

# Non-native accent in intersemiotic theatre translation

Sirkku Aaltonen

University of Vaasa, English and Translation Studies

Visiting Researcher at Effat University, Jeddah, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

**Abstract:** The study of theatre translation has remained marginal among the fields in translation studies. There are so many variables, the objects themselves are absent, and the moment of production is the moment of consumption. Although the script may still exist, it is unlikely to contain any indications of acting styles or the actors' accents. This article will focus on a number of performances of two famous actors from the early years of the Finnish language theatre. Charlotte Raa (1838–1907) had the leading role in the “first” Finnish language theatre performance, while Ida Aalberg (1858–1915) was the first Finnish star actor who performed both in the Nordic countries and in Europe. Their non-native accent did not serve a dramaturgical function in their performances and was, therefore, read both against the artistic heritage and world, in this case, the ideological climate of the time.

## INTRODUCTION

The aim in this article is to explore the responses to two cases of intersemiotic translation where an accent, which has not been indicated in the script, has appeared as a consequence of the non-nativeness of the actor. The material of the study consists of the performances of two actors, the Sweden Swedish Hedvig Charlotte Raa (1838–1907) and the Finland Finnish Ida Aalberg (1858–1915) in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Neither performed in their mother tongue; Raa performed in Finnish and Aalberg in Finland Swedish, Danish and German. The evidence of the reception of their performances will be drawn from historiographies and their documentation of mainly newspaper reviews. The research question will concern the reasons for the variation between positive and negative reaction to the actors' delivery of their lines in a language variety which was not theirs.

Theatre translation may involve three types of translation, that is, there are three ways of interpreting a verbal sign. According to Roman Jakobson (1959: 233), the three types consist of *intralingual translation*, that is, rewording of verbal signs by means of other signs in the same language. Secondly, in *interlingual translation, translation proper*, verbal signs are interpreted by means of some other language, and, finally, *intersemiotic translation, or transmutation* involves an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems. In staged performance, intralingual translation might include

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replacement of one dialect by another for purposes of localisation (see the example of *Masjävlar* below), interlingual translation would be needed in staging Finnish plays abroad and, the other way round, translation of foreign plays for staging in Finland. Intersemiotic translation in theatre refers to the fleshing out of the script, the bringing together of the actor's body and the script, stage, lighting, music, costume, makeup and special effects. In this article, a foreign accent is regarded as deriving from intersemiotic translation. Research into intersemiotic translation in theatre has produced mainly case studies (e.g. Aaltonen 2007, 2010), whereas theatre studies have largely focused on the type of relationship between the text and performance (e.g. Carlson 1985; Vanden Heuvel 1993), or staged performance as a process (Chauduri 1999). Research into intersemiotic translation is complicated by the fact that staged performances are events of the past and, therefore, not directly accessible to researchers. Instead, as Thomas Postlewait (1991: 158) has pointed out, they have to rely on secondary evidence from often random documentation. According to him, documents, then, are also products of their time, drawing upon presuppositions of complex theoretical ideas such as cultural ideologies, narrative paradigms and principles of causality or contiguity. In addition, even if researchers could gain access to the script, both audible and visible signs suggested in them may have been changed or ignored in the actual *mise en scène*, or there might be no guidelines at all.

Everything on stage can carry a semantic meaning. Visible signs, such as costume, makeup, furniture, and lighting, can be read as part of the story and so can audible signs of music, noises, silence, the actor's voice quality and/or accent. The decision on the use of a particular language or language variety (dialect, accent, style, or register) may have been taken *a priori* by the playwright or director/translator, and all characters may use it. A language variety may have been employed in the text to promote an ideological agenda and to support the rights of those who use it. It may also be used in the text to imply a characterological or locational feature such as in the play *Masjävlar* (2001) when the Swedish playwright Maria Blom set her play in Dalarna, a county north of Stockholm. All characters used the local dialect *dalamål*, and, as the inhabitants, the Dalecarlians, are usually called *masar*, the play got the title *Mas + jävlar* meaning 'bloody Dalecarlians' (see Wadén 2001). When the play crossed the border to Finland in intralingual translation, the title changed first to *Bondjävlar* (2010), 'bloody peasants', and the dialect into the Finland Swedish Närpes dialect (an Ostrobothnian town) (Perera 2016) and later, to *Närpesboan*, which specified the location already in the title (Rothberg 2010).

The use of an accent may be either intentional or unintentional. An intentionally employed stage accent has traditionally been designed to give the impression of a character's geographical background. Certain features of the accent are selected and exaggerated or simplified for theatrical purposes (Carl-

son 2006: 11). In American films, the villains tend to have a British accent which makes them appear less trustworthy (Willgress 2017). On stage, a non-native accent, used for characterological purposes, turned both Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich into exotic, mysterious and even dangerous *femmes fatales* (Bell 2011).

Even if a foreign accent is an unintentional indication of the actor's non-nativeness, the audience will first try to integrate it into their external world, the world between the stage and the audience. A particular venue with its traditional audience is likely to support this integration. If this does not succeed, the audience can ignore the distraction if the acting skills or the fame of the actor overshadow the disruption. If nothing succeeds to motivate the acceptance of an intrusive accent, it will dominate their theatrical experience. The language (or language variety) will move to the centre of attention, challenging the existing consensus of staged performance. The audience either accepts or rejects this challenge. (See Aaltonen 1993: 36.)

The article begins with an account of the performances in the research material, which is followed by the discussion of research literature and the reservations that need to be made when using these historiographies as evidence of past events. The analysis itself has been carried out within an interdisciplinary approach combining sociolinguistics, translation and theatre studies. The research paradigm will be introduced before the report and discussion of the findings. Conclusions will close the article.

## PERFORMANCES IN THE ANALYSIS

The performances in the material have been selected from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Finnish language stagecraft was taking its first steps towards a Finnish-language theatre. Sceptics doubted if there would be enough plays for a Finnish repertoire, enough Finnish-speaking actors for the roles and a sufficiently large audience to support the venture. Some amateur theatre performances had already been organised in Finnish by the Finnish conscript army (Finns were exempted from conscription into the Russian army) to lower estates, but these are not usually recorded in historiographies (Paavolainen 2014: 391). Irrespective of all difficulties, the Fennomans, the mainly Finland Swedish nationalists, succeeded in organising the “first” Finnish language theatre performance of *Lea* by the Finnish playwright Aleksis Kivi (1834–1872) on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May, 1869 with the Sweden Swedish Hedvig Charlotte Raa (1838–1907) in the leading role. This performance will be included in the analysis.

Raa was born in Stockholm and got her actor training at the Dramatens elevskola (the school of the Swedish national scene) in Stockholm. She started her career in travelling theatre companies in both Sweden and Finland, and

became the leading actor in *Nya teatern*, the first permanent Swedish language stage in Finland. (Rossi 1997.)

Unlike Raa, Ida Aalberg (1858–1915) had no formal theatrical training but learnt acting in minor roles in the 1880's on the stage of the new Finnish national theatre, established in Helsinki in 1872. Her family had spoken Finnish at home although her mother came from a Swedish-speaking region and had been taught Swedish by Ida's grandmother (Räsänen 1925: 29–31). Aalberg is likely to have picked up some Swedish from her, and she also went to a Swedish school in Helsinki (3 years) and, after that, received private tuition in Swedish (Koski 2013: 90). Her acting developed both through praxis and tuition, and through her social skills and contacts, she was invited to act on a number of foreign stages in Hungary, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Germany. Her performances in the analysis will consist of the first one in Christiania (present day Oslo, the capital of Norway) in 1885, where she acted in Swedish, in Copenhagen in the same year (in Swedish), and the following years (in Danish), in Bergen, Norway in 1888 (in Swedish), in Berlin in 1890 (in German) and, finally, in Stockholm in 1894 (in Swedish). Ilmari Räsänen, Aalberg's biographer often gives vague indications of the time of the performances. For evidence of reactions to the non-native accent ensuing from the intersemiotic translation from written text to speech, the analysis will draw on a number of historiographies of the early Finnish language theatre and their commentary on the performances. The most important historiographies for the study of audience response to Ida Aalberg's accent have been Ilmari Räsänen's autobiography of Aalberg and Ritva Heikkilä's autobiography of her (1998). In addition, I have also consulted *Henrik Ibsen's skrifter* and Kansalliskirjasto's (The National Library) digitalized newspapers for dates of performances and reviews. Unfortunately they have remained vague and only the months could have been concluded from these sources. For Charlotte Raa's reception, the main source has been Aspelin-Haapkylä's Finnish Theatre History (1906). As the evidence from the historiographies will be already secondary interpretation of someone else's interpretation which I will, in turn, interpret, the reservations that need to be made will be discussed next.

#### ACCESSIBILITY OF THE PAST

Staged performances, unless they are mediated through film, are inaccessible to researchers except through historiographies whose evidence is authored, but, still, provides a frame and shape to the events. It gives us the perspective from which to look at the events. Some details have been included at the cost of others and these have been woven into a narrative, which, according to Postlewait (1991: 176), is the most prevalent means for ordering history.

Narrativization, which in White's words (1980: 7) refers to feigning to make the world speak itself and speak itself as a story, organises historical events into a sequence or a story line that presupposes contiguous or causal lines of development. No document contains only one possible meaning (Postlewait 1991: 161).

As the purpose of this article is to explore the response to the non-native accent of Charlotte Raa and Ida Aalberg, a number of historiographies has been consulted. Charlotte Raa's *Lea* in 1869, and Ida Aalberg's roles on stage in the Nordic countries and Germany towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century have attracted the attention of historiographers of which the most prominent used in this article include:

- from the "first" substantial history of Finnish language theatre by Eliel Aspelin-Haapkylä Part I (1906) and III (1909)
- the biography of Ida Aalberg (1858–1915) by Ilmari Räsänen (1925)
- the biography of Ida Aalberg by Ritva Heikkilä (1998)
- the history of the Finland Swedish theatre by Ingrid Qvarnström (1946)
- the account of conflicts between the Finnish – and Swedish language theatre groups by Yrjö Hirn (1949)
- the actors and acting throughout the history of theatre in Finland by Pirkko Koski (2013)
- the biography of Kaarlo Bergbom (1843–1906), the first theatre director of Finnish language theatre by Pentti Paavolainen (Part I 2014).

The above works have been used as the evidence of the reception of the non-native accent of the actors who have both been regarded as the "first" in some respect in the new Finnish language theatre. Charlotte Raa was the protagonist in the first play performed in Finnish, whereas Ida Aalberg was the first Finland Finnish celebrity whose performances attracted audiences to the newly established theatre.

There should always be a number of historiographies in order for a researcher to get more than one perspective of the theatrical event. As Postlewait (1991: 160) has pointed out, we do not find the facts themselves in historiographies, but statements of facts. There is always a reason for the statements to be included in historical discourse, but even the best kinds of written or material evidence are not the event but only records of the past that still remain in the present. In order to identify the constraints on historical writing, we need to be aware of the filters between the initial event – and our perception of it. Postlewait has listed twelve challenges that the historiographers themselves and those who are later using their works can face. We need to be aware of the causes, motivations, aims and purposes of the initiating agent(s) of a historical event but are unlikely ever to recover all of them. He further points out (1991: 163–164) that our description will always be partial.

There are a few problem areas listed by Postlewait that apply to the present study. Firstly, as human beings, we need to tie an event somehow into a story line to make sense of it. Similarly, historiographers define and position specific events according to their understanding of the interrelated and even contradictory causes. They have many potential contexts to select from, while each way of framing the description and analysis imposes an interpretive meaning and, also, partially excludes others. (Postlewait 1991: 165.) A case in point are the many exclusions in Aspelin-Haapkylä's history of the first Finnish theatre. Paavolainen (2014: 503) identifies one of the many exclusions in Aspelin-Haapkylä's (1906: 160–65) description of the resistance towards Raa's performance in a Finnish play, which had been published in the Swedish language paper *Hufvudstadsbladet* (3.4.1870). At the same time he omitted all its counter-arguments that had appeared in the press.

Secondly, we need to be aware that the documents express specific meanings for a different time and place, and we must translate carefully, keeping in mind that translations are at best approximations (Postlewait 1991: 167). Thirdly, when we are reading historiographies for evidence, we tend to believe that only one perspective is right. Still, the documentation has usually come from a limited number of participants, witnesses and social organisations, and we tend to choose the ones whose evidence points towards our values. (Postlewait 1991: 167–68.) For example, all Finnish historiographers and researchers into theatre histories tend to use Aspelin-Haapkylä's massive four-volume-work (1906–1910) at least as a starting point. He had a clear political agenda as one of the Fennomans who were yearning to raise the Finnish language and Finnish culture from the peasant status to a prestigious one. He was also a good personal friend of the first Finnish theatre director Kaarlo Bergbom (1843–1906). This is evident in his narrative. Also, Ilmari Räsänen's biography (1925) of Ida Aalberg needs to be read against his statement in the introductory text (no page number) where he admits that the reason for writing the book was the request from persons who wished to honour her memory. For that reason, we can expect a positive and respectable attitude towards Aalberg. It is also obvious that Heikkilä (1998) has consulted both Aspelin-Haapkylä and Räsänen's work. Neither Räsänen nor Heikkilä are aiming at scholarly and detailed recording of events and have, for example, largely left dates out of their narrative and used expressions such as “Kristianialaisen *Aftenposten*in arvostelu Ida Aalbergista ...“ (the review of Ida Aalberg by the Christianian *Aftenposten*) (Räsänen 1925: 201) and “Kun Ida Aalberg palasi Kööpenhaminaan, paistoi taas aurinko ja oli lämmintä, mutta ilmassa tuoksui lähestyvä syksy” (When IA returned to Copenhagen, the sun was shining and it was warm, but there was a smell of the autumn already in the air) (Heikkilä 1998: 205). This will form a limitation to the present study as well, and times (months) of performance are concluded from circumstances and reviews assumed to have followed the performances.

Fourthly, in attaining information of past theatre events and their reception, there is also the problem of interpreting documents that might contain, not only unintentional distortions and mistakes, but also wilful absences and silences (Postlewait 1991: 170). Charlotte Raa's leading role in the "first" Finnish language stage performance has obscured the fact that already before that, the Finnish conscript army had organised Finnish language performances (see above reference to Paavolainen 2014: 391). The fifth constraint has been referred to above, that is, once a specific event is deemed as significant, also subsequent historians are drawn to it. Its status is taken for granted because historians read previous historians and regularly write about the same events that their predecessors did. The sixth challenge to using historiographies as evidence is the distance between our understanding and theirs. The historiographers are working within their codes, discourses, values and cultural systems and *we* are working within ours. In both cases, this affects the understanding of the events. (Postlewait 1991: 172–173.)

Finally, when we are reading a historical account of a specific event, we are thrice removed from it. Postlewait (1991: 177–178) points out that we are reading readings that are readings of the event. The first reading is the document, the second reading is the historian's interpretation of the document, and the third reading is our own interpretation of the historian's report. All readings draw on presuppositions, codes, values and inclinations and there are many possible ways of constituting and writing about historical events and at least as many ways of reading history.

The analysis of the staged performances will take the above reservations into account where relevant. The documentation of the performances of Charlotte Raa and Ida Aalberg covers their unintentional non-native accent, but the reasons for the responses need to be based on the understanding of the constraints that influence the writing of historiographies. It is also important to remember that reviewers form only part of the audience, and we are, thus, working on a partial response.

In what follows, I will combine a sociolinguistic paradigm as outlined by Alan Bell (2011) and Reem Bassiouney (2014) (and the foundation that their work is based on) to the analysis of an unintentional "foreign" accent which has its roots in intersemiotic theatre translation.

## STAGING LANGUAGE

The setting of the play as well as the social class or geographical origin of the characters may have implied the use of a particular language variety, dialect or accent in staged performance. Our imagination together with relevant props enhance the illusion that the characters are using a certain language variety

although our ears may tell us differently. If a play is set in Germany, we imagine that the characters are using German although we clearly hear them speak Finnish (see e.g. Aaltonen 1996: 171). A possible paradigm for analysing the reception of a non-native accent in film and on stage can be based on findings of authentic language use in sociolinguistics, and that may help us to understand the reviewers' reactions we find in historiographies.

One of the pioneering studies of a non-native accent in staged performance has been compiled by Allan Bell and Andy Gibson in a special issue of *Journal of Sociolinguistics* in 2011. Especially Bell's own study of the iconisation of Marlene Dietrich's non-native English in film forms a useful conceptual frame for the study of the performances of Charlotte Raa and Ida Aalberg and audience reactions to them. The Egyptian sociolinguist Reem Bassiouney (2014) has applied a similar paradigm in her study of diglossia in Egyptian film and her conceptual framework derives largely from the same studies as do Bell's.

When Marlene Dietrich (1901–1992) was filming her first American film, *The Blue Angel* in 1930, she had only been in America for some three months. A strong German accent in her English was a shock to the director. It came through already in her first line “I won't need help” where she pronounced the word “help” as ‘hellubh’ (Bell 2011: 628). It took 50 attempts to get her pronunciation right and the required footage in the film. The director Josef von Sternberg (1894–1969) was bewildered but still wanted to have Dietrich in the role. It was obvious that “correcting” her pronunciation was impossible. The solution came when the accent was integrated in the role, and Dietrich was made a stereotypical *femme fatale*, exotic (foreign accent), mysterious and dangerous woman with androgynous dress and bisexual implications.

For the analysis of Dietrich's non-native accent, Bell (2011: 630–632) used the theory of *audience design* and the distinction between *responsive* and *initiative* styles. In the former, the speaker's style is oriented to its audience, making an effort to produce a normative or unmarked style. In initiative style, the speaker adopts alternative styles in order to redefine the situations and roles. They do this through *referee design*, targeting the language of a reference group which is usually external to them. The audience is present in the interaction, whereas referees are third persons whose salience makes them influential on speakers' styles even in their absence. Within referee design, a number of dichotomies can be applied for the analysis of a speaker's accent. For example, in her performances both in film and also on stage, Dietrich was involved in a clear case of *outgroup referee design* (as opposed to *ingroup* one) because she was performing in a language (English) other than her own (German). Her initial performance was *short term*, just for one film, but when she moved to the U.S. it became *longterm* as she was a non-native speaker in an English speaking milieu for many decades. Dietrich was at first expected to produce *accurate* native-like English, but in her case *inaccuracy* did not attract the stigma usually



attributed to it. The *successfulness* of referee design is evaluated by audiences and Dietrich was targeting the speech of her American English audience. In this, she was *unsuccessful* as her lifelong pronunciation remained identifiably non-native. Her way of speaking English became, however, her trademark to the point of being *enregistered* as indexing a *femme fatale*, the undefinable powerful, cold and dominating other, who is transgressing race and gender boundaries. Bassiouney (2014: 55–71) also uses the term *enregisterment* and her concepts of *indexing* and *stance*<sup>1</sup> would also have been suitable for the analysis.

Dietrich's character was given the voice quality of a low baritone in the 1930s with the coming of the sound-film (Bell 2011: 632). It therefore drew on the context of technological developments in society but also partly on the artistic heritage of western theatre, one of the four factors of *context*, identified by Postlewait (2009: 12–14), who has outlined a paradigm in which the four binaries interact with each other and the theatre event as well. Theatrical event can be approached as an interplay between *agency*, those who created it, such as the playwright, director, performers and designers, *audience* who are always part of the context for theatrical event, *artistic heritage* which includes artistic traditions, conventions, norms and codes of not only drama and theatre but all of the arts, and, finally, *world* which contains many factors, including the material and immaterial conditions of human existence. The influence between world and a theatre event is mutual: every human event articulates and mediates a series of relations with the world of which it is a part.

In the analysis of Charlotte Raa's and Ida Aalberg's performances the world includes in its narrowest sense the 19<sup>th</sup> century Finland and Europe. Both Raa and Aalberg were strong personalities, favoured by theatre directors and influential patrons. Also the playwrights whose works they performed were significant at the time of the performances (*agency*). Audiences were very different from today's theatre audiences and their response to the performances drew on both *agency* and *world*. The two performers both challenged the artistic heritage through the language they used on stage.

In what follows, the performances of Charlotte Raa and Ida Aalberg will be analysed in terms of the audience response to their accents. The analysis will adopt the paradigm of Bell (2011) which will be complement with the four-factor model outlined by Postlewait (2009). All through the analysis, the constraints of historiographies and their secondary documents will be taken into account.

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<sup>1</sup> *Indexicality* refers to ways that a sign is related to its social meaning. For example, an accent can be taken to refer to someone's foreign background, lack of education etc. *Stance* refers to the process where an individual evaluates an object, positions a subject, usually the self, and aligns with other subjects. (Bassiouney 2014: 57–58) Raa's and Aalberg's reception by audiences could have been analysed also in these terms.

FOREIGN ACCENT IN INTERSEMIOTIC THEATRE TRANSLATION

Two types of dialogue can be identified in staged performance. One takes place between the characters within *the internal world of the play* and the other, between the stage and the audience in *the external world outside the venue*. As audience members, we may experience a performance text which has resulted from intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic translation. In intersemiotic translation, the accent of actors is generally intentional, whereas the objective of this study is to explore the audience reactions and the motivation behind them to an unintentional accent, resulting either from the referee design, that is, the actor is targeting a language of a reference group external to them (Raa, Aalberg), or the audience feels that the actor's language variety is challenging a normative or unmarked style of artistic heritage (Aalberg).

The first performance in the analysis has been the staging in 1869 of the play *Lea* where Charlotte Raa agreed to act the leading role in Finnish. *Lea* was a demanding play for both the actor and the audience. There is very little action in it, and Lea has, for example, three long monologues. As a biblical play, the exotic setting does not support the understanding either. (Kivi, *Lea* 1869. SKS.) The leading actor, Charlotte Raa was born in Stockholm; she was a native-speaker of Sweden Swedish and spoke hardly any Finnish at all. With some hesitation, she accepted the role. According to Hirn (1949: 292, 204), a word-for-word Swedish translation was prepared for her, and she was also given tuition in the pronunciation of Finnish vowels and diphthongs. In the first run-through, some un-Finnish accent was audible, but the general agreement was that the performance should go ahead. According to Hirn, she rehearsed the part for two months.

Raa's performance of *Lea* was regarded as a success and an encouraging step towards the first Finnish-language theatre. The audience in the premiere – a great many of them Fennomans – was already from the start positively tuned towards the performance. For a Swedish actor to perform in a language so different from her native tongue was understood to be very difficult, and she was seen to have accepted it out of the goodness of her heart. One of the historiographers, Yrjö Hirn describes the atmosphere as follows:

Finally, when Charlotte Raa appeared on the scene as Lea, there were many in the audience who held their breath. Raa had learnt the part so well that she did not stumble at a single syllable and obviously understood every word that she uttered. Naturally, the stress and the movements of the mind, or a mistake with the change of line with an amateur counterpart, she could miss an individual word, and, of course she could not replace it with any other word from, for her, an unknown language. All this anticipation nearly got her to lose heart, but she never retreated. (Hirn 1949: 304; my translation.)

The performance was hailed as a success, and although the sounds of Finnish were not so accurate, nobody had really expected that either. The words were

genuinely and melodiously performed. (*Ibid.* 305–306.) The referee design, targeting the accent of an outgroup, became inaccurate, but it was still felt to have succeeded. In addition, the audience design and the referee design overlapped as some audience members could not understand Finnish either sufficiently or at all.

The second object of the analysis consists of the performances of Ida Aalberg, the first celebrated actor in the newly established Finnish national theatre. Her ambition took her to theatres in other Nordic countries and also elsewhere in Europe. Her travels often caused problems to the plans of the national stage because her performances, which always attracted audiences and through that, the theatre got the badly needed financing, needed to be cancelled or postponed. Importantly, in order to be able to perform on foreign stages, she needed language skills and ambitiously put a great deal of effort into acquiring those. Foreign-language performance is a special case of outgroup referee design, in which it is very difficult to acquire native like competency. Aalberg was determined, according to Ilmari Räsänen (1925), to learn German (pp. 31, 76), Danish (pp. 209–210), French (pp. 31, 76, 209–210, 157), and also to perform in Swedish, which she was somewhat familiar with through her mother and education (see above). Still, the tuition and learning were probably not very systematic, or longterm, which makes her biographer state:

*Some who have been impressed by her effort to act in many foreign languages have even regarded her as a language genius, forget that the only language she was able to master properly was Finnish. She spoke Swedish well, but, by no means without mistakes. (Räsänen 1925: 79; my translation.)*

On many occasions, audiences and reviewers were very critical of her non-native accent although admitting that she had excellent acting skills.

Aalberg's first performance in Norway took place in Christiania (the present day Oslo) where she performed the part of Nora in Henrik Ibsen's *Doll's House* in 1885. She acted the role in Swedish, and the local paper *Aftenposten* (06/1885) remarked that she had chosen Swedish out of politeness towards her audience. Moreover, her acting was praised, and she was predicted to have a brilliant future on stage. The language was referred to only briefly – this was the first time Aalberg performed in Swedish and the reviewer did not find her language choice at all disturbing. (Räsänen 1925: 201–203.) Aalberg's success is confirmed by Aspelin-Haapkylä (1909: 225). At least understanding Swedish was not a problem for the audience as Norwegian and Swedish are mutually intelligible (Wardhaugh 2006: 31).

In Copenhagen in the autumn of 1885, Aalberg acted in the Casino Theatre the part of Princess Zilah in Jules Claretie's play *Prins Zilah (Prince Zilah)* in Swedish, and Herman Berg in the paper *Tilskueren* (09/1885), praised her acting as full of energy, good posture and expression, which all made her far su-

perior to local star actors. Still, according to *Nya Dagligt Allehanda*, a Stockholm paper (09/1885), she did not take her audience immediately. She had pronounced Swedish words with a Finnish accent, and while audiences in Copenhagen were quite tolerant of the Stockholm accent, this “Hämeenlinna (a country town in central Finland) language” did indeed sound very bad. It was also difficult to understand. The Swedish (it was a Stockholm paper) reviewer (in *Nya Dagligt Allehanda*) admitted, however, that as the acting became very intense, the language was forgotten and eventually became overshadowed by expression, which helped the audience understand and feel like Princess Zilah. (References cited in Räsänen 1925: 205–206.)

In order to get a contract in a Danish theatre, Aalberg needed, however, to learn *accurate outgroup language*, including a native-like accent. She did make an effort to do this (Räsänen 1925: 210), but one gets the impression that either the tuition was not very efficient, or Aalberg did not understand the longterm commitment that foreign language acquisition requires. Her language and accent were criticised by Danish reviewers who remarked on her poor performance. The paper *Politiken* (09/1886) compared her acting in Ibsen’s *Gildet paa Solhoug* (1886) (*The Feast at Solhaug*) in Dagmar Theatre in 1886 to a master playing Beethoven with a toy violin. Her language skills ruined both her major and minor talents, and it would be best if she had the patience to wait before trying again. However, another reviewer “Per Anden” (*Politiken* (09/1886) only talked about the play’s new Fennoman style and predicted that it could expect quite a number of performances. Another paper, *Tilskueren* (11/1886), wrote at a later stage that Aalberg’s use of Danish had crushed all hopes of turning her into a Danish actor in any near future. She had had hardly any Danish accent at all, and her later performances were as bad as the first one. When Aalberg performed Victorien Sardou’s *Odette* in Danish in the same year, her acting was praised, but performance in an entirely foreign language accurately and successfully an impossibility. All in all, it seems to have been difficult for the critics to separate acting from staged speech. International stars (Sarah Bernhardt in French, Ernesto Rossi in Italian) could use their own language, but when Aalberg attempted this in performing Ophelia’s madness scene in Finnish in Copenhagen, her acting was deemed old-fashioned. (Räsänen 1925: 209–215.)

Aalberg was invited to Norway again in the autumn of 1888 to give a guest performance in Den Nationale Theatre in Bergen where she acted the lead, for example in Ibsen’s *Doll’s House* and Émile de Girardin’s *Straff* (*Le supplice d’une femme*). Her Finland Swedish was unanimously accepted according to *Bergenposten* (09/1888) which actually praised Aalberg’s Finnishness. She was so thoroughly Finnish already in her name (*sic*) and its sound, and Finnishness constantly slipped into her declamation as if to say: I am not Swedish, Danish or Norwegian. Traces of her Finnish roots were clearly noticeable, although she

had spoken Swedish in Sweden, Danish in Denmark and, like now, Swedish in Norway already for years. Her foreignness did not mean homelessness as art had its own laws. (Räsänen 1925: 272.)

Aalberg's Swedish was typically Finland Swedish, which started developing its own special features and differ from Sweden Swedish after Finland got under Russian control in 1809. Gradually, Finland Swedish as distinct from Sweden Swedish began to attract the attention of the reviewers in Aalberg's performances, and it was often regarded as a non-native accent, both inaccurate and unsuccessful. Even in Finland, Sweden Swedish was given priority over Finland Swedish, which was seen as an inferior dialect, contaminated by Finnish (Qvarnström 1946: 28). When Aalberg performed the lead in *Kameliadamen* (*La Dame aux Camélias*) in Sweden in 1894, she was hailed as a great actor but also criticised for her poor Swedish. Still, some critics ignored her accent entirely (see e.g. Geijerstam 1894: 427–431 & cited in Räsänen 1925: 359–369).

Finally, when Aalberg performed in Berlin in 1890 in German, she did the leads in *Romeo und Julia* and Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe*. Her language skills received both positive (acting skills were seen to be more important) and negative response. Especially the critic in *Vossische Zeitung* (05/1890) adopted a very negative view of her German in *Romeo und Julia*. The critic took her to be Danish whose German sounded comical. He predicted that Aalberg would have no future in German theatre for a long time. The reviewer in *Das kleine Journal* (05/1890) took the opposite view and wrote that Aalberg's acting overshadowed the language deficiencies (cited in Räsänen 1925: 290–291). Aalberg's biographer Räsänen (1925: 292) describes how in Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe*, her language skills were again criticised strongly in *Vossische Zeitung* (05/1890), which went as far as to say that it was a pity that the character had to speak at all. Words whose beauty has been created by Schiller were destroyed; Aalberg stumbled over syllables, the accent was clearly Slavic (*sic*), and the pronunciation occasionally so pedantic that it was almost intolerable. This time also the critic in *Das kleine Journal* (05/1890) was less sympathetic and wrote that, although Aalberg's Finnish accent was less prominent this time and she often got the stress on the words right, her strong rattling "r" sounds, ruined the delicate atmosphere like a grinding millstone.

As can be seen above, the historiographies (or reviews they had used) tended to agree in their evaluation of the response to the actors' outgroup accents. The non-native accent was accepted in Charlotte Raa's Finnish *Lea*, and Ida Aalberg's Nora in Ibsen's *Doll's House* in Norway, whereas in Copenhagen both her Swedish and Danish, in Stockholm her Swedish and, finally, her German in Berlin were found unsuccessful. In order to understand why the non-native accent was sometimes accepted and at other times rejected, the performances can be analysed within the paradigms of referee design and the four-factor categorisation of context.

Theoretically, when Raa acted the role of Lea in Finnish, she aimed at adopting a *responsive style*, which in terms of *audience design* means orientation towards her audience and producing a normative or unmarked style. Still, she was targeting the language of a referee group which was external to her, and produced an *initiative style*, a non-native accent. This was *inaccurate*, but, as was the case with Marlene Dietrich, Raa's non-nativeness did not attract the stigma, usually seen to be caused by inability. The success of referee design depends on the actual audience (in her case the audience and reference group were the same), and if success were linked to accuracy, she would have been unsuccessful. Still her accent was ignored and the performance hailed as a great success.

The acceptance of Charlotte Raa's non-native accent has many potential explanations. She was, in fact, the only possible lead candidate for the pioneering performance in Finnish. She was a trained actor who had a great deal of acting experience and had already received a great deal of admiration for her acting (Koski 2013: 55). When she was employed by the Swedish language theatre in Helsinki, the audiences wanted to see only her in leading female roles (Hirn 1949: 301), and her name in the poster meant that the house became sold out (Qvarnström 1946: 92).

Another reason for Raa's acceptance was the lack of any Finnish language artistic tradition. In terms of Postlewait's model (2009), there would be problems with both *agency* (majority of actors) and *audiences*. There were no Finnish speaking actors, and those who spoke some Finnish were reluctant to develop their language skills (Räsänen 1925: 47). Some had learnt Finnish only at a later age. The audiences had not heard Finnish. There were also those among the audience whose language skills were not even sufficient to follow the play (Hirn 1949: 275).

Symbolically, the meaning of Raa's performance was probably the most important for the future Finnish language theatre. As Suutela (2005: 28, 31) sees it, in *Lea*, four characters are converted to Christianity, which could be read as a symbol, embodied in Raa, for the conversion from Swedish cultural hegemony to Finnish language, culture, and the way of thinking. The character of Lea concretised the fantasy of an obedient and kind Finnish woman who was ready to give her life for her country if necessary.

Ida Aalberg's status was established through her celebrated acting on Finnish stage although she had also been very well-received in her role as the central character Boriska in a Hungarian play *Kylän heittiö* ('the village outcast') and as Ophelia in Stockholm in 1885, where she acted with the famous Italian Ernesto Rossi as Hamlet. In both performances she had adopted *an initiative style* of acting in Finnish. In Hungary her fame was, according to Räsänen, largely due to curiosity, but her superior acting skills and emotional involvement were praised in the reviews (Räsänen 1925: 109–120; 199–200). During her visit to

Christiania, Norway, Aalberg performed in Finland Swedish. Her success there was probably partly due to her role as Nora in Ibsen's *Doll's House* where her emotional acting did justice to the role. There was, maybe, also some affinity between the two countries as both had been under a foreign rule, Norway as part of Denmark and later, since 1814, in a union with Sweden under the Swedish king and Finland as part of Sweden and then a Grand Duchy of Russia. According to the sociolinguist Ronald Wardhaugh (2006: 31), the Scandinavian languages have always been close politically, geographically and linguistically, and they have retained their mutual intelligibility. Danish and Norwegian share a great deal of vocabulary but differ in pronunciation, whereas Swedish and Norwegian differ in vocabulary, but are similar in pronunciation. Danes claim to comprehend Norwegian better than the other way round. The poorest comprehension is between Danes and Swedes and the best between Norwegians and Swedes.

Aalberg's visit to Danish theatre was not so successful. Her first choice to perform in Swedish in Jules Claretie's play *Prins Zilah* might have caused an unnecessary strain for the audience in terms of understanding it (Finland Swedish had its own characteristics), and the language choice had no motivation at all. Her Swedish was deemed disturbing and inaccurate. Her performance in Ibsen's *Gildet paa Solhoug* in Danish was crushed. It is likely that in a tragic role, inaccuracy can intrude in the involvement in the scene which audiences and critics have seen performed successfully before. Aalberg's Finland Swedish was rejected in Stockholm, Danish in Denmark, and German in Germany.

The context for Ida Aalberg's performances in foreign languages were different from that of Charlotte Raa, and her audiences, maybe, reacted partly to her ambition to become a new international star like Sarah Bernhardt or Eleonora Duse who she admired (Koski 2013: 89–90). Her language skills were not sufficiently good, and the problems both with Danish and German are likely to have extended well beyond the accent. Aalberg's effort to learn foreign languages was too closely connected to her ambition about an international career, which would have been very difficult to achieve as she came from a marginal theatre culture. Her Finland Swedish was tied to the general attitude towards this language variety and its weaker position in relation to the more powerful Sweden Swedish. Her Danish and German were simply not sufficiently accurate for the stage. An additional problem might have been caused by the language of the other actors in the plays as it might have further emphasised Aalberg's non-nativeness. In Germany, for example, the main lead was acted by Josef Kainz, one of the most renowned European actors (Heikkilä 1998: 301).

## CONCLUSION

The aim in this article has been to explore the reception of an unintentional non-native accent which has resulted from an intersemiotic translation. The actors and their performances chosen for the study have included

- Sweden Swedish Charlotte Raa's performance of Aleksis Kivi's *Lea* in Finnish in Finland in 1869,
- Finland Finnish Ida Aalberg's performances in Henrik Ibsen's *Doll's House* in Finland Swedish in Norway in 1885 and 1888; in 1888 also Émile de Girardin's *Straff* (*Le Supplice d'une femme*)
- Aalberg's performance as Princess Zilah in Jules Claretie's play *Prins Zilah* (*Prince Zilah*) in Swedish in Copenhagen in 1885,
- Aalberg's performance in Henrik Ibsen's *Gildet paa Solhoug* (*The Feast at Solhaug*) in Danish in Denmark in 1886,
- Aalberg's performance in *Kameliadamen* (*La Dame aux Camélias*) in Finland Swedish in Stockholm in 1894 and
- Aalberg's performances in *Romeo und Julia* and Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe* in German in Germany in 1890.

The analysis of the reception was based on the accounts that a number of historiographies had given of the performances. They had generally drawn their information from contemporary newspaper reviews, which, unfortunately are not dated. It must also be remembered that reviewers represent only a small part of the audiences.

Charlotte Raa's *Lea* was celebrated by her audiences because the context of the performance was exceptional. Her reference group were Finnish speakers and so was her audience. Through referee design she aimed at producing an outgroup style which would have been as close to a native-like language as possible. Her performance was inaccurate, but still deemed successful. The most important explanation to this conflicting situation was that her audience consisted largely of Fennomans, Finland Swedish nationalists who were eager to promote Finnish as a stage language. Their own Finnish skills were not sufficient to evaluate Raa's performance, and there were even those who could not follow the play at all. Still, the first step towards Finnish national theatre had been taken, which in itself made the performance successful. In addition, Raa was a celebrated actor who took a great risk in accepting the role and thus helped to advance the cause of the nationalists. There was no personal gain in the event for her.

From early on, Ida Aalberg's acting skills were praised and she gained the status of a star actor in the first Finnish language theatre. She acted in her Finland Swedish in Norway where her acting skills were praised and her non-native accent and dialect (Standard or Stockholm Swedish were the unmarked style in



the 19<sup>th</sup> century Scandinavian theatre) was accepted in newspaper reviews. The same language variety was, however, received critically in both Denmark and Sweden, which might have been due to its perceived inferiority to Swedish. There might have even been difficulties in understanding her lines. There was also probably a power element involved in the reception; Aalberg came from a marginal theatre culture and had not received international recognition despite her ambitions to become a European actor.

Aalberg's Danish and German were also rejected on stage, and indeed, the time she had been able to devote to them was probably insufficient. In Raa's case, the audience was prepared to accept the inaccuracies, but there was no reason to allow Aalberg to make mistakes, hesitate, or stumble in her lines. Still it is worth remembering, that the negative response came mainly from the critics of newspapers, not the entire audience.

Theatre art appears not to tolerate non-native accents that do not carry a semantic meaning either within the play or in the external world between the stage and the audience. With migration of people across borders, the future will contain many new actors with different non-native accents from different language backgrounds. In any foreign language learning, a native-like competence in accents can be achieved by very few. Will this introduce a new direction in artistic tradition and direct attention to the external world between the stage and the audience? A move towards the Brechtian theatre?

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