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THEORY V. PRACTICE IN 17TH-CENTURY LATVIAN GRAMMARS

Trevor G. FENNELL
(Flinders University of South Australia)

The compilation of the various descriptions of the grammar and lexicon of 17th-century and 18th-century Latvian is due entirely, or so it would appear, to the work of foreigners. The majority of the authors in question were German clergymen, who wrote by and large for their colleagues, in order to render their proselytising more effective through the avoidance of embarrassing errors and other forms of linguistic incompetence. I have elsewhere (Fennell 2002, 1–2) drawn attention to the unflattering remarks of later Latvian commentators, and it is true to say that with very few exceptions these early works have been characterised as inadequate, misleading and often completely erroneous. Such later generalisations are not lacking in truth or pertinence, but they remain generalisations. They do not on the whole dwell on the specifics, or list in any detail the individual weaknesses of any given author. In particular, they do not distinguish between the two major types of linguistic work, viz. grammars and dictionaries.

In what follows, I shall test the hypothesis that in a grammar, where the author is called upon to synthesise and theorise, there are rather more dubious claims and erroneous (even bizarre) postulates than in a dictionary, which is a more practical undertaking, where the author is to a large extent free to record the language without being beholden to whatever the prevailing orthodoxy may be. It could therefore be instructive to compare a grammar and a dictionary compiled by the same author, in order to see whether a confrontation of the two types of material will confirm such a hypothesis. Let us therefore examine Johannes Langius' (1685) "Lettisch-Deutsches LEXICON... Sampt einer kurtzen GRAMMATICA..." in this light.

To take first a phonological question, we observe that Langius is, in his Grammar, rather muddled on the question of vowel length, which he appears to confuse with stress. He makes the straight-forward, unambiguous claim (Langius 1685, 184a) that

Welche Wörter zwo Syllben haben, da wird die erste Syllbe lang ausgesprochen.

["In words which have two syllables, the first syllable is pronounced long."]

The statement is clearly false, as can be seen from the 11 examples which he appends, most of which have a short first vowel, e.g., *asohts* ('breast'), *dischans* ('noble'), *Maxaht* ('to pay'), etc. Further examples abound on almost every page of the Dictionary: thus *darriht* ('to do'), *izkrist* ('to fall out'), *Peldäht* ('to swim'), *Schurka* ('a rat'). (Langius 1685, 23a, 62a, 96, 124a)

Langius, however, continues (Langius 1685, 185):

Welche Wörter drey Syllben haben, da ist die Mittelste kurtz.

["In words of three syllables, the middle one is short."]

This rule is extended with a specific reference to past participles active (Langius 1685, 185):

In den Praeteritis wird auch die mittelste Syllbe kurtz gesprochen.

["In past participles active too the middle syllable is pronounced short."]

and indeed his four appended examples – *darrijis* ('done'), *ligojis* ('swayed'), *maxajis* ('paid') and *rakstijis* ('written') are all given without the lengthening *h*, in clear contravention of the facts of the language: in these and similar examples, the middle syllables are not pronounced short.

Evidence from the dictionary, however, indicates that Langius was in practice well aware of long vowels in this position, as shown by his spelling of numerous participles: *runnahjis* ('spoken'), *muldähjis* ('gone on a rage'), *pellähjis* ('mildewed'), *redsähjis* ('seen'), *schahwahjis* ('yawned'), *mylähjis* ('loved'), etc. – Langius 1685, 51, 88, 96, 110, 121, 151a. For words other than past participles active, we have: *dsirdähjums* ('hearing'),

jautahjums ('question'), *pretzähjums* ('purchase'), *quickschkähjums* ('pig squeal'), *swährähjums* ('oath'), *šwinnähjums* ('celebration'), *wählähjums* ('wish'), *zuziege* ('swinishly') – Langius 1685, 31a, 46a, 102, 105, 148a, 151a, 165, 181. There are numerous other examples (see also Fennell 1987, 195–201, esp. 200).

We are thus left, as far as this issue is concerned, with particularly clear evidence in support of the claim that, left to his own practical devices, Langius provides a rather better reflection of the language around him than when he attempts to set down explanations and rules in a more theoretical context.

Turning to morphology, the question of the locative case provides further testimony. Langius, like Rehehusen (1644) before him, gives a very idiosyncratic treatment of Latvian noun declensions, espousing the most unhelpful view of his predecessor that there are just two declensions, one accounting for all masculines, the other for all feminines. He likewise follows the tradition of most 17th-century grammarians of Latvian in postulating an ablative case and in denying a place in the paradigm to the locative, which is relegated to footnote status and referred to as an 'ablative of place'. This term is, somewhat disconcertingly, abbreviated to just 'ablative', thus creating confusion with the ablative already recognised as the case required by the preposition *no* ('by', 'from').

Within the omnibus declension devoted to feminines in the Grammar, the footnote on locatives allows for the various locative endings which occur with feminine nouns (Langius 1685, 186a):

Auch sind hie viel Wörter, welche in Abl. Singulari a (an) etliche auch i oder äh haben, und in Plurali ahs, ihs und ähs...."

["Here too are many words which have *-a* or *-an* (some also *-i* or *-äh*) in the ablative singular, and *-ahs*, *-ihs* and *-ähs* in the plural...."].

Appropriate examples are appended. For reasons that are not at all obvious, Langius' coverage of masculines is much less satisfactory. Of masculines he writes (Langius 1685, 186):

Es sind viel Wörter, welche in Ablativo Singulari auch i: und plurali ohs haben. Aber selbige Ablativi werden nur im Ort gebraucht...

[“There are many words which in the ablative singular have also *-i* and in the plural *-ohs*, but these ablatives are used only to denote ‘place where’....”]

A range of endings, similar to those given for feminines, should have been supplied here, but in fact Langius allows no choice at all, and a naïve reader would have to conclude that the locative singular of *koks* (‘tree’) is **kokī*, while that of *bende* (‘executioner’) is **bendī*, etc.

The forms supplied for masculine locatives singular in the Dictionary are much more accurate, giving the lie to the theoretical pronouncement in the Grammar. In the Dictionary we find numerous examples with *-ā*: cf. (among many others) *kaktā* (‘in the corner’), *svešumā* (‘in foreign parts’), *tālumā* (‘in the distance’) – Langius 1685, 50a, 151, 152, 161a. Likewise with *-an* (nowadays referred to as an illative) we have *krustan* (‘on the cross’), *postan* (‘to destruction’), *cietuman* (‘in prison’) and a number of others – Langius 1685, 63, 100a, 177; with *-ē* there appears to be just one example: *Billahtāh* (‘to the devil’). Ending in *-ū*, we find *widdu* (‘in the middle’), although for *ledū* (‘in the ice’) Langius writes *leddā* – Langius 1685, 88a, 173a; 70. The locative plural of *ļaudis* (‘people’) does not occur in the dictionary, but is to be found once in the Grammar: *Wings ir Ļaudihs* (‘He is out in the world’) – Langius 1685, 222a. This form too contradicts the very restrictive statement on masculine locatives, and the various examples above, taken together, are a further indication of the extent to which Langius' practice is superior to his theory, which allowed only the singular termination *-ī*, and the plural termination *-ohs*.

The conjugation of verbs provides a further morphological example. In the Grammar we read (Langius 1685, 194):

Folget demnach ein Typus der Lettischen Conjugation, nach welchem alle andere verba... können conjugiret werden, ausgenommen die Anomala.

[“Accordingly, there follows a model of the Latvian conjugation, on the basis of which all other verbs..., excepting the irregulars, can be conjugated.”]

To this end, a full conjugation of *mihlāht* (‘to love’) is appended, including for the first and second persons plural of the present indicative the forms *māhs mihlim* and *juhs mihlit*, i.e., using the *-im* and *-it* endings of *i*-stem verbs as a generalisable termination for all ‘regular’ verbs – on *i*-stem verbs generally, see Endzelīns 1951, 790-802. Regrettably, Langius nowhere explains in detail which verbs he considers to be ‘regular’ or ‘irregular’: only *tapt* (‘to become’), *iet* (‘to go’), *ēst* (‘to eat’), *dzīt* (‘to drive’), *dzirdēt* (‘to hear’), *likt* (‘to put’) and perhaps *būt* (‘to be’) – Langius 1685, 194, 198a, 200, 201a, 203, 204a; 192, 206, 206a – are explicitly called ‘irregular’. Even so, his statement about *-im* and *-it* is such as to lead us to expect a preponderance of these *i*-stem forms in the Dictionary, since it is tantamount to saying that all regular Latvian verbs have *i*-stem presents. In fact, omitting the assumed irregular *būt* (9 exx. with *-im/-it*) and the explicit irregulars *iet* (4 exx. with *-am*), *ēst* (1 ex. with *-am*), *tapt* (2 exx. with *-am*), *dzīt* (1 ex. with *-am*), we have 22 remaining examples, eight of which exhibit *-im/-it*. Of these, six are from the recognised *i*-stem verbs *turēt* (‘to hold’) and *varēt* (‘to be able’). Against these there are 14 cases of *-am/-at* which clearly breach the rule given earlier by Langius: cf. *dserāam* (‘we drink’), *sinnaht* (‘you know’) – Langius 1685, 68, 50.

We cannot then take the statement in the Grammar at face value; the evidence from the Dictionary shows it to be an over-generalisation. Thus, as far as these verbs are concerned, the Dictionary does not bear out the over-restrictive statement of the Grammar, thereby constituting reasonable evidence that Langius’ practice escapes the inadequacy of his theory.

In matters more akin to syntax, we observe that Langius objects to the use of *kad* ('when') and *tad* ('then') in senses other than those genuinely referring to time. Thus he rules out their use in senses such as 'if', 'if only', or 'if... then' in logical sequences. He writes (Langius 1685, 220):

Die Adverbia Tad und Kad müssen nicht ehe gebraucht werden, alß wenn mann eine Zeit benennen wil: E.g. kad Deews mums lihdsähs, tad mähs projam tapsim. Darumb sind sie vielen superfluè und ineptè hinzu gesetzt worden, alß: Ja tad es nu jums kahjas esmu masgahjis, tad buhs jums arridsan etc: kad juhs buhtat man mihlohjusch, tad buhtat juhs preezajušchees, etc:....

[The adverbs *Tad* ('then') and *kad* ('when') must not be used unless one is referring to time, e.g., "When God helps us, then shall we get ahead". In view of this, the way in which they have by many been inserted [into sentences] is superfluous and inappropriate: cf. "If, then, I have washed your feet, then you must...." etc. "When (= 'if') you had loved me, then you would have rejoiced", etc.]

It is clear from Langius' examples that he is going beyond the adverbial use of *kad* to include also its occurrence as a conjunction.

There are numerous examples in dictionaries (including ME) to demonstrate that Langius' prescriptivism on this point is misplaced, but for our purposes it will suffice to show that Langius is perfectly prepared to break his own edict. Expressions of the type *ja tad* ('so aber'; 'if then'), *ka tad* ('wie denn'; 'how then'), *woi tad* ('wie denn'; 'how then') – Langius 1685, 45a; 50a, 67a, 176a; 176a – are clearly in breach of the time requirement, as also is the sentence (Langius 1685, 40a):

Kad tahdu Wihr' nhe warr' pee glaust, tad atsta.

["If you cannot satisfy such a man, then leave off (=stop trying)."]

where the *kad* is equivalent to 'if' and the *tad* is being used to create a logical rather than temporal sequence. The same is true of the sentence, borrowed from Mancelius (Langius 1685, 148):

Kad jauneem Sunņeem Tahrps pa Mähles tohp greests in atjemts, tad tee nhe tohp tracki.

["When (=‘if’) the worm under the tongue of young dogs is cut and removed, then they do not become mad.”]

Also with *kad* Langius breaks his own rule: cf. (Langius 1685, 137a):

kad Deews dohtu uhs=šnickt

["if (only) God would grant that there be snow”]

and (Langius 1685, 127):

Kad teh warräht teescham brauckt, nhe buht tur ja=sengäh

["When (=‘if’) it were possible to drive there directly, we would not have to get dirty ploughing through the mud.”]

but the contrast between the theoretical prescription and the practical expression is seen most clearly in the example, also borrowed from Mancelius (Langius 1685, 81a):

Ko warr Bährns darriht kad Mahte Mauka?

["What can the child do when (=given that) his mother is a prostitute”?]

If Langius is here taken literally, a completely different (and surely unintended) meaning emerges.

Thus the practical handling of the language in Langius’ Dictionary is once again seen to be much more reasonable and descriptively accurate than the somewhat misguided prescriptivism of his Grammar.

Perhaps the most striking departure from reality in Langius’ Grammar is his treatment of the perfect infinitive – ‘to have been’, ‘to have gone’, etc. While there is nothing strange about the concept of a perfect infinitive in Latvian, formed by the combination of the present infinitive *būt* (‘to be’), serving as auxiliary, and the past participle active of the main verb (e.g., *bijis* ‘been’, *gājis* ‘gone’), the analysis provided by Langius is as extraordinary as it is erroneous.

The first occurrence in the Grammar is to be found in the paradigm of the verb *būt* (‘to be’). The form given is *byis buht*

(Langius 1685, 193a), which is, quite correctly, a combination of *būt* with the past participle active *byis*. The word order, with the infinitive following the participle, is a little unusual, and may owe something to the German *gewesen sein*, but the relatively free word order of Latvian can easily enough accommodate the inversion. Nonetheless, it may be just this inversion which subsequently leads Langius to misinterpret the syntactic roles played by the two elements.

The perfect infinitive occurs again in the paradigm of the verb *mihlāht* ('to love'), where the form given is *byjis mihlāht* (Langius 1685, 195). Instead of leaving the auxiliary *būt* intact, while paradigmatically exchanging *byis* for *mihlāhjis*, Langius has left the form *byjis* as it stood, exchanging the (auxiliary!) infinitive *būt* for the infinitive *mihlāht!* The result is that the infinitive is to be taken as the main verb, with the past participle active of *būt* serving as auxiliary. This arrangement is the reverse of what it should be (*buht mihlāhjis* or *mihlāhjis buht*), and the erroneous result can only be described as grotesque.

A third example is to be found in the conjugation of the verb *eet* ('to go'), where, instead of the correct *buht gahjis* or *gahjis buht*, we again find the same reversal of syntactic roles as for *mihlāht*: Langius' form here is *byjis eet* (Langius 1685, 199a), thus confirming the view that he completely failed to grasp the structure of the perfect infinitive. But that is not to say that Langius was completely satisfied with what he had written: it is quite conceivable that he had residual doubts, in view of the fact that for *lickt* ('to put') the form is simply not mentioned, while for *āhst* ('to eat'), *dsiht* ('to drive') and *dsirdāht* ('to hear') the form is explicitly said to be lacking. This perhaps is some indication that the author may have had second thoughts when confronted by such constructions as **byjis āhst*, **byjis dsiht*, **byjis dsirdāht* and **byjis lickt* – Langius 1685, 205a, 201, 203, 204.

Turning to the Dictionary, we observe, on the basis of a detailed electronic scan of the concordance (Fennell 1991), that there is not a single example of the perfect infinitive, and while

this may be simply fortuitous, it may also reflect a pulling back from the position initially espoused (although perhaps subsequently abandoned) in the Grammar. Certainly the errors that are to be found in Langius' treatment of the perfect infinitive are to be found in the Grammar, not in the Dictionary.

The foregoing provides a growing amount of evidence to confirm the hypothesis that the grammatical writing of Langius at least (but why not of other authors as well?) is prone to serious errors of a theoretical nature which are largely absent from the corresponding dictionary. This in turn suggests that the freer dictionary context allowed Langius to transmit more or less unhindered the essence of the language used around him. Errors there may be, but I have attempted to show that these are far less striking than those perpetrated in the Grammar, and it may well be that future commentators would do well to take the early dictionaries as a more faithful reflection of what the authors actually knew than the sometimes denatured grammars which have attracted so much criticism over recent decades.

Langius himself may have had an inkling of the nature of the problem that beset him, the potential conflict between grammatical theory and idiomatic practice, writing towards the end of his section on the verb (Langius 1685, 209):

Aliud est grammaticè loqui, aliud letticè.

["To speak grammatically is one thing, but to speak Latvian is another."]

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KOPSAVILKUMS

Teorija un prakse 17. gadsimta latviešu gramatikās

Trevor G. FENNELL

Rakstā, izmantojot Jāņa Langija 1685. gada vārdnīcas un gramatikas rokrakstu materiālu, autors pamato savu hipotēzi, ka vārdnīcu materiāls parāda daudz labāku 17. gs. latviešu gramatiku autoru valodas prasmi, nekā varētu spriest no samērā bieži sastopamiem apšaubāmiem vai pat klaji kļūdainiem apgalvojumiem, kas atrodami gramatikās. Atsevišķi analizēti daži fonoloģijas (patskaņu garums vārda pirmajā un vārda vidus zilbē), morfoloģijas (lokatīva formu veidošana, verbu personas formu veidošana), sintakses (adverbu *kad*, *taid* lietojums teikumos) jautājumi Langija gramatikā un vārdnīcā. Īpaši akcentēta t. s. perfekta infinitīva *byis buht* veidošana, kurā skaidri saredzamas Langija darbā sastopamās teorētiskās problēmas.