Shift of meaning and the creation of new philosophical terms

Many philosophical terms come to be used as terms due to philosophers’ verbal creativity while seeking adequate expression for their novel thoughts. In this respect, philosophers might either coin new words from existing language resources or add a new meaning to (a) a literary language word that, when used in a definite philosophical sense, becomes a term; or (b) recast the meaning of an already existing philosophical term – for instance, *Dasein*, which existed as an established term in German philosophy before Heidegger bestowed a new interpretation on it.

The maxim that new thought at times requires a new word refers to language in general and its different scientific terminologies in particular. In the 1930s Gustav Stern gave a number of psychological reasons for this phenomenon. Characterizing the motives for new word creation, he argued the following:

- Intensified expression is sought for that which agitates our feelings.
- A second motive can be found in the need for and pleasure in mental productivity – that is, the formative tendency of imagination, the desire to be artistically active and creative.
- A third motive exists in the elementary tendency towards what is fresh, important, and most progressive; this is the desire for expansion, for the extension of the ego, for possibilities greater than those offered by real life. (Stern 1931)

The first motive mentioned by Stern seems to refer more to ordinary language than to philosophical terminology, since terms should be, as a rule, content-oriented. The second and the third motives refer to the word creation process in philosophical terminology. In respect to terminologies and, moreover, to philosophical terminology, one more motive should be added to this list:

- There is a systematic character to the terminology employed by a definite author or school.
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It should be borne in mind that terms are the verbalization of a definite conceptual system. Hence, terms are a manifestation of a network of concepts that a philosopher has in mind. These concepts form a more or less coherent system. The meaning of a term is dependent on its definition and its relations with other terms, along with their outward expression, in the system of concepts – that is to say, the system of terms. The systematic ties on a conceptual level should find relevant expression on a verbal level in translation. A translator may have to resort to new word creation to preserve in the target language the systematicity of the author’s system in the source language.

Philosophical thought seeks for the respective verbal description to express, to uncover the everchanging situation humans find themselves in the world. A philosopher’s train of thought is often conveyed in the language in which his/her concepts are articulated, or he/she might have chosen to create a new term from the word building materials available in Greek or Latin.

During discourse a need may arise for a more adequate expression of an existing idea or for the expression of an altogether new idea. Change on the conceptual level seeks its expression on the verbal level. These changes can result in the modification of a word or term’s meaning or even the creation of an altogether new word. New ideas are articulated with new words; consequently, these fluctuations of thought in the conceptual and verbal domains have to be presented adequately in translation. In order to attain the necessary adequacy with the author’s original thought, the translator has to keep in mind the maxim that sometimes all of the philosopher’s theoretical inquiry is needed in order to grasp the meaning of some of the central terms in his/her philosophy. In regard to this practical reality, Yvon Belaval’s remark is illuminating: ‘It has been said, not unjustly, that Plato’s whole doctrine is needed to grasp the meaning of the term participation’ (Belaval 1966: 101). As examples from contemporary philosophy, we might consider Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka’s terms beingness and ontopoiesis. In her theory of the Phenomenology of Life, beingness is one of the core concepts.
The word *beingness* pertaining to the literary layer of English-language vocabulary is nothing new, for it appears at least as early as 1662 (COED 1992: 123). What is novel is the content it comprises as a term in Tymieniecka’s philosophy. Professor Tymieniecka holds that phenomenology of life is an interplay of three concepts: first, the concept of ontopoietic self-individualization of life, which, as stated by the philosopher, ‘grasps the real from the inside, through its generative processes in the constructive becoming of beingness’; the second concept is the principle of the unity-of-everything-there-is-alive; and the third concept is the notion of the Human Creative Condition ‘as a frame of reference for both philosophy and science’ (Tymieniecka 2000: 9). It is this last concept – namely, the creative act of the human subject – that provides the crucial meeting point of the sciences and the philosophy/phenomenology of life, since ‘only the creative act of the human subject can mediate the scientific experience by introducing us into the hidden spheres of reality’ (ibid., 11).

Phenomenology of Life, as presented by Tymieniecka, might be compared to a magnificent edifice, the central components of which (laid as the cornerstones of the structure) are the concepts of beingness and life. The concept of beingness is different from the traditional concept of Being or Sein.

In Book Three of *Logos and Life*, Tymieniecka gives the reasons for the introduction, use and meaning of the term. She exposes her mode of arguing in the following way:

Traditional metaphysics inquired into the last principles of what is [...] The traditional ontologies sought in the notion Being an ever-present and everywhere the same last principle that maintains whatever there is whether in stasis or in flux. [...] Modern philosophers shifted the quest for the last principles of what-there-is to the constitutive-envisioning power of the human mind. The human mind was thought to provide the explanation of how what-there-is-as-it-is emerges within the transcendental circuit of human functioning.
With the surging of a new metaphysical vision, one in which what-there-is is seen to consist in an ever-renewed constructive progress, the emphasis shifts from what-there-is to the ways and modes of becoming. One further step taken beyond the metaphysical views of Whitehead, Bergson, etc. [...] and we reach the real crux of the matter; the vision of life. (Tymieniecka 1990: 9)

The philosopher continues, maintaining,

It is [...] life which carries the flux of becoming. Becoming is not a haphazard topsy-turvy coming together and going asunder. It is the poiesis of life as a constructive progress which establishes the relative stability of instants of what-there-is. (ibid., 9)

And now one comes to the crux of the matter – namely, to the essence of the term and concept of beingness. Tymieniecka explains:

No longer can the notion of being function as a principle of the principles which sustain what-there-is. The principle, rather, is beingness, which is what individualizes something and through which, as through a vehicle, life expands. This means that the new vision of what-there-is-and-was, as it originates and unfurls in its beingness [...] focuses precisely upon the life course of this beingness in its generic progress. (ibid. 10)

With regard to the concepts of being and beingness, philosopher W. Kim Rogers admits, ‘Tymieniecka’s metaphysical focus is not on Being or Sein but rather on the way of being or beingness of living beings, and, especially, human beings’ (Rogers 2000: 88). Such an approach is characterized as process philosophy. Gary Backhaus remarks, ‘Beingness replaces being because Tymieniecka rejects substantive ontology and subscribes to her own version of process philosophy, focusing on self-individuating, relatively stable, real entities of becoming and their ontopoiesis’ (Backhaus 2001: 18; see also Ikere 2005: 196).
Does this approach mean that the human role is diminished? To the contrary, Tymieniecka throughout her philosophy stresses the particular situation of a human being and advances her theory of the Human Condition. Accordingly, she writes,

The Human Condition establishes the human living being in a most particular situation with respect to total life expanse, the entire existential schema of living beingness [viss dzīvās esamības (būtnības) pastāvēšanas ietvars – Z.I.]. Simultaneously it gives the human being a central position – a knot position – with respect to the spheres within which a living being is suspended, and lastly, it gives a man a unique responsibility toward all. (Tymieniecka 1990: 13)

Consequently, the term beingness needs respectively a new designation in the Latvian language – for example, esmība or esamīgums (Kūlis 1991: 26), būtnība or būtmība.

Another essential term in Tymieniecka’s philosophy is ontopoiesis, a term coined by her. According to Tymieniecka, the word means ‘ontology-in-the-making’. The philosopher employs the term to illustrate the self-individualization process of life as an individualized unfolding of living beingness:

The investigation of the emergence of sense in the primal ontopoietic becoming/unfolding simultaneously establishes each beingness as its ‘sufficient reason’ and its ‘grounding’ in being. In other words, the ontopoiesis of life simultaneously pursues the ontic progress in the constructive becoming of beingness as it lays down its proto-metaphysical ‘groundwork’ [...] We uncover [...] the field of the inner workings of life, in virtue of the essential – and philosophically crucial – insight into the differentiation – genetic – origination unfolding of the living being as such: the self-individualization of life. The self-individualization of life as the vehicle of ontopoiesis pulls all the strings of forces ‘sufficient’ and ‘necessary’ for its constructive self-enactment; it also handles
all the ‘conditions’ – propitious and adverse – for the forming, existential course of the living beingness-in-progress. (Tymieniecka 1998c: 63)

Tymieniecka characterizes the genesis of life and its unfolding as originally consisting of a self-individualizing constructive progress:

Whoever says “life”, says self-individualization-in-existence [...] Springing forth from the self-individualizing entelechial nucleus, the ontopoiesis of life proceeds. (Tymieniecka 1998a: 10–11)

Life’s unfolding reaches a culminating point at which the entire sense of its procedures is essentially transformed. From an intrinsically prompted unfolding of life on the level of survival, ontopoiesis passes into creative, specifically human life, which knows a need for ‘achievement’. (Tymieniecka 2008: 2)

The scholar of Tymieniecka’s phenomenology Thomas Ryba, when giving an outline of her philosophical contribution, has also found it necessary to explain the term in parentheses:

Tymieniecka’s phenomenology […] takes up the Husserlian’s orientation and subordinates […] them to its new project of the analysis of life as the ‘starting point of philosophy’ […] Epistemologically, this reorientation is a new critique of rationality. Because it puts ontopoiesis (the meaning of being) at the center of meaning, a refocusing of philosophy results that dissolves the artificial dichotomizations between matter and mind, nature and culture, reason and desire, etc. […] (Ryba 2002: 432)

The term ontopoiesis is included in the encyclopaedia on phenomenology with the following explanation:

Ontopoiesis means first makings. Life proceeds as a dynamic process that organizes itself in a hierarchy of relatively stable phases that are meaningfully articulated according to specific principles of valuation and measure. (PHW 2002: 731)
Chapter Two: The Processes of Synonymy and Polysemy in Latvian...

This example from Tymieniecka’s philosophy shows the way in which new words may appear in the lexicon of the target language due to the influence of translations. Since philosophy dates back for centuries, it is translations through which the heritage of the philosophical thought is performed. In connection to Aristotelian legacy it is remarked,

 [...] some of the current versions of Aristotle were Latin translations from a Hebrew translation of a Commentary by Averroes made on an Arabic translation of a Syriac translation of a Greek text. (Barfield 1967: 138)

It has to be noted that a number of new words and terms have appeared also in the Latvian philosophical language due to translations. Concerning the Latvian language, some contemporary Latvian linguists have remarked that the literary language has been enriched considerably due to translations (e.g., Veisbergs 2005: 190). The shift in meaning for words in the source language may lead to word creation in the target language. In order to find an adequate expression for British empiricists, such terms as *drošticamība* (Zariņš, Ikere for *certainty* 1977), *garASFēra* (Ikere for Berkeley’s *mind* 1981), and *izjutums* (Lauzis for Hume’s *impression* 2008) were created. Both *drošticamība* and *garASFēra* have been included already in the English-Latvian bilingual dictionary with the note ‘used in philosophy’ (ALV 1997: 142, 147).

For Austin’s *proposition* the translation equivalent *sacijums* was created (Vējš 2009); for Plato’s *σωφροσύνη*, *pārdomība* was suggested (Vecvāgārs 1990: 86). Since Wittgenstein’s *Satz* in English translations is rendered as *proposition* in Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus but as *sentence* in Philosophical Investigations, Wittgenstein’s *proposition* is translated into Latvian as *propozīcija* or *teikums* in accordance with its contextual meaning (Vējš, Taurens 1997: 252). Translators of Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations chose to introduce *attēleseja* and *attēlpriekšmets* (for Bildgesicht – *picture-face*) and Bildgegenstand – *picture-object* which are not conventional Latvian words (Vējš, Taurens 1997: 252).
Every philosopher has his or her own style. In analyzing the manner of writing among Latvian philosophers, one can also observe a variety of styles. Maija Kūle, for instance, has a precise, curt and expressive manner of writing. Her passages often result in what can be characterized as aphorisms. The expressivity is enhanced by vivid imaginativeness and witty expression, allowing her to make a lasting impact on the reader.

Another example can be found in the writings of Latvian philosopher Jānis Nameisis Vējs. When reflecting on the problems of analytical and phenomenological modes of thought in an essay Saprāts nav ilūzija. Kas ir saprāts? Polemiska recenziā par E. Bucenieces grāmatu “Saprāts nav ilūzija” (Reason is not an Illusion. What is Reason? Polemical Review of E. Buceniece’s Book “Reason is not an Illusion”), Vējs comments on Buceniece’s style of writing, characterizing it as having a special charm that, in a way, shows the impact of her phenomenological mentors. Her manner of expression is a treat both for one’s reason and for one’s soul. In dealing with some concepts, she occasionally resorts to associative language games. At the same time Vējs is mildly critical of her playful manner of writing and calls for a more analytical and assertive approach to the problem of rationality (Vējs 2005: 85–7).

The use of associative language games is also a special manner of Igors Šuvajevs’ writing. He performs his at times challenging manner of persuasion via sharp verbal expression. As with most contemporary Latvian philosophers, he has a good command of modern European languages. Moreover, Šuvajevs has a profound knowledge of Greek. Like Heidegger, he resorts to etymologies of well-established philosophical terms to speak about the essence of the initial Greek concepts. At the same time, however, students of Šuvajevs’ philosophy cannot but feel that the verbal media in which his ideas mature and through which his thought ripens is the Latvian language. He addresses Latvian readers and un-covers, to use his (or, rather, Heidegger’s) expression, the potentiality of the Latvian language system in the domain of philosophy. Regarding language, Šuvajevs asserts, ‘Valoda, vārds

Among contemporary Latvian philosophers, Šuvajevs is most prolific in new word creation. For example, in translating Gadamer’s Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik, Šuvajevs has introduced the neologism tradējums. He has coined this term in order to differentiate it from the meaning the common word tradīcija (tradition) implies. Tradīcija in Latvian associates with the heritage of cultural traditions and rituals. Gadamer, however, speaks of tradition as a heritage of meaning comprehension and interpretation within the historical development of language. In this sense tradējums is now being used by students of philosophy in discussions and their scholarly papers.


In the Latvian language, the word derivational model a noun plus a prefix ne- has recently become very active (Nitiņa 2004: 12–13, Veisbergs 2005). According to this model Šuvajevs has created and uses in his writings such words as neviētība (1999: 24), nedžive (2007: 21), and others. Under the influence of German word models and in accordance with the existing word derivation models existing in the Latvian language, a number of compound words with the element paš- (self-) have been derived by Šuvajevs – for instance, pašmilestība, pašiepazišana, pašrupe, pašrupes, pašvara, pašdomāšana.
(2002: 13), pašdraudzība, pašattiecības, paškomunikācija, pašmīnestība, pašcilvēks, pašhermeneitika. It is worth mentioning here that this model of word formation is exceedingly active in modern Latvian authors’ writings when creating neologisms (e.g., paštrauksme, Repše 2010).

It also should be noted that other Latvian philosophers dealing with translation are likewise active in new word and term creation. For example, Ansis Zunde has coined the terms like ruņa (‘discourse’), labība and launība (substantives for terms labais and launais), and others; Māris Vecvagars has created pārdomība, pārdomīgs (1990: 86–87), laismojošs (1990: 88), ēnava (1990: 96), kārestība (1990: 97), riņpestība (1990: 101), spekulativitāte (1989: 31), pašpretrūnīgs (1989: 18), notulība (2008: 89), and more.

With regard to contemporary translations from German into Latvian, Rihards Kūlis’ contributions for over a quarter of a century have been particularly remarkable. He has translated works of such German philosophers as Kant, Husserl, Heidegger, and Max Weber. His approach to rendering terminology might be characterized first of all by implementation of coherent systematicity in the target language. Another problem a translator has to tackle is the existence of new words for which the translator has to find corresponding counterparts. Both Kant and Heidegger are prolific in coining neologisms. Heidegger’s writings abound in new words specially designed for his original thought; moreover, this flowed out of his belief that the truth of being (Sein) should be expressed in new words and new words can create new culture and new world accordingly. Consequently, the manner of Heidegger’s writing has to be preserved and is preserved in the target language, namely, Latvian.

Systematicity is important in order to create a conceptually distinct and valid system of Kantian terms into Latvian. Kant has created a philosophical system based on universal categories and basic principles; therefore, translation problems cannot be settled without knowing the whole of his system. To create the corresponding system of terms that would associate in Latvian readers’ minds with Kant’s system is
the task undertaken by the philosopher throughout his translation practice over a period of more than twenty years (1988; 1990; 2000; 2004; 2006).

Systematicity and consequence are observed when translating Kantian Sinnen as jutekļi, Empfindungen as sajūtas, Gefühl as jūtas, Gesetze as likumi, Grundsätze as nolikumi, principi, Grundgesätze – pamatlikumi, Anschauung – vērojums, äussere Anschauung – ārējais vērojums, innere Anschauung – iekšējais vērojums, Bestimmungsgrund – noteicējpamats, Bestimmungsgründe des Willens – gribas noteicējpamati. If Hegel’s term Aufhebung is translated into Latvian as atcelšana which implies both the meaning of repealing and preserving, then, as marked by Kūlis, for Kant’s Aufhebung the relevant translation is novēršana (Kūlis 1988: 188). For Kantian aesthetic notions and categories Kūlis has introduced such translations as the following: labvēligums (Wohlgefallen), ieinteresētība (Interesse), patika (Lust), nepatika (Unlust), tikamais (Angenehme), netikamais (Unangenehme), tikamība (Annehmlichkeit) (in characterizing an object), tiksme (Annehmlichkeit) (in relevance to subjective experience). As to the word Wohlgemessen, it is usually translated into Latvian as labpatika. For the Kantian concept Kūlis has introduced a new translation equivalent labvēligums. The latter manifests the present distinction from the concept Lust in a way that is linguistically more precise than labpatika. Moreover, it is this verbal expression that accentuates the benevolent character of judgement, a relation that exists before the sentiments of Lust and Unlust and turns the aesthetic judgement into a more general category.

Distinct conceptual boundaries are observed when introducing such translation equivalents for Kantian terms noteikts (bestimmt), noteikšana, noteiksme (Bestimmung), and nosacīts (bedingt) (such as have preconditions, e.g., space and time as formal preconditions of experience, categories as conditions of experience), nosacījums (Bedingung).