked places interest me, remote prospects, wild country.</b> I’ve never had <b>the slightest bit of interest</b> in the sea. <b>Rather</b> like what Homer says about the Arcadians, you remember? <i>With ships they had nothing to do...</i>”</p> <p>“It’s because you grew up in the Midwest,” Charles said.</p> <p>“But if <b>one follows that line of reasoning</b>, then it follows that I would love flat lands, and plains. Which I don’t. The descriptions of Troy in Iliad are horrible to me — all flat land and burning sun. No. I’ve always been drawn to broken, wild terrain. <b>The oddest tongues come from such places, and the strangest mythologies, and the oldest cities, and the most barbarous religions</b> — Pan himself was born in the mountains, <b>you know.</b> And Zeus. <i>In Parrhasia it was that Rheia bore thee,</i>” he said dreamily, <b>lapsing into Greek</b>, “<i>where was a hill sheltered with the thickest brush...</i>”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Tartt 1993 [1992]: 233)</p>	<p>[Charles:] “Mulle on mäed alati rohkem meeldinud kui meri.”</p> <p>“Minule samuti,” ütles Henry. “Ma arvan, et mul on <b>ses suhtes</b> üsna hellenistlik maitse. Mind <b>paeluvad sisemaa paigad, kõrvalised kohad, kõnnumaa.</b> Mere vastu pole ma kunagi <b>vähimatki huvi tundnud.</b> Umbes nagu Homeros ütleb arkaadlaste kohta, mäletate? <i>Laevadega neil pistmist polnud...</i>”</p> <p>“See on sellepärast, et sa oled kasvanud üles Kesk-Läänes,” tähendas Charles.</p> <p>“<b>Sellest loogikast lähtudes</b> võiks järeldada, et mulle meeldivad lauskmaa ja tasandikud. Mis mulle ei meeldi. Trooja kirjeldused “Iliases” on minu meelest jubedad — ainult üks tasane maa ja kõrvetav päike. Ei. Mind on alati tõmmanud ebakorrapärane, metsik maastik. Sellistest kohtadest on pärit <b>kõige veidramad keeled ja kõige kummalisemad mütoloogiad, kõige vanemad linnad ja kõige barbaarsemad religioonid</b> — Paan ise sündis mägedes, <b>teate.</b> Ja Zeus. <i>Rheia ilmale kandis su Parrahasias,</i>” lausus ta unelevalt, <b>minnes sujuvalt üle kreeka keelele,</b> “<i>Pie a la Mode...</i>”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Tartt 2021 [2007]: 247)</p>
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The distinctiveness of Henry’s idiolect becomes somewhat diminished in translation, with certain aspects standardised or made more casual, such as the translation of *in that regard* as *ses suhtes*. However other translation choices partially counterbalance this, as seen in the adaptation of terms and phrases such as *interest* with *paeluma* (captivate) and *if one follows that line of reasoning* with *sellest loogikast lähtudes* (going by that logic). Henry’s list of characteristics for “such places” separated by several *and*-conjunctions in English, demonstrating his eagerness and him spontaneously coming up with more things to add, is replaced with the seemingly more contemplated enumeration, as the items are paired together, and the pairs then separated with the conjunction *and*: *kõige veidramad keeled ja kõige kummalisemad mütoloogiad, kõige vanemad linnad ja kõige barbaarsemad religioonid*. In

addition to sounding more natural in Estonian, it also portrays Henry as slightly more prepared for answering such questions.

In regard to the final quote, the original gives a better idea and explanation to Henry's spontaneous burst into the Greek verse, as the line *where was a hill sheltered with the thickest brush* references the landscape he was talking about. However, in the translation, the verse ends with the line *Pie a la Mode*, a mystery to which I was not able to find an answer to as Uku Masing's Estonian translation of the poem that is referenced in the footnotes, continues in similar as the English verse. Although this abnormality renders Henry's sense less logical to the reader, leaving them out of the characters' sociolect, its vagueness nevertheless maintains his pretentious character.

In contrast, during a conversation between Bunny and Richard (see Example 7), Bunny makes plans for a trip to France, boasting about his affinity for travel, meanwhile dismissing his recent trip to Italy and reducing French culture to "a few of the native customs". He uses colloquial phrases such as *a real doozy*, *kind of a sinkhole*, *gad about*, and *have a ball* and elliptical sentence structure as seen in the question *ever been to France, Richard?*. Combined with the dismissive tone he uses when talking about his lavish Italian trip, these expressions and features of his speech depict his character as jock-like, arrogant, and entitled. Furthermore, his poor attempt at mimicking French with the phrase *may wee* is drastically different from Henry's pretentious monologues of Greek verse and portrays Bunny's shallow engagement with the world and the cultures around him.

#### Example 7.

<p>"Ever been to France, Richard?"          "No," I said.          "Then you better come with us this summer."          "Us? Who?"          "Henry and me."          I was so taken aback that all I could do was blink at him.          "France?" I said.  <b>"May wee. Two-month tour. A real doozy. Have a look."</b> He tossed me the magazine, which I now saw was a glossy brochure.</p>	<p>"Prantsusmaal oled käinud, Richard?"          "Ei."          "Siis peaksid suvel meiega kaasa tulema."          "Meiega? Kellega?"          "Henry ja minuga."          Ma olin nii jahmunud, et suutsin talle vaid juhmit otsa vahtida.          "Prantsusmaale?" küsisin ma.  <b>"Mee uii. Kahekuune ringreis. Viimase peal värk. Vaata ise."</b> Ta viskas mulle ajakirja, mis, nagu ma nüüd nägin, oli läikpaberist brošüür.</p>
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<p>[...]  <b>"Looks great, doesn't it?"</b> said Bunny.  "Fabulous."  "Rome was <b>all right</b> but actually <b>it was kind of a sinkhole when you get right down to it</b>. Besides, I like to <b>gad about a little more myself</b>. Stay on the move, see a few of the native customs. Just between you and me, I bet Henry's going to <b>have a ball</b> with this."  <p style="text-align: right;">(Tartt 1993 [1992]: 227)</p> </p>	<p>[...]  <b>"Lahe, mis?"</b> küsis Bunny.  "Muinasjutuline."  "Roomas <b>polnud viga</b>, aga <b>kui järele mõelda, siis oli see ikka üks paras urgas</b>. Pealegi meeldib mulle endale rohkem ringi tõmmata. Olla liikvel, <b>näha väheke kohalikke kombeid</b>. Omavahel öeldes, ma vean kihla, et Henry hakkab <b>vastu punnima</b>."  <p style="text-align: right;">(Tartt 2021 [2007]: 240)</p> </p>
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Bunny's idiolect is more preserved in the Estonian translation than Henry's, with the colloquial phrases *a real doozy*, *kind of a sinkhole*, and *gad about* translated as *viimase peal värk* (top-notch stuff), *ikka üks paras urgas* (still a real dump), and *ringi tõmmata* (to get around). This might indicate that it is easier to find different colourful colloquialisms in Estonian as opposed to markers of an elevated register. His often elliptical sentence structure is also maintained through the omission of the interrogative word *kas* (have you/whether) in both the original and the translation. Moreover, the standardisation of certain phrases is compensated elsewhere, for example through translating expressions such as *was all right* to *polnud viga* or *see a few of the native customs* to *näha väheke kohalikke kombeid*, the Estonian *väheke* giving it a slightly colloquial tone. The meaning of the final line, *Henry's going to have a ball with this* has been altered in Estonian with the phrase *Henry hakkab vastu punnima* (Henry's going to resist). While this could have been an oversight on the translator's behalf, either explanation would suit the context: whether Bunny thinks Henry would love the luxurious excursion or he is aware of Henry's disdain for travelling with him, as both are plausible at that point in the story.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* can be considered a critique of elitism, exemplified by the social stratification between the students and the formation of an exclusive clique, emphasised through elements such as clothing, intellectual pursuits, and language. The wide

range of language varieties in English affords the author the necessary tools for shaping the story's central hierarchy. Therefore, as an essential part of the narrative, this thesis explored the linguistic features employed by the author to distinguish language varieties such as idiolects, sociolects, and register, and how the translator conveyed these distinctions in the more limited linguistic system of Estonian.

The literature review gave an overview of three language varieties: idiolects, which describe the unique speech patterns of an individual, sociolects, which define the shared linguistic features of a social group, and register, which may change according to context, such as the speakers' relationship or the setting. An idiolect is mainly influenced by personal factors but may also incorporate elements of sociolects and register, as people's linguistic habits are consciously or subconsciously shaped by their social context. Furthermore, these varieties were described in the context of character speech and translation. Distinct and recognisable character speech is achieved through consistency in creating character idiolects, and the use of sociolects and register may reveal key aspects of the narrative and its social hierarchy. Therefore, the translation of a literary text can shape the reader's understanding of the author's meaning. Because the extent of variation depends on the language and the history of the culture, translation is bound to distort the original meaning.

The data for analysis emerged by examining the novel and its translation in parallel. The comparative analysis found that English has a more diverse vocabulary for conveying higher registers in character speech, as in the Estonian translation, the vocabulary remains relatively similar to the vernacular used in everyday communication. Professor Julian's register, despite not being strictly formal, is nevertheless reflective of his age and social position. His old-fashioned exclamations and genteel expressions are rendered similarly in Estonian with the added respect and distance that Estonian pronouns provide. Estonian is able to convey age and social difference more simply and explicitly through the use of the second person plural

pronoun *teie* and the capitalisation of pronouns in written correspondence. Furthermore, to express a higher register or a more refined idiolect, the dialogue is, at times, provided with more detail in Estonian. Despite Estonian's limited range for conveying a higher register, it has a large selection of colloquialisms as vernacular language is used more frequently and creatively. As a result, the lower register characteristic of Bunny's speech is rendered more distinctly in translation than the formality in Henry's idiolect. The characters' sociolect, shaped by their use of ancient languages, is demonstrated in the original through more archaic vocabulary and non-standard or unusual sentence structure and tense use. In translation, these nuances are conveyed either similarly, by distorting standard grammar constructions and using fragmented sentences, or by employing more figurative or archaic expressions which evoke the sense of a language shaped in an ancient society.

This thesis illustrates that, although language varieties in English are clearly defined in theory, their boundaries often blur in practice, as is seen in the overlap between registers, sociolects, and idiolects. In Estonian, the lack of clear categorisation is similarly attributed to frequent overlap between different varieties. It was also found that in Estonian, conveying variation through higher registers is more challenging than through lower ones because the less prescriptive nature of spoken or colloquial language has allowed it to develop a more expansive vocabulary than standard language. Nevertheless, in Estonian, formality is effectively conveyed through the use of pronouns, added specifications, and refined tone, and colloquialism is achieved through similarly informal vocabulary and figurative expressions. Given the limited research on the translation of language variation into Estonian, further investigation could be conducted through the translation analysis of novels with linguistically diverse source texts.

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## APPENDIX

1. *Bunny's letter to Richard*

<p>Richard <b>old Man</b></p> <p><b>are you Frozen?</b> it is quite warm here. We live in a Penscione (<b>sp.</b>) I ordered Conche by mistake yesterday in a restaurant it was awful but Henry ate it. Everybody here is a <b>damn</b> Catholic. <b>Arrivaderci see you soon.</b></p> <p>(Tartt 1993 [1992]: 129)</p>	<p>Richard, <b>vana semu</b></p> <p><b>kas Külm võtab ära?</b> siin on päris soe. Me elame ühes Pensciones Tellisin eile restoranis kogemata konnakarpu see oli jube aga Henry sõi need ära. Kõik siin on <b>kuradima</b> Katoliiklased. <b>Arrivaderci varsti näeme.</b></p> <p>(Tartt 2021 [2007]: 142)</p>
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2. *Bunny's letter to his girlfriend Marion*

<p><b>old Gal</b></p> <p><b>Bored stuff.</b> Walked down to the party to get a <b>brewski. See ya later.</b></p> <p><b>B</b></p> <p>(Tartt 1993 [1992]: 297)</p>	<p><b>kulla Tüdruk</b></p> <p><b>Jube igav</b> hakkas. Läksin peole, et võtta üks õlu. Näeme hiljem</p> <p><b>B</b></p> <p>(Tartt 2021 [2007]: 313)</p>
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3. *Francis addressing Richard*

<p>"Are you the new <b>neanias?</b>" he said mockingly. The new young man. I said that I was.</p> <p>"<b>Cubitum eamus?</b>"</p> <p>"What?"</p> <p>"Nothing."</p> <p>(Tartt 1993 [1992]: 34)</p>	<p>"Kas sina oled see uus <b>neanias?</b>" küsis ta pilklikult. Uus noormees. Vastasin jaatavalt.</p> <p>"<b>Cubitum eamus?</b>"</p> <p>"Mida?"</p> <p>"Ei midagi."</p> <p>(Tartt 2021 [2007]: 45)</p>
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**RESÜMEE**

TARTU ÜLIKOOL  
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

**Karmel Kaljusaar**

**Social Stratification Through Language: Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* and „Salajane ajalugu“ by Liina Viires / Keeleline sotsiaalne kihistumine Donna Tartti romaanis *The Secret History* ja Liina Viirese tõlkes „Salajane ajalugu“**

Bakalaureusetöö

2025

Lehekülgede arv: 29

Annotatsioon:

Donna Tartti romaani „Salajane ajalugu“ üheks keskseks liikumapanevaks jõuks on tegelastevaheline kihistumise, mille tekkimisel on suur roll keelel. Allkeeled erinevad aga vastavalt kultuuri ja keele ajaloole, mistõttu võib nende tõlkimine osutada väljakutseks. Käesolev bakalaureusetöö uurib keelelist kihistumist Donna Tartti romaanis *The Secret History* ja Liina Viirese selle eestikeelses tõlkes „Salajane ajalugu“. Töö peamine eesmärk on tuua esile, kuidas on teoses ja selle tõlkes kasutatud allkeeli ja kuidas need vastavalt keelele erinevad.

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Märksõnad: Donna Tartt, Liina Viires, *The Secret History*, „Salajane ajalugu“, tõlkimine, tõlkeanalüüs, sotsiolingvistika, allkeeled

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