

**UNIVERSITY OF TARTU
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**STYLISTIC FEATURES IN THE PROLOGUE OF GEORGE R. R.
MARTIN'S *A GAME OF THRONES* AND ITS ESTONIAN
TRANSLATION**

BA thesis

ERIK LÄÄNE

SUPERVISOR: *Lect.* KATILIINA GIELEN, PhD

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to give an overview of what interpretative effects are produced using stylistic and lexical features in the prologue of George R. R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones*. This is done using the three categories of sensory imagery, evaluation and cohesion. These are then qualitatively analyzed through close-reading to assess how shifts occur between the English source text and Estonian target text, *Troonide mäng*, especially how effects are reduced, retained, intensified or recreated.

Key words: Stylistics, translation studies, *A Game of Thrones*, *Troonide mäng*, George R. R. Martin

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INTRODUCTION

George R. R. Martin's epic fantasy¹ series *A Song of Ice and Fire*, starting with *A Game of Thrones*, was not an immediate success upon its release in 1996, but gradually became a cultural phenomenon and international success in the following years (Martin 2016). This circumstance meant that the books were translated into many languages, necessitating an adaptation of the prose text to the target language. This process can be wide-ranging – from seemingly minor changes in syntax to interpreting metaphors, idioms and the overall mood of the work.

Stylistic features are of particular relevance when analyzing epic fantasy texts, as they are used to introduce the reader to an expansive fictional world. These features arise from individual linguistic choices of the author. According to Leech and Short (2007), stylistic features of a novel are the recurrent linguistic choices – at the levels of lexis, grammar, discourse, and narrative structure – that contribute to the text's meaning and artistic effect (Leech and Short 2007: 9-11). Thus, stylistic features are understood in this thesis as phenomena created by linguistic choices that can, based on the empirical material, be grouped into categories such as sensory imagery, evaluation and cohesion, which may produce emotional responses such as tension or unease. Evaluation can be understood in this context as knowing or unknowing opinionated comments made by the viewpoint character, both in and outside of dialogue. Furthermore, after these features are filtered through the narrative voice, they contribute to the broader literary atmosphere of the text. The effect of this filtering varies by category, with evaluation most affected and cohesion least affected. Considering these stylistic and lexical choices, translators need to make interpretative shifts, which may lead to significant changes between source and target texts. The prologue of *A Game of Thrones* was

¹ For this thesis, epic fantasy is understood with characteristics such as an entirely fictional yet internally consistent, secondary world (Tolkien 1947), where plot, events and consequences can be seen as large in scale.

chosen for the analysis of translational choices specifically as it is rich in stylistic features and their effect could be seen as more immediate due to the compact scope. The restricted viewpoint and prominent use of dialogue create opportunities for analyzing evaluative meanings and opinion. Since the prologue is set outside of the main storyline and is not driven by the main characters, it serves to introduce themes such as hierarchy and establish an atmosphere of unease that extends across the novel and the entire series.

George R. R. Martin is best known for his writing in the fantasy genre. Many of his novels, including the one analyzed in the present thesis, are characterized by a large number of viewpoint or focal characters, characters through whose perspective the events of a narrative are presented to the reader, a moral ambiguity, and a descriptive style favoring material and sensory attributes (Vaught 2012: 89-90; Rosenberg 2012: 16). The Estonian version of this novel, *Troonide mäng*, was first translated by Mario Kivistik and published by Varrak in 2006. Kivistik is an Estonian author, publisher, and translator of science fiction and fantasy, with wide-ranging contributions to the local development of science fiction and fantasy genre (University of Tartu n. d.: para. 1; Metsavana and Kallas 2015: para. 1).

The aim of this thesis is to identify and analyze how the use of stylistic and linguistic features leads to specific interpretative effects in the English original and Estonian translation of the prologue of *A Game of Thrones*, which are compared directly. Specifically, the analysis focuses on the most prominent categories that emerged from the comparison: sensory imagery, evaluation, and cohesion. Features in these three categories appear often throughout the prologue, and can thus be analyzed to understand the overall themes of the text. This thesis hopes to add a small contribution to the discussion of stylistic shifts in translation, and to the somewhat lacking academic body of work concerning the literary analysis of works by George R. R. Martin, an unfortunate reality considering their immense cultural effect and popularity.

The main body of this thesis is divided into a literature review and a qualitative analysis. The function of the literature review is to give an academically grounded overview of how effects are created through individual lexical and stylistic features, and how this is handled in translation. The qualitative analysis is conducted through the targeted selection of passages within the source text using the three aforementioned categories, which are then compared to their equivalents in the target text directly, to show the differences and shifts. The aim of the analysis is not to evaluate the translation, but comments on possible themes, effects, and emotional responses are linked directly to features in the text, with no empirical outside testing.

1. STYLISTIC FEATURES AND THEIR TRANSLATION

1.1 Stylistic features through narrative voice

In order to understand the link between textual features and emotional responses for the analysis, the academic literature on both is discussed separately and then integrated. Perhaps one of the most important texts in the context of this thesis is *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose* by Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short (2007). This in particular is an appropriate starting point as they discuss in detail the textual features (immediately visible to readers) that lead to stylistic effects and carry meaning. As argued by Genette (1983), these are filtered through the narrator and, as discussed by Stockwell (2009) and Toolan (2012), eventually reach the reader, where emotional readerly responses take place.

This work is regarded as important when trying to understand stylistic effects and narrative voice. With the term ‘stylistics’, the authors take a linguistic approach in their study of style and essentially link language with artistic intent (Leech and Short 2007: 11-12). Within this method of thinking, they mention the importance in noticing patterns of linguistic choices made by authors, referring to an example of passive or active voice being favored over the

other as a way of conveying meaning (Leech and Short 2007: 34). Expounding on this, they discuss a wide array of possible linguistic and stylistic features that may indirectly convey meaning, categorizing them into four distinct groups: lexical categories, grammatical categories, figures of speech, cohesion and context (Leech and Short 2007: 61-66). The importance of context is also more broadly discussed by Boase-Beier (2014: 134-138), who argues that meaning can be in a number of places in a text and must be evoked in the reader via textual features and wording.

Additionally, an example of micro-level changes affecting interpretation is given using a text with very few pronouns but many definite articles, suggesting an effect on cohesion, specifically creating a more familiar, continuous and less ambiguous effect. Indefinite articles are then used to introduce the unfamiliar elements into the story and make them stand out (Leech and Short 2007: 76-77). A level of caution must be exercised while doing such analysis in the context of this thesis however, for example because of the structurally different way in which Estonian mechanically handles words from categories such as articles and pronouns when compared with English.

Another important point made by Leech and Short (2007: 110-111) is that of ‘foregrounding’, or the prominence given to certain stylistic features and the effects on the level of meaning they have. Quantitative (e.g. lexical changes) and qualitative foregrounding (e.g. exceptionality) are different, yet linked, as small changes can become patterns (Leech and Short 2007: 111). They mention the possibility of conveying emotions, valuations and experiences of written characters through selective use of language, for example clumsy, confused or inadequate descriptions of things uninteresting to the character, but vivid descriptions of things of interest to the character (Leech and Short 2007: 111-113). Importantly, it is stated that the proper situation of these effects is partially the interpretative responsibility of the reader (Leech and Short 2007: 114-115). For the analysis of this thesis, the idea of

foregrounding is crucial for understanding evaluative language transmitted by the narrative voice, especially relating to comments on social hierarchy, as opinion is transmitted through textual features.

Leech and Short (2007: 123-128) suggest the idea that narrative discourse is dependent on shared knowledge and filtered through what is already known. This idea is also argued for by van Dijk (2008: 83-88), who more explicitly discusses how and to what degree this happens depending on the groups of people being considered. Furthermore, van Dijk (2008: 16-17) highlights the subjectivity and evolving nature of context, as well as how it controls how discourse is produced and understood. For this thesis, it could be said then that texts containing such instances of shared knowledge should be conveyed equivalently (more on this term later) in translations, with consideration to what the narrative voice knows, in order to avoid shifts in meaning.

As Leech and Short (2007) look at linguistic choices made by authors and the meanings they might have, Genette (1983: 171-175) mentions a concept applicable to narrator influence, specifically the idea of 'narrative distance'. This is directly relevant to textual features discussed by Leech and Short (2007), as the narrative voice is used to convey them to the reader. According to this concept different types of narration create differing degrees of narrator influence, which may in turn affect categories such as evaluation especially. In this context narratized speech is most distant, and direct speech is most immediate. For this thesis, such perspectives could be a way of analyzing emotional effects and understanding the role of the viewpoint character in furthering the story. In multiple places and ways, Genette (1983: 212-262) also discusses the function of the narrator in the context of voice, in which case they might influence the telling of the story, which may lead to a more, or less, controlled discourse as well as the narrative shaping reader expectations. This is relevant for analysing *A Song of Ice and Fire*, as Martin writes from a broad range of character viewpoints, which could have

the opposite effect depending on the personality of the character. Lastly, Genette (1983: 255-262) discusses the different functions of the narrator that go beyond telling the story, for example also directing the discourse, evaluating or commenting on it, which is especially relevant in multiple ways for this thesis. Specific descriptive choices, for example in terms of sensory imagery, may signal emotional responses meant to direct the story. This idea is also relevant for analyzing evaluative language more directly using words or terms marked for social hierarchy, for example. Overall, Genette's ideas in this text on narrative distance can be used in parallel with Stockwell's theory regarding reader effect to effectively analyze the dialogue-heavy, highly descriptive and viewpoint-centric prologue of *A Game of Thrones*.

As Genette discusses narrator influence and how narration is delivered to the reader, Stockwell (2009) studies how readers cognitively experience the textual choices that are used for that purpose. Stockwell does this with the term 'texture', which is defined as: "Texture is the experienced quality of textuality" (Stockwell 2009: 1). He also links stylistics to the cognitive experience of the reader (Stockwell 2009: 3). It is important to note that although Stockwell (2009) uses the same key terms that Leech and Short (2007) use, he does it from a different viewpoint. If the framework by Leech and Short (2007) can be used to understand the influence of specific lexical and stylistic features, Stockwell's (2009) writing, on the other hand, can be used to discern how cognition and emotion shapes reader experience on a much wider scale.

Though not exhaustive nor definitive, Stockwell (2009) offers measured insights into literary atmosphere, citing the prolonged and significant effect on the reader, as well as anchoring it in basic cognitive mechanisms (Stockwell 2009: 17-19). He stresses the importance of seeing atmosphere and tone as the result of the level of intensity (sustained attention) that the text is being read at (Stockwell 2009: 53-54). That is to say, sustained effort must be taken to notice how effects such as unease, dread or tension are built up across the text.

Stockwell (2009: 54) also mentions that literary atmosphere should be seen as a global theme. This view stems from the opinion that the intensity of reading, combined with resonance, establishes atmosphere in literary texts. Resonance is understood here as cognitive effects that accumulate and persist beyond initial reading. Stockwell's handling of these effects in this manner can be seen as casting a wider net compared to the stricter analysis of lexical and stylistic features preferred by Leech and Short (2007), though it could be said that they both discuss similar processes, just at different stages. Overall, Stockwell's ideas in this text on texture can be used in parallel with Genette's theory to effectively analyze the dialogue-heavy, highly descriptive and viewpoint-centric prologue of *A Game of Thrones* from the perspective of reader effect.

Some scholars have taken the step to mention quite clearly the emotional aspect of text. Interestingly, Toolan (2012: 211-216) suggests that there might be a correlation in the linguistic features of a text and the emotional effect it has, citing how certain highly emotional passages are crucial to certain stories. If this idea is applied in the context of translation, textual effects may become significantly harder to convey in translation, especially in the case of these engaging passages, as the exact wording cannot be used. In the same vein, Toolan also reports on the importance of certain perceptual verbs in conveying an emotional charge, such as 'feel', 'want' and 'see' (Toolan 2012: 212-213). For this thesis, it may be said then that omitting or reimagining such (or similar) verbs might cause a meaningful shift in translation. Furthermore, Toolan (2012: 213) links textual characteristics to strong emotional responses to descriptions of acute pain or pleasure. Toolan (2012: 213) also offers insights into the importance of understanding these effects through the narrative voice, as all descriptions arise from the fictional character's consciousness. Toolan's writing mostly complements Genette and Stockwell in terms of emotional responses, and gets even more specific by explicitly mentioning the narrative voice and specific word types.

A potential tension may be considered between the authors discussing narrator influence, as well as emotional and reader responses (Genette 1983; Stockwell 2009; Toolan 2012) and those focusing on textual features and effects (Leech and Short: 2007). This is perhaps most noticeable by Stockwell suggesting that atmosphere should be seen as a global theme. For the purposes of this thesis, these are causally linked, as local features contribute to the wider theme and carry atmospheric, evaluative, and cohesive effects. It can be said that, to a degree, such effects arise from features that carry meaning and link specific features to interpretative emotional response.

1.2 Stylistic features in translation

The previously discussed meaning found in stylistic features may lead to issues when translating, specifically ones arising from differences between languages. It is helpful for the analysis therefore to understand, through academic literature in translation studies, how shifts might occur, which elements are especially important, and how they might be handled. Baker (1992: 13) states that “/.../ text is a meaning unit, not a form unit, but meaning is realized through form and without understanding the meanings of individual forms one cannot interpret the meaning of the text as a whole.” The author also discusses the differences in propositional and expressive meaning that words or phrases might have, including equivalent words in different languages, where they might have different connotations (Baker 1992: 20-21). This phenomenon can be useful in comparing a translation to the original when it comes to analyzing the emotional responses caused by the texts. These ideas are most comparable to that of Leech and Short (2007), because they both assert the role of individual forms and features creating a wider meaning. Furthermore, Baker (1992: 247-256) uses the term ‘implicature’ to discuss implied meaning in conversation and text, even though it may not literally be present.

Though these ideas are broadly compatible with Leech and Short (2007), a difference in approach can be noted between these authors when discussing translation in this context specifically. Namely, since form is constructed differently between languages, different forms must be used to reach a similar meaning and recreate a similar effect. This does not put the authors in conflict, however, as Baker's (1992) ideas can first and foremost be used to understand translatability and equivalent translation.

On the topic of translation changing meaning, Baker (1992: 59-64) discusses 'collocation', or the acceptable patterns of words appearing together, and that also across languages. Crucially, the author mentions that there is a range of acceptability to this phenomenon depending on the word. Incompatible (or even new) combinations are instead used to convey a specific image or idea. In terms of relevance to this thesis, translating a highly acceptable pattern into one less so could be seen as a shift in meaning. As another important aspect to consider when handling translation, Baker (1992: 202-217) mentions the cohesion of a text as carrying meaning, and how it might differ across languages, with it being made up of the five elements of reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion. For analyzing how stylistic effects shift across translations, lexical cohesion might be especially helpful. Under this term fall phenomena like the repetition of lexical items, which might create semantic links between words, and reinforce or amplify a specific effect (Baker 1992: 224-226). Such micro-level features leading to wider meaning is precisely the main point outlined by Leech and Short (2007), who also wrote on cohesion, stressing the importance of either the implicit or explicit binding of words and the different categories of meaning these connections might have (Leech and Short 2007: 196-204). This is another example of a dimension of meaning that could be lost or morphed when handling translations.

Boase-Beier (2014: 4-6) emphasizes the role of style and the importance of capturing authorial intent. She argues that the translator should consider the broader style of the text, as

well as the content itself. This style makes up a crucial part of the meaning that the author is trying to convey. Referring to a previous work of hers from 2009, the author states that style is “a set of choices driven by commitment to a particular point of view” (Boase-Beier 2014: 4). In the same vein, she amplifies the ideas of Roman Jakobson (2000: 113-118), who argues that ‘creative transposition’ must replace translation when handling poetic texts, as direct translation would not result in a good outcome. In this case the translator should focus on transmitting the universal cognitive experience present in poetic texts. Importantly, stylistic features such as metaphor and metonymy are seen as psychological processes according to this line of thinking (Boase-Beier 2014: 12-13). Interestingly, for analyzing shifts between original and translation, this idea suggests that idiomatic and metaphoric language carry significant meaning, which is useful for the analysis in this thesis. She also discusses authors like Levine and Goddard and Wierzbicka, as well as others, who have written on the possible universalities between languages, both lexical (certain words such as ‘now’ and ‘live’) and stylistic. These include devices such as foregrounding, rhyme, metaphor and parallelism (Boase-Beier 2014: 13-14). These examples reinforce the core idea developed by Baker (1992) and Leech and Short (2007) of features leading to meaning, and Boase-Beier (2014) adds a more translation-focused approach by stressing the importance of correct interpretation and which features are of most significance.

Using different examples of German and English poetry, Boase-Beier (2014: 127-130) further discusses foregrounding as an essential stylistic feature to keep across translations. Specifically, meaning may be present in the unusual sentence structure, rare word choice or repetitive nature of the original text. Alliteration is also mentioned explicitly as an important feature to keep across translation. Developing the idea of metaphorical language being important further by mentioning even basic and psychological conceptual metaphors (such as ‘up’ being good and ‘down’ being bad), Boase-Beier (2014: 134-138) also mentions the

possible contexts evoked by the reader as important to keep when translating, much like Baker and Leech and Short earlier.

Munday (2022: 49-73) discusses in more practical terms the translatability of texts, concluding the accuracy of translation should be assessed as a matter of equivalence. For this thesis, this can be interpreted as the inclusion or omission of certain grammatical and lexical forms. Using the translation theorist Eugene Nida's term 'equivalent effect', the author mentions the importance of conveying the spirit of the original text when translating. This, in turn, might mean that a different lexical route is taken towards that end, which may have a meaningful effect. The author (Munday 2022: 81-84) contextualizes these changes as a system of 'shifts', implying they are natural changes that take place during translation. The idea of equivalence and equivalent effect is perhaps the best way of comparing the source text with the target text in the analysis section. Changes in stylistic and lexical features, as understood by Leech and Short (2007), across versions can be analyzed with these terms in mind.

A slight divergence on what should be emphasized in translation arises between Boase-Beier (2014) and Munday (2022), who suggest a slightly more creative and equivalent approach to translation, respectively. Both authors do stress the importance of changing the original textually, though how exactly this should be done and what type of features are mentioned most often are also telling, with Boase-Beier (2014) more focused on context and metaphor, and Munday (2022) more focused on translation shifts and equivalence.

In conclusion, stylistic features can be understood sufficiently for analysis primarily using the idea of stylistics being developed by Leech and Short (2007). The more perspectival aspects of the narration and emotional response to it can be gleaned from Genette (1983), Stockwell (2009) and Toolan (2012). Baker (1992), Boase-Beier (2014) and others provide insight into how these features shift in translation and which features are important to keep across versions.

2. ANALYSIS

2.1 Methodology

The qualitative analysis is carried out through a close reading of the prologue of *A Game of Thrones* (2011) and its Estonian translation *Troonide mäng* (2017). The general analytical perspective taken revolves around the term 'stylistics' as discussed by Leech and Short (2007), Baker (1992) and Boase-Beier (2014) in the previous section, with Genette (1983), Toolan (2012) and others used in a complementary role to help support findings. The three specific categories chosen are sensory imagery, evaluation, and cohesion. Passages are selected for analysis according to notable lexical and stylistic features in these three categories. This selection is not exhaustive, instead focusing on passages containing instances of foregrounding or shifts in translation. These categories were chosen because the prologue is rich in examples of their features, and are thus used to build specific emotional themes and convey evaluative meaning, as well as being some of the first textual effects to appear in the entire text, giving them a prominent position. These features are analyzed, in both the original and translation, in terms of their textual effects, such as rhythm and emphasis. These are then evaluated according to effects they might create or influence, through the narrative perspective of the viewpoint character Will. Differences in these features and any resulting shifts between the translation and original are compared directly, while avoiding overanalysis arising from the mechanical differences between the two languages.

2.2 Stylistic features in descriptions of sensory imagery

Throughout the prologue, sensory imagery, or imagery pertaining to the senses, as a stylistic device is used as a way to convey meaning. Such repeated use suggests that it is

foregrounded, as discussed previously, mainly through Leech and Short (2007). Descriptions appealing to all the senses are employed and they all broadly contribute to similar effects, the two most prominent being tension and unease. These ideas are filtered through the character Will, which makes these descriptions and effects subjective and allows them to be conveyed from his perspective.

The descriptions of auditory senses are the most notable, as well as being the first to appear. With the example “His voice echoed, too loud in the twilit forest.” (Martin 2011: 1) a sense of vulnerability and discomfort is created using the negative degree marker ‘too loud’ (this effect is amplified when location and time is considered, with the understanding that the late hour and northern forest environment should be quiet). Using an echo as a metaphor, an amplified sound, it also starts a sequence of descriptive auditory events that get quieter as the tension mounts. Another example is “Frostfallen leaves whispered past them /.../” (Martin 2011: 4). This sequence culminates and contrasts the previous sounds with the eventual “The Others made no sound.” (Martin 2011: 8), at which point the sense of unease is explained, since there were ‘Others’ around, a defined group (the ‘O’ is capitalized) responsible for this shift, to which the narrator does not belong.

The translation of these examples introduces a number of changes. “Tema hää kajas liiga valjult üle hāmara metsa.” (Martin 2017: 7) removes the comma that divides the original sentence, which has an effect on pacing and rhythm. The most important phrase (‘too loud’) is no longer directly separated, which in turn means that the change in effect caused by this phrase is no longer in one specific place. The second example “Pakasest näpistatud puulehed sahisid neist mööda /.../” (Martin 2017: 10) transforms the bodily, more eerie source of the noise into a natural one. The auditory description in the last example “Ebalased ei teinud häältk.” (Martin 2017: 14) differs as well, where the ‘-ki’ ending can be understood as ‘not even’. This is an intensified description with more emphasis on the lack of sound. It should also be noted that

the Estonian 'eбалased' could be interpreted as 'zombies' in English (Eesti Keele Instituut 2022), causing an immediate shift from the unclear and unfamiliar feeling (the narrator does not know who they are) conveyed in the original to the explicitly negative understanding in the translation².

Another vivid sensory category is tactile imagery, especially in the widespread descriptions of temperature and bodily function. The sentence "The first time he had been sent beyond, all the old stories came rushing back, and his bowels had turned to water." (Martin 2011: 2) uses the character's loss of bodily control to convey a previous sense of discomfort and fear. More specifically the metaphor 'turned to water' is used in a deeply personal context (it already happened to him once) to convey fear. Another passage is "It burns, it does. Nothing burns like the cold." (Martin 2011: 4), which uses repetition as a foregrounding tool to amplify the perceived negative effect.

The first example is translated as "Esimesel korral, kui ta selle taha saadeti, olid kõik kuuldud lood talle meelde tulnud ja tal oli süda saapasäärde vajunud." (Martin 2017: 8) which replaces the metaphorical 'turned to water' with the more idiomatic 'süda saapasäärde vajunud', causing a weaker, though still bodily, effect. This may be seen as a significant shift if looked at through the aforementioned findings of Boase-Beier (2014). The second example is translated as "See lausa kõrvetab. Miski ei kõrveta nii nagu külm." (Martin 2017: 10), which largely retains the structure and effect of the original, though with slight differences. The foregrounding using repetition is kept through the usage of 'kõrvetab' and 'kõrveta', then lost through the omission of the second 'it'. A foregrounding slightly weaker in effect is then created again through alliteration: 'kõrvetab', 'kõrveta' and 'külm'.

² This is perhaps done to convey a more familiar image to the reader, though this sacrifices the ambiguity of the original.

Instances of visual imagery are somewhat less prominent, though they still serve an important role stemming from descriptions of darkness. This is most obvious in the sequence of descriptions that appear in the following order: ‘twilit forest’, ‘deepening twilight’ and ‘twilight deepened’. These examples mirror the progression of the narrative and signal a mounting tension with the intensifying descriptions. The first description occurs at the very start of the prologue and simply describes the setting, meaning that though the time is late, no additional visual qualification is given. The second description occurs when a decision (to continue the ranging or return to safety) is being considered “He studied the deepening twilight in that half-bored, half-distracted way he had” (Martin 2011: 3). The third description occurs after the decision to continue is made and, unlike the others, is immediately followed by more visual descriptions: “The cloudless sky turned a deep purple, the color of an old bruise, then faded to black” (Martin 2011: 5). Describing the color of the sky with the bodily descriptor ‘bruise’, an explicit sense of bodily harm is transmitted, along with the possible implicit metaphoric expression of death via the ‘fade to black’ occurring after bodily harm. Additionally, this creates an effect of foreshadowing, especially considering the narrative progression idea.

The sequence of descriptions is translated as ‘hämar mets’, ‘tihenev hämarus’ and ‘hämarus tihenes’. These examples keep the foregrounding central, and possibly even strengthen the visual description by using ‘hämarus’, which could evoke the lack of light even more intensely, rather than an observation on the time of day³. The descriptions following the last example are translated as “Pilvitu taevas tõmbus tumepunaseks nagu vana verme ja värvus siis mustaks” (Martin 2017: 11). Interestingly, ‘verme’ is quite different from the original’s ‘bruise’ and possibly implies blood being drawn (Eesti Keele Instituut 2025) more so than the original, and thus the color of the sky is described as red rather than purple. The more literal

³ ‘Hämarus’ could have been used since it is easily paired with the adjective ‘hämar’ to mirror the original.

‘sinikas’ might not be poetic or impactful enough however, hinting at the importance of translating the effect rather than the words. ‘faded to black’ is translated as ‘värvus mustaks’, a more color-centric approach that dampens the aforementioned metaphoric content.

2.3 Stylistic features through evaluation

The presence of three distinct characters⁴ and a large amount of dialogue in the text allows for the analysis of the features that make up evaluative language. This is a particularly effective way of analyzing the narrative voice, as evaluative words and phrases are used almost directly to convey the characters’ attitude and opinions. The aforementioned ideas by Leech and Short (2007) on textual features signaling valuation and conveying emotion and this being an important function of the narrative voice, as mentioned by Genette (1983), become analytically relevant here.

The mocking and dismissive word ‘lordling’ (with the diminutive ‘-ling’ suffix noting age) appears repeatedly in the prologue. In dialogue, Will uses ‘lord’ or ‘m’lord’ five times while speaking, but ‘lordling’ nine times to describe Waymar Royce in thought. This is a clear example of evaluative contrast with one side being favored. Will has a lower opinion (and the one that occurs more often) of Royce between speech and thought, creating a tension in the perception of social hierarchy. A more direct example of hierarchy is given by Royce, when he responds to Gared’s “And night is falling.” (Martin 2011: 1) with “It does that every day about this time. Are you unmanned by the dark, Gared?” (Martin 2011: 2). This is a mocking and dismissive (literal interpretation) answer to the concern expressed, especially with the inclusion of ‘unmanned’. This word, used as a verb, is highly evaluative and conveys a strongly negative

⁴ Gared is described as a highly experienced ranger of forty years and Waymar Royce as a young lord in fancy, clean equipment (Martin 2011: 2-3). The viewpoint character Will describes himself as a ‘veteran’ of four years (Martin 2011: 2).

effect, being an insult that seeks to diminish Gared's social standing while raising Royce's, while elevating hierarchical tension.

The translation introduces many changes to these examples, especially 'lordling', which is translated as 'noorisand' and appears only a few times. No equivalent of the diminutive suffix is used, and neither the 'noor-' prefix nor 'isand'⁵ have any clear negative connotations. Furthermore, many instances of 'lordling' are replaced entirely, the most common example being simply 'isand' and the most striking being 'noor ülik'⁶, as it borders on a positive evaluation. Additionally, the contracted form 'm'lord' that signals lower social standing is replaced with both 'isand' and 'mu isand', losing that effect. All these examples contribute to a significant shift in the translation, that being the reduction of hierarchical tension. The second set of examples is translated as "Ja öö on tulekul." (Martin 2017: 7) and "Nii juhtub iga päev umbes samal ajal. Kas pimedus heidutab sind, Gared?" (Martin 2017: 7). The first sentence largely retains its effect (though night is 'coming', not 'falling' and thus less metaphorical), but the second translates 'unmanned' as 'heidutab', introducing another notable shift in hierarchical tension. This word can be understood as 'frighten' or 'discourage' and does not deliver the idea of hierarchical tension as explicitly as the original. Outside of hierarchical tension, this choice also loses the gender-based insult that seeks to elevate Royce's bravery over Gared.

Further evaluative commentary can be found in the direct description of Royce given by Will, starting with "Ser Waymar Royce was the youngest son of an ancient house with too many heirs" (Martin 2011: 2). In this sentence, 'too many heirs' is used as ironic social commentary to explain why a lord is serving in the Night's Watch, which is mostly thought to be undesirable (Will himself only joined to not lose a hand after being caught poaching). Royce

⁵ 'Lord'.

⁶ 'Young noble' is an approximate translation.

is also described as ‘grey-eyed’ (Martin 2011: 2), which is likely an evaluatively neutral observation, but this description is used to construct the effect of foreshadowing, as later Royce is raised from the dead and has ‘burning’ blue pupils.

This example is translated as “Ser Waymar Royce oli põlise valitsejasoo - kus oli liiga palju pärijaid - noorim poeg.” (Martin 2017: 8) The ironic commentary is detached from the rest of the sentence, breaking up the rhythm but foregrounding it substantially. Interestingly, ‘grey-eyed’ is translated as ‘roheline silmadega’ (Martin 2017: 8), which could convey a very different metaphoric message. Fittingly for the narrative, Will describing Royce’s eyes as green could signal his apparent youth and inexperience, especially in this military context. The color also contrasts even stronger with the later blue. This again focuses on the important feature in the original and foregrounds it even more, also strengthening the effect of foreshadowing.

Will’s opinion appears strongly in comparisons between Gared and Royce, especially their swords. “For a moment he was afraid the older man would go for his sword. It was a short, ugly thing, its grip discolored by sweat, its edge nicked from hard use, but Will would not have given an iron bob for the lordling’s life if Gared pulled it from its scabbard” (Martin 2011: 6). This thought by Will is prompted by a simple look given by Gared, and describes the peak of hierarchical tension in the text. The description of the rugged and useful sword is used as a way of showing preference to the lower social class. In contrast, Royce’s sword is described as not a good fit for the circumstance, jeweled, ‘castle-forged’, ‘splendid’ and something never used in anger (Martin 2011: 6-7).

Will’s thought is translated as “Hetkeks kartis ta, et vanamees haarab mõõga. See oli lühike inetu relv, pide higist pleekinud, tera kõvast pruukimisest sälguline, ent kui Gared oleks selle tupest välja tõmmanud, poleks Will ülikupoja elu eest raudšillingitki kaalule pannud.” (Martin 2017: 12-13) This translation largely retains the same form and effect, though the

pacing of the sentence is somewhat different, with the scabbard being mentioned before the iron bob. Additionally, the somewhat rare collocation ‘kõvast pruukimisest’ is used to translate the comparatively common ‘from hard use’. The word ‘pruukima’ may primarily convey a linguistic or vocal meaning, pertaining to how language is used (Eesti Keele Instituut 2026). As previously discussed by Baker (1992: 59-64), this rare pairing creates a less literal and more poetic meaning, possibly creating a more vivid effect when picturing how this sword has been used in the past.

2.4 Stylistic features through cohesion

Cohesion is an important aspect of the prologue, and instances of it can be analyzed more broadly than the previous categories. Many lexical chains are created to semantically link together the text, with the main effects arising being dread, tension, and unease. This category can primarily be analyzed through the ideas put forward by Baker (1992) and Leech and Short (2007) in section 1 of the thesis, specifically regarding lexical cohesion and lexical chains. For this analysis specifically, Baker’s definition of lexical cohesion is useful: “/.../ lexical cohesion covers any instance in which the use of a lexical item recalls the sense of an earlier one” (Baker 1992: 224).

The most prominent lexical chain is set up implicitly from the start, with the following passage occurring at the start of the prologue:

“Dead is dead,” he said. “We have no business with the dead.”

“Are they dead?” Royce asked softly. “What proof have we?”

“Will saw them,” Gared said. “If he says they are dead, that’s proof enough for me.” (Martin 2011: 1)

This passage heavily foregrounds the word ‘dead’ with many instances of repetition, which is complemented with two instances of rhyme (‘dead’ and ‘said’, ‘we’ and ‘me’). This anchoring conveys dread, tension, and inevitability, which in turn semantically creates the effect of foreshadowing. The cohesive effect also gives structure to the argument taking place

in the dialogue, as Gared's repetition of 'dead' shows certainty, even after Royce's challenge. Royce's doubt also adds to the foreshadowing, as at the end of the prologue Will sees the dead rise, and thus they were not dead in the familiar sense. Specifically, the chain is broken and the category collapses with the following description: "Lying dead like that, you saw how young he was. A boy. /.../ Will rose. Ser Waymar Royce stood over him. /.../ The right eye was open. The pupil burned blue. It saw" (Martin 2011: 10-11). Importantly, this passage also starts a pattern of alliteration in semantically similar words throughout the text, such as 'dark', 'darkness', 'deep' and 'deepening'.

The passage is translated into Estonian as:

"Surnud on surnud," ütles ta. "Meil pole surnutega mingit asja."
 "On nad ikka surnud?" küsis Royce vaikselt. "Mis seda tõendab?"
 "Will nägi neid," vastas Gared. "Kui ta ütleb, et nad on surnud, siis ei vaja ma muud tõendust." (Martin 2017: 7)

Crucially, this preserves the important foregrounding using the same level of repetition, which also retains the original's effects on unease, dread and foreshadowing. The complementary rhyme and later chain of alliteration is mostly lost, leading to a slightly weaker effect. The end of the text is translated as: "Kui ta seal niimoodi lamas, võis näha, kui noor ta oli. Poisike. /.../ Will tõusis püsti. Tema ees seisis ser Waymar Royce. /.../ Parema silma oli lahti. Selle pupill helkis siniselt. See nägi" (Martin 2017: 17). This introduces many differences, most notably the absence of 'dead' in the first sentence and a more fragmented sentence structure. The omission of 'dead/surnud' leads to a significant weakening of the cohesive effect, as the ending is no longer connected to the beginning in this specific semantic way. The diminutive 'poisike'⁷ might convey an even lower opinion or an even more tragic loss. Additionally, Royce is not standing 'over' Will, but instead in front of him, a significant shift when it comes to the level of danger and the effect of dread. Overall, this translation keeps the foregrounding and foreshadowing prominent, though the effects of dread and tension caused

⁷ Could be translated as 'little boy'.

by cohesive elements are weaker, especially since the beginning and ending are not semantically linked.

Another important chain is constructed using the word ‘cold’, which serves a highly cohesive function as one of the most commonly appearing words in the text, excluding names and function words, as well as the very last word in the text. This word is immediately given an implicit supernatural qualification beyond temperature as soon as it appears: “A cold wind was blowing out of the north, and it made the trees rustle like living things. All day, Will had felt as though something were watching him, something cold and implacable that loved him not.” (Martin 2011: 2) This sense of tension and unease is strengthened by Gared’s long description, culminating with the passage discussed earlier: “It burns, it does. Nothing burns like the cold” (Martin 2011: 4).

The meaning of this word beyond temperature is most apparent near the culmination of the prologue, as it is used to convey fear when the ‘Others’ arrive. Royce explicitly asks “Why is it so cold?” when sensing danger, which is confirmed by Will’s “It was cold” (Martin 2011: 8). When Will tries to warn Royce, “/.../ the words seemed to freeze in his throat” (Martin 2011: 8). Interestingly, the temperature also causes Will to both shiver and hold on tighter to the tree branch he was on, which are both signs of fear and extreme cold. Eventually, the way the ‘Others’ kill Royce is described with “It was cold butchery.” (Martin 2011: 10), which cohesively links the killing to the prior examples of fear and the supernatural.

Translated as ‘külm’, the Estonian version mostly keeps the cohesive chain prominently foregrounded, at one point even strengthening it slightly by translating ‘chill’ as ‘külm’. The first example is translated as “Põhjakaarest lõõtsus külm tuul ja pani puud kahisema, nagu oleksid need elus. Terve päeva oli Will tundnud, nagu jälgiks teda miski - miski külm ja halastamatu, mis teda ei sallinud.” (Martin 2017: 8), which slightly strengthens the

foregrounding of ‘külm’ by separating the clause containing it with a dash, as well as with the repetition of ‘miski’⁸. This happens again later, when Royce asks “Miks siin nii külm on?” (Martin 2017: 14), placing the effect caused by the word in a specific location, meaning ‘here’. Will’s answer “Oli tõesti külm.” (Martin 2017: 14) is a more significant shift compared to the others, as ‘tõesti’⁹ is used more explicitly than the original to intensify the description of the cold and thus amplify its cohesive effect. The final example is translated as “See oli kalk veresaun.” (Martin 2017: 16), in which ‘kalk’ partly keeps its cohesive effect via alliteration and can be understood in this context primarily through emotional coldness (Eesti Keele Instituut 2025).

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to analyze stylistic and linguistic features and the interpretative effects they produce in the prologue of the English original and Estonian translation of *A Game of Thrones*. This was done as a qualitative, close-reading analysis using the three categories of sensory imagery, evaluation and cohesion. All categories showed some changes in pacing and rhythm, and the results varied from retention and recreation of effects to moderate or even significant shifts.

Sensory imagery was analyzed using auditory, tactile and visual descriptions. Results show mainly that effects of fear, tension and unease are produced, and broadly retained in the target text. Shifts mostly occur on the level of metaphor and intensifying descriptors, where metaphors are made idiomatic or metaphoric effect is possibly dampened. Possible effects are at times translated using different features, such as leaves ‘whispering past’ becoming

⁸ ‘Something’

⁹ ‘Really’ or ‘truly’

‘sahisesid mööda’, possibly dampening the effects of eeriness and unease built using this category. One instance of bodily fear in the target text is conveyed idiomatically, rather than metaphorically like in the source text, which could be seen as a significant shift. Visual imagery was also found to play a role in structuring the narrative, and was intensified in the translation.

Evaluation was the richest category of analysis, where results also showed the largest shifts between source and target texts. The hierarchical and social tension constructed in the original using negatively charged words such as ‘lordling’ is largely reduced, as equivalents in the target text mostly do not have negative connotations, as well as being translated with varied choices instead of one word. Effects stemming from comments and insults regarding social standing and gender are often weakened in the target text, though at times also foregrounded even more prominently. Metaphoric content is used in one instance to perhaps recreate some of this lost evaluative meaning.

Cohesion was analyzed and showed slightly more nuanced results. For this category, foregrounding using repetition and alliteration are used to create effects such as dread and unease. In some cases, alliteration is significantly weakened, while repetition is often kept central. Further, in some cases these two elements are recreated with different features in order to preserve the foregrounding. Additions such as intensifiers are used to regain and strengthen the cohesive effect lost through elements such as alliteration. Additionally, cohesive effects from links spanning the entire text were found to weaken somewhat.

The overall pattern of changes between source and target text is varied both between and inside categories, though a slight weakening in features and thus effects was observed throughout the analysis. In terms of any specific category, no overarching loss in effect was found, instead favoring intensification of features and recreation of effect as prevention of this loss. Foregrounding is kept consistently prominent and metaphoric descriptions were found to

consistently shift or weaken. These findings are consistent with the authors mentioned earlier, such as Baker (1992) and Boase-Beier (2014), whose ideas relating to meaning being present in form and their creative recreation have shown that translation shifts and retention of effect go beyond lexical and literal accuracy.

It should be reemphasized that this analysis was limited to a qualitative close-reading analysis of only the prologue of *A Game of Thrones* and any effects arising from specific textual features were assessed interpretatively. This thesis was written to add a small contribution to academic literature regarding the novels of George R. R. Martin, and show how small lexical and stylistic choices are used to construct wide-ranging effects and themes, such as hierarchy. For further research, an analysis of the ideological commentary present in the features of this book and series might be considered, especially relating to feudal hierarchy and anti-war themes.

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RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Erik Lääne

Stylistic features in the prologue of George R. R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones* and its Estonian translation

Stilistilised elemendid George R. R. Martini romaanis „A Game of Thrones“ ja selle eestikeelses tõlkes

Bakalaureusetöö

2026

Lehekülgede arv: 32

Annotatsioon:

Käesoleva bakalaureusetöö eesmärk on tuvastada ja analüüsida stilistiliste ja lingvistiliste elementide poolt tekitatud tõlgenduslikke efekte George R. R. Martini romaanis „A Game of Thrones“ proloogis ning selle eestikeelses tõlkes „Troonide mäng“. Töö on jaotatud akadeemilise kirjanduse ülevaateks ja kvalitatiivseks analüüsiks.

Kirjanduse ülevaate eesmärk on esimeses alapeatükis teha kindlaks, millised on stilistilised ja lingvistilised elemendid ning kuidas nad tekitavad tõlgenduslikke efekte. Analüüsi teeb võimalikuks teises alapeatükis arutatavad autorid, kelle kaudu on võimalik kindlaks teha, kuidas need elemendid muutuvad lähte- ja sihttekstide vahel.

Kvalitatiivne analüüs viidi läbi lähilugemise kaudu ja käsitleb stilistilisi elemente kolme kategooria kaudu: meeltest tulenev kujundlikkus, hinnanguline keelekasutus ning teksti sidusus ehk kohesioon. Tulemused näitavad mitmesuguste efektide teket, eelkõige pingelisust, ebakindlust, ohutunnet ja hierarhiline pinget. Eestikeelne tõlge üldiselt mõnevõrra nõrgendab neid efekte, kuid mõned tähtsad elemendid, nagu esiletõstmine (*foregrounding*) on tõlkes jäetud tähtsale kohale ning vahel isegi tugevdatud või ümberehitatud. Kõige suuremad muutused toimusid hinnangulise keelekasutuse kategoorias, eriti sotsiaalse hierarhia kommentaarides, mille efekt nõrgestus negatiivsete alatoonide puudumise tõttu.

Märksõnad: Stilistika, tõlketeadus, „Troonide mäng“, „A Game of Thrones“, George R. R. Martin

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